

Dear friends,

Is it September already? It has been a difficult year for everybody, including my Dad. While we all worry about him of course, he is celebrating his 89th birthday Today and is very well in himself and in good humour. Happy Birthday Dad!

Sunday 6th September – Trinity 13 – Proper 18

I am presiding at the 10am service at St. Peter's on Sunday while Rev. Karen Young presides at All Saints East Budleigh at 9.30am and John Archibald presides at a service of the word at St. Michael's at 11am.

Ezekiel 33:7-11. A sentinel is the gender-neutral way the NRSV translates the more familiar "Watchman" who would warn a city of an enemy coming to kill them. If he failed in this task the watchman would be held responsible. This is Ezekiel's explanation of what a prophet is for, but is it right to hold a prophet responsible for the evil actions of others? A form of answer in the text is that God gains no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Verse 11) for he is a God of compassion as well as justice and He wants as many people as possible to turn and live and sharing in that mission is a massive responsibility.

Romans 13: 8-14. For all Paul stresses that you cannot be saved by following the law, he still wants it fulfilled, and it is fulfilled by loving our neighbour as yourself (verse 9). He also stresses that Christians should "put on Jesus Christ" and live for God (having started a new life) rather than living a life enslaved to sin. He does so in the light of the common belief in the early church that the end times (The day of the Lord) was near (verse 11) and this is given as a motivating factor.

Matthew 18: 15-20. This is a formula for limiting the damage to unity in the church, moving from personal confrontation to one where you have two or three witnesses (following Jewish tradition) and finally if no positive outcome is forthcoming, letting the local church community as a whole make a decision. The most surprising thing is the derogatory way the phrase "gentiles and tax collectors" is used. Elsewhere in the gospel, they are characterised as responsive to the word of God. The familiar "where two or

three are gathered together in my name” may be a Christianized version of the Jewish saying “If two sit together to discuss the law, the shekinah rests between them”. The shekinah is the glory of the divine presence.

I received a beautiful poem from a dear friend in Romania, an American lady called Nancy Rice married to a Romanian man called Eugeniu. (Their story is remarkable!). It brought back many fond memories of them both in their lovely house in Peris, north of Bucharest, which Eugeniu, being an architect, designed himself. Nancy wrote this poem “83 symbols of I am” after a seminar at the C.G. Jung institute in Kusnacht, Switzerland. I am (Exodus 3:14) points to God as the ground of all being or the life principle itself. A long poem, I include here the beginning and end verses.

Symbols of I Am

A tree leaning in the wind
Roots deeply planted in the nurturing
soil of earth
Roots invading the dark terrain
of the underworld
sending out shoots of delicate
fiber to soak up that without which
leaves would fail to unfold

A tree leaning in the wind
By it stands a wistful soul
Whose branches tremble
Whose trunk stands tall in the sun
Whose roots stride like racer’s legs
Whose leaves cycle with the seasons
of the soul.

I am,
By the grace of I AM.

Musical interlude!

In a conversation on what music he would like at his funeral (raised by Dad, not me!) this song by the Seekers came up. Judith Durham has a crystal clear beautiful voice and I know Dad always liked them and “I’ll never find another you” is a beautiful song and he’d like it dedicated to mum who died earlier this

year after 65 years of marriage. Enjoy! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZf41UudAbI>



Thought for the day

We have started re-watching the vicar of Dibley on Netflix from the beginning. It stands the test of time wonderfully. Apparently, it was voted the third best comedy series of all time and I'm not surprised. There are so many piquant scenes depicting small village life and the eccentricities of the church of England that it is very hard not to laugh because it is all so familiar. "Rev" was a very different kind of comedy, starring Tom Holland in an inner-city parish. That was also funny but much darker but the truths it represented were also uncanny. Being neither Irish nor Roman Catholic I can't vouch for how true to life Father Ted was, but I have heard it said that this programme did more to rehabilitate the church in Ireland after the sex abuse scandals there than almost anything else. Being able to laugh along with something is a great way to normalise the church in times where we can feel culturally distant. But however distant we may sometimes feel from the currents coursing through our society, one thing never changes and that is the spiritual needs of a human being who consciously or sub-consciously yearns for connection with something greater than themselves. A church in every parish has always been the way the CofE has tried to accommodate that truth – to make spiritual exploration and the gospel as available as possible. In these financially straightened post-Covid times, that central idea is coming under enormous pressure, but it is good to be reminded why we are organised the

way we are. The English parish church is ubiquitous and it is hard to imagine England without this presence in both city, urban, and country settings alike and the message we carry is eternally relevant. Be that as it may, please God let us retain our sense of humour about ourselves.

The Prayer for Today is from the Lutheran Liturgy

**We thank you, Lord Jesus Christ, King of glory
That you have called us to be your people.
Help us to know the greatness of our calling, so that we,
Having one Spirit of faith and love,
May live in the world as a new and holy generation.
May your eternal and righteous will be always before our eyes,
So that in soberness and vigilance we may await your time,
And witness to your promises, until your kingdom comes.**

Love and peace,
Martin

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