

Dear friends,

**Thank you** to all the people who attended and brought food and drink to the annual vicarage party on Saturday. We have been plagued by rain for years but on Saturday the Sun shone - a bit too brightly for some who stayed indoors – and I hope was enjoyed by everyone.

**On Sunday morning** I was in the villages where there were about equal numbers in each church. Of course, being at All Saints and St. Michael's means that means that I get to sing eight hymns on a Sunday morning. If I'm lucky they will all be different ones but not always. Unlike St. Peter's where I choose all the hymns, hymns at All Saints are chosen by the organist and at St. Michael's by John Archibald.

**We very much enjoyed** Last night at Otterton's "Summer Supper", which is always well attended, a good way for church and community to mix, and a good earner to boot!

**Note:** There will be no email next week as we are on holiday.

**Sunday 17th August – Trinity 9 – Proper 15**

This Sunday I will be presiding at both services at St. Peter's and Archdeacon Trevor Jones will preside at All Saints and St. Michael's at 9.30 and 11am respectively.

**Jeremiah 23: 23 – 29.** This reading starts by affirming that God is everywhere and no one can hide from Him and all our deceits and lies and embellishments might fool a few people but not Him. God then launches into an attack on the false prophets who preach their own dreams for their own reasons but have no real insight into the word of God. Be on your guard – not all who prophesy are true prophets which is why we are to test the prophets and exercise discernment.

**Hebrews 11: 29 – 12: 2.** A stroll through Jewish history and lauding the faith in God of different characters that has sustained them even through many and various persecutions. All that faith was shown even though they lived and died before Jesus – the perfecter of that faith. We are the lucky ones who know "the way the truth and the life". They didn't but demonstrated enormous trust in God and his mercy so they now surround us as a great cloud of witnesses as a communion of Saints that we affirm every Sunday in the Nicene creed.

**Luke 12: 49-56.** Jesus rightly predicts that his coming and preaching love and peace will paradoxically produce much division, pain and ruptures in family life. This is painfully true in all families where believers and non-believers co-exist. In a separate piece he notes that people are adept in interpreting the weather by reading the signs in nature but are far less able to interpret the spiritual importance of Jesus to their lives.

## Thought for the Day

The most poignant encounter I had last week was in a funeral planning meeting. So far, nothing unusual in that, but the person whose funeral we were planning was sitting right in front of me. Paul is dying from brain cancer, and the drugs have been removed and it is only a matter of time before the inevitable happens. His bravery and presence of mind in getting his house in order was a lesson to me. He finally married Sarah after six years and a child and wanted to meet the person who would be conducting the funeral and have a direct input in its planning. Although used to death, both personally and professionally, the meeting has had quite an effect on me.

You can't help but wonder that if that were me, would I show such acceptance and composure? After all, a belief in heaven doesn't entirely dispel a fear of death. Accepting your own mortality is understandably something we push to the margins of our consciousness. You also discover that you love this physical existence quite a lot and are not ready for the alternative.

Life is a gift and nothing that happens to us can change that. Even life changing disability, pain, loss, poverty or social exclusion cannot change that. We have no control over what happens to us but we do have control over how we react to them. Taking everything that life throws at us and still thanking God for the gift of life takes an act of will that has to walk hand in hand with God's spirit and is helped by a sober assessment of God's nature, his will and his purposes. The mainstream media delights in constantly telling us that everything is doom, decay, war, poverty, injustice – its enough to wear anyone down – but when you feel like that and everything seems like the darkness is descending just look outside at a tree, the sea, a flower or any wildlife and know that intrinsically life is profuse and life is good. "To see a world in a grain of sand. And a heaven in a wildflower. Hold infinity in the palm of your hand. And eternity in an hour." (William Blake) and all life, including your life is good, unique and extraordinary just as God intended. God sent his son Jesus Christ to bless and redeem all humanity.

**The Prayer for the Day:** The following prayer is from the Sufi mystical tradition, a branch of Islam (influenced by Christians so it has been claimed). It believes in the unity of all things, loving God and serving others. As a Christian, it reminds me of the God who is all in all (Paul in 1 Corinthians)

**Beloved Lord, Almighty God, Through the rays of the Sun, Through the waves of the air, through the all-pervading life in space, Purify and revivify me, and, I pray, Heal my body, heart and soul. Amen.**

Love and peace,

Martin