



St Marylebone
Parish Church

9.30am Friday Eucharist Lent 3

Readings:

The Prophecy of Hosea 14:2-10

The Holy Gospel according to St Mark 12:28-34

The words of the prophets are good for our times. Plague and pestilence. Chaos and confusion in our minds and hearts, in our households, in our communities and economy and across human society.

Prophets like Hosea remind us that this is not new.

It is also easy to see how fledging Israel sought to make meaning and impose a logic on all of this experience. We humans love cause and effect. We know the effects all too well – illness, panic, loss of life and livelihood. So what's the cause?!?

It won't take long for blame and anger to be tossed around. Our Hebrew forefathers tended not towards expose of officials, but instead to ask 'who's annoyed God and made all this happen?' It is understandable that such a way of thinking was their instinct. I'm not entirely sure that our own enlightened and modern mob-rule and witch-hunt instincts are any more sophisticated or wise.

But the prophet doesn't only comfort us by reminding us that we've been here before, and are in this together with our family across heaven and earth. Also the words of the Lord through the prophet – that God has a good will and good purpose for His people. In our flawed and fragile world things go wrong, sometimes tragically wrong, but God's will and purpose for the creation He made out of Love remains. The Lord says 'I will love them with all my heart...I will fall like dew upon Israel...He shall bloom like the lily'.

We are largely strangers to disaster and tragedy in our part of the world today. It constantly strikes me that it is in parts of our world that are perennially struck by drought, hunger, disease and war that are very often faith-ful and steadfast. Very often where people have been ground down by tragedy over decades of hardship – it is there that the song of God's love and faithfulness rings loudest and truest.

Perhaps it has something to do with those words of Jesus in today's Gospel.

That wherever we are. We may be at home in 14 days of enforced quarantine, we may be caring for a loved one, we may be anxiously carrying on, we may be frustrated and annoyed by family, work or the world. We may be in *any* manner of life, *any* state of being or temperament. We may be anywhere in the world and *any* time of life. The words of Jesus in today's Gospel remain the simple and overwhelming truth, the most immediate task before us, the most urgent thing we have in life, and the most meaningful thing we could seek to be and do – all of us, anywhere. Above all and in all: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' And then we will not be far from the Kingdom of God.