**2020-09-06 Sue Diggory**

**Trinity 13 – Matthew 18 verses 15 – 20**

**When two of three are gathered in my name … I am there among them**

At present it is far from usual for us to gather in large groups; two households inside, a maximum of six people outside, no more than 30 at a baptism, wedding or funeral and even a ‘normal’ service in church is regulated by the current social distancing guide lines, so it is very comforting to hear these words from Jesus in our set Gospel reading for today, *when two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them.* We don’t need to be part of a large gathering to have Jesus in our midst!

The reading appears to be focused on life in the church, and the behaviour of those who are part of it, yet when these words were spoken by Jesus church as we know it did not exist. It was not until Pentecost that the embryonic Christian Church came into existence, the forerunner to the little churches that feature in the book of Acts and the recipients of the of the letter or epistles that make up part of the canon of scripture.

So if ‘church’ doesn’t mean exclusively what the word implies today, what should we have in mind as we read these words. The word for church in the original Greek was *ekklesia* which if translated literally means ‘called out from’ and could simply mean a gathering, an assembly of even a community. I wonder if in these days of post-lockdown with all the changes we have experienced over the few months if our understanding of what the word church means to us has changed.

Is church for us the building of Holy Trinity here in Crockham Hill, somewhere that we can go to each week to worship and pray?

Is it the people whose faces we see week by week on the Zoom screen each Sunday morning, people who generally live in or near our village but who on occasion are those who used to live here and have moved away to another county, or indeed another country, are they just as much part of what we consider to be our church?

Is it the people who quietly follow the Sunday Service sent out weekly in the quiet of their own homes and gardens, people who for a variety of reasons can’t physically come to the church building or link up with the service on Zoom, or indeed prefer not to be constrained by a set time and place for worship?

Is it the people whose names appear on the electoral roll, some of whom we encounter week by week, and others who again for a variety of reasons are not able to be a regular part of the worship linked to Holy Trinity or is it even wider than that; is it all those who live within our community and beyond who seek to live their lives in a way that honours God and the love of neighbour?

I suggest that how we think of church will colour what we ‘do’ as church here within our local community, it will colour how we are as church, those who are part of the patchwork that makes up the *ekklesia,* the called out and gathered ones of Crockham Hill.

In the reading before us today Matthew sets out a structure for helping each of us as part of the church to be useful and worthwhile members of our *ekklesia* community. I could spend time here looking at the guidance and structure that Jesus gives us for dealing with situations that need correcting if we are to live in a community that reflects his call on our lives, but perhaps there is one word that leaps out, that it would be good to focus on, the word *listen.* We are called to listen to others and equally others are called to listen to us as we seek to live out the life style of Christ.

At the start of our reading we are called to listen to others who may not be in our eyes ‘following the rules’ so that we can understand their perspective, to understand where they are coming from, rather than assuming that we are necessarily right! And if that isn’t of help than perhaps a wider group from the church might be able to help with whatever the local issue is, but at its heart this is not about condemning those who are not like us, it is rather to help us and others focus on living our lives in a way that models the transforming love of Christ at work in a way that will build up and strengthen the community that we are part of.

John Wesley said, ‘The world is my parish.’ Perhaps, especially as we are all trying to work out what our ‘new normal’ will become, we should be thinking beyond our local community, and beyond those we are able to gather with at present, when reflecting on this reading. Perhaps we should be willing to lift our eyes to the wider needs of our planet, to the world that we have been given the responsibility of looking after by the God who created it and loves it, knowing that whether we are part of a large *ekkelsia,* or just a post-lockdown household if we are willing to seek the voice of Christ and listen to his call w*hen two of three are gathered in my name … I am there among them.*