

## **Time on our hands**

Many years ago, Bev and I were living in Germany. Over a weekend I was involved in the tragic deaths of 2 soldiers. I spent many hours and days talking to officers and soldiers who had been involved over the weekend. The regiment sent me back to England to take their funerals, and then collected me from the airfield I landed back into with a helicopter journey over the top of the city in which we were based to see the churches from above. I was so grateful to them.

I few weeks later I was not, mentally, in a good place and a German Lutheran military pastor took me to a Benedictine community north of our home and introduced me to the Abbess who had been primed to receive us. She knew I needed someone to talk with who might be able to help me. In a convent in the middle of Germany lived an Irish nun, who was a Cambridge graduate, and had the pastoral skills to help me. It took the first visit to bring her English back to something we could use to communicate as she had been living in Germany for many years.

Over the weeks sister and the community welcomed me into their life and their hospitality was amazing. As well as introducing me to some excellent German food, they introduced me to ways of praying and looking at myself that have stayed with me since then. The sister and her community helped me to a deeper life with God and to fall in love with him. Many years later I was at a chapter meeting in Worthing and Bishop Martin asked all the clergy present a question, when did you fall in love with God? I knew my answer, almost to the day and it was due to the hospitality of a community in the middle of Germany, and a beautiful, Christ-like nun who changed my life.

Hospitality is a pillar of Benedictine life, as it is a pillar of the Christian life. Jesus ate with his friends, he fed the thousands, he turned water into more wine than they needed for the wedding, and he told stories about hospitality. The Good Samaritan didn't have to do all that he did, he had already done more than everyone else, but he paid for the stay of the injured man. The father in the story of the Prodigal Son didn't have to keep looking for him, nor kill the fatted calf for a banquet when he returned, but he did, showing us the hospitality and the generosity of God who loves unconditionally.

St Benedict, in his Rule, tells the monks to be hospitable. Not simply to feed guests and all those who come to the monastery or convent. He tells them "Any guest who happens to arrive at the monastery should be received just as we would receive Christ himself". That's the key to hospitality, and a hospitable life. We meet people all through our life, even in this time of lock-down, on our exercise walks, in the shops when we go for our food, and even on Face Time, Skype and Zoom. They are guests arriving in our world, knocking on our door. If we look for Christ in them, there is just a chance they will find Christ in us. Many of you will have heard me pronounce the blessing at the end of the Eucharist and it is my prayer for you today,

May you be a new creation, Christ for those to whom Christ will send you.