

Dear friends,

Two weeks since I returned from Asia, and it is harder to fit back in as seamlessly to life in England as I thought – it takes time. I want to thank of course everybody who stepped up while I was away, both in church and at our home which has never looked better.

I have a de-brief at the Diocese booked and I am sorting out a suitable evening to present our sabbatical at St. Peter's church. We have booked **St. Peter's church for Saturday 17th May at 6pm**. Mandy will then supply a buffet in the Peter Hall afterwards

On Sunday I was in the villages for Palm Sunday, two services that went very well. I was a bit late getting to St. Michael's and the Palm Sunday procession had already started but I managed to join it halfway up the hill (and all the lights fused in St. Michael's church for some reason!) – C'est la vie. In the Evening we went to Sidmouth parish church as our choir and theirs were jointly presenting "Stainer's crucifixion". It was a lovely and uplifting occasion.

Holy week.

There is compline every evening from Monday to Wednesday at 7pm in St. Peter's – a short contemplative service – that lasts only 10 or 15 minutes. Of course, as this goes out on Wednesday, that is almost over.

Maundy Thursday at 7pm at St. Peter's there is a Eucharist with the washing of feet.

Good Friday has St. Michael's hosting "the cross of Christ" at Midday and at 3pm in St. Peter's we have "Good Friday reflections".

Easter Sunday starts on Budleigh beach (at the prayer cairn). We gather at 5.45am for a sunrise Eucharist hosted by the Methodists. Then each church has its own usual Sunday service.

Sunday 20th April – Easter Sunday

I will be presiding at St. Peter's at both morning services and Reverend Jean Burrows will preside at All Saints and St. Michael's at 9.30 and 11am respectively.

Acts 10:34-43. Peter starts by stating that God shows no partiality to one "nation" or another, with their different cultures and beliefs – He is Lord of all people. He spoke through the Jewish people by Jesus Christ preaching peace to all. Then there follows a thumbnail sketch of his life, death and resurrection. Witnesses to these events were chosen by God and Peter, amongst them, to witness to the world about God's wonderful message of peace and salvation.

1 Corinthians 15: 19-26. For universalists like me (a Doctrine that traces its roots back to the Bible and most prominently to the 3rd century theologian, Origen), this is a wonderful passage for it states that ALL people are raised in Christ. “For as all die in Adam, so in Christ all are made alive”. The enemies of Christ are the powers and principalities that dictate how we function and the last of these is death. Christ of course, through his resurrection has dominion over death.

John 20: 1-18 or **Luke 24: 1-12** (President’s choice). I always choose John for Easter Sunday because I just love the little cameo between Christ and Mary Magdalene. She, not recognising Christ at first in his altered state, comes to full recognition when he speaks her name to her. Spiritually, I suspect that full faith doesn’t come to anyone until they “hear” their name spoken in their heart and know that God’s truth is their truth.

Thought for the Day

I suppose I came to a fresh understanding and appreciation of Holiness when I was away. Whatever Holy may mean to people it carries with it the sense of separateness – being kept apart for God – insulated slightly from the world. The idea is to evoke a sense that you are entering a “different” space where different rules apply.

I was asked recently why people must usually take off their shoes to enter a mosque or Buddhist or Hindu Temple. And it is for that same reason, to symbolically insulate a Holy place from being contaminated by the dust and grit (spiritually and physically) of the world. The request for women (and men to dress respectfully) to cover up in various different ways is a similar cultural need to keep worldly attraction and sexuality at arm’s length. Men, entering a Buddhist temple in Sri Lanka will be given a sarong to cover their legs if they are wearing shorts. Of course there are contradictions. In a Hindu temple, a woman may be asked to cover her shoulders and legs or sometimes hair – and then once you are inside you are confronted with huge sexualised bare breasted voluptuous figures, but the central premise still holds. This is why it vexes people so much when in order to raise money, a cathedral will hold a “rave in the nave” for example. They might not be able to articulate why they feel the way they do, but it just feels and looks wrong. Hand and feet washing is another way that particularly Muslims and Sikhs express their desire to keep things “Holy”. At the Sikh temple in Chennai for example there are taps and sinks outside and you walk in barefoot through a shallow pool of water. These are very human desires that transcend cultures. I know that in the Bible, the curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom, symbolising the breaking down of the barriers between people and God. I interpret that as meaning that the curtain is in every human heart but the idea of a place being hallowed ground – separate from everyday human use is still very strong in people and the “consecration” of either things or elements is Christianity has been a fact of life since time immemorial.

The Prayer for Today is a simple and succinct Easter prayer written by Pope Francis in 2020

Today, as pilgrims in search of hope, we cling to you, Risen Jesus. We turn our backs on death and open our hearts to you, for you are Life itself.

Love and peace,
Martin