

Sermon preached by the Rev'd. Cynthia Jackson St.Mary's Wimbledon 1st September 2019, Trinity 11. 9.30 service; her last service at St. Mary's before retiring to St. Matthew's.

Yesterday I received an e-mail from St. Andrew's Convent, Lewisham, with their Autumn Programme and the message was headed '*Welcome*' and when you book a visit to St Michael's Convent, Gerrards Cross, you write to *the Hospitality team*. What a warm introduction to receive from both Convents.

In our Gospel reading today we can see how important hospitality was in the ancient world. However, some people thought themselves more important than they were. How embarrassing to be asked to move to a lowlier position at a wedding feast. Jesus wanted to make the point that it was not just at a wedding feast where people were trying to get the best seats. They were trying to make out before God that they were better than other people. What a contrast to Jesus' behaviour, he was always defying the conventions of the day, e.g. when he healed people on the Sabbath.

Yes, Jesus came to turn the world upside down. I think the modern hymn '*O Lord all the world belongs to you*' puts the Gospel message rather well:

1. *"O Lord, all the world belongs to you,
and you are always making all things new.
What is wrong you forgive,
and the new life you give
is what's turning the world upside down..."*

4. *The world wants the wealth to live in state,
but you show us a new way to be great;
like a servant you came
if we do the same,
we'll be turning the world upside down."*

When we hear the message of our reading from Hebrews it reminds us of many aspects of St Mary's mission statement e.g. being a welcoming community, a concern for social justice, to name but two.

But how hard it is 'to ... *Keep our lives free from the love of money, and to be content with what we have.*'

But what a wonderful line to hold on to:

'... Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever...'

We certainly need that assurance and certainty in today's chaotic world.

I recently read a book entitled:

'Every place is Holy Ground – making a pilgrimage through everyday places', and I quote:

*... 'Jesus came into the world to reset our priorities for us. He reminds us that we don't need much, but that what we do need we cannot and should not live without.... He teaches us by his example to strive to free ourselves from all that is unnecessary, or clutters up our physical, emotional and spiritual lives. So often we run the risk of putting the progress of our spiritual journey in jeopardy as we insist on retaining much that it is unnecessary – clinging onto old faith practices, nurturing grudges, adhering to rituals that have long become redundant to our spiritual well-being. All these things can impede or even prevent of growth...' **

It is timely for me as I retire from St Mary's, and return to St Matthew's to reassess my priorities. What do I need to relinquish and how can I carry on my ministry as a Priest in serving God? All of us, lay or ordained, need to review our priorities from time to time.

In looking back at over my seven years at St Mary's what memories will I take away with me? The smile of welcome from a Warden standing at the door welcoming people to the 9.30 service; sides people welcoming the congregation at all services. That is hospitality in action.

Memories of the quiet 8 a.m. Book of Common Prayer Book Holy Communion Service; the 9.30 service with its robed choir with adults and young choristers. How I smile when I see the young children coming in holding onto their colourful ropes. At the lively 11.15 service, something unexpected always seems to happen. Thank you to Catherine Linsley for the support I have received when conducting this service and keeping me on the straight and narrow! Lastly memories of Choral Evensong, a service where one is transported into another world with beautiful music, and the rhythm of the traditional language of the Book of Common Prayer.

I remember the busy time of the Interregnum after Mary Bide, our former Rector left and then Chris Griffiths, our Curate leaving too. Memories of our early morning 8.15 am. Planning team meeting with our Wardens on a Thursday morning before Morning -Prayer . John Bush with his spreadsheet and multitasking even to the extent of sorting out a puncture in one of my car tyres whilst I attended Morning Prayer! For the first time I realised what a lot of people did "behind-the-scenes work" that I did not know about. Also, I learnt how much informal support was provided by members of the congregation to one another.

My main memories of St. Mary's will be the people. Being alongside them in their joys and sorrows. The joy of baptising babies or children and the joy of officiating at Helen and Trevor Dean's wedding. (I rarely officiate at weddings).

Visiting housebound members of our congregation, some of them aged 90 or over, and taking them Holy Communion. Taking Holy Communion Services at Lee house Care Home. Preparing Alice Jenkins to be admitted to Holy Communion, how enjoyable that was and how excited she was to receive communion for the first time. Being with people in illness and in their dying and supporting their families and friends. Conducting or assisting at funerals.

Seeing the formation of the Fountain Group and of Shara Leonard's dedicated leadership of that group. What a pleasure it was to be invited to a recent meeting. Thank you to Shara for her help and care to me.

Another joy has been the Julian Silent Prayer Group that Susan Mayo and I started over six years ago. I look forward to continuing with this group.

There are too other many individuals to mention by name who have cared and supported me over the last seven years but nevertheless I leave with grateful thanks. However, I am especially grateful to our Rector, Mandy, for being so understanding and supporting me as my health has deteriorated over the last two years. Thanks too to Nils for all the patient help he has given me with my computer in setting up simple shortcuts for me to access St Mary's information.

I am only sorry that my twin-sister Anne, who supports me in all that I do, and my brother-in-law Michael could not be here today. Unfortunately, they have had to spend an additional three days in the Isles of Scilly as the Scillonian, the passenger boat, has been out of action with engine failure!

I shall miss you all, but I expect I will meet many of you out and about in Wimbledon or Raynes Park. You never know from time to time I may pop up at Choral Evensong or at a Tuesday Lunch.

I'd like to end with a prayer:

*"Lord God, you created the world in six days
and blessed the seventh by resting.
Help us to balance our lives with actions and inaction,
work and rest.
Give us the gift of resting in you,
allowing your hands to hold us and all our concerns,
feeling surrounded by your love,
safe and at peace. **Amen.***

** Every place is Holy Ground – Making a pilgrimage through everyday places. – Sally Welch.*