

Dear friends,

**In these** restricted times it was something of a treat when the Jewellers 'phoned me to ask whether I could come to Sidmouth to pick up my wedding ring because they could see people by appointment. (I have lost so much weight that my ring finger has reduced by two sizes and my wedding ring was in danger of dropping off!) A lovely trip out, one shiny new-looking polished ring later, the trip out was a little reminder of what we are missing during this terrible situation we all find ourselves in. Speaking of which -

**As I speak**, the lockdown situation is unchanged, so worship continues all the while

- The government allows it
- The Bishop of Exeter allows it
- I am healthy enough and Covid-free to provide it

Worship would of course cease if any of those conditions (above) changed.

**Attendance at worship** is a separate issue of course and as ever is a personal choice based on the perceived risk to your health. All I can say is that the congregations at both services I presided at on Sunday were most appreciative and I was blessed by them.

## **Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> January – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Epiphany**

This Sunday I will be presiding at the 9.30am All Saints and 11am St. Michael's services and the reverend Karen Young will preside at the 8am and 10am services at St. Peter's.

**1 Samuel 3: 1-10.** Samuel did not yet "know" the Lord and mistook the voice of God to be that of his mentor Eli. It was Eli who perceived that it was the voice of God and instructed Samuel to listen. The voice of wisdom from an elder to a younger person is a valuable resource. There is much wisdom both in experienced Christians and in the traditions of the church that we overturn at our peril.

**Revelation 5: 1-10.** Apocalyptic imagery abounds here but what can we distil from this piece? That whatever is decreed by the Father, his will and purposes can be made fully known and accurately represented by the Christ represented by the image of a slain lamb. for Christ is the only one worthy to take and open the scroll. The Church - through the Spirit of Christ – is the faithful extension of that will and purpose on earth. No pressure there then!

**John 1: 43- 51.** Although initially sceptical, Nathaniel is soon convinced that Jesus is the expected *Messiah* (or *Christ* in Greek). Messiah literally means “anointed” that is, appointed and empowered to inaugurate a new era in world history. Using the imagery of Revelation, he is the one “worthy to open and read the scroll”. John uses the image of “Jacob’s ladder” to describe the closeness of the relationship between the Father and Jesus – “angels ascending and descending upon the Son of man”

## School appeal for laptops so children can learn remotely

This appeal is pretty self-explanatory. If you can help in any kind of way, either by donating a laptop or by giving money the details are on this short presentation by Steve Hitchcock and the school at Budleigh Salterton. Peter Halford, headteacher at the Raleigh Federation schools in East Budleigh and Otterton is doing the same thing so I’ll give Peter’s email address as well.

<https://youtu.be/U3C6dp4EOuw>

If you can help please contact Steve Hitchcock directly by emailing him on [head@sps1.org.uk](mailto:head@sps1.org.uk)

Or Peter Halford at the village schools on [peter.halford@thelink.academy](mailto:peter.halford@thelink.academy)

## Thought for the day – Developing a Rule of Life.

Mental health has become one of the most pressing topics on the national agenda since the onset of lockdown, but this only accentuates and expands what was already an epidemic of poor mental health especially amongst young people. I got to thinking what is it that helps my mental health as well as my physical and spiritual health. The answer to all three is having a disciplined approach to all three areas that is best expressed in terms of a “rule of life” in terms of Christian spirituality.

For example, in terms of a physical rule of life we have said that I only have two meals a day, I exercise daily for at least 50 minutes, and the food I eat must be healthy. I have recently added the practice of Yoga to this rule whenever we are allowed to do so. I have followed this physical rule ever since the first lockdown and the benefits are apparent.

Mental health is improved by supportive loving relationships with spouse, family and friends and church brothers and sisters. I make sure I speak to my dad and my daughter weekly. Louise and I tell each other that we love each other daily. We play scrabble incredibly competitively daily. I read something every day. These seemingly small things have an enormous impact on our general mental health.

What works for physical and mental health is true for spiritual health – what Buddhists call their “practice” but what Christians have traditionally called a “Rule of Life”. A Rule of life is a discipline that sets out a target that is achievable but makes a certain demand on your time and commitment. I started to think about my own “Rule of Life”. It consists of small achievable things but they have a big cumulative impact. We say grace before every meal (a largely lost practice). We read a chapter of the Bible every day. Of course, as a priest, I also prepare and write sermons, write Blogs and emails, preside at funerals, preside at the Eucharist obviously but beyond that (and underpinning it) a spiritual rule of life that involves private prayer and contemplation is essential for all followers of Christ who wish to grow in their faith. Whether that prayer is currently non-existent, 5 minutes a week, or half an hour a day what really matters is what you are going to do now and going forward. What would work for you? Commit yourself to something that will be achievable with a modicum of effort and when you feel able, step things up gradually. If you find prayer difficult, why not commit to saying the Lord’s prayer every morning or night? I follow Sacred space which leads us in a daily prayer discipline that I find peaceful and comforting. That is easy and there is no better place to start. The important thing is that you use what works for you and you will find yourself growing in knowledge and wisdom. So what does your rule of life look like at the moment? Perhaps it is full and fulfilling, perhaps it is meagre or non-existent. Going forward whatever you do, It must work for you so don’t think you have to copy anyone else’s practice but by tradition some methods have proved their worth by their staying power.

**The Prayer for Today** is the Jesus prayer from the Orthodox tradition.

**“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me”**

This practice entails saying this prayer over and over again as a mantra and letting it seep into your very soul. Pray it as part of a meditation technique, either the whole prayer on an in-breath and the out-breath or break it into two. I also meditate on the name of God “Yahweh” “yah” on the in-breath and “weh” on the outbreath. Remember here that breath and spirit are the same word in Hebrew – Ruach and that Yahweh means I AM.

Love and peace,

Martin

Please note my new email address is [vicar@rmcommunity.co.uk](mailto:vicar@rmcommunity.co.uk)