

Dear friends,

On Friday morning 300 children and their teachers poured into St. Peter's church for their annual Harvest festival which was the opening salvo in a weekend of big set-piece services. And still they come. Children arriving at church each carrying a harvest offering.



On Saturday the scene changed to All Saints East Budleigh and a wedding between Emma and Ian. Unfortunately, for reasons beyond her control, the bride was 40 minutes late which as you can imagine caused a little consternation, not least for the groom. But all's well that ends well and a marvellous wedding ensued, topped by the page boy Edward leading the actions to "My God is a great big God".

I presided at St. Peter's on Sunday and preached about money (a touchy subject for us all). I am continually amazed and very pleased by the large congregations, including newcomers that we continue to attract to St. Peter's. We re-introduced the common cup for the congregation which after a two-year gap and negotiating a new configuration with the nave altar went remarkably smoothly though we learnt a few good lessons. Thankfully, the Diocese have said that the priest no longer has to "reverentially consume" the left-over wine but dispose of it directly to earth. Quite a relief!

On Monday we said a last goodbye to Elaine Harewood, the remarkable 96-year-old stalwart of the church at her funeral at 1pm. It was a lovely affair with a huge congregation. A fitting farewell to a lovely lady.

Sunday 2nd October – Harvest festival

Please note that both services in the villages at All Saints and Otterton are at 11am this morning. This allows All Saints to have a bring and share harvest lunch afterwards. I will preside at All Saints and John Archibald will preside at St. Michael's. Colin Randall will preside at both services at St. Peter's.

Deuteronomy 26: 1-11. Although the modern "Harvest festival" service in England only dates from 1843, started by a clergyman in Cornwall, the need and desire to thank God for all his gifts to us is the oldest religious concept in the world and is present in all early agrarian societies, including the Jewish one written about here in Deuteronomy. The practice of not only giving thanks for what the earth provides but sharing it with others is as old as time.

Philippians 4: 4-9. The dominant theme of this reading is thankfulness which produces rejoicing. This is a theme that should provide the undergirding of every Christian soul, no matter what the surface tone or subject matter – even a funeral. You can grieve your loss, while at the same

time be thankful for their life and rejoice that they are now with God. This section of Philippians is to encourage all believers no matter what their outward conditions might be.

John 6: 26-35. In John we move from the practical and pragmatic provision of food to the provision of spiritual nourishment to sustain and feed us. It ends with one of the famous “I am” sayings. “I am” is the name of God given to Moses in Exodus 3: 14. So there is a deep symbolic resonance to Jesus saying, “I am the bread of life”. That double meaning of both spiritual and practical nourishment bleeds into the bread and wine in the Eucharist where the priest repeats Jesus’ words “This is my body”.

Thought for the day

Sometimes, simplifying things aids clarity. It was when I was trying to distil the essence of Harvest for the children that the defining characteristic of a person that believes in a creator God is thankfulness – for all things, even life itself.

Seeing all life as a gift - Life, the planet, your friends and family, food, drink, church - inevitably changes your point of view and your demeanour and attitude towards life.

It changes your focus away from yourself and towards the gift giver. One of the main functions of organised religion is to encourage the move away from a self-centred life towards a more God-centred life.

The realization that you are not the centre of the universe after all engenders a natural humility and humility is an attribute prized by God.

Seeing Christ as a gift to humanity to help us open our eyes to the truth about life helps us to treat seriously the message that the manner of his life death and resurrection can teach us. His parables likewise.

Seeing the opportunities of life occasionally presented to us as a gift which we are invited to open, and use leads us to a fuller life.

The gifts given to every one of us that we are invited to use for the benefit of all are too often left unwrapped on the shelf through sheepishness and lack

of confidence. A thriving church is one where every member is set free to unwrap and use those gifts for the benefit of the whole assembly.

I encourage us all to see life as a gift and to explore the hidden gifts within each one of us that can be used for the benefit of all. God has given us all gifts and I want to encourage each one of us to try and discern what they are, to metaphorically unwrap that gift and use it for the benefit of all.

The Prayer for Today is the SPCK prayer. I have simply changed the words “this society” and replaced them with “this church”.

Almighty God

Who through the prophets of old

Promised that light should shine out of darkness,

Shine in our hearts,

And so use our endeavours

In this church that many may

Be given the light of the

Knowledge of your glory

Which shone in the face of

Your Son Jesus Christ

Our Lord.

Love and peace,

Martin