

Dear friends,

Temperature 31 degrees, humidity will make it feel like 41 is what my phone app said on our first day in Benaulim in South Goa, the second leg of our trip to India. The Goa leg was sandwiched between Chennai (formally known as Madras) and Mumbai (Bombay). You just about get used to the constant sultry heat, but I don't think I could ever cope with the traffic and general driving conditions. Organised chaos is the kindest description I can think of, and I was glad of taxis and the driver we made use of in Chennai – and otherwise we walked but even then, just crossing the road in either of the two big cities you take your life in your hands. We also visited the French enclave of Pondicherry and the spectacular temples of Mamallapuram and the crocodile sanctuary on a day when the heat was particularly fearsome. I discovered in Goa that my favourite food in the world is their fusion between Portuguese and Indian food, but the food generally was superb and we never got upset stomachs once!

One of the special pilgrimages we wanted to make is to the Basilica of St. Thomas in Chennai, billed as one of only three churches in the world built over the remains of an Apostle – St. Peter's in Rome and St. James in Santiago being the others – which we also visited (though I would also add St. Mark's in Venice, even though they nicked his bones from Alexandria).



Outside St. Thomas Basilica just before dusk

As the sun set, the chanting of what I assume was the Rosary in Tamil boomed from the church and overall I was moderately surprised at the size of the Christian footprint in all three parts of India we visited, albeit still a small minority in a country of 1.4 Billion people (They overtook China last year as the most populous country on earth).

I am glad I visited Mumbai, just to experience being in a “Megacity”. A third of the population of the UK living in one huge metropolis. Hot, dusty, crowded, with wealth sitting cheek by jowl alongside grinding poverty. But it is still possible to find peace here as we found a quiet rooftop restaurant serving great food with the world cup cricket being shown on the big screen – we watched India thrash Bangladesh.

All in all, a superb trip involving a few culture shocks, great experiences, great food (if you like Indian food!) and wonderful friendly and helpful people.

We arrived back at 11pm on Friday night and the jetlag meant I was bright and early for our 8am BCP communion on Sunday. I felt a special bond with the Indian family and their children at a well-attended service to settle back into the Rhythms of parochial life. How many other churches get two children to an 8am BCP I wonder? The 10am too attracted a congregation in the mid-nineties so I was well pleased before going to All Saints East Budleigh to conduct the baptism of Reuben Lynch into the Christian family – welcome home Reuben!

Sunday 29th October – last after Trinity – Proper 25

This Sunday I will be presiding at All Saints and St. Michael’s at 9.30 and 11am respectively and Canon Mike Williams will preside at both services at St. Peter’s.

Leviticus 19: 1-2, 15-18. The essence of the word “Holiness” implies separation. In this sense the Jewish people are minded to express this separation from other peoples by adopting a rigorous ethical code that demands justice based in the law of love. The Old Testament can be a mixed bag, but mixed amongst the chaff and confusing incidents and amoral events are real jewels and this is one such passage.

1 Thessalonians 2: 1-8. Paul never lets bad treatment or brickbats get him down or discourage him from spreading the gospel, because he has full confidence in the voracity of what he is preaching. It doesn’t make him embittered or want to retaliate either, but he deals with people honestly and with love, even when that involves tough love.

Matthew 22: 34-46. Jesus gives his famous summary of the law and declares that this accounts for all of the law and the prophets. He then goes on, quoting psalm 110 verse 1, to declare that the messiah is greater than King David. This implicitly implies that their understanding of what the messiah will be like – a warrior king that will restore the fortunes of Israel and drive the Romans out – after the manner of King David will have to be revised.

Thought for the Day.

It is strange to think that as we were flying over the middle East, the outrages that were about to be unleashed on the people living in southern Israel was only hours away from being enacted. We heard the news on TV in Chennai and were shocked at the scale and sheer brutality of what Rishi Sunak called a “Pogrom”, a well-chosen word that comes from Russian and describes a violent riot with the aim of massacring a religious group, particularly the Jews that was common in the Russian empire. Whatever your views on the current politics in the middle East, the sheer brutality and savagery of the wanton violence showing no mercy to civilian men, women and children – the beheadings, rapes and abduction of civilians to be used as political pawns was absolutely sickening. What was just as sickening was watching the subsequent glee of people, apparently reveling in the torture and abductions because the Jews were getting their “just desserts.” (This was before any Israeli retaliation). One protest leader in Brighton called Hamas action “beautiful”. I am fully behind the government decision to stand full square behind Israel and their right to defend their people in the best way they see fit. Israel must be able to defend its citizens. Hamas means “zeal” in English apparently. Jesus had to deal with zealots in his own time, who thought that violence was the only way to defeat and expel the Romans. Anybody who any knowledge of the Middle East knows that we have a situation where the politics are stuck between a rock and a hard place vis a vis the Israeli state and the Palestinian people, but the hard truth of this terrible situation was spoken by an American in a discussion with Bill Maher, the comedian and commentator. If the Arabs were to declare peace and lay down their weapons tomorrow – there would be peace in the Middle East. If the Israelis were to declare peace and lay down their weapons tomorrow, there would be another holocaust and not one Jew left alive in Israel “from the river to the sea” as per the founding charter of Hamas.

The prayer for Today was taken from another St. Thomas church (The Anglican one in Mumbai) when we visited last Thursday.

**God of light and salvation, our refuge and our strength,
We pray for the people of Israel and Palestine amid the escalating
violence.
We pray for those killed and injured by rockets from Gaza in Southern
Israel.
May your Road and staff comfort them.
We pray for those who are grieving.
May they know your ever-present help.
We pray for the protection of those who have been taken hostage by
Hamas.
As they walk through this dark valley, may they fear no evil.
We pray for the civilians of Gaza.
May they know that their help comes from the maker of heaven and
earth.
And we pray for those in leadership in Gaza and Israel.
May you guide them along the right paths.
We ask all this in union with christ and trusting in the power of your Holy
Spirit.
Amen.**

Love and peace,
Martin