



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Sexagesima 2019 8.30am BCP Holy Communion

It is amazing that these words spoken on a hillside in a middle eastern backwater 20 Centuries ago should still ring in our ears so clearly. How often have *we* been tender shoots of faith, that turned out to be shallow – shallow in faith, shallow in our hope in Jesus, shallow in our Love of God and neighbour? How often has the devil and our own disinterest swept the Word out of our hearts into the corner of priorities?

I do not mean to chastise because we are all in the same boat. Priests, monks and nuns, the outwardly devout, even Saints of God are not immune. In our own ways, many times a day, in what we say and do, how we spend our energy, time and money, we show that we are planted in shallow soil.

Because being a Christian, as we know, is not a switch that is flicked. It isn't something that *he* has but *I'll* only ever be a tourist', a fringe believer. I think lots of time we imagine that others are 'the **in** crowd of the Church, the **in** crowd of faith – the real deal – not *me*'. It's a strange moment when you realise that you really are 'it'. You – as we all are here this morning, including our children – are the hardcore, the real deal. There is no one else in another room busy being expert Christians. It is just us. Because being deep rooted, in good soil, giving forth green shoots, and developed strong branches,

bearing life-giving fruit is not for those people (who don't exist) over there. It's for us.

The way we live up to our calling that we received at Baptism is described in the final words of the Gospel: we are to aspire after an 'honest and good heart, [who] having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.'

Strong hearts. The 'heart' in this case is our anchor in God. A Strong heart – the foundation of our daily lives rooted in our relationship with God.

Hear the word and keep it. Remembering of course that the Word is a person not a text. Jesus is the Word of God – the Logos. He is God's person and purpose revealed. Hearing the Word and keeping it is to live life with Jesus. To 'do' life with Him – the little and the big stuff, through ups and downs to walk life as a pilgrimage with Him as our guide and companion. That means coming here to the Eucharist every week at least, talking to Him in prayer, having Him on our minds throughout the day.

And so finally we will bring forth fruit with patience. That fruit, by God's grace, will be a changed way of interacting with the world. A deeper appreciation of the gifts of life, a deeper love for our family, friends and strangers, it could and will mean lots different gifts for each of us. But we are to remember it is with 'patience'. We are not to become overnight holy-joes. We are simply people doing life with God and thereby discovering the depth and reality of real life. Saints are quite ordinary people, just like us. And we just like them. We probably won't face all that St Paul had to face in his journeys (as we heard in the epistle), but shifting our priorities, renewing our lives in faith, hope and love is a daily effort that requires a stout heart and patient endurance. God is with us in this.