**August Monthly Reflection**

**Holiday or Holy Day**

*“So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.”* Hebrews 4:9-11

At this time of the year, many of us will still be thinking about holidays. Children are off from schools, colleges and universities have slowed down. When the weather is good, we see many people sitting in the sunshine. However, as I’m sure we are all aware, it has not always been like this, even though the Ten Commandments calls us to have a rest. There are numerous verses in the Bible advising us to rest from our labours and give ourselves time for recuperation.

We tend to think that the concept of holidays has always been in existence. Before the 19th century and the onset of the industrial revolution they were Holy Days, which were the days for a rest from work. Employers may have given a day off for a religious festival and those wealthier may have taken time for a pilgrimage or the “Grand Tour”. Those working on the land may have been able to take a short time off for seasonal celebrations such as Harvest or Lammas. The concept of a set period to go on holiday really started in the North of England during the beginning of the 19th Century when factories and mills would shut down, usually two weeks, to encourage people to go to the seaside for refreshment and relaxation; these weeks were known as Wakes Weeks. Where did that term Wakes come from?

The Wakes originated from the Middle Ages as the annual dedication feast of a parish church. Once a year the old rushes on the church floor were cleared out and replaced. Fresh, sweet smelling rushes were gathered from nearby streams in the summer months and brought to church in a ceremony called rush bearing. The church was decorated and garlands hung on the wall, and the whole village commemorated the occasion with a holiday (or ‘Holy Day’). Celebrations included feasting, drinking, music, dancing, and general merrymaking! However, during the 17th century, Wakes were one of the celebrations that were restricted by Puritans, who took a more austere approach to church life.

It was not until the 19th century before this idea of holy days became a holiday. Eventually in 1871 the Bank Holiday Act was instituted ensuring that there were designated statutory days off, and this solidified the concept of public holidays. Enough history, what is important is it states frequently in the Bible that we all need to have time off, a holiday. We don’t necessarily have to dash to the seaside, as was encouraged in the 19th Century, but we do need time for rest and recuperation. We need to be refreshed like the rushes on the floor of the Medieval churches, time to put away our daily stresses and give ourselves time for recouperation and refreshment. As you enjoy this holiday season may you find this prayer helpful:

*"Lord, in the midst of the business of this holiday season, I seek rest and renewal for my weary soul. Help me to slow down, to be present in each moment, and to find joy in the simple things. Renew my spirit and fill me with your peace. Amen."*

Canon Cate Edmonds, Canon Steward Exeter Cathedral