

Dear friends,

We have now got rid of 17 boxes of books, 7 to Book aid (a Christian charity) and 10 to a doorstep collection agency. We still have a lot of books however (!), many that will travel with us to our new home, and we envisage at least four or five boxes of books to a collection agency to come. This is on top of ten trips to the tip with more to follow after we return from India.

Note: There will be radio silence from me for three weeks while we are away. The next “soul food” will arrive on the 18th March. Then I can tell you all about my “exit interview” with the Archdeacon! – exciting stuff.

This email is being sent out on Ash Wednesday, so later I’ll be administering Ash on people’s foreheads (if so desired) with those haunting words. “From dust you came and to dust you shall return. Turn away from sin and be faithful to Christ”.

Lent originally had nothing to do with Christ fasting in the wilderness. It was a period of reflection and prayer and instruction for those preparing to be baptised on Easter Sunday. The church saw that this could be usefully extended to include all Christians. This could include giving things up or taking things on. I like to see the de-cluttering of our possessions at the moment as a Lenten act.

Sunday 22nd February – 1st Sunday of Lent.

Archdeacon Trevor Jones will preside at both services at St. Peter’s and Reverend Jean Burrows will preside at All Saints and St. Michael’s at 9.30am and 11am respectively.

Genesis 2: 15-17; 3: 1-7. What would be best for humankind? Everlasting life without knowledge of good and evil or limited life with this knowledge? Both have advantages and disadvantages which is why this passage has sometimes been seen as a “fall upwards” – a necessary stage of human development. While we may be like God in knowing good and evil of course it doesn’t mean we can cope with the consequences – in fact the immediate effect of this knowledge is to create enmity between the man and woman and lead to such wrongdoing that God eventually decides to destroy the world with a universal flood.

Romans 5: 12-19. Paul contrasts the Genesis story which describes sin being brought into the world by one man – Adam – with the salvation for all mankind available through one man – Jesus Christ. Justification can be described as “Just as if I’d never sinned” and this is reckoned to us as righteousness (right in the eyes of God) through the forgiveness of our sins..

Matthew 4: 1-11. It is the Holy Spirit who leads Jesus into the wilderness (directly after his baptism and anointing with that same Spirit). There he is tempted to rebel against God as Adam had done in the beginning. Jesus answers each of the three temptations with a

quote from Deuteronomy, using the word of God against the tempter. Thus, He retains his integrity and remains sinless.

Thought for the Day

“Forty days and forty nights” is part of the symbolic language of the Bible. Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights. In the great flood it rained for forty days and forty nights. Moses was on Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights. Elijah’s journey to Horeb (Sinai) took forty days and forty nights. So you see that it is a passage of time in which trials and testing take place. It could be seen as just being a very long and arduous time. In the same way, Adam and Eve can be understood as archetypes of humanity. Adam in Hebrew is related to the word for soil or earth while Eve is related to the word for Life. Put the two together and you have ordinary matter which is spirit filled. The story of mankind’s fall from Grace is the Biblical way of explaining how moral corruption and evil came into the world. In the creation story that we heard in church last week everything was created good and mankind was very good, so how do we account for moral evil? Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden is a beautiful and deep account of how sinfulness came to be such a part of the world. Eve taking the fruit from the tree became immortalised in Christian art as an Apple, but it is never described as being an apple. It may have been more likely to be a Pomegranate but that is by the by. Sin (hamartia – missing the mark) came into the world by disobeying God and because it permeates the entire human race it is known as original sin. What Christians recognise in Jesus is that his sacrifice on the cross reverses the effect of original sin and bestows on us the hope of universal salvation.

The Prayer for Today is by Clement of Alexandria, a luminary of the Eastern church. One of his tracts I seem to remember was in one of the first Bibles ever made (Codex Sinaiticus) but then dropped out of the canon but I stand to be corrected – it’s my age you know! In any case, it is a beautiful prayer.

O God, you are the unsearchable abyss of peace,

The ineffable sea of love,

And the fountain of blessings.

Water us with plenteous streams,

From the riches of your grace.

And from the most sweet springs of your kindness,

Make us children of quietness and heirs of peace.

Love and peace,

Martin