

The Letters of John



Biblia

Bible Notes April-June 2016

50p

1st April

I John 1 v1

In the New Testament, there are the Gospel according to St John, three letters of John (I John, II John & III John) and the Revelation of St John the Divine. I intend to look at John's letters this quarter. Traditionally, all these writings have been ascribed to the apostle John, who is referred to as the beloved disciple in John's Gospel. Many scholars dispute this traditional attribution. John is so different from Matthew, Mark and Luke, who are believed to be very much closer to Jesus. On the other hand, these writings make a big point of the fact that they are giving eye witness testimony. Shorn of the prejudices of liberal scholars, I personally would attribute them to the apostle himself. I have to admit, however, that John was a common name even in those days and it could be another John. The Gospel and letters are written in a very similar style, which suggests that they were all written by the same person or by people who worked closely together. Revelation is quite different in style, but it contains ideas which you find in John's gospel and letters, but not so much in the rest of the NT. Scholars think that if all these writings are not by the same author, there was a Johannine school which gave rise to all five. On the strength of these writings, John is often thought of as the apostle of love.

2nd April

I John 1 v1

This first verse strongly implies that the writer knew Jesus in the flesh. He saw Him. He touched Him. So the witness he provides is true. Two points. One is that the Word truly was made flesh. The Son of God was really the Son of Man, a human being just like you and me except without sin. He was not a ghost or a vision. He did not merely seem to be human. He truly was human. He truly is human. We have reliable witnesses to the fact that He was born of Mary, that He got hungry and thirsty and ate and drank, that He wept, that He felt pain, that He experienced both friendship and betrayal, that He did all these signs and wonders, that He taught us the truth of God, that He really died, that He really rose again and that He gives the Holy Spirit to all who believe in Him. The other point is that John and his contemporaries were blessed because they saw and believed, but we are blessed because we have not seen and yet have believed. We have accepted the testimony of others and put our faith in Jesus. Now we know Him for ourselves because He has put His Spirit in us.

3rd April

I John 1 v2

What is eternal life? You might imagine it as going to Heaven when you die and so it is. That's why, in some prayers, we pray that God will bring us to eternal life. On the other hand, we shall die at a particular time on a particular day. Our death, like our mortal existence, is bound by time. But eternity transcends time. Eternity is timeless – no beginning, no end, no being divided up into hours or days or even epochs. I should say that eternity contains time. So, if we have eternal life, we have it in this world as well as in the world to come. If our life in God is eternal, our time-bound life on earth is an aspect of our eternal life. To know God is eternal life. To know God here and now is to have eternal life here and now. That's why other prayers pray that God will keep us in life eternal. Both are correct – bring us to and keep us in eternal life. We have eternal life here and now. We shall have eternal life in all its fulness only when this *corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality* I Corinthians 15⁵⁴), that is when we die.

On that bright and cloudless morning when the dead in Christ shall rise,
And the glory of his resurrection share;
when his chosen ones shall gather to his home beyond the skies,
And the roll is called up yonder I'll be there.

4th April

I John 1 v3

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore.

The word for fellowship in the grace is the same word that John uses here – koinonia (κοινωνία). John bears witness of his knowledge of Jesus in order that his readers (including you and me) should share his knowledge of Jesus. Knowing Jesus, John has eternal life in Him, fellowship with Him. So, if John shares his knowledge of Jesus with us, and we know Jesus, we have fellowship with John and with one another. John's fellowship is with God the Father and Jesus His Son. Our fellowship therefore is with God the Father and Jesus and our fellowship is with John and with one another and with all Christian people on earth and in heaven. We have eternal life in Him in *one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth*.

The essential unity of the Church, therefore, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is the essential unity of the Triune God, Who is love.

5th April

I John 1 v4

And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

Some of you will have, *that our joy may be full*. It doesn't really matter which it is. The point is that the Church is a body of millions of people who know God and therefore have eternal life and consequently constitute *one great fellowship of love*. There is no greater joy than loving God and one another in this life and in the life to come. To share the Gospel is to impart joy to the hearers; to share the Gospel is a joy to the one who shares his faith, his fellowship with the Holy Spirit, with another.

6th April

I John 1 vv 5&6

What we've read so far is wonderful. God is one with us. We are one with Him. In Him we are one with one another, *one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth*. However, that is quite something to live up to. *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all*. How can we claim that we dwell in God and that God dwells in us, if we walk in the darkness, if we live as though there were no God, if we do not love our brothers and sisters as Christ loves us? *Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all*.

7th April

I John 1 v7

When I was studying Theology, I belonged to a college Christian Union with other Christian students who were studying other subjects. Some of them had seized on this chapter and taken it to mean that Christians cannot sin. You could take that in either of two ways. One is to say that anyone who commits any kind of sin cannot be a Christian. That would only leave Jesus to be a Christian and would be a travesty of the Gospel. It wouldn't be good news to consign the entire human race except one to eternal death. The other way of taking it is to say, *I am a Christian and Christians can't sin. Therefore whatever I do must be righteous*. You can see the dangers in thinking like that! But John doesn't say either of those two things. John does indeed speak of us Christians as walking in the light and the fellowship we therefore enjoy, but He also speaks of the Blood of Jesus Christ cleansing us from all sin, our original sin washed away in Baptism and our sins committed after Baptism.

8th April

I John 1 vv 8&9

These two verses form the last of the sentences that the minister may say at Mattins and Evensong to introduce the long exhortation to confession:

Dearly beloved brethren, the Scripture moveth us in sundry places to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness; and that we should not dissemble nor cloke them before the face of Almighty God our heavenly Father; but confess them with an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart; to the end that we may obtain forgiveness of the same, by his infinite goodness and mercy. And although we ought at all times humbly to acknowledge our sins before God; yet ought we most chiefly so to do, when we assemble and meet together to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands, to set forth his most worthy praise, to hear his most holy Word, and to ask those things which are requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul. Wherefore I pray and beseech you, as many as are here present, to accompany me with a pure heart and humble voice unto the throne of the heavenly grace, saying after me:

This exhortation is often omitted or shortened. Some people would say it is too long. Some people might say it is too hard to understand (though it isn't). But I suspect that the real reason it is often omitted is that we don't take the notion of sin seriously enough. We joke about cream cakes as *naughty but nice*, but the thought that we might have so angered God that we have provoked *most justly his wrath and indignation against us* is not something we think likely. We're not so bad, after all, and anyway God is all-forgiving. We don't feel in any way *that the burden of sin is intolerable*. We expect God to put up with whatever way we choose to live here and now and we are fairly sure that all of us will get to heaven and no-one we care about will go to hell.

And yet, John says *the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin*. If sin doesn't really matter, why should it require the shedding of Christ's Blood on the Cross to make us clean from it? Every failure to love God with all our hearts, every failure to love our neighbour as ourselves, is sin, which disqualifies us from entering into the Presence of God Who is Love. In His absence, there is eternal death. If we walk in the light, there is no place for the darkness of sin, the absence of love, in our lives. We have to take sin seriously. Jesus takes sin so seriously that it takes Him to die at Calvary for us. Take it seriously. Always repent, but never despair because *the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin*.

9th April

I John 1 v10

So who would say that he or she hadn't sinned? My friend who though that, because Christians don't sin everything which he as a Christian did must be good? There aren't many people who think like he did. There are plenty of Christians, however, who don't really see that there is anything much wrong with their lives. They don't recognise that anything short of perfect love in our dealings with God and with other people is incompatible with a claim to be walking in the Light. *If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.*

10th April

I John 2 vv 1&2

These verses are included in the so-called Comfortable Words which are prescribed in 1662 Communion at the point of confession. They are also available in Common Worship as an option, although they are seldom used. It's too much trouble to keep telling people to turn to other pages in the book! It is probably also true that CW allows us to evade confronting the seriousness of sin as 1662 does not, though, to be fair, there is plenty of penitential material in CW, which would make us think very seriously if only we took the trouble to find it!

Hear what comfortable words our Saviour Christ saith unto all that truly turn to him.

Come unto me all that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you. St. Matthew 11.28

So God loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. St. John 3.16

Hear also what Saint Paul saith.

This is a true saying, and worthy of all men to be received, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. 1 St. Timothy 1.15

Hear also what Saint John saith.

If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the propitiation for our sins. 1 St. John 2.1

Sin is taken very seriously. It alienates us from God Himself because God is love. Yet, because God is love, He overcomes the power of sin through the supreme love of Christ in sacrificing Himself on the Cross, opening for us a way back to Him through faith and repentance.

11th April

I John 2 vv 3&4

As a clergyman, you have some odd conversations with people, I once had a lengthy telephone conversation with a woman who insisted that the Jesus she believed in didn't command anything. I couldn't see where she was coming from. Nearly everything we know about Jesus is what we read in the NT. We can't just make up our own Jesus. We do know Jesus in our hearts, but the Jesus we know personally is the Jesus we know in the pages of Scripture and in the life of the Church. He is not our own personal possession to create in our own image. The Jesus in the NT quite clearly did command His disciples to do certain things. He also commanded them to preach the Gospel to the whole world and to teach all nations and to teach all those who come to faith and are baptized in His Name *to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you*. The commandments are comprehended in the command to love, but the love of Jesus is much more than a soppy, sentimental feeling about other people. It is practical action to the extent of giving up your life for the beloved. Love cannot merely be love in word; it has to be love in deed.

12th April

I John 2 vv 5&6

To keep the word means the same as to obey the commandment. The commandment is to love and all the other commandments follow from that. Jesus is the Word. To love Jesus is to keep His commandments. To love Jesus is to love God and to love one another. To love Jesus is to dwell in Him and He in us. To love Jesus is to walk with Jesus. To love Jesus is to walk in His footsteps the path of all-conquering, all-sacrificing love.

13th April

I John 2 vv 7&8

I have to admit that these next few verses make my head spin. John's writing is extraordinarily simple, but it is also incomprehensibly profound. John is the apostle of love. No-one has fully plumbed the depths of God's love. I take these verses to mean that the love commandment goes back way before the preaching of Jesus to this community. It is found in the OT, hundreds of years before Jesus was born to Mary. It stands in all eternity because God is Love and Jesus is the eternal Word by Whom heaven and earth were made and are sustained, for Whom they exist. Yet love is new in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus and in His teaching whilst on earth. Love is always new in the work of the Holy Spirit now and for ever.

14th April

I John 2 vv 9-11

John explains quite simply what it means to walk in the Light, to walk with Jesus. It means to love. We cannot claim to be walking in the light if we hate. Neither, I think, can we claim to be walking in the Light if we are indifferent. Insofar as we don't love, we are walking in the dark. Because we are walking in the dark, we can't see that we are going wrong. So we may not see that we need to repent of our lack of love and come to Jesus the Source of light and life, but that is what we need to do. Maybe it is helpful to be reminded of that when we come to Church and are invited to confess our sins as part of our public worship.

15th April

I John 2 v12

It is a virtuous circle. John writes to these *little children* because their sins are forgiven. The forgiveness of our sins sets us free to become good people. When we first come to Jesus in faith and repent of our sins, we are redeemed from slavery to sin, we are born again, our old nature is crucified with Christ. So we are alive, we are set free to become the people that we are meant to be, the children of God. We can then read what John and the other biblical authors write as the Word of God to sustain and guide our lives as His children.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray; I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free. I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

16th April

I John 2 vv 13&14

These verses have always had me a bit flummoxed. John gives similar but different reasons for writing to different categories in the Church and then slightly changes his reason for writing to the young men. I am possibly being over literal. John is pleased that all the Christian he is writing to of all ages know God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent, that their are strong in overcoming the devil and that they know the Father. I will say this. It appears that John's congregation is "all age" and includes young men, the least represented group in modern English congregations. He celebrates their strength and their victory of the evil one, congratulating them on the sort of thing young men might be proud of – fighting the good fight – not implying, as we so often do, that boys are made of slugs and snails and puppy dogs' tails and only girls are nice. Young men belong to the Church as men, using their strength to battle for the Prince of Peace!

17th April

I John 2 v15

So God loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. How do we explain today's verse in the light of the best known verse in the Bible? If God so loved the world and we are supposed to be like Him, why must we not love the world? In John's writing, the human race is divided into two categories (and only two), those who know God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent and those who don't. The first category constitute the Church and have eternal life. The second category constitute the world and are walking in darkness to their own destruction. We were all "world" until we believed and then we became "Church". If God hadn't loved the world, if He hadn't longed for us to be restored to a loving relationship with Him, we should have remained lost in sin and doomed to death. In that sense, the Church must love the world too. We must long for the world to come to know God and so to have eternal life. God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son. Jesus so loved the world that He sent us (His Church) just as the Father sent Him. In that sense we must love the world and all the people in it. Love is the foundation of the Church's mission.

What we must not do is to love what the world loves.

18th April

I John 2 v16

Yesterday was Sunday, the Day of the Lord's Resurrection, the Christian Sabbath, the Lord's Day. Now it would seem to be obvious (and necessary in the light of the fourth commandment) to spend Sunday in worship – to meet together in fellowship with other Christians, to *do this in remembrance of me*, to hear the Word of God, to pray together for the Church and the world, to confess our sins, to *render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands, to set forth his most worthy praise, to hear his most holy Word, and to ask those things which are requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul*. There will, however, be many things which many people (including many who call themselves Christians) will have done instead of worshipping God in fellowship with one another and with Him. Many of these things will not have been wicked in themselves, just ordinary, but, by participating in them, those who stayed away from Church harmed their own spiritual growth and weakened the local Church which depends on all her members if she is to do God's work.

19th April

I John 2 v17

You might well say that participation in Sunday worship is not the be all and end all of the Christian life. Public worship does, however, set the standard and it provides the resources we need if we are to live up to our Christian calling. By participating in worship, we support one another. We support the Church, which is the Body of all believers. I am sure that there are many excuses and reasons why people don't come to Church. Some of the reasons are even valid – like the need to look after a sick person or to do a job which really is vital to the well-being of the community. Some people are pressured into Sabbath breaking by demanding and unreasonable employers or by their families and friends. You might well also fairly point out that people who don't (for whatever reason) come to Church can find many other ways of serving God in the course of the week and find many other opportunities to relate to Him and so to receive the resources they need. That is quite true, but do they? Anyway, in England today, far too many people are far too interested in the things of this world and God is squeezed out of their lives. The result is a couple of generations of people who don't know how to pray, don't know prayers and hymns and are ignorant of the Bible. The Church is weak and feeble. The majority of white British people claimed on 2011 census to have no religion. Some people think that Islam will soon be the biggest religion in England. *The world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever*. What a pity that so many people are just so busy that they have no time for eternity!

20th April

I John 2 v18

Two problems here. What is meant by the last times? What is meant by antichrists? Both expressions are susceptible of being sensationalised both by apocalyptic preachers and by filmmakers and authors of fiction. The last times are the times in which the coming of the Kingdom of God is imminent. That is always since Jesus died and rose and ascended into Heaven. We are always to live as if He might come at any time, as if we might face judgment this very day, lifting up our heads in all our trials and tribulations because *our redemption draweth nigh*. Antichrists are those who oppose Him or attempt to supplant Him by denying the truth about Him. We should beware of these false would be teachers and leaders, but not fear because of them. God has it all in hand.

21st April

I John 2 v19

For me, this verse is both comforting and dangerous. The ultimate threat a member of a congregation wields is the threat to leave. This may amount to a rejection of the rest of the congregation. It may be a threat against the vicar, whose reputation might be supposed to depend on the size of his congregation. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that people leaving is the worst thing that can happen to a church and something to avoid at all costs. If clergy and congregations take this view, the result can be that some difficult people are always allowed their own way even if this is detrimental to the rest of the Church and gets in the way of its mission. I tend to answer people who think like this by asking them which they think would be healthier – a Church of three people seeking to please God or a Church of three hundred people pleasing themselves? The reason today's verse is comforting is that it suggests that people who leave God's Church may in reality never have been members. They were never truly part of the fellowship of people who know God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent. So when they stopped coming to meetings, they weren't really leaving the fellowship because they never really belonged to it; they were just there in body. The danger to my way of thinking of course is that people may not be leaving because they didn't belong. Maybe they are good Christians who have felt obliged to leave because the vicar or the principal lay members of the church to which they belong are themselves not very good Christians. Generally speaking, it is wrong to leave your church and still worse to take others with you and cause a split. Occasionally, however, it really is the best Christians who leave. I'll set some of you wondering if I say that some people who have left in my time here probably never really belonged but, for some others who have left, it would have been better if we had found a way to make it possible for them to stay.

22nd April

I John 2 v20

As Christians, we have an unction, we are anointed by the Holy Spirit. We dwell in Christ and He in us. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. It follows that we have the resources to walk in the Light, to know the Truth, which sets us free, and reject falsehood, and to live life in all its fulness, not the half-life endured by people whose motivations are based on love of the world. For this reason, it is worthwhile for John to write to us and for us to read his letters. Because you are the sort of person you are, you know it makes sense.

23rd April (S George)

I John 2 v21

S George, patron saint of England. For centuries, England was regarded as a Christian country. King Alfred set the Ten Commandments at the head of the English law code. Even when I was a child and young man, most people described themselves as C of E, if they weren't of some other Christian denomination, and official forms asked for our Christian names. When, as boy scouts, we promised to do our duty to God and the Queen, we assumed no possible conflict of interest. It made absolute sense to pray for parliament: Most gracious God, we humbly beseech thee, as for this Kingdom in general, so especially for the High Court of Parliament, under our most religious and gracious Queen at this time assembled: That thou wouldest be pleased to direct and prosper all their consultations to the advancement of thy glory, the good of thy Church, the safety, honour, and welfare of our Sovereign and her Dominions; that all things may be so ordered and settled by their endeavours, upon the best and surest foundations, that peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety, may be established among us for all generations. These and all other necessities, for them, for us, and thy whole Church, we humbly beg in the Name and Mediation of Jesus Christ our most blessed Lord and Saviour. **Amen.**

So what went wrong? If we knew the truth in Jesus Christ, how did we turn into a post-Christian, multicultural, secular society? How did it come about that there are so many fools who have said in their hearts that there is no God and so many more fools who live as if there were no God? Part of the reason is mass immigration by people who belong to other religions, but this is only a small part of the story. Most immigrants believed that they were coming to a Christian country. Very few of them object to public displays of Christian identity. In fact many of them appreciate living in a country where the predominant Christian ethos has welcomed strangers and supported their rights to practise their own beliefs. Secularising politicians and officials do, of course, use the presence of non-Christians religious communities as an excuse to take the Christ out of Christmas or to try to ban the wearing of the cross. They want to set the rules by which people of all religions and none have to live. They believe that man is the measure of all things and they don't want God intruding in public life. But I am afraid that a lot of the responsibility is ours as weak, complacent Christians. We have been half-hearted in practising our faith, in evangelism and in standing up for what we believe. That is why we are now a marginalised minority.

24th April

I John 2 vv 22&23

The devil is the father of lies. The ultimate lie is to deny God. Idols are all false. People who worship idols become like them. Covetousness is idolatry. To give your life for material things, to love the world, is to devote your life to a lie. Ultimately, as a lover of the world, you offer your life to the devil who claims that all the power and the glory of all the kingdoms of the world are his to bestow on those who will worship him. To serve Satan of course is sin. *The wages of sin is death.* Eternal life is the gift of God.

There is only one God. He made Himself known to Moses as the LORD (YHWH). He makes Himself known to all the nations in Jesus. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Jesus is God. Any other real or supposed revelation of God can only be measured against Jesus because Jesus is God.

So what about sincere followers of other religions? If Jesus is truly God, all those religions which deny that He is God are untrue. Also all those religions which teach that God (or the gods) is unlike God as revealed by Jesus are wrong. I am sure that there are grounds in Scripture for believing that people who do not know Jesus will be judged in accordance with their consciences (Romans 1) and that God honours those who sincerely seek him (Acts 10³⁵). I don't think we have to assume that there is no possibility of salvation for people who do not know Jesus. If they seek, they will find, but the God they will find is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; there is no other God. However, Christians who ought to know that Jesus is the Christ are in very serious trouble if they deny the Truth.

25th April (S Mark)

I John 2 v24

O Almighty God, who hast instructed thy holy Church with the heavenly doctrine of thy Evangelist Saint Mark: Give us grace, that, being not like children carried away with every blast of vain doctrine, we may be established in the truth of thy holy Gospel; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

So, today, we are taught to pray for what John tells us to cling on to, the Truth which/Who dwells in us as we are faithful to our Christian calling.

26th April

I John 2 v25

The wages of sin is death. The love of the world, therefore, the worship of idols and the denial of the Truth, all destroy us as human beings. John 3¹⁷ is slightly less well known than John 3¹⁶. *For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.* "God desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may return from his wickedness, and live." *The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* This is God's Will for us.

27th April

I John 2 vv 26&27

Sometimes it feels as if there are too many rules in the Church of England. Only bishops may confirm and ordain. Only priests may preside at Holy Communion, bless and absolve. Only ordained ministers or licensed lay ministers may conduct any form of worship or preach publicly. Nobody (including the bishop) may conduct worship or preach in an English parish church without the invitation of the rector or vicar. Possibly there are too many rules and they don't always seem to work as intended. However, it does matter that preachers and teachers proclaim, not their own ideas, nor worldly philosophies, nor necessarily what would be popular, but Jesus the Word of God. *For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.* (I Corinthians 2²).

28th April

I John 2 vv 28&29

We have fellowship with the Father and with Jesus now, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. We have fellowship one with another. We have eternal life here and now. We walk in the Light. We are not, however, to forget that the best is yet to come. He will return. We shall see Him as He is. We shall know as we are known. We shall be made like Him. In the meantime, as born of Him, we seek His grace to live like Him.

April 29th

I John 3 v1

It is almost too much to contemplate, that we should be the children of God, that God loved us so much, that Jesus died for us, that our sin might be forgiven so that we should be made like Him. We are different from the world and the world may well treat us as it treated Jesus. If we are true to our Christian vocation, however, we will live like Him so *that the world through him might be saved.*

April 30th

I John 3 v2

Those of you who listen to my preaching know that this is one of my favourite verses.

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

May 1st (S Philip & S James)

I John 3 v3

How do you go about purifying yourself? Can we possibly aspire to be pure as He is pure? Evidently, we would have to rely on God to purify us from our sins. So repentance and prayer. There are also the means of grace such as the Bible and Holy Communion which we must not neglect. I think it is fair to say also that we must co-operate with the grace of God. We need to align our wills with His Will so that we no longer desire to let Him down by leaving undone those things which we ought to have done or doing those things which we ought not to have done. Think before you act or speak. Bring even your thoughts before the judgment seat of God. Review your life when you say your daily prayers and before you come to Church (especially Holy Communion). Pray for grace to recognise where you are going wrong and pray for the assurance that all your sins are forgiven in Christ. Christians don't pretend to be virtuous when they aren't. Neither are they weighed down by guilt. We know that God loves us as we are and willingly forgives our failure to love Him as we ought. We know too that it is His Will that we should grow in faith and hope and love and that He provides the means of grace which enable us to do so.

O Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us perfectly to know thy Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life; that, following the steps of thy holy Apostles, Saint Philip and Saint James, we may stedfastly walk in the way that leadeth to eternal life; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou biddst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come!

May 2nd (S Athanasius)

I John 3 v4

You might not have heard of Athanasius, but he was a great man and I studied his *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* at college. The title means *Concerning the Incarnation of the Word of God*. It is very much the theme of John's writings. Athanasius was a C4 Bishop of Alexandria. His Easter Letter of 367 is the oldest list we have of the books of the Bible recognised by the Church. Athanasius was present at the Council of Nicaea in 325 as an assistant to the then Bishop of Alexandria whom he would eventually succeed. (He tried hard not to be elected bishop, but the multitude of lay Christians insisted that he was the only choice.) The Council of Nicaea was convened to consider the nature of Christ in the light of the teaching of Arius, who maintained that Jesus is the first and greatest creation of God the Father. If that were so, He would not be God. Athanasius recognised that the whole Christian Gospel depends on our faith that God became man in Jesus Christ. The Council of Nicaea gave us the clauses in the Creed variously translated as [I believe] *in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made: and We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.*

Athanasius develops the idea that God became human so that we might become divine. This very much fits in with this chapter and is even more explicit in II Peter 1⁴: *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.*

Athanasius suffered quite a bit of persecution in his lifetime. He was a prickly character who suffered for the truth.

Ever-living God, whose servant Athanasius testified to the mystery of the Word made flesh for our salvation: help us, with all your saints, to contend for the truth and to grow into the likeness of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

May 3rd

I John 3 vv 4&5

I'm writing this on 26th January, which is the day after we celebrate the Conversion of St Paul. The psalms at Morning and Evening Prayer were a celebration of the Law (Psalm 119). Superficially, we might think that Paul was against the Law. He is the great teacher that we are saved by faith, not by works. We are saved by the grace of God, not by obeying the Law. Yet I am sure that this is a misreading of Paul. He isn't saying that it doesn't matter how we behave. Neither is he saying that the Law is a bad thing. How could the Law be bad when it was given by God Himself on Mt Sinai to Moses? What Paul teaches is that, first of all, the Law condemns us, because none of us can keep it. In fact, knowing the Law and being unable to keep it can make worse people than if we didn't know it all. It is Jesus Who fulfils the Law's demands. We, then are set free from sin, set free to obey the Law. Why would we not want to obey the Law, which is summarised in the requirement to love. God is love and we, in Christ, are made like Him. Thy word is a lantern unto my feet: and a light unto my paths. (Psalm 119¹⁰⁵).

May 4th

I John 3 vv 6&7

He that doeth righteousness is righteous.

This is another way of saying *By their fruits ye shall know them*. If you are a good person, you do good. There is no point in claiming to be a good person, perhaps on the basis that you say that you are a Christian or that you come to Church, but you don't even try to do good things and to abstain from doing bad things. Paul talks about a terrible conflict within himself between good and evil, between the spirit and the flesh, between the person he desires to be and the person he is Romans 7¹⁴⁻²⁴). This is very often the experience of the Christian. We are called to be like Jesus and we know that we very often do not live up to our calling as the children of God. John is not denying this truth here. What John cannot allow is that people who claim to know Jesus do not even seek His grace to become more like Him. If we sincerely profess Christ, He works in us through His Spirit to transform us into His likeness. This certainly creates a conflict within us, but the victory is His if we truly believe. Paul ends his account of his internal struggle with these words: Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (Romans 7²⁵ & 8¹)

May 5th (Ascension Day)

I John 3 v8

The Roman Catholics have given up keeping Ascension Day on a Thursday. We moved Candlemas this year from 2nd February to the nearest Sunday. I was rather dismayed to hear of people celebrating Twelfth Night this year the weekend before Tuesday 5th January and Burn's Night the Saturday before 25th January, the date it should share with the Conversion of St Paul (when incidentally we didn't have the Eucharist we ought to have had because I didn't think anyone would come). There is talk of fixing Easter to make it more convenient for schools and for the holiday industry. (There is also the better point that we might be able to agree to keep Easter the same date as the Greeks and Russians which would be good for church unity, but, on the other hand, it would break the link with Passover, which is the context necessary to understanding the meaning of Easter – the blood of the Passover Lamb delivering us from death, liberation from slavery to sin, the fact that the Last Supper was a Passover meal, a foretaste of the Christian Communion and an earnest of Heaven, unleavened Bread, manna in the Wilderness, Jesus the Bread of Life, etc..)

What I am concerned about is that we are allowing the mundane, everyday routine to control our lives. We don't live to earn a living; we earn a living in order to live. We don't live in order to go to school; we require an education in order that we may live. There may be more important things than school and work Monday-Friday. Family time, leisure, celebrations, above all, religion, are not to be confined to weekends, when we have nothing important to do. Dare I suggest that faith, family, celebration, spending time on what you really want to do, might be more important than achieving good grades or making plenty of money?

This dull materialistic world has no time for the heart and spirit. Neither does it understand the devil. It cannot comprehend the immaterial. No devil and material gods invented by human ingenuity.

Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe thy only-begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ to have ascended into the heavens; so we may also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with him continually dwell, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

May 6th

I John 3 v9

I was trying to make the point yesterday that human beings are meant to be citizens of Heaven. Our lives ought not to be dominated by material things. The things of this world are time bound. Heaven and earth will pass away. In the end, it doesn't matter how rich you are, how famous, how clever. What matter is what lasts for ever – love, our relationship with God and our relationships with one another. Love, joy, the Light of Christ, these are the things which have eternal significance. To be born of God is to be born again. To be born again is to be born from above. St Paul says: *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above. Not on things on the earth* (Colossians 3^{1&2}). Worship is our highest priority, not something for when we have nothing more important to do or a last resort when we can't think of anything else to help us out of our difficulties.

May 7th

I John 3 vv 10&11

It follows from a right relationship with God that we love one another. This may well include caring for one another's material welfare – feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and the prisoner – but the perspective is of the eternal. You are free to care for me because you don't have to look after number one because your life is *hid with Christ in God* (Colossians 3³). Brother let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you; Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant, too.

May 8th (Sunday after Ascension)

I John 3 v12

Adam and Eve disobeyed God. The consequence was that they lost the right to eternal life. They were cast out of the Garden. They represent the whole of humanity in our rebellion against God, Who is love. Cain and Abel quarrelled because they (especially Cain) no longer put God first. Cain longed for acceptance. He put his confidence in an obviously insincere offering. He became jealous of his brother. He was a bad person and therefore did a bad thing. He killed his brother. Like all human beings, what Cain needed was for his sin to be forgiven in Christ and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit to be strengthened and exalted to the heavenly realms in heart and mind. O God the King of glory, who hast exalted thine only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph unto thy kingdom in heaven: We beseech thee, leave us not comfortless; but send to us thine Holy Ghost to comfort us, and exalt us unto the same place whither our Saviour Christ is gone before, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

May 9th

I John 3 v13

You might have expected that Jesus would have been very popular. After all, He did nothing but good. And so He was. Crowds of thousands came out to hear Him. They hailed Him as the Messiah on Palm Sunday. We possibly think about preachers like St Peter on the Day of Pentecost, preaching to a multitude, 3,000 of whom were baptised that same day. We think of big churches with hundreds of worshippers as successful and we wonder why we aren't. We believe that Jesus has the words of eternal life and that we hold them in trust for Him, proclaiming them every Sunday. So how can it be that the majority of our neighbours are indifferent and some of them are actually hostile? We are possibly not reading our bibles with sufficient attention. From the very beginning, Jesus met with hostility. Herod tried to kill Him while He was still a baby. People plotted against Jesus and eventually the crowds sided with the plotters and called for Barabbas to be released. Shortly after preaching so profitably at Pentecost, Peter was imprisoned and beaten. Eventually, Peter too died a martyr's death. The consistent story in both Old and New Testaments is that the authentic prophet, priest or preacher is disbelieved, unpopular and quite often persecuted. Human beings are all in the thrall of original sin. It is human nature to rebel against God and therefore to refuse to listen to those entrusted with His Word. We should not be surprised that it is difficult. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name (John 1^{11&12}).

May 10th

I John 3 v 14

Reflections like yesterday's on the probable unpopularity of the Church and of us, her members, and the difficulty of the task before us, could be very depressing. Except that we do have the words of life. We know that we have eternal life because we love. Love is of God. God is love. God is the Lord and Giver of Life.

Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart;
Come quickly from above;
Write Thy new name upon my heart,
Thy new, best name of Love.

May 11th

I John 3 v15

Again this is a way of saying *By their fruits shall ye know them*. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus teaches us that to be angry with your brother is like killing him and that lusting after a woman is like committing adultery. It is not just what you do that matters; it is the person you are. In the end, of course, they come to the same thing. A hypocrite might be able for a time and in the right context to behave well and a good person might on occasion lapse into behaviour unworthy of his Christian vocation, but in the end, the way you live depends on your character and your character depends on your relationship with God in Jesus Christ.

May 12th

I John 3 v16

The initiative is God's. God reached out to us in love. We didn't reach out to Him. He laid down His life for us while we were yet sinners. He chose us; we didn't choose Him. I sometimes think that some people feel some merit in choosing to become Christians and to go to Church, almost as if they were doing God a favour by believing in Him. It is entirely the other way round. It is a privilege to know God. To know Him is to love Him. To love Him is to keep His commandments. To know Him is to have eternal life. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Our knowledge of God is His gift to us. We cannot do less than to respond to His love with ours, even to the extent of laying down our lives for the brethren.

May 13th

I John 3 v17

When I was in college, we were setting up a body to raise money for overseas aid. Before the meeting began, I chalked this verse up on the blackboard. To be honest, I was a bit disappointed in the poor response. A lot of people (including too many Christians) don't realise that the Bible speaks to us directly today. They don't read it as the Word of God to them and ignore the parts they don't agree with or find too challenging. Even if we do accept that these words speak directly to us, however, how are we to take them? Do they mean that we should sell all our goods and give everything to the poor? Do they mean that we should be supporting poor people only in our local church or in our own community or do they mean a limitless commitment to the poor whoever they may be and wherever they may be. Is our duty to the poor to give them our loose change or our tithe? Should we go without to help people less fortunate than ourselves?

May 14th

I John 3 v18

Carrying on from yesterday, should we expect our families to go without, so that, as a Christian household, we can do more for the poor? Does our commitment to the poor go beyond giving of our money, time and talents to individual poor people, and include supporting charities and even political action or putting pressure on the way businesses are run to ensure fair wages, respect for the environment, affordable prices, etc.? What are the limits of these two verses? On the one hand, surely, there cannot be any limit to the demands of love. On the other hand, surely we are entitled to a reasonable lifestyle, enjoying what most people like us have in modern Britain, even though most people in the world today are much worse off and we could make do with a lot less ourselves and give away a lot more. I really don't know where I should draw the line. Do you?

May 15th (Pentecost / Whitsunday)

I John 3 vv 18&19

God, who as at this time didst teach the hearts of thy faithful people, by the sending to them the light of thy Holy Spirit; Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgement in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen. That right judgment in all things, the light of the Holy Spirit, his holy comfort (=strength), these are the gifts we need in order to see how to live as Christians, how to live lives of perfect love. If we see the fruits of the Spirit in our lives and in the lives of other people, we know that we are walking with the Lord and that there is therefore now no condemnation. Galatians 5²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, ²³ Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Gracious Spirit, Holy Ghost, taught by thee, we covet most
Of thy gifts at Pentecost, holy, heavenly love.

Faith and hope and love we see joining hand in hand agree;
But the greatest of the three, and the best is love.

From the overshadowing of thy gold and silver wing
Shed on us who to thee sing, holy, heavenly love.

May 16th

I John 3 v20

They used to publish lists of sins so that people going to confession could tick off the ones they had committed. This might not be a terribly good idea. It might suggest things you've never thought of or introduce you to horrors you never knew anything about. It can also promote a morbid guilt. There was the story of the very scrupulous teenage boy who convinced himself that he was guilty of everything from avarice to xenophobia. In the end, God is our judge. We don't judge ourselves. God is our judge and He is just and merciful. We are not always just. Often we fail to recognise just how serious our sins are. On the other hand, we can be consumed by guilt for things which are not sins or which we have not committed. (It isn't a sin if you fail to do something which you really cannot do, like persuade your teenager to stop taking drugs when he refuses to listen to you, or pay for the new vestry roof when you just haven't got the money.) We are not always merciful to ourselves; we imagine that some besetting sin is unforgivable. But God is both just and merciful. He alone is our judge. He knows what we are guilty of and He freely forgives for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. There is therefore now no condemnation and we should trust God sufficiently not to live as though there were. For similar reasons, it is not for us to judge other people. God is their judge too.

May 17th

I John 3 v 21

Having faith, having hope, having love, our hearts will not condemn us. We have confidence towards God. There are times when I'm very casual about worship. My mind wanders from the hymns or prayers or readings. Sometimes I'm in a bad mood and thinking quite unchristian thoughts about people. Sometimes I'm worried or in a hurry. On other occasions, I'm really caught up in worship. I am only too conscious that our words and our music and everything we do is utterly inadequate to express the greatness of the God of Love. Being casual obviously isn't good enough. That is sin we need to repent of, especially the sin of harbouring uncharitable thoughts about other people. When we're distracted by worry or by being too busy, however, that isn't sin. The thing to do is to offer our anxieties to God as part of our worship. But when worship is at its most sublime for us, we might feel that our offering is so hopelessly unworthy that it cannot possibly please God, that there is no place for us in His Presence. But that is not so, if we love, we have confidence towards God.

May 18th

I John 3 v22

This can be a difficult verse. You could read it as meaning that Christians always get what they ask for in prayer. That obviously isn't true. We know that we shouldn't ask for bad things like our rival for a job being ill on the day of the interview. We'd probably have doubts about the propriety of asking God that we should win the lottery, even if we were intending to give the prize money to charity. (Should we be undertaking any activity if we feel uneasy about asking God to bless us with success?) But we know we don't always get what we ask God for even when it is something which to us looks good: a person getting over a serious illness, rain in time of drought, peace in a long-standing conflict. Jesus tells us that God knows what we need before we even ask Him. God is love. So He will give us what is good for us and He knows infinitely better than we do what is good. Why would we want to change God's mind when He is so much wiser and more loving than we are? Prayer is really about aligning our wills with God's Will. *Thy will be done* is the essence of prayer. God is love and, insofar as we are people of love, we want the same things as He does. His commandment is love. If we keep that commandment, we are people of love and what we ask for is what He wants to give us anyway, like a child asking his parents for his dinner. So, if we keep His commandments, all our prayers are answered in the affirmative. We work with God in order that His Will may be done on earth as it is in Heaven. As we pray, so we are thankful for what we receive. The more people who pray, the more people there are who recognise the reasons for being thankful to God always and everywhere, the more people there are working with Him to bring in God's Kingdom of mercy, justice and peace.

Having said all that, we shall not be made like Him until we see Him as He is – when our life on earth is over. We do not yet see him face to face. We now see as through a glass darkly. Our love is imperfect. So we don't always know what we should ask God for in prayer. Don't worry. Jesus knows. The Holy Spirit knows. Jesus and the Spirit pray on our behalf. I'm sure that God listens to all our sincere prayers. Sometimes, He says, No, because we are asking for the wrong things or at the wrong time, but He always hears our prayers. So I pray sincerely and naively for what I believe to be God's Will and trust Him to know best.

May 19th

I John 3 vv 23&24

When I was studying Theology at King's College, London, I lived at first at Dog Kennel Hill on the Dulwich/Camberwell border. We used to go to a variety of local churches. In a way, that was a good thing to do. It broadened our experience of Christian communities and the way they serve God – useful in those studying to become clergy. On the other hand, it was a bad thing. It meant never really committing oneself to a given fellowship and perhaps it indicated something of a feeling of superiority. No church was quite good enough to demand our absolute loyalty. Whatever, one of the churches I used to go to was St Paul's Herne Hill. I liked the said 1662 C of E Communion, which is a big part of my Christian formation. Later in the day, I might go to churches of other denominations where the worship was less formal and there was more emphasis on preaching or to Mattins or Evensong or to a Roman Catholic service where I wouldn't have been a position to take Communion. I have derived tremendous benefit from the said 1662 HC since I was a teenager, but, if that is your only spiritual nourishment, you badly miss out on music and preaching, although Cranmer's words provide excellent biblical teaching. On one particular occasion at St Paul's, I can remember it suddenly dawned on me what it means when we say the Prayer of Humble Access (which in 1662 comes immediately after the heavenly vision: Therefore with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious Name; evermore praising thee, and saying: Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory: Glory be to thee, O Lord most High. Amen.)

We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table. But thou art the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy: **Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.**

If it hasn't hit you yet, you've got all eternity to contemplate it.

May 20th

I John 4 v1

Most church meetings (from PCC to General Synod) start with prayer, prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Yet we don't consider church meetings to be infallible. Sincere, well read people may disagree at meetings. Even when a meeting has reached a conclusion, honest, decent members of the Church may disagree with its decisions. It is also true that some people at church meetings do not always behave in very Christian ways. People may be claiming that they have been inspired by the Holy Spirit to take up particular positions, while other people may think that unlikely. God doesn't make human beings infallible. Neither does He guarantee that church meetings, synods or councils will always get it right. He respects our freedom to make up our own minds. We have to accept, therefore, that the Church sometimes gets things wrong and we have to respect the consciences of good people who sincerely believe that the majority or the leadership of the Church have got it wrong. We have been promised that we shall be guided into all Truth, but that promise will not be finally fulfilled until we see Him face to face. So, how do we judge whether or not what somebody says (or teaches or prophesies), or what a meeting decides, is of the Holy Spirit? Good indications are whether it is in accord with Scripture, whether it is in tune with what we know of Jesus and the Holy Spirit – love, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance – how it relates to what the Church has always believed and preached, the opinion of other Christians whom we respect, what sense it makes to our own God-given reason and how God answers our own personal prayers for wisdom to discern the truth of the matter. Having said all that, there may be times when we prefer going along with something with which we do not entirely agree if the alternative is to create a schism (division or split) in the Church. We do indeed need to pray for wisdom.

May 21st

I John 4 vv 2&3

There were and are plenty of people who believe that Jesus is a good man, even the best man who ever lived. In the ancient world, it wasn't too hard to imagine a god disguising himself in human form. They were always doing it in Greek and Roman mythology. Neither of these ideas will do, however, for what we believe about Jesus. *The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us – God of the Substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds: and Man, of the Substance of his Mother, born in the world.*

May 22nd (Trinity Sunday)

I John 4 vv 2&3

The Church's doctrine of the Trinity does not attempt to define God. That would be impossible and blasphemous. God is beyond anything we can imagine or conceive. Certain things, however, cannot be true, given that we have the Light of the Gospel to illuminate our understanding, to enable us to know God. It cannot, for example, be true that there is more than one God. He is the fount and origin of everything that there is and its end – the alpha and omega. All existence, all power, all virtue, all wisdom, all beauty derive from Him alone and in Him alone they have their fulfilment. Given that Jesus is God's perfect revelation of Himself, Jesus cannot be anything other than God in all His fulness. Given that Jesus is totally one of us, He cannot be anything other than fully and perfectly human. Given that the Holy Spirit is totally God in us, in the Church and in the world, He cannot be anything less than the fulness of the Godhead. From those things which cannot possibly be true flow all the clauses of the three creeds which therefore must be true. God is three persons but one substance (or being), Jesus is one person but two substance (or being).

Almighty and everlasting God, who hast given unto us thy servants grace, by the confession of a true faith to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity: We beseech thee, that thou wouldest keep us stedfast in this faith, and evermore defend us from all adversities, who livest and reignest, one God, world without end. Amen.

May 23rd

I John 4 vv 4&5

I suspect that what is going on here is that some would be leaders of the Church are trying to simplify what the Church teaches about Jesus. They want to make the Gospel more comprehensible to the people of the world. Now, obviously, it is a good thing to present the Gospel in a way that people can understand it. If they don't know what we mean about Jesus, how can they know whether or not to believe us? Some people make fun of Christians for believing what appears to them to be irrational, such as that God is both three and one, and that Jesus is the man who is God. Some people (many Muslims and Jews for example) believe all this to be blasphemy and are very offended by it, occasionally to the point of attacking us. So you can see the attraction of watering down the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, but to do so is to deny Jesus. We don't, however, have to fear the world. He overcame the world!

May 24th

I John 4 v6

The Trinity and the Incarnation are not mathematical puzzles. Many good, sincere Christians know Jesus as their personal Saviour without being able to explain the Creed! On the other hand, it would be perfectly possible to understand the meaning of all those Greek and Latin words without actually knowing Jesus. In the end, faith is a personal relationship. If people are open to God, our faith will resonate in their hearts even if they can't make head or tail of *We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.* If they are not open to God, it will make no difference how cleverly we present it or how simply. That is why the first thing to do if you want someone to come to faith is to pray for them, not to argue with them. You can start trying to answer their questions when they ask you for the reason for the hope that is in you, which hopefully they will be prompted to do by the way you live.

May 25th

I John 4 vv 7&8

O Lord, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth: Send thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee. Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

May 26th

I John 4 vv 9&10

These are the kinds of words which really move me when I am sufficiently free from sin to worship God in spirit and in truth. Can we even begin to think what it means to be loved by God, considering Who God is? Can we even begin to think what it means to be loved by God when we didn't at all love Him? Can we even begin to think what it means for our eternal destiny? Can we even begin to realise what it means for our life on earth, His love for us and ours for Him and for His Church and for His world? Can we take in what a difference it makes to our lives that God loves you and me?

Three in One, and One in Three, Ruler of the earth and sea,
Hear us, while we lift to thee holy chant and psalm.

Three in One and One in Three, dimly here we worship thee;
With the saints hereafter we hope to bear the palm.

May 27th

I John 4 v11

Well, it's obvious isn't it? So how come Christians have been active in persecution? How come we've been active in war? How come some Christians have been ruthless capitalists? How come some Christians have been violent revolutionaries? How come many Christians are routinely guilty of much more mundane sins of selfishness and indifference to the well-being of others? Why do we so signally fail to live up to our vocation to be Christlike people? As St Paul puts it, the flesh lusts against the spirit, but don't most of us give in too easily to the lusts of the flesh? We neglect the means of grace. Too many of us skip church attendance and Holy Communion. How many of us read the Bible regularly and pray? Obviously, I'm preaching to the converted here, but don't we too easily settle for second best? We don't really want to be spiritual heroes; we'll settle for being just ordinary people, just ordinary Christians. Ought we not to be seeking the grace to live like Jesus?

May 28th

I John 4 v12

We live in a very materialistic age. For many people, the only certain way to truth is Science. Science deals with the world we can see and touch, with what we can measure. Science is regarded as objectively true. Everything else is subjective, a matter of opinion even: art, music, literature, relationships, religion. There is no ultimate truth in anything but Science. Of course, this is a gross oversimplification. Modern Science is only too aware of the importance of the observer in any observation. Moreover, for well over 200 years, we've known that Science is based on certain propositions which cannot be proved by observation or logic. So is Mathematics. On the other hand, we do of course recognise truth in beauty and in relationships. We stake our lives on what we believe about the people we fall in love with. Religion, too, has a powerful hold on the way most people see the world – for good or ill. But, in this very materialistic C21 West people will say that you cannot believe in God because you can't see Him or prove that He exists by any other scientific tests. Hence most white people telling the census that they are not religious. But people can see God in us if we love one another.

To Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love,
All pray in their distress,
And to these virtues of delight
Return their thankfulness. (PTO)

For Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love,
Is God our Father dear;
And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love,
Is Man, his child and care.

For Mercy has a human heart,
Pity, a human face;
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.

Then every man, of every clime,
That prays in his distress,
Prays to the human form divine:
Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace.

May 29th

I John 4 v13

Religious experience. On the one hand, something quite dangerous. People have claimed all sorts of experiences of the divine and gone on to do terrible things. They may have been mentally unstable. They may have made up the experiences. They may honestly have believed in them. But the consequences have been dire. Then there are the sincere Christians who just don't feel anything, maybe for a time or maybe ever. Doesn't God love them? Is it because they are guilty of some sin that they don't experience what other people claim to have experienced of God? So I'm always a bit suspicious of religious experiences. Are they genuine? Is someone trying to gain some advantage by claiming to have had them? Should this good Christian be tormenting himself or herself because of a perceived lack at the emotional level? Isn't it rather selfish to seek personal experiences of God? Wouldn't it be better just to get on with serving him? On the other hand, we do have genuine experiences of God and these are in fact very precious.

I should say test the spirits. Is it of God? Or could it be made up or the result of mental illness? See the tests May 20th. Don't seek experiences. The point is to keep God's commandments. Experiences may follow if this is God's Will for you, but trust Him. Some of the greatest saints have experienced a dark night of the soul. This too is a manifestation of the love of God. He shows you of Himself in accordance with what is best for you.

May 30th

I John 4 vv 14&15

This is the objective truth. Sometimes we feel very close to God. Sometimes we don't feel close to God at all. But the objective truth is that God is always close to us whether we can feel His Presence or not. The facts are that Jesus is the Saviour of the world and that He does dwell in the hearts of all believers whatever we may feel. Sometimes we feel passionate and extremely close to human beings whom we love. Sometimes we may be cross with them, even deliberately cold towards them. A lot of the time in families, the beloved are just there and we don't have strong feelings about them. It can be the same with God.

May 31st

I John 4 vv 16-18

I have mixed feelings about these humanist or non-religious funerals. In one way, I'm quite glad to be got off the hook of talking about the Christian hope when I'm not sure that the deceased and his family shared that hope. I feel sorry, however, that some families deny themselves the comfort that a religious funeral can bring. They may not realise that they won't be turned away if they didn't come to church. Sometimes I think it is for convenience. Many humanist officiants have no other responsibilities and may be more ready than some clergy to perform on the required date and at the required time. Often I think the reason for a non-religious funeral is that it puts the family in control. It can be a celebration of life which effectively ignores the fact that a death has taken place. Readings, music, etc., can be according to the family's tastes without any rules regarding what might or might not be suitable. The eulogy can be whatever the family want it to be with no mention of judgment and the officiant can give any account of the afterlife they want - from an optimistic belief that we shall all be in our own personal heaven to an insistence that death is final and we shan't know anymore about anything. A clergyman, on the other hand, is likely to insist on reality. A death has occurred and we make sense of that in the light of what the Bible teaches, as we do the life we are celebrating. Prayer is among the most useful of our resources. Readings and music should be more profound than mere entertainment or even making a joke of the proceedings. (*Smoke gets in your eyes* is far too popular at cremations.) There will be a judgment and we shall all give account to God for our lives. The way to avoid fear at this prospect is not to pretend that it won't happen, but to put our faith in the God Who is love.

1st June

I John 4 vv 22-25

All so obviously true, which raises the question for any preacher or teacher of the faith, how do I measure up to the teaching I am giving, the teaching with which I am entrusted by God? Even St Paul was concerned *lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway* (I Corinthians 9²⁷). Very few of us attain to the heights of Christian living which Paul demonstrated. We've seen that we're not to allow our hearts to condemn us. We don't judge ourselves. God is our judge. We know, however, that the measure by which we are judged is love and we know that we all fall short of perfect love. I am afraid I can think of many of my relationships in which what I do and say, even how I think is less than loving. So we pray that God will reveal to us where we fall short. We pray for the grace of repentance. We pray for grace to do better in future. So we clergy are charged with proclaiming and praying:

He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel. Wherefore let us beseech him to grant us true repentance, and his Holy Spirit, that those things may please him, which we do at this present; and that the rest of our life hereafter may be pure, and holy; so that at the last we may come to his eternal joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

2nd June

I John 5 v1

Jewish people and Moslems believe that there is one God. Other religions and secular philosophies may well believe the same. Certainly, Jewish people recognise that the commandment to love the LORD our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength is the very foundation of everything it means to be a member of the people of God. I don't know much about Islam, but the principle is similar to the Christian and Jewish belief – utter submission to God. Secular philosophies may believe in one God as the ultimate cause of everything or the source of all virtue or the goal of the universe but that would not necessarily imply that God is personal and entitled to our love and worship. Other religions may have a more distant relationship with the Supreme Being than do Jews, Christians and Moslems. Where Christians are unique is in believing that Jesus truly is the only-begotten Son of God the Father and equally to be worshipped and adored with the Father and the Holy Spirit. This is the essence of Christianity and we are not Christians either if we do not worship Jesus as God or if we deny that He has come in the flesh.

3rd June

I John 5 vv 2&3

It is a virtuous circle. To love God is to love His people, our brothers and sisters. To love one another is to love God. He dwells in us and we dwell in Him. We are, therefore, members one of another. God is love. God loved us while we were yet sinners. Through His grace, our sins are forgiven and we are set free to love Him. To love Him is to grow to be like Him. To be like Him is to love. It is a virtuous circle.

4th June

I John 5 vv 4&5

The world – ordinary human nature, what St Paul calls the flesh – rejects God. This is called original sin. The people who are of the world may well persecute Christians, the people who are no longer of the world because they have become the Church. The temptations of the world – the ordinary things of self-centred everyday life – may well distract Christians from the unconditional love of God and His people and lead us to spend our time and money on that which cannot satisfy – status, possessions, power, etc.. Christ has, however, overcome the world by His perfect self-sacrifice in love. Those who believe in Him have also overcome the world through His grace; we are in Him and He in us. Faith is victory over the world. So we don't have to succumb either to temptation or to fear of persecution. We know that, whatever happens, we can let go and let God.

5th June

I John 5 v6

Unlike the other three Gospels, John does not specifically include Christ's commandments to His Church to baptise new believers and for all believers to celebrate Holy Communion together. However, the Sacramental life is implicit throughout the Gospel. It is only John who mentions that blood and water flowed out of the side of Jesus on the Cross. Water symbolises the Holy Spirit. It is essential to life. It quenches thirst. It cleanses. It sustains and supports. It nourishes the plants which give us food and healing medicines. Blood stands for Christ's Sacrifice of Himself. It is the supreme expression of love. His Blood atones for all sin. It is the Blood of the new covenant – *I will be your God and you shall be my people. I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts.* It is the Blood of the Passover Lamb, which brings freedom from sin and death. Water and blood are present in abundance in normal childbirth - deeply symbolic of our being born of God. Water & Blood, Baptism & Eucharist proclaim Christ.

6th June

I John 5 v7

For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

I print this verse out because many of you may not have it in your bible at all. It occurs in no ancient manuscript that still exists. There are a few possible ancient references to it, but nothing like as many as you might expect. It also jars with the language of the rest of the epistle. The conclusion must be that it is very unlikely that John wrote this verse. It has almost certainly been inserted much later. So we should be cautious about it. In the light of the rest of Scripture, what it says is however true. We can celebrate it, but perhaps not use it as a proof text.

7th June

I John 5 v8

This is definitely authentic and much more the language of John. All these things do bear witness – the work of the Holy Spirit in the world, in the Church and in the heart of the believer, the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion, the testimony we have that Jesus, the Word, died on the Cross for our salvation. We can trust all these witnesses even when we might feel weak in faith or far from God. Martin Luther fell back on *I am baptised* when he didn't "feel saved". It isn't what you feel that matters; it's what you are. What you are is saved if you are a baptised Christian and all these things bear witness, no matter how far from God or how weak you feel.

8th June

I John 5 v9

In John's Gospel, witness is a key issue. How do we know that Jesus is the Word of God? What is the evidence? The Gospel points to a number of things that bear witness. John the Baptist was a witness. The Old Testament is a witness. That signs and miracles that Jesus did bore witness to Who He is. The writer of the Gospel is Himself a witness. Even the high priest Caiaphas was a sort of witness, despite the fact that he totally opposed Jesus. *It is expedient for us, he said, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this he spake, not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.* (John 11⁵⁰⁻⁵²). Greater than all this human witness, it is God Who bears witness of Jesus.

9th June

I John 5 v10

God bears witness of Jesus in all these ways. The whole creation bears witness to Jesus. The universe was created by the Word of God. God reveals Jesus in the Old Testament- Moses and the prophets. God reveals Jesus in the hearts of individuals, in the Sacraments, in the life of the Church and in the affairs of this world. It's a question of opening our eyes and ears to what He is doing. We pray for His grace to recognise His work in the world and our place in it. Of course, if people don't believe the witness of God, they are treating Him as though He were a liar, which is impossible. He is truth. It is the devil who is the father of lies.

10th June

I John 5 v11

John writes in his gospel, *these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life through his name.* This is the point of witness, that people might believe, because to believe is to live. It is the reason for all the witness we have thought about over the last few days. It is the reason that we are called to bear witness to the world, that men and women and children might believe and live.

11th June (S Barnabas)

I John 5 v12

He that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

Many people simply exist. If you live for the things of this world, you cannot escape the fact that they are all perishable. Neither can you escape the fact that you and your friends and family are all mortal. Whoever you are and whatever you achieve will crumble into dust and ashes. Nothing in this world ultimately satisfies. The materialist exists until he dies. Living is entirely different from merely existing. Eternal life is to know God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent; it is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is, not only to experience, but also to radiate love and joy and peace, etc., and to do so in the knowledge that the joys we experience on earth are but a foretaste of what is to come.

O Lord God Almighty, who didst endue thy holy Apostle Barnabas with singular gifts of the Holy Ghost: Leave us not, we beseech thee, destitute of thy manifold gifts, nor yet of grace to use them alway to thy honour and glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

12th June

I John 5 v13

This morning, I took assembly at Halling School. We looked at the story of Caesarea Philippi when Jesus asks His disciples whom people suppose Him to be (Matthew 16 vv 13-28). Various theories are advanced and then Jesus asks His disciples what they think. In response, Simon says *Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.* Jesus responds *Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.* It is the same for us. Ultimately, it is God Who has made Jesus known to us and enabled us to confess Him as the Christ. Read on and you will see that Peter (like us) is still very far from perfect. He so far misunderstands the One Whom he has just recognised as the Son of the living God that he denies the fact that Jesus will suffer and die and earns for himself comparison with Satan, who, like Peter, could not understand that sin can only be defeated by the perfect sacrifice of love. Yet, for all Peter's failings (and ours), it is because of his God-given faith that Jesus will build on him (and on all believers) His Church against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.

Before assembly, I was saying Mattins and the Litany in Church. Some of the prayers for the people of God just seemed so apposite today.

That it may please thee to give us an heart to love and dread thee, and diligently to live after thy commandments,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to give to all thy people increase of grace, to hear meekly thy Word, and to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to bring into the way of truth all such as have erred, and are deceived,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to strengthen such as do stand; and to comfort and help the weak-hearted; and to raise up them that fall; and finally to beat down Satan under our feet,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

13th June

I John 5 vv 14&15

That it may please thee to give to all nations unity, peace, and concord,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to succour, help, and comfort all that are in danger, necessity, and tribulation,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to preserve all that travel by land or by water, all women labouring of child, all sick persons, and young children; and to shew thy pity upon all prisoners and captives,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to defend, and provide for, the father-less children, and widows, and all that are desolate and oppressed,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to have mercy upon all men,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to forgive our enemies, persecutors, and slanderers, and to turn their hearts,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please thee to give and preserve to our use the kindly fruits of the earth, so as in due time we may enjoy them,

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

Here are a few more prayers from the Litany. I am sure many people make heartfelt prayers like these every day, though perhaps not in this language. Surely, all these are good things to ask for, things we might expect a good God to grant, yet, despite centuries of prayer, there are still nations at war, car crashes, perinatal death, debilitating sickness, neglected and abused children, ill-treated prisoners, lonely and oppressed people, hardened sinners, persecuted churches and ruined crops. We don't know why. Some of it may be explained in terms of God respecting the freedom of His creation. If people are free, they are free to do evil as well as good. If the world runs in accordance with scientific laws, God doesn't switch them on and off unpredictably so that cars don't crash and people suffering from untreated infections don't die. Some of it may be explained in terms of the way hardship and suffering develop character and confirm faith (Romans 5). Whatever the explanation, if prayer is aligning our wills with God's Will, the answer to some of these prayers might be us, visiting the lonely, caring for the sick, sharing the good gifts God has given us, engaging in politics, showing forgiveness to our persecutors, getting on with our work.

14th June

I John 5 v16

I can look round the congregation and think to myself that I am a better Christian than many other people I could mention. They don't measure up to my standards in all sorts of ways. I can also look round the congregation and think what a poor Christian I am in comparison with many others. For one thing I'm too self-righteous and judgmental. Neither of these attitudes is very helpful. Jesus tells us not to judge one another. Paul tells us not to judge others. In this letter we've seen how careful we should be in judging even ourselves. God is my judge. He is your judge. God is just, whereas we are unrealistic. God is merciful whereas we are sometimes too condemnatory and sometimes too relaxed about sin. Justice is fair. Mercy takes sin seriously and deals with it in love. There are occasions, however, when our responsibility to one another, in all humility, is to point out to a Christian brother or sister where he or she is going wrong.

15th June

I John 5 v17

All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

This does take some thinking about. Sin alienates us from God. Therefore the wages of sin is death. Any unrighteousness is sin. Our sins are, however, forgiven in Christ – including the sins of which we are guilty as Christians. Some people have thought that, if you sin after Baptism, you can't be forgiven again. For that reason, some people have postponed Baptism till their death bed, for fear of committing some sin after being baptised and so losing the chance to go to Heaven. That is wrong. We continue to sin so long as we remain on this earth, but there always remains the possibility of repentance and forgiveness. The Bible does speak about unforgiveable sin – sin against the Holy Spirit. If you were guilty of that, paradoxically, it wouldn't worry you. Your heart would be so hardened against God that you wouldn't have a conscience or any fear of the consequences of disobeying Him. The unforgiveable sin is a great mystery. I'm sure that God would always work round it if at all possible. He does not desire the death of a sinner. On the other hand, I think that He would also respect our right to reject His Love eternally, if we were that hardened against Him.

16th June

I John 5 vv18&19

There are only two possibilities – for Christ or against Him, Christian or not, Church or world. That is not to say that Christians are always and consistently good people. Neither is it to say that people in the world are all bad, all the time. It is a question of orientation. Are we turned towards God or away from Him? If we are turned towards God, by His grace we grow more like Him and dwell with Him eternally. If we are turned away from God, we are alienated from Him, from the source of life and joy and peace.

As we gaze on Your kingly brightness
So our faces display your likeness,
Ever changing from glory to glory,
Mirrored here may our lives tell Your story.
Shine on me, shine on me.

17th June

I John 5 vv 20&21

I used to think that v21 was a sort of appendix to the epistle without an obvious connection to what went before, but I was wrong. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Idols are false. The devil is the father of lies. You might think of false gods as devils. You might think of false gods as nothing at all. You might think of false gods as the meaningless goals which so many people set themselves in life – what they spend their time and energy on, things that can never satisfy. To keep yourself from all such idols is to cleave to Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life and in Him to live eternally.

Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days, Let them flow in endless praise.
Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for Thee.
Take my voice and let me sing, always, only for my King.
Take my lips and let them be filled with messages from Thee.
Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect and use every pow'r as Thou shalt choose.
Take my will and make it Thine, it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is Thine own, it shall be Thy royal throne.
Take my love, my Lord, I pour at Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself and I will be ever, only, all for Thee.

18th June

II John vv 1-3

The other two letters of John are to individuals rather than to the whole church. We don't really know they were and we don't know anything about them except what we can infer from these letters. The theme is the same, though – the truth of Christ, life and love – the inseparables.

19th June

II John vv 4-6

When we see other Christians, we rejoice that they are walking with the Lord. It is especially joyful to see new converts or to see the maturing of Christians for whom one has had a special care, perhaps as a church leader, teacher or youth leader, or as a parent or grandparent. As Christians mature, they walk in love, the Summary of the Law.

20th June

II John vv 7-11

It is tempting to think that things were better in the past. We look around at our small, diminishing and aging congregations and remember a time when our churches seemed much stronger and our country much more Christian. Maybe we look back a bit further to the Victorians who sent missionaries all over the world, restored existing churches, established hundreds more, abolished slavery, introduced education for all and fought for better conditions in the mines and factories. Or perhaps we think of the Reformation, when those valiant for truth gladly embraced martyrdom, contending for scriptural teaching and bestowing on us the Bible and the prayer book in our own language. We can go back to the great achievements of the Church in the Middle Ages and to missionary work in the so-called Dark Ages and to those brave Christians who kept the faith in the face of persecution by the Roman Empire. Above all, we might be tempted to go back to the very early Church, to those churches led by the apostles themselves which were founded within a few decades of the Ascension and the Great Commission. But they too had their problems, their heresies and divisions. Even in those days, Christians had to cleave to the truth in Christ. They found, as we do, that there is nothing too hard for Him. *Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world* (I John 4th).

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

21st June

II John vv 12&13

I like e mail. It's quicker and easier than writing a letter and waiting for a reply. It gives you more control, however, than the telephone, which can ring at very inconvenient times and often turns out to be someone trying to sell you something you don't want. I don't do social media, but I can see the attraction of keeping in touch with as many people as you want, especially if it is physically impossible for you to meet them in person. Some people might also enjoy the distance social media give you, even anonymity, though that can be a dangerous game to play. You might say things you really ought not to say if you think people don't know who you are. Nothing is better, however, than really being with other people. John, even though he writes these amazing letters, longs to see his friend face to face. There are things you can't say in a letter or e mail or on the phone or Facebook. There is a joy in being with someone that you don't get from texting. Jesus in the flesh is our Word from God, the way we can know Him so that our joy may be full. He is with us when we meet for worship. We can talk to Him in prayer. We don't just read about Him in the Bible; we encounter Him. That is why we stand for the Gospel in church and face the book. Holy Communion is infinitely more than a memorial service for a dead friend. He is present with us as we obey His command to do this in remembrance of me. One day, we shall see Him face to face and our joy will be full.

22nd June

III John vv 1-4

We don't know who Gaius was. That is of course true of many of the people named in the Old and New Testaments. Sometimes it puts us off reading the Bible, especially out loud, when we have to contend with long lists of names, some of which are hard to pronounce. They were, of course, real people with their own lives to lead. They had families and friends, joys, disappointments and hopes for the future. One day, we shall meet many of them in heaven. Their story is the context for our story. As we read about them, we learn from them about our relationships with God and with other people, how to cope with life's problems and how to respond to life's opportunities. A friend used to joke how embarrassing it will be in heaven, if we are introduced to someone like the prophet Zephaniah, and to admit that we never got round to reading his book! John's personal friendship with Gaius is evident in these verses.

23rd June

III John 5-8

Hospitality is a great Christian virtue. It is pointed out that by taking in strangers some have entertained angels unawares. It is something to think about as we contemplate the large numbers of homeless people and the even larger number of refugees there are in our country today. One important area of hospitality in the early Church was to put up travelling missionaries and other church workers. This is what John is commending Gaius for doing and supporting him in his work. We may occasionally be asked to provide hospitality for Christians staying in our parish as visiting mission partners or doing some Christian work in the Medway Towns. More often we do this work second hand by supporting with our prayers and our financial contributions organisations like the Church Mission Society, which themselves support missionaries' travelling and housing costs.

24th June (Nativity of S John the Baptist)

III John vv 9&10

What do you do about a Diotrophes? On the one hand, the Church, like Jesus, is called to welcome everyone. We are rightly expected always to be willing to forgive. We give second, third and fourth chances. Our purpose is always to restore the sinner, rather than to destroy him or her. On the other hand, someone like a Diotrophes can really damage a Church and the work she is doing. Diotrophes refuses to accept the authority of those above him. He has power and influence in the local Church such that he can refuse to support those who work with John in the mission and even exclude from the fellowship those who support them. There has to be a place for discipline in the Church. This is the prayer at the consecration of a bishop. Almighty God and most merciful Father, who of thine infinite goodness hast given thine only and dearly beloved Son Jesus Christ, to be our Redeemer and the Author of everlasting life; who, after that he had made perfect our redemption by his death, and was ascended into heaven, poured down his gifts abundantly upon men, making some Apostles, some Prophets, some Evangelists, some Pastors and Doctors, to the edifying and making perfect his Church: Grant, we beseech thee, to this thy servant such grace, that he may evermore be ready to spread abroad thy Gospel, the glad tidings of reconciliation with thee; and **use the authority given him, not to destruction, but to salvation; not to hurt, but to help:** so that as a wise and faithful servant, giving to thy family their portion in due season, he may at last be received into everlasting joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth, one God, world without end. Amen.

25th June

III John 11-14

So John repeats his message about how we recognise the true Christian. He commends Demetrius because he does seek to live up to Christ's example. Then the personal greetings and the hope to see them all personally.

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.

26th June

Revelation 1 vv 1-8

The Book of Revelation contains some of the most horrifying passages in the Bible. It also contains some of the most sublime. In the last few days of this quarter, I thought we would look at some of the latter. The Book is a terrible warning of the consequences of rejecting God and a wonderful promise for all those who believe in Him. John (the apostle, the writer of the epistles and Gospel or another John?) is an exile on the island of Patmos. He is granted a vision a revelation on the Lord's Day. Maybe it was when he was present at the Sunday Eucharist of the Christian congregation there, or maybe he was praying on his own. He sees Jesus exalted in Heaven. He sees that He is Alpha and Omega, that He is everything that God is. He sees also that He is in human form and bears still the marks of the crucifixion. John sees that Jesus will come again to receive His own to Himself, those whom He has washed clean from their sins by His Blood and whom He has made kings and priests as He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and the great High Priest Who offers Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

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.

27th June

Revelation 1 vv 9-20

In order to appreciate Revelation (as with the New Testament in general) it is necessary to be familiar with the Old Testament. The New Testament understands Jesus in the light of the Old Testament of which He is the fulfilment. It is a great mistake when churches omit OT readings from their public services and Christians neglect the OT in their daily Bible readings. These seven Asian churches were under various degrees of pressure when John was writing to them. They would find hope and the resources to continue in the revelation of Christ to them. John's vision draws on OT imagery to represent Christ as God and Man, as the one Who represents the people of God before the Throne of Grace. He is the One Who has won the final victory over death. So the Church does not have to be afraid of the worst the world can do to her. We learn that churches each have their own special angel to take care of them. So we shouldn't be afraid either. 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.

28th June

Revelation 4 vv 1-11

This must be one of my favourite chapters in the Bible, though I only just realised that when I read it in preparation for these notes. Of course, we cannot have anything more than the tiniest conception of the glory of God, but something of what we can understand is revealed in this chapter. There is no description of the One Who sits on the throne. God is beyond description and any attempt to define Him would be to break the second commandment. When we think of the wonders of the material universe, made to the glory of God, we have also to contemplate that there is also a heavenly realm of angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, beyond our imagining, who also worship in all eternity. We are privileged to join our worship with theirs, especially in the Holy Communion, *Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of Heaven...* The four living creatures are usually taken to represent the four evangelists – Mark, Luke, Matthew and John in that order. The 24 elders presumably represent the twelve patriarchs of the tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of the new Israel. *Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.*

29th June (S Peter)

Revelation 5 vv 1-14

The scroll is the outworking of God's plan for His Creation. It is the eternal destiny of the whole cosmos. No-one can unlock that destiny except the Man Who is God. Human beings, made in the image of God, have a key (the key?) role in what God intends for the whole of His Creation – the heavenly realm as well as the earthly. In no human being, however, is that divine image unsullied by sin, except in Jesus, the One Whose Nature as pure love is revealed in His yielding His life on the Cross – perfect obedience to God, perfect love for the human race which had rejected Him – the Man Who is God. The Old Testament imagery piles up – the sacrificial Lamb, the Passover, the perfection power indicated by the seven horns. The Holy Spirit is only ever mentioned in Revelation as seven-fold. Seven-fold, yet so closely associated with Jesus, He is sent forth into all the earth. The whole creation joins in praise to the Lamb Who is slain.

Come, let us join our cheerful songs
With angels round the throne.
Ten thousand thousand are their tongues,
But all their joys are one.

“Worthy the Lamb that died,” they cry,
“To be exalted thus!”
“Worthy the Lamb,” our hearts reply,
“For He was slain for us!”

Jesus is worthy to receive
Honour and power divine;
And blessings more than we can give,
Be, Lord, forever Thine.

Let all that dwell above the sky,
And air and earth and seas,
Conspire to lift Thy glories high,
And speak Thine endless praise!

The whole creation join in one,
To bless the sacred Name
Of Him Who sits upon the throne,
And to adore the Lamb.

June 30th

Revelation 22 vv 1-10

One of the first flower festivals we did at St Michael's summarised the bible story in flower arrangements around the church. The porch was the first and last. It represented the Garden of Eden – the beautiful home God planted for the first human beings, which we forfeited by our sin. It represented the paradise at the end of time when human beings are restored as God's children through the shedding of the Blood of the Lamb of God. Water represents life. The tree of life provides fruit all the year round. The fruit is for nourishment and healing and peace. The imagery is drawn from Genesis and Ezekiel and the Old Testament generally. God's people are no longer separated from Him by sin. We are washed clean. We bear His Name, our Christian name. *You shall be holy because I am holy.* God is our eternal light in this land where there is no more darkness, no tears, no death, no sorrow, no crying, no pain, for the former things are passed and all things are made new. It is to this end that our lives are directed. It is in this light that we live our lives on earth. This is the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life.

Jerusalem the golden, with milk and honey blest,
beneath thy contemplation sink heart and voice oppressed:
I know not, oh, I know not, what joys await us there;
what radiancy of glory, what bliss beyond compare!

They stand, those halls of Zion, all jubilant with song,
and bright with many an angel, and all the martyr throng:
the Prince is ever in them, the daylight is serene;
the pastures of the blessed are decked in glorious sheen.

There is the throne of David; and there, from care released,
the shout of them that triumph, the song of them that feast;
and they who with their Leader have conquered in the fight,
for ever and for ever are clad in robes of white.

Oh, sweet and blessed country, the home of God's elect!
Oh, sweet and blessed country, that eager hearts expect!
Jesus, in mercy bring us to that dear land of rest,
who art, with God the Father, and the Spirit, ever blest.