

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : November 7th, 2021
“3rd Sunday before Advent”

SERMON : 3RD SUNDAY BEFORE ADVENT 2021

At first sight, the calling of the first disciples may seem to be an odd choice for today, the 3rd Sunday before Advent, when we are fast approaching Advent and Christmas. Yet why not go back to basics? It is sometimes good to be reminded of our roots, good to hear again the story of the calling of the first disciples as Mark tells it. As you may know Mark’s Gospel doesn’t include anything of the birth narratives – instead Jesus strides straight out into his ministry, announcing the coming kingdom of God and urging repentance and belief in the good news. No sooner had he started to alert people than he begins to gather workers for the harvest, calling local fishermen from casting and mending their nets to reach people and mend them through God’s love. The obedience of those first disciples to his call is vital for the saving of many – and is the basic foundation of the Christian Church.

We, the disciples of this 21st century, need occasionally to be reminded of the calling of those first disciples of the 1st century, as we continue the work they began, albeit in a world which they would not have imagined possible. As an active Christian community, we try to forge ahead, to move forward – but should never forget our past inheritance – even if we cannot really remember it and can only imagine it.

November is traditionally the month of Remembrance. Next week Farhad will preach at our Remembrance Sunday service and at 11am we will hold our short Act of Remembrance at our memorial. Then in the evening we will be welcoming to Christ Church those who come to remember their loved ones who have died in the past. It will be good to hold that service in person once again and in particular to remember those who have died in the past 18 months and for whom it was not

possible to hold a funeral attended by everyone who would have wished to be present.

So, November is all about recognising and remembering our past and the people who have gone before us. Last Sunday we remembered all the saints – that wonderful celebration of light, of all the saints of the past, known and unknown who form the foundation of our worldwide Church today. Then tomorrow is a less well-known festival when we commemorate the saints and martyrs of England. Amongst them I would include many from this church who have been real pillars of our community in the past. There are too many to mention but their names and our memories of them live on. The prayer for tomorrow includes these words: *God, we praise you for the saints in our own land and for the many lamps their holiness has lit. The many lamps their holiness has lit* – what a wonderful phrase as we remember those former members of this church and all they have left behind for us to build upon.

The Bishop of London recently said: “We cannot change the past, but we are responsible for how we remember it”. I was reminded of this when I recently saw a film, *Suffragette*. Here is the story of the suffragette movement, but told from the viewpoint of one laundry worker, who, quite by chance, finds herself pushed forward into the vanguard of women demanding the vote. It is the first film in history to be shot in the Houses of Parliament, done with the permission of MPs – and that fact alone says something about its significance. Like many other films, it helps to remind us of our past as well as our present, for there are still many countries where women do not yet have the vote.

Remembering our roots, our past histories, whether or not we actually lived through them, is an important part of our psyche, our make up – and should not be ignored. After all, we are both Christian disciples who are following the example of those 1st century fishermen who were called by Jesus of Nazareth, as well as being people who have been shaped by wars, past and present.

So, we are encouraged today to do two things. We are encouraged to remember – but also to look ahead – to highlight our awareness of our past, of what we have inherited – but then to try to make a difference in the future.

This two-pronged approach really does work. We need to be the bright fresh wandering, travelling race of people that Moses led – and which Estelle White captured in her wonderful song called ‘Moses I know you’re the man, the Lord said’ with its chorus ‘So ev’ry day we’re on our way, for we’re a travelling, wandering race called the people of God’. Yes, we are travelling, wandering – not perhaps as literally as were those who followed Moses, but agile in mind and heart. We should always be looking for new ways to bring about the kingdom of God, looking for new ways of being the Church, of being faithful to our calling as disciples; of being faithful to our pledge that we really will fight – fight for peace and justice amongst all peoples; and also to do anything we can do to work together for a better world, which was the primary reason why Jesus of Nazareth called those Galilean fisherman to be his disciples all 20 centuries ago.