

Dear friends,

Our trip down memory lane to my former church – the Church of the Resurrection, Bucharest (COR) – for their centenary celebrations was so meaningful and for me, quite emotional. Making contact with old friends and celebrating with the current congregation left me feeling buoyant and very hopeful for the future. The Bishop of Europe + Robert Innes remarked on how young the congregation was because of course all the English-speaking people in Romania are of working age. The international make up of an Anglican church in the East is of course mind boggling, coming from every corner of the globe. The travelling traumas involved in getting there were quickly forgotten as we celebrated Choral Evensong on the Saturday and on Sunday we celebrated the Eucharist with the confirmation of an entire young American family – mum, dad, and their two girls. The celebration evensong was sung by a recently put together choir in the presence of representatives from many other denominations in the Romanian capital.



The Bishop of Europe surrounded by guests including the Papal Nuncio, Fr Tita representing the Orthodox Patriarchate, Fr. Nevsky, the current Anglican priest, The Armenian Orthodox, Various Hungarian and German reformed churches, Greek Catholics, seventh day Adventists. I am robe-less because I travelled hand luggage only (and felt completely underdressed) standing in front of my old friend and main Orthodox contact, Fr. Mihai (who still has my lawn mower after all these years!).

Returning to the UK we spent a lovely week with my old friend Fr. John Barker and his wife Ella in his parish of Harrow Weald North London. John and I were in Bucharest together all those years ago and we spent the week reminiscing about old times. Louise must have been quite left out as none of the people and situations meant anything much to her. But she certainly got her own back by insisting we travel across London on Friday night during the rush hour in the dark (picking up the congestion charge en-route) to see her friend Kirstin. I arrived in Herne Hill feeling like a damp rag but the stay was lovely and I gathered my strength for a nightmarish journey back to Devon with closures on the M4 and the A303 arriving back on Saturday evening. My first day back at work of course was Remembrance Sunday.

The two Remembrance Sunday services I was involved in, as well as the two war memorial services were all well attended and meaningful affairs. East Budleigh war memorial service went smoothly with children reading out the names of the fallen. The Royal British Legion service in St. Peter's attracted over 100 people with flags being presented and collected at the end for the singing of the national anthem. A frenetic and incident packed week was brought to a calm and beautiful end with our monthly celebration of choral evensong. What a lovely end to a lovely week away!

Sunday 20th November – Christ the King

I will be presiding at St. Peter's at both services and the venerable Trevor Jones will preside at All Saints and St. Michael's at 9.30 and 11.00 respectively.

Jeremiah 23: 1-6. “Shepherds” is a well known way of describing the Kings and rulers of Israel and here, depending on which translation of the Bible you are using, they are accused either deliberately or by their negligence of leading the people astray. The scene evoked is probably after the Babylonian exile when the Jews were finding their feet again in the Holy Land. The piece looks to the far future to the re-emergence of David’s defunct line, to a “righteous branch” who will rule wisely, and this motif is applied by Christians to the Christ figure who was of the line of David according to the Bible.

Colossians 1: 1-20. A fabulous theologically demanding piece. This “righteous branch” prophesied in Jeremiah is called the “image of the invisible God” and in him all things in heaven and earth were created, and further to that He is the “head of the body” the church. Nowhere in the New Testament is there a fully worked out doctrine of the Trinity (that would come hundreds of years later) but here we come as close as humanly possible it is to come to saying that Jesus Christ is Divine and indwells all things – quite a statement!

Luke 23: 33-43. We are being spoiled today with exceptional readings. This scripture from Luke’s gospel carries Jesus’ famous prayer to his Father to forgive his murderers prayed while he hung on the cross. The notion of what it means to be a king, an exemplar, a shepherd, is being taken into new territory here. The exchange between Jesus and the “thief” is also mind blowing and is a source of hope. This thief who will die that day and who “deserved his punishment” is told “Today you will be with me in paradise”.

Funfaith: our nascent junior church is developing quickly. For logistical reasons the team are delaying the launch until the new year but now have dates for the first part of next year. They are;

January 15th Creation

February 12th Valentines/Love

March 19th Mothering Sunday

April 23rd Breakfast on the beach story/Forgiveness

May 21st Pentecost

June 11th Prayer

Please pray for the organising team and the children that will come to Funfaith.

Thought for the day

When times seem uniquely hard for the church of England in the UK it is good to be reminded that the church is infinitely bigger and more diverse than anything we can imagine.

I was reminded of this fact during my all too brief trip back to Bucharest. The Anglican congregation is made up from people from diverse places as the USA, India, Sri Lanka, and all manner of European and African countries. They come with all manner of church backgrounds and experiences. Luke, their treasurer is from the Mar Thoma church in Kerala (South India). One church warden is from Sri Lanka and the other is the British Ambassador's wife. What binds us together is the English language and the Eucharistic liturgy which all can engage with no matter what their home churchmanship. (I do remember from my time there that I was always pleased that we had very liberal Americans sitting next to very conservative Africans – all breaking bread at the same altar).

From the picture on this email you get a flavour of the various denominations and traditions that make up world Christianity. At various times we can be flourishing in one place, suffering in another and dying in another. Despite our differences in theological interpretation and ecclesiastical tradition we are still able to recognise the Spirit of Christ that unites us.

To all that we can add the “communion of Saints” which unites all Christians alive and dead across time and space. Our faith, our communities, are islands that are joined together with something truly awesome and truly catholic (which means universal) by the Spirit of Christ so no matter what concerns you may have locally about your church and its situation, we are all part of something universal and eternal, and with that sense of perspective our problems just seem to melt away in the grand scheme of things.

The Prayer for Today is from the 2nd century liturgy of Mark.

O Sovereign and almighty Lord,

Bless all thy people and all thy flock,

Give thy peace, thy help, thy love unto us thy servants,

The sheep of thy fold

That we may be united in the bond of peace and love,

One body and one spirit

In one hope of our calling

In thy divine and boundless love

Love and peace,
Martin