

Dear friends,

My first services at St. Peter's since the re-start and the 10am service was augmented by dedicating the high altar flower stand to the late lamented Janet Parrish which provided a poignant point in the service for Chris and I'm sure many others. Janet's funeral was the last one conducted in church before the very first lockdown in March earlier in the year – and so much has happened since then. You may also have noticed Lucinda filming the service. This is an experiment and who knows where that will lead!

Sunday 20th December - Advent 4

This coming Sunday the fourth candle on the Advent wreath is lit commemorating Mary, the mother of Jesus as the most obvious antecedent in the Jesus event we call the incarnation. This Sunday I will be presiding at All Saints East Budleigh at the 9.30am service and at St. Michael's Otterton at the 11am service. Rev. Karen Young will preside at the 8am and 10am at St. Peter's, Budleigh Salterton.

2 Samuel 7: 1-11, 16. The important question that this piece raises is “Does God need a house or any special building to reside?” This is of enormous significance for Christians as we believe that the spirit resides in believer's hearts wherever they may be – that we human beings in fact are the Temple of the Holy Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 3: 16-17). While God's Spirit lives in us in a very special way, He is also present in all things and believing that God can be located to one place is when you think about it diminishes and attempts to domesticate to universal and infinite God that knows no boundaries.

Romans 16: 25-27. The mystery of God, the eternal word, whose Spirit manifests the Kingdom of God whenever anyone follows the way of Love was always true but only became fully apparent in the life, works, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God didn't start loving the world 2020 years ago in Jesus Christ– it was always true

Luke 1: 26-38. The mystery – the eternal Christ – was incarnated (revealed) to a largely unsuspecting world in the body of a woman, Mary. Mary's “Yes” was absolutely pivotal to the revelation happening at all. This is why Mary is so revered in both Eastern and Western Christianity and attracts so many honorific titles. Symbolically she is the “New Eve” undoing the

disobedience of the first Eve. Theologically she is forever honoured with the title Theotokos which means the God-bearer.

This lovely and touching poem was written by Christine's Channon's niece, Jenny Heathcote. She qualified as a doctor at Newcastle University but was found to have MS just as she qualified. In spite of this she has practised medically supporting students at Manchester University for the last 30 years.

This year she lost her father-in-law and her mother in March. One niece put off her wedding until 2021 but another had a very small ceremony.

Oblongs and Circles

A prayer: for those like me who are struggling with the lack of physical contact with friends and family during the COVID pandemic

COVID puts life into boxes –
Family, squeezed into the phone,
Contact separated by oblong screens;
My niece's wedding, achingly distant
Watched,
Bride and groom in a box.
Friends' faces reduced to oblongs,
Zoomed, Skyped,
And yet, untouchable.
Homegroup,
A moving patchwork... of yet more boxes.
Am I inside looking out,
or outside, looking in?

Oh how I yearn for circles:
A group hug, with the littlest in the middle;
Family round the dining table,
...a picnic blanket,
...the Christmas tree?
Homegroup comfy on settees,
no longer squinting,
not watching myself .

Lord, help me to see the boxes
Not as resented oblongs,
But as presents,

Boxed up
For me -
Gift-wrapped in technology...
From you.
Bringing loved ones closer,
A virtual embrace
Sent to carry me through this time,
And labelled
'From a loving Father'.

On-line stats

One never really knows the value of one's on-line presence but Google have sent me the stats for my YouTube sermons and while I don't really understand what they mean (I'm from a different era) they tell me I have gained 23 subscribers, 2,398 new views, 11,375 minutes watched, and they have been shared 41 times. So, it does seem very worthwhile keeping it all going and thank you all for watching!

Musical interlude!

This beautiful soul-wrenching song by the marvellous Kate Bush really connected with my soul when my wife Alex died. Soulful, full of regret, sad, beautiful. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXzx--YefD8>

Thought for the day

In his book the universal Christ, Fr. Richard Rohr maintains that the necessary and positive change in a person that would seem to be desired by any faith, not just Christianity, can only be advanced by either Love or Suffering. This is borne out by ones own experience of course in that those who have loved or suffered greatly usually have a greater more expansive depth to their character, less likely to judge, more giving, more humble, more grateful than they were. With regard to suffering, one has to fully allow the suffering to change you by facing the suffering and not running from it. We can refuse to change, by blocking any movement in our soul but giving in to what we cannot change is full acceptance. Refusing to let suffering change us is I think one meaning meant by the phrase "quenching the Spirit" within us. Fr. Richard also reminds us that in dealing with suffering, Christianity has traditionally focussed more on "what" to believe rather than "how" to believe. Buddhism has much to teach us here and as Vatican II stated we should reject nothing that is good or true in other religions.

The Prayer for Today is by Linda Jones

God of joy

**God of joy
Remind me to rejoice
Wrapped up in my Christmas gifts
Tied down in my debts
I have forgotten
God of peace,
Remind me of your calm
In my anxiety
And in my haste
I have forgotten
God of all
Remind me
Of the true light of Christmas
Of your gift shared
In my own wants
And in my own needs
I have forgotten
Wrapped up in my little world
Remind me of your world
God of joy, remind me
To rejoice
Amen.**

Linda Jones/CAFOD

Love and peace,
Martin

Please note my new email address is vicar@rmcommunity.co.uk