



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Wednesday Eucharist with Prayer for Healing
24th June 2020

Isaiah 49:1-6 Luke 1:57-66,80

As we go through this time of transition and uncertainty, many people are looking to the future, speculating as to the lessons we can learn from the Pandemic, the changes it may bring long term to our society. Do we just want everything to go back to normal? Could anything be better post Covid than it was pre Covid? Thousands of words are being written, broadcast, preached, tweeted, blogged. Out of all of them, let us hope that we might find a real prophet who can give us some signposts, some creative ways to approach our future life together. But being a prophet is a difficult calling. Jesus himself commented that prophets are not honoured in their hometown. Many of the Old Testament prophets had an unpleasant end – Isaiah was killed by a wooden saw, apocryphal accounts suggest Amos was murdered, as was Micah, Habbakuk was stoned, Zechariah was murdered in the temple, and today's Saint, John the Baptist famously had his head cut off after Salome's dance for Herod.

John the Baptist was a unique prophet. He was a bridge between the Old and New Testaments, in the tradition of the former prophets but heralding a new age, preparing the way for Jesus Christ. And the thing I find really interesting about him is that he was unafraid to speak his mind, challenge, shout aloud, but unlike some who do that, was incredibly humble. In the words of our first reading from Isaiah, he was called before he was born, his mouth was a sharp sword, a sharpened arrow'. How that arrow stung those who he challenged! But as well as this, John had an accurate, reasoned estimation of the role he had to play, and he knew when to let go. He had a task to do, and when it was done, he withdrew. Jesus must increase, he said, I must decrease. A man of complete integrity, honesty and humility.

I am the voice of one who cries in the wilderness but I am not worthy to undo Jesus's sandal.

This is the kind of leadership we need in all stratas of society.

Forthrightness, honesty, integrity combined with the humility that knows there is a greater authority, a higher power. Leadership that knows when it is time to defer, when it is time to withdraw.

May God raise up prophets for us in these days to speak forth the things we need to hear. And may we all like John have the courage to speak the truth in humility of spirit and prepare the way for the coming of Christ's Kingdom into the hearts and lives of all people.