

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon :
January 14, 2018 ~ “Epiphany 2”

“Well, I’m glad it’s all over” said someone to me last week – and of course they meant Christmas! And many might echo that sentiment. Yes, a lovely Christmas will have been enjoyed by many, though not perhaps by all – but now we have to get back to the normality of everyday life. Yet we are still in the season of Epiphany, the season which is all about God being revealed to the world. And it is this wider world – or at least our part in it – that I want us to think about this morning.

You will know full well that Christ Church West Wimbledon doesn’t just exist on its own as an isolated enclave. We are part of the Deanery of Merton, the Archdeaconry of Kingston and the Diocese of Southwark, a diocese which serves 2.8 million people in the 16 local authority areas of South London and East Surrey through 356 places of worship with 106 church schools educating over 37,000 young people – a Church of England presence in every community. It’s all a bit mind-blowing. But we **are** part of a bigger picture and it is good that we should always look beyond our parish boundaries – remembering too we have a relationship not just with our Anglican neighbours but also with our ecumenical neighbours – and I’ll be thinking about that ecumenical aspect next week, as we approach the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

But to go back to our part in the wider Diocese of Southwark. Bishop Christopher, as our Diocesan Bishop, has begun to try to develop a real sense of our collegiality together with the strapline **Hearts on Fire with a vision for growth**. This year we have been asked to use Epiphanytide as a time of thanksgiving; thanksgiving for God’s generosity to us and for the generosity shown by us through our financial contributions to the Parish Support Fund which supports the mission and ministry of the whole diocese. Additionally Bishop Christopher wants everyone to know what the **vision for growth** for our diocese is. It’s summed up in three words:

Walking, Welcoming and Growing.

The desire is for Southwark to be a Diocese which is

- **walking** with Jesus and getting to know Jesus better as we journey on;
- **welcoming** all, embracing our diversity and seeking new ways of being church
- **growing** in number, generosity faith and discipleship as we grow God’s kingdom.

And that involves us all – because we are all part of the wider Church of England. You will know that a parish priest has a responsibility not just for those who come to Christ Church but for all who live within the parish boundary – some 6,000 people. And of course that is a huge responsibility which I can't possibly manage alone – but which needs everyone to be involved. So we work hard to try to communicate with people that Christ Church is here, that it is their local Church of England parish church, a church to which all are welcome. I hope you remembered that, for example, as you valiantly trailed round the parish delivering the Christmas cards to each house – for we never know what happens when they are received in the letter box. Many may throw them away. Some might recycle them. But some might just look at them and think "isn't it about time I popped into my local church to see what it's all about?" So we all have to develop new ideas to encourage growth so that we really do become a Walking, Welcoming and Growing Church – and we are no exception.

In the reading from Revelation, we have that vivid picture of all God's thoughts locked up forever, since no one can be found who is worthy to break the seals on the scroll. John literally weeps at the hopelessness of it, until the figure of Christ appears who has become human, who has given up his life and triumphed in love, so that in the end, the secrets of God can be revealed through him.

And then that lovely incident between Jesus and Philip and Nathaniel – or Bartholomew as he is sometimes called. It's a bit of a chain reaction. Jesus says to Philip 'Follow me' – and then Philip goes off to find Nathaniel and urges him to 'come and see'. So he does – and Jesus amazes Nathaniel by what he appears to know about him. 'Come and see' – we use that phrase so often when we eagerly want someone else to see what we are seeing, to share what we have discovered. We don't want to keep such things to ourselves. Many times I have brought people into our Church building and they have responded incredibly positively to what they find. The difficult part is persuading them to want to stay, to stay long enough to discover what God wants of them, what he might be calling them to be.

And this is an urgent matter. This shows itself in the Gospel – certainly this one for we can pick up something of the urgency from this part of John's Gospel – which is, make no mistake about it, aimed directly at us. Yes, at us, who have been privileged to meet with Jesus, and are the ones who can spread news of who the true God is, as revealed in Jesus Christ. We are the ones who can speak in the language of today that hopefully those around us can understand. And if we don't – well then the thoughts of God, which the world so desperately needs, will remain closed and shut up, effectively shutting many people out of what we have discovered.

Teresa of Avila, a Spanish mystic who lived from 1515–1582 put it like this:

*Christ has no body but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks with compassion on this world
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes,
you are his body. For Christ has no body now on earth but ours.*

There is a prayer for Epiphanytide printed in the middle of the pew sheet at the top which I'd like you to join with me in saying now as we pray that we may truly become a walking, welcoming and growing Church: