

Dear friends,

Sunday saw our biggest congregation yet at St. Peter's since we resumed worship after the lockdown with 76 people worshipping at the 10am service. I have also telephoned a lot of people who had been reticent about returning and I am pleased to say that the response was overwhelmingly positive so we are well on the way back to something approaching full strength of around 120 people a week. This is important because the "energy" generated by a large crowd of people is undeniably uplifting and encourages everyone involved.

Having completed the appropriate risk assessments we can also announce that St. Peter's choir is scheduled to return on the 4th October (Harvest festival) in a limited capacity (Hymns are still not allowed to be sung by congregations). The balance of the service should not be altered as the choir will sing only four parts, the intro, Agnus Dei and anthem during communion distribution, and an Alleluia before the gospel so the length of the service won't be affected.

Filming of our first video presentation service I was told on Sunday can probably start this week after some technical problems were sorted out.

Sunday 13th September – Trinity 14 – Proper 19

I shall be presiding at All Saints at the 9.30am and St. Michael's at 11.00am and Rev. Karen Young will preside at the 10am at St. Peter's.

Genesis 50: 15-21. After detailing various family tensions throughout this first book of the Bible, the last chapter ends in reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers. Unfortunately, our lection does not include the very last words which are words of promise to the Hebrew people – of a new beginning in the promised land. This speaks into a wider spiritual truth that reconciliation always changes a situation for the better and creates new possibilities.

Romans 14: 1-12. What is remarkable in this passage is that Paul does not adjudicate between different points of view of how Christians should

observe food laws or feast days. Instead he says that we are all servants of God and this is the most important thing and in recognizing this reality we are led towards reconciliation. So, the health of the believing community takes precedence over “right” belief or “right” observance. True there are limits of course, but as long as our belief and practice are held with integrity, we should not pass judgement on those whose attitude to faith and worship differ from ours.

Matthew 18: 21-35. The central point of this passage is the incredible Mercy of God. Jesus makes clear to Peter in his response “not seven but seventy-seven times” that forgiveness is not a commodity that can be measured out or have limits. That same point is made in the parable where the man is forgiven by the king (God) the debt of ten thousand talents – which represents the wages of a day labourer for 150,000 years! There is simply no way of measuring the extent of God’s generosity when it comes to his forgiveness. When examining our own personal capacity or incapacity to forgive others, this is our starting point!

Thought for the day – The sound of silence

What moved me – amongst many other things – at the funeral of Eric Brooke in the West Midlands was the extraordinary profusion of fresh flowers over the entire graveyard which was huge – as if every one of the thousands of plots had been freshly tended. Particularly moving was a “remembrance garden for babies” which was a riot of colour and artifacts and again on a large scale. It would have made a good photograph but even thinking that seemed like an intrusion into grief and voyeuristic. One can try and contemplate the scale of grief and heartache such a scene represents but one always comes up short. The extent of personal tragedy that people endure takes no account of money, status, or religious conviction. The grief that anyone endures is common to all humanity whatever ones believes. The knowledge that I can never fully appreciate or comprehend all the feelings of hurt, failure, loss and longing that every death represents is why I generally include a moment or two of silence in every funeral service. Words are extremely useful and necessary for framing a service – providing the scaffolding that supports people needing a structure within which it allows them to rest, contemplate and provide an overarching meaning, but in the end, words cannot encompass all that needs to be encompassed, especially when it is a baby. Silence can also be an entirely appropriate response when contemplating the mystery of death.

The Prayer for Today is by Frank Colquhoun written specifically for the death of a child but then again we are all someone's child so I think it is applicable to all people.

**Lord, this dreadful thing has happened, and our minds are baffled
And our Spirits weighed down with grief.**

**It is beyond our understanding why this little life should be taken,
Or why we should be called upon to suffer so terrible a loss.**

**Yet we know that life is full of mystery and that many others at this time
Are facing the same problem and enduring the same anguish as
ourselves.**

**Help us to bear our sorrow without bitterness and not to question your
Love;**

For to whom can we look for comfort but to you O Lord?

**Speak your word of peace to our hearts; ease our pain and lift our
darkness**

**And be to us a very present help in trouble,
For Jesus Christ's sake.**

Love and peace,
Martin

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