

Revd Michael Burns  
Christ Church West Wimbledon  
Sermon : September 6th, 2020  
“Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity”

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**6 SEPTEMBER 2020 – TRINITY 13**

I have to admit that I was a bit taken aback when I began to prepare today's short address – they have to be brief in these days of Covid-19 – because I can't recall ever having really taken much notice of our Gospel snippet before now. I suppose I must have done but I don't really remember. Maybe though it has resonated a bit more strongly now because the church in general – and the Church of England in particular – has found itself at the centre of a great deal of argumentative discussion in these past six months: mainly over the controversy of the enforced closure of churches. In *The Spectator* this week was an article by Jason Goodwin, extolling the virtues of the local parish churches of this land – and the affront that was felt when they were closed. He writes: “for the first time since the general papal interdict placed on King John in 1208, our parish churches were shut at Easter and are only just now beginning to re-open. We have had plagues, invasion scares, civil wars, world wars. Time was when the priest stayed with his flock and the church was a place of refuge and support. Instead we were enjoined to phone in or watch on Zoom”. Since March the internet has been awash with clergy and congregations arguing about this closure: “Avoid twitter and the viciousness of social media” a friend advised me. And I have!

Yet what today's readings clearly tell us is that there have always been disagreements since the earliest days – and so they pose the question ‘what is the character of our Christian communities?’ This question is highlighted in the Gospel

as Jesus explores how hurts and disagreements are to be settled within the life of the church. It's a delicate area and a detailed way forward is suggested. St Paul picks this up in his letter to the Romans, speaking of how Christians are to behave towards one another as agents of light and love.

There is as much a definite dose of reality in this for us today as there was in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine – the truth that where two or three human beings are gathered together life will not necessarily be easy. Jesus gathered round him a group of men who didn't always see eye to eye. So, we have to learn that to live as God's people is to learn to deal with disagreements well, recognizing the presence of God in one another – and agreeing to disagree if needed. We know it is our collective responsibility to encourage and uphold one another in living by the standard of real love. Thankfully real divisive disagreements are rare in most local churches and most reasonable human beings manage to sort of learn to rub alongside each other in harmony. And long may that continue. So, as a new normal way of living continues to be developed and explored by the world in this age of a global pandemic, let us be encouraged to walk together under God in the same direction. "Almighty God, you search us and know us: may we rely on you in strength and rest on you in weakness, now and in all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen".