

Dear friends,

The Sunday after Easter is traditionally known as low Sunday referring to a more reflective and sober time after the intense celebrations of Easter week. This is often reflected in “low” congregations. But not too bad in East Budleigh and Otterton which attracted the same amount of people each, though only about half who turned up last Sunday. But the Spirit was good and after the service at St. Michael’s we had a good conversation with visitors from North Carolina who are heavily involved with their church in the USA which is Anglican but no longer in communion with Canterbury.

**As most** of you know, the churchwarden at St. Michael’s, Anne Radcliffe got awarded the British Empire Medal, which is so well deserved, and because we’d missed her thankyou meal for all those who nominated her, she treated us to a lovely meal at the Kings Arms, which was lovely. Thank you Anne.

### 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 have put a sign-up sheet at the back of all three churches.

### Sunday 4th May – 3rd of Easter

I’ll be presiding at the 8am service at St. Peter’s and Ken Parry will be presiding at the 10am service. Chris Cant will preside at All Saints at 9.30am and John Archibald will preside at the service at St. Michael’s at 11am.

**Acts 9: 1-6.** To be declared “the son of God” by your disciples who had followed him for years is one thing. To be declared so by an enemy who had presided over the stoning to death of Stephen (the first Christian Martyr) and had been en route to Damascus to drag Christians back to Jerusalem to share a similar fate is another. Such is the enormous personal spiritual impact of what happened on the road to Damascus to Paul. God can reach out and touch anyone, whether they be friend or foe.

**Revelation 5: 11-14.** It is tempting to think that Paul’s vision on the road to Damascus was something like this scene described by John of Patmos in his revelation. The glory, enormity and importance of this vision are so overwhelming that seeing it is what was needed to change Paul from an oppressor of the church to its greatest evangelist.

**John 21:1-29.** As in other resurrection appearances, Jesus is not immediately recognizable in this encounter in Galilee. The location is also of note. For reference, Mark’s original gospel has no resurrection appearances at all. Matthew has one in Galilee, Luke in Jerusalem only and only John has them in both Jerusalem and Galilee. Regardless of that, we have the extraordinarily accurate count of fish – does this have any meaning I wonder? The other significant aspect is the three-fold question of Jesus to Peter – do you love me? This is because Peter famously denied Jesus three times (recorded in all four gospels). St. Peter is the leader of the church and is why when catholic commentators talk of choosing the next Pope they talk of a successor not to Pope Francis but as the successor to St. Peter.

## Thought for Today

The proclamation that Jesus is both fully human and fully divine – a proclamation declared by St Thomas in the gospel reading last week is central to Christianity. When asked to put his finger in Jesus' wounds Thomas exclaims "My Lord and my God".

Without prejudicing any other way of understanding that startling phrase we were treated in India to a lecture on how that is understood using Eastern wisdom and thought patterns, which are more centred on enlightenment and levels of consciousness. We are all born with an ego – the first level of consciousness – I am me. The next level of consciousness that develops is a group consciousness. This means that I am a member of this or that family, nation or religion. For Jesus of course that meant "I am a Jew". The boundaries of that level of consciousness were broken through at his Baptism in the River Jordan, when he became conscious that he was a "son of God", and sent, yes first to the Jews but subsequently to all nations. The final level of consciousness was articulated most clearly in John's gospel (10:30) when he declared "I and the Father are one". I can see why the scribes and Pharisees declared him guilty of blasphemy and wanted to get rid of him. He declared that he, the person standing in front of them was also the Lord of the universe.

On the spiritual level this appeals to Indian thought because it means that every level of consciousness is fully open to all people even if it very rare, (like nirvana for example). In Romania I came across a similar practice in the Orthodox church - a controversial doctrine exists there called Hesychasm and the goal of this deep meditative practice is called Theosis – union with the uncreated energies of God. Deep stillness and meditation using a mantra instils a union with God who is beyond all concepts and images. None of this replaces any other way of understanding that Jesus the man is also God but it does have the obvious ramification articulated by Archbishop Michael Ramsey that is if true, and Christians believe that it is, then if want to know what God is like, you just have to look at Jesus because very simply "God is, as Jesus is"

**The Prayer for Today** is a prayer that has become very popular in the west but not many people know is actually from the Hesychast tradition and is the main mantra that they chant daily to achieve this eventual union with God. It is called the Jesus prayer.

**Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.**

Love and peace,  
Martin