



St Marylebone
Parish Church

First Sunday after Trinity 2020, 8.30am BCP Holy Communion

Readings:

1st Epistle of S. John 4.7-end

The Holy Gospel according to St. Luke 16.19-end

What are we? Today's Collect reminds us of 'our mortal nature': we are flesh and blood. **Today we give thanks that God Himself gives us His Eucharistic Flesh and Blood – Holy food for His Holy people - as we journey through life home to Him.** We clergy *long* for the day when we can share in the Eucharist where we belong: all together. Physically present, together, flesh and blood. That is what, who *we* are.

What is God?

St John gives us the answer in today's epistle: love.

Not God *feels* love, but God *is* love.

We know the instability of our flesh particularly acutely at the moment: the virus, the tragedy of past and present prejudices and hatred, and closer to home my own failings and insecurities accentuated by lockdown. That's us.

God has no such frailty. His answer never wavers: love.

God reveals Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit as we celebrated last Sunday. His love is shown in creation, in Jesus, and in the life of the Spirit among us in hope, love, prayer, the grace of the Eucharist and the Sacraments, and *all* good gifts. Just as St John lays out in today's epistle.

God is love.

No conditions, no fear, no two-faces, no sell-by-dates, pure, endless, love.

Although we can know a share of His love in *this* life, and although we use the same word: *love*; actually, all that we know of human or divine love on *this* side of death is like a black and white 9 inch telly still warming up compared to the Imax of what will follow this life.

And so to today's Gospel. And suddenly we're fidgeting because all this talk of love has been... lovely, but Jesus shocks us with what love looks like. **Because this love is so pure that we cannot handle its intensity. In fact, we build all kinds of real and metaphorical walls and gates (like the rich man) to secure ourselves against it.** Even our senses cannot handle the truth that this bread and wine is the Body and Blood of Jesus; let alone our lifestyles, prejudices and the identities we have spent *years* constructing handle His love. Just as the rich man couldn't.

This love burns like fire, before which our defences are nothing.

This love-fire is urgent. Who will listen? Or will we turn away the prophets too, and silence the voice of the Holy Spirit because it is inconvenient; this call for justice, for faith, for radically looking upon every person (even disgusting Lazarus) with the loving eyes of God.

Jesus always reserves His most fiery words for the comfortably religious – today's story was told to the pharisees who, St Luke tells us just before today's reading, 'loved money and were sneering at Jesus'. (16.14)

The depth and reality of His love is surer than anything in all creation, but His purity is unquenchable, and **its call is urgent.** This is who He is, **what/who will we be in response?**

I'll end with these words of St Catherine of Siena:

'In your nature, eternal Godhead,
I shall come to know my nature.
And what is my nature, boundless
love?
It is fire,
because you are nothing but a fire of
love.
And you have given humankind
a share in this nature,
for by the fire of love you created us.
And so with all other people
and every created thing;
you made them out of love.
O ungrateful people!
What nature has your God given
you?

His very own nature!
Are you not ashamed to cut yourself
off from such a noble thing
through the guilt of deadly sin?
O eternal Trinity, my sweet love!
You, light, give us light.
You, wisdom, give us wisdom.
You, supreme strength, strengthen us.
Today, eternal God,
let our cloud be dissipated
so that we may perfectly know and
follow your Truth in truth,
with a free and simple heart.
O God, make speed to save us!
O Lord, make haste to help us!
Amen.