

Dear friends,

Monkeys aren't normally an everyday hazard in the West country but both our first destinations on our sabbatical so far have identified them as a threat to our property. If I had any thought that they might be joking, I was innocently sitting on our balcony in our rainforest chalet when two large, long-tailed macaques appeared on the hand rail inches from my head and stared at me and another scampered up the chalet supports in a kind of pincer movement. They are quite large and menacing up close and we had been warned not to make eye contact and I beat a hasty retreat indoors and locked the sliding door behind me as apparently they are expert at pulling them open.

**Twenty-six** hours travelling, over 6,000 miles, three flights and our first stop is Langkawi, a tropical island in the Andaman sea, just for 5 days to unwind. While we are here we decided to attend mass at the Catholic church in the capital Kuah – a 45 minutes taxi ride away. The service was in English, the priest Chinese, and most of the congregation appeared to be Indian. All visitors were asked to stand at the end and receive a round of applause which felt quite special. It is about 31 degrees here every day and the Andaman sea is so warm. I heard via a news App that it was snowing in England with ice and power cuts so feeling very blessed to be here.

**Next stop** we flew to Kuala Lumpur (KL) and got a taxi to an Ignatian house of prayer in the Jungle miles from anywhere. Up here in the hills the temperature is a bit cooler – about 24 or 25 degrees and it rained an awful lot, but we are here for a silent Ignatian retreat. Lillian, our retreat director, a lovely Chinese lady, is very helpful and insightful and spiritual. Both Louise and I feel that we haven't really prayed like this in a long time and are getting an awful lot out of this experience. The retreat centre is called maranatha which is Aramaic for "come Lord Jesus".

**Time** to leave and get a taxi back to KL for the next step on our Journey. We arrive in this bustling Metropolis and are staying in a part of the city called Bukit Bintang, We are on the 32nd floor of a skyscraper and outside our window we have the Merdeka tower (a couple of pics above and below from our window), apparently the second tallest building in the world. Today Louise is giving a presentation to the university of Malaya which her friend and former work colleague Maw Pin Tan, a Chinese Malaysian has organised. We get picked up at noon for the next experience!

**Spiritually** we are reading a chapter of Paul's letter every day, writing a daily journal and then praying the Examen (an Ignatian prayer technique). We have already visited the Anglican Cathedral St. Mary's which is in the dead centre of the city next to the parliament building (a legacy of Empire). I have a meeting with the dean on Sunday. They conduct services in English, Chinese, Tamil, Nepali and Malay. After careful consideration we elected to attend one of the two English services which are both at 11am on Sunday – one traditional and one contemporary. Our friend attends the contemporary one so I suppose that is where we'll end up at first and then we can attend the traditional one after that.

**Malaysia** is multi-cultural and multi religious and there is quite a stark racial divide in who attends what religion. The Indians are mainly Hindu, the Chinese are either

Buddhist or Christian and the Malays (most of the population) are Muslim. Alcohol is hard to get here so is no bad thing for us (I know we drink too much) and there is a green arrow on our ceiling indicating the direction of Meccah. In my spiritual reading I have now read over half of the Koran and dabbled quite extensively into various Buddhist Sutras (Which are basically aphorisms). At the retreat centre it seemed disrespectful not to read the Bible of course but a new way of reading it was promoted to us called Lectio Divina. This is a slow meditative reading and absorbing of scripture waiting for a particular word or phrase to resonate with you and asking God to speak to you through those words. So not bible “study” seeking to find out the meaning of a text with which I am very familiar, but a spiritual absorption of the text treating scripture as spirit inspired and able to speak to us today and personally.

**The Prayer for Today** is going to be the same one I’ll be using throughout my Sabbatical which we read every day – the Jewish Traveller’s Prayer.

**May the God who called our Father Abraham  
To journey into the unknown,  
And guarded him and blessed him,  
Protect me too and bless my journey.  
May his confidence support me as I set out,  
May his spirit be with me on the way,  
And may he lead me back to my home in peace.  
Those I love I commend to his care.  
He is with them, I shall not fear.  
As for myself,  
May his presence be my companion,  
So that blessing may come to me  
And to everyone I meet.  
Blessed are you Lord  
Whose presence travels with his people.**

Love and Prayers,  
Martin