

Dear friends,

I had a lovely conversation with some newcomers to St. Peter's church after our Sunday service. One of them tried us out back in July because we were one of the few churches actually open and liked us so much they stayed. The thing that finally convinced her to come in and give us a try was the words "All Welcome" on a poster outside our church announcing our re-opening. Never deride the God of small things!

Two Annual General meetings down and one to go! This year has thrown up particular problems and uncertainties, especially over remembrance Sunday, Harvest and Christmas but in conversation with the headmaster of the Raleigh Federation schools, Peter Halford we are salvaging at least one local tradition – **Bun throwing** from All Saints church Tower as near to All Saints day as possible. So, on the 4th November we will throw 55 individually wrapped iced buns down from the tower into the clutches of excited schoolchildren! This year we will have to split them into two slots – at 1pm and 2pm - because the two "Bubbles" aren't supposed to mix and I will meet the children outside instead of having a service first inside, but we deemed it important that some normality must be retained for the children, if you can call throwing iced Buns off a church Tower "normal".

Sunday 25th October – Last after Trinity – Proper 25

This Sunday rather uniquely I will be presiding at all three churches – at St. Peter's at 8am, All Saints at 9.30am and St. Michael's at 11am and Rev. Chris Cant will be presiding at St. Peter's at the 10am. service.

Leviticus 19: 1-2, 15-18. A Dictionary defines Holiness as "perfect in goodness and righteousness" and the attempt to define what this means when it is lived out is spelled out in different parts of the Bible including Leviticus. Verse 18 carries the most important meaning identified by Jesus because he quotes from it in our gospel reading today – Love your neighbour as yourself as the natural corollary to "Love your God".

1 Thessalonians 2: 1-8. The watchwords that describe what Paul is saying here are courage and integrity. We need the courage of our convictions to “preach the gospel”, a very grand way of saying that we owe it to God to not be cowed or embarrassed when asked what we believe – to be strong . We can “preach the gospel” through our actions as well of course, which requires integrity of thought, word and deed.

Matthew 22: 34-46. The centre of the law – the greatest commandment – is to love God with all your heart, soul and mind(or strength) . A Jewish teacher would expand this by saying that to Love God was to obey the law from the heart (i.e. The will), to risk ones life (or soul) in defence of the faith and to put ones strength (property and resources) at the disposal of Israel. This way love is not an emotion but a programme of action. Thus, love can be *commanded*. And the second commandment is like it. Love is commanded towards one’s neighbour.

A few people told me how much they enjoyed the prayer prayed by St. Francis last Saturday. None more so than a dear friend of mine who found herself actually in Assisi in front of the very same little church (currently locked because of Covid restrictions) who had read my email at about the same time. It was one of those God-incidences that leave such a profound impression on us. Karen also writes poetry and she sent me this one she had just written in Siena. It resonates with me as I am currently reading “The Universal Christ” by Richard Rohr which sees Christ as the universal divine principle in all things, which in turn is the basis of the sacramental principle underpinning all Christian theology – that God can be apprehended through the material world in things such as bread, wine, water, oil etc..

Heads and Tails

I’m not living according to Pascal’s wager,*
but by an altogether different calculus.
I choose to live as if The Universe,
and every particle in it, cares,
knows itself alive,
in a now that may also be
the start and end of time
and every moment in between,
experienced, vital, connected,
seeking that connection,
making The Whole

Now and Forever, which are the same.
I choose to live this way
because I feel this
is what it means to be,
or to have been,
alive at all.

Siena, October 2020

*Pascal argues that a rational person should live as though God exists and seek to believe in God. If God does not actually exist, such a person will have only a finite loss (some pleasures, luxury, etc.), whereas if God does exist, he stands to receive infinite gains (as represented by eternity in Heaven) and avoid infinite losses (eternity in Hell)

Thought for the day

“God-incidences” where ordinary happenings take on extraordinary significance in our hearts and minds happen to everyone but to perceive the hand of God in them takes a leap of faith away from the sterile dead hand of scientific materialism into a world of infinite possibilities, meaning, awe and mystery. As St. Francis’ prayer was for Karen, her poem was for me. The occurrence that spoke most loudly to me in my life was when I spent my first night in Cernavoda, Romania, alone and frightened in a strange culture and sent to work with children dying of AIDS. by my theological college, Mirfield. The house I was detailed to stay (as were all foreign helpers from Britain) was the “Casa Inglese”. The first thing I saw as I entered the house was a brass plaque thanking the people who had bought the house for the hospice. It was bought by the congregation of St James the Great, East Malling in Kent. East Malling is a tiny village unremarkable to everyone except me because it was the church I was baptised in and had never visited since. Mirfield had insisted that I provide a certificate of Baptism before I commenced training and my mum (God rest her soul) had identified the wrong village church (St. Mary’s West Malling) because we were effectively homeless when I was born so “St. James the Great “ had already loomed large in my life because it had taken some time and detective work to find out where I had in fact been baptised. That night I prayed knowing that I was in the right place and I was being directed. Everything can be rationally explained of course as mere coincidence which misses the point. It is what this occurrence *meant to me* at the time which is the important thing and it is as vivid now as it was then.

The prayer for Today is by Gail A. Ricciuti

**For all things bright and beautiful
For all things dark and mysterious and lovely,
For all things green and growing and strong,
For all things weak and struggling to push life up through rocky earth,
For all human faces, hearts, minds and hands which surround us,
And for all non-human minds and hearts, paws and claws, fins and wings,
For this life and the life of this world
For all that you have laid before us O God
We lay our thankful hearts before you. In Christ's name.
Amen.**

Love and peace,
Martin

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