



St Marylebone  
*Parish Church*

## **Wednesday Healing Mass 13<sup>th</sup> May 2020**

### **Readings: Acts 15:1-6, John 15:1-8**

Producing rich and flavoursome wine is a long and complex process. One of the key people in that process is the vinedresser who has to work continuously and skilfully, because a vine is high maintenance. The vine is cut back hard in winter, but the vinedresser has to continue pruning and thinning out during the growing season to produce large and sweet fruit. It's a lot of work, but the result brings joy. Psalm 104 tells us that wine 'gladdens the human heart', and it does, providing of course it is consumed in moderation! But in order to achieve that joy, an awful lot of cutting and pruning is required. If you let the vine grow freely, the leaves and the extra canes would suck away the goodness from the potential grape clusters.

Part of the experience of lockdown has felt like a dramatic pruning, a cutting away of many things we felt were vital to our life. Worshipping together in church. Receiving the bread and wine of Holy Communion. Socialising with friends and family, travelling freely, the popping in and out to shops at will, a very important part of Marylebone life! Enjoying the arts and entertainment. And of course, for many, far far worse than this, the experience of good health and the ability to earn a living has been stripped away. So much has been cut away.

In today's gospel, Jesus is preparing himself and his disciples for his departure. They will not be together for much longer, they will be separated in the most brutal way imaginable. Their communion will be fractured, and yet, it won't be permanent. He is looking forward to the resurrection life of the church and preparing them for what will sustain them, inspire them and enable them for the future.

'I am the Vine he says, you are the branches. Those who abide in me, and I in them, bear much fruit; because apart from me you can do nothing'. Our flourishing as Christians is to be connected at our core to Jesus so that the moisture, the sap, the goodness flows through us from the centre out and produces fruit.

'Abide in me' is the command, the invitation. It is not easy at the moment to abide in Jesus. Without the presence of Christ experienced physically in our church community, without the sacraments, without corporate worship, we sense that fracture, that exile, that experience that so many persecuted Christians throughout the world have continually.

But abide we must and abide we shall.

If we carry on reading in John Chapter 15 we discover the key of abiding. Jesus says this 'As the Father has loved me so I have loved you: abide in my love.

If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love....

This is my commandment, that you love one another.'

At this time of cutting back, we can focus on love.

Loving our communities by behaving responsibly and gratefully

Loving our neighbour through acts of kindness and compassion;

loving our family in new ways and maybe with greater appreciation;

loving ourselves by not heaping up unreasonable expectations,

but letting ourselves, in our own time, put forth little shoots of newness.

These are not just nice things to do, loving one another is actually Jesus' command.

There may be times of dryness and unfruitfulness, depression or despair.

These are unprecedented times, and we are living through extended grief and loss.

But the skilful vinedresser can tell when a branch is dormant

and just needs a bit of time resting on the vine before the little buds appear.

So, abide in the patient, nurturing love of Jesus, trust, and above all love.

God the vinedresser will bring forth fruit, because he always does.