

## A LETTER FROM REV STUART

Someone asked me recently, “Are you the new priest who’s just retired here?” Well, 37 years on from my ordination I hardly qualify as a new priest. And since we retired here from Surrey 32 months ago, ‘newcomers’ probably isn’t the most accurate description of our status. Though, for sure, I’m the most recent arrival among Milborne Port’s retired priests.



Moving house is among the most stressful life events, so no surprise we found moving from a fair-sized Rectory to our new house here a tad traumatic. No complaints about the process itself or the removers, but I was left with a severe allergy to cardboard boxes that still afflicts me. Large packing cases we emptied fairly quickly, but plenty of smaller ones survived the experience – at least one made it through four house moves without being opened. I’m still occasionally amazed at what I unearth in the darker recesses of the garage!

Although my mother was a keen down-scaler, I’m not in her league. Things I consider ‘collectable’ still occupy a lot of space in the garage. And despite offloading boxloads to charity shops, we’re still saying, “Wherever did it come from?” or “I haven’t seen that in years!”. It’s made me reflect on Jesus’ parable of the farmer who demolished his barns to double his storage capacity. “I’ve earned it! I deserve it!” he announced, contemplating a comfortable retirement, which never materialised. Unfortunately, we can’t increase the size of our garage, so we’re left wondering why we put money and effort into things we barely remember now!

November is the month of Remembrance. As we give thanks on 11<sup>th</sup> November for those who’ve given their lives to bring us the peace and security we now enjoy, we remember equally all victims of war and conflict. Refugees, many escaping conflict and violence, remind us of countless millions around the world who have no storage space for their forgotten acquisitions, who journey on with only a suitcase or cardboard box containing their entire life. Before indulging my collecting instincts, I try to remember those who struggle to collect food and life’s essentials.

We’ll both wear poppies gladly, remembering our own brave relatives and giving thanks for all those whose lives paid for today’s freedoms. But my mother often said, “You can’t take it with you when you go”. Today I find acquiring more possessions far less satisfying than putting my energy and resources into making the world a more peaceful and kinder place. Which for me is the heart of what it means to follow the way of Jesus Christ.

*God bless you all*

*Stuart*