

SERMON NOTES Sunday 16th September 2018

sunnysidechurch

Theme: The Church at Ephesus and the Church at Sunnyside

Main passage: **Revelation 2.1-7**

Additional passages: **Matthew 5.13-16**

Some of the major points made during the sermon:

I and me, we and us

Instinctively we react as individuals. We feel, think and act as individuals most of the time. John's prophetic message is for churches not individuals. This is a little alien to our way of thinking but not to our actual experience. We ARE part of a body. We DO belong together and our Christian lives are all intertwined.

First love

Many of us will be able to look back and remember the experience of our first loves. That newness of being 'in love' can't and shouldn't go on for ever. For love to last we need to build a shared life. The same is true of our individual Christian lives. At some stage we may have been overwhelmed by God's love or Jesus's sacrifice on our behalf. That experience can't and shouldn't be something we either cling to or try to recreate falsely.

Settling down and cooling off

But what happens next is very important. Do we settle down to a growing, maturing love of God or do we just cool off – discovering that our 'enthusiastic phase' was just about warm insubstantial feelings. The Church at Ephesus had collectively cooled off (Rev 2.4). They were okay doctrinally (Rev 2.2 & 2.6) and had endured suffering with resilience (2.3) but their actions have stopped being prompted by grateful love and obedience to Christ.

Remembering what matters

A good Christian life is about choosing: Choosing to remember God's love, choosing to remember Jesus's life, teaching, death and resurrection, choosing to listen to what God is saying to us through his Spirit. This is what the church in Ephesus had chosen to ignore. What about the church at Sunnyside?

Let anyone who has an ear, listen to what the spirit is saying to the churches

Some questions for discussion

- ① How did it feel when you first became a Christian? Share your stories of both the way you came to faith and the way it felt
- ② What first attracted you to Sunnyside as a Christian community? Has Sunnyside changed since then? If so, how? How have you been part of that change?
- ③ The early chapters of Revelation pinpoint two paradoxes about Jesus:
 1. He is awesome but gentle and inviting (Rev 1.17)
 2. He has triumphed but calls us to work with him to bring about his victory. (Rev 2.7)

How can we express the reality of these paradoxes in our collective worship and in our shared and individual lives?

- ④ Do you see similarities between Sunnyside and the church at Ephesus?
- ⑤ Are there any other issues that the sermon raised for you?

Quotes of the week both taken from the Parish Profile we wrote when we were searching for a new vicar:

We (Sunnyside & Bourne End) are open evangelical churches. Our mission is to love grow and serve: Love God and each other, Grow in our faith and Serve our community. Between the two parishes we cater for a diverse range of worship styles. A number of church members attend services at both churches. Our vicar and several of our readers and retired clergy take services and preach at both churches. We have a broad range of activities that cater for the needs and spiritual growth of our existing church members and that reach out to others within our local communities.

"When I first came to Sunnyside, it was the warmth, friendliness and kindness that first struck me. Then as I spoke to people within Sunnyside and Bourne End churches, what struck me was the tremendous energy and passion which so many people have – so many are involved in some sort of voluntary work – whether Christian or secular charities and organisations.

As time went by, I realised almost unawares, how God and Jesus's teaching had woven themselves into my life, 24/7. My faith has now become an active foundation for the whole way I live my life.