

Dear friends,

The weekend started with St. Peter's being the sole venue for the early spring literary festival so along with Louise's mum and dad we availed ourselves of listening to David Dimbleby (National treasure), Kate Bingham (of covid vaccine rollout fame), and Esme Young (from the Great British sewing Bee). I'm sure all the talks were great, but I think three over two days was enough for us. St. Peter's was rammed and underlines our position as a cultural hub.

This set the scene for Mothering Sunday and there were a slew of new faces. Two Indian women at the 8 O'clock stopped to talk and asked me when our times for "confession" were. In the Anglican church, this is of course possible but seldom asked for so I'll have to brush up my "sacrament of reconciliation" skills.

The 10am service was all singing and dancing with a presentation on the work of the missionary society "Interserve" – we help sponsor Wendy and Yong in Cambodia – and the children from Funfaith distributed the lovely flowers to the women in the congregation. Yes, we are reassuringly unwoke and traditional in our outlook in the RMC!

A mothering Sunday lunch at Marco's with Louise's mum Linda, mowed the lawn before it rained and so ended a manic week on returning from central America. Onwards and upwards!

Sunday 26th March – 5th of Lent

Archdeacon Trevor Jones will preside at both services at St. Peter's and I will preside at All Saints and St. Michael's at 9.30 and 11am respectively.

Ezekiel 37: 1-14. Although there was no real belief in life after death in 6th century BC Israel, to be left unburied was seen as a calamity nevertheless. The desolation of bones whitened by the scorching sun can be seen as a metaphor for Israel in Exile. The message is clear that only God can achieve anything here and breath his spirit into a broken and decimated people to energise and bring about any kind of salvation. Breath is synonymous with God's spirit and life as it always has been in Biblical theology.

Romans 6: 8-11. Sometimes Paul's writings carry more than a whiff of dualism but here the flesh and the spirit are not two separate parts of a

person but two ways of living so “living according to the flesh” does not mean living a life of gluttony and vice necessarily but living life according to the ways of this world, to secular values rather than a life lived according to the values of God. Plus, the spirit is nobody’s possession – it is God’s spirit. If even Jesus did not raise himself from death it was the spirit of God that caused this miracle to happen as Paul says, how much less to we own or control it.

John 11: 1-45. The raising of Lazarus occurs no-where else in the gospels but has served the function of re-assuring people of their personal resurrection. It is curious because it appears that Jesus delays going to Lazarus for the purpose of demonstrating the very sign that is the final sign that started with the turning of water into wine at the beginning of the gospel. God’s spirit working through Jesus gives Jesus an unrivalled authority and tells of a unique relationship with God.

Dinner club – April 13th at 7pm

Our much-appreciated dinner clubs make a welcome return this year after a long gap caused by Covid. We have opted for two a year, returning to the East Devon Golf Club and our first one is on Thursday 13th April. The cost is £22 per person (Just a £2 increase in five years can’t be bad) and we have the pleasure of a speaker from our congregation in St. Peter’s – Andrew Kingsnorth - an eminent surgeon who carried out hernia operations throughout the world and also helped train local surgeons.

A Ukrainian lady who was sponsored to come and find sanctuary in Britain like so many others, knows that her current sponsor cannot house her for too much longer so she is looking for an alternative sponsor. If you were amenable to such a proposition, please contact Fran in the office and she will furnish you with more details.

Don’t forget that the second in our Lent course in this week on a **Wednesday** at 7pm.

The Spring concert by the Exeter Temple salvation Army Band and Songsters is at St. Peter’s this Saturday 25th March at 6.30pm. Tickets are £8 and available from Fran in the office, on the door or from “The card shop too”. It promises to be a sparkling evening.

Thought for the day.

Whenever I get on a plane, I always pray more fervently than at other times. My ritual is straightforward. In my mind I first tell people that I love them - then I pray the Lord's prayer and the Hail Mary. I suppose I pray the Hail Mary because it asks Mary to pray for us "now and at the hour of our death". It is asking someone to intercede *for me*. The Jesus prayer also asks Jesus to have mercy on us but that doesn't go quite as far. Until recently I always thought of prayer as something I did. I never thought of others, the saints, or God praying in and for me but there is a power in knowing or asking for the intercession of others. To know that God's spirit is praying within yourself and your job is simply to sit, say nothing and be open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit is quite liberating. It is the art of contemplation. Prayer can become quite a trial, making us nervous, not knowing what to pray for or how to put it into words. Prayer can then become an anxiety producing performance in which standards need to be maintained. Becoming comfortable as a Christian is learning and accepting the truth that you are already loved and accepted, and God is already prompting and guiding you and praying in you if we would but learn to be quiet attentive and just listen to the still small voice of God.

The Prayer for Today is called the "Five finger prayer" and was reputedly devised by Pope Francis when he was still Archbishop of Argentina. It is used specially for teaching children how to pray for others, and I had never heard of it until I had to find out about it quickly when I was asked to speak to the children about the prayer at St. Peter's school!

The 5 Finger Prayer

This prayer method is really simple. Each finger represents a group of people for whom you can pray. You can open your prayer time with "Dear God," or however you normally open prayer. (We usually alternate between "Dear God," and "Hey, God..." depending on how formal - or informal - we are feeling that day.) As you pray, go through each of the fingers (and thumb) on your hand. Pray for the people those fingers represent.

Thumb: Pray for those closest to you: your family and friends.

Pointer finger: Pray for those who point you in the right direction: your teachers, and other leaders in your life. Pray for wisdom and support.

Middle finger (tallest): Pray for those that lead us: those in government, in business, in church leadership. Pray for guidance and wisdom.

Ring finger (weakest): Pray for those who are poor, sick, in pain, in trouble: those most in need.

Pinkie finger (smallest): Pray for ourselves and our own needs.

Love and peace,

Martin