

The Gospel According to St John

Bible Notes January -
March 2020

50p

January 1st (Circumcision and Naming of Christ)

John 1 v1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Who is Jesus? That's a big question and an important one. Who is Jesus and what difference does He make. If I'm right about Him, He makes all the difference to everything. So I hope you agree with me about Who Jesus is.

Jewish boys have to be circumcised when they are eight days old. When our Lord was circumcised, He was called Jesus, *which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.* Jesus means the LORD is salvation. He was also called Emmanuel, which means God with us. *At the Name of Jesus every knee shall bow.* This is the Name above all names. When we are christened, we receive our Christian name. We belong to Jesus and Jesus belongs to us. When we pray *hallowed be thy name*, one of the many meanings of those words is that the way we live honours Jesus, honours God, that we are worthy of the holy name we bear. We're asking God for similar radical commitment to Jesus and His ways in the words of today's collect.

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

John 1 v2

The same was in the beginning with God.

Jesus is the Word of God. Jesus is the Wisdom of God. Jesus is the very Being of God. *Such as the Father is, such is the Son: and such is the Holy Ghost.* Who Jesus is determines everything. *By the Word of the LORD were the heavens made. God said, Let there be light and there was light. The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens.*

It is this Jesus Whom we know as our friend and brother. It is this Jesus Who teaches us the ways of God. It is this Jesus Whom we read about in the Bible and in Whose Name we say our daily prayers.

January 3rd

John 1 v3

All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.
How can we imagine the scope of creation? We can look at the world around us and wonder. It is all the creation of God. We can think about all our fellow human beings. They are all the creation of God. We might study astronomy – the far reaches of the galaxies – or atomic physics – the scarcely conceivable nature of electrons and neutrons and protons and the other subatomic particles which scientists always seem to be postulating or discovering. There is the wonder of life, from microscopic micro-organisms to gigantic elephants, whales and redwood trees. It is all the creation of God. Pure mathematics exists in the mind of God. So do the truth and beauty in art and music, in architectural proportion. The skills human beings have as engineers, doctors, artists, teachers, mechanics, whatever skills we have, are the gift of God. Our abstract nouns – love, justice, mercy, truth, right, wrong – they all exist because of Who God is, Who Jesus is. Some scientists think that there may be other universes as wonderful as our own – possibly an infinite number of such alternative realities. And then there is the infinitely more wonderful realm of the spirit – angels and archangels and whatever other spirits there might be, dwelling in heaven, ministering here on earth, beings beyond our comprehension. All this is the work of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Wonder!

January 4th

John 1 v4

In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

Two reasons why we cannot do without the insight of Jesus. One is that, as we have seen in the first three verses, everything depends on God in Christ for its creation, for its continued existence, for its function and purpose. Another is that we human beings are made in the image of God. It is only as the children of God that we truly fulfil what it means to be fully human. In order that we might be at peace with ourselves, we have to be at peace with God and with one another. We are only at peace insofar as we are conformed to the likeness of Christ and His nature is love. He is what we are created to be, what we ought to be, *the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.* He is what we should be – perfect love – which can only be in communion with Him.

January 5th (Christmas 2)

John 1 v5

And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. *Comprehend* in this context means both understand and overcome. I love reading these verses as the Christmas Gospel each year. Some priests actually recite them after every Communion service. These are amazing truths. Perhaps it would be better to say that this is the amazing Truth. God's love for us is such that, although He is the One Who creates and sustains everything that is, He becomes part of His creation. Suppose you made and furnished a dolls' house and peopled it with dolls and yet remained yourself, fully human. Suppose you then became a doll and entered the house. Suppose you made a hive and populated it with bees and then you became a bee and experienced everything it means to be a bee and yet remained yourself, fully human. No wonder the world doesn't comprehend in the sense of understanding the mystery. But neither does it understand what this incarnation means, why He has done this and what difference it makes that He has. I guess the bees would sting to death another bee they believed to be an intruder, especially if that bee were a better bee than all the other bees. And that is just what happens to Jesus. The world seeks to overcome its incarnate Creator. The darkness seeks to swallow up the Light in deeper darkness, but it cannot. This world is a very dark place, but it cannot destroy the Light. The world will be illuminated whether it likes it or not!

January 6th (Epiphany)

John 1 v6

There was a man sent from God whose name was John.

Epiphany means manifestation or revelation. Jesus is the manifestation of God, God's revelation of Himself. Through Jesus, we may know God, Whom to know is to have eternal life, to be taken up into the fellowship of the Trinity, to be made like Him as we behold Him face to face and see Him as He is. We who, like John, experience this revelation are bound to share our knowledge of Christ with the world. **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

John 1 v7

The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

John preached the coming Kingdom of God to multitudes on the banks of the River Jordan. *Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.* Those who believed and repented their sins came to the Light. They were baptised. They became one with Christ and He with them. With Him, they received the Holy Spirit of God. John's Baptism is completed by the manifestation of the Holy Spirit when people are baptised in the Name of Jesus (See Acts 19 vv 1-7, which does raise the question of people who were baptised by John or his followers but did not transition to Christ. I'm afraid I don't know the answer!) What I do know, however, is that all Christian people are called to proclaim the Gospel. How do we do so? Teaching our children, conversations with friends and strangers, setting a good example, praying for people that they may come to faith. S Peter says, *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*

John 1 v8

He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

It does appear that there were people who had accepted John's message, been baptised by him and then failed to transition to Jesus. In fact, they had not really accepted John's message. They were right to believe that God's Kingdom is imminent. They were right to repent of their sins. But John pointed not to himself, but to Jesus. People who really understood and accepted John's message, turned to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Yesterday, we considered how all Christian people share John's mission to proclaim the coming of God's Kingdom. But there is always the danger that people will be drawn to particular Christians who have shown them love or particular preachers who have expounded the faith in ways that made sense to them rather than to Jesus Himself. Jesus commended John and He commends all those who preach the Gospel and lovingly care for others, but what is needed is that people cleave to Christ not to this or that vicar or Sunday School teacher or parent or friend. We all relate to God directly in Christ, not through intermediaries however holy they may be. Neither must we be too taken with great Christians. It is God we worship and Him alone.

January 8th

John 1 v9

That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. One of the things I was concerned about in writing yesterday's meditation was that Christians may become too attached to particular pastors, fellowships or local churches. Our ultimate loyalty is to God and Christians do not cease to worship because they move away from the place where they felt at home in the local church or because the vicar they loved is replaced by someone they don't like much or because some prominent Christian they had idolised turns out to have feet of clay. Idolatry is, in any case, a sin!

Jesus is the Light. He alone is the source of the light which shines in all Christian people. His light is for everyone who comes into the world, but, tragically, the majority prefer the darkness. *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

January 9th

John 1 v10

He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and world knew him not.

That takes some pondering. According to Isaiah 1³, *The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider.* It is astonishing really that the human race disregards and rejects the God Who made us and everything that is. St Paul puts it like this: *Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.* I resisted getting glasses for as long as I could, but one day I failed to recognise my mother across the road – much to her annoyance. Then I really knew that I was short-sighted and needed help to see. Isaiah & Paul were both tasked with making men and women see – to see their need for God, to see how the way they lived their lives was in fact a denial of God. For all of us Christians, we need to pray for grace to see the ways in which the lives we lead may be a denial of the holy Name we bear and for grace also to enable us in our generation to demonstrate to the world why and how it must return to God.

January 10th

John 1 v11

He came unto his own and his own received him not.

Whom does John mean by Jesus' own? It is true that there were times when even His own earthly family & friends did not recognise Him (Luke 2⁴⁹, John 7⁵) or understand His mission (Mark 3²¹). The people of Nazareth were ready to throw Him over a cliff (Luke 4²⁹). Often the apostles entirely misunderstood what Jesus was about. At the end, Peter denied Him, Judas betrayed Him and the others all ran away.

Maybe John means the Jews when he speaks of His own. The Jews were His own people, the chosen people, the people *who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises*; (as St Paul says). Surely, the Jews might have been expected to recognise their own Messiah!

And that thought can lead to anti-Semitism, to the thought that because the Jews rejected Jesus, God has rejected the Jews and we Gentile Christians are now the chosen people. A better way to look at it is to say that the world rejected Jesus, humanity rejected Jesus, the Jews rejected Jesus because of their humanity. The Gentiles too rejected Jesus. It is original sin that all of us reject God.

The world is His own and the world received Him not.

January 11th

John 1 v12

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.

While the generality of the human race rejects God in Christ, there are many millions who have received the Gospel into their hearts. We have received Him. We do believe in His Name and we are the children of God.

I am not sure that we are sufficiently conscious of what a privilege that is. We are the children of God. With Jesus, we address God, *Our Father*. We are like Jesus in that respect. Our Christian calling then is to act as Jesus acted. *Take up your cross and follow me.*

January 12th (Epiphany 1)

John 1 v13

Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

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.*

Today's verse is usually taken to mean that our being born again as Christians is wholly of the Spirit, wholly of God, whereas the natural birth of our physical bodies is a messy business brought about by worldly desire or even lust. I should be cautious in making that distinction. God is Lord of the physical realm as well as of the spiritual, of the body as well as the soul. Unbelievers, unbaptised people are His children as well. It is by His Will that they came into the world albeit by the perfectly natural processes He instituted when He told His Creation to go forth and multiply. Everything, everyone is of God and should be revered as such by us the people of God. So children conceived irresponsibly by adults unfit to be parents are still the children of God and have the right to be treated as such. And so have those teenagers and adults who have been degraded by abuse, ill treatment, harsh poverty, addictions or whatever. We are all the children of God. *God so loved the world* (not just the Church), all people not just Christians, all people not just good people.

However, just as the creation of every human being is the act of God's grace, so it is a further act of God's grace that we come to know Him in Jesus Christ as our heavenly Father. This weeks collect takes it for granted that we can only perceive what is right, that we can only act in His service, by God's grace, and so we pray for that grace.

Children of God by virtue of being human or children of God by virtue of being Christian? I should say that all human beings are children of God (Luke 3³⁸), but that, like the Prodigal Son, we have selfishly left home and wasted our inheritance. God the Father brings us home and adopts us once again into His family such that we are co-heirs with Christ of the Kingdom of God.

January 13th

John 1 v14

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

This verse is the very essence of Christian faith. There are many religions in the world with their own ideas about God. Some, like Islam and Judaism, emphasise the otherness of God. The Creator is absolutely distinct from the creation. Some religions envisage God permeating creation. Many religions, like Greek & Roman religion, imagine God or the gods entering creation disguised as men or animals or trees or rocks. Religious, political and philosophical movements may revere great men or women. Some philosophies come close to worshipping abstract perfections such as beauty, justice, truth and goodness. Only Christianity recognises that there is one God infinitely greater than anything we can imagine Who actually becomes one of us. He isn't aloof from our world. He isn't an aspect of our world. He doesn't come into our world in disguise. He is personal, not merely ideal. Christ is fully human and yet He is fully divine too.

For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess : that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds : and Man of the substance of his Mother, born in the world; Perfect God and perfect Man : of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead : and inferior to the Father, as touching his manhood; Who, although he be God and Man : yet he is not two, but one Christ; One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh : but by taking of the Manhood into God; One altogether; not by confusion of Substance : but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man : so God and Man is one Christ;

No, I don't understand it either. I expect we shall do so only when we get to heaven. But it is the truth. The almighty Creator of all that is is also one of us and that is what the Christian faith is all about.

January 14th

John 1 v15

John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.

John preached first to prepare the way for Jesus. Jesus was six months younger than John. So John came first and, like all faithful preachers, directed his hearers not to himself but to Jesus. Jesus is before John because He is the Son of God in all eternity. John must have been born around 4BC as was Jesus, but Jesus exists in all eternity. This is Who Jesus is and why it makes all the difference to everything when we believe in Him.

January 15th

John 1 v16

And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.

In the New Testament, there is John's Gospel. There are also three letters of John and there is the Revelation of St John the Divine. Traditionally, these have all been attributed to John the apostle, brother of James, partner of Simon Peter and Andrew. John was not an uncommon name, however, and they might not all be by the same John – especially the Revelation which is in a rather different style. Many scholars doubt that the gospel and the three letters were by the apostle and some also doubt that they were all from the same person. The tone of John's Gospel is very different from Matthew, Mark & Luke. However, there is a unity between the epistles and the gospel and even the Revelation, which leads even those who don't believe that they were written by the same man, to think that they belonged to the same school of thought. All this is leading into my saying that there is a powerful sense in John of the writer's own personal experience of what it means to know Jesus. In this verse, you can almost feel the warmth that John felt from knowing Jesus. That is my experience of Christ (sometimes) and I hope it is yours.

January 16th

John 1 v17

For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ, God's Law is a great gift to His people. The world would be a much happier place if everybody kept the Ten Commandments. But the Law cannot save us from ourselves. Only God can do that.

January 17th

John 1 v18

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

Why can't we see God? For one thing, He is infinitely greater than our capacity to see. For another thing, His holiness is such that we should be consumed by the fire of His love if, as sinful creatures, we came into His Presence. And yet, to know God is eternal life. We are not truly alive unless we know God. So how can we receive life? Jesus says, I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. Jesus makes God known to us on earth – in what He says and does, in Who He is. Christian people, baptised into His Body the Church, ought likewise to make God known in what we say and do, in who we are. Then, when our time on earth is over and we are perfected in Christ we shall see Him face to face and live eternally in His Presence for we shall have been made like Him.

January 18th (Week of Prayer for Christian Unity)

John 1 v19

And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?

Good question that. *Who art thou?* The priests and Levites ran the Jerusalem Temple. They were important men. Their strategy was to co-exist with the Romans. By and large, they accepted the reality of Roman power and tried to preserve the independence of the Jews to practise their religion by not rocking the boat. So, who was John, this man who was attracting thousands to hear him proclaim that the Kingdom of God was at hand? That would certainly rock the boat! He might (for all the priests knew) be one of a number of rabble rousers who stirred up armed (and fatally hopeless) rebellion against Rome. Or could he really be a genuine prophet, announcing that God was about to act in a miraculous way? So, who was John? Who are we? John's mission was to prepare the way for Jesus. Surely, that is our mission too. This is the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity which is inspired by our Lord's own prayer in John 17²¹: That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. They'll know we are Christians by our love. That means for one another in our own Church and between the Churches, because all Christian Churches are essentially one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church – the Bride & Body of Christ.

January 19th (Epiphany 2)

John 1 v20

And he confessed, and denied not: but confessed, I am not the Christ.
When Pope John Paul II came to England, he quite rightly made a point of baptising, performing other sacramental rites and preaching the Gospel. He was just a priest, just a Christian and shared with millions of other Christians the responsibility for carrying out Christ's work on earth. But I, for one, was always a little bit afraid that people might somehow think it was more special to be baptised by the pope than to be baptised by just any ordinary minister or that Holy Communion celebrated by the pope was more special than any other celebration of Holy Communion or that the Gospel was preached with greater authority by John Paul II than by other living Christians. As I am sure that the pope himself would have confessed and denied not, none of those things would be true. It is God Who makes us one with Him in Baptism. It is God Who feeds us with Himself in Holy Communion. The Gospel is the Word of God, whoever is tasked with proclaiming it.

It is not only Roman Catholics, of course, who are at risk of treating ministers of religion as celebrities. I remember being at Spring Harvest with thousands of evangelicals who got quite carried away by the fact that Graham Kendrick (the hymn writer) was coming in person. We may similarly lionise or even idolise our own bishops or vicars. In Corinth, in St Paul's day, there were even rival factions claiming to be loyal to different ministers – as in churches today there may sometimes be factions favouring the vicar or the curate over the other or whose loyalty to previous pastors might blind them to the qualities of the minister God has given them now. This is what Paul says about that! I Corinthians 3²¹⁻²³ Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

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 20th

John 1 v21

And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered no.

When Jewish people keep the Passover, they reserve a seat and portions of food and wine for the prophet Elijah. At the end of the celebration, there is a ritual looking to see if he has come. The tradition is that God would send the prophet Elijah to prepare for the coming of His Kingdom. In a way, as we see elsewhere in the Gospel, John fulfils this role. He prepares the way for Jesus. But the end is not yet.

Before he died, Moses told the Israelites that God would raise up a prophet like him to teach them the ways of the LORD. This means both that God would send a succession of authentic prophets (who are to be recognised by their fidelity to what we have already received of God and the fact that their words prove true) down through the ages and that there would be one special prophet who would proclaim the Word in all its fulness. That Prophet Who is also the Word of God is Jesus.

January 21st

John 1 v 22

Then said they unto him, Who art thou? That we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?

So, what have you got to say for yourself. A text I like to preach on is I Peter 3¹⁵. *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.* Do people wonder why you are a Christian? Do they even notice? If they ask you, what do you tell them? I'd say that the world is so wonderful that it must be God's creation, that in prayer and worship I experience what makes life worth living and find the resources to face whatever I have to face, that my faith teaches me how I ought to live and provides the means for which I can be forgiven for my failures, and that the hope of the resurrection takes away the fear of death. You may want to put it differently. What does knowing Jesus mean to you and how can you explain that to other people? You might think it is easier for me to say because I have the training, but that also cuts the other way. People sometimes think that I have to say these things and would have to even if I didn't believe them because of my job. You don't have that to overcome.

January 22nd

John 1 v23

He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.

When I went to Newington, Ramsgate, as minister, they did not normally read the Old Testament lesson at Holy Communion. Neither do they in many other churches. Some of it is quite hard to understand. There are some hard words to pronounce. People don't want the service to go on too long. But, soon after I arrived, was the 24th June – the Nativity (birthday) of S John the Baptist – and the OT lesson appointed was Isaiah 40. If you read it, you will see why I just could not leave it out on S John the Baptist's Day. From then on, we had there, as we have here, lessons from both the OT & the NT at nearly all our services. What is true of June 24th is true of every day of the year. You can only understand the NT in the context of the OT. The OT is the Law and the Prophets which Jesus fulfils. The OT bears witness to Jesus. The OT was the bible for Jesus and the apostles. Christians and whole churches who give up reading, preaching and teaching the OT very often cut back on the NT too and then they have lost that very precious resource which Scripture is by which we may know God better and so become more like Jesus and receive His gift of eternal life.

II Timothy 3¹⁶: *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:*

January 23rd

John 1 v24

And they that were sent were of the Pharisees.

If we had lived in Judaea in those days, we might well have admired the Pharisees. They took their religion very seriously. They observed even the most minor points of the Law. They studied the Scriptures assiduously. They prayed publicly. They enjoyed the respect of ordinary people. Yet, in the NT, they get a very bad press. They are condemned by Jesus as self-righteous, hypocrites, casuists, who get round the plain sense of the law by elaborate legal arguments, too full of themselves, too prone to look down on people they regard as beneath them, obsessed with petty rules, but indifferent to the things that really matter like justice & mercy. Paul, who was himself a Pharisee, proclaims that a pharisaic approach to the Law actually misses the whole point of faith. But we are not supposed to read these condemnations and to feel superior to the Pharisees. Rather we are to examine ourselves as religious people lest we fall into the same errors.

January 24th

John 1 v 25

And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?

Why do we do the things we do? Why do we baptize? Why do we meet for worship? Why do we celebrate Holy Communion? Why do we preach the Gospel? Why do we give thanks? Why do we pray? Why do we confess our sins? The answer is because we are the people of God and we are called by God to do these things. They are not optional. It is what it means to be members of God's church, to be Christians.

January 25th (Conversion of S Paul)

John 1 v26

John answered them, saying, I baptize with water, but there standeth one among you whom ye know not.

In II Corinthians 5¹⁶, S Paul says, *Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.* What he means is this. In the past, before his conversion, Paul knew about Jesus. He never met Him but he'd heard a lot about Him. He knew that thousands of people followed Jesus. He had probably heard reports of miracles performed by Jesus and His followers. He surely knew that Jesus preached a radically different Gospel from what the Pharisees and Sadducees believed and preached. He must have known about the crucifixion and he had probably heard stories about the resurrection. He had probably also heard things about Jesus and His followers which were not correct. So Paul had a lot of information about Jesus. He had formed strong opinions about Jesus and the Church. But he did not know Jesus. He had not experienced Jesus. And then he did. Paul was converted. He came to know Jesus and the experience of knowing Jesus transformed Paul's life and changed the way he saw the world & appreciated other people. Many people in the world today think they know a lot about Jesus and have strong opinions about Him and the Church, but they don't yet know Jesus. If they came to know Him, their lives would be transformed like Paul's!

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 holy doctrine which he taught; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

*He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, who's shoe's
latchet I am not unworthy to unloose.*

What do you think of the following prayer – in this or its more modern form?

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

It was written by Thomas Cranmer himself – Henry VIII's Archbishop of Canterbury who really deserves the credit for the services of the Church of England in our own language which reflect both our reformed and our catholic nature. Some people bridle at saying *We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table*. For others, it is an important part of the service and there have been complaints that we so often leave it out (for reasons of time on Sunday mornings here). The people who put together our services are not entirely sure what to do with it. The ASB 1980 put it before the Peace, which seemed a bit odd straight after the Confession. The Common Worship we use now puts it immediately before receiving Communion, perhaps a personal devotion rather than a congregational prayer. They don't like to leave the prayer out but they don't know where it fits appropriately. In the 1662 service, it comes directly after the Sanctus.

To me, that is where it belongs. **IT** is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times, and in all places, give thanks unto thee, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty, Everlasting God.

THEREFORE with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious Name; evermore praising thee, and saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory: Glory be to thee, O Lord most High. *Amen.*

I believe that the Prayer of Humble Access does express something of what we ought to feel before God. We are not worthy to be in His Presence, to speak to Him, even. It is in His mercy, on which we can always rely, that He comes to us, nourishes us, empowers us & dwells within us.

January 27th

John 1 v28

These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptising.

And that verse roots it. We've been thinking about eternity. We've been filled with awe as we contemplate the infinity of God and the wonder of His being made flesh in Jesus Christ. We've talked about heaven and earth and the passage from one to the other. And it is rooted at a particular time in a particular place, just as it is rooted in Cuxton and Halling, in your heart and mine, today.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, mercifully look upon 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 28th

John 1 v29

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

What is wrong with the world is that it is alienated from God. How did the world come to be alienated from God? The world alienated itself from God through sin. We rejected God from the beginning. We rejected God in Jesus Christ. God prepared Himself a sacrifice for the sin of the world. It is His love reaching out to us. Sin is overcome by the gentle Lamb, yielding His own life for our transgressions. We often use John's words at Holy Communion when we remember the sacrifice the Lamb of God made of Himself on the Cross.

January 29th

John 1 v30

This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.

John was a very wonderful man. God entrusted him with the prophetic task of proclaiming the Kingdom of God and preparing the way for Jesus. He had few possessions and little comfort. He preached to vast crowds and took on suspicious and hostile religious authorities. He bravely condemned sin at every level of society, right up to the king in his palace. John died a martyr's death. Jesus said of John: *Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.* (Matthew 11¹¹). Yet Jesus is infinitely greater because He is before Him. *In the beginning was the Word.* Jesus is eternal.

January 30th

John 1 v31

*And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel,
therefore am I come baptizing with water.*

We walk by faith, not by sight, as S Paul says. Despite the fact that their mothers were cousins, John does not seem to have grasped everything about Jesus straightaway. He must have had a tremendous conviction that it was his task to preach on the banks of the Jordan, but God had not revealed His full plan to John. John walked by faith, not by sight. His task was to remain faithful and, in due course, he accomplished the task God had given him. He baptised Jesus and he made Him known to the world. God doesn't reveal His whole plan to any of us. We seek His grace to do our best to play our part in it, but we don't necessarily see how our part fits into the whole, how things will turn out. Our task is to remain faithful, to walk by faith.

Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom, Lead thou me on; The night is dark, and I am far from home; Lead thou me on; Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see The distant scene: one step enough for me.	nor prayed that thou Shouldst lead me on; I loved to choose, and see my path; but now Lead thou me on. I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears, Pride ruled my will: remember not past years. So long thy power hath blest me, sure it	still Will lead me on, O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till The night is gone, And with the morn those angel faces smile, Which I have loved long since, and lost a while.
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January 31st

John 1 v32

*And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven
like a dove, and it abode upon him.*

The Father, the Son & the Holy Spirit are one, indivisible in creation, redemption and sanctification. Those who come to Him in faith, who repent and are baptised are taken up into this unity. We dwell in Him and He in us. The Spirit abides on us and in us. We are the Body of Christ. God is our Father. We are His children. All this might seem scarcely believable, but it is all there. It is there in the Bible. It is there in the words of our services. It is in our hymns and prayers. I often think that we don't think enough about what we are reading, thinking & saying!

February 1st

John 1 v33

And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.

John remained faithful. He trusted God. God was faithful to John (as He is always faithful to all who call on His Name). John accomplished what God had called him to do. John saw more clearly where all this was leading. But it's not just John. This isn't a history lesson. We are called to be disciples of Jesus, children of God. What does God want us to do with our lives? Even if you are housebound you can pray. Even if you are confined to bed you can show kindness and love to your carers. There is nobody who is useless. We all have a calling. We all have a part in God's plan. Our lives impinge on the lives of others, even if we are helpless. Our lives affect the world in which we live. That being so, everybody deserves our respect, even those who may seem quite detached from this world through dementia or mental illness or disability or addiction.

February 2nd (Candlemas)

John 1 v34

And I saw and bear record that this is the Son of God.

John's testimony when Jesus was baptized aged 30. On this 40th day of Christmas, we remember Mary & Joseph taking the infant Christ to the Temple in Jerusalem for Mary's purification and to offer the sacrifice required at the birth of a first born son. Two old people in the Temple – Simeon & Hannah – recognise Jesus and acclaim Him. They speak to the crowds of this wonderful child, predicted something of what He would accomplish and warned Mary of the pain which she must expect. Today's collect starts with this presentation of Christ. He is one of us. He is a human baby. He is presented to God as the children of religious people are presented to God. When He is crucified, He enters the heavenly Temple. He is the great High Priest Who offers Himself as *a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world*. Thus in Him, we are presented eternally to God in the heavenly Temple.

A LMIGHTY 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

John 1 vv 35-39

It appears that some of the thousands who came out to hear John and were baptized by him stayed with him and effectively became his disciples. They were his pupils. They learned from him and probably assisted him. Some of them became disciples of Jesus, which is what John intended. John always pointed to Jesus rather than to himself and that is what all Christians – including ministers of religion – ought to do.

February 4th

John 1 vv 40-42

We're not even told the name of one of these two who followed Jesus. One of them, however, was Andrew. They had both been smart enough to follow Jesus and to accept His invitation. Andrew was so excited that he wanted to share the good news with his brother, which he did. There's a lesson there for us about sharing what God has made known to us. Jesus knew Simon's potential and called him Cephas. Cephas is Aramaic and Peter is Greek for rock. Jesus does know all about us. He knows our potential. He knows how we can serve Him, what plans He has for us. Peter will get a lot wrong. He will even deny Christ. But He will also be a key figure in preaching the Gospel to the ends of the earth and building Christ's Church. So we might be Peters. We might also be Andrews, quieter, less well known, more behind the scenes. But without Andrew, Peter might never have come to know Christ!

February 5th

John 1 vv 43-46

Something similar happens the next day, but it is Jesus Who takes the initiative in calling Philip Himself. Jesus does speak directly in people's hearts. When Philip finds Nathaniel he tells him that Jesus is the One Who fulfils the Law and the Prophets. He is the fulfilment of the Old Testament, one of the ways we understand Him. Nathaniel probably knew the OT well and may have been expecting the Messiah. If we are witnessing to people who don't know the bible, we might have to start with a different approach, but we shouldn't make evangelism unnecessarily difficult by failing to teach children & adults the bible. Nathaniel is prejudiced against Jesus. He's sure nothing good comes from Nazareth. Many people are prejudiced against Jesus because they have the wrong idea about Him, sometimes wrong ideas the Church has given them. He does, however, have the good sense to go and see for himself. Perhaps we can persuade people to do that much. *O taste, and see, how gracious the Lord is : blessed is the man that trusteth in him.* (Psalm 34⁸).

Jesus knows Nathaniel through and through. He knows all of us through and through. He knows what we need. We knows what we are capable of. He knows what is wrong with us. He knows who and what we are. And He loves us just as we are. When Nathaniel realises at least a little of this wondrous truth, he exclaims that Jesus is the Son of God, the King of Israel – which is quite true, but it means a lot more than Nathaniel realised at the time. Kings of Israel were called sons of God metaphorically in the OT. Jesus is really the Son of God in the most literal manner. He is not merely the Messiah of Israel. As well *as the glory of thy people Israel*, he is *a light to lighten the gentiles*.

(Gentiles = nations, all the nations, us even!). Jacob, hundreds of years before, had a vision of a ladder connecting heaven and earth, a ladder on which angels ascended and descended. God promised Jacob that his seed would inherit the Promised Land. Jacob promised God a tithe, a tenth of all the blessings God would give Him. Jesus is the eternal ladder linking heaven and earth, God and the world. He promises His disciples that we shall inherit all things but asks of us nothing less than everything we own, everything we are.

Take my life, and let it
be
Consecrated, Lord, to
Thee;
Take my moments and
my days,
Let them flow in
ceaseless praise,
Let them flow in
ceaseless praise.

Take my voice, and let
me sing
Always, only, for my
King;
Take my lips, and let
them be
Filled with messages
from Thee,
Filled with messages
from Thee.

Take my will, and
make it Thine;
It shall be no longer
mine.
Take my heart; it is
Thine own;
It shall be Thy royal
throne,
It shall be Thy royal
throne.

Take my hands, and
let them move
At the impulse of Thy
love;
Take my feet and let
them be
Swift and beautiful for
Thee,
Swift and beautiful for
Thee.

Take my silver and my
gold;
Not a mite would I
withhold;
Take my intellect, and
use
Every power as Thou
shalt choose,
Every power as Thou
shalt choose.

Take my love; my
Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its
treasure-store.
Take myself, and I
will be
Ever, only, all for
Thee,
Ever, only, all for
Thee.

February 7th

John 2 vv 1&2

A recent study indicated that a very large proportion of the population are not really party people. They are shy and do not feel at ease in social situations. They would rather stay in than go out for the evening and dread the sort of invitations which they cannot refuse. What is more, they often imagine that everyone else is relaxed and having a good time, not realising that many of the other guests are also feeling uncomfortable, not knowing what to say to people, but not liking to be left out either and wondering how long before they can decently leave. I have the impression that Jesus was a party person. He enjoyed social interactions. Maybe that was because He was a naturally loving person. Maybe He didn't lack self-confidence, feeling judged, as many of us do, by other people in the room. I'm not sure what to deduce from this. When Bishop Simon was archdeacon, he talked about extraverts and introverts, how we are all different. God has made us the people we are. We need to respect one another as the people we are, but we also need to accommodate the needs of others. We shy people do need to overcome our shyness sufficiently to join in other people's celebrations where it really matters to them that we are there. Party animals need to accept that other people might not enjoy lively social events and hate to be dragged out into the limelight.

February 8th

John 2 vv 3&4

When Jesus fasted forty days in the wilderness, the devil tempted Him to turn stones into bread and He refused. *Man doth not live by bread alone*, He said, *but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God*. Miracles are not magic tricks by which we can exert control over the world and make the world fit in with our convenience. Miracles are signs of the Kingdom of God. Prayer is *Thy will be done*. There can be nothing better than for God's Will to prevail. If you're hosting a party and the wine runs out, you can't really expect God to turn water into wine to save you an embarrassing whip round and dash to the off licence before it closes. Yet I do pray in the little things as well as the big. I do ask God to help me with whatever problems I might have small or great. Unless what I think I might want is clearly contrary to God's Will, I'll always ask His help, though I don't feel justified in expecting miracles to order. Nevertheless, Jesus does perform the water into wine miracle & it is a sign of the Kingdom.

February 9th (Septuagesima)

John 2 v5

His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.

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.*

Today's collect is another prayer some people have difficulty with.

They don't like the idea that we might be *justly punished for our offences*. Though don't really think of themselves as offenders and, even if they were, they don't really believe that God judges us.

Mary told the servants to do what Jesus told them. Jesus is the Word of God. He is the power and wisdom of God. If we love Him, we keep His commandments. To disobey Jesus is to act wickedly or foolishly or both wickedly and foolishly. Actions have consequences. So does inaction. God is just. There is judgment. If we are honest, we all fall short of His commandment that we should love one another. At Septuagesima, we start thinking about Holy Week and Easter and Lent which prepares us for the Paschal celebration. It is a time especially to examine ourselves, to acknowledge our sins and to pray for God's mercy that *we may be mercifully delivered by thy goodness, for the glory of thy Name.*

February 10th

John 2 vv 6-8

I wonder how the servants felt about being told to offer water to the governor of the feast when he wanted wine? A bit apprehensive I should think. Following Jesus in faith requires us to be bold, sometimes to do things which non-believers might think were not sensible.

February 11th

John 2 v 9&10

You can see why a host might offer people the good wine first and then the less good when they'd had enough drink not to notice, but why is it so significant here that the good wine is served last? I think the reason is that the Law & the Prophets were like the ordinary wine – good in itself but not the fulness of goodness. Then Jesus comes, the perfection of what has gone before.

February 12th

John 2 v11

This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.

The word translated here as *miracle* would be better translated as *sign*. Miracles are signs of who Jesus is and what God is doing through Him. Earlier in this story, He had told Mary, *Mine hour is not yet come*. He means the hour of His Crucifixion, the greatest sign of all. These other miracles are foretastes of what He achieves on the Cross by the pure outpouring of His love. Subsequent miracles in the NT and down through the ages to the present time bear witness to Christ crucified as they derive their power from His self-sacrificial love.

February 13th

John 2 v12

After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples and they continued there not many days.

I don't know about you, but I often find it hard to relax. There is always something that wants doing and, even if there isn't, I tend to find something rather than sit and do nothing. Then I get stressed when I feel that I am committed to doing jobs that will take 65 minutes within an hour. That is not good for the individual in question. Neither is it good for his family and friends. Time for one another, time with one another is important. There always will be jobs that need doing. Literally, there is no end to it. But we'll be better people if we have the good sense to take time to rest, to be with friends and family. And we'll be better at the jobs we have to do when we go back to them refreshed.

February 14th (S Valentine)

John 2 v13

And the Jew's Passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

When you read the creation story in Genesis 1, it is perhaps surprising that light is created on the first day, but the sun, moon and stars do not appear until the fourth day. All the light we know of comes from the sun and other stars. (Artificial light uses the sunlight stored in oil or coal, atomic particles or whatever.) Genesis 1 is not primarily a scientific or historical account of Creation. It is about the way we know God and how we may have life in all its fulness. The sun, moon & stars mark day & night; they mark the seasons, the rhythm of life. Passover, S Valentine, sabbath, Christmas, Easter. *To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.* (Ecclesiastes 3¹).

February 15th

John 2 vv 14-17

There has been a certain amount of controversy this last Summer about unusual attractions in cathedrals. Rochester had crazy golf. Norwich had a helter skelter. Some people felt that Jesus would not approve. Sacred space was being used for purposes which, while not in themselves sinful, would seem to have been more appropriate elsewhere. Cathedrals are havens of peace in city centres, places where people can go to be quiet, to feel safe, and to pray. On the other hand, these attractions brought into cathedrals people who probably would not otherwise have come. Some of these people were then interested to look at what else the cathedral had to offer, an opportunity to discover what the Christian faith is all about. Despite the crazy golf in the nave, there were still spaces set aside where people could pray quietly or just sit and contemplate. To be honest, I have not yet entirely made up my mind what I think. If we lose our sense of awe in the Presence of God, our fear even, we lose what the Bible calls *the beginning of wisdom*. If on the other hand, Jesus warns us that it is possible to *make the word of God of none effect through [y]our tradition*.

February 16th (Sexagesima)

John 2 vv 18-22

The point about the Jerusalem Temple was that it was thought of as the House of God. Likewise, we somewhat carelessly talk about our churches and cathedrals as houses of God. But God does not dwell in buildings constructed by human hands. Even heaven cannot contain Him. Acts 7^{48&49}): *Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?* God dwells in Christ. We are the Body of Christ. God dwells in us. I Corinthians 3^{16&17} *Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are* surely has a great deal to say about what we truly ought to reverence – people, Christian people, ourselves, more than buildings however hallowed they might be.

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

February 17th

John 2 vv 23 - 25

Two thoughts here. Jesus knows everything that is in us. There is no point dissembling or cloaking before God. He knows what is within us. This is a massive liberation. We don't have to pretend. He loves us as we are. We don't have to succeed. The One Whose assessment of us is more important than anyone's accepts us as we are. Don't worry. On the other hand, don't think you can get away with anything (thought, word or deed). You can't, but you can be forgiven everything in Christ. The other thought is that a faith based on miracles may not be a very trustworthy faith. People might well say that they believe in God if they see miracles. They might even believe at a superficial level. But faith cleaves to God whatever happens, whether there are miracles or not.

February 18th

John 3 vv 1&2

The Pharisees generally get a bad press in the NT and we may be tempted to write them all off. But there were good, sincere, open-minded Pharisees – including Nicodemus & Gamaliel. If you read the NT carefully, you see that some Pharisees (including Saul of Tarsus who became Paul) and Sadducees followed Jesus. It is a very bad mistake to write off people as a class. We are all individuals and God cares for each one of us individually. Since we are called to be like God, we must do the same.

February 19th

John 3 v3

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.
Seeing miracles isn't the point. What is the point is to be born again. This phrase seems always to have been difficult. Nicodemus badly misunderstands it in the very next verse! *Born again*. It could also be translated *born from above*. It certainly does not mean that there are two kinds of Christian as some people seem to suggest – those who are born again and those who are not. When you become a Christian, you are born again. You make a fresh start, a new beginning. You are born from above. God gives you His Holy Spirit. He acknowledges you as His child. We are crucified with Christ in order that we *may walk in newness of life*, that we may be, *partakers also of his resurrection*.

February 20th

John 3 vv 4&5

There is more than one way to interpret these two verses. *Born of water* might mean ordinary human birth, which takes place when the waters break. Ordinary human beings, born of women, need to be born again as Christians. Or else *born of water* might mean Baptism, maybe John's Baptism for the washing away of sin and *born of the Spirit* being the additional blessing that Baptism in Christ brings, the Holy Spirit and fire. Christian Baptism is for the forgiveness of sin, our incorporation into the Body of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The two interpretations are complementary and I believe that they are both true – as is often the case where biblical verses seem to have more than one meaning.

February 21st

John 3 v6

That which is born of flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. We are flesh. We are physical bodies. Our bodies experience what it is to live in a physical universe. Our bodies are precious. What we do in our bodies matters to God and comes under His judgment. Our bodies are essential to what we are as human beings.

On the other hand, the flesh, our natural human physical bodies are prone to sin. They are prone to decay. They are doomed to death. Essentially ourselves, our souls, are infinitely more than our bodies. When we become Christians, the flesh is crucified with Christ. We are buried with Him in Baptism in order that we *may walk in newness of life*, that we may be, *partakers also of his resurrection*. We are redeemed. We are changed. We are transformed into His likeness. We are different and we are on the Way to a Life which is utterly different from and no longer bound by the physical world with all its weaknesses, pain, sins and limitations.

Love divine, all loves
excelling,
Joy of heaven to earth
come down;
Fix in us thy humble
dwelling;
All thy faithful
mercies crown!

Jesus, Thou art all
compassion,
Pure unbounded love
Thou art;
Visit us with Thy
salvation;
Enter every trembling
heart.

Breathe, O breathe
Thy loving Spirit,
Into every troubled
breast!
Let us all in Thee
inherit;
Let us find that
promised rest.

Take away our love of
sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith, as its
Beginning,
Set our hearts at
liberty.

Come, Almighty to
deliver,
Let us all Thy life
receive;
Suddenly return and
never,

Never more Thy
temples leave.
Thee we would be
always blessing,
Serve Thee as Thy
hosts above,
Pray and praise Thee
without ceasing,
Glory in Thy perfect
love.

Finish, then, Thy new
creation;
Pure and spotless let

us be.
Let us see Thy great
salvation
Perfectly restored in
Thee;
Changed from glory
into glory,
Till in heaven we take
our place,
Till we cast our
crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love,
and praise.

February 22nd

John 3 vv 7&8

There are many things we don't understand about the physical world – not least the weather. Weather forecasting is an inexact science and many scientists believe that there are so many variables that it is actually impossible to have a perfectly accurate weather forecast. So one lesson from the Lord's words here is that, given that we cannot understand much of the material world, we surely cannot expect to comprehend spiritual things (comprehend in either sense, understand or control). It is also the case, however, that the words for wind and spirit in the Greek NT are the same. You cannot see the wind. You don't know where it is coming from. It is powerful. It can drive ships and power turbines. It can cool or warm. It may bring rain. It blows away the mist. It dries your clothes. It can also discomfort, tear down and destroy. Wind is one good metaphor for the Spirit.

February 23rd (Quinquagesima)

John 3 vv 9-13

Nicodemus might have expected to understand. He was a student of the Scriptures. He belonged to a community of men dedicated to understanding the meaning of the Law and the Prophets. He no doubt worshipped regularly in the synagogue and temple. Yet these things were beyond Nicodemus. They are beyond human understanding. Only Jesus truly knows God. Only in Jesus does God dwell in all His fullness. Reading the Scriptures, belonging to a community of faithful people, participating in public worship and private prayer are all very good things to do, but the spark is to encounter Jesus for yourself.

February (24th) S Matthias

John 3 vv 14&15

In order to understand these words of Jesus, you need to know the story in Numbers 21 vv 4-9. The Israelites got discouraged in the wilderness. They wished they'd never left Egypt. They were fed up with the manna. They rebelled against Moses and against God. There is a lot in this story. They thought the comforts of the world (slavery to sin?) might have been better than the journey of faith. They abandoned faith in God. They rejected the leader He had given them (Jesus, the Way, the Truth & the Life?) to bring them to the Promised Land (Heaven?). They were dissatisfied with the bread God gave them (Jesus? Holy Communion?) God, therefore, sent serpents among them (emblem of the devil?) which bit them so that they died. When they repented, God told Moses to put a bronze image of a serpent on a pole and those who were bitten could look at it and be healed. Jesus on the Cross is like that serpent on the pole. When we repent and turn to look at Him, we are saved.

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

John 3 v16

So God loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. This may be the best known verse in the Bible. We decided to put it on the Christmas card we try to send to every home in this parish last year. It is what Christmas is all about. It is what the Christian faith is all about.

Hark! The herald
angels sing,
"Glory to the newborn
King;
Peace on earth, and
mercy mild,
God and sinners
reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations

rise,
Join the triumph of the
skies;
With the angelic host
proclaim,
"Christ is born in
Bethlehem!"
Hark! the herald
angels sing,

"Glory to the newborn
King!"
Christ, by highest
Heav'n adored;
Christ the everlasting
Lord;
Late in time, behold
Him come,
Offspring of a virgin's

womb.	King!"	by,
Veiled in flesh the		Born that man no
Godhead see;	Hail the heaven born	more may die.
Hail the incarnate	Prince of Peace!	Born to raise the sons
Deity,	Hail the Sun of	of earth,
Pleased with us in	Righteousness!	Born to give them
flesh to dwell,	Light and life to all He	second birth.
Jesus our Emmanuel.	brings,	Hark! the herald
Hark! the herald	Risen with healing in	angels sing,
angels sing,	His wings.	"Glory to the newborn
"Glory to the newborn	Mild He lays His glory	King!"

February 26th (Ash Wednesday)

John 3 v17

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

During my last year of college, there were two American students studying with us as part of an exchange programme. One of them, I remember, was particularly fond of this verse. Everybody knows v16, but, in his experience, there were too many people who were delighted to have everlasting life through believing in Christ but seemed also to take pleasure in the thought that unbelievers would be condemned. That was not God's purpose in sending Christ into the world. God *desireth not the death of a sinner*. He *sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved*. God is love. Our professed Christianity is nothing worth without love (or charity in some translations, same thing in this context). As Christians we cannot take pleasure in bad things happening to anyone – least of all in the thought that they might not make it to heaven. **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 27th

John 3 v18

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth is not is condemned already; because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.

God sent Jesus into the world in order to save the world. Christ's death on the Cross is *a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world*. In principle everybody could be saved, no matter how evilly they had lived. Sometimes when I say these words when presiding at Holy Communion, I think just how much sin there is in the world and what a wonderful sacrifice it is that Jesus made which can atone for every single sin everyone has ever committed. Yet does not compel us to be saved. He does not take away our choices. He respects our free will. It is possible not to be saved if that is anyone's choice.

February 28th

John 3 v19

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

This takes something about. The Bible offers two paths to all human beings. There is walking with God, which is the path of life. Then there is going our own way (the devil's way), which is the path of death. On the path of life, we are accompanied by Jesus. We talk to Him about all our needs. He guides us, upholds and comforts us and the end is eternal life. On the path of death, we are on our own, and the end is eternal death. So why do so many (probably the majority) choose death? The answer is the all too prevalent mistaken belief that looking after number one is the secret of happiness, when, in fact, the reverse is the case. Isaiah 55^{1&2} *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.*

February 29th

John 3 vv 20&21

I'm labouring a bit with this. The Light in these verses is obviously Jesus. Good, sincere people obviously seek to draw near to Him, to come into the Light. But am I wrong in thinking that the principle applies more generally, that the people who write or post anonymously, take official action against their neighbours *in confidence* etc. come under the same condemnation?

March 1st (Lent 1)

John 3 vv 22-24

For a time, Jesus and John were exercising parallel ministries, preaching the Kingdom of God and baptising those who came to them with repentance and faith – though it is made clear in chapter 4 that it was the disciples, not Jesus Himself, who baptised. In a sense, however, we are all baptised by Christ, whoever administers the water in His Name. It is He Who washes away our sins and He Who gives us the Holy Spirit,

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.

March 2nd

John 3 vv 25-28

There is so much rivalry in the world – and in the Church. People seem to want to create division even where there is none. There are petty jealousies. We imagine slights. We feel superior. We feel inferior. We always seem to have a reason for not getting on with someone. Even our loyalty to our Church can be defined by our feeling separate from some other Church for whatever reason. John, however, won't play that game. He points people to Jesus. If we turn to Christ, we find in Him the grace to put away these petty jealousies, these rivalries, the desire to be distinct from and better than other people. We subdue the flesh to the Spirit. **O LORD**, who for our sake 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.*

March 3rd

John 3 vv 29&30

As followers of Jesus, we rejoice in Him. We do not put forward ourselves, the flesh, the worldly aspects of us. These are the things which hold us back, which deny us life, which prevent us from experiencing joy in all its fulness.
He must increase, but I must decrease.

March 4th

John 3 vv 31&32

Only Jesus can reveal the fulness of God. Only Jesus fully knows God. Only Jesus is without sin. It is only in Christ that we find the fulness of the Godhead dwelling bodily. John and other ministers of religion may experience God for themselves. They may point to the Way to God, but every believer must find this Way for him or herself. Every believer has his or her own personal encounter with God in Jesus Christ. Yet it sometimes feels as if human rejection of Jesus is universal.

March 5th

John 3 v33

He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.

Not everybody has rejected Jesus. Some have received His testimony of God. The word *testimony* or *witness* translates the Greek that came to mean martyrdom. This is the extent of His love, the love which we experience when we receive it. To accept Jesus is to accept the Truth of God and there can be no greater Truth than that.

Immortal Love for
ever full,
for ever flowing free,
for ever shared, for
ever whole,
a never-ebbing sea.

in vain we search the
lowest deeps,
for him no depths can
drown:

But warm, sweet,
tender, even yet
a present help is he;
and faith has still its
Olivet,
and love its Galilee.

The healing of his
seamless dress
is by our beds of pain;
we touch him in life's
throng and press,
and we are whole
again.

Through him the first
fond prayers are said
our lips of childhood
frame;
the last low whispers
of our dead
are burdened with his
name.

Alone, O Love
ineffable,
thy saving name is
given;
to turn aside from thee
is hell,
to walk with thee is
heaven.

Our outward lips
confess the name
all other names above;
love only knoweth
whence it came
and comprehendeth
love.

We may not climb the
heavenly steeps
to bring the Lord
Christ down;

March 6th

John 3 vv 34-36

John repeats here what has been a constant theme of these first three chapters. Jesus alone fully presents the love of God to His Creation. Through faith in Him, we are caught up in God's love to eternal life. But if reject God's love, the consequences are inevitable,

Living in Christ and He living us, we too are witnesses of the love of God and may be instrumental in bringing others to know the Truth, the Truth which sets us free. It also means that we may well face rejection by the people of the world, as the world rejected Christ.

March 7th

John 4 vv 1-4

When I lived in London forty years ago, there were a couple of places I didn't like cycling through on my own late at night – Camberwell Green and Finsbury Park. It might be that you feel uneasy in some parts of town or at certain times of day. That might be more the case if you had to go through an area dominated by members of a different community who were not generally friendly towards people of your community. As noted a few days ago, human beings are very good at dividing themselves up into rival groups – race, religion, social class, accent, tastes & cultural values. In big cities, rival gangs even define themselves by post code and a boy walking alone through the wrong postal district is likely to be attacked. Jews & Samaritans were a bit like this for religious and historical reasons. Yet, as we shall see, Jesus engages in conversation with a Samaritan with highly beneficial results.

March 8th (Lent 2)

John 4 vv5-8

Jesus asked the woman to give Him a drink. That was a good introduction. Sometimes, the nicest thing you can do for someone is to let them do something for you, especially if they are feeling that they are getting too old or too frail to be of any use. It's too easy to go into an old person's house, take over their kitchen and make the tea. Unless they are very frail, it's often better to be waited on. We all like to be useful. It is better to give than to receive. So, if we want other people sometimes to enjoy what is better, we have to be prepared to receive.

Brother let me be your servant is good. So is *Pray that I may have grace to let you be my servant too*.

March 9th

John 4 vv 9-12

The woman misunderstands Jesus. First of all, she is surprised that He is willing to speak to her and ask a service of her. Then she seems to think that He can give her a better water supply than Jacob's well. Surely, this man isn't greater than Jacob, Abraham's grandson, who changed his name to Israel and was the ancestor of both Jews and Samaritans. (Roughly speaking, the Jews were thought of as descendants of Judah, the priests and ministers as descendants of Levi) and and the Samaritans as descendants of the other ten brothers, especially Joseph – but it is a lot more complicated than that!)

March 10th

John 4 vv 13-15

When you go to a posh restaurant, while you are studying the menu, they very often offer you water. Still or sparkling? Drinking water is not all the same. Well water would be cool. Spring water would be call and bubbly. Mineral water has minerals dissolved in it, which affect the taste and might give it health-giving properties. Some mineral waters are naturally gassy. Water saved in cisterns in hot countries would be flat, warm and probably full of algae and other microorganisms. So, living water? That would probably be spring water. Maybe it would be bubbly too. Water is essential to life. We drink it. We wash in it. We swim in it. Our boats sail on it. Most of our bodies is water. Our crops depend on water to thrive and grow. Water is essential to life. But what we be the water that springs up into everlasting life? Think of Jesus dead on the Cross. The centurion sticks a spear in His side to make sure that He is dead. There flow out mingled blood and water. The water stands for the Holy Spirit, the Lord & Giver of Life.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee;
let the water and the blood,
from thy wounded side which flowed,
be of sin the double cure;
save from wrath and make me pure.

Nothing in my hand I bring,
simply to the cross I cling;
naked, come to thee for dress;
helpless, look to thee for grace;
foul, I to the fountain fly;
wash me, Saviour, or I die.

Not the labours of my hands
can fulfil thy law's commands;
could my zeal no respite know,
could my tears forever flow,
all for sin could not atone;
thou must save, and thou alone.

While I draw this fleeting breath,
when mine eyes shall close in death,
when I soar to worlds unknown,
see thee on thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee.

March 11th

John 4 vv 16-18

Maybe, this accounts for why the woman was at the well at noon. Women usually fetched the water morning and evening when it was cooler. Water is heavy to carry. Fetching the water was a time to meet up and catch up with friends. We often remark that Jesus, as a Jew, would not have been expected to ask anything of a Samaritan and that, as a man on His own, He would not have been expected to engage in conversation with a woman on her own. Even today, if a woman were sitting alone, say, on a park bench, it would seem odd and maybe slightly threatening if a man came up and spoke to her.

Apart from all this, however, this woman has had a colourful domestic life. Perhaps she comes to draw water at noon because the other women look down on her and don't want to talk to her. Whatever we might think about other people's life styles, it is not our place to judge. That is in God's Hands. It is, however, our responsibility towards God to treat every human being whom He has made with respect.

March 12th

John 4 vv 19-24

Rather like Nathaniel under the fig tree, this woman realises that, if Jesus knows all about her, He is someone very special. So she puts to Him a question. Has she always wondered about this issue? Has she just thought of it? Is she putting Him to the test? Perhaps she wants to change the subject away from her colourful domestic arrangements. She wondered why Jews and Samaritans had different places of worship and slightly different rites and customs. We may wonder why Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox have different houses of prayer and different ways of doing things. Are they all really Christian? Does God prefer the Protestant offering of praise or the Catholic one or the Orthodox one? Or does He accept them all equally? If they are all the same to God, why don't we all agree to worship together in the same places and use the same rites and practise the same customs? To suit ourselves? But surely, we are seeking to please God rather than ourselves. Jesus tells her that what requires is that we worship in spirit and in truth – far more important than whether we worship in Jerusalem or in Samaria, in the Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox Church, using Common Worship or Common Prayer, hymns, choruses or holy silence!

March 13th

John 4 vv 25&26

The woman anticipates the coming of the Messiah which is called Christ, Who will tell us all things. The reason for the phrase *which is called Christ* is that the woman and Jesus would have been speaking Aramaic in which the word for the Anointed One is Messiah and John is writing in Greek for Greek-speaking readers. In Greek, the word for the Anointed One is Christ. This explains several examples in John's Gospel of things being translated. (Cephas = Rock [Peter], Rabbi = teacher or master, etc.).

Anyway, Jesus tells her that He is that One. Indeed, He says *I am*. Many scholars here in these *I am* sayings of Jesus an echo of God's response to Moses, when Moses asks God's Name at the burning bush. *I am what I am*, says the LORD; *Tell them that I am sent you*. God is the One Who is. He is the only entity which exists in itself. Everything else that exists only exists because God creates and sustains it. God is the One Who is and the One Who causes everything else to be. Jesus is God. And Jesus is man. That is the Christian faith.

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 14th

John 4 vv 27-30

The woman went back into town to tell the people who lived there about Jesus. That is rather wonderful if the townsfolk had made her feel bad about herself so that she had had to fetch water at noon when nobody else was about. In a way, this fits in with the disciples refraining from questioning Jesus as to why He was talking with the woman. Possibly, they had learned that things are different with Jesus. Our way of relating to people is changed. Our parents quite possibly brought us up not to mix with people who might be a bad influence. We naturally socialise with people like ourselves. We expect to reciprocate when people are courteous and kind towards us. One way in which we incentivise people to behave decently is to ostracise those who don't. Jesus, on the other hand, offers friendship to all sorts and conditions. Can we really do less, if we are His disciples?

May 15th (Lent 3)

John 4 vv 31-34

There was a heresy called Docetism. Docetists believed that Jesus only appeared to be human, though in fact He was wholly divine. Although you are not likely to meet people who call themselves docetists, it is a common enough idea. People worship Jesus and, somehow, they do not believe that He is really human. They don't think that He was tempted as we are. They can't imagine Him subject to human weakness and human needs. You can read these verses in a docetic way. Jesus doesn't need to eat because His body isn't really human. He doesn't need to be nourished by bread or any other human food. But that is not the way to read them. Other passages in the NT make it quite clear that Jesus thirsted, that He ate, that He wept, that He felt pain. Jesus is

indeed wholly divine. Jesus is also wholly human. When He says, *My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work*, He is speaking metaphorically, just as you or I might say that what we're doing is so important, that it's worth missing dinner in order to finish it on time.

Of course, there have always been people who make the opposite mistake to the docetists. They believe that Jesus is human (maybe the best human who has ever lived), but that He is not divine. They too are wrong as the Bible & the teaching of the Church make clear: *And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten son of God, Begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made: Who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven, And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, And was made man, And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, And ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead: Whose kingdom shall have no end.*

Just to complete this, there have also been people who have thought that Jesus was a mixture of the divine nature and the human nature. They are called monophysites and they are wrong because a mixture of the divine and the human would be neither divine nor human. Jesus is completely human and completely divine: *For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess : that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds : and Man of the substance of his Mother, born in the world; Perfect God and perfect Man : of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead : and inferior to the Father, as touching his manhood; Who, although he be God and Man : yet he is not two, but one Christ; One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh : but by taking of the Manhood into God; One altogether; not by confusion of Substance : but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man : so God and Man is one Christ;*

March 16th

John 4 vv 35-38

The Gospel is urgent. God's Kingdom is imminent. There is no time to waste. Every generation of faithful people builds on the labours of those who have gone before. In eternity, we all rejoice together at God's Harvest. We in our generation must be found faithful. We pray God to send forth labourers to harvest His crop, but all of us as Christians are part of His labour force and we need to get on with it!

March 17th

John 4 vv 39-42

Again this is somewhat reminiscent of the story of Philip & Nathanael. Philip is so excited about Jesus that he tells Nathanael. This Samaritan woman is thrilled about Jesus and tells the townsfolk. Intrigued, they come to Jesus themselves and find out that it is true from their own experience of Him. These Samaritans accept Jesus as the Saviour of the world. After the Resurrection, the disciples, inspired by the Holy Spirit of the Risen Christ, will proclaim the Gospel *in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth* – which is how we came to know the Gospel and to believe.

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 18th

John 4 vv 43-46

In a couple of places, Jesus talks about a prophet being without honour in his own country. Is it because we know our neighbours too well? Maybe we'd be jealous if we allowed that they were something special. Not in Jesus' case, but in the case of other supposedly holy people, we might know that the way they behave isn't always consistent with what they preach. Or it might be that they have little habits which are not wrong in themselves but get on our nerves, like whistling when they're working. A prophet is someone who conveys the Word of God. To that extent, all Christians are prophets. Our actions speak for our faith. The words we say surely reflect what we believe. God may speak through us to other people. We are people of the Word and the Word is Jesus. I Peter 4⁷⁻¹¹: But the end of all things is at hand: be ye

therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

This is our calling as Christians and most of us have to fulfil our calling *in our own country*, ie at home, where perhaps we cannot expect to receive honour.

March 19th

John 4 vv 46&47

I've read this story several times this week. It's been the reading in Church more than once. I've been looking at it for these notes. That happens sometimes. You keep coming across a passage of Scripture. The question then is God telling you something by it? I'm not sure yet about this passage this week. But it is right to be open to the possibility that God is trying to tell us something in our everyday lives. It might be in the Scripture we read. It might be when we are praying. It might be when we are thinking about something. I often try to resolve problems in my mind when I am walking with Tommy in the woods. God might speak to you by other people. It just might be something that happens in your life – one door closes, another opens.

March 20th

John 4 v48

Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.

We have already seen that a faith based on miracles is precarious. You can see a miracle and refuse to believe that it is a real miracle. There must be some other explanation, you think. Some people do accept that they have seen a miracle, but still don't turn to Christ, repenting of their sins and giving their lives to Him. A faith based on experiencing miracles won't survive if God doesn't grant the miracles you expect. It would be like you were bargaining with Him. As long as You give me what I want, I'll believe in You. I'll only trust You so long as You prove that You are Who You say You are. A faith based on being

impressed by miracles would be shallow. But Jesus takes the man as he is and heals the boy. Jesus takes us as we are and leads us closer to Himself.

Ye saints, who toil below,
adore your heavenly King,
and onward as ye go
some joyful anthem sing;
take what he gives
and praise him still,
through good or ill,
who ever lives!

My soul, bear thou thy part,
triumph in God above:
and with a well-tuned heart
sing thou the songs of love!
Let all thy days
till life shall end,
whate'er he send,
be filled with praise!

March 21st

John 4 vv 49-54

The man was obviously desperately worried about the boy. I doubt if he really took in what Jesus had said in v48. He begged Jesus to come with him. But Jesus didn't. Perhaps the man needed to take another step on the path to faith, to trust Jesus without Him physically going with him. The nobleman did believe Jesus and went home. His faith was vindicated. The boy was recovered and the whole household believed in Jesus.

If you have time read the different story in Matthew 8 vv 5-13, where Jesus offers to go to a centurion's house in similar circumstances and the centurion says that he is not worthy that Christ should come under his roof.

Jesus deals with different people differently according to their needs.

March 22nd (Lent 4, Mothering Sunday)

John 5 vv 1-9

Mothering Sunday is a difficult day for people who plan services, choose readings, hymns, etc.. It comes in Lent when we are preparing for Holy Week and Easter with a solemn, penitential approach to our prayers and (maybe) fasting. On the other hand, it is a celebration of motherhood. It is a joyful time. The emphasis in our services is very often on children. There is always the dilemma for the Church in the world. Give people what they want and it might not be what they need. Or give people what they need, but, if it isn't what they want, they might not accept it.

This man got what he both wanted and needed. He had been infirm for 38 years. We wanted to be cured. He needed to be cured. Jesus gave him what he wanted and needed. Maybe, the fact that Jesus was prepared to do this on the Sabbath was an indication that we should not be too rigid when it comes to giving people what they want & need. Though it could be argued that Jesus lost the “Jews” in this story by not giving them what they wanted – a religious leader who kept the Sabbath according to their rules. So giving people what they want in order to keep open the channel of communication with them isn’t always the right thing to do.

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

March 23rd

John 5 vv 10-16

Jesus told the man to sin no more lest something worse befall him. There isn’t a simple relationship between sin and suffering. There is a good deal of undeserved suffering in the world. Sometimes, wicked people seem to get away with it for a long time. Sometimes people suffer because of their own wrong-doing or foolishness. Sometimes people suffer as a result of other people’s sins – such as an innocent child run over by a reckless motorist. If there were no sin, there would be no suffering. I take Isaiah 11¹⁻⁹ as a description of Heaven. Actual sin can always be forgiven through repentance and faith. To blame oneself or to be blamed by others for one’s suffering is cruel & wrong.

March 24th

John 5 vv 17-20

Here again we have it that Jesus and the Father are one. The works and words of Jesus are the works and words of God. Here is a Christmas hymn which spells it out for us. It is in our books, but I can’t remember ever singing it.

From east to west, from shore
to shore
Let ev’ry heart awake and sing
The holy child whom Mary
bore,
The Christ, the everlasting
king.

Behold, the world's creator
wears
The form and fashion of a
slave;
Our very flesh our maker

shares,
His fallen creatures all to save.

For this how wondrously He
wrought!
A maiden, in her lowly place,
Became, in ways beyond all
thought,
The chosen vessel of His grace.

And while the angels in the sky
Sing praise above the silent

field,
To shepherds poor the Lord
Most High,
the one great Shepherd, was
revealed.

All glory for this blessed morn
To God the Father ever be;
All praise to You, O Virgin-
born,
And Holy Ghost eternally.

March 25th (The Annunciation)

John 5 v21

*For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the
Son quickeneth whom he will.*

It has been commented on that it is appropriate that we keep this feast of the Incarnation at the time of the year when we are especially thinking about the Crucifixion & Resurrection. It is all part of the same story – God’s love for us in Jesus Christ – that He shares our life, teaches us God’s way, redeems us from our sins and grants us everlasting life with Him.

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 the same Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

March 26th

John 5 vv 22-27

Sometimes, trying to explain things to children, people make the terrible mistake of dividing God & Jesus. They portray God as the just Judge Who condemns us to hell for our sins and Jesus as the merciful Redeemer Who saves us for heaven by somehow propitiating the Father’s wrath. These lessons we learn in childhood tend to stick and we can continue to think like this, albeit subconsciously, when we become adults. Such an understanding is entirely wrong, however. God is just and merciful. The Father and Jesus (and the Holy Spirit) are all God. God the Holy Trinity is just and merciful. God the Holy

Trinity is both our Judge and our Saviour. Through faith in God the Holy Trinity, we have everlasting life. We look to the Trinity for justice. We look to the Trinity for mercy. Perhaps v27 [*The Father*] *hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man* reminds us that Jesus is also human and that therefore He is a sympathetic Judge. He knows from His own experience (as well as His divine omniscience) what it is to be human. He has Himself suffered all the temptations we suffer. We can relate to Him as our brother as well as our Lord.

O GOD the Father, of heaven : have mercy upon us miserable sinners. *O God the Father, of heaven : have mercy upon us miserable sinners.* O God the Son, Redeemer of the world : have mercy upon us miserable sinners. *O God the Son, Redeemer of the world : have mercy upon us miserable sinners.* O God the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son: have mercy upon us miserable sinners. *O God the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son : have mercy upon us miserable sinners.* O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three Persons and one God : have mercy upon us miserable sinners. *O holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three Persons and one God : have mercy upon us miserable sinners.*

Remember not, Lord, our offences, nor the offences of our forefathers; neither take thou vengeance of our sins: Spare us, good Lord, spare thy people, whom thou hast redeemed with thy most precious blood, and be not angry with us for ever. *Spare us, good Lord.*

From all evil and mischief; from sin; from the crafts and assaults of the devil; from thy wrath, and from everlasting damnation, *Good Lord, deliver us.* From all blindness of heart; from pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy; from envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness, *Good Lord, deliver us.* From fornication, and all other deadly sin; and from all the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil, *Good Lord, deliver us.* From lightning and tempest; from earthquake, fire, and flood; from plague, pestilence, and

famine; from battle and murder, and from sudden death, *Good Lord, deliver us.* From all sedition, privy conspiracy, and rebellion; from all false doctrine, heresy, and schism; from hardness of heart, and contempt of thy Word and Commandment, *Good Lord, deliver us.*

By the mystery of thy holy Incarnation; by thy holy Nativity and Circumcision; by thy Baptism, Fasting, and Temptation, *Good Lord, deliver us.* By thine Agony and Bloody Sweat; by thy Cross and Passion; by thy precious Death and Burial; by thy glorious Resurrection and Ascension, and by the Coming of the Holy Ghost, *Good Lord, deliver us.*

March 27th

John 5 vv 28&29

It is so simple really. The dead will rise. We shall be judged by God. God knows everything about us – all the details of our lives, every thought, word and deed. There is reward for the just and there is punishment for the unjust.

That is the first point. The second to grasp is this and it is important that we do grasp it, because none of us would be acquitted in that heavenly court. None of us is good enough for the resurrection of life, but Jesus is the *full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.* Through faith in Him we shall rise to eternal life. This is why we have no need to fear our own deaths or to be worried for our loved ones who have died in the Lord.

March 28th

John 5 v30

This is a difficult verse. I think what Jesus means here is that there is no division between Him and the Father. His Will is the Father's Will. His human will is free like ours. So, He could choose not to go with God. That is the choice we have and, except for Jesus, all human beings have chosen not to go with God. Remember His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: *Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.* Our Lord's will is freely aligned with the Will of God. Our joy, our life depend on our wills

being freely aligned with the Will of God. *Thy will be one*, we pray as Jesus taught us. It is Jesus living in us and we in Him which enables us to progress in our lives towards that goal of perfect submission to God and eternal communion with Him.

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine
O what a foretaste of glory divine
Heir of salvation, purchase of God
Born of his Spirit and washed in his blood

Perfect submission, perfect delight
Visions of rapture burst on my sight
Angels descending bring from above
Echoes of mercy, and whispers of love

*This is my story, this is my song
Praising my Saviour all the day long
This is my story, this is my song
Praising my Saviour all the day long*

Perfect submission, all is at rest
I in my Saviour am happy and blessed.
Watching and waiting, looking above
Filled with His goodness lost in his love

March 29th (Lent 5 Passion Sunday)

John 5 vv 31-38

So how do we know that Jesus is true? How do we know that anything is true? One way of being sure of the truth is to hear it from a trustworthy witness. But how do you know that witnesses are trustworthy? If someone bears witness of himself, he might be lying, boasting that he is better than he really is or covering up his faults. So we might doubt someone whose sole witness was himself. Jesus says that there are other witnesses to Him. There is John the Baptist. He proclaimed that Christ would come. When John saw the Holy Spirit come upon Jesus at His Baptism and heard the voice of the Father, *This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*, John knew that Jesus is the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world and told the people so. The Father bears witness of Jesus. The Spirit bears witness of Jesus. We experience Jesus in our hearts. We experience Him in Christian fellowship. We experience Him in the Sacraments. My own personal experience is that Creation's witness to the Creator is witness

to Father, Son & Holy Ghost. Psalm 19¹: *The heavens declare the glory of God : and the firmament sheweth his handywork.*

Conversely, those who reject Jesus do so because the word of the Father does not abide in their hearts. Nevertheless, the works, the signs that Jesus performs, themselves bear witness to Christ. We have seen that a faith based solely on miracles is inadequate. But the signs do point to Jesus. If people will only look at the world within an open mind, they will find Jesus. Matthew ^{7&8}. *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*

WE beseech thee, 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 30th

John 5 vv 39-47

One lesson to derive from what Jesus says here is that the Scriptures testify to Him. He means the Old Testament. So I repeat, once again, that it is very unwise for Christians to think that they can dispense with the Old Testament. It is a gift of God to us, one of the means of grace and we undermine our own personal relationship with God if we neglect to read it.

The other lesson, paradoxically perhaps, is that it is possible to read the Bible, to be a bible basher even, to go through all the rituals of religion without ever knowing God. Self always stands in the way and obscures the view. When we read the Bible, when we pray, when we attend Church, we need to be open to God. Seriously repent of your sins before you approach the Throne of Grace. Ask God to speak to you and make you listen when the lessons are read in church and the sermon is preached. Ask God that you may discern His Word in your personal bible reading. Pray that your prayers may be His prayers. Listen for His voice. Make time in your busy life God and then don't let the things of this world clutter up your thoughts during those precious times.

O Jesus, I have promised
to serve thee to the end;
be thou ever near me,
my Master and my friend;
I shall not fear the battle
if thou art by my side,
nor wander from the pathway
if thou wilt be my guide.

O let me feel thee near me!
The world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle,
the tempting sounds I hear;
my foes are ever near me,
around me and within;
but Jesus, draw thou nearer,
and shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear thee speaking
in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion,
the murmurs of self-will;

O speak to reassure me,
to hasten or control;
O speak, and make me listen,
thou guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, thou hast promised
to all who follow thee,
that where thou art in glory
there shall thy servant be;
and, Jesus I have promised
to serve thee to the end;
O give me grace to follow,
my Master and my friend.

O let me see thy footmarks,
and in them plant mine own;
My hope to follow duly
is in thy strength alone.
O guide me, call me, draw me,
uphold me to the end;
and then in heaven receive me,
my Saviour and my Friend.

March 31st

John 6 vv 1-14

It will soon be Easter, the Christian Passover. Jesus the true prophet that should come into the world. Jesus the One Who delivers us from slavery to sin & death. Jesus Who gives us and epitomises In Himself God's perfect Law of Love. Jesus the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus the Bread of life Who nourishes us with His own Presence as we journey through the wilderness of this passing age. Jesus the Rock in Whom we trust, out of Whose side flow streams of living waters, the Holy Spirit poured out upon the world. Jesus the Way, the Truth and the Life. Blessed be the Lord God, even the God of Israel : which only doeth wondrous things; And blessed be the Name of his majesty for ever : and all the earth shall be filled with his majesty. *Amen*