

Dear friends,

You may have come across reports in the media that some younger people may be re-examining the Christian faith. I saw a YouTube video for example which was lauding the huge increase in baptisms into the catholic church in England for example this Easter – up over 40% (the supposition was that in an uncertain world people are being attracted to tradition, authority and longevity). The Anglican church and our graphs have also been sounding a bit more chipper recently. So, what happened on Easter Sunday? Well, the sunrise service on the beach was a lovely occasion but with noticeably fewer people than last year but that could have been to other factors like the timing of the service- 5.45am rather than 6am perhaps? But when it came to St. Peter's in Budleigh we were markedly up on last year. We planned for the 19 people we received last year at the traditional BCP service at 8am and 32 people turned up. At the 10am service after the late comers were added to the 147 we thought we had, we were well over 160, a little bit up on last year. So perhaps the rumours are true? I checked with All Saints and St. Michael's and they were both up on last year. All together the RMC attracted over 300 people to our worship on Easter Sunday. One swallow doesn't make a summer as they say, but nevertheless it is all quite encouraging and a nice antidote to the inexorable decline stories of the past few years.

Sabbatical presentation

Saturday 17th May at 6pm in St. Peter's church followed by a buffet provided by Mandy in the adjacent Peter Hall. For catering purposes, we need to have an idea of numbers of course. I put a sign-up sheet at the back of church on Sunday and I'll do the same at All Saints and St. Michael's next Sunday.

Sunday 27th April – 2nd of Easter

The Reverend Jean Burrows will preside at St. Peter's at the 8am and 10am services, and I will preside at All Saints and St. Michael's at 9.30am and 11am respectively.

Acts 5: 27-32. Peter is already the putative leader of the apostles and gets a separate name check. He appeals to the highest authority – God himself – to account for their teachings, for it was God himself that raised Jesus from the dead, plainly marking him out as his instrument and mouthpiece. So in following Jesus the apostles are following God.

Revelation 1: 4-8. Jesus is cast in the mould of being divine in John's revelation. "Coming on the clouds" (an allusion to the imagery in the book of Daniel) invokes divinity as does the title "the alpha and the omega" the beginning and the end – the totality of all things.. We are left in no doubt that John believes Jesus to be God himself.

John 20: 19- 31. The scripture about doubting Thomas takes on a new significance for me having witnessed the church he founded in India and his place of execution. Thomas casts a long shadow in India. Thomas utters the most direct affirmation of the divinity of Jesus when he says "My Lord and my God". Also present in this piece is the Johannine "giving of the spirit", which happens on Easter Sunday in John's gospel instead of having to wait until Pentecost as in Luke.

Thought for the Day

“The greatest thing you’ll ever learn is just to love and be loved in return.” Lyrics from a haunting song by Nat King Cole called nature Boy. Does anyone else get spiritual comfort from popular music – I’m sure I can’t be the only one! It comes at you from all angles. The Oasis song “Some might say” has the lyrics “Some might say they don’t believe in heaven. Go tell it to the man that lives in hell”. When I was bereaved many years ago the Bruce Springsteen song “Dancing in the dark” became my anthem in its depiction of frustration and of being stuck in a rut. Some lyrics are more obvious than others or lend themselves to being used in a way that could be taken spiritually like Paul McCartney singing about Mother Mary coming to him when he’s in times of darkness – “Let it be”, which could be a reference to his own mother or a certain universal mother. Swedish house Mafia singing “Don’t you worry, don’t you worry child, ‘cos heaven’s got a place for you”. And the song writer doesn’t have to have meant what it means to you either. Meanings become elastic and they certainly don’t have to be theologically correct. One of my favourites is by the late lamented Leonard Cohen. In his beautiful and haunting song “Suzanne” this verse appears;

And Jesus was a sailor when he walked upon the water
And he spent a long time watching from his lonely wooden tower
And when he knew for certain only drowning men could see him
He said all men will be sailors then until the sea shall free them
But he himself was broken, long before the sky would open
Forsaken, almost human, he sank beneath your wisdom like a stone
And you want to travel with him, and you want to travel blind
And then you think maybe you’ll trust him
For he’s touched your perfect body with his mind

Which is as good a song for Good Friday as I’ve ever heard. Leonard was an Orthodox Jew as well as being an ordained Buddhist priest, so spirituality flowed through his veins. The list is endless of course and you can appropriate anything and make it yours as many people do with Simon and Garfunkel’s “Bridge over troubled water”. But as much as I love secular music wandering onto our turf, I am dead against pop music being used during a church service. It’s horses for courses and choral music and communal hymnody, plainsong and chant are specifically designed to enhance church services and long may that continue.

The Prayer for Today. Only Last week I included a prayer penned by Pope Francis and of course on Easter Monday he died. The same prayer can be used for him and anyone who has recently died.

**Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord
And may light perpetual shine upon him.
And may his soul, and the souls of all the faithful departed,
through the mercy of God, rest in peace.
Amen.**

Love and peace
Martin