



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Wednesday Eucharist with Prayer for Healing

Readings:

Isaiah 6:1=8

Psalm 15

John 21:15-17

9th September 2020

Charles Fuge Lowder

We are coming into ordination season, when men and women will be entering the sacred ministry as deacons and priests. The ordination services will be very different in this Covid world; with copious amounts of handgel between each laying on of hands, and far fewer people attending. Many of those to be ordained will be hearing that thrilling reading from Isaiah we heard earlier; 'Whom shall I send?' 'Here I am, send me!' It's the perfect reading for those in both ordained and lay ministry, as it reminds us that although we are unworthy, fallible human beings, God cleanses us and calls us to serve him in his church. He just needs people, and lots of them, to be open and willing to receive the divine spark, the live coal, and be sent!

One such person who did this is remembered by the Church of England today, Charles Lowder. He was born in 1820, ordained in 1844, and was drawn to Catholic spirituality and ritualism, at a time when it was faced with fierce opposition. His passion was to work amongst the poor of London's East End, to bring colour, liturgy, discipline, education and pastoral care to a place of terrible deprivation.

It was during an outbreak of Cholera, because of the care and Christian love he and his team showed, that he became known as the Father of the parish – the first time that an Anglican priest was called Father.

Charles Lowder is one of a list of heroic and eccentric Anglo Catholic slum priests from the 19th and early 20th century; Joe Williamson, Stuart Hedlam, St John Groser, Robert Dolling, and Basil Jellicoe. Fr Jellicoe stated that the slum housing amongst which he worked in St Pancras was “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual disgrace” He put into action his belief that religion was about maintaining the right for people to live decent lives and initiated a huge slum clearance programme, founding the St Pancras House Improvement Society

Many of these men were difficult, disliked by church authorities, radical, and burnt themselves out at an early age; Charles Lowder himself died at the age of 60. But they all had a vision, like Isaiah, of a Holy God that called and equipped them, and a love for Jesus that made them wish to follow Jesus’ command to Peter to ‘Tend my Sheep’. They were determined to make a difference, to change lives. We need more of them! For there is still so much in our society that is “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual disgrace

May those to be ordained in the next few weeks catch something of this vision; and be prepared to go where God sends, even when this might mean a difficult and demanding ministry in an unglamorous context.