

Dear friends,

The intense heat seems to have broken this morning where grey skies and drizzle herald a more traditional British summer.

A huge change for my daughter Claire and her partner, who, having been served an eviction notice from their house in South-east London and priced out of the rental market there are trying to affect a move North to Yorkshire, where they will have more chance to eventually get on the housing ladder. It is a fact of life that major challenges and negative events can be a spur to embracing positive life changes. As I say often, we have little or no control over what happens to us, we can only control how we react and deal with the cards we have been dealt. Claire has lived in London since 2014 so it will be quite a change!

Numbers continue to be large at St. Peter's and this Sunday was marked by us singing "Happy birthday" to Di Bagshawe who was 90 on Saturday. Di is a much-loved member of the congregation and her books of prayers can still be purchased at the back of church.



Divine Grace

On a distressing note though, I was sad to hear that no priest materialised at All Saints and St. Michael's. This is the first time this has happened since I have been here. Some things are inevitably out of our control (like sickness) but I am making enquiries and will endeavour to make sure that this never happens again. Many Thanks to Lynda Bunting at All Saints and John Archibald at St. Michael's for stepping up to the plate. As I said, it is not what happens to you, but how you react!

Sunday 21st August – Trinity 10 (Proper 16)

I am presiding at All Saints and St. Michael's this Sunday and canon Mike Williams is presiding at both services at St. Peter's.

Isaiah 58: 9-14. A familiar prophetic call that links God responding to the Jewish people with them having a care for social justice and not making false accusations against people. "Your ancient ruins" implies that the Jews have just returned from exile and are trying to re-build their cities and their religious practices but God reminds them that this must go hand in hand with fairness and justice.

Hebrews 12: 18-29. The God of Moses in Sinai is depicted as a dangerous and frightening presence. Even Moses was full of fear. Sinai is contrasted here with Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, where there is free access to God and a great community with Him. God is still judge but Jesus not Moses is the mediator of this new covenant. The blood of Abel (Genesis 4) killed by Cain called on God to avenge his murder but the blood of Jesus brings forgiveness of sins so "speaks a better word". God must still be worshipped appropriately but with awe inspired by this new access to God rather than with the fear of Moses.

Luke 13: 10-17. The meaning of Jesus' healing miracles changes according to the context and how it is told. This healing has the conflict with the religious authorities as it's main thrust. The second interest is Jesus' authority over evil. The position of the priest designating healing on the sabbath as "work" is shown up as ridiculous in the eyes of the crowd and it reveals a divided Israel divided over Biblical interpretation. It also shows us that in Jesus, the reign of God breaks into human life bringing healing and wholeness and therefore if you are against Jesus, the text is implying that you are against God!

Thought for the day

I've always found it easier to deal with people from other religions than with representatives of other Christian denominations. It is because you know they have a different belief system from the outset so you work with it and can hopefully learn from the encounter as well. Other Christian denominations, being from the same family are much trickier because the differences are much closer to home. It is the same dynamic as dealing with actual families. Arguments within families are much worse and long lasting and the hurts deeper than arguments between complete strangers.

You feel much more able to tell a family member – “No, this is how it should be done” or “No, we must believe this” whereas with a Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist, the encounter can be much freer because you never expected to be on the same page anyway. You can learn very valuable lessons on the oneness of God from Muslims for example, about the oneness of all creation from Hindus, wonderful lessons on living in the present and detaching ourselves from our thoughts from Buddhists, the Sanctity of all life from Jains, the cohesion gained from shared family rituals from the Jews. From us they may gain an insight into the redemptive power of suffering perhaps. All valuable stuff, but from different Christians we are just more likely to be annoyed that they don't do things like us!

The fragmentation of the Christian church from being a cohesive whole into the current state of a thousand competing factions is not a good selling point to anyone so finding the point on which we all agree is an important task. Sometimes I think that the only thing that unifies us ALL is the concept of LOVE. Even the Eucharist and Baptism divides us. Learning to look at another human being not as a Hindu, Muslim Buddhist or whatever and closer to home not as a Baptist, Methodist, Quaker, evangelical, charismatic, catholic, Orthodox, Anglican or whatever but as a human being first, an object of God's loving care towards whom we should extend that same courtesy is a task that is needed more amongst Christians than between people of different faiths.

The Prayer for Today was written by King William III (1650 – 1702)

O God,

Bless and preserve your church dispersed over the face of the earth.

Restore it to unity and concord, in the acknowledgement of the truth and the practice of righteousness.

Remove out of it all errors and dissensions, that they who proclaim the same faith

May no longer persecute and destroy each other

But be kind and tender-hearted one towards another

As it becomes brethren and those that are heirs of the same common salvation^{17th}

Love and peace,
Martin