

Dear Friends,

September has always been for me a month of beginnings - time to find the school satchel, sharpen the crayons, fill the fountain pen, swap sandals for shoes and whiten the plimsolls for gym. Whether it is your first school, moving up to secondary or on to higher education there is a particular pleasure in preparing although I expect the list has changed quite a lot since my days.

Actually this September will be very different - I am not returning from Summer holidays and Frances, my wife, is not returning to school as she has decided to take a break from full time teaching. So for the first time in maybe forty years we will be having a holiday just as most are returning to work. We are taking a trip to walk in the mountains, something we used to do together before, before children, before careers and which will in a way be a nostalgic recovery for the mind and a shock for the legs. It will be in any case a good time for me to take a break for I shall have been here in post in the Burnhams for six months so there is much to absorb and think over.

Which is why mountains may be good! In the Bible there is mention of many mountains: Gilboa, Hermon, Nebo, Tabor, Ararat, Carmel and whenever they are mentioned or someone significant goes up them we know something important is going to happen - Moses going up mount Sinai, or Jesus predicting the destruction of the Temple on the mount of Olives as well as the many unidentified summits where we read "He led them up a high mountain." So rooted is this idea that we speak of a moment of revelation or understanding as a mountain top experience.

The Balkan mountains running from east to west divide Bulgaria in two and we are off to the very middle of the range where most peaks are above 2000 metres there are miles or more likely kilometres of walks and several Orthodox monasteries to visit. I cannot guarantee that I will have any special insights but I shall pack my rucksack, my sketchbook, sharpen the pencils, fill the drawing pens, swap shoes for walking boots and hope to return inspired and rested ready to start again and to see you all at our special services for Harvest, Remembrance and Advent.

With blessings to all

Steve