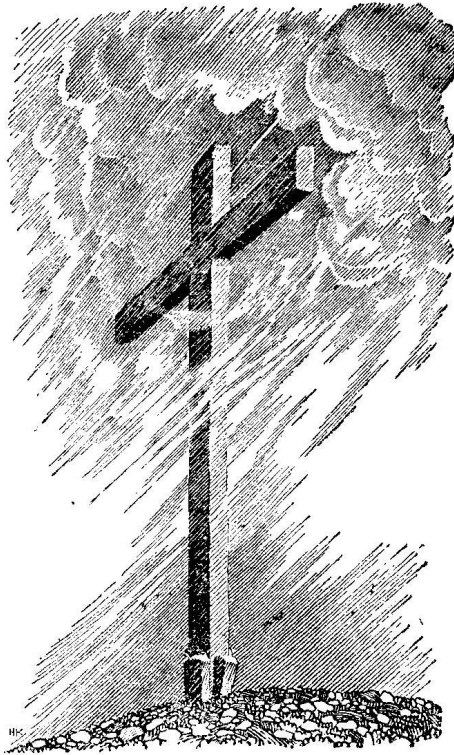


The Epistle to the Hebrews



Bible Notes January – March 2015

50p

January 1st (Naming & Circumcision of Jesus)

Hebrews 1 v1

I thought this quarter that we would have a look at the Epistle to the Hebrews – one of my favourite books of the Bible. It follows on naturally from our study last quarter of the very being of God. (It has been said that even God cannot know what God is because God isn't anything; also that we cannot know what God is, only what God is not.) As we have tried to apprehend something of the infinite majesty of God over the last three months, so it is appropriate in this coming quarter to try to apprehend something of what it means that we are able (through His grace) to come into His Presence. Hebrews is not an easy book, but it is a very wonderful book.

It starts with the fact that God has made Himself known to humanity. We can only know anything of God because He has made Himself known to us. Before Jesus, He has made Himself known in the wonders of creation, in art and science, and human relationships. To some extent, He has made Himself known through other religions and human philosophy. Above all, before Jesus, He has made Himself known in the Law and the Prophets, the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament. Jesus was born into a world prepared for His coming by God's revelation of Himself to Moses and the prophets. He comes not to destroy, but to fulfil the Law. The Old Testament is the context in which Jesus is born, in which He teaches, in which He performs His miraculous signs, and in which He dies and is raised from the dead. It is the context in which the Gospel is to be proclaimed to the ends of the earth so that Jesus is a light to the gentiles and the glory of His people Israel.

In His lifetime, Jesus is obedient to the Law revealed to Moses on Mt Sinai. He is circumcised on the 8th day (Work it out from 25th December.). In His life and death (as the OT prophets foreshadow), it becomes clear, that obedience to the Law is a matter of the Spirit, rather than of the flesh. So we are invited today to pray:

Almighty God, who madest thy blessed Son to be circumcised and obedient to the law for man; Grant us the true Circumcision of the Spirit: that, our hearts, and all our members, being mortified from all worldly and carnal lusts, we may in all things obey thy blessed will; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

January 2nd

Hebrews 1 v1

Pause a moment. If God has made Himself known through the Law and the Prophets, the Old Testament, if God has supremely made Himself known in Jesus, we do indeed have a Gospel to proclaim. In our multicultural society, it sounds much more tolerant and indeed acceptable if we can say that all religions are basically the same, just different routes to God. “The Jews have their God. The Moslems have theirs. Sikhs, Hindus and Buddhists all have their own understanding of God. We believe in Jesus, but who are we to say that they are all wrong?” Religious intolerance has caused so much suffering in the world that many people no longer say that all religions are equally good, but that all religions are equally bad. Do we have the right to say that Christian faith is a universal truth (even the universal truth) which all people of every race and language ought to believe? As Christians, we must say that. Christianity is either universally true or it is not true at all. Either Jesus is God’s perfect revelation of Himself (against which all other supposed revelations of God must be measured) or He is not. However, if our knowledge of God, derives from our knowledge of Jesus, we know that God is love. We pray for the conversion of people who are not Christians. We bear witness of our faith, but we never forget that a Christian witness is basically a martyr. The love of Jesus, our love as the people of Jesus, is made manifest in our willingness to lay down our lives, in self sacrifice. It is a denial of Christ to persecute people of other faiths.

At the Name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
Every tongue confess him King of glory now:
’Tis the Father’s pleasure we should call him Lord,
Who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

January 3rd

Hebrews 1 v1

God makes Himself known in Jesus. His Spirit bears witness with our spirit. We know Jesus as our brother and our friend. We know Jesus as our fellow human being and as our God. We love Him. We talk to Him. We know Him. This is all our subjective knowledge of Jesus. Our objective knowledge of Jesus derives from the Bible, first from the Old Testament, then from the New Testament. We need both the subjective and the objective if we are to make sense of our faith and to be inspired by it: Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

January 4th

Hebrews 1 v2

This is what we have been celebrating all this Christmas season. In fact Hebrews 1 is the traditional epistle for Christmas Day. The child in the manger is the One by Whom God made the worlds and He is the heir of all things. He is the beginning and the ending, the alpha and the omega. By Him all things consist. You cannot have too high an understanding of Jesus. And yet He became man. He took the form of a servant and was obedient even to death on the Cross. He became what we are in order that we should become what He is. Almighty God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure Virgin; Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit: through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

January 5th (Twelfth Night)

Hebrews 1 v3

What does God mean to you? A lot of people start with Creation. God is the One Who made heaven and earth. For others, it is about redemption. He is the One Who saves us from our sins and has prepared for us a place in Heaven. The more I read the Bible, the more I feel how inextricably these themes are linked. Our Redeemer is our Creator. We know that we can trust God both for our daily life on earth – our life in time and space – and for our true life – our life in eternity – because He is the Creator of all things. This God is Jesus. Everything exists because of Him. It is He Who will bring us home.

At his voice creation sprang at once to sight,
All the angel faces, all the hosts of light,
Thrones and dominations,
Stars upon their way,
All the heavenly orders in their great array.

January 6th (The Epiphany)

Hebrews 1 v3

When I was a small child, I was fascinated by the collection of curiosities to be found in my grandmother's coal shed. I wasn't encouraged to go in their too much because everything was covered with a filthy film of coal dust.

Among these curiosities was a box of gold paint – powder which you were supposed to mix up with some liquid (turpentine probably). Not having the right stuff, we used water, which was not entirely satisfactory, but good enough for a child's painting of God. Not realising, I was breaking the second commandment, as for many children, it seemed obvious to me that God should be represented as golden light. It makes sense, doesn't it. Without light there would be no life. Indeed, without light, there would be nothing at all, as light is ultimately what the universe is made of. (Matter and energy are manifestations of the same thing and energy is basically light.)

O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest thy only-begotten Son to the Gentiles; Mercifully grant, that we, which know thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of thy glorious Godhead; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

January 7th

Hebrews 1 v4

The word “angel” mean messenger. In the Bible, angels are spiritual beings created by God. They are definitely not to be worshipped. Only God is worthy of worship. To worship anything less than God would be to break the first commandment. We generally meet angels in the bible stories as messengers and also as guardians of God's people. Pagan religions imagine all kinds of spirits, demigods and gods in disguise coming down to earth. They are all false gods and to worship them is idolatry. Jesus is not a created being. Jesus is the Truth. Jesus is *the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person*. Jesus is God made manifest – infinitely higher than the angels, worthy of all worship.

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.

January 8th

Hebrews 1 v5

This takes some thinking about. *Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee* comes from Psalm 2, which was probably sung in Old Testament times in celebration of the King of Israel reigning in Jerusalem. *I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son*, is what God promised King David with reference to his son. In the OT this, in the first instance, means Solomon and Solomon's descendants who would be kings in Jerusalem. Kings are, of course, anointed (messiah in Hebrew, christ in Greek). What is going on here is that God has made known to His Church that Jesus fulfils these Old Testament prophecies in an infinitely greater manner than could possibly have been suspected. David and his descendants, kings in Jerusalem, were metaphorically the sons of God. Jesus is literally the Son of God and, therefore, far above all angels, and rightly worshipped by the whole of creation.

Hail to the Lord's Anointed, great David's greater Son!

Hail, in the time appointed, his reign on earth begun!

He comes to break oppression, to set the captive free,

To take away transgression, and rule in equity.

January 9th

Hebrews 1 v6

And let all the angels of God worship him.

This comes from the Old Testament, too. In the OT it is God Whom the angels and every other created being are exhorted to worship. Jesus was accused of making Himself equal with God. In fact, He is equal with God, as this verse declares.

Crown him the Lord of years, the Potentate of time,

Creator of the rolling spheres, ineffably sublime:

All hail, Redeemer, hail! For thou hast died for me;

Thy praise shall never, never fail throughout eternity.

January 10th

Hebrews 1 v7

This is from Psalm 104 v4. This is what angels are, spirits, ministers of God, flames of fire. I have been getting more and more into psalms lately. They are religion of the heart as well as of the head. As we pray the psalms, as we sing the psalms, we come to know God as well as to know about God. In a sense, it is not so much a question of knowing Who God is so that we may worship Him in spirit and in truth. It is more that it is as we worship God in spirit and in truth that we come to know Who He is. O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the whole earth,
Sing unto the Lord, and praise his Name: be telling of his salvation from day to day.

January 11th (Baptism of Christ)

Hebrews 1 vv 8&9

This from Psalm 45. Again, it would originally have been understood as a reference to the earthly King of Israel. (Some people think it was originally sung for the notorious King Ahab when he married Jezebel!) Here it is made manifest that the fulfilment of these words is in Jesus. When Jesus is baptised, God the Father acknowledges Him as His Son in the words of Psalm 2 (as in our study for 8th) and Jesus is anointed with the Holy Spirit Who comes to Him in the form of a dove. He does this in solidarity with His people, who, by His grace, are themselves anointed by the Holy Spirit, acknowledged as the children of God and initiated into as kings and priests to sing the praises of him who called us out of darkness into His own marvellous light.

Uprising from the waters there,
the voice from heaven did witness bear
That he, the Son of God, had come
to lead his scattered people home.

Above him see the heavenly Dove
the sign of God the Father's love,
Now by the Holy Spirit shed
upon the Son's anointed head.

January 12th

Hebrews 1 vv 10-12

Two ways of doing things. If you use the Common Worship daily readings (as I have been doing for the last 14 years), the psalms and other readings are chosen to reflect the seasons from Advent through to Trinity. This has the advantage of emphasising the Church's year with its annual recapitulation of the events of our salvation, but it has the disadvantage that we do not read the Bible in order and that some passages come up several times in the year and some never and I'm beginning to feel that this disadvantage is a major impediment to my spiritual growth. So I am reverting (for weekday Morning & Evening Prayer) to the reading scheme in the 1662 book, which, generally speaking, reads the whole of the Bible with few omissions in order over the course of a year. The Book of Psalms is read in sequence over the course of a month and I hope to become much better acquainted with it as a result.

Today's verses are a quotation from Psalm 102, and were rather beloved by the grandmother whose coal shed contained such interesting curiosities. Psalm 102 is one of those which tends to get left out if we pick and choose our liturgical material. It is quite long and much of it is a lament – too depressing for Christians who seem to believe that authentic believers always have silly grins or their faces and also for those Christians who don't think that what we do in Church has much to do with real life. But the strength of our faith is that it is relevant to every detail of our lives and it is foolish to disregard the means of grace which God makes available in the Scriptures and the Sacraments and in so many other ways. This psalm is indeed a lament and the psalmist finds the answer to his prayers (just as we do) in God Who is the beginning and the end of all creation. Our Hebrews passage makes clear that this God is Jesus, our friend and brother – all the more reason for our faith and hope and love. My grandmother liked to remind us of the other use of these psalm verses in the NT. God will bring this created order to an end. We shall all stand before His Judgment Seat and there will be new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

O Lord, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people which call upon thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

January 13th

Hebrews 1 vv 13&14

What Hebrews is trying to do is to make us appreciate Jesus. If we saw an angel, we would probably be awestruck, possibly terrified. When angels appear to people in the Bible, they nearly always have to begin by saying, *Fear not*. It is appropriate that we should be awed by angels, the messengers of God. And Jesus is infinitely greater than the angels.

Jesus is the name we treasure, name beyond what words can tell;
Name of gladness, name of pleasure, ear and heart delighting well;
Name of sweetness passing measure, saving us from sin and hell.

January 14th

Hebrews 2 vv 1-4

I've just returned from my lunch break when I was wondering how these notes come over to my readers? Hebrews is pretty strong stuff. As many of you know, at heart I am a conservative evangelical. At the very foundation of my life is the belief that the Bible is the Word of God and that it is our responsibility as Christians to share the Gospel with the whole world. Over the years, I have learnt from the charismatic, catholic and even the liberal wings of the Church to be open to the unexpected power of the Holy Spirit, to hold the Church in veneration as God's creation and to recognise in the Sacraments supreme means of His grace, and also to be open to new ideas from outside the Church, as well as inside, because God is active in the whole world, not in the Church alone. As a conservative evangelical at heart, I take the Bible as normative. If I don't understand or don't agree with it or don't see how it applies in the modern world, I assume that the fault is in myself, not in the Bible. So I wrestle and pray and try to work out how God wants us to interpret and to apply His eternal Word in the society in which we live, in the state of life to which it has pleased God to call us. Other, Christians, however, seem to work the other way round. They start with the world we live in and with what most people in the world today think and then turn to the Bible. If the Bible can't be made to agree with twenty-first century beliefs and practices, for them it is the Bible which has to give way. I say all this because Hebrews is demanding. It requires from us an absolute commitment to Jesus.

Thy word is a lantern unto my feet: and a light unto my paths.
I have sworn, and am stedfastly purposed: to keep thy righteous judgements.

January 15th

Hebrews 2 vv 1-4

Imagine if you had been at Mt Sinai when God gave Moses the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Law. Only Moses went up into the presence of God. The rest of us would have been behind barriers placed on the lower slopes of the mountain. Maybe Sinai was a volcano. There were thunder and lightning. The rocks shook, God gave Moses the Law mediated by angels. There were over 600 commandments and punishments were prescribed for every transgression. I expect we would have been filled with awe and fear. We might think we would have obeyed those commandments, given in such dramatic circumstances. But the Israelites didn't. While Moses was up the mountain they made and worshipped the golden calf. Time and again in the centuries following, they disobeyed God's Law and experienced the consequences. There is no reason to think that we would have been any different. It is human nature.

But God has done for us something infinitely greater than what He did on Mt Sinai. He sent His Son to die on the Cross for our salvation. It is human nature to sin, but God has dealt with our sin by sending His Son to die on the Cross for us. Now, says Hebrews, if there were consequences for the Israelites in disobeying the Law given on Sinai, how much greater would the consequences be if we were to neglect the salvation which God has purchased for us by the price of Jesus' Blood? What God has done for us is priceless and that is very different from being valueless.

Lift ye then your voices; swell the mighty flood;
Louder still and louder praise the precious blood.

January 16th

Hebrews 2 vv 5-9

When I was at medical school, our dean, who lectured in anatomy, was quite rightly awed by the wonder of the human body. He used to try to communicate this awe to us students, who were perhaps too young and brash to appreciate it, by quoting this verse that God has made human beings a little lower than the angels. The dean used to add, *just a little!* I will give thanks unto thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well.

January 17th

Hebrews 2 vv 5-9

This passage is rooted in Psalm 8 where the psalmist gazes into the night sky and is awed, as we all are sometimes, first by the grandeur of Creation and then by his realisation of the infinitely greater grandeur of His Creator. In this light, we may well feel our relative insignificance and yet. And yet, says the psalmist, God has made human beings (the sons of men) lower than the angels to crown us with glory and worship.

Thou who art beyond the farthest mortal eye can scan,
Can it be that thou regardest songs of sinful man?
Can we know that thou art near us, and wilt hear us?
Yea, we can.

January 18th (Epiphany 2)

Hebrews 2 vv 5-9

In chapter 1, we saw how the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews takes Old Testament Scriptures which apply to God and applies them to Jesus because Jesus is God. In the same way, here he takes Old Testament Scriptures which apply to humanity and applies them to Jesus because Jesus is man. Almighty and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth; mercifully hear the supplications of thy people, and grant us thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

January 19th

Hebrews 2 vv 5-9

Go right back to Genesis and God creates human beings to have dominion over His Creation. We are His stewards. We mess that up by rebelling against God and the consequence is that *in the sweat of thy face, thou shalt eat thy bread, till thou return unto the ground*. Jesus fulfils our human vocation. In this world of sin in which everything is awry because we won't work with the Creator, *we see not yet all things put under him*. *But we see Jesus*. Jesus is in perfect harmony with the Creator and therefore overcomes sin and the consequences of sin. In Christ, humanity's sins are washed away and we therefore share in His victory, even in His dominion. And he shall reign forever
His throne and crown shall ever endure
And he shall reign forever
And we shall reign with him

Graham Kendrick.

January 20th

Hebrews 2 v10

Forgive me, if you've heard this before, but it's a good analogy. The owner of a multimillion pound company has a son who will one day succeed him. He wants the son to understand everything there is to understand about the business and the people who work in it. He wants him to experience it, to sympathise with the workforce and the customers and the suppliers and the shareholders in the truest sense of the word sympathy. So the boy takes a job in the company and work his way up through the system.

Thou didst leave thy throne and thy kingly crown,
When thou camest to earth for me;
But in Bethlehem's home was there found no room
For thy holy nativity:
O come to my heart, Lord Jesus;
There is room in my heart for thee.

January 21st

Hebrews 2 vv 11&12

It's more than that, though. Probably, the boss's son would never really be one of "us". Everyone would know whose son he was. He would definitely be taking over eventually how ever he got on on the factory floor. *But we see Jesus*. He really is one of us and endures everything that we endure, every temptation, even death itself. He really is at one with us.

Now, my tongue this mystery telling of the glorious body sing,
And the blood, all price excelling, which the Gentiles' Lord and King,
In a Virgin's womb once dwelling, shed for this world's ransoming.
Given for us and condescending to be born for us below,
He, with men in converse bearing, dwelt the seed of truth to sow,
Till he closed with wondrous ending his most patient life of woe.

January 22nd

Hebrews 2 v12

The words which Hebrews here ascribes to Jesus are a quotation from Psalm 22, the great psalm which prophesies the Crucifixion. *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* In all the horror of the Cross, the glory of God is manifest in the love of Jesus. The people for whom Christ died are His brothers and sisters. We are the Church. We are God's congregation, called by God to be His people.

He died that we might be forgiven, he died to make us good,
That we might go at last to heaven, saved by his precious blood.
There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate of heaven, and let us in.

January 23rd

Hebrews 2 v13

This verse is based on Isaiah 8 vv 17&18. It is worth remembering here how much the New Testament depends on the Old Testament. It is the New Testament which bears direct testimony to what Jesus did and said on earth during those thirty three years, but the New Testament understands Jesus in the light of the Old Testament and we will miss a good deal of the sense of what the New Testament is saying if we don't know our Old Testaments.

In the time of the prophet Isaiah, the Holy Land (not unusually) was surrounded by enemies. The Assyrians (who lived in what is now Iraq) were rampaging through the Middle East and Syria and the northern Kingdom of Israel were trying to cobble up an alliance against them. This was a disastrous policy which Ahaz (King of Judah in Jerusalem, southern Israel), following the counsel of Isaiah, was trying to keep out of. God speaks through Isaiah to reassure Ahaz and his people that this confederacy will come to nothing. Isaiah's baby son will be a sign of God's faithfulness. As Jesus is the fulfilment of all prophecy, the ultimate Redeemer, Hebrews uses this OT story of God's faithfulness and family solidarity to help us to understand that we are of one flesh with our Redeemer. He is one of us and what He does in dying on the Cross, He does on our behalf. 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 follow the example of his patience, and also may be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

January 24th

Hebrews 2 vv 14&15

They say that the only certainties are death and taxes. We shall all die (unless we are still alive at the end of time when Christ comes again in glory to judge the living and the dead). Campaigners talk about preventable deaths meaning deaths which could be avoided if ate the right things and wore cycle helmets and dosed ourselves up with statins, but death is not preventable, only postponable and then not certainly. A diet of lettuce won't save you if you're run over by a bus. If we have faith in Jesus, however, death is nothing to be afraid of, even something to welcome because it is the gateway to a new, fuller life with God. (PTO).

O thou, most kind and gentle death,

Waiting to hush our latest breath,

O praise him, alleluia.

Thou leadest home the child of God,

And Christ our Lord the way hath trod:

O praise him, O praise him, Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

January 25th (Conversion of St Paul)

Hebrews 2 vv 16-18

Jesus is not an angel. He did not become an angel. He is God. He became man. He makes Himself at one with us in order to make us at one with God. This is the Gospel and it is for people of all races and nations, for the whole creation. It is ours to believe and ours to proclaim. O God, who, through the preaching of the blessed apostle Saint Paul, hast caused the light of the Gospel to shine throughout the world; Grant, we beseech thee, that we, having his wonderful conversion in remembrance, may shew forth our thankfulness unto thee for the same, by following the doctrine which he taught; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

January 26th

Hebrews 3 v1

How many apostles were there? Most people answer twelve. Then they think a bit and add in Matthias, who succeeded Judas, and Paul and maybe Barnabas. So perhaps fifteen. But we generally forget that the first apostle is Jesus. An apostle is one who is sent by God. Jesus is the first and foremost apostle. We also forget that we are members of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. We are all sent by God to fulfil the mission of Jesus. In that sense, all Christians, all the baptised, are apostles – we in Him and He in us. The first Jewish high priest was Aaron, Moses' brother. He alone entered the holy of holies to make atonement for the sins of the people. He alone was allowed into the presence of God and only then once a year and after the performance of the appropriate sacrifice. No high priest truly fulfilled his vocation until Jesus Who fulfils everything priesthood entails. In Him all Christian people are priests with open access to the Father, offering prayers to Him and conduits of His blessing and grace into the world.

For, as the priest of Aaron's line within the holiest stood,

And sprinkled all the mercy shrine with sacrificial blood;

So he who once atonement wrought, our Priest of endless power,
Presents himself for those he bought in that dark noontide hour.

January 27th

Hebrews 3 vv 2-6

Who is the most important person in the Old Testament? In other words, if we didn't have Jesus, who would matter most in the story of God's people? Moses would probably be a powerful contender for that position. He was the one whom God chose to lead His people out of Egypt and to lead them for forty years in the Wilderness to the brink of the Promised Land. It was through Moses that God gave His people His Law. So Moses is perhaps the most important person in the Bible apart from Jesus. Moses was faithful in the house or household of God. Moses was God's steward of the Israelites. Now, how much greater is Jesus? Moses was a servant in God's house, but God is the owner of the house. He is the builder of the house. Jesus is the Son of God. However faithful the steward in a big house, he ranks far below the son. Jesus is much greater than Moses. Therefore our faithfulness to Christ ought to be proportionately greater than a faithful Jew's faithfulness to the Law. The household of God is His house. He is the owner and builder. He is the heir. We cannot have too much respect for Jesus. We cannot love Him too much. We are in fact the household of God, His house, His temple, His workmanship. This is our status, of which we must walk worthy. We bear His Name. We can't let Him down.

The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is his new creation by water and the word;
From heaven he came and sought her to be his holy Bride;
With his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.

January 28th

Hebrews 3 vv 7-11

None of the Israelites who escaped from Egypt made it into the Promised Land except Joshua and Caleb. All the rest, including Moses, died during the forty years wandering in the Wilderness. They did not enter God's rest, the rest He has prepared for the people of God, because of unbelief. They did not believe that God could save them from Pharaoh's hosts. They did not believe that God could supply them with food and water in the desert. They complained that the manna was monotonous. They did not believe that they could overcome the armies of Canaan. Because of unbelief, they were always murmuring, complaining and grumbling and they did not make it into the Promised Land.

Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon all our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth thy right hand to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

January 29th

Hebrews 3 vv 12&13

Having adopted the 1662 prayer book for daily Morning and Evening Prayer, I say Psalm 95 daily except for Easter Day. This psalm is an exhortation to worship, a proclamation of God's glory in creation and salvation, an expression of our joy and sense of wonder as the people of God and a warning of the consequences of disregarding the word of God, of unbelief. At Meribah and Massah, the Israelites rebelled against God because there was no water in the desert. Moses struck the rock and water flowed out in abundance, but even Moses incurred the wrath of God for his lack of faith. When is it the time to put our faith in God? Today is the time. Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts: as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness; When your fathers tempted me: proved me, and saw my works. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said: It is a people that shall do err in their hearts, for they have not known my ways. Unto whom I swear in my wrath: that they should not enter into my rest. 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.

(Many churches leave out those verses when they sing Ps 95. No wonder the Church of England is in the state it's in!)

January 30th

Hebrews 3 vv 12-14

We are called, you see, to encourage one another to be faithful to Christ while it is today. We are members of Christ and therefore we are members of one another. We are all responsible to God for the welfare of the whole fellowship.

Almighty and everliving God, we most heartily thank thee, for that thou dost vouchsafe to feed us, who have duly received these holy mysteries (Holy Communion), with the spiritual food of the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, and dost assure us thereby of thy favour and goodness towards us; and that we are very members incorporate in the mystical body of thy Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people; and are also heirs through hope of thy everlasting kingdom, by the merits of the most precious death and passion of thy dear Son. And we most humbly beseech thee, O heavenly Father, so to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

January 31st

Hebrews 3 vv 15-19

When is the time to put our faith in Christ? Today is the time to put our faith in Christ. Every day we have that opportunity. But there will come a time when it is no longer today. One day we shall die. One day the world will end. Shall we have left it too late? Is it possible that we shall find that we cannot enter heaven, that we cannot share in the rest which remains for the people of God, because of our unbelief right up to the end? Some people seem to think that they can put questions of faith indefinitely on hold. So long as they delay to put their faith in Christ, their existence in this world is impaired and they may find that they have sacrificed their eternity.

Wakened by the solemn warning, let the earth-bound soul arise;
Christ, her Sun, all ill-dispelling, shines upon the morning skies.
Lo, the Lamb, so long expected, comes with pardon down from heaven;
Let us haste, with tears of sorrow, one and all to be forgiven;
That when next he comes with glory, and the world is wrapped in fear,
With his mercy he may shield us, and with words of love draw near.
Honour, glory, might, and blessing to the Father and the Son,
With the everlasting Spirit, while eternal ages run.

February 1st (Septuagesima)

Hebrews 4 vv 1&2

Today I'm caught out trying to use both the 1662 version of the Church's year (for my personal Morning & Evening Prayer) and the Common Worship lectionary (for most public services). Common Worship keeps Christmas till Candlemas (which is tomorrow or today as a concession to people who won't meet for worship on weekdays) whereas 1662 starts looking forward to Lent and Easter on Septuagesima Sunday, which is also today. The point of worshipping the Church's year is not just to remind ourselves of all the things that Jesus did, but for us to participate in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is His story and our story. As we grow to know Him, so we become like Him. Having said that, there are rough edges. It is not always clear how best to mark these events in our public and private worship, but that is no reason for not doing so. The recipients of this letter to the Hebrews were threatened with persecution and under pressure to cease meeting for worship. This letter is written to comfort and strengthen them in their faith as members of the people of God. O Lord, we beseech thee favourably to hear the prayers of thy people; that we, who are justly punished for our offences, may be mercifully delivered by thy goodness, for the glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

February 2nd (Candlemas)

Hebrews 4 vv 3-6

This takes some thinking about. The Gospel is God's Good News. So it was Gospel for the ancient Israelites to be told that God had prepared a rest for them in the Promised Land. The Sabbath, itself, is a sign and a foretaste of the rest which God has prepared for His people – that we might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of our lives. It is curious how little we value the Sabbath, preferring to give up our lives to the work of our hands, rather than to yield our lives to Him Whose Hands made us. Because of unbelief, the ancient Israelites did not enter the Promised Land (except Joshua who led their descendants across the Jordan and faithful Caleb). It follows that God's promises were not fulfilled by the Exodus and the settlement of Canaan. They are fulfilled in an infinitely more wonderful way in Christ Who opens, not Canaan, but the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.

Almighty and everliving God, we humbly beseech thy Majesty, that, as thy only-begotten Son was this day presented in the temple in substance of our flesh, so we may be presented unto thee with pure and clean hearts, by the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

February 3rd

Hebrews 4 vv 7-9

Joshua was Moses' assistant and, when Moses died, he was the one who led the people of Israel (the descendants of those who had left Egypt forty years previously) through the River Jordan and into the Promised Land. His Name means something like the LORD saves. Joshua and Jesus are versions of the same name. So the angel tells Joseph to call Him Jesus *for he shall save his people from their sins*. It is Jesus/Joshua, the Son of God, Who brings God's people into the Kingdom of Heaven, just as it was Jesus/Joshua, the son of Nun, who led the people into Canaan. What Joshua, the son of Nun, achieved was only a partial fulfilment of God's promises. They are fully fulfilled in Jesus, the Son of God. The one serves as a metaphor for the other. I realised I wasn't quite sure which Jesus was meant when singing this hymn lately. Possibly both of them.

Though nature's strength decay, and earth and hell withstand,
To Canaan's bounds we urge our way at his command:
The watery deep we pass, with Jesus in our view;
And through the howling wilderness our way pursue.

February 4th

Hebrews 4 vv 10&11

I don't know about you, but there are times when I get uptight about things. In my daily prayers and bible readings, I come across many resources, many words to use to complain to God and to ask for His help. They help me in two ways. Yes, they do remind me, that God is always on hand to listen to our prayers, that He does love me and that the thing to do in all circumstances is to pray. On the other hand, they shame me. The bible stories and the psalms and many of the Church's traditional prayers are for people much worse off than I am – desperately poor, seriously ill, anxious for the safety and welfare of their families, dying, living in a country at war or facing invasion, threatened with death or torture for their faith. I am richly blessed and so are you reading these notes. *There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God.* The recipients of this letter are facing the serious prospect of persecution. The Epistle to the Hebrews is written to comfort them, to encourage them to cleave to Christ whatever happens. *There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God.* Jesus will bring us home if we cleave to Him in faith, but, if we are guilty of unbelief, we will miss out on the blessings which are so easily ours. Now, if Christians facing actual persecution need to remain faithful, how much less excuse is there for us if, with all the blessings we enjoy, we allow our faith to grow cold?

Abba Father, let me be Yours and Yours alone.

May my will for ever be evermore Your own.

Never let my heart grow cold. Never let me go.

Abba Father, let me be Yours and Yours alone. Dave Bilborough.

February 5th

Hebrews 4 vv 12&13

Someone was talking to me the other day about how she went to a christening somewhere and wondered whether she had made enough effort to dress up for the occasion. She decided that God would just be pleased that she was there at all. Strangely enough, I had been engaged in a conversation a few days previously with someone else about whether we show enough respect for God in the way we dress when we come to Church. There is a great deal to be said about that on both sides. If we dress up because we believe that worship is very special, that is good. If we dress up as an act of personal vanity, that is sinful. If we look down on other people who are not as well dressed as we are, that too is sinful. If people were put off coming to Church by the dress code, that would be

unhelpful for the purposes of evangelism and pastoral care. If people dress comfortably because they are comfortable in Church and we live in a society in which it is normal to dress casually except for work and on very formal social occasions, that might be a good thing. (I certainly hope it is as I don't like dressing up.) Anyway, the point is not the clothes we wear but the state of our hearts before God. What we choose to wear may or may not reflect what is going on in our hearts. What does concern me is that we may not take sufficiently seriously what an awesome, even fearful, thing it is to come into the presence of God. Taking part in public worship is not a chore or a social occasion or something for which God should be grateful that we bothered. Taking part in worship is an astonishing privilege.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
Though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see,
Only thou art holy, there is none beside thee
Perfect in power, in love, and purity.

February 6th (Accession of HM Queen)

Hebrews 4 vv 14-16

There is a mystique about royalty. We probably wouldn't call round at Buckingham Palace unless we were invited. We would dress up if we had an invitation from the Queen. We wouldn't initiate conversation with her, touch her or turn our backs on her. Even if we didn't like her personally or if we didn't believe in all that flummery, we would still observe a respectful protocol because of who she is and what she represents. Now, if all this applies in our dealings with someone who is after all a fellow human being, isn't it astonishing that we can come into the Presence of the thrice holy God at all? Only through Jesus.

Alleluia, sing to Jesus! His the sceptre, his the throne;
Alleluia his the triumph, his the victory alone:
Hark, the songs of peaceful Sion thunder like a mighty flood;
Jesus out of every nation hath redeemed us by his blood.

Alleluia, bread of angels, thou on earth our food, our stay;
Alleluia, here the sinful flee 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 and Victim in the eucharistic feast.

February 7th

Hebrews 5 vv 1-3

Who makes the better Maths teacher? Someone who is brilliant at Maths and can't understand why other people find Maths difficult or someone who has struggled himself to get qualified and understands his pupils' problems only too well from personal experience? Unless you are a brilliant pupil, I guess you will find the latter a better teacher. In the same way, a priest or pastor needs to be able to understand the temptations that ordinary people have to face. Aaron and his descendants as high priests in Jerusalem were only too human and experienced the temptations to which human beings are susceptible. They could, therefore, sympathise. On the other hand, the barely qualified teacher may not be able to offer students help with serious difficulties if he is only one page ahead of them in the text book or if, worse still, he abuses his authority to compensate for his inadequacy. Many of the high priests in Jerusalem did abuse their authority as you can see if you read the Bible. Jesus is fully human and is tempted just as we are. He understands us from personal experience. He sympathises with us. But He does not yield to temptation. He is the end of life's journey as well as our fellow traveller.

His manhood pleads where now it lives on heaven's eternal throne,
And where in mystic rite he gives its presence to his own.
And so we show thy death, O Lord, till thou again appear;
And feel, when we approach thy board, we have an altar here.
All glory to the Father be, all glory to the Son,
All glory, Holy Ghost, to thee, while endless ages run.

February 8th (Sexagesima)

Hebrews 5 vv 4-6

Priesthood is a calling. All kinds of ministry are callings. I do believe that every Christian is called to serve God in particular ways throughout his or her life. Indeed we are Christians not because we have chosen Christ, but because He has chosen us. Even Jesus is called by God to be our great High Priest and Hebrews quotes Psalms 2 and 110 to indicate this. 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 gladly serve thee; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

February 9th

Hebrews 5 vv 7-9

When we do little dramas to act out Bible stories, I am always very dubious about casting anyone as Jesus. This is partly from a sense of reverence, but it is also because I think that, in order to act a part, you have to be able to imagine yourself as the person you are playing and how can you imagine yourself as Jesus? We have just one nature – our human nature, but He has two natures; He is both fully human and fully divine. Moreover, while He is tempted in very respect as we are, His human nature is without sin. He knows exactly who and what we are, but how can we know what He is? It is, however, made clear here that He went through all that we would go when confronted by the effects of sin – pain and death – and that He grew as we would grow through experiencing these realities. It is also clear, thank God, that, through suffering all these things, He becomes the author of our eternal salvation.

O wisest love! That flesh and blood, which did in Adam fail,
Should strive afresh against the foe, should strive and should prevail;
And that a higher gift than grace should flesh and blood refine,
God's presence and his very self, and essence all divine.

February 10th

Hebrews 5 v10

Melchizedek was high priest and king in Jerusalem centuries before the city came into the hands of the Israelites. He is a somewhat mysterious figure whom the New Testament regards as prefiguring Christ in a number of ways. We meet him in a time of war in which Abraham's intervention has recovered prisoners and booty captured by a superior enemy. Melchizedek brought Abraham bread and wine and blessed him – priestly functions – and received tithes from Abraham – exercising his priestly rights. Like Jesus, the origins of Melchizedek are not straightforward and like Jesus Melchizedek is not a descendant of Aaron or a member of the priestly tribe of Levi.

O Lord God, who seest that we put not our trust in anything that we do; Mercifully grant that by thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

February 11th

Hebrews 5 vv 11-14

Some Christians don't seem to want to grow up. Maybe they were converted at a mission service or a rally and think that worship ought always to be at that simple level. Maybe they are cradle Christians who have never seen the need to advance from what they were taught as children. Quite a lot of older Christians seem to prefer a children's service, in which the worship leader tells the children a simple story to illustrate some simple moral such as "always been kind to people", to attending an adult service with serious teaching and engagement with the big issues which confront us in the world. As St Paul says, *Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men*. Of course Church rightly caters for children and new believers, but we mustn't let caring for them become an excuse for not taking part in (or paying attention to) adult worship and teaching. It is perhaps a special temptation for us clergy to be so attentive to what other people expect from a service that we fail to worship God ourselves.

Thine is our youthful prime, and life and all its powers:
Be with us in our morning time and in our evening hours.

In wisdom let us grow, as years and strength are given,
That we may serve thy Church below and join thy saints in heaven.

February 12th

Hebrews 6 vv 1-3

The author of this letter feels that he is expected to keep going over what mature Christians ought to know perfectly well. You have probably noticed that I have been finishing every meditation this quarter with a prayer, hymn or psalm. This is partly because I was asked more often to supply a devotional conclusion to the day's study, but it is also because I don't think we (often including me) always fully take in the words we say and sing. I thought it would be worthwhile to think about these well known words in other contexts. A collect typically begins with a recital of particular attributes of God, a meditation on His nature, before going on to make a petition and very often conclude with a doxology – an ascription of praise. It is worth meditating on what the prayer has to say about God and to worship Him as He is prior to asking for what we want. For example: O Lord, our heavenly Father, Almighty and everlasting God, who hast safely brought us to the beginning of this day; Defend us in the same with thy mighty power; and grant that this day we fall into no sin, neither run into any kind of danger; but that all our doings may be ordered by thy

governance, to do always what is righteous in thy sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

February 13th

Hebrews 6 vv 4-8

This passage makes you think. The author is telling people threatened with persecution that if they abandon their faith there can be no way back. If you have experienced Jesus and then you deny Him how can you expect another chance? You have in effect crucified him afresh. What are to make of this? Is there comfort in what Jesus says when He says that nothing is impossible with God? Whatever, it ought to shake us out of our comfortable complacency that it will all be all right in the end no matter how casual we are about God.

Take up thy cross and follow Christ,
Nor think till death to lay it down;
For only he who bears the cross
May hope to wear the glorious crown.

February 14th (S Valentine)

Hebrews 6 vv 9&10

The writer speaks of his readers' *labour of love*, which God will not forget. In the shops, in the weeks leading up to today, there have been shelves of Valentine's cards. Some of them are lovely. Some are mushy. Some are quite frankly obscene, confusing unselfish love with self-centred lust. The love Hebrews writes about is characterised by its steadfastness. God is faithful. Our Christian calling is to be faithful. It might well appear today that there is much more interest in romantic love than there is in the love between God and humanity, but it is all love. Love is the same thing. God is love. Our Lord's Will is that we should love one another as He loves us. Human love is an aspect of the divine love. It is in this context that we love our husbands and wives, other members of our own families, close friends, members of our Church fellowship. Where there is love there is God. Where there is no love there is sin.

A wedding hymn:

O perfect Love, all human thought transcending,
Lowly we kneel in prayer before thy throne,
That theirs may be the love which knows no ending,
Whom thou for evermore dost join in one.

February 15th (Quinquagesima)

Hebrews 6 vv 11-18

My mother took up teaching primary school children when a teaching qualification was not required at least in the private sector and she was very good at it, some of her pupils doing extremely well in later life. In those halcyon days, Religious Education meant acquiring a good grounding in our religion, not learning a little bit about several different religions without making any commitment at all to God. RE was about learning to relate to God not learning to relate to other cultures. (Actually, of course, our relationships with other people ultimately depend on our relationship with God.) I used to help prepare the Scripture lessons and, just as I had myself learnt at school as a child, we looked at the stories of Abraham. The relevance of Abraham is that he had faith. He trusted God's promises and remained faithful to God through all the vicissitudes of his long and eventful life. God is faithful. We are called to be faithful. God is love. We are called to love. But this story only makes sense to the readers of the letter because they, like me and my mother's pupils, know the story of Abraham. It is absolutely vital that we tell these stories to the next generation. It is probably unrealistic to think that they will learn them at school. So it's left to us to tell them in the Church and in the home.

The God of Abraham praise who reigns enthroned above,
Ancient of everlasting Days, and God of love;
Jehovah, great I AM, by earth and heaven confest;
We bow and bless the sacred name for ever blest.

February 16th

Hebrews 6 vv 19&20

An anchor prevents a ship from drifting. Without an anchor a stationary ship could drift away with the currents or be cast up on the rocks. Either way she would be lost. An anchor, however, is useless unless the business end is firmly grounded. Otherwise the anchor itself can drift and the ship still be lost. Employing rather a mixed metaphor, the epistle reminds us that we have an absolutely trustworthy anchor which can save us from drifting and disaster because it is firmly grounded in the strongest ground of all. Our anchor is grounded within the (temple) veil, that is in the holy of holies, that is in God Himself.

We have an anchor that keeps the soul
Steadfast and sure while the billows roll;
Fastened to the rock which cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love!

February 17th

Hebrews 7 vv 1-3

The writer is explaining to his readers who Jesus is. Like all good teachers, he starts from where they are. He starts from their knowledge of God in the Bible (the Old Testament). It is a question where we start from today when people (even church people) know so little of religion. Depending on the person, we may start at the emotional level. It is natural for human beings to relate to God emotionally: awe at nature; the tenderness of human relationships; the demand for justice; desperation; anger; frustration; grief; thankfulness; praise; guilt; hope. They are common enough human emotions which for many people have a religious context. Other people we may engage at a more intellectual level: God as the answer to the "why?" questions which puzzle us. However we set about sharing our faith, it is not about exploiting people and their needs – another notch on our bibles. We bear witness to the glory of God and for the good of the people with whom we seek to share His love.

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

February 18th (Ash Wednesday)

Hebrews 7 vv 4-11

What all this about is who may enter into the presence of God? Who may offer sacrifice? Who may pray? Who may judge, curse or bless? Who may forgive sins? The answer is that no one is worthy to enter into the presence of God. In the OT priests of the tribe of Levi, descendants of Moses' brother Aaron, were commissioned to act as mediators between God and man, but their priesthood was never adequate as no human priesthood ever could be adequate. However, the Levitical priesthood was God's gift to Israel until the Messiah should come and many Jews may have found it difficult to believe that Jesus had supplanted what they had always been taught to revere. Today's verses show that there always was a greater priesthood than Aaron's, the priesthood of Melchizedek, the priesthood of Jesus.

Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent; Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

February 19th

Hebrews 7 vv 12-17

Aaron and the OT priests were all members of the tribe of Levi. Jesus was of the tribe of Judah – the descendant of David, the family of the kings. Like Melchizedek, Jesus is, however, both King and High Priest. So Psalm 110 which we have already applied to Jesus. His priesthood and His reign are eternal – unlike the OT priests and the OT kings who were concerned with the things of this life. There is very little in the OT about what happens after death or in the realm of spirit.

King of glory, King of peace, I will love thee;
And, that love may never cease, I will move thee.
Thou hast granted my request, thou hast heard me;
Thou didst note my working breast, thou hast spared me.

February 20th

Hebrews 7 vv 18&19

Only the perfectly holy may enter the fulness of God's presence. So only Jesus is fit to stand before Him. The OT system of priesthood and sacrifice provided a temporary answer to the problem of sin. It effected an atonement in this world of time and space, an atonement which had to be repeated every year on the Day of Atonement. The whole system, therefore, drew attention to its deficiencies. The Law given on Mt Sinai could not make men and women righteous. It could only show up that we are not righteous. Jesus alone is righteous in Himself and He alone can make us righteous by shedding His Blood on the cross, *a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.*

Blest are the pure in heart for they shall see our God;
The secret of the Lord is theirs, their soul is Christ's abode.

The Lord, who left the heavens our life and peace to bring,
To dwell in lowliness with men, their pattern and their King;

Still to the lowly soul he doth himself impart,
And for his dwelling and his throne chooseth the pure in heart.

Lord, we thy presence seek; may ours this blessing be;
Give us a pure and lowly heart, a temple meet for thee.

February 21st

Hebrews 7 vv 20-25

Hebrews is again quoting Psalm 110. *The Lord sware, and will not repent: Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.* Jesus' credentials are far superior to those of the Levitical priesthood, because it is based on God's unalterable Word. He is our priest for ever and He ever lives to make intercession for us. Jesus is praying for you and me at the Throne of Grace. All our prayers come to God through Him and His prayers make up for the deficiencies in our own prayers. He knows each one of us. He knows everything that happens to us and will happen to us. He loves us.

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear~
All because we do not carry everything thing to God in prayer!

February 22nd (Lent 1)

Hebrews 7 vv 26-28

On the first Sunday in Lent we remember that Jesus was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness and fasted there for forty days and was tempted by the devil. Jesus was tempted in every way that we are. He, therefore, fully understands what it is to be human. He entirely sympathises with us. Yet He lives the human life as it was meant to be lived. He is always obedient to the Father. He always resists temptation. He always overcomes Satan. He is the perfect man. He is perfect God. He is therefore the eternal High Priest Who reconciles man to God, Who opens the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers, through His one perfect sacrifice of Himself, made once for all upon the Cross.

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer!
Can we find a friend so faithful, who will all our troubles share?
Jesus knows our every weakness. Take it to the Lord in prayer.

O Lord, who for our sakes didst fast forty days and forty nights;
Give us grace to use such abstinence, that, our flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may ever obey thy godly motions in righteousness and true holiness, to thy honour and glory, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy ghost, one God, world without end.
Amen.

February 23rd

Hebrews 8 vv 1&2

That week when we were talking about what clothes it is appropriate to wear to church, the subject also came up of the vestments the clergy wear. I suppose I'm rather inconsistent in that I can be very informal indeed when I'm sitting in a congregation, but I would expect to wear full vestments when conducting a service. Ultimately, the vestments of Christian ministers go back to the vestments priests wore in Old Testament times in the Temple in Jerusalem. In the same way, traditional churches like ours are roughly built along the same lines as the Jerusalem Temple. The altar is in the sanctuary where the priest presides at Holy Communion – a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. The chancel is where the clergy and the robed choir minister to God. The nave is the space in which the “ordinary” worshippers gather. It all seems so natural and the whole building becomes a visual aid pointing us towards God. This is why I'm not comfortable with messing about with “sacred” space – a nave altar the “wrong” side of the choir; a nave foreshortened to make space for a hall; chairs turned to face one another, instead of facing the lectern, pulpit and altar; a big screen dominating the sight lines, distracting from or even obscuring the sanctuary. On the other hand, I am not entirely comfortable with the OT symbolism of churches like ours. In the OT sense of priesthood, only Jesus is our high priest. All baptised Christians are kings and priests. We all have direct access to the Father in Christ. As the BCP says, Jesus is our only mediator and advocate, the only one we need, the only one we've got. Maybe it is safer to refer to the altar as the holy table. Maybe it should be placed in the congregation. Maybe clergy and choristers ought not to have their own areas. Maybe they should not dress differently from anyone else. Maybe a screen capable of showing multimedia is of more use to a modern congregation than a polished altar rail, fair white linen and candles. What I really find difficult is mixed signals – a building which is essentially a traditional church, but chopped about to incorporate contradictory architectural symbolism. Please go for one or the other – a traditional church which draws on our OT and Mediaeval history or a different sort of church maybe more like a NT house church, more Reformation perhaps. But don't accept a compromise which does justice to neither.

Thou art the King of Glory: O Christ. Thou art the everlasting Son: of the Father. When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man: thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb. When thou hast overcome the sharpness of death: thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. Thou sittest at the right hand of God: in the Glory of the Father.

February 24th (S Matthias)

Hebrews 8 vv 1&2

I ran out of space yesterday. What I was intending to do was to make use of the symbolism of the way we do things at St Michael's and St John's. Our principal service is always Holy Communion and, at that service, I get to wear the robes and to preside at the table in the sanctuary, leading the sacrifice of praise, pronouncing the words of absolution and blessing. It is an incredible privilege, one for which no human being is fit. But Jesus is. He is the priest in the heavenly sanctuary. He offers the sacrifice of Himself. Through Him our prayers and praises are offered at the the Throne of Grace. He presides at the banquet. It His Body and Blood. He really pronounces the absolution and blessing. At our Eucharist on earth, we echo that heavenly reality. By His grace and His grace alone, the presiding minister (or priest in the Anglican sense) stands in for Christ in enacting the drama, but the reality the drama represents is the eternal reality of heaven. In that eternal, heavenly reality all baptised Christians (on earth and in heaven) participate in Christ. All Christians are kings and priests because all baptised people participate in His royalty and priesthood.

But the Church on earth does need ministers, set apart for God's service. As I've been indulging myself with the 1662 BCP this quarter, today is S Matthias Day (moved in CW to 14th May to avoid too many festivals in Lent). Matthias was chosen by God to replace Judas.

O Almighty God, who into the place of the traitor Judas didst choose thy faithful servant Matthias to be of the number of the twelve apostles; Grant that thy Church, being alway preserved from false Apostles, may be ordered and guided by faithful and true pastors; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

February 25th

Hebrews 8 vv 3-6

The OT high priests offered the sacrifices prescribed in the OT Law in the Temple in Jerusalem, for which Moses was shown the pattern when he spoke with God on Mt Sinai. All these things – priesthood, sacrifices and Temple – are types and shadows of Christ. He transcends and fulfils them all and therefore they are no longer necessary for us.

Therefore we, before him bending, this great Sacrament revere:

Types and shadows have their ending, for the newer rite is here;
Faith, our outward sense befriending, makes our inward vision clear.

February 26th

Hebrews 8 vv 7-13

There were two problems with the Old Testament (or covenant). One was that it only ever dealt with this life on earth, not with eternal reality. Of eternal reality what pertained to the Old Testament were but types and shadows. The other was that, while God always remains faithful, the Israelites did not. They were, like us, only human and they repeatedly broke the covenant. *I will be your God and you will be my people. You shall be holy because I am holy.* The Old Testament itself is only too aware of its own deficiencies and foretells that God will make a new covenant with His people. He will put His Spirit (the Lord and giver of life) in their hearts and they shall know God Whom to know is eternal life. This is the new covenant in Jesus Christ.

Who, in the same night he was betrayed, took Bread; and, when he had given thanks, he brake it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take, eat, this is my Body, which is given for you: Do this in remembrance of me. Likewise after supper he took the Cup; and, when he had given thanks, he gave it to them saying, 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: Do this as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me.

February 27th

Hebrews 9 vv 1-5

You can read about these types and shadows in Exodus and in I Kings. First of all, the Israelites made a tabernacle or tent for the sanctuary with the various altars, lights and artefacts that were required for the service. King Solomon replaced the tabernacle with the temple, which was built on the same pattern – the pattern which God showed Moses on Mt Sinai of the heavenly sanctuary. The holiest place was where the Ark of the Covenant was placed. There was some manna to remind the children of Israel how God had fed them in the wilderness. Aaron's rod that budded demonstrated that he was the legitimate high priest and that other claimants to that position were not. The mercy seat represents the Throne of God and the cherubim are His attendants. You can read more in Revelation 4. Outside the holy of holies was the sanctuary for daily worship. The shewbread was a daily offering of fresh bread to God. Beyond that was the space where the "ordinary" worshippers gathered while the priests ministered in the sanctuary.

Holy, Holy, holy! All the saints adore thee, casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea; Cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee, which wert and art and ever more shalt be.

February 28th

Hebrews 9 vv 6-8

Whom do we set out to please when we engage in worship? Do we worship to please ourselves or do we worship to please God? If we worship to please ourselves, our worship will be arid. It will fail to please and we shall cease to worship. If, however, we worship in order to please God, we shall receive joy in all its fulness and we shall allow nothing to stand between us and our obligation to God. So worship was offered daily in the sanctuary as worship is offered daily in the Church. But, in the OT, the perfection of worship, the fulness of God's Presence, atonement was withheld from sinful humanity. Even the type or shadow of atonement was available only once in the year when the high priest entered into the holy of holies by the blood sacrifice.

Holy, Holy, Holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
Though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see,
Only thou art holy, there is none beside thee
Perfect in power, in love and purity.

March 1st (Lent 2)

Hebrews 9 vv 9-14

If the offerings in the Jerusalem temple had been able to deal with sin, if they had been able to make God's people righteous, it would not have been necessary to offer them again and again, year after year. Only the sacrifice of Christ which He Himself offers can deal finally with sin and make us righteous in Him. Given that animal sacrifices were effective in their own terms for a time, the sacrifice of the Son of God is eternally and totally effective. We are washed clean in His Blood.

Humbled for a season, to receive a name
From the lips of sinners unto whom he came,
Faithfully he bore it spotless to the last,
Brought it back victorious when from death he passed.

Bore it up triumphant with its human light,
Through all ranks of creatures to the central height,
To the throne of Godhead, to the Father's breast;
Filled it with the glory of that perfect rest.

March 2nd

Hebrews 9 v15

He died that we might be forgiven,
He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to heaven,
Saved by his precious Blood.

There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin;
He only could unlock the gate~
Of heaven and let us in.

So the children's hymn puts simply and beautifully the essence of Christian faith.

March 3rd

Hebrews 9 vv 16&17

The moral teaching of most religions is not dissimilar. *Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you* is common to many religions and philosophical systems. It so obviously makes sense. So why don't people generally live by a rule which is so obviously sensible? The answer is original sin, that perverse twist in human nature which inevitably inclines us to act foolishly and wrongly rather than wisely and lovingly. We shall never make ourselves righteous. Righteousness is the gift of God and it is through faith in Him that we are made righteous. The way we behave reflects the kind of people we are and the kind of people we are depends on where, on Whom, we put our trust. So what do we know of God? We know Jesus and what we know of Jesus is that He expresses His Love by embracing death on our behalf. It is that knowledge of Jesus which makes us righteous.

Almighty God, who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves; Keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

March 4th

Hebrews 9 vv 18-22

The Blood of Jesus is the Blood of the New Covenant. You can read about the blood of the Old Covenant in Exodus 24. This was the blood of sacrificed animals. Blood stands for life, the most precious offering of all. *Greater love than this hath no man.* The blood of all those animal sacrifices in the OT is a type and shadow of the Blood of Jesus. The offering of His life once and for all at one time, in one place, Calvary, effects the eternal atonement. There is no more need for blood sacrifice, but, for all those of us who are redeemed by the Blood of Christ, there is the inexpressibly wonderful opportunity for us to offer our whole lives as a living sacrifice in service to Him Whose service is perfect freedom. All this is symbolised and effected in the Eucharist. Hence this prayer.

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

March 5th

Hebrews 9 vv 23-26

The Cross he bore is life and health,
Though shame and death to him;
His people's hope, his people's wealth,
Their everlasting theme.

March 6th

Hebrews 9 vv 27&28

As I write this, there is a number of vacancies for clergy in the Medway towns. Why is there this deplorable shortage of young men offering themselves for Christian ministry? Part of the answer is the deplorable indifference to the Christian faith which we find in general in England. Most people can't be bothered to go to Church. Most people can't be bothered to make a worthy offering of their time, talents and money to do God's work. And yet, on the one hand, we shall all die and face judgment, and, on the other hand, Christ died for our sins, the only hope for our salvation? So how come this indifference?

Wherefore with my utmost art I will sing thee,
And the cream of all my heart I will bring thee.
Though my sins against me cried, thou didst clear me,
And alone, when they replied, thou didst hear me.

Seven whole days, not one in seven, I will praise thee;
In my heart, though not in heaven, I can raise thee
Small it is, in this poor sort, to enrol thee:
E'en eternity's too short to extol thee.

March 7th

Hebrews 10 vv 1-10

As I have meditated on the various prayers and hymns to which I have turned for a devotional response to the truths contained within Hebrews, I have been tempted to grow nostalgic for an age of faith in which people believed the Bible and responded to its teaching in loving adoration of our heavenly Father. "It was all so much better in the past when there were more people in our pews, more clergy in our parishes and society as a whole showed much more respect for Christian teaching!" Yet, if you read your Bible carefully, it is evident that 'twas ever thus. Mankind's love for God has always been a poor, weak thing. The psalms and the prophets, hundreds of years before Christ, lament the faithlessness of the so-called people of God. Their sacrifices are worthless because they do not act in accordance with God's holy law. They are unjust in their dealings with one another. God doesn't need our sacrifices. He requires our obedience. Paradoxically, because Christ is obedient, He alone can be our sacrifice, and a perfect one at that. Spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults. Restore thou them that are penitent; According to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesu, our Lord.

March 8th (Lent 3)

Hebrews 10 vv 11-14

One of the most popular pictures of Jesus is the one which shows Him in a flowery meadow surrounded by children. That is a true picture of Jesus. So is this one, Jesus sitting at the right hand of God. His love for children in the Gospels is well known. *Suffer the little children to come unto me.* This picture is perhaps easier for us to grasp than the picture of His love in perfecting for ever them that are sanctified – i.e. us. Yet it is the same Jesus.

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

Weak is the effort of my heart, and cold my warmest thought;
But when I see thee as thou art, I'll praise thee as I ought.

March 9th

Hebrews 10 vv 15-18

So, it's all down to Jesus. He fulfils all God's promises. He deals with sin once and for all. He effects the atonement. We are His people in all eternity.

We beseech thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of thy humble servants, and stretch forth the right hand of thy Majesty, to be our defence against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

March 10th

Hebrews 10 vv 19-22

Soon after I arrived in this parish, as well as the daily Morning & Evening Prayer which rectors are obliged by canon law to say in the parish church, I also inaugurated a daily Eucharist, just as the early Christians broke bread together daily in their houses. This has become less possible lately, which I am sorry about, but it has caused me to place a greater emphasis on Mattins & Evensong and to think afresh about their riches. I was moved recently to preach a sermon on the long introduction: how we Christians are *dearly beloved brethren*; how we ought always to acknowledge our sins; the faithfulness of God, Who is both Almighty God, and our heavenly Father; the purpose of worship, to meet together, to give thanks, to praise, to pray; our utter dependence on Almighty God; the awesomeness of what we are doing when we come together for worship. Wherefore I pray and beseech you, as many as are here present, to accompany me with a pure heart, and humble voice, unto the throne of the heavenly grace.

March 11th

Hebrews 10 vv 23-25

It can be very precious to attend Church to make my Communion. It is unutterably good to know Jesus as my personal Saviour. That is all true, but it is also true that Christianity is a corporate thing. We are members one of another. We are responsible for supporting and encouraging one another in the faith. Meeting together for worship is part of that responsibility. The Hebrews were tempted to give up coming together for Christian fellowship because they were threatened with persecution. That wasn't a sufficient excuse, they were told. I wonder what they would make of modern English Christians and the petty reasons they give for *forsaking the assembling of yourselves together*.

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

March 12th

Hebrews 10 vv 26-31

What do we do about biblical passages which threaten judgment and punishment? Do we read them in church out loud, possibly putting off outsiders? Do we discount them on the basis that, if God is indeed love, He won't judge or punish anyone? It will all be all right, whatever? My first point, is that we have to speak the truth to the world. If there is a judgment, if there is punishment for evil, then we must warn people. We are responsible for what happens to them if we don't warn them. My second point is that if God is a God of love, He must be a God of Justice. Otherwise the wicked will just get away with their wickedness. He is love. As I often say, if we think of love as a coin, justice is one side of that coin; mercy is the other. You can't have mercy without justice or justice without mercy. So God does provide for the wicked (no matter how wicked) to be forgiven. If we really know ourselves, we know that by God's standards, none of us deserves to be in His Presence. We are sinners insofar as we are not perfect love. We all depend on God's mercy, because God's justice would exclude us eternally from His Presence. God has provided a way of forgiveness at great personal cost to Himself – Christ's Death on the Cross. In Christ everything is forgiven, but what about those who reject God's offer of forgiveness?

Lo, the Lamb, so long expected, comes with pardon down from heaven;
Let us haste, with tears of sorrow, one and all to be forgiven.

March 13th

Psalms 105

March 14th

Hebrews 10 vv 32-39

Again, I'm just starting again after lunch. My prayer in writing these notes is that I might be inspired in order to be inspiring. Is it hard to be inspired by these words written to people with a very different background from ours and facing very different challenges? Do their lives make sense to us? Do the answers they were given to their problems help us at all? Christians must have thought so over the last 2,000 years. Otherwise they wouldn't have been preserved in our Bibles. The readers of this letter had fairly recently been converted to Christianity. They started off full of enthusiasm. They were quite happy to put up with all kinds of sacrifices. They were expected to support the Christian ministry from their resources. They had to face ridicule from their former friends. It was all worth it for the joy of knowing Christ. But now the initial excitement has worn off. As in a marriage, their love is no longer new and all consuming. Being a Christian has become ordinary. Faced with persecution or even mere opposition, why not let it go? Why not drift away? Why not divorce? Well, just as in a marriage, life changes, but love is eternal. Now can't we relate to what these Hebrews were going through? Has our faith become so unexciting that, in the face of a little discouragement, we should give it up.

Who would true valour see, let him come hither;
One here will constant be, come wind, come weather;
There's no discouragement shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent to be a pilgrim.

March 15th (Lent 4 Mothering Sunday)

Hebrews 11 vv 1-3

I've heard two versions of the origin of Mothering Sunday. One is that it was the Sunday in the year when servants and apprentices boarding away from home for their work were allowed to go home to visit their mothers. The other is that it was the Sunday on which people returned to their mother Church in their home village and settled any dues etc.. Either way it would amount to the same thing – going back to your roots. Where do we come from? Science helps to explain how we came about, but why did we come about? What is our true origin? What is our end? What is the purpose of our lives? By faith, we know that the answer is God. For my reins are thine: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks unto thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well.

March 16th

Hebrews 11 vv 4-6

Transcendent and imminent. That's what we say about God. It is possible to be so awed with the thought of God: the Almighty Creator of everything that is; the awful Judge, Who will call Creation to account for all our deficiencies; the mighty Redeemer, Who will restore all things in Christ – the transcendent God – that we lose our sense of intimacy with the One Whom Jesus taught us to know as Father. [It is also possible to forget that our personal Saviour is also the Creator, Judge and Redeemer of the universe.] These verses speak of how God was intimately involved in the lives of Abel and Enoch, as He is intimately involved in our lives. We know Him in our daily lives through the gift of faith – a faith which both calls us to account for what we do with our lives and gives us hope that, through His grace, we may live out our lives in His Will for us.

Frail children of dust and feeble as frail,
In thee do we trust, not find thee to fail;
Thy mercies how tender, how firm to thee end,
Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend.

March 17th (S Patrick)

Hebrews 11 vv7-12

What so many of the characters in the Bible have in common is that they seemingly defied common sense. Why build an ark just because God told you to? Why would an old man leave the security of city life to go and dwell in a foreign land as a nomad just because God told him to? Why would a childless old man with an apparently barren wife put his faith in posterity? The answer is faith. *The just shall live by faith.* If God asks you to do something which requires you to give up the comfort and security of the world you inhabit, if you have faith, you will do it because you trust God for your life and for the lives of your loved ones. If, however, your confidence is really in the things of this life – job, house, shopping, money, physical well-being, etc. – and you see God as a sort of optional extra, you won't be prepared to give up those things and follow Christ. You may indeed gain the whole world, but the cost will be your own soul.

Not the labours of my hands, can fulfil thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone: Thou must save, and thou alone.

March 18th

Hebrews 11 vv 13-16

We've had this before in this epistle. Marvellous as are all these things that happened in the Old Testament, wonderful as are the lives of the great OT heroes, it was all provisional. It was all about salvation in this life on this earth as a foretaste of what God has prepared for those who love Him, eternal life in Jesus Christ. Wonderful as God's mercy was towards them in their lifetimes, we are infinitely more privileged than they were. They reached out towards what was then unattainable because Christ had not yet come. But we see Jesus. If we have so much more than they had, it follows that so much more is expected of us than could be expected of them.

Take up thy cross, the Saviour said, if thou wouldst my disciple be;
Deny thyself, the world forsake, and humbly follow after me.

March 19th (S Joseph)

Hebrews 11 vv 17-19

Let me recommend a book *I am Asher Lev* by Chaim Potok. In case you can't get it, I'll briefly outline the plot. A young Jewish boy in America has a tremendous artistic talent. This causes problems as strict Jews regard all representational art as potentially in breach of the second commandment. It becomes even more of a problem, however, when he feels the need to produce a picture which portrays the utmost sacrificial love. The only Jewish story which comes close is Abraham almost sacrificing his son Isaac. For Asher Lev, however, this does not go far enough. Only Christ crucified adequately expresses love.

Before the Saviour's face the ransomed nations bow,
O'erwhelmed at his almighty grace, for ever new;
He shows his prints of love; they kindle to a flame,
And sound throughout the world's above the slaughtered Lamb.

March 20th

Hebrews 11 vv 20-22

The strange thing about the Jacob and Joseph stories is that neither of them (at least at the beginning) is a very nice person. The point is that God loves them just as they are and that, through His grace, they respond in faith and therefore achieve great things in His service.

Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds to worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

March 21st

Psalm 51

March 22nd (Passion Sunday)

Hebrews 11 vv 23-29

And so we come to Moses, quite possibly the greatest of the OT heroes. His parents protected him from Pharaoh's tyrannical order to kill the boy babies. As a young man, Moses put solidarity with God's people before wealth and power. He bravely stood up for the oppressed children of God. He trusted God for the outcome of his confrontations with Pharaoh. He saved the Israelites from the Egyptians and brought them safely through the Red Sea. In fact, it was God Who did all those things and Moses (and his parents) worked with God because they had faith. Last Sunday, when I was lamenting the shortage of Christian clergy, itself a reflection on the lack of Christian commitment in this country, I had the answer right in front of me. I was just about to celebrate Holy Communion. God is no less faithful than He was in Moses' time. The promises which we reach out to take are infinitely greater than what was on offer to Moses. What is required of us is that we are found faithful. God working with and through faithful Christians is no less able to save His people than He was at the time of the Exodus. So we can trust God for the future of the Church of England, but can He trust us?

We beseech the, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon thy people; that by thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore; both in body and soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

March 23rd

Hebrews 11 vv 30&31

Rahab the harlot hid the Israelite spies whom Joshua sent to check out Jericho before the famous battle in which its walls came down. Harlots have traditionally been looked down upon – not least by religious people, yet Jesus said that they (along with the publicans) would enter the Kingdom of Heaven before those who regarded themselves as righteous. Is harlotry worse than the more respectable sins religious people get up to? Might the harlot have been driven to it by poverty? Has she been trafficked or enslaved? Is she bullied by a pimp? Aren't the men who use her services at least as bad as she is? Whatever, she was made in the image of God and Christ died for her. We might also be uncomfortable about victorious generals like Joshua who kill everyone they conquer (on God's orders). It will all depend on faith in God to redeem every situation.

O perfect redemption, the purchase of Blood! To every believer the promise of God; The vilest offender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

March 24th

Hebrews 11 vv 32-40

It is worth reading the whole of Hebrews 11 plus the first couple of verses of chapter 12 in one go. I know that it strains a congregation's capacity to concentrate and it may be at the limits of our attention spans. It is, however, worth it. The effect is cumulative. We are brought through all these wonderful people to a deeper understanding of what faith can mean and then we are reminded that what is on offer to us is what they only dreamed about.

Patriarch, and holy prophet, who prepared the way for Christ,
King, apostle, saint, confessor, martyr and evangelist,
Saintly maiden, godly matron, widows who have watched to prayer,
Joined in holy concert singing to the Lord of all, are there.

They have come from tribulation, and have washed their robes in Blood,
Washed them in the Blood of Jesus; tried they were and firm they stood:
Mocked, imprisoned, stoned, tormented, sawn asunder, slain with sword,
They have conquered death and Satan by the might of Christ the Lord.

March 25th (The Annunciation to Mary)

Hebrews 12 vv 1&2

We beseech thee, O Lord, pour thy grace into our hearts; that, as we have known the incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel, so by his cross and passion we may be brought unto the glory of his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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.

March 26th

Hebrews 12 vv 3-13

We've been encouraged to think about all the men and women of faith in the past, what they endured and what they accomplished. They were an example to us and they are our companions on the way within the communion of saints. Now we are exhorted to consider Jesus, the Example, the One in Whom we dwell and Who dwells in us. Even our sufferings are within the Providence of a loving God and work out to make us better people.

Marching with thy Cross their banner, they have triumphed following~
Thee, the captain of Salvation, thee their Saviour and their King:

Gladly, Lord, we thee they suffered; gladly, Lord, with thee they died,
And by death to life immortal they were born and glorified.

March 27th

Hebrews 12 vv 14&15

Now they reign in heavenly glory, now they walk in golden light,
Now they drink, as from a river, holy bliss and infinite;
Love and peace they taste for ever, and all truth and knowledge see
In the beatific vision of the blessed Trinity.

The saints in heaven. Heaven is our home. We are strangers and pilgrims on earth. We are citizens of heaven. Inspired by the example and fellowship of all God's saints, inspired by the Holy Spirit of Christ crucified, risen ascended, glorified, we are to act on earth by the laws of Heaven. This is what is meant by these two verses.

God of God, the One-begotten, Light of Light, Emmanuel,
In whose Body joined together all the saints for ever dwell;
Pour upon us of thy fulness that we may for ever more
God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost adore.

March 28th

Hebrews 12 vv 16-21

Another reminder of the dangers of giving up. You remember the story. Esau sold his birthright to his brother Jacob for a mess of pottage when he came home hungry from hunting. So easy to give in to what will make us comfortable rather than to do what is right. The Israelites experienced the theophany – the manifestation of God on Mt Sinai and still they made the golden calf. So easy to forget what we have experienced of God and to turn out faithless.

Thine for ever! Lord of life, shield us through our earthly strife;
Thou the Life, the Truth, the Way, guide us to the realms of day.

March 29th (Palm Sunday)

Hebrews 12 vv 22-29

The golden evening brightens in the west;
soon, soon to faithful warriors comes their rest:
Sweet is the calm of Paradise the blest Alleluia!

But lo, there breaks a yet more glorious day;
The saints triumphant rise in bright array;
The King of Glory passes on his way. Alleluia!

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
Singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost Alleluia!

March 30th

Hebrews 13 vv 1-8

The practical details of living as a church in this world while we await the final consummation in Christ: hospitality; solidarity with the persecuted and oppressed; sexual continence and marital fidelity; trust in God rather than possessions; upholding the Christian leadership; everything depending on Jesus Who is entirely dependable.

Yesterday, today for ever, Jesus is the same;
All may change, but Jesus never, Glory to His Name!
Glory to His Name! Glory to His Name!
All may change, but Jesus never, Glory to His Name!

March 31st

Hebrews 13 vv 9-25

A reluctant teenager was persuaded to go and see Hamlet. When he came out he agreed it was all right, "I suppose, but it's all made up of quotations." So much has Hamlet entered the language and much of this passage has entered the language of the Church. You may well find a lot of it sounds familiar, especially, if like me you read it in the AV. Because we have Jesus, He is all we need. What we have in Him is only available to those who have faith in Him, but He invites the whole of humanity to come to Him in faith. We don't belong on earth. We belong in Heaven but we can live the life of Heaven here on earth, perpetually praising God, enjoying Christian fellowship within God's Church, doing good in the world, living lives of prayer and service, blessed by the peace of God *that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, whom we pray, will make us perfect in every good work to do his will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be praise and glory for ever. Amen.*

We sing the praise of him who died, of him who died upon the Cross;
The sinner's hope, let men deride, for this we count the world but loss.

Inscribed upon the Cross we see in shining letters, *God is love*;
He bears our sins upon the Tree; He brings us mercy from above.

The Cross! It takes our guilt away; it holds the fainting spirit up;
It cheers with hope the gloomy day, and sweetens every bitter cup.

The balm of life, the cure of woe, the measure and the pledge of love,
The sinner's refuge here below, the angels' theme in heaven above.