

Dear Friends

I often wonder quite what people make of my magazine letter. Those who do comment are usually positive and encouraging. One lady said that she sat down, once the magazine arrived, read my letter and usually agreed with every word. Well that was praise indeed! I can only remember one person criticising and he was not happy at all. The problem is that I suspect that most people who moan, do so to themselves or someone else, not to me.

I am always careful with my magazine letter because it is about reaching out to people beyond church. In a sense it is my pulpit to the 3 parishes and my opportunity to be heard outside my normal preaching. I think it is important therefore not to be churchy or even preachy and in my reflections to try and connect with people's lives and the issues they face each day. Of course at the end of each epistle I do bring it back to faith, but then I trust that is what you would expect a Christian Minister to do.

It is often said that you should not mix politics with religion and if you believe that to be true then clearly I have failed. I have never agreed with this principle as life is full of both. In any case I have obviously ignored the dictum by discussing my concerns about current American politics and Brexit, to cite just a couple of recent examples. However, what I've tried to steer clear of is getting into party politics. I doubt whether any of you, other than a few who have picked it up from other places, have an idea of my own party political affiliations. Oh, I did once I remember, wonder whether I could vote at all but I didn't think that gave you much of a clue. The other thing I have done is to give some guidelines about how you should use your vote but never who you should vote for. Here the point was to think carefully about voting and to avoid voting for people whose appeal is to prejudice and bigotry.

Looking back over some random samples of my letters, I see that the overwhelming thrust has been towards explaining the Christian faith. It would appear this falls into two broad categories, the first of which is explaining the significance of the main aspects of the Church's teaching; the death and resurrection of Jesus, the coming of the Holy Spirit and the story of Christmas are examples. The other part is to encourage you all in the following of Jesus; trying to help you in your own walk of faith or encouraging you to step into faith if you haven't yet begun the journey.

My aim has usually been to make the Faith accessible to everyone. There are many people who profess themselves as Christians but are rarely or ever in church and there are those who say they have no faith. Whatever it may be, I hope to be able to say things that you might hear. It may not bring you rushing into church, but I hope that you might find comfort and hope in the words I have written, whoever you are.

In all of this, I have borne testimony to my faith. Many letters start with a declaration of my own thoughts, hopes and even doubts. In my ministry I have always been ready to share myself and my inner reflections. I certainly don't seek to stand on a place of total certainty or believe I have all the answers. Far from it, I am as human as anyone and the best testimony is often the way God has helped me in my weaknesses. That is how faith grows though, by trusting God in the dark and painful situations, where uncertainty is the name of the game. What I have found is that God never lets me down and that's what I commend to you.

In my experience of Father God I have discovered some wonderful truths, the most important of which is that His love is fully for me. So in each new day I believe I can set out in expectation that He will always guide me on my journey. Not only that but I have confidence that what He wants is the best thing for me. To be filled with the Holy Spirit, to know the fullness of His love, to be one with Jesus, transforms our lives and makes us whole. All of this is written for you. My belief is that whatever I have come to know about God, you too can know. You too can be filled with the wondrous joy of knowing God's love for you. All you have to do is humbly ask and believe it is given you and it will be yours.

May the Lord richly bless you.

Robert