

Dear friends,

The past week has been topped and tailed by visits from various relatives including two children, so I've seen more of Budleigh beach than I have done in five years. The weekend was also punctuated by a glorious wedding at St. Peter's on Saturday and a lovely family baptism at All Saints East Budleigh. It is a good job that the weather pretty much played ball which helped everything to pass off with everyone enjoying each occasion.

A surprise package got delivered on Friday. It turns out it was a bottle of fine Tawny Port, sent by our Bishop Robert Atwell, to commemorate my twenty years of ordination. A lovely surprise that put me in a good mood as of course we all like to be appreciated.

Note: There will be no email next week as I'll be travelling "oop North" to visit my daughter who now lives near York and various other friends, but I'll be here for both Sundays either side.

Sunday 20th August – 12th of Trinity – Proper 15

I will be presiding at both services (8am and 10am) at St. Peter's and Canon Mike Williams will preside at All Saints East Budleigh and St. Michael's Otterton at 9.30 and 11am respectively. Our three readings today all address the question of who is an insider and who is an outsider in relation to God.

Isaiah 56: 1, 6-8. Although the Israelites regarded themselves as a "chosen people" they needed to be reminded that their role was to be a "light to the gentiles", an attractive beacon to attract all non-Jews to the truth of God. With such true insight, Isaiah reminds people that the Lord's house is to be a house of prayer for all peoples.

Romans 11: 1-2a, 29-32. Despite the new revelation of God's will being embodied by Jesus, which Paul now embraces, he reminds people that he himself is a Jew and because of this new revelation, God has not abandoned the Jews or forgotten His covenant with his "chosen people". As Jesus himself said, he came not to abolish the law or the prophets but to fulfil them.

Matthew 15: (10-20), 21-28. In the first part of this lection, the Pharisees are described as "blind guides" for not perceiving the spiritual reason behind the purity codes that they are very zealous to uphold. The Pharisees of course saw themselves as the ultimate in spiritual insiders but were in Jesus'

eyes actually outsiders. In the second half of the lection, an outsider (the Canaanite woman) was brought very much into the inside (after some good-natured banter).

This Saturday 19th at 3pm, the friends of All Saints church have organised the cream tea concert, featuring the Budleigh Salterton male voice choir. It will take place outside the church hall or in church if raining. I believe tickets are still available. £10 adults and £5 children available from the EB community shop, EB garage, or the “card shop too” in Budleigh High Street.

Thought for Today

I often tell people that I am an accidental Anglican, because when I became convinced that I believed in God, the church I started attending just happened to be my local church because it was convenient. At that time, I simply didn't know or understand about the 1001 varieties of Christian denominations, their differences in style of beliefs or where they derived their authority. That my local church was an Anglican one – St. Paul's Sandgate on the Kent coast – I always think of being a happy accident for me. They nurtured me, gave me the chance to attend university and a choice of place to be trained. By this time I had started to understand not only the differences between denominations but that the differences between different traditions within the church of England were also massive. Guided more by instinct than anything else I chose the most traditional monastic seminary in England to be trained – Mirfield – because I reasoned that as our religion is based on the apostles, prophets, and early church fathers, the most traditional one rooted in those traditions would give me a solid foundation to my religious faith. Again, I was proved right but this was a more reasoned decision than just chance. They introduced me to Eastern Orthodoxy and the rest is history I might say. So, I never judge anyone who follows a different denomination or even a different faith. I am a Christian because I was born into a country where the dominant religion is Christianity, but I could just have easily been born into a majority Hindu or Buddhist or Muslim country. My local church I started attending may have been Methodist or Baptist or Catholic or Apostles of God. What started by chance I then adopted by conviction as I dived deeper into the worldwide church. I know now, that I couldn't be a Baptist or a free church congregant – I needed to be allied to what I consider to be the “One Holy Catholic and Apostolic church”. I needed to be part of a liturgical and Eucharistic church, I needed to be a member of a church that respects the witness of the Bible but is not ruled by the Bible alone, so notwithstanding my current concerns about our present direction of travel, I am still relatively happy that that first church I entered, turned out to be church of England. I always remember that when any “outsiders” enter our churches for any reason. Respect, Kindness

and forbearance for when they don't know or understand why we do things are paramount. We love and accept people where they are, but we don't leave them there, we teach, guide and cajole them to grow and love the traditions of the church, to bring them in until they become insiders.

The Prayer for Today is short, sharp and to the point as was written by Michael Quoist.

Lord come to me. My door is open.

Love and peace,
Martin