

Dear friends,

Having a lovely pork baguette and a bottle of wine in our re-opened and community owned pub, the Sir Walter Raleigh was a much-needed dollop of conviviality and normality in a troubled world. The weather has been beautiful, and with my in-laws we did two much loved walks, one on Dartmoor, and one from Weston to Branscombe in full sunshine. So, it was a little sunburnt and sore that I welcomed our second speaker from the “Mary’s meals” charity, Rob Holmes, who addressed the village churches on Mothering Sunday. Katie, who addressed St. Peter’s the week before tells me she raised £120 in donations on the day and Rob gained a further £140 from the villages and both gained further sign-ups to further giving.

Sunday 3rd April – Lent 5

I will be presiding at the 8am service at St. Peter’s and then the 11am “Songs of Praise” at All Saints East Budleigh. The 10am. at St. Peter’s will be conducted by Reverend Chris Cant and the 11am service of the word at St. Michael’s will be led by John Archibald.

Isaiah 43: 16-21. Taken in context from the wider tract from which this is taken, it appears that Israel had misunderstood its relationship with God. They imagined that their many sacrifices made God indebted to them! But He is a God of Grace and God will provide a “new path” for a forgiven people and they should be thankful for his mercy. This new journey provides opportunities rather than dangers and can be applied physically to the exiles returning from Babylon to Jerusalem or the spiritual journey of a forgiven people, which is what we are.

Philippians 3: 4-14. The gospel is often presented as the answer to life’s problems, but here Paul presents the gospel as disturbing the answers he already had and sent him on a journey to find new answers. Everything he had previously put his faith in he now views as garbage and now being “in Christ” (a result of his conversion) he seeks new answers and spiritual maturity, though he candidly says that he isn’t there yet! Faith seeking understanding is how this is understood in the church.

John 12: 1-8. Mary shows how grateful she is for Jesus raising her brother Lazarus from the dead by anointing the feet of Jesus. That she anointed his feet and not his head is surprising and perhaps it foreshadows the foot washing at the last supper (only mentioned in John) – an act of service and worship. The remark about the poor always being with us can be taken as just a bald statement of fact while Mary has a premonition that the

end is near for Jesus as she purportedly bought this perfume to anoint his dead body.

Church of the Resurrection Bucharest.

As you all must know I have a real affinity to all my previous postings and enjoy good relations with them all, none more so than the church of the Resurrection in Bucharest which changed and challenged my life, my ministry and my religious beliefs forever – a wonderful three years. I am so pleased that after many years of struggle, and with a war now on their Northern border, they are finally getting a full-time priest again, Fr. Nevsky Everett who is currently the chaplain of Keble college Oxford. These unfashionable outposts of the “English church” in Eastern Europe are always up against it financially and spiritually and I ask for your prayers for Fr. Nevsky and his future ministry.

Thought for the day

Rob, who presented for “Mary’s meals” on Sunday was an interesting character. He told me of his “Damascus Road” experience he had on the M5, just south of junction 27 (very ordinary and quite specific), when he had an experience of what he described as pure love that came out of nowhere, tears streaming down his face that lasted only about 20 seconds and was so overwhelming that it changed his life completely. He had previously owned a business selling baby clothes which he never went back to, sold it, and started writing children’s books with moral messages and presenting sessions on mindfulness in schools (and presenting for Mary’s meals). Such a radical re-orientation of one’s whole live, way of thinking and doing is the definition of the word Metanoia, which we have translated into English as repentance. Such a radical change in one’s life is akin to Jesus saying that Nicodemus needs something that Jesus says feels like being born again. Born again not into a doctrinaire Christian faith though, in Rob’s case, but born again into a feeling of universal love and connectedness that finds expression in many different religions including Christianity. What Rob experienced from a Christian point of view, we call the universal Christ or the holy Spirit, and other faiths like non-dual Hinduism or Buddhism will call it something else, but what is important is not what we call it but how we experience it and how it changes us. To know that love is the central unifying value of the universe, and this love is present to us and can be spiritually perceived in all things, is the most important goal of any and all religion. What is also striking it that this revelation, this “God incidence” came completely unsought, out of no-where. God works in mysterious ways his wonders to perform.

The prayer for Today was inspired by the notion of growing in Christ that St. Paul talks about in the Philippians reading today as was written in the 12th century by someone called Isaac of Stella.

**My brother and sister,
May the Son of God who is already formed in you,
Grow in you so that he will become immeasurable
And that in you he will become laughter, exultation,
The fulness of Joy, which no one will take from you.**

Love and peace,
Martin