

## Holy Week in Pychester.

Some personal thoughts from fictional Pychester.

In the green meadows of Nether Pyke, the lambs have been gambling and seem to be winning in the game of life, as a loving God continues to load the dice in favour of beauty and joy. In the city, the crowds of seagulls cry Barabbas & Brexit; a far cry from the 1970s rose-tinted neo-Buddhist vision of Jonathan Livingstone Seagull, or the naïve certainties pedalled by Marxists or Moonies.

In 2017 as in AD30, it's a cruel world; types & shadow have their ending, for the Newer Right is here. Then as now, everyone wanted power & control; only one man rode humbly into Jerusalem on a donkey and stood out for a better & lovelier way, but He got crucified and rose again.



Pychester's Bishop Rick, bruised by General Synod, has met with his diocesan members, a colourful but slightly wooden group of people who keep saying "S I G, Bishop" - Synod is Green-, Gay-, Grey-, Girl-friendly?

Now he's girding his loins for the Church of England's forthcoming teaching document, Options Regarding Good Anglican Sex & Marriage, but history is not on our side – Henry VIII, Elizabeth I, Charles II as exemplars of the joy of marriage? Perhaps the Bible can help? Jacob sent his 2 wives and 2 slave girls across

the river, and wrestled all night with a man... Needs some careful exegesis.

The Bishop has given up theology for Lent. He is reading "Herbs: A Brief History of Parsley, Sage, Rosemary & Thyme", but he can't escape the Bible, so full of Garden images – Eden, Song of Solomon, Gethsemane, Garden Tomb, Paradise – all that planting, pruning, praying, harvesting, feasting. He prays the Church will bear better fruit, bringing more people to the love of Jesus.

Last year the magnolias stood like burning bushes by St Sidwella's Almhouses, their flowers like cups to drink deeply from. This year their petals are already fallen, strewn like palms upon the pavement as our Saviour makes his way to the green sward by the Cathedral within the city wall, to be re-crucified in Good Friday's ecumenical Walk of Witness.

What was it all about? That Cross, He who had done no wrong – punishment, ransom, sacrifice, example, forgiveness, apology, suffering alongside, victory? Some or all of the above, for all people, for all time. The good thief had it right – Lord, remember me.

The Rituals of Holy Week ground us as pilgrims, participants as the story unfolds. Judas' sad Betrayal on Spy Wednesday for 30 pieces of silver. Jesus' Maundy command to gather, with those we find difficult as well as those we like, the humility of washing feet and being washed, sharing bread and cup, all of us tainted with sin, stripping bare altar and soul, watching sleepily with Him in the Garden, while the Paschal Moon rises like a consecrated host over our city.

Aleph, Beth, Gimel, Dalek – Good Friday Tenebrae at St Pythag's Church and the Disciples' hope is exterminated; Jesus is laid in the lowest depths with hard words and songs of Lamentation as the candles are extinguished one by one. We



leave in silence; nothing remains but faith, hope and love.

The good people of Nitcombe Regis have a sudden vacancy; the Church finally safeguarding the vulnerable rather than the venerable. So they are more than pleased the Georgian Parsonage has been let for a couple of weeks to a group of Londoners, on condition that one of them, who happens to be a priest, albeit of the lady variety, provides some Holy Week & Easter services at St George's.

Fr Lizzie from St Anna's mugs up on BCP Matins, pins up her hair discreetly, and prepares her homilies; asking how the various characters in the story of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus were affected and perhaps changed for the rest of their lives? Pilate & his wife, Peter, Simon of Cyrene, Jesus' mother Mary & the disciple John, Joseph of Arimathea, Mary Magdalene.

The children, who can't escape Church while holidaying with grandparents, make a time-line of different people, Jew, Gentile, poor, rich, Roman, African, Celtic, married, celibate, married, missionary, indigenous, female, gay, being accepted as priests and bishops, and wonder whether a bishop might ever be a wheelchair user, or on the autism spectrum, or occasionally wrong.



For the Easter Vigil (too exotic for Nitcombe Regis), Joanna, Mary & baby Carol [remember them from Christmas in Pychester], with family and friends, have returned to the Church of St Pythagoras & All Angles. The Church of England may not yet bless Jo & Mary's love, but baby Carol will be baptised into the family of Christ on this auspicious night, as in the Early Church, amidst deep ritual and holy prayers; outward and visible Signs of inward and spiritual Grace.

The new Fire is kindled at the open West Doors, the Paschal Candle prepared, lit and carried aloft as light is shared and spread from West to East throughout the church this glorious night.

The choir sings "Domine lux tui amoris lucet" by Giovanni di Kendrika, champagne corks pop, and the floating candles and groaning tables of food give the Easter Feast a look of Hogwarts.

High in the spire, the Pychester's urban Peregrines patiently warm their clutch of four Easter eggs towards new life.

And so, whether in exultant Easter Vigil, cool Dawn Service, bright Family Eucharist or Messy Church Easter Egg Hunt – for once in so many ways across the Churches of Pychester Diocese there is Unity in Diversity – Christ is Risen; He is Risen indeed, Alleluia!

Richard Barnes – April 2017.