

Dear friends,

On Friday we said a fond farewell to Di Bagshawe at St. Peter's. We got off to a nervous start because the piper had gone to St. Peter's catholic church by mistake, but it was worth the wait as the church was filled with the sound of bagpipes which sounded wonderful. Di's poetry was much in evidence and I began the service with a funny reflection on funerals written by Di just after she had returned from one of her friend's funerals.

Sunday was cold and grotty which affected numbers, but Advent got off to a great start at the morning services and was topped by a superb service of Advent carols and readings at which the choir excelled. A busy December is off and running!

I am pleased to announce that our new webmaster that will take over the reins of the RMC website is Stacey James. We wish her well in her new role.

Sunday 10th December – Advent 2

Canon Mike Williams will preside at both services at St. Peter's and I will preside at both services at All Saints and St. Michael's at 9.30 and 11am respectively and will also preside at Choral evensong at St. Peter's at 6pm that evening. The second candle on the wreath this week represents the Prophets in our salvation history.

Isaiah 40: 1-11. One of the best-known pieces from the most loved prophet in the Hebrew scriptures. Well known because it is used in the New Testament to refer to John the Baptist but in its original setting was addressed to a people in exile in Babylon to expect relief from their suffering and imminent return to the promised land. A message of comfort (a word which is stronger in Hebrew and implies action). There is also a passage that is much used at funerals that acknowledges how transient and powerless is human agency and how we must rely on the power (Grace) of God.

2 Peter 3: 8-15. Peter confronts the issue of people expecting the end of the world and its delay by pointing out that God is beyond time – not constrained by time and mortality as humans are. As time passes people become sceptical and tend towards moral laxity when they doubt that God will intervene. It is better to face the future with hope and expectancy rather than cynicism. Peter, like Paul, explains the delay as God having

patience and as evidence of his Grace i.e., not wanting to consign any of his disobedient children to judgement. Patience is of course a hard sell to the truly suffering in this world who long for redemption.

Mark 1: 1-8. In Mark's view, Isaiah prophesies John the Baptist and then John foretells the coming of Jesus. John is also identified with the prophetic tradition in the description of the clothes he wears which identifies him in the tradition of Elijah (2 Kings: 8) and he is placed "in the wilderness" which corresponds with Isaiah reading, though this is most likely a theological rather than a geographic location. Mark was the first gospel written and lacks any birth narratives at all – something to be mindful of as we celebrate Christmas later this month.

Thought for Today – some thoughts on the second coming.

In our Sunday liturgy we affirm "Christ has died Christ is risen and Christ will come again." What do we mean? Certainly some do believe that Christ will return physically at some point in the future and I would never say that was wrong, but can you say those words and believe something a little more nuanced? I think you can.

Jesus definitely said that "This generation will not pass away" until all these things had taken place which is why the first generation of Christians were so convinced that the "day of the Lord" was imminent. But it plainly didn't happen so we need to ask the question what did Jesus mean by "all these things"? We can see the progression of Paul's thinking on the subject and his theology within the pages of the New Testament. In his first letter (1 Thessalonians) he was talking about people being taken into the sky in a cataclysm that some people refer to as the rapture. But in his later letters this had morphed into his body of Christ theology – meaning that Jesus had already returned in the body of the church. We were his body on earth – the second coming is us! That reflects something that is called "realised eschatology" for those who like to know these things. Those who believe that The Christ event is still to be completed sometime in the future are believers in "inaugurated eschatology".

What did definitely happen of course within that first generation of Christians was that the Spirit that had animated Jesus was sent by the Father to be poured out on all flesh. Furthermore, the "second coming" is not a Biblical phrase at all but a paraphrase of the word Parousia which means something like "presence". We do claim that "where two or three

are gathered together in my name there am I in your midst". We claim the presence of Jesus all the time of course or more precisely the Spirit of Jesus. In terms of that famous proclamation, we say in the Eucharistic prayer that I started with – if you interpret it in this way it actually makes it far more dynamic. Instead for waiting for a future cosmic event we make Christ present (he returns) every time we act in accordance with his will – we become his hands and his feet now in this mortal life.

The Prayer for Today is by Teresa of Avila and reflects this way of interpreting the "return" of Jesus.

Teresa of Avila (1515–1582)
Christ Has No Body

**Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.**

Love and peace,
Martin