

Dear friends,

According to our esteemed church warden Chris Parrish it was the first time in his memory that the attendance for choral evensong exceeded the attendance at the morning services – 100 to 98. The reason was that we were joined by Woodbury church choir, which of course boosted attendance and the sound of our combined choirs was magnificent. The whole service flowed seamlessly, and the result was smiles and appreciation at the door afterwards – a real sense of uplift. The theme of the day which was “creation” was carried on into the evening and I had the relatively easy task of preaching about wisdom and the majesty of God.

As you will remember, we invited Mary’s meals to present to all three of our churches last year – a wonderful organisation that provides food for children in poor and troubled countries throughout the world. Of course, Syria has been affected by the recent massive earthquake as well as southern Turkey and the problems are increased there by the security situation. Our contact Katie sent me this last week.

Mary’s Meals – Syria Earthquake Appeal

Following reports of two devastating earthquakes affecting Turkey and Syria, the prayers of the Mary’s Meals family are with the many families caught up in this disaster and those mourning loved ones. We invite you to join us in prayer for those affected, and for the success of emergency response efforts. Mary’s Meals has provided school meals in Syria since 2017 with our local partner Dorcas, and we have now launched an emergency appeal to provide urgent support for children and families in and around Aleppo who are in desperate need.

To find out more or donate, please visit marysmeals.org.uk/campaigns/syria-earthquake-appeal or call 0800 6981212.

Ash Wednesday – 22nd February

We of course already have a very stable and regular congregation of around 18 people at our regular Wednesday BCP communion service, so we are simply making that service our RMC Ash Wednesday communion service – all welcome. Ashing will be offered but isn’t obligatory of course.

Sunday 19th February – next before Lent

Canon Mike Williams will preside at both morning services at St. Peter's and I will preside at both services at All Saints and St. Michael's at 9.30 and 11am respectively

Exodus 24: 12-18. There are contextual difficulties contained within this text but the theological force of this piece is to emphasise the divine origin of the law. High places have always been associated with being nearer to God in the near East and Mount Sinai (Horeb) is one such place. The cloud is also associated as representing the presence of God (Compare with the transfiguration of Jesus). Hebrew numerology is also used to express divinity. God's glory settling on Horeb for six days before speaking to Moses on the seventh day (creation) and Moses staying on the mountain for 40 days and 40 nights, a number often used to time divine events and of course subsequently used to describe how long Jesus fasted in the wilderness

2 Peter 1: 16-21. Here Peter, or an author writing on behalf of Peter, affirms that he was an eyewitness to the Transfiguration of Jesus and this gives him authority to speak and act on behalf of Christ. Where the gospel reading seeks to affirm that the Transfiguration is a fulfilment of Jewish history (The law and the prophets) 2 Peter has a forward looking perspective and it is like a lamp shining in the darkness reminding us that there will be a day when Christ shall return, "when the morning star shall rise in our hearts"

Matthew 17: 1-9. Peter, James, and John are an inner circle of trusted disciples and only they are witnesses to this mysterious, obviously divine event. All the elements are there, the high place, the cloud, the voice from heaven but also has additional elements: Jesus glowing with the uncreated light of God, Moses and Elijah – representing the law and the prophets, appearing to talk to Jesus (showing that Jesus transcends/fulfils them both) and accompanied by the voice of God echoing the words heard at his baptism "This is my Son the beloved" but now with the words added – listen to him!

Lent course

There will be a four session Lent course starting in March, not always on the same night every week – a mixture of Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The course is based on Richard Rohr's book "The Universal Christ". Fr. Richard comes from a radical Mystical and contemplative school of catholic theology in the same vein and stable as Julian of Norwich, William Blake and Thomas

Merton and while you don't need to have necessarily read the book, it would give a solid background to the course and is £9.55 for a paperback copy or under a Fiver for a Kindle version. The dates are as follows.

Lent Course. – The Universal Christ Everything is sacred

4 session course. All sessions start at 7pm.

Tuesday 14th March – The four worldviews

Wednesday 22nd March – Spiritual transformation.

Tuesday 28th March – Christ is everywhere

Wednesday 5th April – Contemplation

A Spring Concert – 25th march at 6.30pm

In St. Peter's church with the Exeter Temple Salvation army band and Songsters. Tickets are £8 in advance from the "card shop too" in Budleigh High street or on the door. It promises to be a wonderful evening!

Thought for the day

I know that some people have reacted very negatively to the church of England's proposal to change texts that refer to God with male pronouns, and for some it just represents the general woke leftward drift of the church, changing our liturgies as they tinker with our favourite hymns. Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali - before he left to join the ordinariate - said that he thought that the C of E had been captured by single issue "entryists" in much the same fashion as the Labour party was nearly destroyed by entryists from the left. – Discuss! "Let's have a heated debate" as Mrs. Merton used to say....

My own view is that I think everyone has always agreed that God (as in the Godhead), three in one and one in three is a community of masculine and feminine qualities so could be said to transcend gender as a triad, but there are definite male and female qualities and roles that have also always been affirmed and attributed to different aspects of the Trinity. The creator God, the divine essence from whom the whole of creation was formed (the active principle) has a masculine quality and personality and was referred to as such by Jesus Christ when we were urged to pray to "our Father" in heaven. The spirit of God, on the other hand has always been referred to in female terms (the receptive collaborative principle). Synonymous with the concept of divine wisdom – Sofia – she has been female from the beginning. The greatest church dedicated to Christ in the world was in Istanbul was called the Hagia Sophia – female – Christ the Holy Wisdom of God. We heard from

the reading from Proverbs on Sunday evening that Wisdom (she) was there with God from the beginning

In my view, there is no such thing as gender *neutral* – there is always just masculine and feminine interacting together and bringing their complementary qualities to bear to effect and balance each other. Sometimes we need masculine qualities and sometimes we need feminine qualities. Jesus, while being definitely male, you could say has a perfect and complimentary balance between the male and female principles. I find the Chinese philosophical concept of Yin and Yang helpful here. Yin is the receptive (female principle) and Yang is the active (male) principle. They fold around each other in mutuality while remaining separate. But not entirely separate. In each principle there is a bit of the opposite principle represented by a dot of the opposing principle. But put very simply, we won't be replacing the "Our Father" in the RMC while I have anything to do with it.

The Prayer for Today is well, it had to be, didn't it? Matthew 6: 9-13

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy Will be done,
on earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.**

Most Bibles end here but many add in the footnote that the following is added in some ancient texts

**For thine is the kingdom the power and the glory for ever and ever
Amen.**

Love and peace,
Martin