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Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : August 30th, 2020
“Twelfth Sunday after Trinity”

TRINITY 12 2020

A few years ago, I was fortunate to be able to go to the ballet at Sadler's Wells Theatre. Performing there on a rare visit to the UK was the National Ballet of Cuba. Their performances were thrilling and breath-taking and took the audiences by storm. The National Ballet of Cuba is one of the most renowned companies in the world – but, of course, contradictions abound. Here is a socialist, communist country, where every child is given an equal chance – yet it is expressive individuality that marks out these Cuban artists. What is even more remarkable is that the success of this company is down to one woman, Alicia Alonso, one of the 20th century's greatest ballerinas. When she was a child, there was no ballet in Cuba and she taught herself to dance. When still young, she founded Cuba's first serious ballet school, and she was still in charge of the National Company until her death last October at the age of 98. This is all the more extraordinary given that Alicia Alonso became pretty much blind in her early 20s and has danced literally in the dark for the decades following. You can imagine the scenes at Sadler's Wells when she came on to take a bow, still very much in charge.

Why am I telling you about the remarkable achievements of Alicia Alonso? Alicia Alonso's cross has been her blindness, yet she has risen above it and has worked miracles for the people of Cuba in the world of dance. What is our Cross? Can we rise above it and go on to serve God and our fellow human beings despite those things which might drag us down?

This all links into part of the point of today's Gospel reading – where Jesus is speaking to the crowds and using the powerful image of the Cross - with those familiar words "if anyone would come after me, he must deny

himself and take up his cross and follow me". He is speaking about the importance of discipline and obedience – obedience to what is right and good – obedience to God.

And of course, I know that many are very faithful and obedient to God – faithfully and without question carrying the crosses that have been given us to bear. Looking at you today, I see many who I know carry your own personal crosses – some of them more heavy and painful than others - but all of us aware of the burdens we carry throughout our lives. For some the crosses we bear are quite personal and private – for others they may be more public – but all of them crosses which we cannot ignore. And, I would suggest, all of them are crosses which we cannot carry on our own. We need others to help us. We need God to carry us. Even Jesus needed the help and assistance of a stranger, called Simon from Cyrene, literally to carry his Cross for him.

In all this, Jesus is trying to help his disciples understand who he is and he is beginning to explain what following him will involve. Jesus firmly but with kindness outlines the need for the obedience needed for all his potential followers – and that must include us. Helpfully, the letter of Paul to the Romans this morning gives us a sort of job description for Christians. So, what I want us to take away this morning is the need for following God through the teaching and example of his Son – and being obedient only to him. Underneath all the obedient things we do there is a deep solid rock of obedience to God.

A child, I would suggest, learns discipline and self-control from disciplined, self-controlled adults, who value obedience themselves. Each of us, whatever our age, should never forget that we are a child – a child in the eyes of God – and that we must always be ready and willing to allow ourselves to be held and carried by God, our loving and heavenly Father – particularly when we are at our lowest and most vulnerable. A couple of weeks ago I read the piece called Footsteps, the picture of God carrying us at times, which leave only his footsteps in the sand. Hold that picture in your mind's eye and give thanks for the times when we know for certain that God is carrying us in his strong and caring arms. May that be so for each of us here today.