

From the Vicarage,



“Did you have a good holiday?” I wonder how many times we have had that said to us, and how many times we have asked it. How do we answer? What constitutes a ‘good holiday – fine weather? an exotic location? a chance to do nothing for a week or two (that would certainly not be a good holiday for me)? an opportunity to indulge with food and drink? a time to meet new people – even find romance perhaps? I guess it all depends upon our outlook and tastes; we all look for something different in a good holiday.

With the holiday season fast approaching perhaps it’s a good opportunity to stop for a moment and reflect upon this question. Will that planned break live up to expectations? Jo and I have already been away, having had the privilege once again to undertake a chaplaincy in the Swiss Alpine resort of Wengen, near Interlaken. This is a two-week stay that is intended to be part work and part holiday as we lead the English-speaking church in that wonderful place. I use the word privilege quite deliberately for every time we go there, or to one of the other resorts where we have served, we are extremely struck by that sense of privilege in working for God in such a wonderful location. There is very little local English-speaking Christian community, so the ministry is intended almost entirely for the tourists who come along. Many are committed Christians, of course, and that’s why they come; but others are people who just want the opportunity while on holiday, to reflect upon the bigger issues in life and even the presence of a chaplain in the resort can give great opportunities for very significant conversations.

This year our chaplaincy was, as many readers already know, overshadowed by an awful tragedy that happened to an American family staying in the next village, which we also cover. Their twelve-year-old only son was lost at a local tourist attraction, a huge flight of ten waterfalls scoured into the solid rock, bringing down thousands of gallons of water a minute from the glacial melt of the Eiger, the Mönch, and the Jungfrau. No-one actually saw him fall, but he clearly disappeared, and only a shoe was recovered at the bottom a few days later. His body was eventually recovered on June 18th, almost a month after the accident.

I cannot claim to have a clue as to how that family feels. There is nothing anyone can say that makes it feel better, but we can be there, and we can pray for them, and with them. I had the great privilege of praying with those grieving parents and holding them while they wept, and now as we are back home on different continents we remain in contact by e-mail and our three churches still hold them in our prayers.

Yes, this coloured our time away, of course it did, but it certainly didn’t spoil it. In some ways it was the most fulfilling chaplaincy of the five we have now completed. Yes, it meant that the two weeks were rather unevenly balanced – less than 50% holiday and more than 50% work, but we did not come home feeling drained by it, but quite the reverse. We had an amazing sense of God’s presence with us, and over and over again of turning up in just the right place at the right time. We came home, if anything, feeling more invigorated than we usually do after a holiday. I come back again to that word ‘privilege’. It was certainly a privilege to be allowed in to that family’s very personal grief and anguish and yes, thank you, the verdict is that we had a very good holiday indeed! I pray that all our readers who are going away this summer will also have a very good holiday – whatever that means for you”!

And by the way – for those who are going abroad, I do have a copy of a directory of English-speaking churches abroad. If anyone would like to consult it before you go, please do let me know.

Just one item of news from Ecton Church this month. On July 19th we are beginning a long-awaited regular monthly Family Service at 11.00am. This will be child-friendly, active, and exciting – definitely a ‘can’t miss’ occasion, but there will be an opportunity for the grownups to receive Holy Communion as well. The exact format is still being planned, and we shall learn as we go along, so please come and give us a try – not just once, but please keep coming and help us to grow into getting it right by your comments and your support. The time of this service has been set in response to a survey that we conducted among young families earlier in the year, so we know we got that bit right at least!

With very best wishes,

Chris Pearson