

Dear friends,

The last of seven funerals since Christmas this morning (although a new one has just come in) which feels like I have survived the post-Christmas surge. It is remarkable when you think about it, that the death rate always increases after Christmas. It appears that the power of the mind – the willpower – to survive and see loved ones for one last time keeps the body going and when that milestone has been reached, the mind (spirit) allows the body to just let go. It reveals just how interlinked are mind, body, and spirit, that we are as the Hebrew scriptures always assured us, a psychosomatic unity.

St. Michael's Minis

Whilst “open the book” has been doing sterling work for a long time, and hot on the heels of the first “Funfaith” at St. Peter's church, we can announce that a new after school children's church will be starting after Easter on Friday evenings from 4.30 until 6pm at St. Michael's church Otterton. This will run from 14th April to the 29th of September. Please pray for this new venture in your personal prayers.

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.

Tuesday 14th March – The four worldviews

Wednesay 22nd March – Spiritual transformation.

Tuesday 28th March – Christ is everywhere

Wednesday 5th April – Contemplation

29th January – Presentation of Christ in the Temple (Candlemas)

I will be presiding at both services at St. Peter's on Sunday. Reverend Margaret Scrivener will be presiding at All Saints at 9.30am and Reverend Jean Burrows will be presiding at St. Michael's at 11am.

Malachi 3: 1-5. Malachi literally means “my messenger” and messenger and Angel are the same word in Hebrew. The divine coming will be painful for many who experience it. There will be a process of purification that will start in the Temple (where people should know better) and move to the social realm. Although this is paired with the celebration of the presentation of Christ 40 days after his birth, arguably it is best suited to the “cleansing of the Temple” incident.

Hebrews 2: 14-18. The book of Hebrews stresses more than any other book in the New Testament how essential it was that Jesus was human in every sense. For only in experiencing the pains and sufferings of human beings could He faithfully represent humanity to God, and through his sacrifice become the “lamb of God” sacrificed for the sins of humanity.

Luke 2: 22-40. However new and decisive Jesus may be, by locating his family in the Temple, fulfilling Jewish ritual traditions, Luke is saying in no uncertain terms that Jesus is faithfully from within the Jewish tradition. Luke isn't apparently concerned with the ritual details here though because he confuses the “presentation” of the first-born which entailed no visit to the temple and no sacrifice with the purification of Mary which is what is actually being described here.

Thought for the day

I got up early on Sunday morning and the Sunrise was so spectacular that it stopped you in your tracks. I was just stunned by the beauty and majesty of the scene I was presented with. Scenes like that just jolt you out of your busyness and fussing over what seemed very important and immediately relegates it to being a secondary unimportant matter. I can't remember what I was “supposed” to be doing at the time, but whatever it was, the relative unimportance of whatever it was, was revealed to me as now I can still remember the sunrise but not a clue about what I was doing at that time.

These are moments a bit like those experienced by people in the Bible that we call theophanies – encounters with God. The dominant reactions to such events are awe and wonder but when one intuits that it is God Himself that is communicating Himself to you, fear is the common response. The message “Do not be afraid” is said many times in the Bible, not 365 times as sometimes claimed, but that doesn’t diminish the force of the injunction. You can’t live without fear – that is just not possible and most probably a psychological disorder – what God wants is for us not to always succumb to our fear but to be courageous and face our fears head-on. We can do that by trusting the nature and purposes of God who never wills the destruction of anyone but wills our salvation.

Whatever the bald scientific explanation that explains how a sunrise that illuminates the sky happens, the important thing is how it touches your soul. It was a lesson to me to remember that God is here as a “hidden hand”, hiding in plain sight in the fabric of the universe, and whatever fears I have I can use the knowledge of that benevolent God to face those fears and live more courageously.

The Prayer for Today is a beautiful prayer by Ted Loder

Empower me

To be a bold participant

Rather than a timid saint in waiting,

In the difficult ordinariness of now.

To exercise the authority of honesty,

Rather than defer to power

Or deceive to get it.

To influence someone for justice,

Rather than to impress anyone for gain,

And by grace to find treasures

Of joy, of friendship, of peace

Hidden in the fields of the daily

You give me to plough.

Love and peace,

Martin