

Dear friends,

Fifty people, done up to the nine's, happy and expectant, turned up to witness little Archie's baptism at St. Michael's Otterton on Sunday afternoon and boy did I need something to cheer me up in the face of the world falling apart. No matter what crisis is looming or subsiding – life goes on regardless.

Mary's meals presentations

Speaking on which, while the war in Ukraine fills every available second of media attention, the worlds poor continue to suffer regardless. I was contacted by a wonderful charity called "Mary's meals" a while ago and their concept is so simple. They simply make sure that every child in a poor region gets fed a square meal at school every day! This hits the spot in two important ways – making sure children are fed and that they are in school getting an education. So impressed was I that representatives from Mary's meals are coming to talk to St. Peter's church next Sunday (Katie Harding) and to All Saints and St. Michael's church (Rob Holmes) on Mothering Sunday.

Sunday 20th March – Lent 3

I will be presiding at both services at St. Peter's and Revd. Colin Randall will be presiding at both All saints and St. Michael's respectively.

Isaiah 55: 1-9. A monumental piece of writing that is contrasting idolatry which involves payment and gives nothing in return (In Isaiah's estimation) and religion that depends on the gracious free gift of God. Yet as the paradox of buying food when one has no money implies, the gifts of God are not free, but the cost is borne by Him.

1 Corinthians 10: 1-13. The Corinthians are presented with an extended warning and a promise taken from the example of old Israel. They are presumably falling victim to practicing idolatry just as the Israelites did and they are reminded that just like the Israelites their own status does not guarantee them immunity. On the other hand they are reminded that God is faithful who has not abandoned the chosen ones and will provide a way back to God.

Luke 13: 1-9. Don't go judging other people as more deserving of judgement and death than yourself, always pointing at others. You are responsible for your own sinfulness and subsequent repentance. It is only the mercy and forbearance of God that has spared them thus far. Corporately, as well, the fig tree is a classic symbol of the nation of Israel and Jesus asks why it shouldn't be cut down, but again patience and forbearance and tending of the tree are offered to encourage fruit to grow.

The cruelties and dislodgement caused by war is terrible as experienced in a general sense but comes much closer when you are aware of someone who is directly involved so, please pray for Cosmo (The son of good friends of ours) and his wife Anna who had been living in Odessa in Ukraine and have had to flee to Moldova and the last we heard were trying to get to Bucharest in Romania before making their way to Britain.

Thought for the day

The literary festival talks I attended in St. Peter's were thought provoking and challenging. 417 people attended David Olusoga's talk on being "Black and British" and having your certainties and assumptions and ways of thinking challenged is certainly uncomfortable but is of course very needful. Talking about slavery and Britain's part in it challenges us to re-orientate our minds and hearts in ways that Jesus would have been very familiar with trying to accomplish.

In both cases it really challenges us to see the truth rather than the deliberate omissions and amnesia of our collective culture.

Christianity is a call, if you will, to see the truth about human nature and not delude ourselves that we are all on this inevitable one-way highway to peace, prosperity and justice.

Ever since Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and became people who could choose right from wrong, we are in a continual spiritual war between light and darkness that cuts through every human heart. Choosing to do the right thing rather than its' opposite is a daily decision. Religious people bolster their sense of right and wrong by aligning ourselves as far as possible with God's revealed will, revealed uniquely through Jesus Christ. That is never comfortable and we tend to resist some of Jesus' more strident demands because we find them too uncomfortable. Lent is the time for us to sift through our own minds and consciences whose will are we going to follow – a totally selfish one or a more God-centred one.

The Prayer for Today is one I have used before and it never palls. It is known as the serenity prayer, an aspirational prayer for Lent by the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr.

**God, give me grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things
which should be changed,
and the Wisdom to distinguish
the one from the other.**

**Living one day at a time,
Enjoying one moment at a time,
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,
Taking, as Jesus did,
This sinful world as it is,
Not as I would have it,
Trusting that You will make all things right,
If I surrender to Your will,
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,
And supremely happy with You forever in the next.**

Amen.

Love and peace,
Martin