



St Marylebone
Parish Church

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

By the late 1980's the British Government was rolling out its Care in the Community programme.

Care in the Community was not new, and had at its heart an admirable aim of deinstitutionalization care.

Sadly, people found – especially those who had spent many, many years in psychiatric hospital or other long-term care facilities that they had been forced to enter a world where there was no longer any real community in which to live and very little, if any, care.

Levels of isolation, homelessness and suicide rocketed and we still live with the consequences of a good idea gone badly wrong.

Jesus came to restore right relationship. To build community, if you like, to provide a community of mutual care and flourishing which would live the Kingdom.

Right relationship between neighbour and neighbour, neighbour and stranger; right relationship with God – the source of all relationship.

The incarnation of the eternal Word was part of God's eternal plan to restore 'right' relationship, restore 'true community' fractured – but not irrevocably so - at the Fall through creation's waywardness and man's misuse of freewill.

In the groping theology of Genesis, the first thing fallen humanity does, is to hide: to hide its physical body behind fig leaves, and to hide itself from its creator: to break relationship, destroy community on both the horizontal and vertical planes.

The whole of the Old Testament can be read as an on-going narrative of cat and mouse: God the Father going in search of humanity and humanity running away and hiding from God's loving gaze. God trying to build and restore community and relationship and man dashing it to pieces.

At the Ascension, the risen Christ, freed from the boundaries of time and place, lifts fallen, broken, fractured humanity into the heart of divine love, and the relationship – the community severed by the Fall - is repaired, restored and the invitation made to all who have ears to hear and eyes to see to become part of a new community, the Church, the living body of Christ.

Next Sunday, we celebrate Pentecost; the Holy Spirit poured out on the Church, relationship mended, community recreated, and, as St Paul writes the Romans, once again man is able to give restored creation voice by “cry[ing] out, ‘Abba, Father’” (Rom 8:14-15).

Right relationship is restored; right relationship to God re-established; a new community birthed in and through and by the redemptive work of Christ on the Cross; a community sealed for eternity through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit is given to us by the Father, leads us back to the Father. The entire work of salvation is one of “re-generation”, in which the fatherhood of God, through the gift of the Son and the Holy Spirit, frees us from the sad and hopeless condition of being (through our own wayward wilfulness) isolated, community-less orphans into which we had fallen.

No longer orphans but sons and daughters; no longer isolated individuals but a living, serving, praying, worshipping community of hope-filled brothers and sisters of Christ, co-heirs with him of God's eternal promises; no longer strangers but pilgrims; no longer estranged by our own wilfulness but embraced but God's all-forgiving, limitless love; members together of the Body of Christ, the One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

In the joy of Easter and in the glory of the Ascension, we now pray for the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the Defender and Comforter, the Spirit of truth, freedom and peace to fall upon us and renew us and strengthen us; to reassure us and to draw us ever-deeper into truth, draw us ever-more closely to the eternal heart of divine life and love, the community we name Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

So come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your people. Alleluia!