

Dear friends,

Friday and Saturday were heavy travelling days up and down the West coast line to Lancaster, negotiating delays and cancellations along the way. Happily, Andrew, who in hospital there, was pleased to see us and a very fruitful visit ensued. The nurses managed to transfer him to a wheelchair, and we managed to push him (on his first trip out of the hospital) to the pub where we were staying where he enjoyed a latte and a cup of tea. It all seemed too easy, and it was, and I realised that the trip back to hospital was all uphill! - well, I needed the exercise anyway.

Sunday was an early start for the 8 O'clock BCP communion and The Ten O'clock was lightened by us singing "happy birthday" to Sue Lowe who provided lovely cakes for us all afterwards at coffee. Choral Evensong was superb as usual with the lighter nights drawing more people to the service, but afterwards the weekend's schedule caught up with me and I felt spent. Time for bed said Zebedee.

Sunday 21st April -4th of Easter

Reverend Jean Burrows will preside at both services at St. Peter's (Jean is celebrating 30 years of ordination!) and I will preside at All Saints and St. Michael's at 9.30am and 11am respectively.

Acts 4: 5-12. The name of Jesus saved (healed) a crippled man and now, like Jesus before them, the disciples are in trouble with the Jewish authorities who effectively ran the Temple and country on behalf of the Romans. Jesus' name is Joshua of course (Jesus is the Greek translation of his Hebrew name). Joshua literally means "God saves". Many interpret the final verse as indicating the uniqueness of Christianity so we cannot compromise or work with other religions. Others will note the context in which it occurs and say that Luke cannot have foreseen the bewildering plurality of beliefs in the world. However, the uniqueness of Luke's doctrine, if taken at face value, cannot overrule the universality of God's creative love made manifest in Jesus Christ.

1 John 3: 16-24. How the commandment to "love one another" played out in reality is an open question (John's first letter is to one half of a church that had split in half) but the lesson we have in front of us is a call to personal integrity where what we do corresponds with what we say. This of course, short of giving all our money and possessions to the poor potentially makes liars and hypocrites of us all. An open and non-judgmental Generosity is what most Christians aim for. Again, believing in the "name" of Jesus is mentioned as the most important commandment and when this happens, we enjoy a mutual indwelling in God by the Spirit of Jesus.

John 10: 11-18. One of the famous "I am" sayings. The double meaning is that "I am" is the name of God given to Moses when he asks God who he is. (Exodus 3:14). Jesus is alluding to both himself and God being the Good Shepherd, who lays his life down for the sheep which includes the current believers and others (v16) who don't currently belong as well indicating that they will ultimately be one flock. Jesus is the sacrificial lamb for all of humanity.

Music at St. Peter's

Two things to look out for this April.

First is the Spring concert on Saturday 20th April with the Exeter Temple Salvation Army Band and Songsters starting at 6.30pm. Admission is £10 and all proceeds go towards the upkeep of St. Peter's church.

Also we have a series of Sunday music concerts starting at 6pm hence the title "Sundays at six". These concerts get under way on Sunday 28th April when we will be treated to a recital by Jean-Rene Andre the organist from Rennes cathedral in Brittany, France.

Thought for the day.

Sunday marked a step change in the situation in the Middle East when Iran attacked Israel directly for the first time. Hitherto, they only did so through their proxies whether that be Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon or the Houthis in Yemen. It of course state policy for Iran that they want to see the annihilation of Israel (as it is for Hamas). I have largely stood back from the conflict publicly but whether we like it or not Britain is now directly involved because some of those Iranian missiles and drones were shot down by RAF jets. Perhaps the most surprising detail about what happened yesterday was that Jordan too shot many of them down – Israel and Jordan perhaps the unlikeliest of bedfellows. The wider context of this whole conflict is that Iran desperately wanted to stop Saudi Arabia signing a peace accord with Israel, which is why they goaded Hamas to start the war on October 7th last year – to stop that process in its tracks. Whatever various politicians say from various countries, this is shaping up into a larger Sunni/Shia conflict with Israel uncomfortably allied with the Sunni states alongside Britain and the USA. It is all very uncomfortable for all of us. No-one wishes for tension, anxiety, and war but often these things are unavoidable whether we want them or not. My analogy is with serious illness like a stroke or a heart attack or cancer. No-one wishes for them either, but they do just happen, and we have no control over it. The only control we have is over how we react. How we will react to the gathering storm in the Middle East is well above my pay grade but that doesn't stop us praying for peace in a turbulent world. There will be I'm certain an awful lot more bloodshed before any peace accord takes place and the conflict might last years or decades, but in the end, we must keep faith that in the end...all will be well. We have to keep that faith. Nothing will happen quickly and there may be an awful lot more heartache for an awful lot of people in the meantime but keep faith we must that in the end...all shall be well.

Prayer for Today. I have spliced two sayings of Mother Julian together to make one prayer.

"If there is anywhere on earth a lover of God who is always kept safe, I know nothing of it, for it was not shown to me. But this was shown: that in falling and rising again we are always kept in that same precious love."

"And all shall be well. And all shall be well. And all manner of things shall be exceeding well."

Love and peace,
Martin