



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Corpus Christi 2019 8.30am BCP Holy Communion

Today's Epistle was St John's wonderful tract on love. We're so used to those words: 'He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him'. As with so many things, their familiarity can rob them of their power. We relish the poetry and beauty but we must also allow them to have the gut punch they deserve and the power to change the way we conceive of our whole lives.

Similarly for the rich man, the sight of poor Lazarus at his gate grew so familiar it held no scandal as it should. I'm sure we can all see ourselves in that situation. The rich man is outraged by his *own* fate, but had long forgotten to be outraged by the injustice, pain and poverty he saw in his community. Which of us here can honestly claim to be any different in our global village. Does our outrage at scandal and love for our brother stretch as far as our supply chains, even? My M&S jumper, my vegetables, the paper I am holding, and the economic system that feeds my way of life – can my love and my sense of scandal even stretch as far as where they are from? And how quickly, as Abraham said, will I simply forget to love and care and listen?

Scandal and love are at the heart of the Gospel. Not just in today's readings as we have seen, but also in the feast we are celebrating today. Today we are celebrating Corpus Christi, also called the Thanksgiving for Holy Communion. Today is set aside to say an especial thankyou to God for the gift of the Eucharist. And this great gift is certainly a scandal, and it is all about love.

Time and again Jesus turned the world of the religious authorities upside down. He has done the same here. Jesus, as a good and devout Jew, lived in a world in which animal sacrifice was the means of people putting things right with God. And He becomes the Lamb of God, the

ultimate and final sacrifice. Astounding. Not a warrior king, or a strong leader, but a lamb to the slaughter.

In the Temple, the presence of God in the holy of holies was enrobed in gold and statues and fine fabrics and incense and beauty. At the Last Supper Jesus knows He is soon to leave and so He gives us the means of being with Him, as He promised, to the end of the world. He gives His disciples His presence not enrobed in gold and jewels, but hidden in the most ordinary household things of bread and wine – *peasant* food and *peasant* drink are to become the place of God's grace in our lives.

What love, what a scandal.

Jesus, on that night right at the heart of human history does not give His disciples a list of rules, or a book, or anything else – He gives them Himself. Just that. The simplicity of this gift – here it is bread and wine – touchable smell-able, feel-able, edible – the simplicity of this gift is only matched by the mystery of the fact that God has said – ‘This is my Body’ ‘This is my Blood’. His enduring presence, His gift for us to be with Him day by day and week by week. To grow in grace, to be filled with His life, returning here to this wellspring as we journey through this pilgrimage we call ‘life’. The simplicity of this gift is only matched by its mystery. Here, in a few moments time, He is before our very eyes, but in a mystery that is beyond our ability to know and understand.

What love, what a scandal.

Christ puts Himself in our hands, in our bodies, not because we are worthy, not because our hearts are ready, or our faith is perfect. But simply because He loves us. He puts Himself here, even though we have the power to ignore Him, to disrespect Him, and pretend that this is nothing much.

What love, what a scandal.

Hopefully we always do, but perhaps especially today, as we come to Holy Communion, let's do so with our eyes and minds and hearts open to the scandal of His love, and be changed by it.