

Revd Michael Burns  
Christ Church West Wimbledon  
Sermon : April 18th, 2021  
“Third Sunday of Easter”

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**EASTER 3 2021**

I suspect you don't need me to say how good it is to be back together in church today. This past year has been a real roller-coaster ride – and I, for one, hate roller-coasters! Yes, it is true that most of us have coped and that hopefully most of the congregation of Christ Church have still felt connected to each other during these past months, albeit in very different and new ways. We certainly wouldn't have got through without the internet and telephone. But it has not been the same and for some it has been a year of real struggle and pain – not least as we have mourned the loss of some of our members who have died. And of course, we are not out of the woods yet – we still cannot sing, we still have to wear masks and remain socially distanced. But maybe, slowly but surely, with the vaccination programme continuing to roll out, we are getting there. Certainly, to be able to get my haircut and my car washed this week felt like a great achievement!

I think from the start of lockdown I was keen we should worship in an appropriate way. Rather than following the example of some of my colleagues who have tried to replicate a full Sunday service, I have been more concerned to try to stream 'domestically appropriate services'; to celebrate the presence of God and the love of Christ in our homes. We've learnt names; we've enjoyed the lively contribution of our children; we've been able to sing our hearts out at home, and also enjoyed some good conversations in the breakout rooms – meeting old friends and making new ones.

One new person who has been part of our Zoom congregation from some miles away wrote to me: *“It has been a great, never-to-be-forgotten privilege, to have been made to feel so very welcome and warmly invited into the Christ Church congregation and community from afar for the last year plus, when it has never mattered more that we all extend support to one another on a constant and*

*continuing basis. The fellowship of Christ Church really is very welcoming. This is a huge achievement, since we have all, by-and-large, been on screens only for the last year. A big thank you to all those who have participated, and especially to the IT squad, all of whom have been quite brilliant in keeping the flame of belief alive and burning bright in such very difficult times. My deepest thanks".* Yes, we know we have a lot to be thankful for.

By a happy coincidence, our first Sunday properly back in church together has the wonderful Easter story of the road to Emmaus. Luke 24, the final chapter of his book, is broadly an account of one day in the life of Jesus – from what happened early in the morning on that first day of the week, moving on to what happened later that extraordinary day.

The chapter includes the story on the road to Emmaus – of the two disciples walking the seven miles from Jerusalem and talking as they went until unexpectedly they were joined by a stranger who talks with them in considerable detail about the events and who turned out to be their risen Lord, recognised by them when “he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them”. Then, as Luke records it, “they gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence. Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures”. The day ended with Jesus disappearing from sight and these two then ran back to Jerusalem with great joy to tell the Eleven what had happened on the road “and they were then continually in the temple blessing God”. Luke chapter 24 should give us great hope and encouragement, for it assures us that the risen Christ still walks with us even if we can’t see him, that in this breaking of the bread Christ can still open our eyes and our minds to God’s blessing.

These events as Luke chapter 24 records them reminds us that churches, communities of Christians, do not stand still – they are changing and evolving all the time. What I believe we now have to do as the months ahead unfold is to be people who are constantly looking ahead, moving forwards to what lies before us, rather than constantly looking over our shoulders at the past. The exciting and sometimes scary fact is, of course, that we really do not know what lies ahead – which is why the human in us usually prefers to look back to the past: it feels safer and less daunting. Yet the story of the road to Emmaus and the appearance of Jesus to those first disciples should encourage us to do three things –

- Always to move forwards;
- Always to move forwards together;
- And always to move forwards together in faith and hope and love.

Jesus of Nazareth is the one constant in the lives of all faithful Christians who trust his word. He promised: "I am the way and the truth and the life". So, I encourage us all:

- Always to move forwards;
- Always to move forwards together;
- And always to move forwards together in faith and hope and love.

I am genuinely excited that we can properly begin to gather together again and hope that more and more of you will feel able to return to worship once again. Of course, we have lots to do – particularly to build up those whose confidence to get out and about amongst other people has been seriously undermined in these past months. But we know we can trust God that he will be there to guide us in all that lies ahead.

Someone wrote: *"The task ahead of you is never as great as the power behind you"*. And perhaps we can all say a quiet but confident 'Amen' to that as we move ahead. *Risen Christ, you filled your disciples with boldness and fresh hope. Strengthen us also to proclaim your risen life and fill us with your peace, to the glory of God the Father.*