



St Marylebone
Parish Church

8.30 am BCP Holy Communion 9th Sunday after Trinity

Well, Saint Paul is on about ‘fornication’ and ‘lust’ again. There are times when hearing the Epistle in the Prayer Book lectionary (normally a snippet of S. Paul) that Monty Python and the like can be forgiven for half a century of taking the mick. We Christians have a reputation in certain parts of being obsessed with lust and flesh and naughty things.

But we can’t ignore the widespread and socially acceptable climate of abuse into which Paul is writing. In Corinth, from today’s Epistle, and in civilised cities all over the Roman world, prostitution, the sexualisation and enslavement of children, control and abuse in harems and temple cults and adulterous set-ups were all normal. And it was into this *status quo* that the Early Christians were trying to work out what it meant to live in the light of the Resurrection. Jesus hadn’t given them a ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’ and it took centuries to unpick (indeed we are still in the process of asking) ‘How then shall we live?’ in the Holy Spirit in the light of the Resurrection. So considering what we would now call the *horrors* of normal upstanding life in 1st century late Roman cities; I think we can (instead of wincing or rolling our eyes) hear St Paul talk about lust and fornication in a life-giving way. Perhaps when we hear fornication and lust in the Scriptures we can ask how we manifest or exacerbate or tolerate such ab-use and objectification of fellow children of God in our own time.

I doubt many of us replicate 1st Century behaviours, but the same blueprint of dehumanisation, objectification, control, abuse and enslavement that so exercised St Paul is sadly alive and well, normal and socially acceptable. Is pornography not of the same blueprint? Is the payment of unfair and low wages for labour and goods across this city and the global economy not of the same blueprint? Is not the terrifying numbers of people who are in bonded labour, prostitution, who live with abuse at home in many different forms, not the same? Isn’t the dehumanisation of migrants and homeless people? Racial discrimination, any kind of discrimination for that matter? The objectification of women? Anything, any thought or act, any social, economic, religious or political system (and anyone who maintains or even *tolerates* such a system) that makes any human being *de facto* less than a beloved and precious child of God is participating in the same sins that St Paul writes about.

St Paul’s writings are a wonderful gift to us. They challenged and provoked his hearers then, and if we hear them intelligently they will rightly challenge and provoke us to. In the days following the Resurrection of Jesus, God gave St Paul to us as the Apostle to gentiles; his mission and ministry continues in these wonderful letters in the New Testament, and in his prayers and love for us from heaven. If we listen to him and ask his prayers and join him here at the Eucharistic banquet he can really help us to ask in a much more profound way, what it means to live in the light of the Resurrection and the Holy Spirit – that is to be truly alive.