

Dear friends,

The sun shone (mostly) and there was a chill wind on Sunday but overall, the conditions were well set for the “Famous East Budleigh scarecrow festival” over the weekend. This is an important time for the church because we raise around £7000 a year from this venture and draw thousands of visitors. It is extremely hard work, for which the church is extremely grateful for all the input from volunteers over many months. We drew crowds on both days from near and far and the village hall did a roaring trade in cream teas and bacon baps. One can't get around everything, so I trust that the dog show went well. All I know is that there was a steady stream of people to my front garden for the classic car exhibition and that each day I was unable to buy a duck for the two duck races because they had all sold out and there are 290 ducks in each race! (Well, I suppose no-one could accuse me of cheating as I started the things!). The grand finale was the “Scarecrow songs of praise” in church at 6pm. there was a lovely joyful atmosphere, after which it was time to sample the liquid delights of the Sir Walter Raleigh pub. Every year Louise and I walk around the village delivering thank you letters to everyone who put anything up in their garden. We thought there may have been fewer this year but actually there were about the same – 100 last year and 94 this year – so community engagement is very high.

The highlight of my weekend came though as I was bringing in the seat cushions from the patio and in the twilight a huge hedgehog shuffled across the lawn and disappeared into the bamboo jungle. It is the first hedgehog I can remember seeing for years, perhaps decades, and that few second thrill knocked everything else into a cocked hat.

Sunday 16th June – Trinity 3 – Proper 6.

Archdeacon Trevor Jones is presiding at both services at St. Peter's, and I will be presiding at All Saints and St. Michael's at 9.30am and 11.00am respectively.

Ezekiel 17: 22-24. These couple of verses are the sequel to an elaborate allegory about the fate of certain Judean kings. In these two verses particularly, the cedar top represents the house of David that will be planted (restored) in Israel that will have universal significance. In verse 24, the omnipotence of God reverses human estimates of rank success and failure. Taken together they are a message of hope re-written in post-exilic Israel.

2 Corinthians 5: 6-10 (11-13), 14-17. Paul wants to articulate the difference between how things look (to the non-Christian) to how things really are (The Christian) because nothing is the way it seems. The gospel is hidden yet transparent, the apostles seem close to death but bear life within them. Christians seem at home in their bodies, but their real home is with the Lord. Christians judge people not on outward appearances but on the inside of a person. Christians see things differently, and none more so than Jesus Christ himself who they once saw from a worldly point of view (a common criminal or a fool) but now their Lord and saviour.

Mark 4: 26-34. Two parables about how the kingdom grows almost imperceptibly despite all our best efforts to try and understand how. Human beings like to have

neat boxes of cause and effect – you do this and this happens (witness every failed church growth programme ever). The kingdom grows mysteriously. Just sow the seeds and God does the rest. Lots of growth is ephemeral and transient but true long-lasting growth comes from God alone.

Thought for the Day

Da da da da da da da – Da da da da da da da da da -Batman! Sang a few children as they came across our “batman in a tree” display as they toured the village looking for scarecrows. It was lovely to see families of all shapes and sizes coming together to enjoy the two days of the scarecrow festival in East Budleigh. There was Rishi Sunak and Kier Starmer squaring up in a boxing match, Barbie, a ChatGPT computer wanting to design one for you, a cyclist who’d crashed into a hedge and a man on a stepladder looking over the fence into a nudist colony to name just a few. There was no edge, no problems (the worst incident happened when a little girl mislaid her insulin pump which made for a nervy time until it appeared after being handed in at the pub), a good friendly carefree atmosphere so for a while at least you could imagine that all the troubles of the world had melted away and here we were in this picture postcard Devon village doing traditional homespun things and enjoying ourselves. I didn’t even see much mobile phone use – except to take pictures. We had my old friend Simon with us which made me very happy. Our favourite Peruvian who grew up in Jamaica, knew Bob Marley, swam for Jamaica in the Commonwealth games, was the second white man to visit the only remaining Buddhist monastery in the Russian far East during Glasnost, managed to get some legislation on the books of the EU a few years ago, but most importantly just a good friend whose sharp, inquiring mind enlivened me for the day he spent with us. He was correctly (I think) described as “enigmatic” by someone else who interacted with him during the day, and he wanted to attend worship at St. Peter’s that morning with us. It was a lovely service which he said he really appreciated which as coming from an avowed Buddhist I think St. Peter’s can take as high praise! I am at the moment a very happy man -which as I wrote recently, I know cannot last – but we have to cherish these moments when they come because they make life all the richer.

The Prayer for Today in contrast to the general tone of this email acknowledges that suffering and mourning walk hand in hand with us all and this is a prayer for all those who are mourning by Vienna Cobb Anderson.

“Bless those who mourn, eternal God, with the comfort of your love that they may face each new day with hope and the certainty that nothing can destroy the good that has been given. May their memories become joyful, their days enriched with friendship, and their lives encircled by your love.”

(Vienna Cobb Anderson)

Love and peace,
Martin