

Dear friends,

A couple of weeks ago St. Peter's school in Budleigh asked us for the names of people who might appreciate a personal card from one of their children so I immediately asked Jenny who chairs our pastoral care team to draw up a list of recipients numbering about 50 I believe. We have received these cards and Jenny and her small team are distributing them and the reaction has been heart-warming to say the least – I know because a couple of them phoned me to say so. That such a little thing can bring just joy is wonderful. Don't despise the day of small things!



The daffs have decided that Spring has sprung! (Photo by Maria in EB)

**Having kept the RMC going** through thick and thin and having worked through Christmas, Epiphany and the beginning of Lent since my last break in September I have decided to take a couple of weeks off to re-charge my batteries from next week. I'll be back in the saddle from **week beginning Monday 15<sup>th</sup> March**. There will be a pause in "soul food" for that time but of course worship will continue as normal in all three churches with the magnificent help of clergy whose help is valued and appreciated. Our administrator Fran Mills is working normally also should you need to contact the church.

## **Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> February – Lent 2**

This Sunday I will be presiding at the 9.30am service at All Saints and the 11am service at St. Michael's and the Venerable Trevor Jones will preside at the 8am and 10am services at St. Peter's.

**Genesis 17: 1-7, 15-16.** To inaugurate a new status and new responsibility, the Bible assigns new names. Abram and Sarai, meaning "High Father" and "mockery" are now to be known as Abraham and Sarah meaning "Father of many" and "princess". It is a story of God's grace and faithfulness that his promises will be fulfilled that people of such a great age are to become parents against every natural expectation and biology.

**Romans 4: 13-25.** Abraham was righteous before God through Faith because he lived centuries before the law was introduced to Moses. Therefore, Paul returns to the very genesis of the people of Israel to argue that being declared righteousness before God through Faith is the original godly position and is true for all "his descendants", that is us! The law was introduced to teach/guide an errant people, but it is *faith* in God that makes us right with God.

**Mark 8: 31-38.** Peter is told he is satanic for daring to suggest that Jesus not follow what has been discerned by Jesus to be the will of the Father. Jesus then goes on to say that anyone who tries to follow in his footsteps must do likewise. What this looks like in practice has been debated in the church for 2000 years. Courage to stand up and be counted? A devotion to speaking the truth despite where it might lead. A willingness to stand up to powerful interests if that is what is called for. A keenness to see people through impartial eyes. All said, it means discerning God's will and having the strength to follow where that leads.

## Thought for the day

Nothing causes as much controversy as the choice of music in public worship. Worship is a very particular animal that needs to unite lots of different people with different tastes. And of course, worship is not entertainment so while I like many things, they will not necessarily be suitable for worship. I mean I like Led Zeppelin's "stairway to heaven" but as an offertory hymn?

To be sure people have tried and I have even heard of people staging a "Rock Mass" and that is OK if people know in advance what they are getting themselves into but then the lines between mere entertainment and worship become seriously blurred. The question has to be whether the music enhances or diminishes the experience of the worshipper – as in, does it lead a person deeper into God? This is a very subjective judgement to make and making that choice isn't taken lightly. The delivery of that music or Hymn is another thing entirely. There is no congregational singing allowed in services at the moment but choirs and soloists/small groups are allowed and All Saints is readying itself for a couple of hymns to be sung by either two or three people from this Sunday. And of course our magnificent choral tradition at St. Peter's is in abeyance at the moment because of problems of practicing in a Covid secure way but we hope that situation will be rectified as soon as possible. For the sake of reference and contrast it won't surprise you to know that I always compare things to Eastern Christianity and their history is very different. They generally have no congregational singing at all and never have. Any music is sung or chanted by the priest or a choir. No instruments are ever used on the premise that the finest musical instrument given to us is the human voice and only the best is good enough to worship God! Contrast this approach with a lot of western "modern" worship which without music the service is more or less empty, it is so central – the difference couldn't be more stark. A lot of modern worship has been dismissed unkindly as a "concert followed by a lecture" which is harsh, but as someone firmly in the tradition that sees worship as essentially eucharistic – the heart of worship lies entirely outside what hymns we use. Music should enhance worship as I have said and I enjoy music as you know but that said the weekly BCP service said entirely without music or any other distractions can also be a most meaningful experience simply because it is so spare and yet so rich.

**The prayer for Today** is I think rather beautiful. It is by Jim Cotter and expresses well the soul of worship.

**Give me a candle of the spirit O God,  
As I go down to the depths of my being.  
Show me the hidden things, the creatures of my dreams,  
The storehouse of forgotten memories and hurts.  
Take me down to the spring of my life,  
And tell me my nature and my name.  
Give me freedom to grow, so that I may become that self,  
The seed of which you planted in me at my making.  
Out of the deep I cry to you O God.**

Love and peace,  
Martin

Please note my new email address is [vicar@rmcommunity.co.uk](mailto:vicar@rmcommunity.co.uk)