

Dear friends,

It's been a great week for the literary festival which sold around 8,000 tickets this year, most of them at St. Peter's. The organisers also extended WiFi at St. P's to the main body of the church and the Peter Hall so while there are frustrations to handing over the building, we do benefit from the association.

Louise and I attended six talks and we walked from East Budleigh to Budleigh Salterton for them all so our step count is pretty good as well.

In between time I conducted my first wedding at Otterton in five years on Saturday. There have been plenty at St. Peter's and All Saints of course, but my first one at Otterton which was very special. Lydia and James were both doctors in London but mum had moved to Devon, so it was held here. The church looked marvellous with the pew ends all decorated and a string quartet played the beginning and end.

There have been three high profile deaths of people connected with St. Peter's recently. Brian Shakleton, who used to run the burial ground, Christopher Briscoe of course and we just heard on Friday that Barbara Parry wife of Canon Parry, former vicar of St. Peter's died last Friday. By the time this goes out, Brian's funeral will already have taken place (yesterday), Christopher Briscoe's funeral is set for Tuesday 3rd October at 11.30 (Note time change from the one in the pew sheet!) and Barbara Parry's funeral is at an early stage but contact has been made with the undertakers.

Sunday 1st October – Harvest Festival

I will be presiding at All Saints at 9.30am and John Archibald will preside at St. Michael's at 11am. Canon Mike Williams will preside at both services at St. Peter's. This is the closest Sunday to Mike's 30-year anniversary of ordination. I will be joining St. Peter's for their harvest lunch at around 12.15/12.30.

Deuteronomy 8: 7-18. A piece that tells people of the promised land – a land flowing with Milk and honey. But be mindful, when you are enjoying the fruit of the land, that you don't forget that the hand of God is behind it all. Remember how God guided you through the wilderness and don't think that when you are metaphorically "in clover" think everything was down to you and your hard work. A timely lesson for modern people who, comfortable in a land of plenty, are apt to forget from whence it all came – the creator God from whom everything has its source.

2 Corinthians 9: 6-15. Agricultural metaphors abound in the Bible because of course they were an agrarian society. Here, generosity of spirit and generosity with money, possessions and in a wider context generosity in spreading the gospel are compared with someone who sows generosity in a field. The Christian is also asked to contemplate the generosity of God towards them, in showering them with the indescribable gift of Grace.

Luke 12: 16-30. Another agricultural parable that seeks to convince people to see their lives in perspective and to know that your life may be shorter than you knew and that time runs out for everyone in the end. This leads Jesus into a discourse on how we should not worry i.e. Getting our lives and needs into perspective and learning to trust God more. This works in situations when there is plenty, but it goes without saying that you cannot tell a man dying of starvation to “consider the ravens”. In his situation, he needs food!

Thought for the Day

Thought provoking talks from the first female surgeon in Britain, to a hilarious talk by the author of the no1. Ladies detective agency, to a frightening discussion on artificial intelligence, and a thought provoking one on the role of viruses on world events kept me on my toes intellectually during the literary festival. There was also an interesting talk from the Daily Telegraph’s political editor on 13 years of conservative rule, but I suppose the most interesting one for me was the David Baddiel talk on his book “the God desire”. David is an atheist just like Richard Dawkins who spoke at last year’s festival (no-one can accuse us of being narrow minded!) but he was very different from Dawkins. Richard Dawkins is dismissive of religion but David Baddiel has a god desire – he wishes he could believe in God but just can’t – and sees the benefits of religious faith psychologically (religious people live longer happier lives according to all data). He said in his talk that the very fact that he had a “desire” for God meant that for him, God didn’t exist. Now I didn’t quite understand that point, but nevertheless, I suppose you could say that religious people are ones who have chosen to respond to that desire and embraced it. So it was a good humoured occasion. David only arrived in Budleigh seven minutes before his talk and had no idea it was to be given in a church which led to much mirth at the beginning. It was his long association with Frank Skinner – a devout practicing Catholic – that interested me most. He said that he had absolutely no comeback to when Frank said to him after one of their debates on religious faith that when the priest gives him the host at Mass all doubts and fears disappear, and Frank feels the presence of God. There is no comeback to such a personal experience of God. You cannot argue it away or pretend it doesn’t happen. In

the Hebrew scriptures there is a choice laid in front of the Jewish people that they can either choose life or death and the choice is made clear. Choose Life.

The Prayer for Today. One of the most potent prayers is actually from the Bible from Mark 9:24, when a Father, desperate for his child's ailment to be healed exclaims to Jesus.

“I believe. Help me overcome my unbelief.”

Love and peace,
Martin