

Dear friends,

Monday's funeral of the Queen was an example of Britain at its best. The Christian emphasis was profound and unmistakable. What surprised me was there was no hint of a nod to religious plurality – Just involvement from different Christian denominations – which may have been a request of Queen Elizabeth or normal state protocols. I simply don't know as these things are way above my pay grade!

Personally, I preferred the relative intimacy of the committal at St. George's chapel Windsor to Westminster Abbey but everyone without exception performed their duty seamlessly and the military were absolutely marvellous.

Our own services to commemorate the death of our Queen in the villages where I presided on Sunday were well attended, particularly at Otterton which drew well over 70 people and it was a privilege to be a part of them. Thank you to everyone involved and I must mention Alan Murdoch the bell tower captain at All Saints and his meticulous tolling of the bell and Ian Smith making sure the flags were in the right position at all times

I awoke next day to a mini-crisis at East Budleigh (Thank goodness it didn't happen on Sunday morning!) where the lock on the front door had moved and we couldn't get in but luckily I had the key to the outer vestry door so eventually morning prayer could continue as normal.

Sunday 25th September – Trinity 15 – Proper 21

This Sunday I will be presiding at the 8am and 10am services at St. Peter's, Margaret Scrivener will preside at All Saints and Chris Cant will preside at St. Michael's.

Amos 6: 1a, 4-7. Amos is one of my favourite prophets – direct, punchy and contemptuous of organised religion that made sure everything looked good from the outside but didn't also concern itself with societal issues of justice and exploitation of the poor. He rails against the rich and comfortable and complacent. An archetypal prophet speaking truth to power.

1 Timothy 6: 6-19. The lesson that peace and contentment cannot be bought is a hard lesson for all people. Wealth has always been a problematic topic for the church (and all Christians) since the very start. Some heroes of the faith manage to live in Holy Poverty as a religious conviction but most of us (including the church as an entity) try to live in the knowledge that the “love” of money is the root of all evil but having also to live in the real world where the harsh economic realities of life mean we have to earn enough to survive and thrive. It has ever been thus. The essential message is to not be ruled by money (seek ye first the kingdom of God) and be as generous as you can be given your circumstances.

Luke 16: 19 – 31. This parable about the rich man and Lazarus serves to illustrate the common gospel narrative that the first shall be last and the last shall be first – a sort of cosmic “levelling up” agenda - and also to underline the fact that even if someone were to be raised from the dead many people (including many Pharisees) wouldn’t listen to him either! Jesus points out that justice and concern for the less well off has always been a focal point of Jewish religion, Moses and the prophets – See Amos above!

The literary festival has come to an end and we finally get our church back!. Over 7000 tickets were sold for the weeklong festival and Louise and I attended 8 varied and interesting talks. I, as a born-again Philistine of course enjoyed Pam Ayers the most. She was so warm and naturally funny with no side or agenda to her. And instead of being interviewed as is normal for everyone else we were treated to what was basically an hour of stand up. Other highlights were Jeremy Bowen talking about the middle East and Jonathan Friedland’s non-fiction book about the man who escaped from Auschwitz. The festival causes us a few local difficulties to be sure but we are far better off being the centre of this festival than outside it.

Thought for the day.

One of the benefits of living in a stable constitutional monarchy is that when the head of state changes as it has done recently it is done quickly and seamlessly and without civil unrest or troops on the street. We take this for granted of course but in many places of the world change is not so well ordered. Having a monarch who sits above and outside normal politics is a key unifying strength of this country and any fiddling with this system needs extremely careful thought. And having a national church that frames all big events in the nation’s life does have a lot of detractors and internal

contradictions but as the past weekend has shown, the church of England can still perform that function very well indeed. We enjoy religious freedom in this country and having a national church that performs this function does not stop or hinder any other profession of faith. The funeral was framed and led by the C of E in a thoroughly sober liturgical Anglican way that brought calm and a certain gravitas to the occasion. Just as in the case of the monarchy itself, any change to the status quo needs careful thought. We all known of course that King Charles would prefer the title defender of faiths rather than defender of the faith. I think that can be welcomed. As we known that title was bestowed on Henry VIII by the Pope and (actually rescinded soon after) and its continued use was adapted to serve the purpose of the established national church. But in a free pluralistic society we need have nothing to fear from any other religious expression so long as they obey the laws of the land and they themselves don't try and stop the free expression of religious faith.

The Prayer for Today was written by Christina Rossetti

Lord purge our eyes to see

Within the seed a tree,

Within the glowing egg a bird,

Within the shroud a butterfly.

Till, taught by such we see

Beyond all creatures thee

And hearken to thy word

And hear its "Fear not; It is I"

Love and peace,

Martin