

Dear friends,

It was a lovely whistle stop mid-week trip to county Durham, Yorkshire and the Midlands visiting old haunts, meeting a few old friends and visiting my daughter Claire. We didn't get as far as Newcastle this time – just that bit too far in the time we had – but I have nothing but affection for all the places I have served and of course plenty of affection for where I am now in Devon. The journey back was a bit fraught with the M5 absolutely clogged but it was good to see the “Welcome to Devon” sign on the motorway. Home at last.

Whilst in Yorkshire, wandering through the Arboretum adjacent to Castle Howard I had slipped down a wet grassy bank, twisting my ankle. Just a bit sore but on Bank holiday Monday we embarked on a ten mile walk from East Budleigh via Newton Poppleford, Mutters Moor and Ladram Bay (in new boots!) so arrived back in East Budleigh hobbling five hours later. A bit stiff-ankled at the moment but no harm done – I think.

Sunday 3rd September – Trinity 13 – Proper 17

I will be presiding at St. Peter's at both services this Sunday, Canon Mike Williams will be presiding at All Saints at 9.30am and John Archibald will be presiding at St. Michael's at 11am.

Jeremiah 15: 15-21. Jeremiah loves God's word and knows it to be true but following God's will and word has had a profound impact on his social life and led to inner turmoil. It even leads the prophet to complain that he has been deceived. God's response is hard to decipher but effectively He tells Jeremiah that the people will have to respond to him because what he says is true. This passage speaks of the privilege and pain of being caught up in the divine mystery.

Romans 12: 9-21. Lessons in living a wise and humble life as a Christian. The verse that I have taken to heart most from this lection is verse 18 where it says that “if it is anything to do with you, live peaceably with all.” It is not always possible but as long as peace and harmony are your basic motivation, I believe that this is the basis of stable church communities.

Matthew 16: 21-28. Difficult to interpret accurately but essentially it is saying that suffering and death are sometimes necessary if one is to follow God's will – something that Jesus did of course, right to the end. Opposing this central motif Peter is called “Satan” by Jesus for putting merely human considerations (comfort, avoidance of anything bad) above the divine will.

Following God's will does not guarantee comfort, popularity, or success as attested by Jeremiah or Jesus in today's readings.

Thought for Today

At the arboretum next to Castle Howard there is a red squirrel enclosure. A beautifully presented open space with lovely trees, where you can see red squirrels eat, play and scamper about. You enter the enclosure through double set of doors and there is an electrified fence surrounding the enclosure. Red Squirrels are endangered of course because they have been pushed aside by Grey squirrels who carry a pox to which only the red variety are susceptible. So while they are indeed beautiful, their future is very debatable. It was human beings that introduced the Grey squirrel initially to these islands, and now ironically the red variety are dependent on human intervention to safeguard their shaky future. On reflection, I saw the Christian churches as being akin to those red squirrels, who find ourselves as an endangered species in the British Isles, hemmed in by a hostile environment. It won't be man's intervention that tries to save us of course, it will be God and his spirit, who will eventually find a way. In the meantime, we need to keep the faith, keep confident that what we proclaim is the truth, and bear good fruit in our lives. Like Jeremiah in today's Hebrew scripture reading, proclaiming the truth can alienate you from your peers and leave you feeling alone and a tiny bit resentful of the God who led us here, but in the great scheme of things we believe that God will prevail and vindication will be ours.

The Prayer for today

**O God, the author and fountain of hope,
Enable us to rely with confident expectation on thy promises,
Knowing that the trials and hinderences of this present time
Are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed,
And having our faces steadfastly set towards the light that shines more
each day; through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Love and peace,
Martin