

Dear friends,

So much has happened since my last communication that it is hard to know where to start so let's start at the beginning!

Easter Sunday started with a well-attended ecumenical gathering on the beach at 6am where we greeted the rising Sun. The symbolism of this (rising sun/rising son) is not accidental and is the reason that all altars in traditional churches of all denominations face East and the altars were originally against the wall so the priest faced east (Towards the sun) and not towards the congregation!

Easter Sunday in St. Peter's was so uplifting it has held me up ever since. Stephen Tanner, our musical Director, remarked that he had never seen so many people in St. Peter's for a Sunday service and across our two morning services just shy of 200 people celebrated the Eucharist in suitably buoyant style.

Later that day of course we travelled to Gatwick for our flight to St. Lucia to enjoy our post Easter break in the Caribbean (Marking my 60th birthday is going on all year obviously!). The weather was scorching and the view from our balcony iconic especially at sundown.



Now home refreshed we have enjoyed a lovely OVA walk led by Paul and Penny Kurowski and presided at joyful and uplifting services on Wednesday and Sunday continuing the Easter vibe.

The saddest news since we returned from holiday came on Sunday morning when we received a phone call telling us that John Hutchinson had died that morning. As fate had it, I had been forewarned that the end was nigh and I managed to see John and Ruth just the afternoon before and prayed with them. John was a fervent evangelical Christian so we had our differences on certain theological points but he was always a loyal servant of St. Peter's and a great influence on the church and a great support for me and I will miss him greatly.

Sunday May 8th – Easter 4

This morning I will preside at the services at All Saints and St. Michael's at 9.30am and 11am respectively while the venerable Trevor Jones will preside at both services at St. Peter's. I will of course be back at St. Peter's to preside at our monthly 6pm service of choral evensong.

Acts 9: 36-43. Peter raising a woman, Tabitha, from the dead mirrors Luke's gospel story of Jesus raising Jairus's daughter. (The raising of Lazarus occurs only in John's gospel). The message is that the actions of the disciples carry on the deeds as well as the teachings of Jesus. The location is also significant. Joppa is a port city with a very mixed population and this presumably Jewish woman also has a Greek version of her name – both mean "Gazelle" and Peter was staying with a man "Simon the Tanner" whose very occupation dealing with the hides of dead animals would have made him an outcast in strict Jewish eyes.

Revelation 7: 9-17. It is in Revelation that the meaning of the word "Martyr" which originally in Greek means a "witness" became more closely identified with a person who witnessed to Christ by dying for him. That meaning of the word Martyr has stuck in the world's consciousness. People who shared in Christ's suffering, persecutions and death have an exalted place in the book of Revelation especially as the author was expecting much more persecution to come. The visions of the seer/poet called John of Patmos depict strong colourful imagery with a slain lamb sitting on the throne of God.

John 10: 22-30. “I and the Father are one”, the end verse of this lection needs such a conceptual shift that it is akin to Jesus telling Nicodemus that he must be born again. Having knowledge and information is not enough (Nicodemus was a teacher of Israel after all). The point of all the signs in John's gospel was not simply to amaze people (which they did) but to point to the greater truth that divinity dwelt in Jesus and there was a functional unity between God and Jesus.

Thought for the day

The motto of the Bodyholiday resort we attended was “Give us your body for a week and we'll give you back your mind”. A bold claim, but it was a truly calming experience and in my case at least that bold claim more or less held true. And this points to a greater truth that in Christianity we don't pay enough attention to the physical and have produced a very cerebral faith, paying no attention to the body at all.

Eastern religions have always been better at recognising the link between the mind, the body and the spirit leading to such practices as Yoga, T'ai Chi, and massage and meditation.

But actually, the Judeo-Christian tradition has also always recognised that human beings are a psycho-somatic unity meaning that your mind and your body are inextricably linked. You already will be aware that emotional stress can cause physical reactions and likewise physical ailments can cause psychological reactions like depression.

Theologically, in Christianity we regard our bodies as Temples of the Holy Spirit so if God sees fit to dwell within our bodies, your body is rendered Holy. So be kind to your body, don't abuse it unnecessarily, keep it as healthy as possible, train and discipline it as you do your mind because your body and mind are one entity. What we do with our bodies is important to us religiously but unfortunately tends to be used to differentiate between traditions so raising your arms in praise, making the sign of the cross, kneeling in prayer, putting your hands together in prayer in front of your chest or open in front of you, clapping or not clapping, we use to mark us out as “one of them” rather than one of us.

Bodies are important. That Jesus had a physical body is fundamental to our faith. And we the church are “the body of Christ”.

The prayer for today is a very simple but heartfelt prayer/plee written by John Donne.

O lord, never suffer us to think that we can stand by ourselves,

And not need thee.

Love and peace,
Martin