

Dear friends,

Haytor on Dartmoor was bathed in sunshine, but it was only when we tried to get out of the car that we felt the full force of the wind – not approaching the force of the recent hurricane in the American South perhaps but fierce nonetheless. The walk might best be described as invigorating and certainly blew any cobwebs away ready to face the weekend.

The highlight of which was a large separate baptism at St. Michael's in the afternoon. Over 100 people with adults only just outnumbering children (I'll let you picture the scene – joyful chaos). Training in crowd control was never part of my formation at the monastery but I think I managed to hold most of the people most of the time and the end result was that 10-month-old Evie was duly baptised to the obvious delight of the family and friends. What was rather gratifying is that some of the children that went to St. Peter's school recognised me and started practicing the "five finger prayer" I talked to them about in their assembly a couple of weeks ago. Just shows that they take in more than you sometimes give them credit for!

Sunday 2 April – Palm Sunday

I will be presiding at both services at St. Peter's, Canon Mike Williams will be presiding at All Saints East Budleigh at 9.30 am and John Archibald will preside at St. Michael's Otterton at 11am. Note: For those who are able, Otterton will process up from the Green with their palms at about 10.50 am.

Isaiah 50: 4-9a. The word "servant" doesn't appear in this piece but has often been seen as the most personal of the servant songs. Instead of "Israel" it mentions the tongue, ears, back, cheek, beard and persecution so has sometimes been called the "Gethsemene of the servant" referring to the passion of Jesus. Following God's will, despite the brickbats, is what is most important.

Philippians 2: 5-11. This is an early Christian hymn that sings of the self-abasement of Christ who although divine became human for our sake (using the symbolism and language of the time). For executing this perfectly he was raised to the right hand of God for all eternity, and the picture of humility and obedience has been a template of human discipleship ever since.

Matthew 21: 1-11. This pre-meditated counterdemonstration on palm Sunday that challenged not only the temporal Roman authorities but stands as a transcendent challenge to all human systems before or since. Sometimes billed as a “clash of kingdoms” it pits the eternal conflict between the kingdoms of this world against the kingdom of God and it opens the final week of Jesus’ life. Later on Good Friday, the earthly kingdom of Rome and their collaborators appear to have won when they crucified Jesus but God delivered that final coup de grace on Easter Sunday that love, light and life will never be overcome by hate, darkness and death.

Holy Week

Palm Sunday introduces Holy Week and then on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday we have the service of compline at 7pm in the Lady Chapel at St. Peter’s. This is a short and simple service of night prayer.

Note: On Wednesday this is followed by the last in our Lent course which is on contemplation so can just continue in the Lady chapel after a short gap to let others leave if they want to.

Maundy Thursday at **7pm**. Eucharist and stripping of the altars at St. Peter’s

Good Friday at **12 Noon** – “The cross of Christ” at St. Michael’s Otterton – a traditional service with choir, hymns and readings.

At **3pm** at St. Peter’s. Our annual service of Good Friday reflections.

Easter Sunday at 6.30 there is a sunrise service on the beach and then services at the normal times in each of our churches.

Thought for the day. Mind your language.

“El” as a suffix in the Hebrew language means God. They took the word from the local Canaanites who occupied the land before them. When it is applied to the names of the “angels” – a word which means messenger we come up with evocative descriptions of these heavenly messengers. Michael means

“one like God”, Gabriel means the “strength of God” and Raphael means the “medicine of God”. Names are very descriptive in Hebrew and most famously “Jesus” is a Greek translation of Joshua – which means “God is Salvation”. Remember Barabbas, the man the Jews wanted freed instead of Jesus? Barabbas means curiously “Son of the Father” which is exactly what we call Jesus. Adam and Eve in Genesis – their names are related to Earth (Adam) and Life (Eve) so literally and descriptively humanity is formed from the earth that has life breathed into it. And while we are speaking of spirit and breath – they are tellingly exactly the same word in Hebrew – ruach. Incidentally they are exactly the same word in Greek also – pneuma. I love the way that clues to the underlying meaning of a word or concept are hidden in plain sight. The name of God himself – Yahweh – means simply “I am” or “I will be”. How awesome, transcendent and mysterious is that? Language is fascinating and the numbers used in the Bible are equally so. Have you noticed just how many times 12 (or multiples thereof) appears in the Bible or 40 or 7 (the number of perfection) therefore leaving 6 as the number of imperfection? Unwrapping the Bible usually means a lot more than deciphering the actual words themselves but also their symbolic meaning.

The Prayer for Today is by R.S. Thomas and it is called “Tell us”

**We have had names for you:
The Thunderer, the Almighty
Hunter, Lord of the snowflake
and the sabre-toothed tiger.
One name we have held back
unable to reconcile it
with the mosquito, the tidal-wave,
the black hole into which
time will fall. You have answered
us with the image of yourself
on a hewn tree, suffering
injustice, pardoning it;
pointing as though in either
direction; horrifying us
with the possibility of dislocation.
Ah, love, with your arms
wide, tell us how much more
they must still be stretched
to embrace a universe drawing
away from us at the speed of light.**

Love and peace,
Martin