

St Christopher's, Pott Shrigley.

### ***3D Volume 3***

#### *Sabbath: luxury, or necessity?*

I'm enjoying the memories Google Photos is sharing with me at the moment. This time 7 years ago Kim and I were walking the Camino de Santiago, the pilgrimage route in northern Spain; and it's lovely to be reminded, via a daily diet of photos, of our progress, and the adventures we had.

Our Camino was part of my Sabbatical: three months away from normal life and duties. Clergy are permitted to do this after a number of years' service, and can use the time for a whole variety of things. Some delve into the academic world. Some experience church life and ministry in contexts and places far from their own. Others embark on adventures; last summer I followed the progress of a colleague who travelled with his family from Liverpool to Cambridge by canal boat. One colleague wrote a novel. Sabbatical is a time to re-calibrate, to be resourced, to be renewed.

Most of us who have had that privilege have also had to contend with the inevitable 'on holiday again, Vicar?' comments (not confined to sabbaticals, I'm afraid!). We don't mind (much...), but it does miss the point: simply working non-stop may fit some people's ideas of 'what you should be doing', but rest, re-creation, reflection also have a vital place. And even the 'holiday again?' brigade will benefit, hopefully, from a refreshed and re-envisioned vicar!

The Bible enshrines this in the concept of Sabbath (from which the word Sabbatical comes, of course). The creation narrative in Genesis, when read properly, tells us some fundamental things about the nature of our world and of our own selves: and a prominent feature is the rest God took on the seventh day – and in turn commanded us to take (read the fourth commandment in full: Exodus 20.8-11). We humans aren't designed to function without the proper balance of work, rest and play. This was the basis, years ago, of the Keep Sunday Special campaign, which I strongly supported. It might seem quaint now that we tried to resist inevitable march of commercialism and consumerism into every space of our lives; but I think that, while we might have gained a modicum of convenience, as a society we have lost a lot more – which is what many of us feared. I still avoid shopping on Sundays.

I have been made to think again about Sabbath in recent weeks, as this time has had more than a hint of the Sabbatical about it for many. Yes, lockdown has actually curtailed freedom – whereas 7 years ago I was, briefly, gloriously free! And, yes, there has been a very wide range of experiences, bitter and difficult ones for many, over these months. But many have had the unexpected – if enforced – ‘Sabbath’ experience of stopping what they were doing, of stepping aside from the established routine, and, perhaps, of assessing their lives and priorities.

It’s easy to be simplistic; the trauma and damage which has been visited upon us as a society are huge; the lessons to be learned, let alone the problems to be solved, are unimaginably complex. I don’t disregard any of that. But equally I would hope that we can take some positive things forward into the new normal. And if that includes re-capturing an appreciation of the true meaning and value of Sabbath, then I think we will have gained something very important.

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