

Dear Friends,

Grab taxis are wonderful – a bit like Uber in the west. It could be very energy sapping walking in this 31 degree heat and humidity so we go everywhere by taxi. Luckily it's very cheap. Eating is an adventure and we are enjoying choosing between Chinese, Thai, Malay, Indian and my personal favourite (so far) Vietnamese. There is a swimming pool on the 6th floor of our building so we periodically make use of that. After an initial splurge we now have just two meals a day and again because it is very cheap, we can afford to eat out every day.

Yesterday we went to the Islamic arts museum which was great – I do admire their clean geometric aesthetic - and then went to the butterfly park which to our surprise was amazing. Hundreds of different butterflies in a tropical setting with a collection of bugs, turtles, carp, beetles and snakes. The National butterfly of Malaysia is called the Rajah Brookes butterfly named after the guy who is buried on the edge of Dartmoor – we happened upon his memorial on one of our walks in Devon. The brass neck of a man who can leave Britain and set himself up as the rajah of Sarawak – they don't make them like him much anymore!

Thursday we went to the pool and then got a “grab” to Chinatown where had a superb lunch. The Thai coconut soup nearly blew our heads off so I found myself regretting ordering the “Spicy” chicken and rice. Thankfully when it came the Spice was in a separate bowl and could be added to taste.

We went to the main Hindu temple in KL, which incongruously is in the middle of China town. We had to pay to deposit our footwear at the entrance and Louise was deemed to be improperly dressed so we had to pay a little extra to hire a Sari to cover her shoulders and legs. After the Temple we visited a Chinese “Chan” clan temple which comprises Confucian ancestor worship and with a little bit of Taoism and Buddhism thrown in just to cover all the angles. It was lovely to see a couple of youngsters, a brother and sister (about eight or nine years old I'd guess) lighting incense sticks, bowing reverently towards the “altar” many times and planting their sticks in the bowl provided with their hands together in prayer. So much of religion is about “identity” and the comfort that an ancestral “Chan” meeting can give the wider Chinese Diaspora cannot be under-rated. I continue to pray in the Ignatian way every morning an evening keeping me grounded in my own tradition which counts me as a child of God in God's kingdom – for this in my identity.

We went to the Batu caves today, on the northern outskirts of the city, site of one of the biggest Hindu Temples in Malaysia, You climb hundreds of steps past the largest religious statue in the world of the god of war to several shrines at the top. If there was a competition for the most brightly coloured religion in the world, Hinduism would win hands down.

The bird park is again reputedly the largest in the world and we spent a wonderful couple of hours wandering around this superb inner-city space almost next door to the national mosque of Malaysia. It is a huge open prayer hall and we got accosted by a Mosque guide/Employee who told us there was only one religion – Islam and that Christianity was invented by St. Paul about 50 years after Jesus, perverting his

message to return to the one God – that basically Jesus was a prophet of Islam. He further assured us that we were living in the end times and Jesus would return within the next ten years. On more familiar ground we learnt that he had a daughter at Bristol University and had visited the UK and travelled to a few large cities.

Sunday we were picked up by our friend Maw Pin Tan and driven to St. Mary's cathedral where we attended the liturgical service because that is where the Dean, Andrew was presiding. The service took the form of a modern language BCP service with some common worship additions. It lasted 1 and 3/4 hours! The congregation was genuinely multi-racial, the preacher a youngish Chinese minister. It was pretty full of people so communion took ages. You could opt to take communion via a little container of wine with a wafer in the top (not our cup of tea) and communion in both kinds (by far the most popular method) where the communion chalice had a little spout which was poured into an individual cup that you held, which was quite novel – a hybrid system which meant you received from the common cup but individually. Before anyone gets any ideas both methods are un-canonical in the C of E! Evangelisation is against the law in Malaysia but church attendance is healthy. How they square that circle is beyond the scope of my competence. The church of Malaysia is part of the global South which does not ordain women or sanction same sex blessings, indeed takes nothing from the Western church any more apart from their heritage – traditional Anglicans and are therefore in impaired communion with the Church of England, so officially (I guess) wouldn't share communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury – mind you, currently neither would many English churches! As luck (or providence) would have it I wasn't the only priest from Exeter diocese in the congregation that day – there was a Vicar from near Totnes on holiday with his wife there as well, and they like us were being taken to lunch by our respective Chinese hosts. Maw pin and Chee (Her husband) and son Ewan took us to a traditional Chinese restaurant which reminded Maw Pin of the food she ate growing up – called "Straits Chinese" which is Chinese food from Malacca – a place we hope to get to on this Sabbatical. Her family have been in Malaysia for 700 years. The sermon was on Matthew 18: 15-20 on how conflict was to be resolved in the church congregation. We were reminded that the principal object of conflict resolution was to bring the other party back into the fold - redemption -and this was a communal effort if this could not be achieved in private and that the process had eternal consequences. What stuck in my mind from visiting the Mosque one day and the cathedral the next was just how "book bound" Islam and "Sola Scriptura" Protestant religions are – positions that I have, in Spirit, moved on from - supporting the idea of a magisterium working in tandem with the bible dictating church doctrine and practice. That of course raises the whole nature of authority in the church – a can of worms that I don't want to open at present.

In the name of Allah, the compassionate, the Merciful – I have finished reading the Koran from cover to cover - Hurrah. All I can say is that it is extremely dualistic and bombastic and was obviously written in a very pagan and idolatrous time in Arabia in the 7th century so is a powerful corrective to the climate of the times that Muhammed was living through. To my eyes it mentions and respects the Torah, the psalms of David and what they call the gospel of "Jesus son of Mary" to make the point that he was mortal and his prophetic voice was corrupted (in their view) by the gospel writers and St. Paul. An on-the-spot observation is that Muhammed (or God) has a soft spot

for Noah, Abraham, Moses and Lot, who are all cited numerous times. Christians and “Jesus, son of Mary” get quite a few mentions also.

We have booked the Petronas towers today – the iconic and largest twin towers in the world and we have also booked to go to Malacca on Friday – which was the centre of trade and commerce when Singapore was still a fishing village. It has plenty of Christian influence from Catholic Portuguese and Calvinist Dutch colonisers and is the ancestral home of the “straits Chinese” sub-culture.

Spiritually, my practice has solidified into a morning and Evening prayer which is Ignatian in origin and includes meditating (in the morning prayer session) on one certain verse from Isaiah that was learned at “Maranatha”.
Isaiah 43:1 “Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. you are mine”

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