

Dear friends,

We had an excellent week “up North”, an annual pilgrimage, necessarily fleeting, to meet some old friends where I have been vicar in the past. Trouble is I was so used to warm weather and sunshine recently that I forgot to take a coat, so our first destination-Tynemouth – I was absolutely frozen and wet from icy drizzle. Still, the beach is always lovely as you can see.

From there to Gainford and Winston, which is a lovely couple of villages next door to Barnard castle, whose regeneration can be attributed to Dominic Cummings and his famous visit to Specsavers. They really should make him an honorary mayor or something.

Then on to visit my daughter near York for a couple of nights and a lovely walk on Bridlington beach – which seems to go on for miles and lastly to Buxton for a family get-together to celebrate Louise’s Dad’s 80th Birthday. A great time was had by all and the M5 on Bank holiday Monday was pretty good so a few pounds heavier we arrived back in sunny Devon none the worse for wear.

Sunday 31st August – Trinity 11 – Proper 17

I am presiding at both services at St. Peter’s and Chris Cant is presiding at St. Michael’s.

Proverbs 25: 6-7. A delightfully short couple of verses asking that people show a little humility, a value in very short supply in our culture. Humility shown to another person is a reflection of the proper humility that we show before God.

Hebrews 13: 1-8, 15-16. This reads like an extension to our reading in Proverbs. Having a sober and proper assessment of ourselves and our fellow man allows us to show empathy towards the stranger, the tortured, or imprisoned. “There but for the grace of God go I” It allows us to see others as God sees them. Fidelity and integrity is a way of life that demonstrates love to your spouse and allows us to look God in the eye with confidence.

Luke 14: 1, 7-14. Jesus expands on the short two verse extract we read from Proverbs today. It reminds me that Jesus was steeped in the Bible. And the result of proper humility is exactly as the writer of the letter to the Hebrews explains – it allows us to show greater compassion towards those less able or well off than us. We give to people who cannot pay us back because we give from generous compassion, not to be paid back.

Thought for Today

Meeting and eating with friends makes you realise how valuable friendship is to the human condition. To be a true friend is a calling of the highest order. And whenever I muse on the nature of friendship my mind always turns towards Abraham. When I visited Hebron in Israel many decades ago we went to Abraham's final resting place. There is both a Mosque and a Synagogue built over the top of it and they coexist uneasily in this part of the world where the major Abrahamic faiths are at constant loggerheads.

The name of the Mosque is the Haram El Khalil – the mosque of the friend of God. To be a friend of God is the highest accolade that could be bestowed on Abraham. Think of all the wonderful attributes that you both give and expect from a true friend and then apply all those attributes to your relationship with God.

To be able to be completely honest with each other. Easy in each other's company. To be willing to go the extra mile for them, to always be there for them. To be able to laugh and joke with them and to know that they will never let you down.

To be a friend of God, as Abraham was, is a goal to aim for, for every believer. Of course, being a true friend means also being able to tell someone sometimes an uncomfortable truth and the God we worship has to tell us often that we are no better than the next man, that we are equally deserving, or more often equally undeserving of God's love and Grace.

The best thing we could ever hear from God on judgement day is "Thank you for being a friend".

The Prayer for Today is by St. Thomas a Kempis

Grant me, Lord, to know what I ought to know,

To love what I ought to love,

To praise what delights you most,

To value what is precious in your sight,

And to hate what is offensive to you.

Let me not judge according to superficial appearances,

Nor condemn on the basis of what others say;

But may I have the discernment to understand

Deeper realities,

And above all seek your will.

Love and peace, Martin