

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : March 7th, 2021
“Third Sunday of Lent”

LENT 3 — MARCH 7 2021 HOMILY

In the smallest room in my house, I have a very useful book. Called ‘Rules for Reverends’ and written by a vicar it contains all sorts of helpful hints and tips about being a vicar. Among the gems are *‘no, the Diocese does not know what it is doing’*; and *‘no one is ever happy about car parking arrangements. For any event. Anywhere.’* Or *‘there is no such thing as a quiet toy’*; or *‘the one time you answer the phone in an amusing way will be the one time you wish you hadn’t’*; or *‘there should be a misprint in every order of service. Only God is perfect’*. I like this one: *‘the best way of galvanising the 99% of your parish who never come to church is to propose the removal of a pew’*. And, finally, what about *‘don’t mess with the flower arrangers.’* But there is one that fits perfectly for this morning – it reads *‘no, the compilers of the lectionary for Sunday readings don’t know what they are doing’*. Absolutely. How else can we explain why the Gospel reading for today, mid-Lent, jumps straight into the events of Holy Week with the cleansing of the Temple, which normally follows Palm Sunday? I have no idea – except that, to be fair, John places this dramatic event very early on in his particular Gospel. No matter, ours not to reason why.

But nonetheless, it is a vivid story. God’s people have always needed holy places. But sacred places are open to misuse: they, and what takes place within them, can easily become objects of worship in themselves. Jesus’ cleansing of the temple reminds us of the fundamental message of the Ten

Commandments: that the worship and devotion which God requires is central. Nothing – not even our religious practice – must be allowed to become an idol. Jesus goes on to speak of raising up the temple of his body: and so, we are drawn beyond things of this life on earth into God’s new order of resurrection life.

God’s people have always needed holy places. Of course, we are very fortunate to have a lovely church in which we can worship. There are many congregations that have a less than attractive building – though not that that matters very much of course; for it is the people in the building who make up the Body of Christ. Over this past year though, never before have so many felt so acutely the pain of being unable to freely worship together in their house of prayer – and that is certainly true for us who make up Christ Church. Of course, we have been very fortunate to be able to worship together in a different way as an alternative – but, as many have said, there is nothing like being together as the Body of Christ in a church building.

I am quietly hopeful that we will soon be able to do this once more – and, God willing, never again have to close our holy place to the worship of God. But this long period we are going through without our holy place will remind us that we can actually be Christians anywhere, in the same way that we can pray and worship anywhere. For it is what is inside us that matters – where our heart is. But to achieve that we know that we all need space and quiet to become the people God wants us to be. Lent is a time to make space for God and get our lives back in perspective and balance. With this in mind, I recently came across this quote recently; it’s not from ‘Rules for Reverends’ but from St Anselm. St Anselm of Canterbury was an Italian Benedictine monk, abbot, philosopher and theologian who held the office of Archbishop of Canterbury from 1093 to 1109. He wrote these words:

“Come now ... flee for a while from your tasks, hide yourself for a little space from the turmoil of your thoughts. Come, cast aside your burdensome cares, and put aside your laborious pursuits. For a little while, give your time to God,

and rest in him. Enter into the chamber of your mind, shut out all things save God and whatever may aid you in seeking God; and having barred the door of your chamber, seek him.”

That personal seeking after God is perhaps best summed up in the last verse of our first hymn with its words of personal dedication for us all to reflect upon and with which I finish this morning:

*Lord Jesus Christ,
I would come to you,
live my life for you,
Son of God.
All your commands I know are true,
your many gifts will make me new,
into my life your power breaks through,
Living Lord.*

May those words encourage and guide us as we continue travelling forwards through the desert on our journey as Christians together during this season of Lent. Amen.