

Revd Michael Burns  
Christ Church West Wimbledon  
Sermon : March 10th, 2019  
“First Sunday of Lent”

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**LENT 1 2019 PREACHED BY THE REVEREND MICHAEL BURNS**

“Good home decorating is more about the preparation than it is about the actual painting” said a decorator to me the other day. That comment set me thinking of all the other things we do which all require careful preparation. There really are too many to mention – but amongst them are every kind of sport; then there’s cooking, learning to drive, gardening, building work, making music, dancing, going on a journey, etc., etc., All of these, if properly done, can take more time in preparing the groundwork, the foundations, than it takes to see the result. When I rehearse a couple for their wedding or help a family prepare for a funeral, it always takes twice as long as the actual ceremony on the day. A lot of what we do, if we do it properly, requires a great deal of preparation. Skimp on that side of things and we can swiftly come a cropper.

Sermons are a case in point. I don’t know about others but I do take several hours to think about, draft, change, hone and write a sermon – and often the shorter the sermon, the more work it takes. I know that people who lead a two minute ‘Thought for the Day’ on Radio 4 say it takes many hours of time to create those two minutes, where not a word can be wasted. But to what end do clergy and readers work on a sermon. Isn’t it really an outmoded way of trying

to communicate in today's world? Should we not bother? Would people miss the sermon? Do people ever remember what we say? But then I heard this story which raised a thought-provoking question: A woman wrote to a paper saying 'For 30 years I have been to church almost every Sunday and I must have heard something like 3,000 sermons, but I can't remember a single one. Am I wasting my time and the vicar's time?' A week later came a reply: 'I've been married for 30 years now and my wife has cooked me over 30,000 meals, ready for me when I return home from work. I don't know what the recipe was for any of those meals, but I do know they all nourished me and gave me strength. Without those meals, I would be dead today'.

Lent is the season for careful preparation – the time when we commit to preparing ourselves properly for the festival of the Resurrection. As Luke records the life of Jesus, it is our baptism that is, for many of us, the starting point of our preparation. By his baptism Jesus was filled by God's Holy Spirit and was promptly driven into a six week ordeal of testing and battling, of spiritual preparation. Jesus' ministry began with a long period of rigorous self-discipline, painful soul-searching and costly self-examination. But of course the result of this was that when he later spoke about our need to count the cost of discipleship, he was talking from personal experience. We know all too well that committing ourselves wholeheartedly to God's service is indeed a costly business, and one which many all too naturally back away from when they start to realise the full implications. You want to join a football team – are you willing to put in the hours of practice that will be required. You want to join a choir – will you be fully committed to the many hours of rehearsal? You want to be

baptised – are you willing to walk the way of the cross? Are we really willing to say to God “Your will be done”? Wouldn’t we prefer it to be “Our will be done”? Most of us feel fine about the idea of obedience until it differs from what we want in life.

In all of this, we are helped by Jesus as we think about these forty days and forty nights that he spent in the desert. He readily did this because he knew he would have many difficult issues to face during his life and he knew he would not be fully ready for his short ministry until he had made time to face them squarely, however unpleasant that might be. So he prepared himself by living very simply, going without food and letting God lead him into the areas he needed to think about. He wanted to spend time finding out what God really wanted him to do with his life.

I am certain that God wants the same for us. He wants our real, honest selves, and can’t start working with us until we are willing to share everything with him – and that means sharing our doubts, our misgivings and our sins. If there is anything we feel ashamed to mention to God, then we may be sure that’s the most important thing he wants us to say.

So this Lent, whatever we decide to give up or take on, try to spend some time in quiet, alone with God through Jesus. Try to hear what he might be calling you to be or to do. Lent (along with Advent) is one of the two seasons when Christians think especially about how our lives match up to the way that God wants us to live. *Carpe Diem!* Seize the day now with both hands!