

Dear friends,

The Ceilidh behind the Anchor pub in Sidmouth was absolutely heaving. When we got there, security guards were operating a “one in, one out” system. Luckily for us, because of the crowded and chaotic scene inside, quite a few people were making their way out. What was immediately noticeable was that there was a complete lack of malice in the crowd and the atmosphere was very convivial and we managed a few wayward dances before eventually retreating to eat fish 'n' chips on the sea front before going to see “Polly Button” at the Manor Road theatre which was very good.

At St. Peter's in the morning, the service was lightened by the fact that it was Stephen (our director of music) and Shirley's ruby wedding anniversary on that very day and apart from our hymns all the other music was what they had chosen for their wedding 40 years ago. They also donated the special red flowers that adorned the church. We commemorated the Transfiguration of Jesus as we did across the RMC.

I'd almost forgotten that on Sunday afternoon I'd agreed to meet a wedding couple – not something I'd usually do on a Sunday – but because the couple had driven down for the weekend from London (where they are both Doctors) I made an exception. Luckily for me, they were superbly organised and had even booked a string quartet to play at their wedding in September so it didn't take too long.

Sunday 13th August – 10 after Trinity – Proper 14

The reverend Colin Randall will preside at both services at St. Peter's and I will preside at All Saints at 9.30. I will stay to officiate at a baptism at 11.30 meaning that Archdeacon Trevor Jones will preside at St. Michael's at 11.30. As is our normal practice there is no evensong during August.

1 kings 19: 9-18. Horeb is an alternative name for mount Sinai and in this famous “Theophany” (manifestation of the divine presence) Elijah is depressed and alone, even though he had just demonstrated the power and superiority of God over Baal at Mount Carmel. God does not speak in any of the dramatic events of earthquakes, fire or wind but in what our NRSV Bibles translates as a “sound of sheer silence” and in other translations as a “gentle whisper” or a “faint murmuring”. Several interpretations abound about what this means, one being that God's purposes will not be achieved through mighty shows of power but by people listening intently for the gentle inner promptings of the Spirit.

Romans 10: 5-15. A complicated piece with multiple interpretations but at its core lies the universal availability of the gospel and that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. At the end of this lectionary piece there lies the importance of preaching the word of God which reminds each preacher of the importance of his task. This is not something that can be relegated to just another thing I must do.

Matthew 14: 22-33. This piece about Jesus walking on water could just as easily be re-cast as “Peter walking on water” for he did just that until his faith failed him. This is indeed an acted parable, where one has to keep one’s eyes and faith firmly fixed on Jesus lest you succumb to the trials and storms of life. Water, lakes, seas, have always represented the forces of chaos to the Hebrews, and God brings order out of chaos, right from the opening verse of the Bible in Genesis whose Spirit “hovers over the waters.” Jesus shares with God authority over the elements.

Thought for Today

I had never heard of “subject access requests” until the recent furore over Nigel Farage having his bank accounts closed because of his political stance. Whether you oppose or support his political views is neither here nor there, but it is extremely sinister, because without a bank account you cannot function in the modern world and is a terrible abuse of power. As a result of this high-profile case, it now appears that thousands and thousands are suffering the same treatment at the hand of overbearing corporations exceeding their remit. Luckily for ordinary people who are pretty much voiceless, Nigel Farage has a public platform which he has used to expose these practices and he has gained public apologies and high-level resignations and Government support who are closely monitoring banking practices as a result. As Christians, we believe that everybody deserves a level playing field and everyone is loved equally by God. Gina Miller, for example, who vehemently opposed Brexit and a bitter foe of Nigel Farage has suffered in the same way and now ironically shares a common experience with its main proponent. It surely cannot be right that a small band of politically motivated people who think they are apparently better than the rest of us and want to dictate how we act, what we say and through indoctrination and harassment eventually (they hope) dictate how we think. I read George Orwell’s book “1984” recently and. In the book it says of the “Ministry of truth” that once you accept that $2 + 2 = 5$, then everything else follows, and this is starting to happen in so many different fields. You hear loads of people willing to moan privately to each other about the current situation but collectively seem cowed into silence by what they see as a prevailing orthodoxy and are scared to put their heads above the parapet.

That is understandable but it is also the most effective and insidious way of undermining freedom there is – that people self-censor what they say for fear of the repercussions. It reminds me of all totalitarianisms, that used to thrive in the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc, where there were spies in every apartment block and children were encouraged to denounce their parents to the state. No one can thrive in a climate of fear and as it says in John's first letter, the perfect love of God drives out fear. Trust in God to give you courage to stand your ground and to speak without fear. Justice should be blind. It might be Nigel Farage or Gina Miller today, but it could be you tomorrow.

The prayer for Today is written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer as he awaited trial for his part in a plot against Hitler.

O Holy Spirit,

Give me a faith that will protect me from despair, from passions and from vice,

Give me such a love for God and for men as will blot out all hatred and bitterness,

Give me the hope that will deliver me from fear and faint-heartedness.

Love and peace,

Martin