

Mike's message

Lent and Easter

This year the March/April edition of 'Roundabout' covers all of the period of Lent and Easter itself. It's a season of great contrast, from the penitence of Ash Wednesday (2nd March) to the joyous proclamation of 'Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! on Easter Day (17th April).



But I'm going to start my words this month focussing on the final Sunday of February because, in a very real sense, that is where the Lenten journey begins.

The Bible readings on 'The Sunday next before Lent' (27th February this year) include an account of The Transfiguration. That's the account in the Gospels (Matthew 17.1-23; Mark 9.2-37; Luke 9.28-48) when on a mountain top Peter, James and John witness Jesus' appearance shining like the sun. Added to which they have visions of the long-dead prophets Moses and Elijah. Hardly surprisingly they don't know what to make of this. Peter fumbles and mumbles about building stone cairns to remember the event and, as he is doing so, a voice is heard, seemingly from a cloud, saying "this is my beloved son, listen to him". They look at Jesus who simply says "You mustn't tell anyone about this!". When you think about it that must have left them somewhat frustrated.

The Transfiguration is a glimpse of God's radiance and glory in the person of Jesus Christ. If you look at the references I gave you'll see they include much more. From the heights of glory the disciples and Jesus return to the nitty gritty of reality. There's a troubled boy and an anxious dad to deal with, and it's in that healing that God's greatness is again glimpsed in the person of Jesus.

The disciples must have been elated. Glory, wonder, awe and popularity. Jesus then puts a stick in their spokes as it were. "I'm going to Jerusalem to die" he said, which no doubt poured water on the fire of their enthusiasm somewhat. They turn inward and start arguing about which of them is the greatest. Jesus borrows a child, places the child in their midst and says something along the lines of "Be like this little one, greatness is found in humility".

The road to Jerusalem that lies ahead, will be one of humility. It leads to suffering, death and resurrection. In The Transfiguration God's glory was glimpsed in a vivid way. In the journey to the cross it is seen again, in love poured out by Jesus Christ for you and me. A love that cannot be extinguished.

Have a holy Lent and a joyous Easter. God is with us.

Mike's message

Let the nations gather together,
and let the peoples assemble.

(Isaiah 43.9)

It's been a long wait but it's almost here. From 28th July until 8th August the nations will gather together right here in Birmingham.

The Commonwealth Games have arrived.



What is The Commonwealth? It's own website describes it as "a voluntary association of 54 independent and equal countries". It includes around one-third of the entire population of the planet! It carries out programmes of trade and economic development, promotes democracy and good government, encourages sustainability and environmental programmes, supports youth empowerment and gender quality, and also supports the development of small independent states.

The Commonwealth isn't about the British Empire! Indeed some of its members were never part of that colonial past, such as Rwanda and Mozambique. Neither is it about royalty and monarchy. The Queen is Head of State in only 15 of the 54 member states, of the others 34 are democratic republics and 5 have different monarchs. Although The Queen is currently Head of the Commonwealth it is extremely unlikely that Prince Charles or Prince William will follow her in that role. The Commonwealth will chose its next head.

Every four years the nations gather for the Commonwealth Games. Although there are 54 member countries, there are 72 teams! That's because some regions and territories compete separately. From the British Isles there will be separate teams for England, Guernsey, Isle of Man, Jersey, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Their athletes would all compete for Team GB in The Olympics, as would any from Anguilla, Turks and Caicos, Montserrat, Falkland Islands, St. Helena, Tristan da Cunha and Ascension Island, Pitcairn Island and Gibraltar. But all those territories, and several others, will compete separately in Birmingham.

St Paul knew about sport. He was almost certainly familiar with the ancient Olympic Games, as can be seen from a passage in his first letter to the Corinthians. He uses imagery of athletics to portray the challenge of Christian life. It's a passage to keep in mind when enjoying The Commonwealth Games.

"Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable garland, but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified". (1 Corinthians 9 .24-27)

Mike's message

Autumn anxieties

It always comes as a shock that autumn is rapidly approaching - although hopefully there'll be a bit of an 'Indian Summer' to round off what's been a very hot year.

That itself brings anxieties of course as the hot summer has led to a depletion in water supplies in reservoirs. In truth what we need is a long wet autumn to replenish the supplies.

Utilities are another source of anxiety too. Rising gas and electricity prices are a source of concern for all of us. We see figures being quoted that are frightening. It seems as though those in charge of the country don't care about the issues that many people face. It's hardly surprising that there's growing disquiet. Industrial action is on the increase as people rightly try and ensure fair pay and working conditions. Maybe there'll even be a General Strike. We may also have to face power cuts if the situation doesn't improve.

Where is all this can we find some solace? There's a saying that "Whatever happens the sun will rise again tomorrow" and that's very true. Creation, the natural environment around us, continues to exist, despite our inadvertent attempts to suppress and damage it. We can give thanks for it. Autumn is sometimes called the church's 'Season of Creation'. There's always been time to give thanks, whether at Harvest Festival or other festivals, for all that earth supplies. In the early 13th Century St Francis wrote a hymn of praise known as Canticum of the Sun. There's a version of it in our hymn books (StF 99) called "All Creatures of our God and King".

St Francis is of course the Patron Saint of our Church of England neighbours, St Francis, Bournville. St Francis Day is Tuesday 4th October and there's an open invitation to join them that evening at 7.00pm for Holy Communion followed by light refreshments. It'd be a great way of round in off what promises to be a wonderful week here at Cotteridge for our Green Week. It'll include a Green Fair on Saturday 1st October, Harvest Supper and Barn Dance, and our Harvest Festival on Sunday 2nd October at 10.30am. Details elsewhere in this magazine.

Let's give thanks for what God has given us in creation, while at the same time holding before him all our anxieties. Remember that the authorities can't reasonably expect you to pay any more than you can afford! If you're in difficulty contact your suppliers as soon as you can. Here at Cotteridge we'll be endeavouring to open the church building longer hours to be a 'warm space' for all to share. We're in this together - and God is with us!



Mike's message

Having a 'sort out'

Advent is almost with us! It starts on Sunday 27th November and is the period of four Sundays and the week days from then until Christmas. It's a time to prepare to celebrate Christmas, but also to have a 'sort out' in our lives so that we are ready to welcome Christ when we meet face to face.



As many of you will know my Dad, Eric, died in April. In much of his working life he was an engineer with GEC at Witton. He started there as an apprentice in 1943 and, apart from his National Service in the RAF from 1950-1953 (as an engine fitter mostly on Short Sunderland Flying Boats) he worked there (and on projects for them on nuclear subs in Barrow and power stations in Iran) until his late 50s. Then he used some of his redundancy money to set up a Greeting Cards and Gifts Shop in the house on Pelsall High Street where he'd been born and grew up.

One thing that anyone who has an old engineer in the family knows is that, if they can avoid it, they never throw anything away. Dad's house has a very large triple garage, but when he died there was only just enough room to get one car in! It was full of wood, metal, old engineering tools, the skeletal remains of an Austin Seven, old gardening equipment, enough home winemaking paraphernalia to start a small brewery and loads of stuff that "might come in useful one day you never know" as he used to say.

Since April, together with my sister and brother-in-law, we've spent most Mondays having a sort out. We've been absolutely brutal. I've lost count of the times we've been backwards and forwards to 'the tip'). We've sold a few things but, mainly, there wasn't much that could ever be needed by anyone - oh and woodworm. Eventually we could not only see, but also reach, all four walls. Sorted, as they say. Well we're nearly there. We're also having to tackle the upstairs at the shop.

Advent is a time to talk about sorting. All of us gather stuff around us in our lives. As with dad's garage a lot of those things are material items that corrosion, moth, rot - and woodworm! - can destroy. We all have also financial clutter too. A survey revealed that on average in the UK people pay £468 per year on services they never use including gym memberships and streaming services. Imagine what that money could be used for. Then there's all the emotional clutter in our lives - guilt and regrets about the past and often needless worry about the future.

Advent isn't just about preparing cards, baubles and turkeys for Christmas. It is also about looking at our lives and being ruthless at sorting things out. When all sorts of clutter is cleared there'll be more room for Christ in our lives. Then we'll be ready to enter Advent with confidence in the bidding "Come, Lord Jesus, Come"!