

A Reflection from a St Mary's Churchwarden (Charles Wilson)

I've just had a light lunch with Julia beside the Bosphorus, that narrow straight of water that separates Europe from Asia. Yes, we've finally arrived in Istanbul on the motorbike, after many years of dreaming about it. It's stunning, fascinating and compelling. West and East clashing over 1500 years, yet co-existing today. Christian and Muslim history is pictorially recorded on the walls of the Aya Sofya.

Today is another sunny day, there's a breeze and it's got all the colour and noise you'd expect of this remarkable city. I know many readers have already been here. Everyone loves it. Now I know why.

We've already had numerous interesting encounters on the journey with Turks, Slovenians, Serbs, Czechs, Germans, Austrians, and Le French. Some are fellow-bikers, doing much more adventurous journeys than us. In a few days of travel, we've met people so diverse and interesting, despite the language barriers. Balcombe now seems a lifetime away, but when this magazine is delivered, Istanbul will seem a lifetime away. By then, we'll have crossed Greece, Italy and France on our return and met dozens more fascinating people.

All this makes me reflect: do I like the stability and continuity of a small Sussex village, or do I like the cosmopolitan challenge of travel and constant change? Well, of course, it's both in different pockets of our lives. I'd hate to be travelling like this all year round, though some would love it. I like the steadiness of a stable community, probably because I had 13 homes in my childhood. But others don't.

The church is a bit the same. There's so much value in our tradition, history and roots of faith. I've learnt a lot about the church year and festivals since coming to St Mary's. But equally, we need fresh expressions, new events, new people and differences amongst us to brighten our collective life up. Don't we?

That's why I loved the vigour and drama of the recent Royal wedding. An American Bishop to preach? Really. A Gospel choir from London? Surely not! There was a visible collision during the marriage ceremony of tradition with outright passion.

I liked the contrast. Personally, I think our monarchy contributes hugely to our society, but I also heartily welcomed that passionate message of redeeming gospel love from a black American bishop. As we journeyed towards the East a few days ago, even those who spoke very little English admitted that they too had watched the Windsor Royal wedding!

By the way, if you like singing, the leader of the Royal wedding choir, Karen Gibson, has long been booked to come to St Mary's to lead a Gospel singing day on 10th November this year! And there are several other events in September and October for us to look forward to.

By then, the bike will be looking forward to its winter rest!