



St Marylebone
Parish Church

11.00 Eucharist Trinity 2 21st June 2020

Readings: Jeremiah 20:7-13, Matthew 10:24-39

Over the next few weeks, as the lockdown slowly comes to an end, we may choose to share with one another the stories of what it has been like during the past extraordinary three months.

Some parents have found it a surprisingly happy experience, having more time to be with their children. Others have found the frustrations of teenage children difficult to experience. Incidentally, a shout out to all Fathers on this Father's Day; God bless you for the sacrifices you have made and the love you have shown, particularly during this time.

For some people it has been a painful and lonely time. Others have enjoyed time with spouses and partners. Some have been bereaved or sadly lost their lives, others have given birth. Some have found lockdown creative and peaceful, others have ached to be with loved ones. Some have found a new perspective and new ways to work, others have lost jobs or been furloughed.

Some have been imprisoned by anxiety, others have found new skills.

What many of us will have experienced is conflict in some ways.

Conflict of opinions as to the success or otherwise of government strategy and example. Conflict with those whose practice of social distancing differs from ours.

Conflict with ourselves as to how to behave, work, relate, travel, pray, eat or drink in these times that we describe with that irritating phrase, 'the new normal'.

Some have had conflict at home with those they are unusually cooped up with.

And recently there has been civil conflict over how to raise difficult issues in our society such as racism.

Now I generally dislike conflict. It's a weakness of mine, because conflict is a part of life that we have to accept. It's a given. Its part of the human experience.

And I think that conflict is the theme of today's most difficult of gospels.

Jesus has summoned his 12 disciples and sent them out to proclaim the good news and to heal the sick. He gives them very specific instructions but also some very major health warnings. Basically, he says,

the authorities will persecute you, those closest to you will betray you. People will hate you. Its not a very good job description. But conflict will happen he says, because following me means making a choice, which others are bound to disagree with.

In the context of Roman persecution, if I was the mother or sister of one of the disciples I'd probably try to persuade them to take a nice sensible job rather than put their lives on the line. Especially as most of them did come to a sticky end.

If people slag me off, Jesus says, they will definitely slag you off too. A disciple is not above the teacher. But have no fear because lies and slander will always be uncovered. The truth will out. And despite all this hostility, the truth is that we are so valued and loved that even the hairs of our head are counted. Both our hairs, and the hairs of those who we are in conflict with!

So being a human being means conflict in life is inevitable, especially in a pandemic. Being a Christian is likely to mean even more conflict. And growing, developing, becoming fully alive sometimes means having to take a stand when those closest to us think that they know better. Ultimately the direction God is calling us in has to take precedence over everything. It doesn't mean being unloving to those we live with, in fact the opposite. When our relationship with God is good, that often means our capacity for love, patience and forgiveness increases.

May God grant that one of the fruits of this strange time we have shared may be greater self awareness and an increased ability to disagree well with others. And also to recognise that out of the inevitable furnace of conflict may well come gold that has been purified. Amen.