

Revd Michael Burns  
Christ Church West Wimbledon  
Sermon :  
August 26, 2018 ~ “Thirteenth Sunday of Trinity”

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A few months ago, I saw an amateur production of Henry V, commemorating over 600 years since the Battle of Agincourt in 1415. In his younger days, or so the story goes, the man we know as the hero of Agincourt had been a wastrel, hanging around in taverns with the wrong sort of people. This play portrays his extraordinary transformation from inexperienced leader to mighty warrior, trying to secure a place for himself, his dynasty and his country as repeated clashes between England and France were being fought.

The lead actor brought out very strongly both the humanity of the King as well as his strength and courage – and his faith too, for in the play Henry prays to God to guide and lead him. Indeed you could almost imagine Henry reading those words from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians to give him the strength and courage that he needed. For these are stirring words as Paul writes of the *belt* of truth, the *breastplate* of righteousness, the *shield* of faith, the *helmet* of salvation, the *sword* of the Spirit and *feet* fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. Truly the *full armour of God*. Finally the imprisoned Paul prays that “when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.” Stirring words which might have encouraged Henry V and which can

encourage us today, as we face a world which does not hold Christianity in very high regard...so “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power”.

Yet, despite all these stirring words, this is scary stuff when we it begins to dawn on us what is involved in being a Christian. “This teaching is difficult”, as John records it in the last part of chapter 6 of his gospel, where Jesus teaches that he is the Bread of Life and that he who feeds on the bread from heaven will live for ever. No wonder that, as Jesus expounded his message, many disciples deserted him. As they left, Jesus challenges the twelve “do you also wish to go away?” And it is Simon Peter who speaks for them all: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Henry V proclaims “Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more; the game's afoot: follow your spirit, and upon this charge cry 'God for Harry, England, and Saint George!' And he did so because he believed and knew God was with him. We too can leave church this morning, with the phrase of those first disciples of Jesus ringing in our ears and encouraging us, the Christian disciples of today, of the here and now: “We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”