



St Marylebone  
*Parish Church*

## **Book of Common Prayer Holy Communion 8.30am Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> May The Fifth Sunday after Easter**

'Be Ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only'.

Firm advice from the ever practical St James.

We cannot be content with just hearing, understanding and or even believing the gospel. It has to show that it has 'taken' through our actions.

Otherwise all we are dealing with is words. Empty echoing words.

Noisy gongs and clanging cymbals as St Paul puts it.

For most of us, there is an uncomfortable disconnect

between what we hear in the Word and what we show in our lives.

On this pilgrimage through life, we truly grow in faith when that gap narrows, and our belief informs what we actually do. Thank the Lord that it is grace that saves us; nevertheless we are not let off the hook when it comes to attempting to live out our faith.

And on this pilgrimage it is helpful to have the inspiration of people who have managed this well.

People whose actions show without doubt the message of the gospel.

People whose behaviour echoes that of Christ himself,

whose belief and actions are 'joined up'. Many of the saints and heroes of faith have been weak, frightened people with serious faults,

but who have nevertheless found from somewhere the spiritual energy

to change the world around them for the sake of Christ. If they did it, maybe we can!

One such is the truly inspirational Florence Nightingale, whose bicentenary we celebrated this week.

It couldn't have come at a more appropriate time in our national life.

Where would each of us be without the modern nursing profession?

When Florence Nightingale was a girl, nursing was a very dubious occupation.

Nurses had the reputation of being frequently drunk, disreputable characters.

It was unthinkable that a young woman from a wealthy family could become a

nurse. Her destiny was to marry well and take her place in society. But at 16 Florence had a strong sense of a call from God, calling her to future service of some kind. It took her a while to ascertain this calling. When an American physician and abolitionist visited her family home she asked him

‘Do you think it unsuitable and unbecoming for a young Englishwoman to devote herself to works of charity in hospitals and elsewhere as Catholic sisters do? Do you think it would be a dreadful thing?’ He answered that it would be unusual, adding ‘whatever is unusual in England is thought unsuitable’, Nonetheless he advised her, ‘Act on your inspiration.’ And this is what Florence did. Her call from God was to do something that wasn’t as yet possible, but that didn’t stop her. Her nursing career took her from a women’s hospital in Harley St, to the Middlesex, to the Cholera Epidemic in London, and on to her famous work transforming military healthcare at the Scutari barracks.

And thereafter, her work extended from nursing to social reform. She influenced legislation to assist hospitalised and handicapped veterans. She wrote books on nursing, improved conditions in workhouses, opened a nurse’s training school, and was a pioneer of hospital design, and infection control. Her faith, broad, liberal and ecumenical, informed the work she did and both a diamond brooch given to her by Queen Victoria and her memorial in Westminster Abbey bore the inscription ‘Blessed are the Merciful’.

Florence believed that God was to be found in the heart of every person ‘Look for his thought, his feeling, his purpose, in a word, his spirit within you, Work your true work and you will find his presence in yourself’. It was a hard calling, and she battled exhaustion, depression and ill health for many years herself. But her obedience and faithfulness changed the world, and we are now reaping the benefits of this intensely practical Christian.

Jesus’s words in Matthew’s gospel could have been written about her ‘I was sick and ye visited me’.

‘Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only’.

Florence Nightingale encapsulated these words of St James.

How might we follow her example this week? Every day brings opportunities to follow Christ, however confined our life may be at this time.

Help us, Lord to be doers and not hearers only. Amen.