

Dear friends,

Some delays and cancellations are to be expected on the west coast line but nevertheless we made our way to Lancaster to visit Louise's brother Andrew in hospital on Friday. We hadn't factored in the Cheltenham races either and at Bristol we were joined by hordes of "high-spirited" race goers who thankfully all left us at Cheltenham Spa half an hour later but that added pressure delayed us still further. We missed our connection at Birmingham and because of that had to change again at Preston. Ho-hum, we finally reached Lancaster and spent two sessions with Andrew, who is surprisingly in quite good spirits, but possibly lacking some insight into just how serious is the stroke that has befallen him. Andy, although married to a Vicar, is an atheist but that doesn't stop us praying constantly for him and for his predicament to be eased. Family is so important at these times and his mum and dad, and his middle daughter Katy has really come through by organising the rota of family visits and planning rehabilitation care. Unfortunately, Louise's work commitments means that our next visit is not possible until the 5th April.

Lancaster and back is quite a gruelling experience but after a good night's sleep the 8am BCP service beckoned and I delivered a sermon on the High priesthood of Jesus Christ. This wasn't necessary at the 10am service as we had a presentation from Wendy and Yong from Cambodia and a talk by Colin Edwards representing "Interserve", the mission organisation. It was also St. Patrick's Day of course and more especially David Waddington's 83rd birthday!

24th March – Palm Sunday.

Unfortunately, we are not allowed to have a donkey any more because of animal welfare concerns but nevertheless we'll still have palm crosses to celebrate Jesus entering Jerusalem at the start of the last week of his life. Colin Randall will preside at both services at St. Peter's and I will preside at All Saints and St. Michael's at 9.30am and 11am respectively. I have always used the "liturgy of the palms" (Mark 11: 1-11) on Palm Sunday in preference to the long readings concerning the passion – that event that is dealt with on Good Friday.

Isaiah 50: 4-9a. The most strongly individualistic and personal of the servant songs in Isaiah mentioning his tongue, ears, back, cheeks beard and face. Jesus embodies the suffering servant leading his people to fulfil their destiny against fierce opposition but remaining resolute.

Philippians 2: 5-11. It is generally supposed nowadays that this passage is an early Christian hymn. It concerns Christ's pre-existent status, his self-abasement to earthly life and death and his exaltation to universal Lordship. This is considered to be Paul's last extant letter and Paul is making the case that Jesus demands our allegiance and worship.

Mark 11: 1-11. So begins the final week of Jesus' life and the final showdown between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world represented by the Jewish authorities collaborating with the Roman authorities. What strikes me is that it all appears to be pre-planned almost like a counter demonstration directly mirroring the entrance into Jerusalem by Pontius Pilate (who lived on the coast). Pilate entered in enormous military pomp designed to impress, as a show of power. Jesus, by contrast enters on the back of a donkey instead of a warhorse to general acclaim from the local population who shout "Hosanna" a strange word with multiple applications but here means "Save us!"

A Spring concert – 20th April

With Exeter Temple salvation Army Band and Songsters starting at 6.30pm. in St. Peter's church. All Proceeds towards the upkeep of the church. Tickets are £10 and available from The card shop too, on the door or from Malcolm Jones in church. This event raised £800 last year so we are going to try and top that!

Sundays at Six

This new venture introduces music at 6pm on Sundays as the name suggests and gets off to a flying start on the 28th April with a recital by Jean-Rene Andre, the organist from Rennes cathedral in France. Other dates are as follows

5th May – David Davies

12th May – Choral Evensong

19th May – Stephen Tanner

26th May – Choral concert with Stephen Tanner and Andrew Millington (refreshments will be served after this concert).

Admission is free with a retiring collection.

Thought for Today

For my Sabbatical in 2025 I will be spending time in three countries to find out how Christians cope with being a minority faith in three separate contexts. Hindu in India, Islam in Malaysia and Buddhism in Sri Lanka. In order to prepare myself I have set myself the task of reading the sacred texts of each religion, the Tripitaka (Buddhist) composed between 550 BC and the birth of Christ, the Koran (Islamic) which for Muslims is the literal

word of God dictated to Mohammed by the angel Gabriel over a period of 23 years starting at age 40, and the Bhagavad Gita (The song of God), the best known Hindu text. Not being a great reader myself, I'm sure I will find it very taxing albeit very interesting. I am already a bit familiar with the practice of Buddhism and have read about Sufi Islam (a mystical universal form of Islam) before, but I am immediately struck about how different the Bible is from either of the other texts. The Christian Bible (Protestant, anyway) has 66 books written by different authors over many centuries. The first 39 books are the Hebrew scriptures that we share with Judaism reflecting Jewish experiences and outlooks (The Hebrew scriptures we usually call the Old Testament) and the last 27 books which reveal the gospel of Jesus Christ. Catholic and Orthodox Bibles have extra books included that Protestant churches call Apocryphal. In fact, the New Testament carries on the pattern of having multiple authors giving their own take on the present and the future. I have read every word of the whole Bible but that took a lot of years so how comprehensive my study of the other Holy Texts will go is anybody's guess. I may not have the stamina (or time) to read them all but what is important is to get an insight into the main Ethos and defining ideas that underpin each religion in which Christian churches have to operate.

The Prayer for Today is so interesting because it comes from Ukrainian Byzantine Catholics in Canada. (They adopt an orthodox liturgy but owe allegiance to the Pope) and was written to commemorate Indigenous peoples day in Canada and obviously references some calamity in their schools.

Prayer for Tolerance, Forgiveness, Reconciliation

*O God, Creator and Father of all,
with humility we your children acknowledge the relationship of all living things.*

For this we thank you, we praise you and we worship you.

We call on you, Great Mystery, the Word made Flesh

– our teacher, prophet and brother –

*to open our hearts to all our brothers and sisters,
and with them to grow in the wisdom, honesty, courage and respectfulness shown in The Sacred Teachings.*

*Give us the vision and honesty to recognize
that we are all brothers and sisters of one human family,
created and sustained by the One Creator.*

As we deal with many challenges, may we never give way to fear and anger, which can be the source of division and threat amongst peoples.

*We look to how God always gives to us,
as a remedy for sins of prejudice and intolerance.*

*We see in God the Creator of all things,
One who always provides and is generous
– even given the abuses we have heaped on one another and on the
earth.*

*We see in the Son, Jesus Christ
– the innocent Victim who pours His life blood out from the Cross for all
peoples.*

*We see how the Holy Spirit is God's gift,
alive in our world today
– inspiring vision and hope that we can have
the same mind and heart of God!*

*May Your Spirit bless the souls
who died at the Kamloops residential school
and all souls who died at residential schools.*

*May this same Spirit also bring blessing and healing
to all families and communities affected in any way by the schools.*

*O Creator, show us the way to healing,
forgiveness and reconciliation
and a renewed fellowship.*

Amen

Love and peace,
Martin