



St Marylebone
Parish Church

14th Sunday after Trinity 2021, 8.30am BCP Holy Communion

What do you hear when you come to Church?

Or to put it another way, what do you hear most clearly, most affectingly?

I'm one of those people that you could say 10 nice things to me and one point of genuinely constructive criticism and *that* is what will stick in my head.

But the same happens in Church. The Book of Common Prayer, that 16th and 17th Century treasure-trove we delve in every Sunday at this 8.30 Holy Communion is, let's face it, not short of words. They are beautiful, ancient and fresh, stirring and comforting, and there are *lots* of them.

What do you hear? Which lines stick on your tongue or in your heart?

Which bits form the building blocks of your relationship with God?

As clergy we often meet people who are trapped by imbalance. Who have got stuck in the Confession, and don't really believe they are loved and forgiven, always trying to earn their salvation. Or people who believe that Jesus is good, but have never bothered therefore to look further - Jesus being 'Mostly Harmless' and thereby mostly meaningless. Balance. We all need to confess *and* Jesus' mercy is endless.

What do you hear when you come to Church?

What do you hear when St Paul (he loved a list) lists as he does today the things that belonged to the old life, trapped in flesh, rather than the new life we have through Baptism? He says 'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance' or did that encouragement float past us, lost; and all we remember hearing is the former list: 'adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like'.

Maybe it's just me. Maybe I've got a guilty conscience, but my eye and ear always get drawn to the negative, and then normally to the relational sins - 'adultery, fornication, lasciviousness' leap out of the air at me underlined and in capital letters. Whereas 'variance' (that is, disagreement), 'emulations' (jealousy), 'wrath' (anger), seem not to stick in the same way. Is it the same for you?

Too many people think Christians and the Church are obsessed with sex and lecturing people hypocritically about their lives; too many Christians are. It has been true in our history and is a reality today. But the fault is ours - the approach we take. What we actually find in the sound doctrine of the Church and the great gift of the Scriptures, and gifts from the Holy Spirit like the Book of Common Prayer is a balanced meal, a life-long and life-giving nourishment. Yes, unfaithfulness in relationship and abusing ourselves and each other is poisonous and it will hurt us, but those red neon sins are no more sinful, and no more dangerous than envy, or jealousy, or anger, and God wants to help free us from those things *just* as much. The sins that don't leap off the page at us or conform to our stereotypes (be they tragic or comic), are perhaps a lot more socially acceptable, even socially advantageous, certainly commercially advantageous (like coveting thy neighbour's house or car or whatever) are *just* as important and central, it's just that they might not grab our attention? Look again at St Paul, listen again to the words of the Prayer Book - don't let short-sightedness or imbalance disguise the fact that what we have here is a rich, varied and balanced diet for life-long wellbeing and nourishment of body, mind and spirit. What do you hear when you come to Church? Listen again, with fresh ears and hear the bits you've perhaps been missing.

And the good news is, amongst whatever else we hear, whatever else we need to overcome our deafness or prejudices and hear, every week St John means exactly what he says when he tells us in the Comfortable Words of this service 'that Christ came into the world to save sinners'. Sinners, like us.

10 were healed in today's Gospel, ungrateful, perhaps undeserving - it made not a jot of difference.

What will you hear when you come to Church?