

Dear friends,

The weekend got off to a great start with the Fish 'n' chip supper in the Peter Hall. Modesty forbids that I say which team won the annual quiz but a great time was had by all and special thanks go to Tony for putting together the quiz every year and to Fran for organising the food and everyone who helped.

**There's** never a good time for one's back to give way but it was unfortunate that it was one of the busier Sundays that it got pretty bad, but with careful nurture during the three morning services it held out and it was great to preside at Choral Evensong in St. Peter's where we were joined by the choir of St. Swithin's Woodbury . The joint service drew 83 people in total which must be some kind of record for an Evening service since I have been here.

### **Ash Wednesday**

The RMC Ash Wednesday service is today at St. Peter's at 9.30 am in the Lady Chapel. Ash is traditionally applied at the confession stage in the service and is a reminder of our mortality. (Ashing is entirely optional of course). I use the immortal words "From ash you came and to ash you shall return. Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ".

### **Dinner Club at the Holt (The new cricket pavilion)**

On the 22nd February we have our first Dinner club for 2024 and the first one for a long time. The Holt is very new, extremely well kitted out and plenty of parking and has a great aspect. 6.30 for a 7pm start and £25 per ticket. You will be greeted with a glass of fizz or orange juice, have a hot buffet style 2-course dinner followed by coffee. Be quick as we need final numbers by the 16th Feb!

### **Come and see!**

The Lent course this year will be the Exeter Diocesan course called "Come and see". The dates will be Feb. 28th, March 6th, 13th, 20th and 27th in the Peter Hall at 5pm.(Not 7pm as I previously stated)

### **Sunday 18th February – 1st of Lent**

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

**Genesis 9: 8-17.** According to this ancient tale, the rainbow is a sign from God that he loves all that he has made, and will never again attempt to

destroy to world. As a side issue it has always amused me that God's attempt at genocide (save for a few special people) in the story of Noah's ark is always presented as a cosy story to children, where if it is accepted as a fact it involved the mass drowning of millions!

**1 Peter 3: 18-22.** A very interesting piece theologically because it says that the redemption of Christ works backwards as well as forwards. Everyone who may have been killed in the aforementioned flood are also covered by the cross as Jesus Christ went back in time to preach to them. A favourite Eastern icon of mine has Jesus standing over the gates of hell on a cross helping Adam (representing all mankind) out of hell to salvation.

**Mark 1: 9-15.** 40 is a symbolic number in the Bible. (The Jewish people wandering for 40 years in the wilderness, raining for 40 days and 40 nights in Noah's flood, Jesus spending 40 days in the wilderness and many others). It basically means "a long time". Many people miss the fact that it was the Spirit of God that drove Jesus into the wilderness. It was a period of discerning the meaning of being God's son and what was to be the defining characteristics of his witness and ministry. Originally it had no connection to Lent – it was a period of time where new Christians would prepare for baptism at Easter, which was eventually expanded to include the whole church in the enterprise.

### Thought for Today

Talking about symbolic numbers leads me to talk more generally about Hebrew numerology in the Bible. As with forty occurring many times (Jesus in the wilderness, Jewish people in the wilderness, the rain for the flood lasting forty days etc.) you will have noticed many other numbers occurring time and time again. Seven represented perfection or completeness in the Bible. Why – because it was the number of God (Three) added to the number for the world (Four) God and the world together is utter completeness. Therefore, six came to represent incompleteness as in "there were six stone water jars" at the wedding feast in Cana. The six stone jars used for ritual washing represent the incompleteness of the Jewish law that Jesus transforms into rich wine. Many things in the New Testament echo the Old Testament such as it is not an accident that there are twelve disciples because that is a direct mirroring of the twelve tribes of Israel in Genesis. What this is telling us is that Jesus is the well-spring of the "New Israel". Often numbers are used to disguise what they are really referring to as in 666 being the number of the beast in revelation. This is a coded reference to the name of Emperor Nero. We know this because we have a cross reference because in some

other manuscripts the number is 636 which corresponds to a different spelling of Nero's name. As with so much in the bible, both new and old, very little is entirely random. It is full of hidden meanings and pointers. Symbolism is huge so that water represents all the chaos in the world (Jesus and Peter walking on the water) which mirrors the creation of the world itself where God's spirit "hovered over the waters" to bring order out of chaos at the very start of the Bible. This just scratches the surface of the hidden depths hiding in plain sight in the text of this collection of 66 books collected together in one place which many people still think of as one book. A myriad of different authors writing in different genres, writing in different languages from differing perspectives, the Bible is both a gold mine and a mine field for the unsuspecting. Handle with care!

**The Prayer for Today** is by the 14th century mystic Julian of Norwich, the first woman author writing in English that we know of.

**God, of thy goodness, give me thyself,  
For thou art sufficient for me.  
I may not ask for anything less  
Than what befits my full worship of thee.  
If I were to ask for anything less I should always be in want  
For in thee alone do I have all.**

Love and peace,  
Martin