

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : November 15th, 2020
“Second Sunday before Advent”

**15 NOVEMBER 2020
2ND SUNDAY BEFORE ADVENT**

Last Sunday evening, over 30 people joined by Zoom for our annual service of remembering. The darkness of the night was contrasted by the brightness of the empty church building lit by the candles and our remembrance flowers. It seemed to be appreciated by those who joined, particularly those who were still sad, still raw with grief and sadness. One person wrote afterwards: “I have been feeling so dark lately that it was good to be reminded that there is still light around”. So often it is all too easy, particularly in these days of lockdown, for us to be so overwhelmed with a feeling of gloom and darkness that we forget to look up and see the light. Yes, there is much darkness and evil in our world – but there is also much good and light in our world, if we only can see it.

In the Bible, we have a powerful image of the gathering evil that it is foretold will accompany the heralding in of the last days. Jesus is very concerned for his disciples – and for us today – to be on our guard. In the parable of the talents, Jesus reminds us that God expects us to make the most of all we have been given, rather than hiding our gifts away. All the talents we have been provided with can be used and enjoyed, both for the encouragement and building up of the Church and in the service we are called to give in the world. For we do indeed need to take great care as we travel through our time on earth. We know that all around us are subtle temptations to steer us off course and distract us from our calling.

When I was an Area Dean, I always admired and valued the staying power, the stickability of the clergy and their congregations. One priest told me: “Real ministry is all about staying in the place and really getting to know people. Too many areas of our life change so quickly – it is good for there to be real stability in a community, and a church can often provide that.” In the TV series, Granchester, the Archdeacon tells Sidney, the parish priest, to “hold your nerve, hold a steady course, take a long view of life”. Not a bad philosophy for us all in these nervous and uncertain days of 2020!

My ministry, your ministry, our ministry is a ministry of plodding on but with a spring in our step. It is about being alongside people when we can. I well remember, when the Christ Church Toddler Group was reopened earlier this year – though it seems so long ago – one new Mother said to me “Thank you for providing this opportunity for me to meet other Mums, with my baby”. The role of our Church in the community is to keep the light burning whatever – whatever.

The service we provided last Sunday evening is one of the more significant ministries that I think we are able to provide for people who might never otherwise come in to a Church, even if only via Zoom, and we should rightly give thanks to God for such an opportunity.

So, this morning, I would want us to remember that our lives as human beings is all about trying to dwell on the positive, of refusing to be side-tracked by distractions and upsets that can easily knock us off our path. It is about clinging to the light and refusing to allow the darkness to overwhelm it.

I have one of those torches which has no batteries – it only keeps alight through my efforts of winding it up. Each of us has to work at keeping the light shining. *“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing”* as Paul puts it. And for that encouragement of each other and for being built up by each other, a heartfelt “thanks be to God”. Amen.