

Revd Michael Burns  
Christ Church West Wimbledon  
Sermon : October 24, 2021  
“Last Sunday of Trinity ”

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**SERMON : LAST SUNDAY OF TRINITY 2021**

Like many who use a computer, I do all I can to keep it clean of viruses. I install all the regular updates, I have a strong firewall and I have installed a good virus shield. Yet still, particularly in my church email, unwanted junk mail creeps through – and I immediately have to delete what I don't want in order to read what I do. It is, in an electronic sense, no different from the junk mail that comes through every letter box in the land on a regular basis. In other words, I try to set my priorities quite carefully so that my computer does not rule me but rather helps me in my ministry.

I took the same attitude when I went last week to the Christian Resources Exhibition held at Sandown Racecourse. 150 exhibitors were there displaying their wares, offering everything from banners to Bibles, heating to seating, puppets to pulpits. You have to be very selective who you talk to and whose information you take away with you. Mind you, it depends to a remarkable degree on the different sales people you encounter. Some are chatting away to their colleagues and ignoring any potential customers. Some are fixated on their electronic devices and ignoring any potential customers. Some are so bouncy and enthusiastic that any potential customers quickly shy away. But then others are just there, catching your eye, smiling pleasantly and wanting to chat gently with you as you pass by.

I think all this and more boils down to the fact that, the older we get, the more important it becomes to set the right priorities. I suppose we learn to focus on what is important; to narrow, if you like, our vision a bit so that we can concentrate on what is more pressing. I know many of you try to do the same, particularly those of

you trying to balance the pressures of family, work, leisure, church. You begin to say 'no' more readily and without so much guilt.

Certainly, the church has slowly begun to do the same. It is all too common for a congregation to become so exhausted from keeping the organisation running that they have forgotten what they are there for in the first place. It has long been recognised that there are 7 marks of a healthy church:

1. **Energized by faith** rather than just keeping things going or trying to survive.
2. **Outward-looking focus** with a 'whole life' rather than a 'church life' concern.
3. **Seeks to find out what God wants** rather than trying to please everyone.
4. **Faces the cost of change and growth** rather than resisting change and growth.
5. **Operates as a community** rather than running as a club or religious organisation.
6. **Makes room for all** by being inclusive rather than exclusive.
7. **Does a few things and does them well;** focused action rather than frenetic.

**Does a few things and does them well.** Many years ago, I discovered a book, written in 1924 called the Personal Life of the Priest. Later on it was republished as the Personal Life of the Christian. In a chapter intriguing called 'Over-Occupation, the author writes of the importance of priests trying to limit what they do so that they can be true to their calling. He says this: *'Your life easily becomes too crowded; you allow too many interests to enter in and absorb your vital strength; too many plants struggle for existence in the garden of your nature. It becomes simply another case of 'no room to live'. You will have to thin out. You must see to it that the good seed gets its proper chance. Reduce the number of excitements and engrossments, make more free spaces for stillness and quiet thought, and see if you do not soon begin to feel the gain in the strengthening of what is best in your life'*. He speaks of the need for time – time for prayer, time for reflection, time for bible study – as well as time for pastoral work and visiting. It is why any priest is so grateful when the people of the church do so much work to free him to do his work of ministry – it is why I am so grateful that so many of you so generously share in the work of this church with me.

I say all this because it seems to me that Bartimaeus had got it right. He would have been a familiar sight on the dusty main street of Jericho. He would have been anxious not to miss any opportunity to beg for money in order to live. It would have been understandable if he had begged Jesus to give him food or money or clothes.

Yet, as soon as he heard it was this famous preacher and healer passing by, what did he ask for? For his sight to be restored to him. That was his priority above everything – even if his restored sight would mean that his begging days would be over. But in the story, we find Jesus going about his healing business of giving sight to the blind. Bartimaeus is anxious not to miss out of this opportunity and it is his faith, Jesus tells him, which heals his sight.

In the life of this beggar, happy and freed from his blindness, choosing to follow Jesus, we glimpse the wider vision of people turning to the God who never gives up on them and longs to gather them to himself. In Jesus, God gathers his scattered people and opens their eyes to see. In these so-called Post Covid days, it is evident that many are re-evaluating their lives in a whole host of ways – and for some it is leading to their return to church and to faith.

As we all get older, it is inevitable that our priorities can become more focussed – and that it can be God who helps us to set the priorities in our lives, who helps us to limit our work, to concentrate on what is important. To do a few things and do them well – if only we have eyes to see.

*Merciful God, teach us to be faithful in change and uncertainty, that trusting in your word and obeying your will, we may enter the unfailing joy of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*