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Christ Church West Wimbledon  
Sermon : 1st Sunday after Trinity ~ June 18, 2017

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By last Wednesday morning I had more or less written today's sermon – and then the news of the horrific tower block fire came through. The scenes we saw on television have been truly appalling and goodness knows what it has been like to be living this week in the streets of North Kensington surrounding Grenfell Tower. 45 years ago, as a first year student, I lived on the top floor of a 23 storey block of flats in Bermondsey – it's still there – and, though the view was stunning, I do remember occasionally thinking what would happen if there was a fire. It wasn't an easy place in which to live: the lift often broke down and the rubbish was pushed down a chute which ran the height of the building, so the mess in the refuse room below was pretty awful. No, tower blocks are not easy places in which to live.

This tragedy, coming on top of the recent terrorist attacks in central London and Manchester, means that the nation has been through a horrible few weeks. But what has been also truly remarkable about all these terrible events so close to us here in leafy Wimbledon has been the remarkable response of people. 'London Unites' was a headline in the evening paper this week. It will have moved us all to see the way in which people of all faiths and of none have so quickly responded – with food, water, clothing and bedding – as well as readily opening up their homes for those affected. And that's not to mention the heroic efforts of the emergency services. For me and many others, I suspect these spontaneous acts of generosity, kindness and love has restored our faith in humanity. And quite naturally it is the places of worship of all the faiths which have been used as a focus for the community response – not just as centres for handing out food and clothing but also by being a focus for people's anguished prayers – and that is right and proper and unsurprising. For as Christians we are only following what has been handed down to us by Jesus of Nazareth himself.

In 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine, Jesus moved around the towns and villages and the sight of the crowds moved him to pity – they were harassed and stressed. It was something of a depressing picture. And Matthew goes further, describing the people as like sheep without a shepherd – which leads Jesus to challenge his followers with the memorable phrase "the crop is heavy but the labourers are too few; you must ask the owner to send labourers to bring in the harvest". And then we read of the call of the twelve disciples who are first and foremost commissioned to go out to their own people – the lost sheep of the house of Israel – to share the message: "the Kingdom of heaven is upon you" – and then he goes on to give them specific instructions about how they should do this.

What Jesus was wanting to offer the crowds was a strong faith in a loving and caring God for them to cling onto because of the stable leadership he was showing to his disciples. He yearned to give the crowds a sense of purpose for their lives – living out the first two commands – love God and love your neighbour as yourself. And that has never wavered down the centuries as the Christian Church has grown and spread. Church history is littered with the name of faithful disciples – men and women – who have given their all in the name of Christ to draw more into the Kingdom of

God. And still today God calls men and women to service in the church, both by ordination as well as in other ways – such as admission to Reader ministry and so on. In the next week or two hundreds of men and women will be ordained as deacons and priests to serve in the church – and we give thanks for them and pray for them. I vividly remember my own ordination as a deacon in Hereford Cathedral 40 years ago next Sunday and give thanks that under God I have been able to play a small part in the life of the church down the years. Perhaps you will want to give thanks for those priests who have been a part of your spiritual journey – and give thanks for what you are able generously to give to the church by the gifts and talents which God has given you – and pray too that people will continue to respond to God's call in the years ahead.

Jesus wanted to give a sense of purpose and stability to the lives of the people he encountered while wandering through the countryside in his itinerant ministry. And people today, perhaps even more so, need a sense of purpose and stability in their lives – which is why the current political uncertainty in this country is deeply troubling to many. Sadly the church itself does not always give a sense of stability, not least because of its infighting, disunity and, sometimes, its downright lack of Christian charity. It is said that the church has lost its hold on the vast majority of people....and yet – actually we find that our country is littered with churches where faithful Christians generously continue to serve their community in all sorts of creative ways, to be people of prayer – and who are always ready respond to a crisis when needed.

My hope for this church congregation is that we will continue to be a group of people whose lives have been touched by Jesus of Nazareth and who ourselves want to pass on that faith to others as much by what we **do** as what we **say**. You can't easily parcel up love, kindness, caring – but I hope and pray that we may all, in our own ways, be beacons of stability in our local community so that others may be attracted to think about their faith because of what they see of the God of love in us.

I am quickly discovering that many people who belong to this church live some distance away but you come to Christ Church, along with others who lived nearer, because you have found your home here. What we hope and pray is that more from our local community will discover this love, generosity and caring that flows from this church – and want to become part of the Church of God. And when faced with unbelievable tragedies, all we often can do is to pray.

Revd Michael Burns