

Dear friends,

On Saturday it poured down but that didn't put off the audience for the Budleigh Salterton Male voice choir cream tea concert in East Budleigh church hall. It was a sell out – the choir were excellent and the cream tea delicious. After expenses around £800 is expected to be raised towards the cost of repairing the water pipe leading to the church affecting our ability to provide teas and coffees after the service.

On Sunday I was at St. Peter's. Some Sundays for some reason just go very well indeed and the spirit is strong and this was one of those Sundays. Stephen Tanner's "voluntary" at the end of the service got the loudest cheer I have ever encountered in seven years with a few "Bravos" thrown in for good measure.

This was followed by Solo's lunch catered by Mandy in the Peter Hall when we were joined by Robert and Josie Charles for a superb two course lunch.

Sunday 7th September – Trinity 12 – Proper 18.

Robert Charles will preside at both services at St. Peter's and I will preside at All Saints at 9.30am and John Archibald will preside at St. Michael's at 11am.

Deuteronomy 30: 15-20. There are obvious problems with this passage. There is no neat, automatic correlation between following God's laws and resulting prosperity or general blessedness. After all, the psalms are full of complaints as to how the evil seem to prosper. There is also a problem from a Christian point of view that it appears to promote a "salvation by works" theology. The authors have adapted the common covenant relationship between kings and their people in 7th century BC middle East and applied it to a legalistic relationship with God. For Christians we seek to do God's will, not for any reward but because of its intrinsic value.

Philemon: 1-21. Slavery was an uncontested fact of life in the ancient world but that doesn't stop modern Christians lamenting that there is no firm and straightforward denunciation of the practice. But here Paul, so impressed is he by Onesimus, that he implores Philemon to set him free. Paul even offers to pay any of his debts if he has any and he asks that Onesimus be treated as a brother in Christ.

Luke 14: 25-33. One of the so-called "hard sayings" (all the readings seem to be today) of Jesus. There is no Jesus "meek and mild" here. He is speaking with typical Semitic hyperbole and directness. What he means by this piece is that we need to get our priorities straight – That love of God is the most important thing in life. And following Jesus is a hard thing to do so are you sure you want to even start? Make sure you have counted the cost of being a follower of Jesus.

Thought for the Day

The readings this week are all problematic in their own way which only highlights the problem we all face when trying to interpret pieces of scripture that were written thousands of years ago in a different time in vastly different contexts to different audiences and written for different reasons. The subject is too huge to summarise easily in a short "front piece" but particularly when dealing with the Old Testament – more correctly termed the Hebrew scriptures – I would try and interpret a lot of that as symbolic – and try and see it all as though looking through Jesus tinted glasses.

For as Christians we believe that Jesus is the unique and perfect revelation of God's will, nature, character and purposes so if we see or read anything that appears to contradict what Jesus says or does – Jesus always takes precedence. That is a simple and easy guide to trying to make sense of some very tricky parts of the Hebrew scriptures. But of course Jesus himself existed in a very different culture and expressed himself in terms of that culture and often we find that very hard to get a handle on.

Understanding Paul is notoriously difficult as well, as he wrote in Greek with no punctuation and again operating in a culture very different from ours.

We need to understand that we are looking at a translation of a translation of another translation and based on fragments that are often incomplete and in the case of the gospels based on orally transmitted stories. There are also different versions of the ancient scripts.

The Bible as a whole is a unique treasure trove that has no parallel in any other Holy book or indeed in any other book in existence. How one reads and interprets the bible changes according to ecclesial tradition and according to differing understandings of how literally we take certain texts.

This is why theological training, wisdom and being steeped in the texts is so important and why the discernment process for who is qualified to interpret the Bible is so rigorous!

The Prayer for Today. If you are having a hard time take heart that a psalmist has written and prayed about it before you and written about it thousands of years earlier. A cry of despair and longing for some relief. This is an extract from psalm 6.

**Deal kindly with me Lord,
For my health is failing;
Heal me,
For I am disturbed in my bones,
Deeply agitated in Spirit.
How long Lord, until you help me?
Turn to me and save my life,
Rescue me on account of your constant love.
I am tired of groaning, Lord.
Night after night I inundate my pillow with tears;
I soak my divan with weeping.**

Love and peace,

Martin