

Dear friends,

When Louise has meetings in London we always make good use of the opportunity to stay overnight and acquaint ourselves with big city life and opportunities, so the packed agenda included a play called “A long day’s journey into night” starring Brian Cox, an exhibition at Japan house on the Ainu people of Hokkaido, an immersive art exhibition in Marble Arch and the sampling of Japanese, Vietnamese and Lebanese restaurants. Culturally enriched (and a few pounds heavier) we return to Devon from Paddington to a more sedate and rural environment – variety is the spice of life!

On Sunday I was colder in All Saints than in St. Michael’s unusually because the heating has temporarily conked out but the singing at East Budleigh sounded much louder than usual so perhaps people were compensating? After a traditional roast dinner at the Sir Walter Raleigh pub it was back to all Saints for the baptism of Andrew Millington’s grandson “Noel Benny Robinson”. At the end of the service Andrew accompanied four singers – two men and two women – singing Rutter’s “The Lord bless you and keep you” which sounded absolutely marvellous.

Sunday 28th April – 5th of Easter

I will be presiding at both services at St. Peter’s and Margaret Scrivener will preside at All Saints and Chris Cant will preside at St. Michael’s at 9.30am and 11am respectively. In the evening at St. Peter’s, at 6pm we have the first “Sunday at six” concert featuring the organist from Rennes cathedral, Jean-Rene Andre.

Acts 8: 26-40. The gospel’s progression to the “ends of the earth” is symbolised here by the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch. The mysterious African interior certainly held huge fascination for Jews. But was he Ethiopian? He was in Jerusalem worshipping and reading Isaiah so there is a possibility that he was a successful Jewish Emigree working for the Candace of Ethiopia. We’ll never know of course and the fact that he was a Eunuch which would disqualify him from being accepted as Jewish is made nothing of in the story. The encounter ends with his baptism and the onward march of the gospel.

1 John 4: 7-21. Along with 1 Corinthians 13, this is the most explicit advocacy that Love is the dominant virtue for a Christian. Here it is given a theological rationale. We love because “God is Love”. This sublime message is compromised somewhat because the scope of that love according to the author of the whole letter, is to be extended to those people he sees as Orthodox believers rather than those who have “gone out” (2:19). So that humanizes the message. God is indeed love but flawed humanity finds it very hard to live up to those standards.

John 15: 1-8. Another one of the seven “I am” sayings from John’s gospel. This one stresses how apart from God or “Christ” we cannot bear fruit for the gospel. We must stay rooted in Christ or the word of God. How we do that varies according to religious tradition, by regular communion, by reading scripture, or through prayer and “spiritual communion”. I would argue that a truly rounded Christianity would emphasise all three equally.

Music at St. Peter's

We have a series of Sunday music concerts starting next Sunday evening at 6pm hence the title "Sundays at six". These concerts get under way on Sunday 28th April when we will be treated to a recital by Jean-Rene Andre the organist from Rennes cathedral in Brittany, France.

Thought for the Day

It probably says a lot about me that my favourite painting is "The scream" by Edvard Munch. It captures something primal about the human condition and the strain, stress and anxiety that plagues our lives. There were four large rooms in the immersive art exhibition where you entered and stood or lay or sat while art masterpieces were projected and melted and were re-formed around you. It was pretty mesmerising and actually made us feel a little sea-sick even though the place wasn't really moving. I had to wait until the last room to be immersed in "The scream" and my day wouldn't have been complete until that had happened. Richard Rohr in his daily communication from New Mexico is currently talking about art as a window into God and spiritual experience, which leads me to think about Western and Eastern approaches to religious imagery. Apart from brief periods of iconoclasm, both West and East have developed sublime artistic traditions resulting in the pinnacle of renaissance art in Italy (I remember being rather exhausted by the umpteenth "Madonna con Bambino" in an art gallery in Venice a couple of years ago) and icons which the Orthodox call "Windows into heaven". These images are not painted but "written" and you are invited to see through and beyond them to eternal truths. The pinnacle of both Western art and Eastern iconography is the same – Madonna con Bambino – the virgin and child – seeing through them to the mystery of incarnation – the fusing and inseparability of God with his creation – of spirit and matter. If the scream is the problem, then the antidote is surely the virgin Mary with Jesus the son of God being held in her arms. Existential angst countered by the peace that passes all understanding. Writing this piece prompted me to find the book that changed my entire Christian outlook and steer it in an incarnational direction. It is called "Ponder these things" Praying with icons of the virgin - written by Archbishop Rowan Williams and is one of my most treasured possessions.

The Prayer for Today is a part of Psalm 143.

**Teach me the way I should go
Teach me to do thy will
For thou art my God.
Let thy great Spirit lead me
On a level path.**

Love and peace,
Martin