

Dear friends,

After a week presiding at three funerals, the first wedding of the year on Saturday was a real tonic! “Ash” and Josephine are a lovely couple and even while we still can’t sing (hopefully that’ll be rectified very soon) the attendance restrictions have been lifted and the sun shone for them on the day and a real happy occasion ensued.

Incidentally, I was asked on Thursday after morning prayer at Otterton how I cope with doing funerals all the time. Well, the truth is, like undertakers themselves, you have to maintain a certain professional distance – sometimes harder than others when the deceased is well known to you as Nigel was of course on Wednesday – because your role on the day is to frame the occasion to allow others to grieve properly. No one is served well when the person charged with holding things together loses his grip on proceedings. You simply learn to do this through experience.

The first Solos’ lunch was held for goodness knows how long in the Peter Hall on Sunday. Of course, Louise and I are hardly solos but that didn’t stop us enjoying a lovely roast chicken dinner followed by meringue, fruit and cream. Thank you to the whole team who made sure this valuable service has re-commenced flawlessly.

Here is the reflection that I delivered in St. Peter’s church on Sunday. If you’d like to watch it just click on this link. <https://youtu.be/OI9FG6x9RAI>
Alternatively, if you’d prefer to read it just click here which will link you to my Blog. <https://revmartinjacques.blogspot.com/2021/06/the-example-of-st-peter.html>

Sunday 4th July – 5th after Trinity – proper 9

I am away in Derbyshire for a family wedding this weekend, but we are ably served by the Venerable Dr. Trevor Jones at St. Peter’s, John Archibald at St. Michael’s and Fr. Peter Nickols Rawle at All Saints.

Ezekiel 2: 1-5. The extraordinary vision outlined in chapter one leads Ezekiel to prostrate himself. In the NRSV version of the Bible we use he is addressed as “mortal” but the literal Hebrew says “son of man” (Jesus’ favourite way of referring to himself). But God sets him on his feet and enables him by God’s spirit to prophesy to the rebellious people of Israel.

Why another prophet? A reminder that no matter how wayward people may be, God never gives up on us.

2 Corinthians 12: 2-10. The context of this passage is that Paul is forced to defend himself against the accusations of “super-apostles”. He doesn’t accomplish great deeds or received marvellous spiritual revelations and does no miracles. In response Paul recounts this mysterious incident (His conversion experience?) and speaks of himself in the third person. He later then boasts not of his accomplishments but of his weaknesses and that his infamous “thorn in the flesh” was given to him to keep him humble.

Mark 6: 1-13. Two distinct sections cobbled together. 1 – 6a is the culmination of stories that outline different people and groups’ reaction to Jesus. Truly, some fell on the path or rocky ground or among thorns, but some fell on good soil and bore fruit. The Nazarenes initially were astonished at his teaching but then fell away because of their preconceptions and how Jesus didn’t measure up to their expectations of how successful, prestigious or influential a “Messiah” should be. The second section 6b – 13 is a call to mission to the surrounding villages by his disciples. Like the church of today, before the disciples were volunteers, they were called and commissioned by Christ. Only then were they (we) able to preach and heal in his name. There is the call to simplicity, thus free from bearing many burdens, and freeing oneself from viewing the venture as a means by which one can profit.

It's coming home?

Congratulations to England at Wembley yesterday. Did seeing 50,000 raucous jubilant fans cheek by jowl, belting out the national anthem, rule Britannia and “It’s coming home” make you wonder why we can’t sing a hymn in church and our choir is limited to six people? I know it did me. This glaring injustice is becoming far from funny.

Thought for the day.

It was while I was reading a biography of Pope Francis “Wounded shepherd – Pope Francis and his struggle to convert the catholic church” and being quite inspired by this simple, unpretentious, devout man that I came across the distinction Francis makes between people who are corrupt and people who are sinners. He was doing so in the context of reforming the catholic clergy and I had never seen the distinction before or perhaps never had it explained to me so plainly.

Sinners are people who recognise their faults flaws and sins, and their need to repent (turn their life around) so there is plenteous scope for God's mercy as is clear from the Bible, but he says that corrupt people leave no room for mercy to work because they simply don't recognise that what they have done or are doing is wrong in the first place. Repentance is therefore not needed and so mercy is stifled. In short, they are spiritually blind.

Of course, on the much wider canvas it is axiomatic to Christianity that we are all sinners and fall short of the glory of God. But it is only when we truly accept that fact that we can see, treasure, and respond to God's love and mercy to us on a personal level.

The Prayer for Today is a pithy one written by John Baillie.

For my deceitful heart and crooked thoughts.

For barbed words spoken deliberately.

For thoughtless words spoken hastily.

For envious and prying eyes.

For ears that rejoice in iniquity and rejoice not in the truth.

For greedy hands.

For wandering and loitering feet.

For haughty looks.

Have mercy upon me O God

Love and peace,

Martin

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