

Dear friends,

I enjoyed an exhibition at the Royal academy of Arts on my own while Louise was at a conference and we both attended an exhibition at the British library featuring artefacts from a town on the Silk Road in Northern China called Dunhuang. In between the high culture we really enjoyed “Hadestown” at the Lyric Theatre – a modern take on Orpheus in the underworld.

At the same time in All Saints East Budleigh, young singers from the university entertained over 100 people. It is likely that we’ll raise around £1000 after costs. Thankfully John Grace, an electrician in the congregation, got our lights up and running for the evening so a big Thank you to him. There is still work to do but I’m so glad that he enjoys doing it!

Getting back to the West country from London was a slow business because of the storm but apart from a few strewn branches and thigh deep leaves by the front door all seemed to be well for which we are extremely grateful.

Given that the weather was still awful on Sunday it was gratifying that both village churches were so well attended, especially in St. Michael’s where we heard a very competent and confident sermon from our LLM (Licensed local Minister) in training, Stacey James. Choral Evensong was the usual triumph (apart from my singing!).

Sunday 15th December – 3rd of Advent.

I will be presiding at both services at St. Peter’s and Funfaith (led by the aforementioned Stacey James) makes a welcome return to the 10am. service. Rev’d Jean Burrows will preside at All Saints and St. Michael’s at 9.30am and 11am respectively. The third candle celebrates John the Baptist on our Advent wreaths.

Zephaniah 3: 14-20. Zephaniah was assumed to have been active between 640 – 609 BC but this extract appears to prophesy the return from the Babylonian exile (circa 597 – 538 BC). The two exiles and return stories of the Jewish faith (slavery in Egypt and exile in Babylon) have a pivotal role in shaping the Jewish Psyche and religious landscape.

Philippians 4: 4-7. A classic piece about joy and peace. It is hard to detach oneself from the dismissal in the Anglican Eucharist. The word “peace” has the strong force of the Hebrew “Shalom” – total well-being for which God is the only source.

Luke 3: 7-18. The two most important themes here is that repentance needs to be shown in acting ethically no matter what occupation you have (John doesn’t tell them to give up their professions). The other is a widening out of the notion of being “children of Abraham” from just being of biological descent to all who act ethically no matter what religion or ethnic group you belong to.

Dementia talk.

Tonight in the Peter Hall at 6.30, my wife Louise (Professor of Geriatric medicine) will talk about new treatments in Dementia. Followed by Mince pies and Mulled wine. No booking required. All Welcome.

Thought for Today

Bashar Al Assad, President of Syria, has been deposed. His two main backers Russia and Iran have both been critically weakened through being bogged down in the war in Ukraine in Russia’s case and in

being pummelled by Israel in Iran's case so couldn't really intervene. Iran's main fighting force in Syria was their client force Hezbollah which has been similarly seriously weakened by Israel. So, the rebel Islamists knew their time has come and pounced because the time was right.

Assad was a brutal dictator but is this really any cause for celebration? The group that has taken over started out as a branch of Al Qaida. Christians and Alawites (The President's religious group) will be quaking in their boots. Both looked to the former regime for protection against the fundamentalists. The Christian church in Syria is one of the few places in the world where the liturgy is celebrated in Aramaic – the language of Jesus. If the example of the first war and the region in general is anything to go by the future looks particularly bleak for both minority groups.

One can only hope and pray for the best and the Western world doesn't have a good track record when it comes to Christian solidarity. I can offer no crumbs of comfort though the new leadership is on record as saying there will be no retribution but how much control they actually have when it comes to their foot soldiers is highly debatable, though thus far things are more favourable than they could be. In this war-ravaged corner of the world where feuds and ethnic and religious conflict rule the roost, and whoever gains the upper hand tends to lord it over everyone else, hope is understandably thin on the ground, but hope is what the Christian church offers. We must pray that some kind of accord – some peaceful ethnic and religious coexistence – can emerge in this sad country. No-one knows what the future holds and looting has predictably already broken out in Damascus. Let us pray for all people of goodwill in that benighted country and pray especially for the historic Christian presence in Syria. And give thanks, that for all our gripes and problems, we are not living in Syria.

The Prayer for Today is by Rachel McCarthy

“The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; of the inhabitants of a country in shadow dark as death light has blazed forth.” Isaiah 9:1-2

**God of light,
We pray for our neighbours in Syria
walking in the shadow of darkness.
In you, Lord, may we see a flicker of hope,
a warm ray of light to heal our hearts.
Pour upon us all your glorious light,
your radiance brings us to fullness of life.
We pray as one the fighting may cease,
and all may be blessed by the dawn of your peace.
We ask this through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.**

Rachel McCarthy/CAFOD

Love and peace,
Martin