

Return of the Prodigal Vicar

Fiona and I thought it a good idea to drop you all a line to say that we are looking forward to being back fully involved in parish life once again on Monday 23rd July.

The first thing to say is a big thank you to the staff team, the office, the churchwardens and our visiting retired ministers (John Blore, Martin Grey and Gerald Rootham) for all the amazing work that has been going on in the last three months. I am so grateful to them, and to you all, for enabling me to have the time away doing my studies and reflection.

Fiona and I are so thankful for the privilege and blessing of the sabbatical. I have gone to unexpected places and met some amazing people. Fiona and I have enjoyed weekends together. I have found my studies fascinating and have relished the ability to get my head down and study Luke 15 from so many different perspectives. It would have been impossible to have done any of this without the demands of parish ministry being lifted for these three months.

I'm afraid I am going to disappoint you if you are hoping for a clear (and short) summary of my conclusions. Unfortunately I discovered that my simple question "What does Luke 15 have to teach us about how we should be the church here and now?" is a lot more complicated than I expected. This has meant I have been unable to get the study paper I wanted to write finished. I simply ran out of time to read any more books or articles or talk to any more people.

However I have been left with reflections and thoughts, which I would like to explore with you at our Benefice Service on July 29th at 10:30am at All Saints Mattishall. This isn't about Mark coming back as some kind of expert, but rather us together discovering the questions Luke 15 is asking of our own lives of faith and our life as churches.

Over the last three months I have observed some moving, creative and thought provoking activities, which have deepened my sense of the call of our Lord to reveal his love to his world. I wanted to share these with you. Therefore there will not be a traditional sermon as such at the benefice service, but as well as worship and prayer as normal, there will be interactive activities based on my encounters, using some of the methods I have experienced to help you to discover what I have been doing while I have been off.

Assuring you of our continued prayers for you all and looking forward to being back.

With every blessing,

Mark and Fiona