

Dear friends,

Thank you for all the cards, presents, and for the lovely comments and well wishes I've received since reaching the age of 60. At the party on Saturday, it came as such a lovely surprise when the hubbub subsided and Jane, accompanied by Mike on our piano, sang a lovely self-penned ditty about me – I was and am very touched – before singing Happy Birthday.

I am aware that there are more important things happening in the world right now of course, but in the midst of all the ghastly results of man's folly unfolding in the East, life goes on.

Lent begins today of course with a RMC Eucharist with optional "Ashing" this morning at 9.30am, and tonight in the Peter Hall at 7pm we engage with the Diocesan Lent course called "Surprised by generosity". The character of the Lenten season is self-examination and repentance, preparing ourselves for the observance of Jesus' passion and resurrection, so in that Spirit I wish you all a Holy Lent.

Sunday 6th March – The first Sunday of Lent

I will be presiding at both services at St. Peter's, Rev. Chris Cant will be presiding at All Saints at 9.30am and John Archibald will be presiding at the service of Morning prayer at 11am.

Deuteronomy 26: 1-11. Together with a theology of creation we believe in a theology of redemption. God's character is revealed as a liberator from oppression and thus a creator of freedom as evidenced from his saving acts in Hebrew history. The natural human response to that is gratitude, which takes the form of the gifts of first fruits to the tabernacle.

Romans 10: 8-13. The twin affirmations that "Jesus is Lord" and "God raised him from the dead" are fundamentals of the Christian faith. The wider context of this passage is the relationship between Israel and the fledgling church and the Christian belief in God's Grace being extended to all people. In this passage it is stated that there is "no distinction" (verse 12) between the two. The climax to Paul's central thesis is found in Romans 11:12 "For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all". Sometimes though we find the wideness of God's mercy hard to accept, just as Jonah finds it hard to accept that the people of Nineveh are also saved

Luke 4: 1-13. Jesus' obedience to God despite being tempted undoes the disobedience of Adam in the garden of Eden and his keeping faith with God for "40 days" undoes the disobedience of Israel in the wilderness for "40 years". Jesus is sent into the wilderness by God himself, but it is the devil that seeks to tempt Jesus to reinterpret and subvert his role for personal gain. Three times Jesus chooses to serve God not himself. Jesus is God's faithful and obedient Son.

This poem by John Donne expresses just how we are all connected with every thing.

No man is an island,
Entire of itself.
Each is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thine own
Or of thine friend's were.
Each man's death diminishes me,
For I am involved in mankind.
Therefore, send not to know
For whom the bell tolls,
It tolls for thee.

Thought for the day

"That this should happen in 2022!" is a cry directed to everything from knife crime in our cities, domestic abuse, third world poverty, the genocide against the Uighur people in China to the invasion of the Ukraine by Russia, as if these things should/could not happen nowadays because we are so much wiser and civilized and peace loving than our forebears. Well not so – obviously. The human condition has not changed at all, so whether it be Israelites versus the philistines 2,500 years ago or the Yemen, Afghanistan or Russia today the same flaws and temptations within the human condition are always there. Pride, jealousy, egocentricity, greed, a lust for power and control are all there lurking just beneath the surface of every one of us. I am reminded of the words of the great Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn who said

“The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either — but right through every human heart.”

Which is why the message of Lent of self-examination and repentance is timeless. As Christians, we acknowledge our sinful state and simply recognising the problem is part way to at least trying to mitigate the effects of that truth. We should certainly pray for the situation, the Ukrainian and Russian people, for a change of mind and outlook of Vladimir Putin, but we shouldn't be surprised when these things do happen. I was also taken by Bishop Stephen Cottrell's words on "Thought for Today" where he said that Jesus did not say "Blessed are the peace *lovers*" he said "Blessed are the peace *makers*" so special prayers should be made for people close to Putin to exercise their conscience and influence their President and even Putin himself to draw back from the ghastly situation that he has initiated and work to make peace which requires that most Christian of virtues, humility. The obstacle to that happening of course is the sin of pride.

A Prayer for Ukraine

**God of peace and justice,
we pray for the people of Ukraine today.
We pray for peace and the laying down of weapons. We pray for all
those who fear for tomorrow,
that your Spirit of comfort would draw near to them. We pray for those
with power over war or peace,
for wisdom, discernment and compassion
to guide their decisions.
Above all, we pray for all your precious children, at-risk and in fear, that
you would hold and protect them.
We pray in the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace.
Amen.**

Archbishop Justin Welby

Archbishop Stephen Cottrell

Love and peace,
Martin