

COLIN HOLLOWAY

The Reverend Michael Burns

Wednesday 19th December 2018

INTRODUCTION

A very warm welcome to you all to this service of thanksgiving for the life of Colin Holloway here at Christ Church West Wimbledon, a church he attended every Sunday for a remarkable 42 years. Colin knew with an unwavering certainty that on his death he would be bound for heaven but was also clear that he had to enter heaven through the Church of England gateway – and we have religiously adhered to his wishes. Indeed Colin himself wrote: “while good liturgy is not incompatible with the inflow of the Spirit, the order of service will need to be settled and not left to gusts of improvisation.” Other instructions are in his own unique style: for instance he wrote “A notice in the Daily Telegraph giving succinct factual details of the death and funeral arrangements will spread the word and let others know. A very sparing use of adjectives please”. The phrase that Angela and the family settled on for the paper was ‘much loved’ – and this packed congregation here today would say ‘Amen’ to that.

It won't surprise you to know that Colin was not a fan of the “If I were a butterfly I'd like to flap around in the sky” style of hymn. He went for hymns with a good scriptural base and proper theology in them – and so it is that we stand to sing together our first hymn ‘For all the Saints’.

SERMON

On the Sunday before his death, Colin led the intercessions here in his own inimitable style. On leaving church, he apologized to me that they were a bit long – which they really weren't – but in any case had been entirely appropriate, bringing many urgent earthly matters to the attention of the Almighty. Colin's entire life was directly motivated by his deeply held commitment to and personal faith in Jesus Christ and this guided him throughout his life.

He was hugely respected in so many ways and by so many people. Angela and his family meant everything to him and he would be delighted that Joanna and Adrian, together with his brother Keith, have been able to take a full part in this service. For us at Christ Church, our loss is huge for he was very much a wise and 'elder' statesman. He gave a great deal to this church as a one-time member of the PCC and as Secretary of the Building Development Committee amongst other roles.

My predecessor, Richard Lane, has sent this tribute: *"Colin was co-author of the parish profile sent round to candidates for the post of vicar at Christ Church in 2003. As would happen again and again in the following years, Colin could be relied on to find the right words. "The vicarage is uncompromisingly modern" he wrote, "and not everyone will like it." Brilliant. Theological literacy, the communication of ideas, meeting management (did anyone else EVER get the last word at a meeting Colin was at?), prayerfulness, kindness, a capacity to maintain relationships even with the most trying members of the congregation and an unfailing warmth that I could only ever marvel at and yearn for. All that said, there are plenty of parishes blessed with able laity where vicars are left feeling defensive and wary. He never once did that to me. One of Colin's great gifts was to wear his ability lightly and never leave others feeling belittled or unworthy. Colin was a blessing to this parish. His clear-eyed vision of what was good for the buildings, the people who worshipped here and the people beyond, whom we serve, has been a great gift to clergy and people of this parish for decades. A man of prayer, a champion of education, a theologian, an administrator, a friend, I will miss him. Hannah and I are very sorry not to have been able to be with you today. But I can well imagine Colin's beam of delight if I'd have been able to tell him that we couldn't make it today as we are attending our son's MA graduation at Goldsmith's College. Firstly of course as a champion of the gift of education Colin would have congratulated Simon on doing well but more than that: he would have taken genuine delight in the happiness and successes of others as he had done on so many Sundays and other days through his long life. Thank you Colin"*

One of the strongest characteristics of Colin is that he never stopped learning and growing in his Christian faith. The Book Club which he led was always a memorable monthly event for its members – Colin took great care in analyzing and assessing the books first before commending them to be studied and he was skilled at devising profound questions to get a good discussion going.

On the evening before he died he attended a monthly house study group and it was at this meeting that they talked about funeral service arrangements. The following day Colin wrote: “My request is for a proper Christian funeral service in church. I see the purpose of the church service as three-fold. It should be a respectful and significant occasion of leave-taking for family and friends. It should be an affirmative and meaningful committal of the dead to the loving mercy of Almighty God. It should be a time of thanksgiving and celebration of a life of assorted qualities but many blessings. The message is one of hope not despair”.

This Christian message of hope not despair to which Colin alluded is underlined by the words of one of the former clergy of this church who wrote to Angela and the family: “The more people I have seen out of this world in the course of my ministry the more convinced I become that death is not the end but rather the gateway to something new and wonderful in the presence of God. All the love that we human beings experience in our lifetime is part of that great love that God shows us in Jesus Christ, the love that is at the centre of all things”. These are words which have moved the family and with which Colin would completely and utterly concur.

In the 19th century the eminent logician and mathematician Heinrich Scholz asked the Swiss theologian Karl Barth ‘what is the basis on which theology operates as an intellectual discipline in the university?’ Barth is reported to have answered, very simply if assertively, ‘The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.’

I suggest that this would also be Colin’s succinct, clear and unequivocal answer to such a question. Whether or not you have a religious faith, you will be in no doubt as to the strength and sincerity of Colin’s faith – and that is what we are recalling now.

Thus we are doing this morning what Colin wanted us to do – giving thanks for his life and committing him from our care here on earth to the care of God in heaven.

May Colin rest in peace and rise in glory. Amen.