

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : Third Sunday of Lent
Sunday 20th March 2021

LENT 3 : 2022

Just for a few moments this morning, can I ask you to cast your mind back to imagine what London might have been like around 160 years ago, roughly the same year as Christ Church was being constructed. One thing you would notice is the many men and boys who earned their livelihood from carrying goods on their backs from one place to another. Sometimes the journeys across the city would be quite arduous and lengthy – and the carrier – or porter as he was called – would easily become tired. If he were to put his burden on the ground, he would face the difficulty of lifting it back onto his shoulders again. So, the porter was always on the lookout for a low wall or window sill on which to place his burden at shoulder height. In some busy spots around London, people thoughtfully and generously assembled suitable resting places. One such still survives to this day on a pavement near Green Park. It's a simple wooden bar resting on two metal legs – and an inscription records it was put up *“in 1861 by the congregation of St George's Hanover Square for the benefits of Porters and others carrying burdens”*.

Now translate that story to the purpose of our churches – and you might agree that they should be places where acts of worship are moments of rest, renewal and revival – where we can bring our burdens to God and let them rest on him for at least a short while. And of course, you would be right. Churches have a special role as a haven of peace, where acts of worship are a time of refreshment – where a person can 'be still in the presence of the Lord'. So it is that churches and cathedrals strive to be places of prayer, of refuge, of wonder, to be places of warmth and welcome to strangers and friends alike, as men and women reach up to God and outwards to the world. Note that these words reflect the shape of the cross –

reaching up to God and outwards to the world. Here at Christ Church, we try to reach up to God and outwards to the world in a variety of different ways, as we *Share God's Love by Walking in Faith together, Working for our Community and Welcoming both strangers and friends.*

Welcoming both strangers and friends. And you will all know that one special project in which we have been working together for a long time is to seek to formally sponsor a refugee family. Many of you have been very generous and affirming in your support for this project – and Chris Larkman will now share an important update with us all.....

Chris Larkman continued:

The good news is that the Parish Refugee Project Steering Group has now formally agreed to welcome a young Syrian refugee family into the flat we have rented in Morden. The family is father, mother, 8-year-old son, one year old daughter and mother is expecting a baby in September. They will have their hands full – and so will we! The family are currently in Egypt having arrived there via a circuitous route fleeing from all that was happening in their home country of Syria. They should be arriving here in about 6-8 weeks' time and we will be supporting them for an agreed period of 2 years. The plan is to help them get established in this country to be able to go on to live here independently. This will be a major challenge for them – coming to a completely different culture and language. We have a fantastic parish team supporting the project. They have been working hard to prepare and equip the property to meet our family's particular needs and have made plans for language lessons and interpreters. Thank you to the many people in the parish who have offered, and continue to offer help, and to give generously to this project in terms of time, money and other gifts, and talents. Going forward, we will be approaching you all for more help and support. And of course, your prayers.

Meanwhile I want to mention that Clare has drawn up a list, which is at the back of the church, of smaller, new items that are needed for the flat. Anything from a tin opener to a double duvet – so if anyone has any of these items available, please sign up on the list. Items can then be brought to church over the next couple of weeks and left in the box at the back of the church, or, if you would prefer, we can arrange to pick them up from you.

With all the horrors of what is happening in the Ukraine, it feels good to be able to do something for one family who has had to flee their motherland. I pray for the

family as they arrive and begin their new life, and I pray that we can offer them a warm welcome, always being sensitive to their needs and expectations.

Michael continued:

Thank you, Chris, for your strong leadership of this exciting if challenging project and for all those who have generously been giving help in these important planning stages.

So, to conclude: this morning we have all come together because we know our need of God, the God who is glimpsed in acts of worship like this one – echoed in the theme of our readings which underlines that we have God’s invitation to come and share freely of his Spirit. Each of us has come today for our own different reasons; but it is enough that we are here, being respectful and supportive of each other, bringing to God our burdens in whatever form they take. Our worship together should be a time of rest and renewal when we can come to God and give our burdens to him for a while. But – and it is a big but – you will know all too well that we cannot hide in our churches from the needs of the world. We come together for one hour a week in order that we may be sent out to live the other 167 hours as God wants us to live.

In the words of one of our final prayers, *send us out in the power of the Spirit to live and work to God’s praise and glory* – and one way in which we are doing that at this time in our history in a very practical and visible way is in our sponsoring and supporting a refugee family.

Porters needed to rest their loads for a few moments before continuing their arduous journey and this is what the church is doing for us now. It is in St Matthew’s Gospel that we find these words of encouragement for us all: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest”.

We are resting now for a few moments before continuing our pilgrim journeys. Amen.