

Dear friends,

I baptised twins, Daisy and Alice, at All Saints church on Sunday morning. Both children were delightful and stood there and let me pour water over their heads. But it was Alice's continual beaming smile that lit up the occasion for me and put a spring in my step for the rest of the day.

I also really enjoyed listening to opera singer Sir Willard White the night before at the last concert of the Budleigh Music festival. What a marvellous venue St. Peter's is, and I take my hat off to Tony Gray and the entire team of helpers that made sure everything went smoothly.

Sunday 25th July – James the Apostle.

We took advantage of the option to keep this saint's day on this Sunday rather than transfer it. This gave me the ability to choose some particularly rousing hymns on our first "singing Sunday" for a year. I am presiding at both services at St. Peter's and Reverend Margaret Scrivener is presiding at All Saints and St. Michael's.

Jeremiah 45: 1-5. Jeremiah prophesies disaster for the Jewish people because of their inability to represent God's love and justice in the land. That raises an interesting point of whether God actively "breaks down and plucks up" or simply withdraws his protection of the Jewish people from the attentions of powerful and malign nations. The Hebrew scriptures strongly suggest the former. The Christian revelation says that while God is involved at every level of pain, suffering and disaster, free will dictates that there are lines and constraints that cannot be transgressed in this life, even for God.

Acts 11:27 – 12:2. This reading mentions the murder of James almost in passing by King Herod who must have been feeling very threatened by this new movement that followed another "King of the Jews". A famine is also predicted and as I have said before, while we have no control over what happens to us we have choices over how we react. The churches subsequently and effectively rallied around to support the impoverished churches in the Holy Land where the church was born.

Mark 6: 14-28. We'll never know whether this was the sole action of a proud and pushy mother or whether James and John put her up to it. Jesus' reaction to the brothers suggest the latter and anyway it provides a wonderful

introduction for Jesus to express the nature of true Christian ministry which is one of service and not lording it over the church. “Servant leadership” as it is known in the church is however a difficult balancing act to achieve convincingly.

Vicarage Garden Party – This Saturday 24th at 3.30pm

Well, the compostable plates, cups and cutlery are here, the Marquee goes up on Thursday, tables in the Marquee on Friday afternoon. Just a few pointers:

Parking. Please be sensible. Parking will be available on our driveway (the new vicarage), Chris and Jane’s next door (Acer house) and at Gerry and Jenny’s (The Old Vicarage) but not the other driveway between Acer house and the Old Vicarage – and of course anywhere legal in the village.

What if it is raining? Well, still come! We have the Marquee, where the food and drink will be, and we can all go indoors of course if we have a few spots of rain – I’ll Hoover the carpets especially!

Our Garden is a carefully crafted Wilderness and wildlife garden. Pandas are thought to inhabit our Bamboo Forest and sightings will be rewarded (photographic evidence required). The butterfly sanctuary is not recommended to enter but if any of the fruit on the bushes and trees are ripe you can pick those, but I think we’ll have plenty of food without having to resort to that.

And finally, this is just to relax and chat and listen to Mike playing a bit of Jazz. No pressure, and a chance for the three churches to mix together and get to know each other.

Thought for the Day.

We enter a brave new world of unlocking the covid restrictions this week. I attended a Diocesan Q&A session last Thursday on what this entails for us in Exeter Diocese and of course it mirrors Government instructions that nothing is mandatory anymore and everything is governed by personal responsibility. Of course, in practical terms I know there are a mix of attitudes that range from the gung-ho to the extremely nervous and to try and balance those two extremes and everyone else in the cautious centre, I think it would be wise to follow the following guidelines.

Social distancing: There is no legal need to do so any longer but as I am not aware that it has impacted our capacity at any of our churches (we haven’t turned anyone away) I think we can safely continue to do so for a short while at least.

Hygiene: Again, no legal need to do so but the hand sanitisers will remain for the present and people will be encouraged to use them at least for the present.

Facemasks: No legal need to wear one now in church so many will be thrilled but some a little nervous so in my view, if in doubt, consider wearing one just out of consideration to those who are very cautious. No-one should make anyone else feel uncomfortable because of the choice they make!

Track and Trace: There is no legal compulsion to get people to give their contact details any longer so they can quite reasonably refuse if asked to do so. Even so we are “strongly encouraged” to keep track of who is attending worship. So that’s clear then!?

Singing: no restrictions at all so from Sunday 25th July we will be singing the hymns.

Communion will continue to be in one kind only as it is now until we receive further guidance. In regard to the very nervous I will continue to sanitise my hands before communion and wear a facemask when distributing the host at least for now.

The peace: To safeguard people who are very nervous, be thoughtful and polite and I think the current practice (bowing and waving) is perfectly fine to be getting on with and in fact means we can share the peace with lots of people at the same time. Just be mindful that however keen you may be to share a handshake or hug, the recipient may not be as keen to receive it!

Above all, Let us all be loving and considerate to each other as we negotiate this transition.

The Prayer for Today is from the church in Wales

**Infinite Lord and eternal God,
Rouse your church in this land,
Restore your people’s sense of mission.
And revive your work in holiness and strength.
By your spirit, teach us to give our energy,
Our time, our money, our service and our prayer,
That your kingdom may be advanced
Here and in all the world.
I the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Love and peace,

Martin

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