

Revd Michael Burns  
Christ Church West Wimbledon  
Sermon : October 18th, 2020  
“Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity”

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**ST LUKE 18 OCTOBER 2020**

I don't know about your experience, but over these past few months a lot of people have commented to me that the coronavirus has caused many to rethink how they live their lives – the latest conversation I had was with my Muslim barber on Monday. No longer taking things or people for granted. Deciding who are the most important people in our lives. Who we must really get in touch with after a long silence – and then keep in touch with? In other words, rethinking our priorities, deciding what really matters. Perhaps even going so far as to simplify and declutter our lives, if only a little.

Well, that may be a positive side of this dreadful world situation – but there has also been much illness, many deaths, the loss of jobs and livelihoods as well as the detrimental effects of people's mental health and wellbeing. It is all very complex.

One aspect that has come to the fore for many is the realisation that companionship matters. St Paul knows this, writing to Timothy that 'only Luke is with me' – for it was Paul who took Luke with him as one of his missionary team around the Middle East. Jesus too knows that companionship matters. The 70 are sent out in pairs to every place that he intends to visit. Two is better than one. Two can encourage one another. Two can pray together. Two can hold each other to account. Discipleship is always best done together.

For many Christians in these uncertain days it has been an important priority that we continue to worship together with others as best we can – whether in person or online. Yes, our worship has to be more muted and simpler – but we are doing the best we can to reconnect with God as did those first disciples, albeit without the more modern additions of glorious hymns, animated conversation or delicious hot coffee.

I have always loved today's post communion prayer: "Lord God, the source of truth and love, keep us faithful to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, united in prayer and the breaking of bread and one in joy and simplicity of heart". Those wonderful words speak volumes to me as they might to you. They remind us of the foundation

of our faith some 2000 years ago – of the simple but profound priorities taught by Jesus of Nazareth.

Today we celebrate Luke – an educated man, a doctor, who was probably the only writer of the NT who was not a Jew. In his writings – and he wrote both his Gospel and Acts – he presents to us a Jesus who is utterly and believably real. There are more women in Luke's Gospel than in any of the others – and also more poor people, more lepers, more 'sinners' and tax collectors, more outsiders who are shown the love of Christ. This is the great Gospel of inclusion and compassion. It is Luke who shows us a Jesus who is truly for the whole world.

When I worked in Stevenage in the early 1980's in my 2<sup>nd</sup> curacy, I made friends with a neighbouring Roman Catholic priest who taught me a great deal about ministry. He died recently and in his funeral instructions he made it known that the homily to be given at his funeral should have 'few biographical references but concentrate on the manner in which I have lived out my priesthood, my Christian faith'. His was a life which echoed much of today's Gospel passage – travelling light, staying in the place, genuinely connecting with all the people he encountered, whether Catholic or not.

His favourite hymn was a modern one by Estelle White called 'Moses, I know you're the man' which I have also come to love. I won't sing it to you now but some of the lyrics read thus: "Don't get too set in your ways, the Lord said, each step is only a phase, the Lord said, I'll go before you and I shall be a sign. So, every day we're on our way, for we're a travelling wandering race, called the people of God".

May we all, in these continually uncertain times, hold fast to the command of our Lord to keep faithful to the apostles teaching and fellowship, united in prayer and the breaking of bread, and one in joy and simplicity of heart. And may God bless us all, as the travelling, wandering race called the people of God. Amen.