

## **Sabbatical Report: Summer 2019**

I am so grateful to the Lord and to His people for the opportunity of having a sabbatical over Summer 2019. I have much to give thanks to the Lord for. Below is a short report, written primarily in order to be accountable to the St Nicholas PCC, in line with our sabbatical policy.

At St Nicholas a sabbatical is for a two month duration but in addition Sue and I were able to dovetail a month of annual leave around the study leave so that in total I was away from normal parish duties for a three month period. It was great to start with annual leave in Suffolk and then later on to have an extended holiday in the Alps, with plenty of walking and reading, in July and early August. We certainly returned from our time away well rested, though what happened fairly soon after will emerge in my report below!

In terms of the study leave I had two main aims, to which I added a third as it progressed.

### **Phase 1**

My first priority was to write a preachers' commentary on 2 Peter and Jude. It fits into the same series as my previous books, also written for Christian Focus under the auspices of the Proclamation Trust. The writing built upon the preaching series I have done within the last year on both 2 Peter and Jude. Given all the difficulties that the Church of England is currently facing in relation to false teaching, my aim was to provide a work which unpacks Jude's message about how as believers we are to contend for the faith once and for all delivered to the saints. The writing progressed more quickly than I could have hoped. It is now with the Proclamation Trust and in their editing process - I am sure that there will be all sorts of improvements required for the text. My prayer is that the book should be available for next summer, ready to equip preachers for some of the key issues facing the Church of England then.

### **Phase 2**

My second priority was to invest time in studying certain parts of the Old Testament on which I have rarely preached. Over the years I have tried to ensure that sermons are preached from right across the range of Biblical genres. Even so, looking at my sermon records there were a few significant gaps! So, looking at Leviticus, 2 Samuel and Zechariah I found these had accounted for only one sermon. Gathering various commentaries and resources, it was incredibly stimulating to spend time in some of these relatively obscure parts of the Scripture. Each pointed in different ways to the Lord Jesus. So in Leviticus it was good to look at sacrifices, priesthood and the tabernacle/temple and see how each found their fulfilment in Christ. In 2 Samuel the focus was on the kingship of David which also points to the reign and rule of Christ. Finally in Zechariah it was wonderful to see how all of God's promises will find their fulfilment through Christ in enabling God's own glorious presence with His people. These studies expanded my understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ and I trust that at some point in the coming years I might, under God, be able to pass these things on to the Lord's people in Sevenoaks.

### **Phase 3**

My final priority, which emerged towards the end of my sabbatical, enabled me to focus on the account of Jesus' Transfiguration in Matthew, Mark, Luke and 2 Peter. Some will be aware that back in the early Spring I led a Toolbox study on the Transfiguration. In leading that study I was already aware that this incident includes a richness of material about the person, identity and mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet compared with other key passages in the Gospels about Christ it is relatively neglected. The Feast of the Transfiguration is 6 August which means it doesn't really feature in the church year because most churches are in 'holiday mode' at that point. So, the idea came together of producing a set of fourteen devotional studies on

the Transfiguration which would take believers through the material at a relatively leisurely pace so that they could savour the treasures to be found. I have tried to tie these devotions to a holiday theme so that it could be the sort of devotional material believers might take away with them on a two week summer holiday, which would feed their soul and enable them to focus as clearly as possible on the Lord Jesus. The material may well never see the light of day but currently one publisher is considering whether it merits a wider audience.

## **Phase 4**

With one week of my study leave to go, having just returned from the Alps and as fully rested as I could be, I thought that more or less everything that I had planned had been accomplished. At that point, Sue and I discovered that I had a recurrence of my auto-immune disease leaving me at one stage with 4 platelets in my blood - normal range is 200-400. So, my final week of sabbatical was spent in Guy's Hospital followed by a few further days there as the medical team tried a whole assortment of treatments in order to try to elevate my platelet level from critical. In one sense this incident was not entirely unexpected as my consultant had been trying to lower the dose of a particular medication over the last year. It looks like I'll be back on the full dose for the foreseeable future! It wasn't the easiest of experiences. For a couple of days I was in considerable pain with which I really struggled. For over ten days, despite all sorts of treatments being tried, the situation actually deteriorated and there were certainly times when we were left wondering whether on this occasion a cure would be found. We are very grateful to so many who prayed, for the medics who eventually found a solution, and above all to the Lord for His kindness. And amidst everything there were some great experiences of God's grace and a number of opportunities to open God's word with fellow patients.

So, I am extremely thankful indeed for the provision of this study leave. I am particularly grateful to Gavin and others on the senior staff who covered whilst I was away, both the parts that were planned as well as the unplanned section at the end! The end of the sabbatical didn't turn out quite as I expected but it has been an amazingly rich and precious time. Thank you!

Angus MacLeay  
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