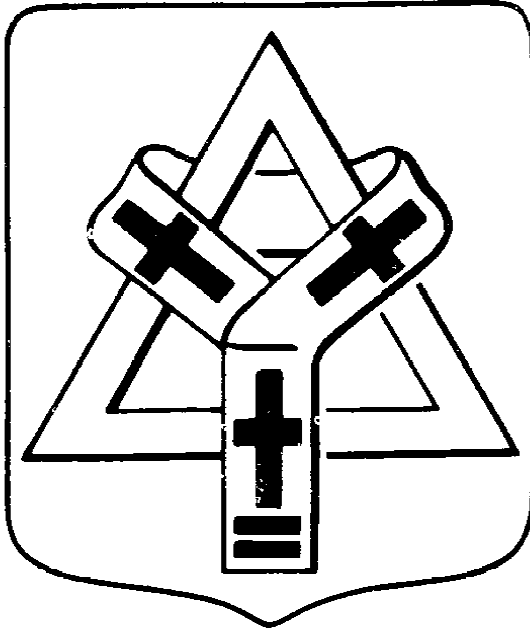


Belief



Bible Notes July – September 2018

50p

July 1st (Trinity 5)

Ephesians 4 vv 1-7

We believe in one God.

This quarter, I thought we'd look at belief or faith. Perhaps they are not quite the same thing in English, but both words are used to translate the same word in the Greek of the New Testament or the Hebrew of the Old. We'll work through the Nicene Creed, the one we use at Communion, studying biblical passages which shed light on these wonderful words which many of us say every week. Creeds started with the Apostles' Creed – the one we say at Morning and Evening Prayer and which we often use at Baptisms. The Apostles' Creed was published around 200AD as a summary of what people should believe if they converted to Christianity and sought to be baptised. After some very heated debate about how we should understand Who Jesus is and Who the Holy Spirit is, the Apostles' Creed was expanded to form what we call the Nicene Creed. For baptismal candidates *I believe* was the obvious requirement. The Nicene Creed was about what we all believe as members of God's Church and so it is often formulated *We believe*. Sometimes, however, it is *I believe*. This makes a good point. Faith is an individual matter. I believe in Jesus. You believe in Jesus. It is also a matter of belonging to the body of all believers. We believe in Jesus.

July 2nd

Hebrews 11 vv 1-3

But what is faith? St James tells us that the devils believe that there is one God and they tremble. That can't be faith in Christ. Belief in God is much more than belief that God exists. It is more than believing that God is great and powerful and all the other things God is, even that He is love. Faith is being in a relationship of trust with God. It is like marriage. You can know that a certain woman exists. You can know a lot about her. She might even make a big difference to your life as your teacher or boss or friendly neighbour or police officer come to arrest you. But, if you marry her, you give yourself to her; you entrust your life to her. Faith and hope and love are not far removed one from another. *Faith is the substance of things hoped for*. Your love for your wife or your husband is the basis of your hope for your marriage which you enter in hope. Sadly, your faith in a man or a woman may prove to have been misplaced, but God will never let you down.

July 3rd

Hebrews 11 vv 1-3

Forgive me, but I can't leave those verses there. *Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.* I may hope that the weather will be nice tomorrow for my picnic. Faith that it will is like having a really accurate weather forecast. The reason for our *sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life* is our faith in Jesus Whom God, Who is love, raised from the dead.

It is through faith that we know that God created everything that is. It is through faith that we know God Who created everything that is. Human beings instinctively believe that there must be an explanation for the universe, a reason for everything. We can argue very powerfully that there must be a first cause, a prime mover, an end to which all things tend, an ultimate explanation, though we cannot prove it. Even if we were convinced by rational argument alone that some great power made heaven and earth, we should not thereby know God. That great power might not be involved in the daily working of the universe, might not be interested in what happens to it, might not care about you and me. God reveals Himself in Creation and in Scripture and in the life of the Church and to you and me personally. We know God by faith and by faith we know that the God Who loves us is the Maker of heaven and earth.

July 4th

Hebrews 11 vv 4-6

St James also tells us that faith without works is dead. If you believe in God, you act on your belief. You entrust your life to God. You believe that He will look after you. You believe that obeying His commandments is the only way to live and that, conversely, adopting the world's way of doing things can only lead to disaster. You believe that God has prepared a life for you and that He will provide the resources for you to do the things He wants you to with it. You wouldn't want to live a Christian life if you didn't have faith. *Let us eat, drink and be merry, you might say, for tomorrow we die.* You couldn't live a Christian life without faith. *Without me, Jesus says, ye can do nothing.* If we love God, however, how can we not long to please Him? Faith without works is dead because, if we have faith, it is by faith that we live.

July 5th

Hebrews 11 v32 – 12 v3

Hebrews 11 is a catalogue of great men and women who, in OT times, accomplished amazing things because they had faith in God. The chapter reminds us that we have so much more than they did. They had the promise of Christ coming. We have Christ. They, therefore, are our examples, but we ought to be able to do even more than they did. We have Jesus. We have His example in dying on Calvary for the sins of the world. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit set free by that precious death so that we may know Him and in Him have eternal life – the experience of God which enables us to offer up our lives to Him, Whose service is perfect freedom.

GRANT, O Lord, we beseech thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by thy governance, that thy Church may joyfully serve thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

July 6th

Psalm 53

Why do people say in their heart *There is no God?* S Anselm answered this question by saying that the fool says this because he is a fool. If he really thought about it, he would understand that God exists more surely than anything else exists. Everything else depends for its existence on God. Nearly every human culture has religion of some kind. It could be argued that human beings are naturally religious simply because God is.

Some people insist that there can be no God because of all the evil in the world. In fact some people seem to refuse to believe in God as a way of getting back at Him for the bad things which have happened to them.

Many (most? all?) people deny God because they don't want to obey His commandments. They want to go their own way, the world's way. They don't recognise that selfishness and self-centredness lead to the eternal death of self, whereas it is only in the giving of the self to God that the self lives. S Paul includes all of us in this universal condemnation. It is original sin. We have all rejected God and are

therefore bound for eternal death, except that He has sent Jesus into the world to save us through faith in His Blood.

July 7th

Deuteronomy 6 vv 1-9

We believe in one God.

There can only be one God. If God is all powerful, all wise, all loving, etc., the Source of all that is, there can only be one of Him. I think I am right in saying that religions which believe in many gods tend to the belief that all these gods are manifestations of the One, though of course, I can't speak for them and I could be wrong about this! But it is inconceivable that there could be more than One Being Who is everything that we believe about God. So-called other gods are misrepresentations of the One true God, human inventions and lies, or false spirits. There is only one God and He uniquely manifests Himself in Jesus Christ. Anything else anyone says about God must be assessed in the light of Christ and that includes what we read in the Bible.

However, the best known bible passage about the essential unity of God isn't primarily philosophical or theological. It is about loving God with all our heart, soul and might, about knowing God in our hearts, about walking with Him in our daily lives and about sharing our love for Him with the people whom we love.

July 8th

Deuteronomy 6 vv 10-15

I wonder whether this is what has gone wrong with us. God has given us all these blessings - freedom from want, peace and security, all the benefits of modern medicine, so many good things – and we have forgotten Him. Most people don't go to church. Many of those who do go to church sometimes aren't totally committed. We don't teach our children the faith. Instead of receiving all these material goods thankfully as gifts from God, we treat them as ends in themselves, almost as gods even. We adopt the methods of the world in order to earn a living, stay healthy and fit in with modern society. Yes, we should work hard, eat healthily, exercise, take our medicine if we need it, be good neighbours and colleagues to the people around us, but these should never become ends in themselves. God is our end as He is our beginning.

O GOD, who hast prepared for them that love thee such good things as pass man's understanding; Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may

obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

July 9th

Deuteronomy 6 vv 16-25

The Exodus is a very wonderful story. Every year, Jewish people keep the Passover, both to remember what God did when He set them free from being slaves in Egypt and to affirm that He is the same God faithful in every generation including this present one. Remembering that everything they have, they have from God, they thank Him for all His blessings and affirm their allegiance to the covenant made between God and their forefathers. As God is faithful, so ought His people to be faithful. As God has called His people, not because of their goodness or greatness, but simply because He loved them, His people must be holy as He is holy and obey all the commandments He has given them for their well-being.

How much more true is all this for us. The New Testament or Covenant is brought into being by the Death of Jesus on the Cross. We owe everything to Him and His love. *Do this in remembrance of me,* He said. In doing so, we remember what He accomplished in setting us free from slavery to sin and death, how much He loves us. We praise Him that what He has done is effective in every generation. We glorify Him for His faithfulness. We affirm our membership of the people of God, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. We commit ourselves to obeying His commandments, that we should love one another as He has loved us. We believe in one God and we are one with Him and He with us and we are one with another in His love.

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my
pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my
God!
All the vain things that charm me
most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His
feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled
down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow
meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a
crown?

Were the whole realm of nature
mine,

That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,

Demands my soul, my life, my all.

July 10th

Luke 11 vv 1-4

The Father, the Almighty

Maybe we are too used to saying these words. Perhaps we have lost the sense of astonishment which they ought to generate. *God Almighty* is a very ancient title for God. Even when people believed in a multitude of gods, in the background, there was the idea of God Almighty, perhaps thought of as the head of the Pantheon or maybe as the Source and Origin of them all. God Almighty, the Most High God. If you think about God, surely you think first of all of Almighty God. It is Jesus Who teaches us to call Almighty God Father – *Our Father which art in heaven*. Think about it.

July 11th

Luke 15 vv 11-32

What would it mean to call God *Father*? The story of the Prodigal Son, the Lost Son, is one answer. God loves us like a father. We can turn to God as we would turn to our earthly fathers. Indeed, while earthly fathers might less us down, we can always trust God for His love for His children.

July 12th

Matthew 26 vv 36-44

Jesus talks to God as His Father. He does so here in anguish, but it is characteristic of Jesus' relationship with God that He speaks with God as any son to any Father.

Ride on, ride on in majesty! Your last and fiercest strife is nigh.

The Father on His sapphire throne awaits His own anointed Son.

July 13th

Luke 4 vv 21-38

Jesus speaks to God as any child would speak to his father, but there is much more going on here. God acknowledges Jesus as His Son in a very special way, as He acknowledged the Kings of Israel in the OT. Jesus is specially God's Son. But if you make it to v38, so is Adam. Adam and Jesus represent humanity as the children of God –

respectively in creation & subsequent fall, then in redemption and exaltation to heaven.

July 14th

John 10 vv 22 – 42

And yet there is more. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He is the Son of the Father. What Jesus does is the work of the Father. The Father vindicates Jesus. Father & Son are one in caring for us His sheep. Jesus is one with the Father, making Himself equal with God. The Father/Son relationship of Jesus with God is unique and yet it says, *ye are gods*, a hint maybe that created beings may be made divine by the Word of God? Jesus is the One in Whom we are at one with God.

July 15th (Trinity 7)

Galatians 4 vv 1-7

Where I fail as a preacher is in getting people to realise how wonderful it is to be a Christian. I find I cannot convince those outside the Church that they should belong. I cannot convince Church members that their membership of the Church, the Body of Christ, is what they are, what their life is, and not just one aspect of a busy life in which faith is just one of many rival commitments, contending for our time and energy with work, home life, hobbies, etc.. To be a Christian is everything. We do our work, we live out our home life, we engage in leisure and sporting activities as people of faith. We see the world in the light of eternity.

This is perhaps a difficult passage to understand. What I think Paul is saying is that God gave the Law because people behave like unruly children. Naturally, we behave irresponsibly. We need rules. We may need to be punished for breaking the rules. We are watched to make sure we obey the rules by parents, teachers, employers, the police, even God. But becoming a Christian transforms our relationship with God, with the world and with the Law. We cease to be irresponsible, rebellious children and teenagers. We cease to be resentful servants, obeying orders because we can't afford not to. Christ sets us free. We are mature in Him. We are the children of God – in some sense even on a level with Christ. We are heirs of God with Jesus. We no longer act naturally after the flesh. Our nature is transformed by the Spirit.

LORD of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things; Graft in our hearts the love of thy Name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of

thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

July 16th

Romans 8 vv 11-18

We believe in God, the Father Almighty. He is our Father. That means that we are the brothers and sisters of Jesus. His Spirit dwells in our hearts and transforms our nature. We are adopted into God's family. As the children of God, co-heirs with Christ, we have eternal life – both in this world and the world to come.

Father God, I wonder how I
managed to exist
Without the knowledge of
your parenthood and your
loving care.
But now I am your child, I
am adopted in your family,
And I can never be alone,
'Cause Father God, you're
there beside me.

I will sing your praises,
I will sing your praises,
I will sing your praises,
Forever more.
I will sing your praises,
I will sing your praises,
I will sing your praises,
Forever more.

July 17th

I John 3 vv 1-3

Jesus is the Son of God. Through Him, through faith in Him, we Christians are the children of God. This is what we are now here on earth and what we have now is but a foretaste of what we shall be when we are made fully like Him in the hereafter. Jesus is the Son of God and He dwells in us and we in Him. His Spirit lives in us. We are His family. Live up to it.

July 18th

Psalms 24

Maker of heaven and earth.

Everything depends for its existence on God. You can think of Him as the great architect who designed everything or the builder who put it all together or the engineer who makes it all work. Whereas we make things out of something (cakes out of flour, butter and eggs, for example), God makes everything out of nothing. What you cannot think of about God, however, is that He is indifferent to His Creation. He is the God of justice, mercy and love. Those Who would come into His Presence must be similarly holy. Only Jesus is worthy to come into

the Presence of God the Father, Maker of heaven and earth, yet Jesus has opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.

July 19th

Psalm 19

Creation declares the glory of God. We wonder. We experience its beauty. Scientific enquiry discovers the laws by which it operates – the law of God. There is order. There is beauty. There is wonder. For those who have eyes to see the world in which we live powerfully witnesses to the glory, the beauty, the holiness of God. As we saw yesterday, God's infinity is not merely concerned with the mechanics of Creation, but with moral values, ethics, the way we behave. God loves His Creation. He loves us and requires of us that we should love Him and one another and that we should be good stewards of the material universe He has entrusted to our hands. The same God Who decreed the law of gravity also gave us the Ten Commandments. With the psalmist we pray for grace to think and speak and act here on earth in accordance with His heavenly Will.

O worship the Lord in the
beauty of holiness!
Bow down before Him, His
glory proclaim;
With gold of obedience,
and incense of lowliness,
Kneel and adore Him: the
Lord is His Name!

Fear not to enter His
courts in the slenderness
Of the poor wealth thou
wouldst reckon as thine;
For truth in its beauty,
and love in its tenderness,
These are the offerings to
lay on His shrine.

Low at His feet lay thy
burden of carefulness,
High on His heart He will
bear it for thee,
And comfort thy sorrows,
and answer thy
prayerfulness,
Guiding thy steps as may
best for thee be.

These, though we bring
them in trembling and
fearfulness,
He will accept for the
Name that is dear;
Mornings of joy give for
evenings of tearfulness,
Trust for our trembling
and hope for our fear.

O worship the Lord in the
beauty of holiness!
Bow down before Him, His
glory proclaim;
July 20th

With gold of obedience,
and incense of lowliness,
Kneel and adore Him: the
Lord is His Name!

Revelation 4

Of all that is, seen and unseen.

I once asked a teenage confirmation class what they thought was meant by God's unseen creation. One of them suggested abstracts like love and justice and mercy. Of course, he was right. Everything is of God. What I think the Creed means by the unseen Creation, however, is the world of angels and whatever other spiritual beings there might be. John is granted a revelation of what heaven is like. So was Moses on Mt Sinai and his vision was the pattern for the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle and, later, of the Temple. The worship of earth blends with the worship of heaven. God pours out upon us the blessings of His heaven. Jesus is God and enjoys the worship of the angels in all eternity and yet He becomes one of us, made a little lower than the angels for He suffering of death.

July 21st

Hebrews 2 vv 9-18

Wow! Jesus becomes one of us. He makes Himself at one with us. He suffers for our salvation. We are sanctified, we are made holy by Him Who is the holy One. He wasn't an angel and He didn't become an angel. He became a man. He set us free from slavery to sin and death. The immortal died so that we might live eternally. The sinless One suffered the punishment that was our due. He endured temptation in order that He might stand by us when we are tempted. In Jesus, heaven and earth meet and we are changed from glory to glory till we take our place in heaven.

1. Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven, to earth come down;
fix in us thy humble dwelling;
all thy faithful mercies crown!
Jesus thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation;
enter every trembling heart.

let us find that second rest.
Take away our bent to sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
end of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.

2. Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit
into every troubled breast!
Let us all in thee inherit;

3. Come, Almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return and never,
nevermore thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,

pray and praise thee without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

4. Finish, then, thy new creation;
pure and spotless let us be.
Let us see thy great salvation

July 22nd (Trinity 8)

perfectly restored in thee;
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Mark 1 v1

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God.

The Gospel is the Good News of the Son of God. This is what makes Christianity distinctive. There are plenty of religions in the world. Some of them believe that there is one God and that He is transcendent and that He makes Himself known through wise men and prophets. Some believe in many gods and that these gods have sometimes come down to earth perhaps disguised as animals or plants or even people or that the gods make their home in rocks or springs or temples made by human hands. It is only the Christian faith which knows that there is one God Creator of everything, infinitely greater than His Creation, utterly separate from His Creation and yet essentially bound up with His Creation – manifest as Father, Son & Holy Spirit.

O GOD, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth; We humbly beseech thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

July 23rd

Philippians 2 vv 1-11

Some people think of Jesus as a good man, the best who ever lived, as a teacher, healer, miracle worker, example, friend, brother, lover even. Some people think of Jesus as God. They are all right because He is all of these things. What we must be careful of is not to limit our ideas about Jesus, but to believe that He is all that the bible says He is. Paul speaks of the wonder of Who Jesus is and what He has accomplished here. But it's not just head knowledge that Paul is imparting. He isn't just giving a lesson in Theology. Paul is saying that what Jesus is and what Jesus has done makes all the difference to who we are and what we should do. We should be like Him because we have the mind of Christ.

July 24th

John 1 vv 1-11

Those of you who attend our Christmas services know how much I enjoy reading these verses. But note it isn't just me who can't get

people to accept Jesus. It is of the nature of the world to reject God and His Son, but, if we can accept Him into our hearts, we become what He is, the children of God. It is God's gift that we can.

July 25th (S James)

John 8 vv 32-59

There's a lot in this passage. Jesus offers these Jews salvation. They don't think they need it. They are the children of Abraham. Why should they need Jesus? Before we blame them too harshly, ask yourself how many people in the world today don't know their need for Jesus. We're decent people; we don't need to have our sins forgiven by Jesus. Jesus points out that truly good people wouldn't do what they are planning. Abraham didn't. So then they claim to be God's children, just as many people today claim to be Christians without accepting Christ into their hearts. If people were good children of God, Jesus says, they would welcome Him and recognise Him. But they aren't. They are deceived by the devil into thinking that they don't need Jesus and can carry on living what they consider to be respectable lives, but are not by God's standards good enough. Jesus teaches them that it is only through Him that they can live for ever. This leads them to mock Him. Everybody dies, even Abraham. Who is this Jesus? Those who have faith in God don't, however, die says Jesus. Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus. But how can that be? Abraham had been dead for centuries. Jesus explains, *Before Abraham was, I am*. Think about that. **GRANT**, O merciful God, that as thine holy Apostle Saint James, leaving his father and all that he had, without delay was obedient unto the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him; so we, forsaking all worldly and carnal affections, may be evermore ready to follow thy holy commandments; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

July 26th

Colossians 1 vv 11-20

God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God.

So where do we start with a passage like this? Perhaps where Paul does with thanksgiving for what Jesus has done for us. Then to think on Who Jesus is and what He has accomplished. He is God. Images are forbidden because they are false, but Jesus is real. He is the true image, the actual revelation and manifestation of God. The world was made by Him and for Him. He is the firstborn of Creation. He constitutes the

Church. He redeemed us by His Blood. We are filled with His Spirit. As God and man, He brings together all things in heaven and earth, effecting the atonement of the Creator with His Creation.

July 27th

John 20 vv 26-31

Begotten, not made

Thomas acknowledges Jesus, *my Lord and my God*. This truth is seldom explicit in the Bible. It is just such a big truth that we can't get our heads around it. But it is implicit in what we learn of Jesus throughout the Old and New Testaments – if we have eyes to see and ears to hear. Jesus is our Lord and our God, just as He is our friend and our brother, a man like you and me, tempted in every respect as we are and yet without sin.

God is the Maker of everything. God is not made. Jesus, therefore, is not made. He is not a created being. *Through him all things were made*. Jesus is the eternal God. All three persons of the Trinity are wholly God. If Jesus were not wholly God, we couldn't say that He is the complete revelation of God. If He were not wholly man, we should not be wholly redeemed in Him. Similarly, the Holy Spirit is wholly God, in time and space and encompassing time and space. There is only one God. God is three persons, each of Whom is everything that God is. We try to understand what it means that they are three persons by thinking of the persons as in relation to one another. The Father is the font and origin of deity. The Son is begotten of Him. The Spirit proceeds. The three persons of the Trinity relate to each other in love.

All this is beyond our understanding, *But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through his name*. It's not a puzzle to solve. It's the gift of eternal life through faith in the Jesus we know and love.

July 28th

Hebrews 1 vv 1-14

Of one Being with the Father – being of one substance with the Father. There was a guy called Arius. He was a great preacher and very popular. However, he had come to the conclusion that Jesus is only the

greatest of created beings, not the Creator. According to Arius, the Son of God is very much greater than everything else, all human beings, even greater than the angels and archangels, the cherubim and seraphim. He taught that there was a time when the Son was not. In others words he taught that Jesus wasn't the eternal God Who created time, but a creature made by God in time. A lot of straightforward Christians might not give much thought to this matter, but many, notably S Athanasius, realised that to say that Jesus was just a created being, even the greatest of all created beings, is fatal to Christian faith. We believe in the incarnation of the Son of God. *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.* That is how closely God identifies with us in His love. The immortal dies that we might live. They held a great council (or synod) at Nicaea in 325 to discuss the matter. Athanasius came up with a new word to try to express what we need to be able to say about Jesus if the Christian religion is true - ομοουσιος – homoousios, variously translated *of one Being with the Father or being of one substance with the Father.* What it means is that Jesus is God – *God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God.* Some of the bishops at Nicaea didn't like using the word because it doesn't appear in the Bible, but it says explicitly what runs through the Gospel. The Son of God became human so that we might become divine (II Peter 1⁴). *Such as the Father is, such is the Son: and such is the Holy Ghost.*

July 29th (Trinity 9)

Psalm 104

Through him all things were made.

This psalm is a tremendous celebration of God's work in Creation. As we say this psalm, we worship God Who is active in creation now. God did not great the universe at the beginning of time and then leave it to run like a piece of machinery. He sustains His creation. If He stopped caring even for a moment everything would simply cease to exist. We praise God or every minute of every hour. Our prayers join us with Him in accomplishing His purposes for individuals and for the whole cosmos. In v24, it says that God made all things in His wisdom. S Paul teaches us that Christ is the power and wisdom of God. I'm writing this in Whit week, for which this psalm is also appointed. The breath of God is the Holy Spirit (v30). Creation, Redemption and Sanctification

are the work of every person of the Trinity in the perfect harmony of the eternal unity.

GRANT to us, Lord, we beseech thee, the spirit to think and do always such things as be rightful; that we, who cannot do any thing that is good without thee, may by thee be enabled to live according to thy will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

July 30th

Psalm 33

Years and years ago, when I was still at school, I asked someone to read this psalm in assembly. He asked, “Didn’t I mean Psalm 23?” Some people only know that one psalm and, by not reading the others, deprive themselves of 149 witnesses to Wisdom. The whole Bible is God’s Word written and we need to read all of it in order to receive the blessings it brings. The Bible is the written Word of God. Jesus is the living Word of God. *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made.* I remember saying this psalm when we came out of S Michael’s and went up to the field behind one Rogation tide to ask God’s blessing on the growing crops. *For the word of the Lord is true: and all his works are faithful.* The Word of God is made flesh in Jesus. I’m still a little bit sad at the resistance I encountered to doing something different and taking it outside.

BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

July 31st

Hebrews 3 vv 1-19

While Jesus is fully human, He is also fully God. He is therefore greater than any of the many holy men and women God has sent to proclaim His Word. Jesus is not only a preacher and teacher of the Word of God; Jesus is the Word of God. Moses must have been one of the greatest men who ever lived, sent by God to deliver the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt and to lead them through the hardships, vicissitudes and temptations in the Wilderness to freedom in the Promised Land. Through Moses, God wrought great miracles. Through Moses, God revealed the Law to Israel. Moses was the minister of the Old Covenant or Testament. God showed Moses a vision of heaven, which became the pattern for the Ark of the Covenant

and the Temple. Moses was a servant in God's household – which is a very wonderful thing to be. Jesus, however, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is the Builder of the House. *Through Him all things were made.*

Colossians 1¹⁶ For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. ¹⁹ For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;

In the Wilderness, the Israelites let God down. They faithlessly gave up on Him, despite everything God had done for them, and, for that reason, none of the generation which had come out of Egypt (except Joshua and Caleb) made it to the Promised Land. It was their children and grandchildren who inherited the promise. Given that Jesus is so much better than Moses, we should be very careful not to follow their example and throw away our inheritance by faithlessly giving up on Jesus, the Way of Life.

August 1st

Proverbs 8 vv 1-36

Something interesting happens here. The chapter starts with the wisdom of living wisely. So far, so good. That's obvious, though perhaps you wouldn't think so when you consider how foolishly human beings often behave. *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. The fool hath said in his heart, 'There is no God.'* The chapter goes on that God has created everything that there is through wisdom. So it really makes sense to act wisely in a world created by wisdom. This is the way of life. It has to be when you think about it. Jesus is the power and wisdom of God. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

August 2nd

Job 28 vv 1-28

I couldn't resist including this chapter here because it is so beautiful. Treasure can be very hard to find and take a lot of dangerous work to acquire, yet nothing is as valuable as wisdom. Jesus is the wisdom of God We know Jesus through faith and for Him no amount of labour or danger is too much.

'Twas grace that taught
my heart to fear
And grace my fears
relieved
How precious did that
grace appear
The hour I first
believed

Through many dangers,
toils and snares
I have already come
'Tis grace has brought me
safe thus far
And grace will lead me
home

The Lord has promised
good to me
His word my hope
secures
He will my shield and
portion be
As long as life endures

August 3rd

Psalm 8

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven.

Suppose you had lived in Old Testament times. Obviously, you don't know the story of Jesus, but, let's assume, you know God. You look at the wonders of nature. You are filled with awe. How can it be that the God Who made all this could care about us human beings? And yet, from your own experience and observation, and the shared faith of the community, and the history of your people, and the sacred writings, and the words of the priests and the prophets, you know that He does. You know that we human beings are specially privileged as the ones to whom He has entrusted the earth. Back on 28th July, we saw how this psalm is used in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Jesus fulfils the psalm, God's love for us, His involvement with us, by becoming one of us – imminent and transcendent.

August 4th

Isaiah 40 vv 18-31

It is sheer folly to try to make images of God. He is so far beyond our imagination. It is madness to worship our images, which are, after all, the work of our own imaginations. If we consider His works, then we can only be amazed at what He must be. And yet, we can absolutely rely on Him. *They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength,* not the clever academic, not the rich or the powerful, not the beautiful or the athletic, but they that wait upon the LORD. What we now know which was a mystery hidden in Old Testament times, is that Jesus is the key to all this.

Colossians 1¹² Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: ¹³ Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: ¹⁴ In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: ¹⁵ Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:

August 5th (Trinity 10)

Hebrews 4 vv 14-16

Was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man.
Our prayers then come to God through Him.

LET thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of thy humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions make them to ask such things as shall please thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

August 6th (The Transfiguration)

Luke 1 vv 26-38

In the story of the Transfiguration (Luke 9 vv 28-36), Jesus takes Peter, James & John up a mountain and He is transfigured before them. His countenance is altered, it says. His clothes shine. Moses and Elijah appear with Him and speak of His exodus – presumably His Death, including I suppose His Resurrection and Ascension, His departure from this earth to prepare a place for us. Exodus means departure and normally for us, of course, it means the Hebrew slaves being set free and departing Egypt on their journey to the Promised Land. A cloud overshadows them as God manifests Himself (as He did on Mt Sinai) and God says, *This is my beloved Son: hear him.* So which is the true glory? How do you see the Son of God – the baby conceived in Mary's womb or the magnificent shining figure on the mountain, flanked by the great me of the past, honoured by God? The answer, of course, is that both are aspects of His glory.

August 7th

Luke 1 vv 39-56

That which is conceived in Mary is the Son of God. Elizabeth recognises how special the unborn Christ child is. Her own unborn child John, somehow knows too. Mary's response is to praise God in the words of the Magnificat, a hymn which speaks of God's Justice, justice which will exalt the downtrodden while bringing down the downtrodden. Do you think this story has any relevance to the abortion debate? The implication surely is that the unborn child is already a human person. One of our most basic moral principles is that we do not kill innocent human beings. You can debate in some cases which is the lesser of two evils – kill the unborn child or risk the mother's physical or mental health or perhaps possibly her well-being and that of her family. I don't think you can really, if you are a Christian, regard the unborn child simply as a blob of jelly, a part of the woman's body, she has the right to get rid of if she simply doesn't want to undertake the

responsibilities of motherhood. There are those who believe in abortion on demand and those who would say that abortion is wrong even if the pregnancy is likely to kill the mother. Most of us are not comfortable with either of those extremes, but where would you decide prayerfully to draw the line?

August 8th

Matthew 1 vv 18-25

Luke and Matthew tell the Christmas story quite differently and Mark and John don't tell it at all. Matthew relates the events from Joseph's point of view. Joseph doesn't understand how Mary can be expecting a baby. God sends His messenger, the angel, to reassure him. Mary's child is the Son of God. The significance is in the two names – Emmanuel and Joshua. Emmanuel means *God with us*. That is what the Incarnation is. This is the significance of Christmas. It's always been a puzzle to me that so many people come to Church at Christmas and sing the carols and then we don't see them again for a year. If the Christmas story is true, that fact transforms our lives. Through faith in the incarnate Son of God, we have eternal life. Our life is bound up with His. Whatever we do in our lives – work, family life, hobbies, whatever, we do in the light of the fact that we are the children of God, His brothers and sisters. Belonging to His Body the Church is essential to our being Christians, meeting together with other Christians for prayer and worship, hearing and obeying the Word, participating in the Sacraments. Whereas, if we don't believe that the Christmas message is true, why do we get excited about Christmas at all? Joshua (the OT version of Jesus) means the LORD is Salvation. The LORD saves us. This is the effect of the Incarnation. In the second century, Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (c. 130–202) said that God had "become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself."

August 9th

Isaiah 7 vv 10-17

We thought extensively about this in our last quarter's meditation on Isaiah. Whatever we think the passage was originally about, it is Christian Scripture and forms the background to the story of the Incarnation of the Son of God. The coming of Jesus fulfils the Law and the Prophets, which were the work of the eternal Holy Spirit.

Hark the herald
angels sing

Glory to the
newborn King!

Peace on earth
and mercy mild

God and sinners
reconciled
Joyful, all ye
nations rise
Join the triumph
of the skies
With the angelic
host proclaim
Christ is born in
Bethlehem
Hark! The herald
angels sing
Glory to the
newborn King!

Christ by highest
heav'n adored
Christ the
everlasting Lord!

Late in time
behold Him come
Offspring of a
virgin's womb
Veiled in flesh the
Godhead see
Hail the incarnate
Deity
Pleased as man
with man to dwell
Jesus, our
Emmanuel
Hark! The herald
angels sing
Glory to the
newborn King!

Hail, the heav'n-
born Prince of

peace
Hail the Son of
Righteousness
Light and life to all
He brings
Risen with healing
in His wings
Mild He lays His
glory by
Born that men no
more may die
Born to raise the
sons of earth,
Born to give them
second birth
Hark! The herald
angels sing
Glory to the
newborn King!

August 10th (S Laurence)

John 11 vv 17-46

And was made man.

V35 is the shortest in the Bible. *Jesus wept.* Why did He weep? Did He feel sad because His friend Lazarus was dead? Did He feel sorry for Lazarus' sisters Martha and Mary? Were they tears of frustration at the seeming inability even of those closest to Him to grasp Who He truly is? We don't know, but we do know that Jesus wept. He also thirsted and hungered. Jesus was truly and absolutely and completely human. In fact He is truly and absolutely and completely human. The Incarnation is eternal. God is both human and divine. *For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess : that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds : and Man of the substance of his Mother, born in the world; Perfect God and perfect Man : of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead : and inferior to the Father, as touching his manhood; Who, although he be God and Man : yet he is not two, but one Christ; One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh : but by taking of the Manhood into God; One altogether; not by confusion of Substance :*

but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man : so God and Man is one Christ.

That takes some getting your head round, but what it's trying to do is to put into our very inadequate human language that Jesus is both one of us and one with God. He is therefore the bridge between us and God. God reaches us through Him. We reach out to God through Jesus.

August 11th

Luke 4 vv 16-32

I'm afraid I let you down yesterday. Or at least I let S Laurence down – which I ought not to do as he is the patron saint of the two churches which have been at Upper Halling. I was so carried away with the wonder of Who Jesus is and trying to put into words why we should offer our lives as a living sacrifice to Him Who sacrificed Himself in order that we should have eternal life, that I ran out of space for Laurence. Now what he is best known for is his care for the poor and his martyr's death. Laurence followed in the footsteps of Jesus and is now with Jesus in heaven. Jesus brought Good News to the poor. Many refused to hear Him for all sorts of pathetic reasons and sought to kill Him, which eventually they did. But His Death made it possible for even this wickedness to be forgiven. So love overcomes everything.

August 12th (Trinity 11)

Daniel 7 vv 9-14

You might read this passage on Ascension Day. In the Son of Man, Who comes with the clouds of heaven to receive dominion, we see Jesus. *Son of Man*, human being, we see Jesus. What we might miss in this story is that Jesus, the Son of Man, in this story represents the people of God. He brings us into the Presence of the Father to serve Him as kings and priests in all eternity. How can it be that ordinary human beings can come into the Presence of the thrice holy God to serve Him in all eternity? The answer is that we repent of our sins and put our faith in Jesus. He has done everything on our behalf. All we have to do is to believe in Him.

O GOD, who declarest thy almighty power most chiefly in shewing mercy and pity; Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace, that we, running the way of thy commandments, may obtain thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

August 13th

I Timothy 6 vv 6-19

For our sake, he was crucified under Pontius Pilate.

How to live? Paul is cautioning Timothy against those who seek to be rich in this world. He reminds Timothy of the One Who gave up everything, even His life, for us, of Who He is and what He offers to us. So what really matters in life?

August 14th

I Corinthians 1 vv 18-31

But we preach Christ crucified.

There is a small crucifix behind the pulpit at St Michael's. So there is in many other churches. Most churches display one cross or many or crucifixes. Those churches which don't usually don't do so because they are afraid of breaking the commandment against images. We don't worship the metal or wooden object made by human hands. We don't believe that anything we could make could in anyway represent God. But most of us are helped by having objects, artefacts, words, music, which point us towards the divine truth. The truth is Christ crucified and it makes very little sense to those who do not know Him. They are bemused. They mock. They persecute even. But the reality is that the cross is everything. It is the link between heaven and earth, Creator and created, eternal and temporal, sinners like us and the Holy One Himself. The Cross is how God relates to us and therefore how we relate to Him, to other people and to His creation in general. The Cross of Jesus is everything.

August 15th

Romans 5 vv 1-8

Once, when I had just acquired a dog, it ran into the road when there was a car coming. I discovered that I automatically got between the car and the dog, answering a question I used to wonder about. How come people take risks to protect the ones they love. I'm not claiming that I would have laid down my life for my dog, but it helped me see why people do lay down their lives for their children or their husbands or wives, for the men of their platoon or for their country. Some are even prepared to risk their lives and even die for strangers, professionally as firemen or lifeboat crew or even just because they happen to be standing by. *But God commendeth his love for us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

My God I love
thee; not because~
I hope for heaven
thereby,
Nor yet because
who love thee not
Are lost eternally.

Thou, O my
Jesus, thou didst
me~
Upon the cross
embrace;
For me didst bear
the nails and
spear,
And manifold
disgrace,

And griefs and
torments
numberless,
And sweat of
agony;
Yea, death itself –
and all for me
Who was thine
enemy.

August 16th

Romans 8 vv 9-11

We're not comfortable about talking about the wrath of God. We know that God is love. So how can He be a God of wrath? Don't you ever feel wrath at injustice? If you don't, you can't care much about the victims of injustice. If you feel wrath at injustice, you probably feel wrath at those who behave unjustly. You certainly ought to try to understand why they behave the way they do. You certainly should be prepared to forgive. But forgiveness is not pretending that the injustice never happened or that people are not responsible for their actions. If the unjust are not to get what they deserve, either there can be no justice in the world, or else sin has to be dealt with. God's wrath is provoked by human sin and, because God is love, God deals mercifully with the sinner. He deals with human sin through the cross – that supreme outpouring of His love.

ALMIGHTY God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, judge of all men; We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, Which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed, By thought, word, and deed, Against thy Divine Majesty, Provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent, And are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; The remembrance of them is grievous unto us; The burden of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father; For thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, Forgive us all that is past; And grant that we may ever hereafter Serve and please thee In newness of life, To the honour and glory of thy Name; Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

August 17th

Romans 5 vv 12-21

Paul's explanation goes like this. Adam rebelled against God. All human beings rebel against God. Our calling is to love God with all our hearts and our neighbours as ourselves. We fail to love and each failure

to love is sin. As sinners, we come under judgment. We deserve punishment. We are banished from the Presence of the thrice holy God. We have alienated ourselves from the source of all life. The wages of sin, therefore, is death. So we are utterly lost. We cannot redeem ourselves. We cannot pick ourselves up by our own bootstraps. But we don't have to. God has done it all by the Cross of Christ. Our sins are washed away by His Blood. He has brought about the atonement. Eternal life is His free gift to us and therefore we rejoice in Him.

August 18th

I John 4 vv 1-10

There are plenty of people who claim to be Christians and they may well have different ideas about what that means. So how do we know what is authentic? How do we recognise the Spirit of God at work in people and in religious movements? The Spirit bears witness of Jesus. Fundamental to our faith is that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Anyone who does not believe that Jesus is both fully God and wholly man is not led by the Spirit. On the other hand, those of us who do love Jesus and come to God through Him, the One Who is both God and man, are filled with His Spirit. We are His Body. We dwell in Him and He in us. Therefore, as He has overcome the world, so we have overcome the world in Him. We don't have to be afraid of anything the world might do to us. The most important characteristic of Christians is love, because God is love. Love originates with God, not with us. We love Him because He first loved us. And how much does He love us? *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

Then why, O blessed Jesus Christ, Should I not love the well? Not for the sake of winning heaven, Nor of escaping hell.	Not from the hope of gaining aught, Nor seeking a reward; But as thyself hast loved me, O ever-loving Lord.	So would I love thee, dearest Lord, And in thy praise will sing; Solely because thou art my God, And my most loving King.
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August 19th (Trinity 12)

I John 4 vv 11-21

It all follows from the love of God. Loves us just as we are. We don't have to earn His love. No matter how unworthy you may feel, no matter how far away you feel God is, God loves you as you are. He has

accomplished everything for you on the Cross. We love God because He first loved us. If we love, we do not fear. If we love God, we love one another.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we are to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire, or deserve; Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy; forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. *Amen.*

August 20th

Romans 6 vv 1-11

Paul puts it a different way from John, but it is the same Gospel. God has done everything in Jesus Christ. Our relationship with Him depends absolutely on His love for us. All that is required of us is faith in Him. Even faith itself is His gift to us. We love Him because He first loved us and what follows from that is that we are entirely transformed. We are people of love because God is love. It is like we have been crucified with Him. The old self, the selfish self, the ordinary human self, has died with Him on the Cross. That's just as well because this self was anyway heading for eternal death. Our dying selves are dead and buried with Him. The Spirit of the Risen Christ enlivens our mortal bodies so that we might live with Him eternally. And that means that, by His grace, we live like Him; we live lives obedient to the Law, because the Summary of the Law is love and love is our nature in Christ.

August 21st

Romans 6 vv 12-19

Now, but not yet. If everything we've read in the Bible over these weeks is true, which of course it is, why are we not better people and why is the Church not a holier institution? The answer is that God has not taken away our freedom. We still get to make choices. Do we choose the way of God or the way of the world, life or death? Do we yield our lives to Him or do we yield our bodies to sin? We know that yielding to sin ultimately hurts both ourselves and other people, however enjoyable it may seem at the time. We know it makes sense to live godly lives. So how do we do that? Stay close to Him. Pray. Read the Bible prayerfully. Attend Church. Receive the Sacraments. These are just some of the means of grace which we neglect at our peril.

August 22nd

Romans 6 vv 20-23

We keep being told how unhappy young people are today, even to the point of suicide. What's gone wrong? Here's a clue. Many, even a majority, claim not to believe in God. They're pressurised at school to do well in tests. Arts and humanities vanish from the curriculum in favour of utilitarian subjects with a view only to increasing earning potential. They are mercilessly judged regarding their appearance, their opinions, etc., online. They are taught to behave as though this life were all there is. Nobody has shown them the Way, the Truth and the Life.

August 23rd

Romans 12 vv 1-8

O LORD and heavenly Father, we thy humble servants entirely desire thy fatherly goodness mercifully to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; most humbly beseeching thee to grant, that by the merits and death of thy Son Jesus Christ, and through faith in his blood, we and all thy whole Church may obtain remission of our sins, and all other benefits of his passion. And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee; humbly beseeching thee, that all we, who are partakers of this holy Communion, may be fulfilled with thy grace and heavenly benediction. And although we be unworthy, through our manifold sins, to offer unto thee any sacrifice, yet we beseech thee to accept this our bounden duty and service; not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offences, through Jesus Christ our Lord; by whom, and with whom, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, all honour and glory be unto thee, O Father Almighty, world without end. *Amen.*

This is one of the 1662 prayers for use after Communion. It is partly based on Romans 12. Where I think it is superior to the shorter version in Common Worship in that it makes much clearer our utter dependence on God. We have nothing to offer Him save what He has given us. We cannot worthily offer Him anything, but, in His love He accepts what we offer Him in faith. We cannot do Him any favours. It is our privilege to serve Him. We can only know the perfect freedom of serving God because He forgives our failures in Jesus and empowers us by His Holy Spirit to please Him.

August 24th (S Bartholomew)

Romans 12 vv 9-21

S Bartholomew's Day 1662 was the date by which the Book of common Prayer had to be reintroduced into English parish churches

(having been abolished by Parliament after the Civil War). We celebrated the 350th anniversary in 2012. Together with the King James Bible, it has always been one of my chief resources for growth in spiritual understanding. You may well have other resources. What matters, however, is that they point us to God and to love, His love for us, ours for Him & for one another.

O ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who didst give to thine Apostle Bartholomew grace truly to believe and to preach thy Word; Grant, we beseech thee, unto thy Church, to love that Word which he believed, and both to preach and receive the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

August 25th

Matthew 26 vv 34-50

He suffered.

We can't imagine the suffering of being crucified, but we can be sure that it was terrible. So why the need to include this clause in the Creed. Surely, it is obvious that He suffered, but not to some people! God cannot suffer. To suffer would be to change. The perfect cannot change without becoming less than perfect. So, some people reasoned, Jesus only appeared to suffer on the cross. It was a show put on for our benefit. Or maybe, God anaesthetised Him. It is hard to think of Jesus suffering. It's hard to think of anybody suffering the horror of crucifixion, Jesus least of all. *God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.* How could God suffer? We can't claim to know the answer to that, but we know that He really did. The Cross wasn't playacting. We know that Jesus loves us so much as to suffer so terribly. We know that such a sacrifice is *a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.* We know that, whatever we suffer, Jesus understands because He suffered too and that therefore He understands our prayers.

August 26th (Trinity 13)

John 20 vv 28-37

He suffered death.

Death too needed saying. The Immortal surely cannot die, people reasoned. Resurrections are impossible. Once you're dead, you're dead. God cannot die. So, some people thought then and think today that Jesus had not really died upon the cross. God had somehow saved Him or He had been taken down and buried before He was really dead. Even Pilate was surprised that He had died so quickly. Some people

suffered agony for days dying on a cross. That's why the thieves legs were broken, to speed up the process. The spear in Jesus' side proved that He too was definitely dead. Paradoxically, the sign of His Death, water mingled with Blood, is the sign of gift of the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life.

ALMIGHTY and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service; Grant, we beseech thee, that we may so faithfully serve thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly promises; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

August 27th

Ezekiel 47 vv 1-12

I'm sorry, I can't resist getting ahead of myself. You know how sweet water tastes when you are really thirsty. You know how fresh water revives a drought-stricken landscape. So the Holy Spirit, poured out on the Cross of Jesus, brings life to a desiccated and dying world.

Beneath the cross of Jesus
I fain would take my stand,
The shadow of a mighty Rock
Within a weary land;
A home within the wilderness,

A rest upon the way,
From the burning of the
noontide heat,
And the burden of the day.

August 29th

Revelation 22 vv 1-7

We asked a little while ago which was the true glory of the Son of God – seated at God's Right Hand, or the baby in Mary's womb? Or is it the Cross, the supreme expressing of self-giving love. The life-giving Spirit, the Principle of life flows from the Cross, flows from the Throne, grows in the womb of Mary. It is all of God. This is how God creates, redeems and sanctifies. This is the end of all things. We are walking and working with Him to that glorious new day. He is our Alpha and our Omega, our beginning and our end.

August 30th

John 19 vv 38-42

And was buried

I was at a conference lately at which a speaker was trying to explain his work as a chaplain. One of the key questions was, what is the purpose or end for which you are striving? A widget factory exists to make widgets. A bus company exists to provide people with transport. A

hospital exists to care for the sick. They have, however, other ends or purposes. They also have to care for their staff, for the environment and for wider society. What are you trying to achieve? What is your end or purpose? If you don't have a goal, your life is likely to be dominated by personal preferences. I think I'd like a drink now. I'll just have a nap. I'll spend my savings on that sports car I fancy. Going back to our thoughts for 22nd, if you think your ultimate end is to be buried (or cremated), life very easily becomes a matter of personal preferences. If you have no ultimate goal or purpose, you might as well just exercise your preferences as a consumer of goods and services. Ultimately meaningless, you fritter away your life on a variety of nothings.

August 31st

Luke 24 vv 50-56

The speaker was also keen to point out that what we do in worship isn't a matter of personal preference. He was speaking particularly about music in church. I've been known to try to point out that we attend Church to please God, not to please ourselves. What pleases God is that we worship in spirit and in truth. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We worship in Christ with Christ in us. God is love. Authentic worship, then, is selfless devotion to God and to one another. It is not about getting our own way and pleasing ourselves. This, I think, is where the contemporary Church often goes wrong. Christians treat the Church as a consumer good, pleasing themselves whether or not to attend and, if they do attend, pleasing themselves as to which churches they will attend and on what occasions. So faith is made to fit into the consumer society, but, as we have seen, the consumer society of personal preferences is the unsatisfying consequence of losing sight of the end or purpose for which we live.

September 1st

Matthew 27 vv 50-66

Of course, one obvious explanation for the tomb being empty on Easter Day would be that the disciples had taken the body away and hidden it. So Matthew is at pains to show why that could not have happened. Nearly fifty years ago, there was a book called "Who Moved the Stone?" which tried to prove from the biblical accounts that Jesus must have risen from the dead. It helped a lot of people, but of course it couldn't prove it. If you don't believe in Jesus, it's not likely that you will believe what the Bible says about Him. If your mind is closed to

the possibilities of God, rational argument and evidence are not likely to convince you. It is worth discussing the evidence and the rationale behind faith with non-believers, but ultimately faith is a gift of God. You don't win people for Christ by trouncing their arguments.

September 2nd (Trinity 14)

I Peter 3 vv 18-22

The words *He descended into hell* are omitted from the Nicene Creed. The thought is that, whilst His Body was in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea, our Lord's Spirit preached salvation to those who had died before His coming. Of course, being outside of time and space, this would have eternal significance and some people think that it might mean that those who had never heard about Jesus even after His life on earth have another chance after death. Some go further still and suggest that people who have rejected Jesus because they have been put off Him perhaps by the terrible things Christians have done (paedophile priests, inquisitors, ruthless crusaders), might also have another chance. These questions are, as they say, above my pay grade. We don't know what God will do in His infinite mercy. We do know that whoever calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved. We have reason to believe that everyone will be judged in accordance with how they have responded to the promptings of conscience. We do know that there will be a judgment. We know that there is justice and mercy, without which we should all be condemned. **ALMIGHTY** and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain that which thou dost promise, make us to love that which thou dost command; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

September 3rd

Colossians 3 vv 1-11

I sometimes say at a christening that this is the most important day in the candidate's life. People look surprised, especially if the candidate is only a few weeks old. We hope they still have many days in front of them! However, the question is, to what end are they living? Are they dead to sin and alive to God in Jesus Christ? Are they His adopted children, heirs with Christ of the Kingdom of God? Are they enjoying eternal life with its expected consummation when they see Him face to face? Will they live their lives on earth in the Light of eternity, guided and sustained by their faith in Jesus? Or is christening just one of many of the family's personal preferences with no ultimate end in view?

September 4th

Colossians 3 vv 12-17

If our old man, the flesh, our ordinary human nature, is buried with Christ and we are risen with Him, this is how we should be – *one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth*. We should behave in the way Paul describes here. We find the grace to do so in our relationship with God, which is fostered by our prayer and our bible reading and our participation in the life of the Church. Practice makes perfect! Cultivate good habits. Habits are the clothes we wear, where we live, what we inhabit. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

September 5th

Philippians 3 v20 – 4v8

Another passage about what it means to be baptized into Christ, to be buried with Him, dead to sin and dead to death. It's such a wonderful description of the Christian life that I could not resist including it, the life we lead if we walk with Jesus.

I was tempted to leave out the specific examples in 4^{2&3} because they might seem to spoil the beautiful theory of Christian living, but that's just the point. We have to work out our salvation in the specific, practical examples of everyday life. It's no use claiming to love one another unless we act as if we did. It's no good claiming that we are part of a fellowship if we don't support one another.

September 6th

Philippians 2 vv 12-16

You might want to reread the first eleven verses of this chapter. God works in us and we, if we are true to our calling, work with Him and the result is, if we do, that we are as described in vv 14-16. Paul delights if the Philippian Christians hold forth the word of life. So we ought to rejoice in one another's faith & hope & love and so we do as ministers.

September 7th

I Corinthians 15 vv 1-8

On the third day he rose again.

I was tempted to start with one of the Gospel accounts of the disciples finding the tomb empty. The empty tomb was one way that people knew that Jesus had risen from the dead. It is also evidence for waverers to help them come to faith if they are prepared to be open to the Holy Spirit. Much more to the point, however, is to encounter the

Risen Christ – to meet Him, to converse with Him. The early apostles and other witnesses met Him in the flesh. They saw Him eat. They could touch Him. They could hear His voice. One of the things the Risen Christ said was, *Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.* We know Jesus today, in His Word, in Holy Communion, in our prayers, in the fellowship of the Church, in the beauty of nature, in our daily walk with Him.

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today! He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.

He lives, He lives, salvation to impart! You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart.

September 8th (Mary's Birthday)

Acts 1 vv 12-14

I don't know on what grounds it was decided to celebrate Mary's birthday on 8th September, but it's a long tradition. We probably think most about Mary in the stories of our Lord's birth and childhood. She appears in the story of His adult ministry when He turned the water into wine at Cana and when she and other members of the family seem to be concerned about the attention He is attracting. We see her at the Cross and cannot imagine what it must be for a mother to see her Son die in such a terrible way. We are moved that Jesus dying on the Cross entrusts the care of Mary to the beloved disciple, John. Here, after the Resurrection and Ascension, Mary is with the other women and the apostles praying and enjoying fellowship. They say that to lose a child is the worst thing that can happen to you. When we are bereaved, we cling on to the faith and hope that Jesus rose from the dead and that all who die in faith are with Him eternally. *We are not sorry as men without hope for them that sleep in Him.* Moreover, the fellowship of other Christian believers is also a great comfort to us. It is sad that people choose humanist or other non-religious funerals and that they do not seek succour in the Church.

September 9th (Trinity 15)

Mark 16 vv 1-8

For they were afraid.

Wouldn't you be? They had loved Jesus. He was their hope for the future. He had died a cruel and humiliating death. All that was left that they could do was to make things nice at the grave. Then they found that His Body was gone. A young man, presumably an angel, told them

that in fact Jesus had risen and that His disciples should go to Galilee to meet Him. Can you imagine it?

The oldest copies of Mark's gospel finish here. *For they were afraid.* Was the original last page lost or did Mark mean to finish here? It seems that other people added the endings of Mark which we have in the Gospel recognised as Holy Scripture by the Church. Certainly, the other three Gospels have much more to say about witnesses, resurrection appearances and His commission to the Church. But let's pause here and reflect on the awe and wonder and indeed fear which the Resurrection inspires.

September 10th

Luke 24 vv 13-35

I'm not going to write much here because I have so often preached on this passage. What I want to note is that the disciples encounter the Risen Christ in three ways: their fellowship one with another, the interpretation of the Scriptures, the Eucharistic meal.

Sometimes, if nobody turns up for Communion on a major festival, I say the ante-Communion on my own. That is the first part of the Communion service, up to the intercession. You obviously can't have Communion on your own! I often use the 1662 form which includes the Ten Commandments and prayers for forgiveness for breaking them and grace to keep them hereafter. Why do I need to read the Ten Commandments when I know them so well. Meditating on those words which God gave to Moses on Mt Sinai tends to direct my thoughts in three directions. How far short do I fall of keeping God's Commandments (especially as Jesus expounds them in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere)? To pray for the victims of human disobedience to God's Commandments – people who suffer violence, dishonesty, infidelity, the indifference of other people to their needs. To consider how far short the people of Cuxton & Halling and of England and of the world in general of keeping God's Commandments. Do we worship God alone? Do we worship our own handiwork? Is the Lord's Name sacred to us? Do we honour our parents and remain faithful to our husbands and wives? Are we always honest? Are we ever aggressive? Do we care too much about material goods and what other people have got? And do we keep the Sabbath? The answer to that last

one is mostly “No”. So we miss out on the fellowship of public worship and we don’t contribute to it by our active membership. We miss out on hearing the Word read and preached publicly. We are not nourished by the Bread of life. And we wonder that the Church seems weak and that the love of many has grown cold.

KEEP, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy Church with thy perpetual mercy: and, because the frailty of man without thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by thy help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

September 11th

Revelation 5 vv 1-14

We’ve thought of the Risen Christ as seen and heard and touched after His Resurrection. We’ve thought of the Risen Christ as experienced in the hearts of all believers in every age throughout the world. Now let’s think of Him as reigning eternally in Heaven.

Crown him with many crowns,
the Lamb upon his throne.
Hark! how the heavenly
anthem drowns
all music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing
of him who died for thee,
and hail him as thy matchless
king
through all eternity.

Crown him the Lord of love;
behold his hands and side,
rich wounds, yet visible above,
in beauty glorified;
no angels in the sky
can fully bear that sight,
but downward bends their
burning eye
at mysteries so bright.

Crown him the Lord of life,
who triumphed o’er the grave,
and rose victorious in the strife
for those he came to save;
his glories now we sing
who died and rose on high,
who died eternal life to bring,
and lives that death may die.

Crown him the Lord of years,
the potentate of time,
creator of the rolling spheres,
ineffably sublime.
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
for thou hast died for me;
thy praise shall never, never
fail
throughout eternity.

September 12th

Luke 24 vv 36-48

In accordance with the Scriptures.

This is important for two reasons. One is the question of how to understand Jesus? Who is He? What does His coming mean for us?

How do we know that He is authentic? The answer is that the Scriptures bear witness of Him – originally just the OT, now the NT as well. Jesus fulfils the Law and the Prophets. We know that He is authentic from what God had already revealed to Israel through Moses and the others He had entrusted with His Word. The Scriptures teach us Who Jesus is, what He did and what He taught. It is through reading the Scriptures that we can begin to understand the significance of what He had done. *It is finished*, He said just before He died on the Cross. What did He mean by that? It is in the Bible that you find the answers. The other reason is that the fact that Jesus was prophesied beforehand demonstrates that His life is God's eternal plan.

September 13th

John 20 vv 11-18

This story means a lot to some of our congregation, I know. We think of Mary's initial grief, then her confusion and wonder. Then she hears His Voice. He calls her by name. His sheep know the Good Shepherd's Voice and He knows them all by name. Mary hails Jesus, *Rabboni*. Jesus is the One Mary loves, the One you and I love. He has conquered death and is risen and even yet there is more. He ascends to His Father. Because of what He has accomplished, He can speak of God as His Father and our Father, as His God and our God. We are His and He is ours. We are witnesses to all this and we have the Holy Spirit as the pledge of what He has laid up in store for us.

Magdalene, thy grief and gladness Voice and heart in concert sing, Telling how the risen Saviour Called thee from thy sorrowing, Tidings of his Resurrection To his chosen flock to bring.	She beheld him, yet she knew not In the gardener's seeming guise Christ, who in her heart was sowing Seed of heavenly mysteries, Till his voice, her name pronouncing, Bade her see and recognise.	Weep not, Mary, weep no longer! Now thy seeking heart may rest; Christ the heavenly gardener soweth Light and joy within thy breast; In the glowing cry 'Rabboni!' Be thy gratitude confest
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September 14th (Holy Cross Day)

Acts 1 vv 1-11

He ascended into heaven.

Some people seem to have trouble with the story of the Ascension, yet it is one of my favourites. I think some people feel it is all too physical.

Yet, given that Jesus truly has a resurrection Body, which, while changed in that it could now enter locked rooms etc., was physical and could be touched, there had to be a last straightforward resurrection appearance and an ascent into heaven. I was a bit disappointed in the poor attendance at our churches this Ascension Day. Here's why I'm so enthusiastic about celebrating the Ascension. My Jesus is restored to where He belongs and to the praise which is His due. He has opened the way for me to follow Him. Through Him my prayers ascend to the Throne of Grace. He prays and intercedes for me. He is the propitiation for my sins. He blesses me with the gifts of the Holy Ghost. He will return to take His people home. (See next page for hymn.)

The head that
once was crowned
with thorns
Is crowned with
glory now;
A royal diadem
adorns
The mighty
victor's brow.

The joy of all who
dwell above,
The joy of all
below,
To whom He
manifests His love,
And grants His
Name to know.

They suffer with
their Lord below;
They reign with
Him above;
Their profit and
their joy to know
The mystery of His
love.

The highest place
that Heav'n
affords
Belongs to Him by
right;
The King of kings
and Lord of lords,
And Heaven's
eternal Light.

To them the cross
with all its shame,
With all its grace,
is given;
Their name an
everlasting name,
Their joy the joy of
Heaven.

The cross He bore
is life and health,
Though shame
and death to Him,
His people's hope,
His people's
wealth,
Their everlasting
theme.

September 15th

Ephesians 4 vv 1-13

We read the first part of this passage at the beginning of the quarter. Faith is God's gift to us. As people of faith, we are the people of God. We are all baptised. We all partake of the one Holy Spirit. We are members of Christ, members one of another. We each have a different function to perform within the Body. The Risen Christ ascended into heaven to pray the Father to pour out the Spirit on the Church, giving to each one of us the gifts we need to do the good works God has prepared

for us to walk in. There is no excuse that we can't manage what God wants us to do or that we just don't have the resources. God supplies us with all that we need to do His Will. The consequence is that the Body grows. We become better Christians. We become a better Church. The Church grows in number as God adds to our number those whom He is calling. We work with God. It's safe to assume that if things don't work out, the fault doesn't lie with Him! Here's the other post-Communion prayer from the 1662 service, which draws on this passage. **ALMIGHTY** and everliving God, we most heartily thank thee, for that thou dost vouchsafe to feed us, who have duly received these holy mysteries, with the spiritual food of the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ; and dost assure us thereby of thy favour and goodness towards us; and that we are very members incorporate in the mystical body of thy Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people; and are also heirs through hope of thy everlasting kingdom, by the merits of the most precious death and passion of thy dear Son. And we most humbly beseech thee , O heavenly Father, so to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

September 16th (Trinity 16)

Psalm 68

This is a magnificent psalm and one of those appointed for Ascension Day. Intellectually, it is hard to understand, but somehow has a huge emotional appeal. V18 *Thou art gone up on high, thou hast led captivity captive, and received gifts for men*, is quoted by Paul in v8 of yesterday's reading. As a Christian, I read this as praising God because: Jesus has set us free from captivity to sin and death by His being lifted up on the Cross to die for the sins of the world and to draw all men to Himself; by His Resurrection from the dead, His victory over the grave; and His Ascension into heaven, where He receives from God the Father the gifts of the Holy Spirit which He bestows on His Church for the purpose of empowering its growth. **O LORD**, we beseech thee, let thy continual pity cleanse and defend thy Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without thy succour, preserve it evermore by thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

September 17th

Acts 7 vv 54-60

And is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Faith seeking understanding. That's what Theology is, but, for many people, Theology is something which is hard to understand, beloved of out of touch clergymen, and irrelevant to daily life in the real world.

I'm concerned that there has been a lot of Theology in our study of the creed and that some of you might be thinking that this is interesting to me but irrelevant to you. Yet look at today's story. Stephen is effectively on trial for his life. He faithfully preaches the Gospel to the people who want to do away with him. When they stone him to death, he finds the grace to pray God to forgive his persecutors and to commend his own spirit to God. He does this because he believes in Jesus at the Right Hand of the Father. This theological truth enables him to live & die by the grace of God. *Faith seeking understanding.*

September 18th

Matthew 25 vv 31-46

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

This is the classic biblical passage about the Last Judgment. We shall all be judged. On what criteria shall we be judged? We shall be judged in accordance with how we have treated other people. How should we treat other people? We should treat them as we should treat Jesus. He so identifies with human beings that whatever we do to anyone it as if we were doing it to Him. Moreover, as the examples here illustrate, whatever we fail to do for other people, we fail to do for Him. This informs the kind of people we ought to be. We know that we fall short and that we can and must depend on His mercy to forgive our failures, but that does not mean that we should be complacent. What it means is that, set free from sin by God's mercy, we should seek His grace to sin no more.

September 19th

Revelation 11 vv 15-19

And his kingdom will have no end.

What will happen at the end of time is necessarily beyond our understanding. Jesus will return. There will be an end to this universe of time and space just as there was a beginning. As Jesus was eternally present with the Father and the Spirit at the beginning, so will He be at the end – the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He is God and reigns for ever with the Father and the Spirit. Some bible passages speak of a thousand year reign (Revelation 20) or Christ

ultimately yielding the Kingdom to God (I Corinthians 15²⁴⁻²⁸) which some people have interpreted as meaning that Christ does not reign forever. In fact, this line was inserted into the creed to counter this mistake. Whatever these passages may mean, there is no limit to the reign of Jesus the Son of God and second Person of the Blessed Trinity. I'm not sure what they do mean, but I think they are probably talking about the time between the Crucifixion & the Second Coming. On the Cross, Jesus has conquered sin, the world and the devil. He has vanquished death. But sin, the world and the devil haven't given up yet. It's like the way the Nazis were really finished when the allies effected the Normandy landings on D Day and in the time following, but they did not know that they were beaten and terrible fighting continued until VE Day. We can't proclaim the final victory until the Second Coming.

September 20th

Genesis 1 vv 1-3

We believe in the Holy Spirit,

The Holy Spirit is eternal because He is God – one of the three Persons of the blessed Trinity. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one in the creation, redemption and sanctification of the cosmos. Just as Jesus is eternally present at the beginning and the end, so too is the Spirit. The Spirit is here in the creation story. He is present when God speaks His Word and everything that is springs into being. The Spirit brings what exists out of non-existence. He brings order out of chaos, light out of darkness.

At the name of
Jesus
every knee shall
bow,
every tongue
confess him
King of Glory now.
'Tis the Father's
pleasure
we should call him
Lord,
who from the
beginning
was the mighty
Word:

Mighty and
mysterious
in the highest
height,
God from
everlasting
very light of light:
in the Father's
bosom
with the Spirit
blest,
love, in love
eternal,
rest, in perfect

rest.
At his voice
creation
sprang at once to
sight,
all the angel faces
all the hosts of
light,
thrones and
dominations,
stars upon their
way,
all the heavenly
orders
in their great

array.
Humbled for a
season,
to receive a name
from the lips of
sinners
unto whom he
came,
faithfully he bore
it
spotless to the
last,
brought it back
victorious
when from death
he passed.
Bore it up
triumphant
with its human
light,
through all ranks
of creatures
to the central
height,
to the throne of
Godhead,
to the Father's

breast;
filled it with the
glory
of that perfect
rest.
Name him
brothers name
him,
with love strong as
death,
but with awe and
wonder,
and with bated
breath;
he is God the
Saviour,
he is Christ the
Lord,
ever to be
worshipped,
trusted and
adored.
In your hearts
enthroned him;
there let him
subdue

all that is not
holy,
all that is not true:
crown him as your
captain
in temptation's
hour;
let his will enfold
you
in its light and
power.

Brothers, this
Lord Jesus
shall return again,
with his Father's
glory,
with his angel
train;
for all wreaths of
empire
meet upon his
brow,
and our hearts
confess him
King of Glory now.

September 21st (S Matthew)

I Timothy 6 vv 6-19

The Lord, the giver of life.

What this means in the Creed, I think, is that the Holy Spirit is the source of all life, natural and spiritual, in this world and eternal life. Just as we breathe air in order to live, so we inspire the Spirit to live eternally. Being S Matthew's Day, however, I thought of this passage about how devoting one's life to the things of this world spells death, but living in the Spirit is life indeed.

O ALMIGHTY God, who by thy blessed Son didst call Matthew from the receipt of custom to be an Apostle and Evangelist; Grant us grace to forsake all covetous desires, and inordinate love of riches, and to follow the same thy Son Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

September 22nd

Isaiah 6 vv 1-13

Who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified.

Because the Holy Spirit bears witness of Jesus, not of Himself, it is quite hard to identify Scriptures which tell us a lot about the Holy Spirit. As one person of the Trinity, He is certainly God and entitled to our worship. Christians have often regarded the *Holy, holy, holy* of the angels as fitting because they and we worship one God in Trinity. I was directed to this passage because God's words to Isaiah in vv 9 & 10 are ascribed to the Holy Spirit in Acts 28²⁵⁻²⁷. *Such as the Father is, such is the Son: and such is the Holy Ghost.*

It is right therefore that we worship the Spirit with the Father and the Son.

September 23rd (Trinity 17)

Luke 1 vv 67-79

Who has spoken through the prophets.

What God does is God's eternal plan. God knows in all eternity. Thus the coming of Jesus into the created world and the work of the Spirit are known by God in all eternity. God knows what He is doing and what He is doing is what He has always planned to do. God speaks to His creation in a variety of ways including through the prophets. The prophets' words are tested against what God has already revealed of Himself in the past. God's Word through the prophets is authenticated because it comes to pass. Zacharias sings this song for John the Baptist, celebrating what God is doing in the knowledge that this is what God has made known in the prophets from the very beginning. In v74 we see how what God is doing in Jesus sets us free, sets us free to serve God without fear.

LORD, we pray thee that thy grace may always prevent and follow us, and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

September 24th

Ephesians 2 vv 11-22

If there is less about the Holy Spirit in the creeds than there is about the Father and the Son, it is worth remembering that all the clauses following depend on the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit Who creates and sustains the Church. It is the Spirit Who makes Baptism real. It is the Spirit Who is both a foretaste of eternal life and a guarantor. It is

the Holy Spirit Who will bring this world to become the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ.

Before we knew God, we were outsiders. Divided from God, we were divided from one another, Jew from gentile, barbarian from citizen, bond from free, man from woman. What Jesus has done on the Cross, brings us into the Presence of God. It is sin which alienates us from God. The Blood of Jesus washes sin away. At one with God, we are at one with all God's people. There is peace for those who were far off and those who were near. Everyone of us comes to God in one way and in only one way, led by the Spirit through Jesus Christ our Lord. We dwell in Him and He in us. We are the temple of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit. Amazing.

September 25th

Matthew 16 vv 13-20

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

It is Christ's Church. We are one because Christ is one. We are holy because Christ is holy. We are catholic (universal) because Christ is universal. We are apostolic (sent) because Christ was sent and Christ sent us into the world. Everything depends on Him, not just what we believe, but who we are. I read these words about a Palestinian Coptic Christian living in Jerusalem: *He is deeply conscious of his past. Western visitors sometimes ask him when he became a Christian. His usual answer is "two thousand years ago", pointing out that the Coptic church goes back that far. The church is not something he joined, it is something that he is, something that defines him. He is unthinkable without his sense of belonging to this long tradition of faith and custom.* I think they are worth thinking about.

September 26th

Matthew 26 vv 26-30

As I was growing up, much of the Christian teaching I received was from an evangelical perspective. I am very grateful for this. The Bible is the Word of God and I was encouraged to read it and to live by it. It is imperative for Christians to preach the Gospel to the world and this I have tried to do myself and to support others in their missionary and evangelistic work. I also benefitted by a touch of the Charismatic or Pentecostal tradition. Evangelicals can be dull and fail to reflect that

Christ is alive in the world today and bringing about real change by His effervescent Spirit. Two other possible blind spots for evangelicals in England in the recent past (and present) is that we may stress the individual's relationship with God to the extent of undervaluing our relationships with one another in the Body of Christ and the reality of the Church as His Temple and that we may play down the significance of the Sacraments. We don't say often enough that God Himself acts in Baptism and Communion to make us members of His Church and to sustain us in our Christian lives. I am grateful that, as I have got older, I have had had the opportunity to appreciate what it is to belong to God's Church and what a privilege it is to participate in the Sacraments. I have sometimes got into situations of conflict for insisting on these things, but really they are all vital. God made evangelicals, charismatics and what you might call catholics*, called them all out of darkness into His own marvellous light, and gave us all the insights we have to share with our fellow believers.

[**Catholic* means different things to different people. In the sense in which it used in the Creed, all Christians are catholics. This is the meaning I prefer. Some people use the word *Catholic* to mean *Roman Catholic* – that Christian body which regards the Bishop of Rome, the pope, as Christ's Vicar on earth. *Catholic* is also used to mean the Church in the west as distinguished from the Orthodox Church in the east. That too is unsatisfactory. The Orthodox are part of the Catholic Church as stated in the creed. *Orthodox* means right belief or right glory. Surely, all Christians look for those in themselves and in the churches they belong to. In the Church of England, the word *Catholic* is used of those Anglicans who believe that eventually we should all except the primacy of the pope, stress the doctrines most distinctive of the Roman Catholic church and adopt its rituals and ceremonies. I should say that if we are really catholic, members of the universal Church, we should gratefully receive all the gifts God has given to the different communions and denominations and love one another as He loves us.]

The church's one
foundation
is Jesus Christ

her Lord;
she is his new
creation

by water and the
Word.
From heaven he

came and sought
her
to be his holy
bride;
with his own blood
he bought her,
and for her life he
died.

Elect from every
nation,
yet one o'er all the
earth;
her charter of
salvation,
one Lord, one
faith, one birth;
one holy name she
blesses,
partakes one holy
food,
and to one hope
she presses,
with every grace
endued.

Though with a
scornful wonder
we see her sore
oppressed,
by schisms rent
asunder,
by heresies
distressed,
yet saints their
watch are keeping;
their cry goes up,
"How long?"
And soon the
night of weeping
shall be the morn
of song.

Mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of her war, she waits the consummation of peace forevermore; till, with the vision glorious, her longing eyes	are blest, and the great church victorious shall be the church at rest. Yet she on earth hath union with God the Three in One, and mystic sweet	communion with those whose rest is won. O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace that we like them, the meek and lowly, on high may dwell with thee.
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September 27th

Acts 2 vv 14-47

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

This is the Day of Pentecost when the apostles receive the Holy Spirit in tongues of flame with a mighty rushing wind. The crowds gather. The apostles preach in their different languages. People want to know what is going on. Peter explains that all this is the fulfilment of prophecy, the outworking of God's eternal plan. He preaches Christ and Him crucified. He speaks of the Resurrection, the Ascension and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Like Moses, Peter presents the people with a choice. There are only two ways, the way of life and the way of death. If you choose life, you must repent and be baptised. Choose life and live. Those who do and are baptised in the Name of Jesus becoming part of the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church, one in love, one in fellowship, one in attending to the Word, one in the breaking of Bread, one in the offering of self back to Him Who offered Himself for us. Baptism is once and for all. You are either baptised or you are not. You may reaffirm your baptismal vows in Confirmation. There may be many other occasions on which you formally or informally renew your baptismal vows. Perhaps we do so daily. We certainly do so when we participate in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. If, however, we lapse, we can't be baptised again, but we can always repent and trust God to wash us clean and welcome us into His house. **WE** yield thee humble thanks, O heavenly Father, that thou hast vouchsafed to call us to the knowledge of thy grace, and faith in thee; Increase this knowledge, and confirm this faith in us evermore. Give thy Holy Spirit to *these persons*; that, being now born again, and made *heirs* of everlasting salvation, through our Lord Jesus Christ, *they* may continue thy *servants*, and attain thy promises; through the same Lord Jesus Christ thy Son, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the same Holy Spirit, everlastingly. *Amen*

September 28th

I Corinthians 15 vv 47-58

We look for the resurrection of the dead

Knowing Christ, through His grace, we share His Resurrection. We have eternal life here and now. Hereafter we shall be utterly transformed.

Light's abode,
celestial Salem,
Vision whence
true peace doth
spring,
Brighter than the
heart can fancy,
Mansion of the
highest King;
O how glorious are
the praises
Which of thee the
prophets sing!

There for ever and
for ever
Alleluia is
outpoured
For unending and
unbroken
Is the feast day of
the Lord;
All is pure and all
is holy
That within thy
walls is stored.
There no cloud
nor passing

vapour
Dims the
brightness of the
air;
Endless noonday,
glorious noonday,
From the Sun of
suns is there;
There no night
brings rest from
labour,
For unknown are
toil and care.

O how glorious
and resplendent,
Fragile body, shalt
thou be,
When endued with
so much beauty,
Full of health, and
strong, and free,
Full of vigour, full
of pleasure
That shall last
eternally!
Now with
gladness, now

with courage,
Bear the burden
on thee laid,
That hereafter
these thy labours
May with endless
gifts be paid,
And in everlasting
glory
Thou with
brightness be
arrayed.

Laud and honour
to the Father,
Laud and honour
to the Son,
Laud and honour
to the Spirit,
Ever Three, and
ever One,
Consubstantial,
Co-eternal,
While unending
ages run.

September 29th (Michaelmas)

Revelation 21 vv 1-7

And the life of the world to come.

We often have this reading at funerals. John is given a revelation of life in the world to come. There is so much in this passage which we have been thinking about over the last quarter: the consummation of all things in God's eternal plan for creation, redemption and sanctification, the Church as the Bride of Christ; that, through the Blood of the Lamb, we are the people of God; God's love for us; the gifts He gives us; Jesus our Alpha and Omega; the Water of Life, the Holy Spirit; that we are His children simply because He loves us and, in Him, have overcome the world.

O EVERLASTING God, who hast ordained and constituted the services of Angels and men in a wonderful order; Mercifully grant, that as thy holy Angels always do thee service in heaven, so by thy appointment they may succour and defend us on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

September 30th (Trinity 18)

Luke 3 vv 15-22

Who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

I missed this line out earlier, by accident, but maybe it appropriately comes at the end, because it's a bit difficult. As we said earlier, given that the three Persons of the Trinity have every quality which belongs to God, we distinguish them not by their differences (because there are none) but by their relationship. Thus the Son is begotten and the Holy Spirit proceeds. The Father is the Fount and Origin of the Godhead. If you ever worship with our Bulgarian friends (and can understand the language they use in worship) you will note that they omit the words *and the Son*. They just say, *proceeding from the Father*. We're allowed to do that when we worship with Orthodox Christians. (See Common Worship p140). I think their point is that, as the Father is the Fount & Origin of the Godhead, the Spirit proceeds only from Him. The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. Jesus promises to send the Spirit. The Orthodox believe all that. It's in the Bible. But they stick to *proceeds from the Father*. We think of the Spirit proceeding also from the Son, though I must admit to not understanding the issue enough to decide for myself!

LORD, we beseech thee, grant thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts

and minds to follow thee the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons : nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son : and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one : the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son : and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate : and the Holy Ghost uncreate. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible : and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal : and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternal : but one eternal. As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated : but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible. So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty : and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighty : but one Almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God : and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods : but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord : and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords : but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be both God and Lord; So are we forbidden by the Catholick Religion : to say, There be three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is made of none : neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone : not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son : neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons : one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is afore, or after other : none is greater, or less than another; But the whole three Persons are co-eternal together : and co-equal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid : the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.

The right Faith is, that we believe and confess : that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds : and Man of the substance of his Mother, born in the world; Perfect God and perfect Man : of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead : and inferior to the Father, as touching his manhood; Who, although he be God and Man : yet he is not two, but one Christ; One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh : but by taking of the Manhood into God; One altogether; not by confusion of Substance : but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man : so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation : descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, he sitteth at the right hand of the Father,

God Almighty : from whence he will come to judge the quick and the dead.