

CV week 31 18th October Pastoral letter

Dear friends

The toilets are finished. And they look good... well, they look like toilets, but it is definitely an improvement.

What was the 'gents' is now a spacious accessible facility with enough room for wheelchair users. Around the corner, we now have 3 unisex loos, the one nearest the hall with baby changing facilities. The floors are those that go up the walls, so to speak, and are sealed so much easier to keep clean. All 4 have new stalls and wash basins. We decided to not go with electric hand driers, which apparently can exacerbate the spread of airborne infection, but we have got extractor fans that go on automatically as you walk in.

So, I would like to thank Suzanne who has kept an eye on the project and all who have had a role (roll?) in its design and completion.

The only problem is, as a result of all the work, there is a lot of dust everywhere. So, this morning I decided to do some cleaning, to lend a hand so that Katie, our cleaner, would not be overwhelmed. I quiet enjoyed it, as it was a bit of time to let my mind wander.

I found myself musing about what it means to be a Christian, and the different experiences of that in different countries and cultures. That is partly due to our mission theme this month. As we support Christians facing persecution in many different communities through the work of Open Doors it is a reminder that all do not share the freedoms we have, and that in some places it is really tough to be a Christian. I found myself thanking God that we live a very open society at the moment, which allows us to exercise our faith uninhibited – our society even celebrates (sometimes) our differences as a strength.

My mind then moved on to thinking about the American Elections and a report I saw on the TV about the role of faith in the way people vote. It was fascinating, and I have to say a bit disturbing too, but I don't want to get political here... and it is not my country. However, I was reminded that in some places the Christian faith plays a large role in the way the country is run.

So, there I was in the church kitchen, and as I paused to look out of the window I was aware I was somewhere in the middle of all that. To my left - far away – were many people being persecuted because their faith offends in some way the powerful, and on my right - far away - there were people trying to square their Christian faith with their own political agenda to put someone into what is possibly the most powerful position in the world. Simply put, the powerless on my left and the powerful on my right.

And there I was in the middle of it all washing plaster dust off our church kitchen work surfaces. To those on both sides what difference was I making. Once again, I find myself too small, it seems, to change the world.

However, and without any sense of smugness but certainly a bit of affirmation, I was reminded of a hymn, well known to some I am sure. It is a poem by George Herbert called “The Elixer” and is known by the title “Teach me my God and King”. It’s English is old, but I think the truth of it is bang up to date – the little done in God’s name becomes as gold through his blessing.

Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see,
And what I do in anything
To do it as for Thee.

All may of Thee partake:
Nothing can be so mean,
Which with his tincture—“for Thy sake”—
Will not grow bright and clean.

Not rudely, as a beast,
To run into an action;
But still to make Thee prepossest,
And give it his perfection.

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine:
Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws,
Makes that and th’ action fine.

A man that looks on glass,
On it may stay his eye;
Or if he pleaseth, through it pass,
And then the heav’n espy.

This is the famous stone
That turneth all to gold;
For that which God doth touch and own
Cannot for less be told.

I suppose we are back to the mustard seed again – the little things can have a big effect given the right conditions.

In the face of Christian persecution or the powers that rule the world, the toilets or a clean kitchen are as nothing, but they might have an effect on someone. Amazingly, through such things as these, people might just catch a glimpse of God.

I will always remember our son Daniel’s baptism. We had tentatively invited the whole of our NCT pre-natal group who had become our friends. The service was really good with great songs, and the talk by the vicar excellent. However, when we asked our guests afterwards how they had found it, one of the Dads said that he was really impressed... by the fact that the church had bothered to put a tv and video link into the room where the babies were in creche. He went on to say that his memory of church was of an old fashioned, dusty building where the services were out of date and boring. The thought that the church could be so kind and considerate and up to date had moved his opinion.

So, I say, may God bless our toilets and all who spend time in them. AMEN.

Peter