

Dear friends,

Thankfully, my covid self-isolation period has coincided with a bout of exceptionally good weather so long walks have been the order of the day. Having to dig deep into your own resources exposes our own limitations and reveals an inner emptiness that we try and fill, in the normal way of things, with constant stimulation, experiences and “entertainment” in the broadest definition of that word. But by embracing that void, and knowing that in the silence and emptiness, in the hiddenness, there is the still centre of the universe – a mystery that the ancient Hebrews called the “I Am” (Yahweh in Hebrew) is a reality waiting to be embraced.

Paradoxically, it is in the still centre that one realises that in the hiddenness (and apparent emptiness) is actually the fulness of God – filling every second, and every part of matter. It is here that one realises that all the ebbs and flows of history, all our personal traumas, whether people believe or don't believe, God simply IS. The name of God “I Am” expresses the fact that God is the eternal principle of life itself and finds himself expressed through all created things, from the scale and majesty of the universe to a leaf on a tree, to me, writing these words, to the unique revelation of the Son of God who lived his life in permanent relationship to this reality and who called him Father. Jesus showed us how to live a life in constant relationship to the “I AM” through the same Spirit that animated Jesus. We already possess eternal life when we discover that we are forever joined to the life-giving principle that is God the Father. Jesus revealed the essential nature and character of the Father who is LOVE.

Sunday 26th June – St. Peter

I will be presiding at St. Peter's at the 8am and 10am services and Margaret Scrivener will be presiding at All Saints at 9.30. Please note there is NO service at St. Michael's this week as so many people are involved with the open gardens event.

Ezekiel 3: 22-27. Ezekiel has a religious experience of the truth and life-giving presence of God. And the Spirit of God tells him that He will use him and speak through him to relay his words to the Israelite people, though many will refuse to listen because they are so rebellious.

Acts 12: 1-11. We needn't see a "miracle" here, it could be a dramatic rescue but either way the hand of God was in it. An angel is also a messenger of God (The word means the same thing in Hebrew). The take home message here is that God has big plans for Peter that means his escape and protection from Herod was necessary.

Matthew 16: 13-19. The pivotal declaration "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" is given to Peter by the Father speaking through the Spirit of God. Is "the rock" the statement of faith or Peter himself (or the church?)? Do the infallibility of Peter's pronouncements (binding and loosing) die with him or extend to his successors of the see of St. Peter? Here is the seedbed of all the arguments and schisms that have plagued the church for 2000 years.

Open Gardens in Otterton!

This **Sunday 26th June from 11am – 5pm** there are 9 gardens to enjoy for just £5 (under 16s free). Refreshments in the village hall. Proceeds are split between the church and a local charity. Louise will be there directly after the BBQ at St. Peter's!

Thought for the day.

I ended up killing a shrew this morning. Not on purpose you understand but our cat had brought him in and let him go and he was running around our bedroom. I fetched a Tupperware container and eventually trapped him but it was a feisty little thing and really fought to get out of the container. In trying to slide a mat under the pot so I could transfer him outside I inadvertently must have crushed him under the side of the pot. I felt profoundly sad that something that had fought so hard for his life, I had unceremoniously ended.

Dead mice, shrews, and the occasional bird and rabbit are ten a penny when you have a cat but this instance just spoke to me. Was God trying to say something to me about the innate sanctity of all life in the great scheme of things? Certainly, the strength of the little thing's fight for life made an impression on me. We all have a strong will to survive, which makes suicide such a shocking thing to most people, and people having to endure chronic pain and suffering have led to lively debates on the subject of euthanasia for example, but there is no doubting that life in all its forms is good, as the Bible says and in the case of humanity – very good.

The Prayer for Today is by former Archbishop of Canterbury Robert Runcie.

**Eternal Father, source of light and life,
Whose love extends to all people, all creatures, all things:
Grant us that reverence for life which becomes those who believe in
you;
Lest we despise it, degrade it, or come callously to destroy it.
Rather, let us save it, serve it, and sanctify it,
After the example of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord**

Love and peace,
Martin