

Dear friends,

I had an interesting chat with a new man at St. Michael's church after the service on Sunday. His son has become Orthodox and goes to church in the Torquay area. His wife goes to the riverside evangelical church in Exeter, which with the best will in the world seems to be "not for him" and he, as someone who has never been particularly religious (but is familiar with Otterton) decided to try coming to our little village church which is warm hearted, friendly, but sincere in its goal to worship God in Spirit and truth. He's been attending since November last year and learning about the Christian gospel through sermons and Sunday worship. It warmed my heart that we have a church that meets the needs of someone who is a genuine seeker and with a temperament that finds particular forms of Christianity threatening. Added to that I received some humbling and warm affirmations about my ministry here which left me feeling that I have been used a little by God in this place.

**Two weeks** to go now and a very busy two weeks it is. After my exit interview and lunch with the Archdeacon last week I'm being treated to lunch by the area Dean today.

**Holy Week and Easter services.** After Palm Sunday we have Compline in St. Peter's on Monday to Wednesday at 7pm each evening. The Wednesday morning BCP service goes ahead as normal. On Thursday evening we have our Maundy Thursday "foot washing" eucharist service at 7pm. On Good Friday we have "the cross of Christ" at St. Michael's at noon and then a "Good Friday reflections" service at St. Peter's at 3pm. On Easter Sunday the sunrise service this year is being led by the Baptist church in the absence of a Methodist minister followed by services at their normal times in our respective churches

### **Sunday 22nd March – Palm Sunday**

I will preside at All Saints and St. Michael's at 9.30 and 11pm as usual. Colin Randall will preside at both morning services at St. Peter's.

**Isaiah 50: 4-9a.** The word "servant" doesn't actually appear in this piece but has been added as an editorial note. It has often been seen as the most personal of the servant songs. Instead of "Israel" the text now refers to a human being and names the tongue, ears, back, cheek, beard so the suffering has been personified and is commonly seen as a prophesy referring to the passion of Jesus. Following God's will as Jesus did, despite the brickbats, is what is most important.

**Philippians 2: 5-11.** This is an early Christian hymn that sings of the self-abasement of Christ who although divine became human for our sake (using the symbolism and language of the time). For executing this perfectly he was raised to the right hand of God for all eternity, and the picture of humility and obedience has been a template of human discipleship ever since.

**Matthew 21: 1-11.** This pre-meditated counterdemonstration on Palm Sunday that challenged not only the temporal Roman authorities but stands as a transcendent challenge to all human systems before or since. Sometimes billed as a "clash of kingdoms" it pits the eternal conflict between the kingdoms of this world against the kingdom of God and it opens the final week of Jesus' life. Later on Good Friday, the earthly kingdom of Rome and their collaborators appear to have won when they crucified Jesus but God delivered that final coup de grace on Easter Sunday that love, light and life will never be overcome by hate, darkness and death.

### **Thought for the Day.**

The idea of Palm Sunday being a pre-planned counterdemonstration in direct contrast and opposition to the procession of Pontius Pilate into Jerusalem was revealed to me in the first instance by a theologian called Marcus Borg (now deceased). I've only made the effort to go to listen to three theologians in person in my life. One was John Polkinghorne in Canterbury

many years ago, Keith Ward in Hertfordshire, and Marcus Borg when I travelled all the way to Edinburgh to hear him speak. All three have had a momentous impact on my life, beliefs and ministry. They all expanded my mind and were excellent orators – they could intellectually excite me in a way that others could not. They stand out to me in a way others seem to just conform to the general consensus of theology being the preserve of dry and dusty Dons speaking from their ivory towers. In the more palpable and immediate environs of church life I have been influenced by many and various people who all seemed genuinely in love with their subject. Stephen Cherry in Durham Diocese, my training vicar Brian, my Post ordination training supervisor (whose name escapes me for the moment) both in Canterbury Diocese. Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury was a huge influence on my life. I deaconed at his first ever Chrism Mass in Canterbury cathedral. In his “charge” before ordination it was he that talked to me of Orthodoxy and recommended books to me that led me ultimately to apply for the post of priest in Bucharest, Romania. Dear old Bishop Geoffrey Rowell – Bishop of Europe – (now also sadly deceased) was an old school traditionalist who taught me important lessons. Fr. Solomon, a Catholic priest in Romania was a big influence on me also. I suppose what I’m trying to say is that we live and grow within a complex web of people and we need them to grow. I extend this to people outside the faith community as well. Paul, a dear friend and practising Buddhist was and remains a huge spiritual influence and my encounters with Hindu, Jain, Islamic, and Sikh religions has expanded my view of the world. But in order to explore and learn and grow from others I believe you need to do so from the base of having a firm faith in one religion. Know and believe those beliefs well, and know you are secure in that faith, others pose no threat. They can only enhance understanding in some areas and expose deficiencies in others. Praise be to God, Father, Son and Holy spirit.

**The prayer for Today** is by Samuel Johnson, famous for compiling the first English Dictionary. He recognised the difference between Knowledge and wisdom, which comes from God.

**Almighty God, Giver of wisdom  
Without whose help resolutions are in vain  
Without whose blessing study is ineffectual  
If it be thy will to attain such knowledge  
As may qualify me to direct the doubtful  
And instruct the ignorant  
To prevent wrongs  
And terminate contentions  
Grant that I may use that knowledge  
Which I shall attain  
To thy glory and my own salvation  
For Jesus Christ’s sake.  
Amen.**

Love and peace,  
Martin