

Dear friends,

The literary festival is over and we went to quite a few talks and bought a few books. They run a well-oiled machine – that we are getting used to - but now things should get back to normal very quickly.

I am very encouraged by the continual high attendance rates at all three churches. When I commented last week on the high attendances at All Saints and St. Michael's I saw that on the same Sunday there were 99 attendees at the main service and 17 at the 8 O'clock at St. Peter's. This Sunday I was expecting a big drop because of the continual rain but we only dropped to 92 which was very pleasing indeed. All three churches are in good heart with a good spirit so we should all take great comfort from that fact. We all have our problems and disappointments and challenges obviously but that is a normal part of being a collection of individuals whose only connection is our common faith.

Sunday 29th September – St. Michael and All Angels – (Michaelmas)

I will preside at All Saints and St. Michael's (on this their patronal festival) at 9.30 and 11am respectively and will also preside at Choral Evensong at 6pm at St. Peter's. Archdeacon Trevor Jones will preside at St. Peter's at both the morning services.

Genesis 28: 10 -17. Jacob's ladder or a stairway to heaven has entered our vocabulary. It happens at a place called Bethel (meaning house of God) between his long journey from Sinai to Mesopotamia. Angels ascend and descend from this place to heaven and God speaks to Jacob. The stand-out phrase for me is when Jacob says that "God was here and I didn't know it" which is a statement about what most of us feel most of the time.

Revelation 12: 7-12. This is easier to understand when you remember that apocalyptic books are usually written at times of great suffering and persecution to inform people that despite appearances to the contrary, God is still in control. The devil has been defeated and his time is short but he still has the capacity to create havoc (being experienced in real time during Roman persecution). God has beaten him by raising Jesus from the dead (by the blood of the lamb). God has the final victory but the devil has plenty of fight left in him before he ultimately dies.

John 1: 47-51. Jesus alludes to Jacob's ladder and makes it refer to himself. Angels ascending and descending "on it" can also mean "on him". Jesus is the ladder, the connection between God and man and he will be revealing that in his ministry in a much more profound way than seeing someone under a fig tree before he was called.

The Harvest lunch at St. Peter's church on the 6th October at 12.30 is filling up fast. Tickets are £12.50 and Fran has tickets in the office.

Thought for the Day.

I must confess that my favourite talk in the literary festival was Rev'd. Richard Coles. Very erudite, warm and funny. Our lives are very different, and we will hold different views in certain areas, but we share a common background in that we both attended the same theological college, a monastery in West Yorkshire called Mirfield. We both experienced the rigour of a training – though Mirfield call it “formation” – within a monastic setting and the monastic pattern of daily prayer times and daily Mass. It was here that I found out that “catholic” and “high church” are very different things yet becomes blurred in the Anglican imagination. Set firmly within the Anglo-Catholic Anglican tradition I will be forever grateful for the way they formed me, and I recognise that formation more than ever as I get older. I was in the year above Richard and when he signed his book for me called “Murder at the Monastery” he said I'd recognise an awful lot in it. I was pleased how he answered one of the questions from the floor on “Do dogs go to heaven?” which seems trivial but really matters to an awful lot of people. I share the deep faith tradition that started with Origen, the early church Father that all things come from God and all things will return to God. We don't know how or in what form – we see though a glass darkly as St. Paul wrote – but nothing of value can be lost. As he wrote in my book “Surrexit. Alleluia” which is a mixture of Latin and Hebrew and means “He is risen. Praise be to God”

The Prayer for Today

Probably time to air one of my all-time favourite prayers. What has been dubbed the serenity prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr. There are lots of different versions and one that has a significant addition but the basic premise of the original is easier to lean and memorise.

**God, give me grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things
which should be changed,
and the Wisdom to distinguish
the one from the other.**

Love and peace,
Martin