



**St Mark's Church, Reigate**

January 2024

**Letter from the Vicar, Father Martin Colton**

Dear Friends,

Before Christmas I was reading a devotional book *Walking Backwards to Christmas* by the Most Revd Stephen Cottrell, the Archbishop of York. In the introduction, Archbishop Stephen mentioned that people often asked him how he had time to write books, and this is something that I have often wondered. How does he do it? Surely the work of an archbishop must be very pressured? Archbishop Stephen's answer surprised me. Rather than saying that he got up at 6.00 am, or exercised rigid self-discipline, or did the writing on his day off, he said just this: "The only sensible answer I can come up with is that we all find time for the things that really give us joy."

So, I wonder, do we truly find time for the things that give us joy? We can always experience joy when it surprises us – a beam of bright sunlight on a cloudy day or an unexpected visit from a friend – but I don't think we always intentionally go looking for it. Not only that, but what makes joy different from simple happiness?

There seems to be something deeper at work when we find joy. Joy is a spiritual thing. Joy is a prominent theme in the Bible, a response to God's providence, a gift we can ask God for, and one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit at work in us. It isn't rooted in material happiness which will inevitably fail us, but in Christ himself. When that is the case, we can still experience joy even in hard times. Joy is supposed to be one of the mainstays of our lives, not something we glimpse fleetingly. For Archbishop Stephen then, he must feel God to be at work in him when he is writing. That sense of doing something in partnership with God, in that particular moment.

Very few of us will be writers, but I believe that joy is all around us just waiting to be noticed, and that each one of us can experience it more intentionally. If we make no other resolution this year, perhaps we can be more attentive to where we find joy, and then make space for it. If joy is where God is, then it shouldn't be put to one side waiting for our leisure time, but we should allow it to permeate and weave through every day, until it becomes one of the foundations of our lives.

Every blessing and Happy New Year,