

Pastoral Letter – East Anglia District

Chair of the District – Revd Dr Julian M. Pursehouse

Eastertide 2024

***‘But the silence in the mind  
is when we live best, within  
listening distance of the silence we call God...’ (RS Thomas)***

Dear Friends,

A recent trip to Launde Abbey with our regional probationers, has caused me to reflect deeply upon the spirituality of ‘tarrying’, inspired by Jesus’s command to his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, to tarry and keep watch! *Tarrying* a while encourages us to desist and stop, to wait and watch, and to become truly attentive to the gift of God, each other, and the natural world.

None of this is easy or straight forward in the world in which we live. We live in a busy, frenetic, and noisy world, where we are constantly bombarded by notifications, 24-hour news feeds and the chatter of social media. I am reminded of the Banksy mural, called *Mobile Lovers*, which depicts the passionate embrace of two lovers, who at the same time, are peering over each other’s shoulders at their mobile phones. It is a startling social critique of a society where seemingly, we have lost the art of true and deep attention to anything, and instead, we are content to allow our attentions to be multiple and diffuse!

The poetry of RS Thomas (see above) invites us to ponder the value of silence and solitude. He suggests that we are living at our best or most excellent, when we proceed from a mind that is serene and calm that has become accustomed to the value of silence. It is here in this interior landscape of the heart, that our silence touches the margins of the eternal silence that is God. The cultivation of this contemplative silence is the means to clearing the space, for the divine to be encountered, and for the human heart to be addressed by eternal love.

I note with interest that the Gospel lectionary reading for this Easter Day is Mark 16:1-8, widely regarded by New Testament scholars as the original and authentic ending of Mark’s Gospel. If that is the case, then the Gospel of Mark ends with the fear and awe of silent wonder – as the women flee from the tomb, with fear and amazement and tell no one their story! In some respects, this Gospel lectionary reading does not meet the expectations of Easter worshippers, for the joyful and triumphant celebration of Jesus’ resurrection is absent and instead we have *silence!*

This is a useful corrective to other Gospel passages and a reminder that part of our response to the momentous events of Holy Week and Easter might well be the silence of wonder and awe. The Easter season lasts for fifty days – there is time for silent wonder and reflective solitude, rather than moving too quickly to demonstrative praise and confident proclamation.

As you celebrate the Easter story, and reflect upon the significance of the crucified and risen Christ, I hope and pray, that you will find time for silence and contemplation and allow the revelation of God’s presence to unfold slowly, graciously, and creatively,

*With peace and blessings,*

*Julian*