

Dear friends,

My sister Patricia and her husband were staying with us this weekend but of course all visitors know that they have to fit around church events, which this weekend included a wedding at St. Peter's on Saturday and two APCMs on Sunday after the morning service at All Saints. There was also the Volunteer's tea in the church hall on Sunday at All Saints. Tricia, who is a PCC member at her church in North Wales knows about these things of course, but was also delighted that she and Tony were able to attend the Elizabethan evening in East Budleigh village hall where the meal was as close to what might have been expected in Elizabethan times as we could manage and dressing up was encouraged, so queen Elizabeth I was present as was Roger Conant (the founder of Salem Massachusetts) and many other nobles and peasants alike. Roger Conant was born in East Budleigh as was Sir Walter Raleigh (although unusually Sir Walter was absent on the evening in question). Forks were reserved for the wealthy in those days so if you wanted one you had to buy one to show how wealthy you were – and we were entertained by a Lute player and a magician who did close magic tricks around the tables. 80 paying guests were royally entertained, and the evening was drawn to a close with Mead, Marzipan and cheese.

The Easter season was brought to a close on Sunday with the feast of Pentecost which marks the giving of the Spirit to all believers and the Spirit was tangible in a buoyant service in the morning.

In a week which had a national article printed detailing the Volunteer crisis in the church of England, we certainly seem to be bucking that trend in the RMC. We welcomed three new churchwardens, a new PCC secretary, recorded a 10% increase in the electoral roll in East Budleigh and a healthy financial surplus at St. Michael's Otterton.

Sunday 26th May – Trinity Sunday

I will be presiding at both services at St. Peter's and also at St. Peter's APCM after the service. Reverend Margaret Scrivener will preside at All Saints and St. Michael's at 9.30am and 11am respectively. Explaining The Holy Trinity was always seen as so daunting that it was a job habitually given to the curate to do! I don't have that luxury of course so hard luck Margaret for drawing the short straw this Sunday!

Isaiah 6: 1-8. How do you describe the indescribable? You use shared symbols and thought forms that are readily understood in your time and Isaiah uses the Jerusalem Temple and royal symbolism to convey his encounter with the creator of the universe, not to be taken too literally. The reference to the death of King Uzziah (734BC) may be less concerned to date the experience that to contrast the death of an earthly king with the majesty and awe of an eternal transcendent King.

Romans 8: 12-17. The Spirit is Gods power experienced as guiding the moral life and assuring believers that their relationship with the Father is that of a Son or daughter. The Doctrine of the Trinity is vacuous divorced from a real experience of Life in Christ, and the gospel writers are all writing from personal experience of God experienced as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, centuries before the church codified the Doctrine.

John 3: 1-17. One of the Pharisees, who might normally be thought of as an opponent, actually shows an interest and comes to Jesus surreptitiously at night to try and find out more. Jesus tells him that you cannot enter the kingdom of God unless you have been born again, anew or from above (The Greek is hard to express in English). You have to be born of water and the Spirit, which certain Christians have interpreted as – No Baptism, No Salvation – but before we get too certain of that Jesus then demolishes that argument by saying that the Spirit is like the wind and blows where it wills and cannot be tied down to a simple doctrine.

Thought for the Day

Everything looks better in the Sunshine, both physically and spiritually. Even more so when we have endured endless rain and grey skies. This natural phenomenon expresses a spiritual truth that in order to truly appreciate the highs, we need to experience the lows first. Light and dark are necessary bedfellows and is why we preface the light and joy of Easter with the season of Lent and the extreme lows of Good Friday. It is also why we preface the light of the incarnation at Christmas with the penitential season of Advent.

I am certainly not going to underestimate the severity of depression, which is a terrible thing which needs to be controlled medically but I do fear that the pendulum has swung a bit too far in one direction and the normal ups and downs of human existence which is our common experience of life are being unnecessarily medicalised especially amongst the young. Happiness and sadness are normal. They are also transient. You cannot be happy all the time.

The happiness and sadness that oscillates through our daily existence have a much more common and important thing underpinning them. Contentment is much more important than either happiness and sadness and this contentment that eludes so many people is underpinned by what we call “Christian Joy” but is perhaps more accurately the assurance that we loved unconditionally and that we are forgiven and that our salvation is assured. This Joy or contentment is the rock on which we build our lives and enables us to withstand the storms of life and enjoy even more the sunshine.

The Prayer for Today is Psalm 106:1

Praise the Lord!

O give thanks to the Lord for He is good.

For his steadfast love endures forever.

Love and peace,
Martin