

Dear friends,

Here we go again!

The damage being inflicted on our economic, social and mental health is astronomical and there of course some strange anomalies. The universities, responsible for huge spikes in infections over the past couple of months are to stay open. The churches, where not a single case in the UK has been traced back, must close. Such supreme illogic leads people to devise all sorts of conspiracy theories, some darker than others, as to why this should be the case, so I won't add to those.

Our last Sunday service for "All Souls" on Sunday afternoon drew our biggest congregation yet, over 100 people all told, to a beautiful (though I say so myself) service of remembrance in St. Peter's for those who have died over the past year plus loved ones from any era. The choir sang beautifully, and the proceedings became even more emotional when they sang "Crossing the bar" which was due to be sung at Janet Parrish's funeral but was stymied by restrictions during the first lockdown. Chris (St. Peter's church warden and Janet's husband) had no idea this was going to happen and there were a few wavering voices (initially) and damp eyes in the choir, but it was exactly the right thing to do.

We came through the first lockdown all guns blazing so there is no reason to suppose that the same won't be the case this time around. According to the most recent instructions (these change weekly, daily and sometimes hourly as you know) our next services will be on the 6th December. I will continue to provide a brief commentary on the set lectionary readings during this period plus recorded sermons, and various thoughts and commentaries - I have cancelled my holiday obviously – to provide a kind of "normal" service during the period, so keep your spirits up, exercise, eat sensibly, pray and relax in the knowledge that you are loved and that in the end **"all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well"**.

Pastoral care during lockdown. We had a meeting of our pastoral care team (PCT) yesterday which already looks after a goodly number of people but it was decided that if you know of anyone vulnerable or lives alone – whether they come to church or not – and would appreciate being contacted during November please furnish their name and number to the leader of the PCT Jenny Steele and a list will be compiled and our 14

strong team will share the responsibility of keeping in touch. Jenny's email address is jenny@the-steeles.com

8th November - Remembrance Sunday – 3 before Advent

As there is no official service of remembrance in our area it has been suggested that people stand outside their houses at the appointed hour and observe a two-minute silence. I know the bell will be tolled by our bell tower captain at All saints at that time also. There are of course no church services.

Amos 5: 18-24. This famous piece from Amos criticizing the sacrificial cult in Israel as ineffective as long as it was disconnected from justice and righteousness in society is as true for all modern worship today as it was then. Personal piety must be linked to achieving justice in society so that at least for Amos religion and politics definitely do mix!

1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18. A piece of scripture often misinterpreted by fundamentalists and given to refer to what they call “the rapture”. This is actually a piece brimming over with hope concerning the future of fellow Christians who had died before the return of Christ which in the very early church Christians thought was imminent. Paul uses the only linguistic tools he has at his disposal, the language of “Jewish apocalyptic” informed by his belief in Jesus as the Messiah to try and explain what was happening. They were of course wrong in the prosaic physical sense – Jesus did not return - but right in the wider spiritual and theological sense that God wills the salvation of all things, so it doesn't matter when you die. The guarantee of our own resurrection is based in the fact of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 25: 1-13. In this parable one could say (and I do!) that the ten bridesmaids represent all Christians and the fact they all fell asleep means that they all died before the return of Christ (see 1 Thessalonians above). But some had oil in their lamps, and some didn't. Oil here represents the oil of good works – the outworking of faith in our character and actions without which our faith probably isn't worth very much - The book of James has much to say on this point! This is not a parable to predict the number and fate of the damned but an exhortation to Christians to respond to Grace (the bridegroom) with the genuine light of goodness (the lamps)



Remembrance

The painting above is I think a great representation of “new life” because it depicts poppies breaking through death and desolation represented by the skeleton of the leafless tree. This is of course why the poppy was chosen as the emblem of remembrance Sunday – paradoxically a profoundly Christian symbol for a non-religious secular national commemoration that honours all the war dead no matter what religion or creed they followed. Generalized grief is one thing but what makes these events so poignant is the countless deeply personal human stories that bind us together in such times.

I can still picture my “little” Granddad (so-called because he was a little man) coming over to my house as a small child with a copy of the Beano and a sixpence. This little country man had served through the entire first world war looking after the horses on the front line because that what he was brought up to do and horses were a part of his life. I’ve not watched it myself, but this is now apparently immortalised in the movie “Warhorse”. What horrors he must have witnessed.

Or when Louise and I made a special pilgrimage to lay some flowers on the grave of her relative, Thomas Brooke who was buried in “Blighty wood” war grave, a graveyard near Thiepval in Northern France. As far as we know we are the only members of the family who have ever visited him since he was killed all those years ago. It leaves you with a strange other-worldly feeling as if your soul has been touched.

A million other personal stories overlap in a collective feeling that our souls have been touched. There is no public service of remembrance this year but I have been given a wreath to lay by Andrew Canning who is co-ordinating the wreaths in East Budleigh and will lay it at some point next week. I have room to write something on the wreath. I think I'll write something that touched me deeply at another war grave in France. There were the usual sea of crosses and over to one side were a separate place for Jewish victims, but in amongst all the legions of crosses was a grave that stood out because amongst the crosses it bore the star of David and on it was the man's name and the inscription "In death, undivided"

Musical interlude! This haunting piece known as the symphony of sorrowful songs by Henryk Gorecki was inspired by some Graffiti scrawled on the wall of a Gestapo interrogation centre in Poland by an 18 year old girl during WWII and in English it says "Oh Mamma do not cry, no. Immaculate Queen of Heaven, you support me always". <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5fg8-VWNo0&t=88s>

The prayer for today is by Linda Jones

You are the Resurrection and the Life

**Christ Jesus,
You understand the pain of loss,
the grief that seems to take
the air from my lungs.
You are the Resurrection
and the Life.
All our hope is in you.
Lord Jesus,
may I find a way through
the darkness
to the light of your love.
You are the Resurrection
and the Life.
All our hope is in you.
Christ Jesus,
you wept at the death of your friend, Lazarus.
Now your compassion wipes the tears from our eyes.
May we find comfort in reaching out to others
who feel lost and alone.**

**You are the Resurrection and the Life.
All our hope is in you.**

Love and peace,
Martin

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