



The 2nd Sunday after Trinity 8.30am 2021

This week's Collect speaks beautifully of 'fear' of the Lord. 'steadfast *fear* and love'. We know, of course, that this is *not* fear of an abusive parent bearing a leather belt, or fear inspired by guilt or anything else. This – and whenever Holy Scriptures bids us 'fear the Lord' (as indeed we say when we pray for the departed at the end of the prayers for the Church Militant - 'those who have departed this life in His 'faith and fear') - this is always *holy fear*. It is simply that in recent centuries the word 'fear' has narrowed in meaning. For our great grandparents in the Faith they heard 'fear' and knew this to mean holy fear: awe; wonder; the natural and proper result of finite beings like us coming into relationship with the God of wonder, of joy, of infinite power and goodness and burning white hot love.

We would do well in our days when informality is so prized, to recover the gift of Otherness, of real awe - rather than 'awesome' just meaning 'nice'.

But lest we think all this a little too heady, St John's Epistle given for today drags us straight back to earth with a brilliantly practical approach. Seeing aright, having holy fear and a real relationship with the real God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob isn't an 'in theory' exercise. St John tells us that it is a matter of growing in love, of the daily work of inviting God's Spirit to form and remake us and take from us all hatred and hardness of heart. Not, wonderfully put, 'to shut up [our] bowels', but to see the world with God's eyes - ones of fearsome pure love and compassion. To abide in God in our daily living of prayer, nourished by this Holy Sacrament with regularity and purpose, to abide in God and He in us, St John tells us, so that we can walk the walk, as he says: 'in deed, and in truth'.

This Parish Church has been a house of refuge and prayer and healing and joy and holy encounter for 200 years, and its former incarnations for over 700 more. And yet even here we bear the wounds of our inability to act in deed and truth, in our pettiness and ego and all the rest. We are also acutely aware of contested heritage - that so much of this place, like everywhere else, has been built with blood money of various kinds, and in memorial of flawed people. As part of our Changing Lives project of saving and renewing this place a beautiful new plaque will be prominently installed remembering all those who have been the victims of greed and cruelty, hitherto unremembered. Surrounding words in their honour will be words of Jesus that ring through His parable in today's Gospel - you know them: 'the first shall be last, and the last first' (Mk 20.16).

If ever we were tempted to stop searching once we had reached Jesus meek and mild. If ever we were tempted to resort to a God who is comfortably tame; or conveniently only a Sunday/weekly visitor in our lives; or a vision of God as softly, fluffily unbothered, undemanding. These words of Jesus and today's parable, those words of St John's Epistle and the realisation of God's untamed awe-some fearful wonder should have us stop in our tracks and look again with urgency and love. The Christian life may be simple - 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and thy neighbour as thyself'.(Mthw 22.37) - simple, but we know that it is not easy, rarely comfortable and never banal. If it is any of those things then we probably aren't doing what we *think* we're doing. To really be being a Christian is the simplest and wildest adventure we could ever embark upon.

Keep us we beseech thee O lord in this, they 'Steadfast fear and love'. Amen.