

Dear friends,

We watched Frank Skinner at the Theatre on Friday night in the heart of the West End. We never usually go to comedy nights, but this was a real tonic. He was magnificent from the moment he bounded on stage to the finish – about One and three quarter hours later. It is so good to just laugh – and I know they say that laughter is the best medicine – but now I think I can see why. He referred to himself as the “once famous comedian” and there can be few comics who can unselfconsciously introduce two jokes as “in Mass on Sunday”. You have to be a bit broad minded to attend though he is not as blue as he used to be – a real tonic.

A coffee by the Serpentine, followed by a picnic in Green Park on Saturday was just the ticket with Matthew, one of Louise’s brothers and his family. And then back to Devon on the four O’clock train. A change is as good as a rest!

Sunday had a few hiccoughs and started with me realising that my sermon I’d spent hours over had been left at home a few minutes before the service so I had to extemporise. It went rather well, which set me at ease – too much at ease – and we ended up being late for the Otterton service. The atmosphere at All Saints was excellent and a bit emotional as we said goodbye to Stuart and Janet Lovett, stalwarts of the church who are moving to Lee on Solent to be nearer their family. We presented a parting gift including a little bell necklace for Janet from the handbell team.

Sunday 18th August – Trinity 12 – Proper 15

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 9.30am and 11.00am respectively.

Proverbs 9: 1-6. Lady Wisdom invites people to partake of her knowledge and insight that will lead people to God’s law. This is in sharp contrast to being lured by the prostitutes (earlier in Proverbs) which can also be interpreted as referring to other religions which utilised actual temple prostitutes. Partaking of this rich banquet of food and wine (translated as bread in the NRSV – the Hebrew is uncertain) will lead to real long-lasting satisfaction rather than anything transient and insubstantial.

Ephesians 5: 15-20. Paul advises the recipients of his letter to seek real wisdom. When reading about this passage a book said that “it would be hard to urge, in most cases, the congregation to eschew drunkenness in favour of surrendering to the Spirit” which made me smile. An unremarkable piece that nevertheless urges us to make the most of our time.

John 6: 51-58. These words caused a stir then, as they still do now. When John was writing, the recipients were familiar with the term “body” but here the word “flesh” is used. John has already used the term in his gospel saying that “the word became flesh” so flesh is the physical reality of Jesus and eating his flesh is communion with the physical reality of Jesus. This chimes with my view that Jesus body and blood symbolise all created reality, but enough of that later.

Thought for the Day

Religion is a serious business and so are the objects of veneration or indeed worship. Mohammed, Buddha, Jesus are virtually never depicted having a good laugh. But laughter is intrinsically human, and Jesus was fully human after all so not being able to see the funny side of things would have been

extremely odd. We all love laughter, and we laugh at different things but there is obviously a time and a place for it - so it doesn't demean or tarnish the seriousness of things. That is different from keeping things "light". There is an overbearing fussiness that can diminish the worship experience as well as not taking things seriously enough. I try and present tradition with a light touch. That doesn't mean taking things too lightly, but it does mean being relaxed about inevitable gaffes and mistakes and recognising absurdities but also means showing utmost respect and gravitas at certain points when these are called for. There is also a difference between laughter and Joy. If laughter is on the surface, then Joy is deep seated and fuels our outlook on life and its inevitable disappointments. You can usually tell if someone is full of Joy by their attitude to people and their patience with setbacks. It is this deep-seated Joy that we are aiming for – a joy that results from knowing you are saved and healed and that in the end – all shall be well. But I like a good belly laugh too!

The Prayer for Today is a prayer attributed to the great artist and sculptor Michaelangelo.

Lord, make me see thy Glory in every place.

Love and peace,

Martin