

The Gospel
According
to
St John

Bible Notes April -
June 2020

50p

April 1st

John 6 v15

There is so much in St John's Gospel that I thought that it would be good to carry on from where we left off last time. Christ is all in all. We listed some of the ways in which He fulfils all our needs and the prophecies of Scripture in yesterday's reading. The Feeding of the 5,000 was a powerful demonstration of Who Jesus is. Like Moses, He sets His people free from slavery. Like God (as God!), He redeems His people. He is the Passover Lamb, by Whose Blood we escape death when the angel of death passes over. He is the first born Son, dedicated to God as a sacrifice. Like Moses, like God, He feeds His people in the Wilderness. He is the Bread of Life. He is the Water of life Who slakes our thirst as did the water that flowed from the rock struck by Moses. In Him we are baptised, as the children of Israel were baptised in the Red Sea.

They wanted to take Him by force and make Him King. Jesus withdrew into the mountain alone to pray. Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, but the crowds and the disciples had failed to understand what kind of King He is. It is Pontius Pilate who comes closest when he insists that the charge nailed to Christ's Cross in three languages proclaims Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.

Jesus! My Shepherd, , Brother, Friend, My Prophet, Priest, and King;
My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End, Accept the praise I bring.

April 2nd

John 6 vv 16-19

According to Matthew and Mark, the disciples in the boat thought that Jesus was a phantom walking on the water. According to Matthew, Peter asks Jesus to let him walk on the water too, but Peter does not have sufficient faith, begins to sink and is rescued by Jesus.

I find that singing certain hymns (maybe including the one we thought about yesterday) makes me think about people I love who have died. Then I get too choked up to carry on singing. Other people tell me they feel the same. These things are very precious to us, but difficult to manage. A phantom is something which is not really there or it is something to fear. Jesus is not a phantom. He is really here. He explicitly tells the disciples not to be afraid. Those who have died in the Lord are really alive, more really alive than they ever were on earth.

There is no need for us to be fearful for them and certainly not of them. We do feel our loss when our loved ones die, but, as Christians, we are not without hope for them that sleep in Him. Bereavement ought not to overpower us. We shall see them again. In the meantime, we have to make the most of the time we have left to us on earth. I am sure that is what our departed loved ones would want for us.

Peter wanted to be like Jesus and walk with Him on the water. We want to be like Jesus. Like Peter, we step out in faith, but, also like Peter, when our faith fails, Jesus reaches out to uphold us.

I fear no foe with Thee at hand to bless. Ills have no weight and tears
no bitterness.

Where is death's sting? Where grave, Thy victory? I triumph still if
Thou abide with me.

April 3rd

John 6 vv 20 & 21

The disciples and the crowds misunderstood the kingship of Jesus, but, for those whose hearts are open to the Holy Spirit, Jesus is much more than any earthly king. God creates the world by bringing order out of the chaotic watery darkness, described in Genesis 1, over which the Spirit of God brooded. He allows the waters to return in the Great Flood when creation rejects its Creator and chaos returns. He keeps the family of Noah and the animals safe in the ark. He stops the rain. The dry land reappears and God commands Noah to replenish the earth. Noah knows that the waters have receded by the dove – symbol of peace, symbol of the Holy Spirit. God parts the Red Sea to allow the Israelites to escape the pursuing Egyptians and to arrive at the holy mountain. God's victory over the chaotic and destructive power of the sea is a recurring theme throughout the Bible. This is Who Jesus is.

He only is the maker of all things near and far;
He paints the wayside flower, he lights the evening star;
The winds and waves obey him, by him the birds are fed;
Much more to us, his children, he gives our daily bread.

It is I.

So says God to Moses at the burning bush – the same words in the Greek Old & New Testaments.

Be not afraid.

April 4th

John 6 vv 22-26

Jesus having walked across the lake, it is not surprising that the crowds had trouble finding Him and then wondered how He got there. He warns them that they are seeking Him for the wrong reasons. He says that they did not see the miracle, though evidently they did because they ate the loaves. They did not perceive the miracle. They did not understand it. The miracle is a sign of Who Jesus is and what it means to follow Him, to love Him and to keep His commandments. What really matters in life? One of our Eucharistic Prayers speaks of *Jesus our Saviour, born of Mary, to be the living bread, in whom all our hungers are satisfied*. Is this the reason that we follow Him? We may have become Christians because we were brought up to believe. We might have been influenced by our friends. Perhaps we turned to Him in some crisis in our life. Maybe we were drawn to the Church by the music or the fellowship or the social events it lays on, even because we want to preserve our historic buildings. There are many good reasons for coming to Christ (and perhaps some not so good), but, in the end, do we really get it, what it means to know and love Jesus? If we sincerely step out in faith, as Peter did in the Sea of Galilee, Jesus will uphold us even if we falter. But if we don't get past eating the loaves, claiming to be Christians, but not really knowing Christ, then what? S Paul speaks of the danger of *having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof*.

April 5th (Palm Sunday)

John 6 vv 27-29

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who, of thy tender love towards mankind, hast sent thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to take upon him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility; Mercifully grant, that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

This takes some thinking about. On the face of it, it should be obvious that we ought to work for what is really worthwhile – eternal life in Christ, rather than the things of this world which will all pass away. Yet Jesus says that working the work of God means believing in the One God sent. We don't earn our heavenly reward by good works. Eternal life is rooted in our relationship with Jesus. We have eternal life because we know Him. Living a good life follows from that knowledge, as we grow into His likeness.

April 6th

John 6 vv 30-35

It wasn't really Moses who gave the Israelites manna in the Wilderness; it was God. The manna was itself a great miracle, a sign of God's care for His people. God kept them alive in the desert where they might have starved. But what God has done in Jesus is infinitely more wonderful. Jesus is the Bread of life and, through feeding on Him, we have eternal life. Jesus is Himself the sign that God is love.

April 7th

John 6 vv 36-40

Faith is itself the gift of God. So, when we receive Jesus in our hearts through faith, it is not because we are such wonderful people that we have achieved enough faith to become Christians. Faith is God's gift to us, not through any merit of our own, but simply because He loves us. The people who actually saw the miracles in the flesh and still rejected Jesus had not the gift of faith. We can speculate as to why that should be, why it is that some are given the gift of faith and some are not. Is it that some hearts resist God's Holy Spirit working in them? Is it that some of us are more welcoming of God's grace? What is the effect of human free will and how much power do we have to receive or to reject God's plans for our lives? Certainly there is always the possibility that those who have not yet accepted Jesus into their lives one day will do so. There is much that is beyond our understanding, but at least this should teach us humility. We are utterly dependent on God and He will not let us down. It is not for us to judge those who do not (yet?) know this.

April 8th

John 6 vv 41-47

These particular Jews reject the Jesus they think they know. How can the son of Joseph be the Bread of life? Well, we know that Jesus isn't the son of Joseph, but He was the son of Mary and He was the village carpenter. People in the world today might think they know Jesus and reject what they think they know. Unbelievers might have told them all sorts of things about Jesus and what the Christian religion is. Popular culture has its own takes on Jesus. They might have read and misunderstood the Bible. Their opinion of Jesus might be based on what they know of you and me. There's a responsibility! What people have to do is to meet Him for themselves with an open mind.

April 9th (Maundy Thursday)

John 6 vv 48-51

There are many things I find difficult about the Church. There is a lot I don't agree with in the Church of England and I don't like the direction in which it seems to be moving: more bureaucracy, less spirituality; bishops more managers than pastors; a disrespectful attitude to Scripture on the part of some clergy and laity; a relaxation of Christ's call to utter commitment on the part of His followers in favour of treating Christian service almost as a leisure activity; an obsession with buildings and money; a public relations attitude to the truth which is more concerned that we should look good than that we should be good; a gradual transformation from being a Church for all the people of England into a more inward looking sect; the abandonment of great words and music inherited from the past and their replacement by banal compositions seemingly written by people who have little appreciation of beauty. So why don't I join another Church? Because I think that all the other denominations of the Christian Church are even less perfect than we are! How terribly judgmental on my part! Who am I to judge another man's (ie God's) servants? Who am I to think I know better than so many other people – many of whom are far better qualified than I am? How unfair of me to condemn the Church. There are many, many good things I overlook. The things I don't like might be nothing like as bad as I think. Some of my likes and dislikes are probably based on prejudice and habit. What works for me might not work for other people. I could actually be wrong about some of things regarding which I sometimes feel like the only one who is right. Even Elijah was told by God that, far from being alone in standing up for the right, there were 7,000 others standing with him. I mention all this in the context of Maundy Thursday and this reading because sometimes I contemplate in retirement dropping out of congregational life, just praying at home and reading the Bible, maybe with a few friends, doing my best, by God's grace, to live a Christian life day to day, helping people, bearing witness to my faith, active in the local community. If I didn't go to church I could help the Countryside Group on Sundays! And then I realise that I cannot be a Christian on my own. The Church is Eucharistic fellowship. We love one another as Christ loved us and we must meet together (imperfect as we all are, me as well as you) to share the Bread of Life.

April 10th (Good Friday)

John 6 vv 52-55

ALMIGHTY God, we beseech thee graciously to behold this thy family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was contented to be betrayed, and given up into the hands of wicked men, and to suffer death upon the cross, who now liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified; Receive our supplications and prayers, which we offer before thee for all estates of men in thy holy Church, that every member of the same, in his vocation and ministry may truly and godly serve thee; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

The question people always ask is why do we call this day Good Friday on which the greatest crime ever was committed. And the answer is, of course, that the love of Jesus as High Priest in offering Himself as the Sacrifice for the sins of the world opened the way through Him into the Holy of Holies, into the very Presence of God for us poor sinners that we might live for ever in Him. It is in this great mystery that we participate when we share in the Holy Communion – a joy which we deny ourselves on Good Friday and on Holy Saturday, but, on every other day of the year (especially every Sunday) the Church celebrates with the joy which He gives us in abundance.

April 11th (Holy Saturday)

John 6 v56

GRANT, O Lord, that as we are baptized into the death of thy blessed Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, so by continual mortifying our corrupt affections we may be buried with him; and that through the grave, and gate of death, we may pass to our joyful resurrection ; for his merits, who died, and was buried, and rose again for us, thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

There is always more. We read the same bible passages again and again throughout our lives. Some of the prayers we say we have always said. We keep on singing the hymns we love. There is always more in the bible how ever often we read it. It is the Word of God. The best prayers and the best hymns also have the power to inspire us more as we repeat them. Sometimes, the penny drops and we recognise a depth of meaning we had never previously appreciated. This happened to me c1977 at an 8.00 HC at St Paul's Herne Hill with these words:

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*. That's an amazing prayer yet it's what we are confident in expecting from what Jesus says in today's verse.

April 12th (Easter)

John 6 vv 57&58

ALMIGHTY God, who through thine only-begotten Son Jesus Christ hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life; We humbly beseech thee, that, as by thy special grace preventing us thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. *Amen*.

In the Middle Ages, most people attended Mass (Holy Communion) every Sunday, but did not generally receive the Bread & Wine. The exception was Easter when every Christian communicated. The Church of England states that we should receive Communion on at least three occasions each year, one of which should be Easter. I think that the words of Jesus here explain why our Easter celebration of the Resurrection is so intimately bound up with our celebration of Holy Communion. And, of course, we are the Easter people. We don't celebrate Easter just once a year. Every Sunday is a little Easter. Every day of our lives is a day in our lives as the people of God, crucified with Him that we might live His risen life in all time and eternity. This is why I always contend for the Sunday Communion as the principal service of the Church even though some good people might think that something else with a lesser degree of commitment might be more attractive. The mission service must be in addition to not instead of the service Jesus gave us to celebrate.

At the Lamb's high
feast we sing
praise to our
victorious King,
who has washed
us in the tide
flowing from his
pierced side;
praise we him
whose love divine

gives his sacred
blood for wine,
gives his body for
the feast,
Christ the victim,
Christ the priest.

Where the
paschal blood is
poured,

death's dark angel
sheathes his
sword;
Israel's hosts
triumphant go
through the wave
that drowns the
foe.
Praise we Christ,
whose blood was

shed,
paschal victim,
paschal bread;
with sincerity and
love
eat we manna
from above.

Mighty victim from
the sky,
pow'rs of hell
beneath thee lie;
death is
conquered in the
fight,
thou hast brought
us life and light:

hymns of glory
and of praise,
risen Lord, to thee
we raise;
holy Father, praise
to thee,
with the Spirit,
ever be.

April 13th (Easter Monday)

John 6 vv 59-65

Easter Monday. We carry on celebrating Easter the octave (eight days), till Ascension and Pentecost, for the rest of our mortal lives, in all eternity. There is much which is hard to believe of the wonder of the love of God. These things are spiritually discerned. We can arrogantly rely exclusively on our own human understanding in which case we shall fail to comprehend what God does for us. On the other hand, we can humbly open ourselves up to the Spirit Who will enlighten our human understanding so that we perceive that these things are true.

April 14th

John 6 vv 66-71

Not everyone perceives the truth of the Gospel. For all sorts of reasons, such people may fall away from Christ. Jesus unifies. He welcomes all who come to Him. We become members of Christ, members of one another, called to love as He loves us. But He also creates a division – between those who accept Him and those who reject Him. Following Christ is a matter of taking up one's cross and following Him. It is an openness to the Spirit. It is a total commitment. There is always a welcome for the genuine seeker after truth. None of us is perfect. Christ bears us up when our faith falters. But there is a genuine choice – for Him (however inadequately) or against Him. Remember the story of the rich, young ruler (Mark 10¹⁹⁻²²). The young man asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. When Jesus explains what that means, the man departs sorrowing. He finds it just too difficult to yield everything to Jesus. And yet, as Peter recognises in John 6⁶⁸, there is no alternative. There is nowhere else to go. Only Jesus has the key to eternal life. And yet, men and women don't yield their lives to Him. Even one of the twelve apostles betrays Him, one of the twelve Jesus had chosen.

April 15th

John 7 v 1-5

The feeding of the 5,000 happened at Passover time. Then would have been the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost. Now we have reached the third great feast of the Jewish Year – Tabernacles at the end of the Summer. It was immediately preceded by the Day of Atonement when there was an act of public repentance for all the sins that all the people had committed throughout the year, with appropriate sacrifices, including the scapegoat which was considered to take away the sins of the people out of the camp. It was also the end of the harvest. The Israelites dwelt in tents (or tabernacles) for this feast to remind them of the forty years wandering in the Wilderness. There was a celebration of God's gift of Torah. (No nation cannot flourish without wise, just & merciful laws. Torah – God's Law is how the world works cf Ps 19). There was an anticipation of the coming of the Kingdom of God. All Jews should attend these three great feasts in Jerusalem if at all possible. So, potentially, it would be a good time for the Messiah to appear in Jerusalem, when there would be literally millions of people to acclaim Him. His brothers' might have seemed sensible. But His time was not yet. He would very likely have been arrested. His brothers were really testing Him. They didn't yet believe in Him. Even the family of Jesus did not at once perceive Who He is. *He came to His own and His own received Him not*, which, we may think must have been painful for Him. Many Christians have, however, been the only Christians in their family and have suffered the pain of choosing God or their kinsfolk. People in that position deserve our prayers.

April 16th

John 7 vv 6-9

The life of Jesus unfolds in the Providence of God. His time is the Passover at which He is crucified. Our lives too unfold in accordance with God's plan for us. Those who do not believe (even at this stage Jesus' brothers*) are at home in the world. They are comfortable with the world and the world is comfortable with them. As Christians, we are not necessarily at ease with the world. Ultimately, we don't share the world's values. We have what we believe to be higher standards in the way we conduct business or personal relationships, in our conversations, the way we behave generally, our priorities. We may grate on the world. That is why *the world received Him not*.

*Who were these brothers of Jesus? Some people believe that Joseph had been married and widowed before he married Mary and that these brothers of Jesus are Joseph's children. Some believe that Mary and Joseph had a normal married life after Jesus was born and that these are the natural children of Joseph and Mary. The most common view in the Church is that Joseph had no other children and that Mary remained a virgin perpetually and that, therefore, the word "brothers" is used somewhat loosely and means cousins, perhaps cousins who were brought up by Mary & Joseph.

April 17th

John 7 vv 11-13

Obviously, Jesus was talked about. Thousands of people had seen and heard Him and had experience of His miracles. There would have been a great deal of curiosity about Him. There would also have been hope and anticipation, excitement. It has been said that one of the most extraordinary achievements of the Church has been to make Jesus seem boring. Let the world see how excited we are about Jesus.

April 18th (Easter Saturday)

John 7 vv 14-18

It's a clergyman's oddity to call today Easter Saturday when everybody else thought it was last week, but there is a reason for it, like trying to preserve Advent in the face of relentless pressure to start Christmas as soon as Hallowe'en is over. The joy of Christmas and Easter is the deep joy that takes seriously sin and pain, judgment and death, and appreciates at least a little of what it means that God has overcome them in Christ. Christmas & Easter are not shallow celebrations which just skate over the deep issues which have so much impact on human lives.

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. The truth of the Gospel is experienced in living the Christian life. Walking with Jesus every day, we know Him better and better as the Way the Truth & the Life.

Oh, make but trial of His love,
Experience will decide
How blest they are, and only
they,
Who in His truth confide.

Fear Him, ye saints, and you
will then
Have nothing else to fear;
Make you His service your
delight,
Your wants shall be His care.

April 19th (Easter 1 / Easter 2)

John 7 vv 19-23

ALMIGHTY Father, who has given thine only Son to die for our sins, and to rise again for our justification; Grant us so to put away the leaven of malice and wickedness, that we may alway serve thee in pureness of living and truth; through the merits of the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

[Traditionally, the Church counted Sundays after Easter and this would be Easter 1. More recently, we have tended to count Sundays of Easter of which this is the second – Easter Day itself being the first!]

Jesus knows that the authorities at least want to kill Him. One of the Ten Commandments is *Thou shalt not kill*. How easily people persuade themselves that they are acting in the interests of religion or of politics or of a good cause when they behave in a manner which is contrary to the principles they claim to be defending. If you cannot love people who disagree with you whether about religion or politics or anything else, you are failing to live up to Christian principles. If you mistreat your opponents – misrepresent them, spurn them, actively hurt them – you are not unequivocally on the side of right. The proximate cause for wanting to kill Jesus is that it appears to those who presume to judge others that Jesus is a Sabbath breaker. *Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy* is of course another of the Ten Commandments – one which has often been abused by those who like to feel superior and to condemn others. Jesus doesn't reject the OT Law or destroy it. He comes to fulfil the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5¹⁷). Here He explains the Sabbath commandment in the light of other aspects of God's Law. Above all, the whole Law, all law (human as well as divine) has to be interpreted in the light of the command to love.

CHRIST our passover is sacrificed for us : therefore let us keep the feast; Not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness : but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 1 *Cor.* v. 7. Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more : death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once : but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin : but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Rom.* vi. 9. Christ is risen from the dead : and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death : by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die : even so in Christ shall all be made alive. 1 *Cor.* xv. 20. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. *Amen.*

April 20th

John 7 v24

Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.

Judging by appearances is a temptingly straightforward way of assessing people. Sometimes, we might be prudent to judge by appearances at least initially. People who dress and style their hair and speak in much the same way as we do are probably people like us, people we might be inclined to trust with our friendship. We recognise the authority of people like policemen by their uniform. We might be more inclined to trust a business man or a banker if he is wearing a smart suit. If we see a group of youths dressed as hell's angels, we might think it best to steer clear. If we're single and go to a party, we might be attracted to another person by the way she looks. Yet the beautiful looking girl at the party might not be a very nice person at all. The hell's angel might just be offering to help you carry your bag. The guy in the smart suit could be a con man. There are, unfortunately, policemen we ought not to trust. If we confine our friendships to people like us, we'll miss out on what we could gain by sharing with them and we shan't have opportunities to share our faith outside our natural social circle.

I Samuel 16⁷: But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.

April 21st

John 7 vv 25-27

The people think they know where Jesus came from. He is the son of Joseph and Mary from the carpenter's shop in Nazareth. How can He be the Messiah? Surely the Messiah is a descendant of David and born in Bethlehem. But He does these miracles and, so far, the authorities haven't arrested Him. Do they know something we don't?

What they don't know is that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. He is a descendant of David after the flesh, as St Paul puts it. He is not Joseph's son. He does fulfil the OT prophecies regarding the Messiah.

However, this is still not anything like the principal point. What is the point is that He comes from Heaven & He is the Son of God. The Messiah is much more than people can ever imagine.

April 22nd

John 7 vv 28-31

The crowds don't know Who sent Jesus. They don't know the fact that He is the Son of God. They do not know God in the sense of having a loving relationship with Him. No human being can know more than an infinitesimally small fraction of the nature of God. Jesus does, however, know God in every sense. Jesus knows God in all His fullness. The fullness of God dwells in Jesus. It is Jesus Who makes God known to us. In Him alone we know God. To know God is to have eternal life. In Heaven, we shall know God as He loves us and, therefore we shall worship Him in eternally in pure love.

John 1¹⁸: No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*.

April 23rd (S George)

John 7 v32

The Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him.

About 300 years after this, George was a Roman soldier. The emperor Diocletian ordered the persecution of Christians within the Empire. George resigned his commission and headed for Rome to remonstrate with the emperor. The emperor ordered George's death and George's flag represent his red blood spilt on the white pavement. The story has it that it was on his way to Rome that George rescued a young maiden from a dragon. The dragon symbolises the power of evil. Christians have always been called upon to stand up for what is right even to the point of yielding our lives for the faith.

Revelation 7: ¹³ And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? ¹⁴ And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

April 24th

John 7 vv 32-36

Whither will he go? This question has two answers and it is important to know that, because the thought behind these two answers is crucial to what follows. One answer is that He will go to the Cross. Some Christians will follow Him to a martyr's death. All Christians will take up their cross daily and follow Him, but only He will (*by his one oblation of himself once offered*) *a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world;* Immediately after His Death, His Body will be laid in the tomb of Joseph of

Arimathaea and He will descend into Hell to preach to *the spirits in prison*. Then He will rise from the dead and show Himself to His disciples for forty days at the end of which He will ascend into Heaven, which is the second answer to the question *Whither will he go?* His disciples will follow Him to Heaven too, but the crowds cannot follow Him at the time Jesus is speaking to them in our reading because they do not (yet?) believe in Him. They do not therefore do the works of God.

April 25th (S Mark)

John 7 vv 37-39

The Feast of Tabernacles was for seven days in which the Children of Israel were supposed to dwell in tents to remind them of the 40 years they spent wandering in the Wilderness. On each of those seven days, the high priest would pour out a jug full of water. This symbolised the water that flowed from the rock which Moses struck in the desert and the rain they prayed for to make their crops grow in the Promised Land. Water is absolutely essential for life. S Paul draws an analogy between the rock Moses struck and Christ – from Whom flows all life. Psalm 72 speaks of the LORD's anointed coming down in showers. The priest poured out wine with the water. Jesus will say of the Communion cup, *Drink ye all of this; for this is my Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins*. When the tents were all packed up, there was an eighth day of the Feast, the greatest day. The priest did not pour out the jug full of water on the eighth day, but, as with the woman at the well in John 4, Jesus now speaks of Himself as the water of eternal life. From Jesus flows out the Holy Spirit, Lord and Giver of Life. The Spirit flows out from Jesus on the Cross, the supreme offering of love, as blood and water flowed from His side when it was pierced by the centurion's spear. This Holy Spirit is given to and flows from every believer. The prophet Ezekiel had a vision in which a stream of water flowed out from the Temple to bring life to the Wilderness, fruits to nourish God's people, medicinal leaves to heal their sicknesses. Jesus is the Temple and the Holy Spirit is the Water of life. *Such as the Father is, such is the Son: and such is the Holy Ghost*. This S Mark's Day our church annual meetings will follow the Eucharist in which we do all this *in remembrance of Him*. May the Spirit flow out into our meetings and into the life of our parish!

April 26th (Easter 2 / Easter 3)

John 7 vv 40-44

Of at truth this is the Prophet.

Of a truth. When I first attended a Science & Religion Forum conference, the theme was that science and religion are not, as is commonly supposed, in opposition to one another. They both accept that there is such a thing as truth and that the truth is worth pursuing. The truth might be difficult to ascertain and difficult to demonstrate to other people, but there is such a thing. Science and religion use different methods and some scientists and some religious people disagree as to what the truth is. But science and religion believe that there is such a thing as truth and that the truth is worth pursuing. Too many people in the world today believe that it is all a matter of opinion. There might be your truth and my truth, but there is no such thing as the Truth. It's a matter of opinion whether God exists just as it is up to you whether you believe in vaccination or not. There is no such thing as proof, because there is nothing to be proved. Everything is relative and it is every individual's right to choose what he or she believes about absolutely everything. Such attitudes undermine both religion & science and I believe are fatal also to the arts, the law and politics. Think about it. If there is no right, in practice might is right!

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.*

April 27th

John 7 vv 45-53

So why do we believe what we believe? We cannot after all check every fact we're presented with. Mostly, we tend to believe what other people believe, especially people we respect. We may believe what we are told by those in authority over us. Maybe we stick rigidly to our own interpretation of the Bible or our own denomination's view of things. Sometimes, it is hard to change what we have always believed even in the face of evidence. But the authorities were wrong here, the people generally most respected were mistaken about Jesus, they had misunderstood Scripture and refused to be challenged by the facts. We are in the end responsible for making up our own minds in the light of what we are taught. *I have more understanding than my teachers: for thy testimonies are my study.* Psalm 119⁹⁹. *I am wiser than the aged; because I keep thy commandments.* Psalm 119¹⁰⁰.

April 28th

John 8 vv 1-11

In some bibles this very much loved story is quite hard to find. It does not come here in the most ancient texts. Nevertheless, it is a story close to our hearts as Christians I am sure that we rightly regard it as the Word of God, holy Scripture. Jesus fulfils the Law & the Prophets with love. He does not condone sin. He does not allow the alleged sinner to be destroyed by the outworking of the Law. He reminds the respectable that none of us is in a position to condemn others. Worth remembering when we consider how to deal with criminals in our own time and place.

April 29th

John 8 v12

I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given thine only Son to be unto us both a sacrifice for sin, and also an ensample of godly life; Give us grace that we may always most thankfully receive that his inestimable benefit, and also daily endeavour ourselves to follow the blessed steps of his most holy life; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* Some people deliberately learn collects by heart. We clergy almost do through practice. It is a good idea to look up the collect and the readings before attending a service and to follow in your prayer books and bibles – though perhaps not so easy now as it was when everything was in one small book. But think about today's verse along with this week's collect. It's the BCP collect which we now use at CW services.

April 30th

John 8 vv 13-19

Truth exists, but the truth can be hard to discern. Jesus is the Truth and He is standing right in front of them, but they don't recognise Him for Who He is. They doubt His testimony of Himself. We might doubt anyone's testimony of himself, especially if he seemed to be boasting about being a really great person. Jesus says that His testimony of Himself is backed up by God the Father. The Truth of God is, however, spiritually discerned. If we judge after the flesh, we miss out on recognising and falling in love with Jesus. How do we come to spiritual discernment. We humbly approach in prayer.

Matthew 7⁷ Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

⁸ For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

May 1st (Ss Philip & James)

John 8 vv 20-27

Wow! Jesus isn't going to kill Himself. He is going to be killed. The people He is talking to cannot understand this. He is from above. Mere human beings are from below. He is not of this world. Mere humanity is of this world. Yet God so loved the world that He sent His Son to redeem us. The One Who is from above came to join us below so that we should be born again / born from above and receive God's gift of eternal life, so that we should be exalted to Heaven. These things are discerned by faith and faith is the gift of God. We seek God's grace in order to be open to what God freely gives to us, to those who, through grace, believe that *I am*.

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 steadfastly walk in the way that leadeth to eternal life; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

May 2nd

John 8 vv 28-32

The carol puts it very well!

Once in royal David's city
Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her Baby
In a manger for His bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little Child.

He came down to earth from
heaven,
Who is God and Lord of all,
And His shelter was a stable,
And His cradle was a stall;
With the poor, and mean, and
lowly,
Lived on earth our Saviour holy.

And through all His wondrous
childhood
He would honour and obey,
Love and watch the lowly maiden,
In whose gentle arms He lay:
Christian children all must be
Mild, obedient, good as He.

For he is our childhood's pattern;
Day by day, like us He grew;
He was little, weak and helpless,
Tears and smiles like us He knew;
And He feeleth for our sadness,
And He shareth in our gladness.

And our eyes at last shall see Him,
Through His own redeeming love;
For that Child so dear and gentle
Is our Lord in heaven above,
And He leads His children on
To the place where He is gone.

Not in that poor lowly stable,
With the oxen standing by,
We shall see Him; but in heaven,
Set at God's right hand on high;
Where like stars His children
crowned
All in white shall wait around.

May 3rd (Easter 3 / 4/)

John 8 vv 33-36

S Athanasius (whose feast was yesterday) was Bishop of Alexandria in the fourth century. He guided the Church as she sought to understand what God has done in Jesus Christ. It was he who insisted that in the Creed we say that Jesus is *of one being with the Father* or (in the traditional English version) *being of one substance with the Father*. It is because Jesus is wholly God and wholly man that we are redeemed in Him, that our sins are completely purged, that we are utterly cleansed, that we are made like Him. In Christ God became human so that we should become divine. In Christ we know the Truth and the Truth sets us free – free from sin, the world and the devil, free from the fear of death.

ALMIGHTY God, who shewest to them that be in error the light of thy truth, to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness; Grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's Religion, that they may eschew those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Amen*

May 4th

John 8 vv 37-40

If you read the psalms every day as I do and read them all in their entirety, there are many difficult passages in which the psalmist prays for the destruction of his enemies. Do we say *Amen* to his prayers and pray for the destruction of our enemies? Would we do so if our country were at war? If we couldn't pray for victory, how could we reconcile our faith with fighting for victory? Jesus prayed the psalms. How did He pray these psalms? His prayer was *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*. I was interested to read an account written by someone who had just started praying his way through the psalms. He had decided to examine himself as to whether there was any reason why other people might regard him as an enemy they would like to see defeated. Was there anything in his life that was detrimental to the life of others? In today's John reading, the Jews maintain that they are the people of God, Abraham's children. If we think of ourselves as the people of God we might feel entitled to expect Him to defend us against our enemies. But the Jews in the story weren't acting like the people of God. They weren't worthy of Abraham's heritage. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves whether our behaviour matches our calling as Christians.

May 5th

John 8 vv 41-44

As you all know, I am very interested in questions of right and wrong and what should be the scope of the law. What ought to be regarded as a crime and why? Who decides the difference between right and wrong? What sanctions should there be imposed on transgressors? Should the punishment fit the crime in the sense that the severity of the punishment should reflect the gravity of the crime? What do you actually deserve for not putting on a seat belt or for pruning a preserved tree or thatching your cottage with straw which is not traditional in your neighbourhood? Or is the point of punishment to deter others or to reform the transgressor? I notice that Jesus speaks of the devil as a murderer and the father of lies. Much of what we understand as wrong-doing involves dishonesty or violence. Do you think the law should get involved in other matters where, say, the only person likely to be hurt is the person doing whatever it is that might be legislated against, or to impose standards of taste (as in listed building planning law and churchyard regulations) or in the personal choices of individuals and families in matters such as education and health care?

May 6th

John 8 vv 45-51

These people are not open to the possibility of Jesus. This is why His words make no sense to them. They are convinced that their way of life is the only way and that therefore Jesus has nothing to teach them. But, on the other hand, they are troubled, because part of them thinks that perhaps there is something in it. But they don't want there to be anything in Jesus because they believe that what they would have to give up to follow Him is more than they can afford, that the benefits of following Jesus do not outweigh the sacrifices. The rich young man in Mark 10¹⁷⁻²⁷ again.

Some medical staff have been disciplined for offering to pray for their patients. Atheist patients have made official complaints against being prayed for. That's odd. If the atheists really believe that there is no God, prayer can make no difference one way or the other. So it makes no sense to complain about being prayed for. It can't hurt. Or is it that they are not really 100% sure that there is no God and that they feel unsettled by the faith of those who know Him?

May 7th

John 8 vv 52-59

Before Abraham was, I am.

Here's the nub of the matter. The people do not realise Who Jesus is. He is the One Who is in all eternity. He was before Abraham. He was before everything. He is the One Who was, Who is and Who is to come. He is the One Who can simply say *I am*, as He said to Moses at the burning bush. He is God just as He is man and because He is God and man, man may come to God in Him and absolutely astonishingly may be made like Him.

May 8th

John 9 vv 1-3

We no longer regard illness as a punishment for sin or do we? Smokers get blamed for their bad chests, fat people for over-eating and taking too little exercise, drinkers for their cirrhosis, etc.. We may even punish them by hospitals refusing to treat them unless they mend their ways. Such "punishment" may seem justified. When, say, livers for transplant are in such short supply, why give one to a drunkard who is likely to destroy it in the same way as he ruined the liver he was born with? I think we are less harsh with people who bring their troubles on themselves by doing things society approves of, eg the athlete who keeps turning up at A&E with sports injuries. *There but for the grace of God go I* might be a better way of looking at it. A very high proportion of injuries presenting at A&E will be people doing something careless, stupid or bad: driving too fast, doing DIY without knowing what you're doing, getting into fights, drug-taking. Others will be the victims of these "sinners". Who are we to say who deserves to be treated? Jesus says that this man has been born blind so *that the works of God should be made manifest in him*. Whatever the reason someone needs our help, their need is our opportunity to show kindness, to manifest the works of God.

May 9th

John 9 vv 4-7

Get on with it. Good works do require an initial vision. They very often need planning, but, so often, when all is said and done, there is more said than done. In our personal lives and in the councils of the Church, there comes a time when you just have to get on with it!

May 10th Easter 4 / 5)

John 9 vv 8-12

The people are puzzled. What's happened? Is the same man they have often see, a blind beggar? If it is and he can now see, how did that happen? The answer of course is Jesus. Jesus happened to this man. Now he can see.

O ALMIGHTY God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men; Grant unto thy people, that they may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

May 11th

John 9 vv 13-16

The Pharisees can't see the wood for the trees. Instead of focusing on the miracle – the sign that Jesus is Who He is – they focus on the apparent breach of the Sabbath Law. They strain out gnats and swallow camels. Keeping the Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments and, as such, I am quite sure that it should be respected – a day free from work, to rest, to enjoy fellowship with God and with other people, a foretaste of the rest which remains for the people of God in heaven. I love Hebrews 5⁷: *There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God.* That is such a soothing thought when everything gets too much! Yet, Jesus says: *The Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath.* Maybe He means Himself. Maybe He means human beings in general are lord of the Sabbath. Maybe He means that human beings found in Him are lord of the Sabbath. All three meanings could simultaneously be correct. However, the Sabbath commandment, like all the commandments, has to be interpreted in the light of love, the light of Christ, in this case His compassion for the man born blind.

May 12th

John 9 vv 17-23

There's none so blind as those that can't see. We have to be careful not to be like these Pharisees, unable to accept the truth of what we do not want to be true. Religious people in particular may be susceptible to this failing. It is too easy to assume that God thinks the same way that we think, whereas we ought to be seeking to think the way God thinks. *Thy Will be done*, Jesus taught us to pray, not *My or our will be done*.

May 13th

John 9 vv 24-34

The man's parents had been afraid to say much because they were intimidated by the Pharisees who had the authority effectively to excommunicate them. In that light in particular, I enjoy the dialogue here between the formerly blind man and the Pharisees. They have the power and the prestige. They have the religious education. They have the power to browbeat someone I take to be an ordinary common man, but he stands his ground. There is a great deal that he does not understand but he knows what Jesus has done in his life. St Paul, who had been a Pharisee before his conversion, wrote (I Corinthians 2): *And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.* I know, and I hope you know, what, or rather Whom, Paul and the man born blind knew.

May 14th

John 9 vv 35-38

The man certainly didn't understand everything there is to know about Jesus. He didn't know what it meant to say that Jesus is the Son of God. But He knew enough to come to Jesus in faith and Jesus honoured his faith. We don't have to be smart or knowledgeable. We don't have to be super religious with an ostentatious faith. All we have to do is to come to Him, however tentatively, to trust Him.

Amazing Grace! How
sweet the sound
That saved a wretch
like me!
I once was lost, but
now am found
Was blind, but now I
see.

'Twas Grace that
taught my heart to
fear,
And Grace my fears
relieved.
How precious did that
Grace appear

The hour I first
believed.

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

The Lord has promised
good to me.
His Word my hope

secures.
He will my shield and
portion be
As long as life endures.

When we've been there
ten thousand years
Bright shining as the
sun,
We've no less days to
sing God's praise
Than when we'd first
begun.

May 15th

John 9 vv 39-41

Last Sunday (Septuagesima) Fr Dobromir told me that their Gospel reading in the Orthodox Church that day would be the Pharisee and the publican, the one where the Pharisee thanks God that he is a good man, so much better than other people, even than the publican. The publican prays much more realistically, “God be merciful to me, a sinner.” Jesus says, “This man went down to his house justified rather than the other.” Our reading that day was from Matthew 5 about how Christ fulfils the Law and the Prophets and how our calling is to be like Him in fulfilling its requirements too – perfect love – so that our righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees. That only can happen when we acknowledge our need of God. Without acknowledging that we are *miserable sinners* we cannot even begin to become the people God made us to be. We are utterly dependent on our heavenly Father as His sons and daughters.

May 16th

John 10 vv 1-6

I was eight when my Grandfather Knight died at his home. My mother was there and it meant a great deal that My grandfather's sister read the 23rd psalm when he died. *The Lord is my Shepherd*. Surely, this is the best known and best loved of all the psalms. Nearly fifty years later, I read the same psalm when my mother herself died and when my sister died shortly afterwards. We are loved and cared for. Ultimately, there is nothing to be afraid of. The Lord is my Shepherd.

THE Lord is my shepherd : therefore can I lack nothing. 2. He shall feed me in a green pasture : and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort. 3. He shall convert my soul : and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness, for his Name's sake. 4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil : for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff comfort me. 5. Thou shalt prepare a table before me against them that trouble me : thou hast anointed my head with oil, and my cup shall be full. 6. But thy loving-kindness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life : and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. Amen.

As a matter of fact, I spent the time leading up to my sister's death in the hospice reading through from Psalm 1. It was a great comfort and I often think of that time at the beginning of each month as we start Ps 1 in the monthly recital of the psalter @ Morning & Evening Prayer.

May 17th (Easter 5 / 6)

John 10 vv 7-10

I find it more difficult to imagine Jesus as a door than as a shepherd. I suppose it is like Him being the Way. He is the Way into the Father's Presence. He is the Way into membership of the Church – God's flock. Before Jesus, other men had claimed to be the Messiah. They were false Messiahs and wise people did not follow them. There are many people who set themselves up as religious leaders. If we want to know whom we can trust to follow, the test is whether they follow Jesus. St Paul says, *Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ*. That's the test for all our bishops and clergy and would be leaders.

It wouldn't hurt to learn by heart the last half verse of this reading. *I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*. Life is what the Church has to offer. Couldn't we be rather more lively ourselves and offer to the world something more exuberant and effervescent than what the world thinks we have to offer?

O LORD, from whom all good things do come; Grant to us thy humble servants, that by thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be good, and by thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Amen*.

May 18th

John 10 vv 11-13

We sing the glorious conquest
before Damascus gate, when
Saul, the church's spoiler,
came breathing threats and
hate; the rav'ning wolf rushed
forward full early to the prey;
but lo! the Shepherd met him,
and bound him fast today.

O Wisdom ord'ring all things in
order strong and sweet, what
nobler spoil was ever cast at
the victor's feet? What wiser
master-builder e'er wrought at
your employ than he, till now
so furious your building to
destroy?

O glory most excelling that
smote across his path! O light
that pierced and blinded the
zealot in his wrath! O voice that
spake unto him the calm,
reproving word! O love that
sought and held him the
bondman of his Lord!

Lord, teach your church the
lesson, still in her darkest hour
of weakness and of danger, to
trust your hidden pow'r: your
grace by ways mysterious the
wrath of man can bind, and in
your boldest foeman your
chosen saint can find.

This hymn is sung on 25th January – the Conversion of S Paul. Today's bible reading put me in mind of its first verse. In ancient Israel, sheep grazed out in the open and the flocks might be attacked by wild animals. If the shepherd was a hired man and a sheep was killed by a wolf, say, if he could bring part of the chewed carcass, the owner had to accept that the sheep was lost and the hireling couldn't be made to pay for it. If, on the other hand, there was nothing to lay before the owner, the owner might think that the sheep had not been killed by a wild animal but stolen by his employee. In that case, the hireling would have to pay for it. Obviously, a shepherd might be expected to try to fight off any predators and, equally obviously, he would be more likely to do so if he were the owner than if he were a hired labourer. Nobody, however, would expect even the owner to lay down his own life in order to protect his sheep. But that is what Jesus does for us. The hymn echoes other Scriptures too (as many of the best hymns do), praising God for sending Paul to proclaim Jesus to the nations. We continue to pray that God will raise up many for this service and to pray for the safety and success of those already engaged in this work.

May 19th

John 10 vv 14&15

It is this intimacy between the Good Shepherd and His sheep, between Jesus and the Christian, which is so astounding. We sometimes sing this chorus especially at Easter and it is so amazing.

I serve a risen Saviour, He's in the world today I know that He is living,
whatever men may say I see His hand of mercy, I hear His voice of
cheer And just the time I need Him He's always near

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today He walks with me and talks
with me Along life's narrow way He lives, He live, Salvation to impart
You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart

In all the world around me I see His loving care And though my heart
grows weary I never will despair I know that He is leading, through all
the stormy blast The day of His appearing will come at last

Rejoice, rejoice, O Christian Lift up your voice and sing Eternal
hallelujahs to Jesus Christ, the King The Hope of all who seek Him,
the Help of all who find None other is so loving, so good and kind

May 20th

John 10 v16

Back in the seventies and eighties, we used to hear a lot about the ecumenical movement. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was a big thing when we used to go to other churches or invite other churches to worship with us. National and worldwide discussions between the different churches made the news. It was thought that that at least some of the major denominations might be reunited. The United Reformed Church was created from the English Presbyterian Church and the Congregation Union. There were hopes that Anglicans and Methodists would become one. There has been a lot of progress. We all recognise one another's essential Christianity which perhaps we didn't always. Protestants were suspicious of Catholics. RC's thought theirs was the only true Church. We've got beyond that – mainly, but not entirely. These discussions at national and international level have born fruit in that, when we listen to one another, we find that we agree about more than we realised and that we can learn from one another. To a much greater extent than in the past, we use the same hymns and the same words in our prayers. We work together with other churches in charitable and missionary undertakings and in seeking to influence our national life. But progress towards actual reunion, towards there being one Church in which we recognise that we share a common faith and fully recognise one another's ministry, sacraments and teaching has stalled. Partly, it's cultural. We feel comfortable with our way of doing things and don't want to change too much. I have a feeling that some congregations would be much more comfortable singing the hymn we had on Monday and some the one we had yesterday. I think I'm a bit of an oddity in being happy with both, having attended a whole variety of churches when I was growing up. Nevertheless, there is one Shepherd and it is His Will that there is one fold. The basis of relationships within that fold is love. It is in the context of love that we have to work out the rest of the things which divide us.

Ephesians 5¹ I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, 2With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; 3Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; 5One Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all

May 21st (Ascension Day)

John 10 17&18

As we noted earlier, our Lord's departure to where His enemies cannot follow means both His Crucifixion and His Ascension. He will also say, *And, I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.* He also says, *If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there also shall my servant be, him will my Father honour.* I take both these references also to mean both the Cross and the Ascension. Jesus draws us all to Him by His love shown in all its depth on the Cross. All those who accept His love are drawn up after Him into Heaven. As Christians, our eternal home is in Heaven. On earth, we take up our cross daily to follow Him.

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 22nd

John 10 vv 19-21

There was a division.

Jesus is a unifier. He is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He is one with Christian people and we are one with Him. In Him we are one with one another. The unity of the Trinity, the unity of God with humanity, our unity with one another, is the unity of love. God is love. So it seems hard when we read biblical verses about Jesus bringing division. People are, we are told, for Him or against Him. Those who are for Jesus constitute the Church. Those who are against Jesus constitute the world. Yet *God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son.* God loves the Church and God loves the world. I suppose the point is that He respects our freedom to choose whether we are for Him or against Him – which creates a division between us and them, Church and world. Yet, given that God so loved the world, surely we Christians must love the world (its people, not its priorities). Our duty to God is to continue the work of Jesus reaching out to the world in love so that the people of the world may believe in Him and receive everlasting life. II Corinthians 5: **18** And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; **19** To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

May 23rd

John 10 vv 22-29

There are many that bear witness to Jesus. God the Father is His witness. So is God the Holy Spirit. The Bible bears witness to Jesus. The miracles, the signs which He perform all bear witness to Him. But we have to be open to Him in order to perceive what all these mean. So how do we seek to open to God? How do we encourage other people to open to God? I suggest that the answer to that second question is the way we behave towards other people. All Christian are witnesses to Christ. People do tend to judge Jesus by the behaviour of the Church and of the Christians they know.

May 24th Sunday after Ascension / Easter 7)

John 10 vv 30-42

The crowds think that is blasphemy for Jesus to claim to be one with God the Father. He responds by quoting Psalm 82⁶, which is hard to understand in itself. *I have said, Ye are gods : and ye are all the children of the most Highest.* I think that Jesus is teasing them that this difficult psalm blurs the absolute distinction between God and men as it is in our human understanding. There is one God Who is absolutely the origin and the goal of everything that is. In the OT, however, kings of Israel are spoken of as sons of God. In the pagan world, rulers are indeed blasphemously regarded as divine. Beings we would probably call angels are sometimes called gods in the OT. Lucifer and his angels set themselves up as though they were gods. The NT as well speaks of spiritual powers and it is sometimes difficult to know whether it means angelic beings or human rulers. Maybe Jesus is just saying that these things are beyond our understanding and that it is arrogant on our part to dismiss possibilities, such as that Jesus is one with the Father. He is one with the Father in a sense that none of those beings (whatever they are) mentioned in Psalm 82 can be. Yet, on the other hand, through faith in Jesus Christ, we may become one with the Father, sons and daughters of God.

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 25th

John 11 vv 1-6

Because we have so few evening services these days, we miss out on singing the evening hymns. Some of them speak very deeply to our human need. I was led to think about the fifth verse of this hymn by a particular circumstance lately. In fact, the whole hymn is something we might pray when we can't sleep. This sense of God's all encompassing love for us. Of course, when we do wake, if we are sincere in these prayers for the lost, the sick, the poor, the bereaved, etc., then it follows that we'll try to be part of God's answer to our prayers by showing all these people our love.

Sun of my soul, thou Saviour
dear,
it is not night if thou be near;
O may no earthborn cloud arise
to hide thee from thy servant's
eyes.

thine
has spurned today the voice
divine,
now, Lord, the gracious work
begin;
let him no more lie down in sin.

When the soft dews of kindly
sleep
my wearied eyelids gently
steep,
be my last thought, how sweet
to rest
forever on my Saviour's breast.

Watch by the sick, enrich the
poor
with blessings from thy
boundless store;
be every mourner's sleep
tonight,
like infants' slumbers, pure
and right.

Abide with me from morn till
eve,
for without thee I cannot live;
abide with me when night is
nigh,
for without thee I dare not die.

Come near and bless us when
we wake,
ere through the world our way
we take,
till in the ocean of thy love
we lose ourselves in heaven
above.

If some poor wandering child of

May 26th

John 11 vv 7-16

Why didn't Jesus go at once? We might well wonder why our prayers aren't answered the way we'd like as soon as we should like. God has His reasons. Jesus and the apostles walk into danger in order to do God's work. Sleep is very often a restorative to the sick. Here it is a metaphor for death. *Teach me to live, that I may dread the grave as little as my bed.*

May 27th

John 11 vv 17-24

It seems to me that Mary is dissatisfied with Jesus. He should have come quicker. He could have done more. Sure Lazarus will rise again on the last day, but I want my brother here with me now. We can be honest with God. In fact, there is no point in being dishonest with God. He knows all about us anyway. Characters in the Bible tell God just what they think. The psalms are honest about the whole range of human feelings – the horrible ones as well as the nice ones. Being honest with God is being honest with ourselves. This is why I believe that we have to read the nasty bits of the Bible as well as the congenial. The Word of God speaks to us in bad things as well as good. It wouldn't be much use if it had nothing to say to us when we face our greatest challenges. What we hope and pray for is that we shall find, when we are totally honest about all our negative feelings, that nevertheless our faith is well grounded in God. We can trust Him whatever.

May 28th

John 11 v25 & 26a

I AM the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.

This verse begins the traditional funeral service of the Church when the minister meets the coffin at the lych gate or in the churchyard. It is on this that we pin our hopes as Christians for those whom we love but see no more, for ourselves when our time comes. No-one, nothing can pluck us from His hand.

May 29th

John 11 v 26b & 27

Yea, Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.

If we can say that with Martha, we really have nothing to worry about.

May 30th

John 11 vv 28-35

Jesus wept.

We know Martha and Mary from the story in Luke 10 where Martha busies herself doing practical things to make Jesus comfortable while Mary sits at His feet listening to Him and is commended for making the

smarter choice. Allowing for the difference in their personalities, Mary's reaction to their brother's death is similar to Martha's. He wouldn't have died, they think, if Jesus had been quicker. Naturally we grieve for those whom we love and from whom we are separated by death, however much faith we have that they will rise again. We miss them. Jesus shares our pain. He understands. Jesus wept. He is indeed *God from God, Light from Light, true God, from true God, He also was made man*. He so deeply comprehends what it is to be human. We have that connection to the Author of all that is. Here is another great hymn with something to teach us about this mystery.

Let saints on earth in concert
sing
With those whose work is done;
For all the servants of our king
In Heav'n and earth are one.

One family, we dwell in Him,
One Church, above, beneath;
Though now divided by the
stream,
The narrow stream of death.

One army of the living God,
To His command we bow;
Part of the host have crossed

the flood,
And part are crossing now.

E'en now to their eternal home
There pass some spirits blest;
While others to the margin
come,
Waiting their call to rest.

Jesu, be Thou our constant
guide;
Then, when the word is given,
Bid Jordan's narrow stream
divide,
And bring us safe to Heav'n.

May 31st (Whitsun / Pentecost)

John 11 vv 36&37

Why didn't Jesus cure Lazarus if He was so powerful? Some Christians believe that we always ought to expect miracles, that, if we don't get what we pray for, it must be because we lack faith. But faith trusts God. Faith prays *Thy Will be done*, not *My will be done*. God can and does perform miracles. He answers prayers in many other ways too – ways that don't appear to us at all supernatural, but God always hears our prayers and we can always trust Him to care for us.

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.*

June 1st

John 11 vv 38-42

The point of this story isn't that, if we prayed hard enough, the tombs of our loved ones would open and they would emerge alive. The world would be pretty crowded if that were the case. There wouldn't be much need for faith after a few thousand such demonstrations. The point of this story is that the miracle is a sign of Who Jesus is. He is the Resurrection and the Life. We do not have, therefore, to fear death. In Him, we have the gift of eternal life. We can certainly pray for people when they are sick. We can pray for them to recover. We can pray that they may have courage and strength to face their illness and unpleasant or painful treatments. There may come a time when we feel that we should pray that they might pass peacefully away. I remember once a woman asking me not to pray for her husband who had a terrible illness because she thought that to pray would be to ask God to prolong his life on earth and therefore his agony. I explained that we could pray for God to take him home. I'm fond of the words in our CW intercession for the sick and people facing other troubles: *Give them courage and hope in their troubles; and bring them the joy of your salvation.* Whatever is on your mind, pray to God honestly and trust Him for the outcome. We don't always know what we ought to pray for, but the Holy Spirit does and prays on our behalf. Romans 8²⁶: *Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*

June 2nd

John 11 vv 43-46

How do you imagine this scene? A friend took me to see Caravaggio's painting of the raising of Lazarus and it really offended me. Caravaggio depicted a weak Lazarus barely staggering out of the tomb. I had always imagined Lazarus emerging triumphantly in perfect health. John doesn't tell us. So Caravaggio and I are both entitled to our own opinions. But how do you imagine it? Has Jesus restored Lazarus to fulness of mortal life or merely returned him to as he was before he actually died? Certainly, Lazarus did die again and his body is even now (what there is left of it) buried somewhere in Palestine and, hopefully, his soul is with Jesus in heaven. I feel that it does make a difference whether Caravaggio or I am right, but I am not sure what that difference is.

Of the Unworthiness of Ministers

The chief priests and the Pharisees' response to the miracles is to try to get the story of Jesus hushed up. If it gets out and too many people believe it, it will weaken their own position. They have made an accommodation with the Romans. They have compromised with the world so that they can comfortably practise what passes for their religion. If people follow Jesus, taking up their crosses daily, the world will be turned upside down. Jesus must be stopped. Jesus must be killed. They even want to kill Lazarus because his resuscitation is a sign of Who Jesus is. As high priest, Caiaphas unwittingly prophesies, *It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people*. He means better the death of one man (even an innocent man) than risk changes which might bring the Romans down on them, brutally putting down any possibility of revolt. He doesn't realise that he is actually prophesying, speaking God's Word. The Death of Jesus is indeed for the salvation of the nation and for all nations, as many as the Lord calls unto him.

No minister of the Gospel is worthy. We all depend utterly on the grace of God to preside at the Sacraments, to preach God's Word, to offer pastoral care to those in need. Repentance and faith are required of all bishops, priests and deacons (as they are of all Christians). But some ministers are just sinners, not repentant sinners. Their own lives are a moral disgrace. Their preaching is heresy. Obviously such ministers should be disciplined and removed if they are incapable of reform. But does this negate their ministry? This is a recurring question in the life of the Church, but the answer is no. The work is God's. God's love is received by the faith of the whole Church, by all Christian people, not just that of ordained ministers. The Church of England puts it like this.

Article XXVI. *Of the unworthiness of the Ministers, which hinders not the effect of the Sacraments.*

ALTHOUGH in the visible Church the evil be ever mingled with the good, and sometime the evil have chief authority in the ministration of the word and sacraments; yet forasmuch as they do not the same in their own name, but in Christ's, and do minister by His commission and authority, we may use their ministry both in hearing the word of God and in the receiving of the sacraments. Neither is the effect of

Christ's ordinance taken away by their wickedness, nor the grace of God's gifts diminished from such as by faith and rightly do receive the sacraments ministered unto them, which be effectual because of Christ's institution and promise, although they be ministered by evil men. Nevertheless it appertaineth to the discipline of the Church that inquiry be made of evil ministers, and that they be accused by those that have knowledge of their offences; and finally, being found guilty by just judgement, be deposed.

June 4th

John 11 vv 55-57

It is important that all that follows happens at Passover. Passover makes the Jewish people what they are. It is the most important of the three great feasts of the year. Only Jews by birth or adoption may participate. Participating in the Passover is a mark of being Jewish. Jews are one across the world and with every generation of Jews down through the ages in celebrating the Passover. It is redemption from slavery. It is freedom. It is a proclamation of God's Blessing, a thanksgiving. It is a memorial and much more than that of what God has done in the past. It is a sign of what God is doing in the present. It is hope for the future. The purging of the leaven stands for repentance from sin, the consecration of the people of God as a royal priesthood, a holy nation. The blood of the Passover lamb protects God's people from death. It is life.

Easter is once and for all the Christian Passover, our Exodus experience, and Holy Communion is its weekly or daily expression in the life of the people of God.

June 5th

John 12 vv 1-11

Mary gives generously to Jesus. She anoints the anointed One, His feet, not His Head. At the beginning of His ministry He was anointed with the Holy Spirit. He is the anointed King, the anointed High Priest. He is here anointed for His Burial. He is the anointed Sacrifice. Mary was very generous. Judas was mean-spirited. He abused the very reasonable and religious proposal to feed the poor in order to cover up his own cupidity. Jesus recognised Mary's truly generous, if extravagant, spirit. We have ample resources to give to the poor without stinting on our gestures of love for Jesus.

June 6th

John 12 vv 12-19

The words the crowds sang come from Psalm 118, one of the Passover psalms. The prophecy about the king coming on an ass is from Zechariah 9. Kings ride horses to war in the Bible, but asses when they come in peace. The crowds bear witness. John tells us that some of the crowd are witnesses to the resuscitation of Lazarus. Another prophecy fulfilled, in accordance with what Jesus says in response to the authorities' demand that He silence the crowds including the children who sing Hosanna (Matthew 21¹⁶) is Psalm 8. This psalm exalts the height of the heavens above the earth, the great distance between humanity and the Creator, while at the same time praising God for His care for each one of us. Jesus is the Son of Man Who stands for the whole human race in the psalm and the One Through Whom, by Whom & for Whom God created heaven and earth.

O LORD our Governor, how excellent is thy Name in all the world : thou that hast set thy glory above the heavens! 2. Out of the mouth of very babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength, because of thine enemies : that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger. 3. For I will consider thy heavens, even the works of thy fingers : the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained. 4. What is man, that thou art mindful of him : and the son of man, that thou visitest him? 5. Thou madest him lower than the angels : to crown him with glory and worship. 6. Thou makest him to have dominion of the works of thy hands : and thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet; 7. All sheep and oxen : yea, and the beasts of the field; 8. The fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea : and whatsoever walketh through the paths of the seas. 9. O Lord our Governor : how excellent is thy Name in all the world! Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. *Amen.*

June 7th (Trinity Sunday):

John 12 vv 20&21

Sir, we would see Jesus.

Why did they want to see Jesus? Curiosity? Did they have some particular need to be met there and then? Was it a more general sense of longing for what they might have felt that Jesus could offer them? *We would see Jesus.* How can we stir up in people a desire to know Jesus for themselves? How can we be sure that we are not putting them off? If people do seem to be reaching out for Jesus, what can we do to assist them in their quest?

God reaches out to us in Jesus. God is Trinity in all eternity. It is the nature of God to be Father, Son & Holy Spirit. It is the nature of God that the Son of God becomes the Son of man. Human beings are created in the image of God. God is love. God's nature is to reach out in love to us and to His whole creation. We are responding to God reaching out to us when we reach out to Him. We are cooperating with God when we seek to help those who are themselves reaching out.

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 thy Divine Majesty to worship the Unity; We beseech thee, that thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith, and evermore defend us from all adversities, who livest and reignest, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

June 8th

John 12 v22

Philip gets Andrew's support to approach Jesus with the request that these Greeks may meet Him. (We don't hear any more about whether or not they did.) At the beginning of the Gospel, it is Andrew who introduces his brother Simon Peter to Jesus. Andrew is often thought of as one of the first missionaries or evangelists and we often pray for mission especially around his feast day (30th November), but there's no reason not to do so now! And always! And, don't forget, sometimes God uses us to answer our own prayers.

Jesus calls us o'er the tumult
of our life's wild, restless sea;
day by day his sweet voice
soundeth,
saying "Christian, follow me."

As, of old, apostles heard it
by the Galilean lake,
turned from home and toil and
kindred,
leaving all for his dear sake.

Jesus calls us from the
worship
of the vain world's golden store,
from each idol that would keep

us,
saying "Christian, love me
more."

In our joys and in our sorrows,
days of toil and hours of ease,
still he calls, in cares and
pleasures,
"Christian, love me more than
these."

Jesus calls us; by thy mercies,
Savour, may we hear thy call,
give our hearts to thine
obedience,
serve and love thee best of all.

June 9th

John 12 vv 23-26

Glory to God! God is love! What is truly glorious is to love – to love with all your heart, soul, mind and strength – to love unto death. That is what Jesus does. That is what He invites His fellow human beings to do, to be consumed by love. Where He is, so shall His servants be – the Cross, the highest heaven.

Soar we now where Christ hath led, Alleluia!

Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!

Made like Him, like Him we rise, Alleluia!

Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

June 10th

John 12 vv 27-33

Jesus naturally shrank from the thought of being crucified as we all should. He was fully human and suffered exactly as we should suffer if we were crucified. One of the reasons that we are confident in prayer is that we know that Jesus understands because He is one of us and *was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin*. God is with Him. God promises to glorify Jesus. God's is with us. It is through faith in God that we are brought through our trials and temptations, our sufferings, and are so enabled to glorify God by our lives.

June 11th (S Barnabas)

John 12 v34

The crowds seem at last to have got it that by, *if I be lifted up*, Jesus is alluding to His Death. They think that the Messiah should live for ever. Who is this Son of Man? Is He the Messiah? If so, how can He die? The Messiah means simply, the Anointed One. Messiah has many meanings in the OT. It is the NT which recognises that all the prophecies regarding the Messiah are fulfilled in Jesus. Son of man usually just means human being in the OT, but occasionally it means the one human being who represents the whole human race to God and brings in God's Kingdom. Obviously, Christians recognise that Jesus is the Son of Man. It is through the Holy Spirit that we discern these things and through the Holy Spirit that we act upon them.

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*.

June 12th

John 12 vv 35&36

This is about discernment of Who Jesus is. It is about not being spiritually blind. I don't mean that, in order to be a Christian, we have to understand all this Theology I have been writing about. We shall never fully know God until we are face to face with Him. Then we shall know as we are known. The Church's Theology and doctrine is about pointing us towards the light which shines from His wonderful Face and averting the darkness of erroneous beliefs which diminish our appreciation of Who God is and what He has wrought in Christ. Walk in the Light. The crowds Jesus was talking to had a few days before the Crucifixion in which to appreciate Him. Then darkness, actual darkness for three hours and spiritual darkness till the third day. We have the light today. Jesus is the Light of the World. Walk in the Light and we do not have to fear the darkness of death or the darkness of the end of time. But those days will come and it is possible to leave it too late to repent. As for how the eternal Messiah, the Son of God, is one and the same as the Son of Man Who is lifted up in death, Charles Wesley was as perplexed as the rest of us, but he knew that it is wonderfully true.

And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Saviour's
blood? Died He for me, who
caused His pain? For me, who
Him to death pursued?

Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die
for me?

Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die
for me!

'Tis mystery all! Th'Immortal
dies! Who can explore His
strange design? In vain the
firstborn seraph tries To sound
the depths of love divine! 'Tis
mercy all! let earth adore, Let
angel minds inquire no more.

He left His Father's throne
above, So free, so infinite His

grace; Emptied Himself of all
but love, And bled for Adam's
helpless race; 'Tis mercy all,
immense and free; For, O my
God, it found out me.

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

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness
divine, Bold I approach
th'eternal throne, And claim
the crown, through Christ my
own.

June 13th:

John 12 vv 37-41

One of my favourite OT passages is Isaiah 6, in which the prophet sees the LORD on His Throne, high and lifted up. His train fills the temple. Six-winged seraphim sing *Holy, holy, holy*. Isaiah is overwhelmed with a sense of his own unworthiness to stand in the Presence of the thrice holy God and the LORD sends a seraph to cleanse the prophet's lips with a coal from the altar. I remember reading this as the lesson in Church when I was quite a young child. Not a few Christians believe that OT visions of God must be visions of Jesus. John 1¹⁸: *no man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him*. Isaiah is commissioned to proclaim God's Word, but is warned that the people will not listen. The glory of the Cross is infinitely greater than that of the Throne which Isaiah saw. Will people receive the Word of God which is Christ crucified?

June 14th (Trinity 1)

John 12 vv 42&43

O GOD, the strength of all them that put their trust in thee, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without thee, grant us the help of thy grace, that in keeping of thy commandments we may please thee, both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

The weakness of their mortal nature caused some of those who believed in Jesus to keep quiet about it, *for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God*. That might give us pause for thought. We all need God's grace if we are to overcome these weaknesses and please Him by keeping His commandments in will and deed.

June 15th

John 12 vv 44-50

Jesus came into the world to save the world. He is utterly at one with God the Father and with the Holy Spirit. At Baptisms we ask, *Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist? Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us, and rose again? Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ known in the world?* We must not lose sight, however, that every person of the Trinity participates in all three actions – Creation, Redemption and Sanctification. God is one. His purpose is to save the world. It is our fault if we reject His Word.

June 16th:

John 13 vv 1-17

There are 21 chapters in John. Chapters 12-21 concern the events from Palm Sunday onwards – His Crucifixion and Resurrection. Of these chapters, 13-17 are about the Last Supper. This is an indication of the importance attached to the words and deeds of Jesus.

We surely know the account of the foot-washing very well. Jesus came, not to be served, but to serve, and to lay down His life as a ransom for many. Christians in positions of authority are not to use their power to lord it over others but to care for them. We should not consider ourselves above the humblest service. Jesus sets us an example.

Peter did not want to let Jesus wash His feet, but we have to be humble enough to accept what Jesus does for us, to accept what other people do for us. It is a fellowship of love, membership of the Body of Christ, through the waters of Baptism. I think v9 means something like that it is not the extravagance of the gesture, but its sincerity which is significant. Even within the baptised Body of Christ, some are not clean. Hebrews 12 ¹⁴ *Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:* ¹⁵ *Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;*

June 17th

John 13 vv 18&19

Jesus chooses us. We do not choose Him. Or rather we do, but we choose Him by the grace which He has given us. We cannot therefore claim any credit for being Christians. We are not superior to other people. We do not deserve to be the children of God. We just are because He loves us. We each have a calling, a place in His plan for the world. We are called for a purpose. It is a great privilege to be a Christian, not one to neglect. Hebrews 12: ²⁸ *Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:* ²⁹ *For our God is a consuming fire.* We cannot understand God's Providence, but the fact that Jesus predicts what God will do in the lives of those whom He has called demonstrates (as does successful prediction in the OT) Who He is. *I am he.*

June 18th

John 13 vv 20&21

God desireth not the death of a sinner. Neither should we. Neither does Jesus. He can predict Judas' treachery because He is God. Nothing happens outside the Providence of God and Judas' treachery is necessary to the outworking of His eternal plan for the salvation of Creation. That is why it can be predicted in Scripture centuries before it happens (Psalm 41⁹: *Yea, even mine own familiar friend, whom I trusted : who did also eat of my bread, hath laid great wait for me.*) Nevertheless, Jesus is troubled in spirit that one of them will betray Him. Judas does have choices, but it is inevitable and therefore predictable that he will make the choice that he does and this grieves Jesus.

June 19th

John 13 vv 22-30

John himself is generally taken to be *the disciple whom Jesus loved*. They must have been especially close. The dipping and giving of the sop is part of the Passover ritual. It is normally an honour to receive the sop. It is suggested that Jesus gave Judas the sop to show His love for him, a last chance even to repent, though He knew that Judas would not repent. It is significant that it is night when Judas goes out to betray Him. This is the hour of darkness' apparent victory.

June 20th

John 13 vv 31-35

The name Maundy comes from the Latin *mandatum*, which means commandment. Today Jesus gives a new commandment, *novum mandatum*, that we love one another as He loves us. Now, think about how much He loves us and, therefore, how much we should love one another within the Church.

June 21st (Trinity 2)

John 13 vv 36-38

It is easy to make extravagant promises to follow Jesus whatever happens, whatever the cost. The test is whether we keep these promises. We can only do so by His grace to which we have access through prayer.

O LORD, who never failest to help and govern them who thou dost bring up in thy stedfast fear and love; Keep us, we beseech thee, under the protection of thy good providence, and make us to have a perpetual fear and love of thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

June 22nd

John 14 vv 1-6

This is one of the most common readings we have at funerals. Our hearts don't have to be troubled. We can trust God. We can trust Jesus. He has prepared a place for us in His Father's house, our Father's house. He will come again and receive us. In context, He will rise from the tomb in which He would shortly to be buried. He will be with us always here on earth. He will return to the earth at the end of time to gather His people. He will meet us on our dying day. Where He is, so we shall be. Like Thomas, we might find all this very difficult. But we don't have to find our own way. Jesus is the Way. All we have to do is to walk with Him.

June 23rd

John 14 vv 7-11

Tomorrow is St John the Baptist's Birthday. We also remember John on the 3rd Sunday in Advent. There has been some criticism of the opening words of the collect for this day.

O LORD Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit ever, one God, world without end. Amen.

In 1980, the Alternative Service Book changed it to *Almighty God who sent your servant John the Baptist to prepare your people for the coming of your Son*. The concern was that prayers really should be addressed to God through Jesus, rather than to Jesus Himself. If you think about it, you can see why they might think this. There are not many prayers addressed to Jesus. He taught us to pray to God, *Our Father*. Yet I think the words of today's Bible verses do indicate that it is not always inappropriate to pray to Jesus. Everything God is, Jesus is. To know Jesus is to know God. Common Worship in the year 2000 put this traditional collect back the way it was with an address directly to Jesus. I learnt something helpful from this debate within the Church about prayer and the nature of God. Did you? Whether or not we did, we can all join in the prayer.

June 24th (Nativity of S John the Baptist)

John 14 v12

John prepared the way for Jesus. He was the great forerunner. He attracted vast crowds, preached repentance and baptised thousands. He himself baptised Jesus. Yet John said of Jesus, *He must increase, but I must decrease*. According to Jesus, the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than John, even though *among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist*. John lived out his life on earth before the Crucifixion of Jesus. It is the Crucifixion which makes all the difference. In a way, John is the last and greatest OT prophet, but Jesus brings the New Testament and we are people of the New Testament. This is why, while John does less than Jesus, by the grace of the Holy Spirit we Christians will do greater deeds than even Jesus did in His three brief years on earth.

ALMIGHTY God, by whose providence thy servant John Baptist was wonderfully born, and sent to prepare the way of thy Son our Saviour, by preaching of repentance; Make us so to follow his doctrine and holy life, that we may truly repent according to his preaching; and after his example constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the truth's sake; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

June 25th

John 14 vv 13&14

Asking in Jesus' Name. Christ in us and we in Him. As we grow to know Him better, to love Him better, so our wills conform increasingly to His Will, our nature to His Nature. S Paul says (II Corinthians 5) that he formerly knew Christ after the flesh. He had an ordinary human understanding of Jesus and therefore misunderstood him. Paul believed originally that Jesus was a threat to the people of God and accordingly he persecuted the Church. Then, on the road to Damascus, Paul came really to know Jesus, no longer after the flesh. He knew Who Jesus is. He knew Jesus as His personal Saviour. He then says, *Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh*. Now he knows Jesus, Paul sees other people in the Light of Jesus. He appreciates the love they show him. He loves them as Christ loves us. Jesus says that what we do (or fail to do) for our brothers is what we do (or fail to do) for Him – Matthew 25 vv 31-46 – the Last Judgment, the Sheep & the Goats. When we know Jesus, we see the world in His Light. We pray in His Name. Our prayers are His prayers and He will do what we ask in his Name. S Paul says *But we have the mind of Christ*. (I Corinthians 2¹⁶).

June 26th

John 14 v15

I once had a very strange telephone conversation with a woman who insisted that the Jesus she believed in didn't issue commandments. Well there is only one Jesus and He certainly did tell us to keep His commandments. I think where she was coming from was the notion that commandments are onerous – forcing us to do things we don't want to do or stopping us doing the things we do want to do. If Jesus then came to set us free, I suppose she would have argued, He would not have issued any commandments. But all God's commandments are summarised in the command to love and everyone agrees that love is a good thing. The things we are forbidden to do, we are forbidden to do because they hurt us and other people. The things we are told we must do are for our benefit and the benefit of other people. The devil might tell us that we would be happier if we were more selfish and self-centred, but the devil is the father of lies. In reality, our duty is our joy.

June 27th

John 14 vv 16-18

I know I have said this before, but note carefully that Jesus calls the Holy Spirit *another Comforter* (or *Advocate* or *Paraclete* – depending on the version of the Bible you are reading). The Holy Spirit is another Paraclete, because Jesus is the Paraclete. To put it another way, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Risen Christ. *Such as the Father is, such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost*. Jesus is Emmanuel, which means *God with us*. He is with us to the end of time and in all eternity. The Lord is here. His Spirit is with us – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God ever to be adored. The words translated *I will not leave you comfortless* are really *I will not leave you as orphans*. Hence the well known hymn.

Alleluia, sing to Jesus!
his the sceptre, his the throne:
Alleluia! his the triumph,
his the victory alone.
Hear the songs of holy Zion
thunder like a mighty flood:
'Jesus out of every nation
has redeemed us by his blood!'

Alleluia! he is near us;
faith believes, nor questions
how.
Though the cloud from sight
received him
when the forty days were o'er,
shall our hearts forget his
promise,
'I am with you evermore!'

Alleluia! not as orphans
are we left in sorrow now:

Alleluia! bread of heaven,
Thou on earth our food, our
stay:
Alleluia! here the sinful
come to thee from day to day.
Intercessor, friend of sinners,
earth's redeemer, plead for me,
where the songs of all the
sinless
sweep across the crystal sea.

Alleluia! King eternal,
Thee, the Lord of lords we own;
Alleluia! born of Mary,
earth Thy footstool, heaven Thy
throne:
Thou, within the veil hast
entered,
robed in flesh, our great High
Priest;
Thou on earth both Priest &
Victim,
in the eucharistic feast

The hymn focuses on the fulfilment of Christ's promise to be always with us in Holy Communion. This may be appropriate as our reading comes from what Jesus said at the Last Supper. Holy Communion is one of the many means of grace by which He fulfils His Promise always to be with us through the Holy Spirit.

June 28th (Trinity 3):

John 14 vv 19&20

The world will no longer see Jesus after the Ascension, but we see Jesus, or rather we experience Him through the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. We rely on Him in prayer. We pray for grace to live always in accordance with His Will. We enjoy fellowship with other Christians, especially as we meet together to *Do this in remembrance of me*. He dwells in us and we dwell in Him. His life is in us.

The world cannot see Him, but the world can see us. Christ dwells in us. So the world comes to know Jesus through the lives of Christian people. Now there's a responsibility.

O LORD, we beseech thee mercifully to hear us; and grant that we, to whom thou hast given an hearty desire to pray, may by thy mighty aid be defended and comforted in all dangers and adversities; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

June 29th (S Peter):

John 14 21-24

You remember that when Jesus asked His disciples *Whom do men say that I am?* and then asked His disciples *But whom say ye that I am* and Peter answered for them all *Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God*, Jesus said to Peter that he was blessed. Flesh and blood had not revealed this great truth to Peter. God the Father had shown Peter Who Jesus is. The Trinity is one. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one, eternally united in love, inseparable. The Holy Trinity dwells in the heart of the believer. God is love. Love dwells in our hearts. And we dwell in God. Of course, we are far from perfect. We shall not be perfected until we reach heaven. Immediately after acknowledging Jesus as Christ, the Son of the living God, Peter tries to talk Jesus out of being crucified, the very purpose for which He had come. Jesus says to him, *Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.* When Jesus is on trial, Peter denies Him three times. We have a long way to go before we are made perfect, but we are now the children of God – begotten by Him, nurtured by Him, guided by Him. This is our essential nature.

O ALMIGHTY God, who by thy Son Jesus Christ didst give to thy Apostle Saint Peter many excellent gifts, and commandest him earnestly to feed thy flock; Make, we beseech thee, all Bishops and Pastors diligently to preach thy holy Word, and the people obediently to follow the same, that they may receive the crown of everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

June 30th

John 14 vv 25-31

So we are all set up to live the Christian life. We have the Holy Spirit Who leads us into all truth. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We have Christ's peace in our hearts. There is no need to be troubled or afraid. *Casting all your care on him, for he careth for you.* We are not left comfortless. Jesus is the Word of God. God's purposes are fulfilled in Him. His goodness overcomes all the power of the Evil One. In Christ, we have the victory over sin, the world and the devil. We rejoice in the wonderful truth brought to us by the One Who brings life in all its fulness. It is in living this fulness of life that we are His witnesses as we live in the world until that great day when we shall see Him as He is.

