



S<sup>t</sup>Marylebone  
*Parish Church*

## **Trinity 14 2020, 8.30am BCP Holy Communion**

Today's Collect puts in wonderfully – 'faith, hope and love'. I'm always banging on about 'faith, hope and love' in school. St Paul lists them in 1 Corinthians 13, at the end of the fabulous passage (a favourite at weddings) 'love is patient, love is kind' etc etc 'faith, hope and love remain and the greatest of these is love, or *caritas* (charity)'. Without *caritas*, he says, everything is worthless.

Without love nothing would even exist, of course, because the universe itself was created out of God's love, and is sustained in being in the love of God. Faith, hope and love. This week's Collect encourages us to hold them before our eyes in everything we do; if we do that, we won't go too far wrong. Let's look at each in turn briefly next to today's readings.

Faith *is* our relationship with God: faith is what we call being in relationship with God. The ups and downs, darkness and illumination: all that is our relationship with God. Doing life with God, now and through death into eternity. For today's man suffering with leprosy it was there: face to face with Jesus. For us in our time its in prayer, Sacrament, scripture, service, but the effect is similar, by drawing near to God we are slowly being healed and brought to new and abundant life, in this life and then, finally, in the life to come. Today's healing is an instant metaphor for our whole lives, do you see?

That's the point behind St Paul's great lists in today's Epistle, too. These aren't school rules, or the rants of a grumpy old man. He's dead right about the things that bring life to ourselves and others, and the things that deal death within ourselves and for others.

Faith, is a relationship between persons – us and God. One that transforms us, and that ultimately will save us from death and lead us to life. Note, it's not our *behaviour* that saves us, but God. Unlike what a lot of people *think* the Christian faith is, we aren't saved for eternal life because we behave properly. It is by being in relationship with Jesus that we share in His victory over death and live forever in Him. He has also conquered *all* kinds of sin, so He invites us to be changed by His love, to dump the rubbish and be free to live in love, joy, peace, gentleness and all the rest. Our salvation then, and our growing life in the Spirit now are fruits of the same reality: our living relationship with God: what we call *faith*.

And this sense of forward motion, of living with God into and towards true life, is what defines our *hope*. Faith, Hope and Love. We are a people 'living towards'. As Christians we are called to be honest about life's mysteries, its complexities and darkness, because we are also honest about our hope that Jesus is Risen, and the universe is going somewhere: with joy, home to God. We are not afraid of the darkness, because we have also glimpsed the light. Faith, hope, and love.

'And the greatest of these is love'. Jesus is the fleshy proof that 'God is love'. God is not a tinkerer from on high, an incompetent puppet master or an absentee landlord. Jesus came to dwell among us, flesh of our flesh, to be our brother and Lord, and to open the way home. Plenty of people think they'd prefer a puppet master, or tinkerer God – well, I think they're mistaken for lots of reasons I don't have time for now, and anyway that god doesn't exist so there's no point pretending we'd rather him. The God who *is*, is the one who shows Himself in Jesus. God proves His love by dying for us. He goes through death for us ingrates, so that He can bring us home. Evil and its little friends may hold sway for a time, but love is the only *real* power in the end, because God is love.

Faith – our living relationship with Him.

Hope – where we're headed.

Love – where we came from, where we're headed and everything in between. Faith, hope and love.

These are the stepping stones for us, the pavement we walk on through life. St Paul is right, all that is not them needs to be seen for what it is, so that we can, with the man healed from leprosy, arise and go our way praising God.