Dear friends,

Church Opening

Hallelujah. We have received the generic government advice and now also the “Ad Clerum” from the Bishop of Exeter and while so much is new and unclear, as we emerge blinking into the sunlight, what remains clear is that the safety of our congregations is paramount. So there are certain restrictions to worship and the ramifications of these are being worked through by our wardens, including completing a risk assessment on our separate churches. Karen is on holiday for the next two Sundays, so while there will be no service at All Saints, East Budleigh this Sunday this does enable me to cover our other two churches and we fully intend to hold two services on the 5th July within the RMC. One at **10am at St. Peter’s** and one at **St. Michael’s Otterton at 11.15am**. These are our current plans and I will confirm this decision and these times in my next “Soul food” which I intent to send out on Saturday this week so we have time to react.

Please don’t expect any singing (although this is being reviewed) and communion will be in one kind (wafer only) deposited into the hand. On entering church please use the hand washing/sanitiser provided and maintain social distancing. I have produced a shortened single use A5 communion order of service – not ideal but we have to start somewhere!

On another positive note I am now at my lowest weight since I gave up ballroom dancing around five years ago. Now that I mention that, I really miss the dancing and the close friendships we shared as a group. Still, mustn’t get all dewy eyed and nostalgic (too much). Let’s look at the readings set for this coming Sunday……

Sunday 5th July – 4th after Trinity (Proper 9)

**Zechariah 9: 9-12.** This piece of messianic prophesy is quoted in Matthew and John’s gospel so is well known and is seen as a prophesy of Christ’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem, not on a war horse but on a Donkey symbolising peace. His dominion stretches to the ends of the earth. The “You” in verse 11 (2ndperson feminine singular!) refers to Israel – the daughter of the covenant – and assures them that they will be delivered from all their enemies.

**Romans 7: 15-25.** The Power of sin is pervasive, and Paul has already said that sin can even use and subvert the law to its own ends even though the law is “holy, just and good”. So if sin can subvert the law how much more will it be capable of using and subverting every good intention and desire of human beings? A difficult message to preach, especially to Christians trying to do good, knowing that even as we may re-double our efforts they will be undermined by the pervasive power of sin. But take heart! As much as we may be flawed and have feet of clay, and have no may of achieving anything by our own merits Christ has already done the work and died for us and there is now “No condemnation” for anyone who knows the saving work of Christ, no matter how much we fail.

**Matthew 11: 16-19, 25-30.** Both John the Baptist and Jesus are criticized but for different reasons. John is a crazy ascetic, and Jesus is a self-indulgent libertine. It is like children squabbling in the playground over whether to play “funerals” with John (mourning their sins) or “weddings” (celebrate the dawning kingdom) with Jesus. But both are necessary and complimentary.

Then Jesus compliments those who see as “infants” – sincerely and with honesty – that he is the only Son of his Father in heaven. The final three, well known verses tell us that those who find this truth will experience a peace that passes all understanding.

Thought for the day

I have an educational pack of images of Jesus called “The Christ we share” produced by CMS and USPG containing 32 diverse images of Christ seen through the lens of widely different cultures and contexts,

In them Jesus is depicted variously as white, Black, Indian, Chinese, Latino, middle Eastern etc. and wearing the national dress of these various cultures. These are all produced by the Christians of all these various places and they can do so, in no small part because no one knows what Jesus really looked like (though common sense tells us that middle-Eastern Jewish probably just about covers it), we don’t know whether he had a beard, how tall or short he was. We presume he spoke Aramaic but have no real proof. He never wrote down a single word as far as we know – in fact the only clue we have that he could read is that He read from the scroll of Isaiah in the Synagogue.

The Masai Jesus (Kenya)

The mysteriousness of what Jesus actually looked like has meant that *theologically* (eschewing his probable actual heritage), all cultures, races and ethnicities have been rightly able to appropriate Jesus to their own culture and context. This is entirely appropriate because Jesus died for ALL people so representing Jesus in whatever skin tone and attire that speaks most readily to the people is absolutely right.  So a Black Jesus depicted in a mural in central Africa or a Latino Jesus speaking to the poor in a South American church, is the same Jesus depicted as a white man in Western classical art. We talk about God being incarnated as a human being, so had to be made flesh somewhere and in some context, but in artistic representation is incarnated in the way that speaks most readily to people where they are.

The Prayer for Today is taken from the so-called “Gelasian sacramentary” the second oldest liturgical book in existence (There is a copy in the Vatican library) and dates from AD750

**Into your hands O Lord**

**We commend ourselves this day.**

**Let your presence be with us to its close.**

**Strengthen us to remember that in whatsoever good**

**Work we do we are serving you.**

**Give us a diligent and watchful spirit, that we may seek in all things**

**To know your will, and knowing it, gladly to perform it,**

**To the honour and glory of your name;**

**Through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

**Amen**

Love and peace,

Martin