

Dear friends,

Our Lent course got off to a great start last Wednesday with a couple of groups discussing questions of generosity posed by the evening's film and written material. Every week is a self-contained unit so you can join in at any point if you'd like to – the next one is tonight at 7pm in the Peter Hall.

Generosity of spirit is being enabled in the real-life situation of the war in Ukraine of course. There is the on-line option of personal financial engagement with the D.E.C. campaign as well as our local initiative to hold retiring collections after the services this coming Sunday in all three churches and the practical appeal by Cr2ee (Christian response to Eastern Europe) who are collecting bedding/towels/coats this week every morning at their Spider lane warehouse in Exmouth which they will be sending to Moldova for onward transmission to the Ukraine border as they have now received over 100,000 refugees.

Tomorrow marks the first return after a two-year absence of the "Open the Book" team acting out a Bible story to the schoolchildren of Otterton and Drakes school. Pray for them.

After another long absence the 11.30am Friday service on Fridays sees a return this week. Pray for all involved there also.

Sunday 13th March – 2nd of Lent

Archdeacon Trevor Jones will be presiding at both services at St. Peter's in the morning and I will be presiding at All Saints at 9.30am and St. Michael's at 11am. I will also preside at our choral evensong service at St. Peter's at 6pm in the evening.

Genesis 15: 1-12, 17-18. The strange vision recounted in Genesis has its root in the fact that a covenant (agreement) is "cut" in Hebrew idiom. The central idea being that the party to the covenant that transgresses will share the same fate as the animals cut in two. The deeper message is just how hard it is for human beings to receive gifts or accept promises from God. Doubts that it is "too good to be true" and human pride getting in the way are the main factors.

Philippians 3:17 – 4:1. We may live in London, Paris or East Devon but we also have another citizenship. We know we are part of a much larger entity Paul calls heaven. We have a foot in both camps and our concerns therefore must be not merely worldly and self-serving but be led by much wider concerns led by the will of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

Luke 13: 31 -35. Jerusalem is central to the fate of Jesus, and he is going there to fulfil God's will, not to escape any plot by Herod. He is under a higher authority and of course the reference to the third day resonates with a Christian readership.

Thought for the day

Being absorbed by very earthly concerns like power, control and self-fulfilment rather than heavenly concerns like peace, justice and the preservation of life is a powerful description of what is motivating the war in Ukraine.

I feel a certain emotional closeness to what is going on because Romania, where I lived and worked for three years, has a direct border with Ukraine and Moldova (which you know as an independent country) was formally a part of Romania, and used to be known as Bessarabia, an area that was annexed by the Soviets after the war. A Large influx of Russian speakers since then has resulted in a divided and disputed country with the same internal problems as Ukraine and in fact the Russians keep troops there to this day in the tortured area known as the "Trans-Dnistra" part of Moldova.

So, a wider potential for trouble directly affecting Romania is very real and present. The schism opening up between East and West Europe culturally and politically reveals a fault line experienced by the church over a thousand years ago, a split formalised in 1054, which capped centuries of bickering. In my own tiny way of trying to say that we have so much to learn from each other I sing the "liturgy of St. James" before the Eucharistic prayer quite often, purely because it is an Orthodox Eucharistic prayer and is also used as an antiphon in the catholic church so is common to both East and West. I share so much with the Orthodox church but could realistically never be an "orthodox" because the church is so culturally different. I am a western catholic (and we are all in the western catholic tradition no matter how protestant you think you are) while appreciating and appropriating many Eastern practices and Eastern theology. Learning to appreciate each other whilst remaining quite different in other ways is perhaps a template for

political tensions that are rearing their head again revealing an East/West fault line that has always been there though we have tried to ignore it.

The prayer for Today asks for the courage to speak up and voice our own opinion and insight, though that may differ from our leaders, a courage needed especially in Russia today. A prayer by Mary Zimmer.

Dear God

Somehow many of us have grown to adulthood believing we are not intelligent, experienced or wise enough to give our opinion and share our insight. We passively wait for leaders to solve every problem. Keep us aware that each of us has something to offer – a personal insight different from everyone else's. And we can never know what influence we might have unless we speak up in the spirit of Christian love. Give us courage to share what you have revealed to us.

Love and peace,

Martin