

Dear friends,

On Saturday we said farewell to a great servant of St. Peter's and a local sponsor of the annual music festival Sally Muddle, in a very moving ceremony. In another, completely unrelated incident involving the cover over the sink in the Lady chapel (!) on Sunday, I was temporarily lost in thought about Christopher Briscoe, also recently departed. Of course, given the demographics of our area, this is a completely normal state of affairs to say goodbye quite frequently to well-loved figures and as I have said before, by all logic St. Peter's should be in deep decline, but it isn't. There is a constant turnover and new people keep arriving, month after month and year after year. In a good humoured and very well attended service, followed by a large and quite raucous (for Budleigh!) coffee time it is clear that we are in very good heart.

Dinner Club at the Holt (The new cricket pavilion) on Thursday

On the 22nd February we have our first Dinner club for 2024 and the first one for a long time. The Holt is very new, extremely well kitted out and plenty of parking and has a great aspect. 6.30 for a 7pm start and £25 per ticket. You will be greeted with a glass of fizz or orange juice, have a hot buffet style 2-course dinner followed by coffee. We are looking forward to it.

Come and see!

The RMC Lent course this year will be the Exeter Diocesan course called "Come and see" starting next week. The dates will be on Wednesdays - Feb. 28th, March 6th, 13th, 20th and 27th in the Peter Hall at 5pm. (Not 7pm as I previously stated). While it is not strictly necessary to bring anything, a Bible will be good for reference, as well as an open, honest and enquiring mind.

Sunday 25th February – 2nd of Lent

Reverend Colin Randall will preside at both services at St. Peter's, and I will be presiding at All saints and St. Michael's at 9.30am and 11am respectively.

Genesis 17: 1-7, 15-16. Names are very significant in the Bible and here we have two changes. Abram means "Exalted Father" and here God decrees that his name will henceforth be Abraham with means "Father of many" because he is the progenitor of the Jewish (and Arab) people and the spiritual Father of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Sarai his wife is now to called Sarah. This change is more subtle as Sarai already means Lady or princess but Sarah, according to what God says means "mother

of nations” as her son Isaac become the ancestor of the Jews. The son Ishmael, born to Abram and Hagar her maidservant (initially with Sarah’s blessing) is traditionally the Father of the Arab people.

Romans 4: 13-25. Paul uses the example of Abraham to declare that Grace always preceded law because Abraham preceded Moses and the ten commandments by many generations. In Genesis 15: 6 God declared Abraham “righteous” because he believed God – and not because he had followed the law but simply because he had faith. Faith is the original model of relating to God to be seen as righteous in his eyes, argues Paul, and the law was a temporary imposition because of the extreme recalcitrance of the Jewish people.

Mark 8: 31-38. Jesus plainly and openly prepares his disciples for the difficult path ahead, which will lead to Jesus’ own death. This appals Peter who tries to get Jesus to change his plans. For his trouble, Jesus accuses Peter of being an agent of Satan for attempting to thwart God’s will and purposes. He then exhorts the crowd to take courage and follow the same path, possibly even to their own deaths. To “take up your cross” is referring to the Roman punishment of crucifixion, a cruel and unusual punishment reserved for anyone who dared to challenge the Roman state.

Thought for Today

After talking about numbers last week, words also in the Bible have real and poignant resonances, particularly the suffix “el” which means “God”, as in Michael (Gift from God), Gabriel (God is my strength), Raphael (God has healed). The most thought provoking meaning for me though is that the name of the people “Israel” means “struggle with God.”

Originally it was the name of Jacob who literally wrestled with God all night and in the morning God re-named him Israel and title that subsequently became the name of the entire chosen people. One of the strengths of the Bible is the sheer divergence of opinion and points of view that often conflict with each other and sometimes complement. Having started Lent with acknowledging our complete reliance on God leading to our proper humility before his omnipotence, we have this pivotal foundation story talking not about humility but actively challenging God. It is after wrestling with God that God blesses Jacob and changes his name.

Can we not show humility and also challenge? Of course we can but what if no adequate answer is forthcoming? For God to be God, his ways are mysterious and his ways are not our ways, and his thoughts are not our thoughts as Isaiah says. We cannot possibly comprehend the ins and outs of our lives and current events, so honest questioning of God, his ways, even his nature is quite natural. Many things we cannot explain and glib

explanations for “pain, bone cancer, genocide, war etc.” cannot possibly satisfy our grasping inquiring minds. Admitting that we just don’t know is seen as a defeat, so we often make a good guess and proclaim that as truth. Admitting to ourselves that we’ll never really know the answer to so many myriad complex situations and submitting to the mystery of Christ is the surest way to find peace in this world that I know.

The Prayer for Today is one of the best-known prayers by Reinhold Niebuhr and has become known as the serenity prayer.

“O God and Heavenly Father, grant to us the serenity of mind to accept that which cannot be changed, courage to change that which can be changed, and wisdom to know the one from the other through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.”

Love and peace,
Martin