

Revd Michael Burns  
Christ Church West Wimbledon  
Sermon : October 11th, 2020  
“Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity”

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**SERMON 11 OCTOBER 2020 TRINITY 18**

When I was a curate, I took a group of young people canoeing on the River Severn. As we looked at the attractive but treacherous stretch of water ahead, the instructor urged us: “Whatever you do, keep on paddling”. As you may imagine for the past 40 years, I have always remembered that advice. Life as a Christian is not easy – has never been easy – and is certainly getting less easy as the years unfold. Yet Jesus of Nazareth did not offer an easy life – his was the way of the Cross – the way of pain and struggle. Even in the Apostle Paul’s time, the work of the gospel was a struggle, as Paul wrote in that familiar passage to the church in Philippi – at a time when he was in prison.

‘Keep on’ he urges his Philippian readers – not so much ‘keep calm’ as ‘keep on keeping on’. ‘Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – and be assured that the God of peace will be with you’. Alan Bennett the playwright, when once asked what he was doing as the years advanced, replied he was just ‘keeping on keeping on’.

Keep on. We all know that there is no room for complacency as a Christian in the Church. We may have been swept up by the king’s slaves, in Matthew’s account, and ushered into the royal banqueting hall – but there is no relaxation of the call to whatever is true, honourable, just and pure. As one commentator on this passage has put it ‘the wedding garment may glisten. But what does it cover up’?

The appalling account of the safeguarding failures of the Church of England, published this week, makes for grim reading and casts a significant shadow over the work of the gospel to which Christians try to be faithful. It is no wonder that many now shy away from the church and all it stands for. This kind of bad news makes me all the more determined that any church with which I am involved must be above reproach, must be full of people of integrity and trust – so that we must be people who proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ as much by how we live as by what we say. So we pray, in the words of today's Collect, that God may teach us to be open to his truth, to trust in his love and to live each day with confidence in the task that has been handed down to us by Jesus of Nazareth.

Trust – this is such a difficult concept to build up and so easy to destroy. Those young canoeists had to trust in the advice of the instructor – ‘whatever you do, keep on paddling’. Society is built upon the unspoken ability of humans to be people of trust – so when that trust is broken, particularly by anyone in authority, it hits us very hard. Let us all pledge to be people who can be trusted so that others may see in us the radiant glory of Christ – and know that, whatever else is happening in our world today, this Church and its people will stand firm for the trusted truths of the Gospel. The rocks are all around, the river is in full flood – but we need to keep on paddling. Amen.