

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : 4th Sunday after Trinity
Sunday 10th July 2022

JULY 10, 2022 – TRINITY 4

“Lawyers are trained to ask good questions” – so said someone to me recently. I don’t know if those amongst you who are lawyers would agree – but it seemed, to my mind at any rate, a logical statement. In our Gospel reading today we have the well-known passage of the story of the Good Samaritan. First the lawyer asks a general question: ‘Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ Then he presses Jesus with something much more specific: ‘And who is my neighbour?’ Jesus responds with the shocking, yet remarkable, story – as relevant now as it was then – about how prejudice, fear and status lead many to shun their neighbour. The hero today is of course not a good Jew but a Samaritan, who was, for the Jews, a heretic and an outcast. The Samaritan wasn’t actually able to take the injured man to his own home, because of the social and religious laws of the time, but he ensured that the man received the care that he needed.

The story of the Good Samaritan reminds us that we don’t have to change the world; we just need to do what is within our capability – but we need to do it. It is acts of kindness and generosity like this that each one of us is capable of. The Jewish lawyer has to learn to listen to the law which on his own understanding was meant to foster the love of God and all people. I found this quote recently from Edmund Burke who said “*Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little*”. We know that we all have to do something to help others as we are able, not least because there are so many biblical references where Christians are challenged to help the poor.

I recently spoken with a group of 13–15-year-olds and shared with them the two basic commandments of the Christian faith – to love and worship God and to love and serve our neighbours. When they questioned me further about what the second meant, I told them of the work this congregation has been doing over the past four years to sponsor a Syrian refugee family – and how all our careful research and preparation was now being put into practice as we welcomed and begin to support Mohammed and Bariaa and their young family. Yes, we know that our support is just for one family when millions the world over continue to be in great want – but we know we need to do what is within our capability – and to do it. Remember: *“Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could only do a little”*.

A couple of weeks ago the clergy of the Merton Deanery met with Bishop Richard. He is soon to retire after 20 years in post and was doing a sort of farewell tour. He reflected on the Church of England as it is at the moment and then asked us how our congregations were faring in this time, two years after Covid first struck. I told Bishop Richard and my colleagues that, just as we were meeting, that very morning our Syrian refugee family were arriving at Heathrow and travelling to Morden to begin to make a new life for themselves in the UK. I went onto say how this work has, it seems to me, given a real and positive focus for the whole community of Christ Church as we continue to try to pick up the pieces of our congregational life after the hiatus of the recent two or more years. Many of my fellow clergy were genuinely impressed to hear what we have been able to achieve and assured us of their good wishes and prayers.

I suppose it all boils down to one particular phrase which I am passionate about and it is this: a healthy church does a few things and does them well. Taken from a book of some years ago, the *Healthy Churches Handbook* by Robert Warren, the author identified 7 marks of a healthy church. So, a Healthy Church is:

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** - discerning the Spirit’s leaning rather than trying to please everyone.

4. **Faces the cost of change and growth** rather than resisting change and avoiding failure.
5. **Operates as a community** rather than functioning as a club or religious organisation.
6. **Makes room for all** - being inclusive rather than exclusive.
7. **Does a few things and does them well** - focused rather than frenetic.

And it is this last one that I think is the key: *A healthy church does a few things and does them well.* To elaborate, a healthy church is one which:

- does the basics well: especially public worship, pastoral care, stewardship and administration;
- helps people make sense of life and communicates faith through the occasional offices of baptism, marriages and funerals;
- is active in being good news in its attitudes and ways of working;
- enjoys what it does and is relaxed about what is not being done;

A healthy church does a few things and does them well. One final reflection. In our first reading Paul is full of thankfulness at the lush growth of the Christians at Colossae and he prays for that to continue to flourish. For us in today's church we too must be thankful when we espy signs of regrowth and regeneration. As we continue to build upon the foundations of those who have gone before us, we constantly need to check on what we do and how we do it so that we can stay true to God's priorities and values and continue to live by God's standards of love and care – and above all that encompasses all those in any kind of need.