

Dear friends,

Twenty-two hours travelling on Friday saw us arrive back safely in East Budleigh at about 10.30 pm. I think the last time I communicated anything I was still in Kandy. Since then, we have been camping in a national park, seen wild Elephants, visited Galle (reputedly the sight of Biblical Tarshish), toured Colombo, visited more Temples and are now both thoroughly exhausted and trying to slot back into “normal” life – getting cars M.O.T’d – arranging ’elf and safety checks required by the Diocese, buying a new washing machine (which started tripping the electrical circuit out after our fifth load of washing). It is now three meals in a row, as I write this, that didn’t consist of either rice or noodles!

On the Dubai to Gatwick leg, we travelled in an airbus A380. I’d never been on a plane that had an upper deck before. On the upper deck, it is narrower, and the seats are arranged in a 2-4-2 instead of a 3-4-3. I thought we’d been upgraded but it was a smooth but long flight. Because of the wars in the Middle East, we travelled over the “safe” route of Iraq, Iran, Turkey and the Black sea before entering Europe via Romania. Emirates tries to offer a meal common to the destination on their flights, so in a surreal touch we were given a cream tea to follow our beef stew, mash and veg. We of course just had to put the cream on first or we probably wouldn’t be allowed back into Devon! The house was spick and span, and all our relatives had been looking after our house in shifts babysitting our cat Axel over the past three months so we can’t find anything obviously, but we were welcomed by a “welcome home pack” of essentials left by a kind parishioner.

For church on Sunday on the very last day of the Sabbatical we decided to visit Sidmouth parish church. Remarkably similar in make-up to St. Peter’s in Budleigh, their organist is David Davis, so we knew we’d recognise one person at least. Turns out that David has very fond memories of Malaysia and we swapped notes on experiences and impressions.

Sunday 6th April – 5th of Lent

I will be presiding at both services at St. Peter’s and Rev’d Chris Cant will preside at All Saints at 9.30am and John Archibald will preside at St. Michael’s at 11am.

Isaiah 43: 16-21. In the overall context for this snippet, God is saying that Israel has misunderstood the nature of their relationship to him. Through their offerings they have tried to make God indebted to them but through his forgiveness of sins they must learn to be thankful for his mercy. The “new thing” is about facing a future no longer encumbered by the past. We are on a new journey, with new opportunities, protected by God

Philippians 3: 4-14. Paul too, many centuries later, in the light of the resurrection wants to forget what went before and is “straining forward to what lies ahead” (v.13). He begins this extract by saying that everything he built his life upon in the past he now regards as “rubbish”. Consigned to the dustbin because of the Grace of God revealed to the world in Christ Jesus

John 12: 1-8. This seems to be saying that worship and devotion to God can be more important than charity. I interpret that as saying - Get the devotion right and everything else follows. Pure Nard as we discovered in Nepal comes from the Himalayas, an indication of the strong trade and cultural links, the Middle East had with Asia. Jesus rebukes Judas who had criticised Mary for anointing Jesus' feet by saying "the poor you'll always have with you, but you won't always have me". Of course he was perfectly right. Financial poverty is a fact of life that has never left us and never will, even in the affluent West.

Thought for the Day

Coming from what was always known as the "third world" even while enormous strides have taken place in India and Sri Lanka, I think I can see that where spiritual and cultural poverty is concerned – it is us in the West that is more impoverished. In terms of GDP we might dwarf Sri Lanka but spiritually their respective religious groups are much more together and happy as a collective. The spiritual and cultural poverty that you might encounter in say Hartlepool (sorry to pick on you! It could have been anywhere!) is far greater and exacerbates the financial poverty that also exists there. What I've learned is that the emotional and spiritual stability of the population is higher in the East than in the west in a very general sense. (I don't know if that can be quantified of course but is my general impression). Communities are bound together by religion and their respective religious traditions – it is like a glue that keeps society together. It matters not which religious tradition we are talking about but they each provide a moral and social framework that exists entirely independently of the economics of their respective countries. Secularism in the West has increasingly robbed us of that glue, leaving people adrift and rudderless in a sea of uncertainty. That Christian framework, a system of faith, morals and ethics, is a valuable gift that has been edged out of Britain more and more over the decades. How to re-capture the hearts of minds of Britons that we've let go of is the sixty-four-thousand-dollar question for which there is no ready answer. We carry on, and make sure our worship is sincere and true and that we are not ashamed to call ourselves a child of God. We try and walk the walk as far as we are able and pray that what has happened in Britain over many years is just a blip in history and that the wheels will eventually turn back our way. Ultimately, growth will come from only one source – God himself.

The first Prayer for Today is actually a piece of scripture that I recite every day in my prayers and was introduced to me at the Maranatha Ignatian retreat centre outside Kuala Lumpur. It strengthens me and gives me the peace that transcends all understanding. This is followed by a prayer picking up Lenten themes by George Appleton

Isaiah 43: 1. **"Fear not for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name, you are mine"**

**O Christ, my Lord, again and again
I have said with Mary Magdalene,
'They have taken away my Lord
and I know not where they have laid him'.
I have been desolate and alone.
And you have found me again, and I know
that what has died is not you, my Lord,**

**but only my idea of you,
the image which I have made to preserve
what I have found, and to be my security.
I shall make another image, O Lord,
better than the last.
That too must go, and all successive images,
until I come to the blessed vision of yourself,
O Christ, my Lord.**

Love and peace,
Martin