

The Gospel
According
to
St John

Bible Notes July -
September 2020

50p

July 1st

John 15 vv 1-3

Doctors talk about surgery door syndrome. At the end of the consultation, the patient gets up to go out and, with one hand on the door knob, brings up a new concern – sometimes the problem he or she was most concerned about all along. John 14³¹ seems to be the end of the Last Supper, with Jesus and the disciples about to leave the Upper Room. Then Jesus begins to speak again, three more chapters of the most profound teaching.

Jesus is the vine. We are the branches. All our life derives from Him. We produce leaves and flowers and fruit, we fight off infection, we grow towards the light because we are branches of the vine. However, unfruitful branches may be cut out altogether. Even fruitful branches may need pruning. God is the husbandman. He may remove from His Church those who are unfaithful to Him. Changing the analogy slightly from branch to root, Hebrews 12¹⁵ warns us to be *Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled*; putting on the Church the responsibility of not allowing troublesome individuals to spoil the fellowship. Such people are not enemies. They are brothers to be brought back into the fold if at all possible, but they must not be allowed to make the whole vine in a particular place unfruitful or to damage the fruitful branches. Even the faithful may go through difficult times, a pruning, in order that they may grow more strongly.

July 2nd

John 15 vv 4-6

When I was curate at Orpington, I had a row of runner beans in my garden. When I was looking after the vicar's tortoise while he was on holiday, it went along the row, biting through the bottoms of the vines. The result was that they withered and died. This is what happens to us if we cut ourselves off from Christ. We wither and die as Christians. So, how do we keep in touch with Him? Pray, obviously. Read the Bible. Share in Christian fellowship. Attend to sermons. Participate frequently and faithfully in Holy Communion. There are many means of grace and God extends His love to us in many ways. It is up to us to be open to His reaching out to us, by His grace.

July 3rd

John 15 v7

Ask what ye will. Prayer isn't magic. It's not something which enables us to control the world around us in accordance with our own personal wishes, even with God's help. Prayer is talking to God, communicating with God, receiving grace from God. Prayer is our growing to know God better and aligning our wills with His Will. God is love. God's Will for us, for the people we know, for our Church, for the world in general, is love. To align our wills with His Will is to align our wills with love. As we grow in our knowledge of Him (which is eternal life for us), so our prayers become ever more deeply *Thy Will be done*. Nothing better can happen to us, to other people, to our Church, or to the world in general than that God's Will is done. So, as we pray faithfully in Christ and with Christ, we receive what we most wisely ask for, that God's Will is done. Maybe we become the instruments of His Will if we have the opportunity to help the people we are praying for. We talk naively to God and we don't always know what to ask for. If we ask for the wrong things, He doesn't give them to us. He would hardly be a loving Father if He did. We may have to be patient and wait. But when we are asking for what it makes loving sense to ask for (even though we might not be able to see it), we receive what we seek.

A Prayer of St. Chrysostom.

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications unto thee; and dost promise, that when two or three are gathered together in thy Name thou wilt grant their requests; Fulfil now, O Lord, the desires and petitions of thy servants, as may be most expedient for them; granting us in this world knowledge of thy truth, and in the world to come life everlasting.

Amen.

July 4th

John 15 v8

To bear fruit is to do good works, to do what God wants us to do in the world, to care for one another, to look after God's creation, to show forgiveness and kindness, to work diligently for good purposes, to care even for the people we find it hard to like or respect. When we do these things, God is glorified. *Hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, in earth as it is in Heaven.* God's Name is hallowed, glorified when people do God's Will, when we love one another and act accordingly.

July 5th (Trinity 4)

John 15 v9

This takes some pondering. Jesus is God's Son. God loves Jesus as a parent loves a child. The Son of God is one with God the Father and the Holy Spirit in that perfect unity of love which is the Holy Trinity. Think about that for a minute. Jesus says that He loves us in that very same way. He tells us to *continue in that love*. Why would we ever walk away from such love?

O GOD, the protector of all that trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy; Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal: Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake our Lord. *Amen.*

July 6th

John 15 v10

I was astonished once when someone told me on the telephone that the Jesus she believed in didn't issue commandments. Well, there is only one Jesus, the Jesus to Whom the Bible bears witness, the Jesus proclaimed by the Church, the Jesus we know in our hearts. Jesus does issue commandments. He obeyed the commandments God enjoined on Him. He obeys God's Will for His life and therefore dwells in the love of God. We obey the commandments of Jesus and dwell in His love. It is a virtuous circle. We obey God's Will for our lives, our Christian calling, because we dwell in God's love. We dwell in God's love because we are obedient to His commandments. All the commandments are summed up in the command to love.

Romans 13: Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if *there be* any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love *is* the fulfilling of the law.

July 7th

John 15 v11

These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.

So often, religion is portrayed as though it were against living life to the full. So many things which people think of as pleasures are condemned as sins. So much of what we are told we should do seems to be dull and boring. A lot could be said, on the one hand, about killjoys who don't seem to like other people enjoying themselves and, on the other hand, about people who imagine that destructive behaviour is fulfilling and that doing your duty is inevitably burdensome, but we start from the point that Jesus came that we might have joy.

July 8th

John 15 v 12

This seems to mean more than *Thou shalt love love thy neighbour as thyself*. Your neighbour could be anyone, as the parable of the Good Samaritan demonstrates. *Thou shalt love love thy neighbour as thyself* is in the Old Testament, but many people would have thought that *neighbour* meant *fellow Israelite*. Jesus' story makes the point that your neighbour could be anyone, even a Samaritan, which is a bit like saying that your neighbour might turn out to be someone from a family nobody in your community much likes. *Love one another, as I have loved you*, seems to mean love your Christian brother or sister as Jesus loves you. That can take some doing. Jesus loved me so much that He died for me. Am I supposed to love you that much? Should I be prepared to die for you? If this is how I am supposed to love people in the Church, how much am I supposed to love people in the world outside the Church? I suppose *Thou shalt love love thy neighbour as thyself* comes back into play here. I should love people in the world as I love myself. That would take some doing too.

I don't think there is a definite boundary (at least not that human beings can define) between those in the Church whom I am to love as Christ loves me and those in the world whom I am supposed to love as myself. Charity (love) begins at home, but spreads out, like ripples on a pond, maybe diminishing as they become farther from their origin, but never wholly vanishing. Galatians 6¹⁰: *As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*

July 9th

John 15 vv13&14

These chapters of John are sublime. We are Christ's friends. He lays down His life for His friends, and what an agonising death it was that He died. We are His friends if we keep His commandments. What is His commandment? That we love one another as He loves us.

We may not know, we cannot tell what pains he had to bear;
But we believe it was for us He hung and suffered there.

July 10th

John 15 v15

It would be wonderful simply to be a servant of God. *I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God: than to dwell in the tents of ungodliness* (Psalm 84¹¹). But we are much more than servants of God. We are His friends. He reveals Himself and His purposes to us. To know Jesus is to know the Father. In the Old Testament, it is a very few people like Abraham and Moses who are called friends of God. In the New Testament, Jesus calls all Christians His friends and such we are if we love Him.

July 11th

John 15 v16

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.

We sometimes behave as though God were lucky that we are Christians and if we come to Church and otherwise keep His commandments. The reality is not that we have chosen God and that He somehow owes us. God has chosen us. Because God is eternal, He has always known us, He always knows us and He will always know us. He loves us always and we can always trust Him. He has, however, chosen us for a purpose. He has made us the people we are. By God's grace we are what we are. Each of us is unique. We have different talents, different resources and different opportunities. So we each have our own place in His plan for the world. There are (as S Paul & the Prayer Book say) good works He has prepared for each one of us to walk. This is the fruit Jesus wants us to bear, each one of us playing his or her part in doing God's work in the world.

July 12th (Trinity 5)

John 15v17

Valuing one another. Do we value one another highly enough? It's easy to see other people's faults, to be irritated by them, to complain about them, but that isn't the way to think about the people we are supposed to love. If we love people, we value them. We thank God for them. We try to support them in their Christian lives, to develop their talents and to use their opportunities. We build one another up. We don't tear down

Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. This works both ways. If we judge others harshly, put them down, draw attention to their faults, we undermine ourselves. We are judged and measured by the measures we employ to judge other people. It makes us insecure if we set ourselves up to judge others. If, however, we love ourselves as God loves us, then we are secure enough in ourselves not to measure ourselves against other people, putting them down in order to make ourselves look better. *That ye love one another as I have loved you.*

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

July 13th

John 15 vv 18-21

It's nice to be popular and some of the things about Christians may well make us popular. Hopefully, we are joyful, honest, kind and considerate. It very often happens that Christians are respected for their commitment and integrity. Jesus was very popular for a lot of the time. But He was also an irritant and so are we. Our very existence challenges the values of the world. Christians are described in Acts 17⁶ as those *who have turned the world upside down*. We might pause here and think in what respects what Christ stands for utterly challenges what the world thinks is important, so much so that humanity crucified its Saviour. If we are faithful to Him, people will react towards us as they react to Him. It's nice to be popular and the Church very much wants to increase its numbers, but, what is far more important than being popular is being true. Unless we are true to Christ, paradoxically, we have nothing to offer the world.

July 14th

John 15 vv 21-25

To know God is to have eternal life. The world does not know God. When the people of the world (which, don't forget, God so loved) come to know God through Jesus Christ, they cease to be the world. They become the Church. So, people who oppose Jesus and what He stands for, people who oppose us Christians when we are living authentically Christian lives, don't know God and do not have eternal life. That is why the world crucifies Jesus and so often persecutes the Church. In fact some Christians have suggested that we should be worried when we are not persecuted. It might be a sign that we have sold out, that we are living by the world's values rather than those of our Lord. The coming of Jesus, the Word of God, the proclamation of the Word of God in the preaching of the Church brings the world to a point of crisis. Are you with me or against me? If, having had the opportunity to turn to Christ, they still reject God, then they are more at fault than they would have been if they had never had that opportunity. Nevertheless, it is still our task to proclaim the Gospel to the world because *God so loved the world*. John 1: ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. ¹¹ He came unto his own, and his own received him not. ¹² 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:

July 15th

John 15 vv 26&27

The requirement is to bear witness. The Holy Spirit bears witness. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. Truth matters. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Lies come easily, but the devil is the father of lies. The modern and post-modern world obfuscates the distinction between truth and falsehood. Some people believe that there is no such thing as absolute truth. Image and appearance matter more than the underlying reality. Perception and opinion matter more than facts. Such a casual attitude to truth is as fatal to science and the arts, to politics, the administration of justice and to every human endeavour, as it is to religion. It is the truth which sets us free. Jesus is the Way, the Truth & the Life. The world's salvation depends on Jesus being proclaimed to the ends of the earth. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the work of the apostolic Church. The original eleven spoke of Jesus from their experience of Jesus, we, their successors, from ours.

July 16th

John 16 v1

Psalm 74¹⁰. *We see not our tokens, there is not one prophet more : no, not one is there among us, that understandeth any more.*

Psalm 74 almost certainly refers to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar. Centuries before that, when the child Samuel assisted the old priest Eli in the shrine at Shiloh, when Eli's sons were disgracing the priesthood by their arrogant self-seeking and their contempt for God and man, it says (I Samuel 3¹): *And the word of God was precious in those days; there was no open vision.* The word of God was precious because there was so little of it in those degenerate times. At both periods in history, it appears that people had so far rejected God (the sin against the Holy Ghost?) that there was no prophet left to bring them a word from the LORD.

Maybe it's just me, but I'm feeling a lack of such a word from the LORD nowadays as we endure the consequences of the corona virus. The Church doesn't seem to have anything to say except to repeat the government's message. That's all well and good. We all have to work together and with those in authority over us (though not necessarily uncritically) to deal with this pandemic. But I cannot help but feel that the Church ought to have something more to say than the secular state. Where is God in all this? What has the Church to offer the world? In what respect can we be light and leaven and salt? What leadership have our archbishops and bishops to offer us Christians and the nation at large? Maybe I am the one who is deaf to the Word of God and others are hearing it loud and clear from the Church of England, but I certainly not alone in feeling this way.

A prophet is someone who proclaims the Word of God. How would we recognise a prophet as authentic? (There are, after all many false prophets. Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light.) There are two basic tests of the authenticity of a prophet. Is what he is saying in accordance with what God has already revealed of Himself (principally in Scripture)? Does what the prophet prophesies come to pass? Hence John 16¹. We know that Jesus is authentic because what He says to the apostles (and to us) comes to pass.

July 17th

John 16 vv 2-4

Could it be that Christian leaders in England today are holding back in their public statements because they are afraid of unpopularity? In particular, does the established Church feel the need to keep in with the Establishment? There is always a risk in speaking the truth of God. Look what they did to Jesus Who is the Truth of God made flesh.

Or, is the Church of England now doing and saying the right things?

Or are we saying some of the right things but holding back on delivering the full counsel of God (Acts 20²⁷).

Or doesn't anyone in the Church know what God is really saying to us in this pandemic?

I've been thinking about (but haven't yet got round to writing up) all my thoughts about the pandemic and our Christian understanding of it. I haven't done so because I'm not sure what I do think and because I could ramble on for many pages debating the issues. But what I personally feel is lacking is any sense that there is much more than this mortal life and this material world, that the eternal and the spiritual are infinitely more important than and infinitely more real than the mundane.

I'm not sure that prayer has been accorded its full value in this. Given that eternal life matters so much more than mortal life, we should not be afraid to die. How does living in the light of eternity make a difference to the judgments we make about risk? For example, lockdown obviously diminishes the quality of life for many people, but relaxing lockdown will inevitably reduce the quantity of life that some people will enjoy. How does the *sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life* inform our decisions about striking the balance between the quantity and the quality of this mortal existence?

If facing up to the virus has brought people together and brought out the good in people, how can we sustain and reinforce this? Insofar as facing up to the virus has brought out the bad in people (greed, selfishness, etc.), how can we improve our behaviour? If our communion with God in faith has nothing to say about the way we behave, what is the point in believing at all, or in encouraging others to join the Church?

Is this virus happening because of human sin? Did it originate from negligence or even deliberate wrong-doing? Have we made ourselves more susceptible to this and other diseases by our pollution of the planet? Have we facilitated its spread by our careless indifference to the needs of other people and of the natural world? I don't know the answers to these questions, but I do think that they should be considered and answers sought. What has the Church to contribute to such a discussion? If we have nothing to contribute, what are we for?

July 18th

John 16 vv 5&6

There is genuine sadness in our lives. Jesus came to bring joy, but there is a difference between joy and an ephemeral happiness. Christian joy transcends sorrow so that it is possible to be sorrowful and joyful at the same time. I think that is what the hymn means when it says *tears have no bitterness*. It is a thought I cling onto at funerals.

July 19th (Trinity 6)

John 16 v7

If you were brought up as a Christian, this is one of the basic bits of teaching you will have received. How can it be good that Jesus leaves us and returns to Heaven? The answer is that the bodily presence of Jesus could only ever be in one place at a time. The Holy Spirit (the Paraclete, the Spirit of Jesus) is always and everywhere.

Alleluia! not as orphans
are we left in sorrow now;
Alleluia! He is near us,
faith believes, nor questions
how;

Though the cloud from sight
received him
when the forty days were o'er
shall our hearts forget his
promise,
'I am with you evermore'?

July 20th

John 16 vv 8-11

Iced cake. If life can be compared to a cake, what part of the cake corresponds to our faith? Is faith the icing on the cake? Is faith something which makes life sweeter, more palatable even, but something which is not necessary, inessential? Is life without God OK and sufficient? Does religion impart a zest to life, which isn't necessary and which some people find in other things? It means a lot to Ted that he goes to church every Sunday. It means a lot to Bill that he never misses an Arsenal home game. But Ted could live without church and Bill could live without football. What really matters, they would have to admit, is that they go to work, pay the mortgage and take care of their families. They could do that without either God or football. Bill Shankly once famously said that football was more important than life and death. Even fanatical football fans wouldn't normally really go that far. But Christians do say and mean absolutely seriously that faith in God is more important than life and death. Faith isn't the icing on the cake of our lives. Faith is the whole cake. Faith in God informs and inspires every detail of our lives. This is why I was so shocked when

the archbishops apparently so readily included much of what we do in faith among the inessentials during the Covid 19 outbreak along with football, pubs and restaurants, as if we were part of the entertainment industry and worship less important than shopping or work. I found myself thinking of John 6²⁷: *Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you, for him hath God the Father sealed.* Or am I being unfair to the archbishops? What do you think?

July 21st

John 16 vv 8-11

To be honest, I've always, since I was a teenager, found these verses difficult. The reason they seemed an appropriate foil for yesterday's thoughts is that our Lord is talking about the full comprehensiveness of the Spirit's work. He will reprove the world of sin. What matters above all things is our relationship with God. Sin cuts us off from God and all the *miserias of this sinful world* proceed from that fact. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to reprove / convince / convict* the whole world of sin, to pronounce judgment against all wickedness and to extend the invitation to repent and to be restored to a right relationship with God to the whole of creation. There is no dark corner of our lives into which the Spirit's light cannot come – to reveal what is wrong with is and to illuminate our path to reconciliation and full communion with God in Christ. The Spirit reproves / convinces / convicts* the world of righteousness. Human sinfulness is shown up for what it is in comparison to Christ's righteousness. Human beings may participate in Christ's righteousness through faith & repentance because in Him our sins are forgiven and we have the gift of the Holy Spirit Who sanctifies us. The Spirit reproves / convinces / convicts* the world of judgment. He separates the sheep from the goats. He brings us to the point of crisis (judgment). Which way will we choose? The strait and narrow way which leads to life or the wide gate and broad way which lead to destruction. A patient with some fevers will just grow worse and worse until he comes to the crisis. At that point, he begins to recover, often quite quickly, or else he dies. The Holy Spirit brings people to the point of crisis. Choose life or death, one or the other. There is no middle way. *The Greek word is ἐλεγχω, which the dictionary says can mean: expose, set forth, convict, convince, reprove, correct, or punish or discipline. No wonder it is hard to understand!

July 22nd

John 16 vv 12&13

Truth. Truth matters. We live in a world in which politics is spun, public relations officers put the best possible gloss on things, advertisements mislead without actually lying, confidentiality is often a cover for incompetence or corruption, whistleblowers are sacked and the victims of corporate wrong-doing are bribed or bullied into signing non-disclosure agreements. Public opinion often takes precedence over hard evidence. Even science and mathematics no longer have the authority they once enjoyed. Religion is treated as though it were a matter of personal taste. But there is such a thing as absolute truth and truth matters. If politicians are untruthful, we cannot cast our votes responsibly. If PR and ads mislead, we may make undesirable choices. If confidentiality and official secrecy are used as a cloak for wrong-doing, there is no justice, victims continue to suffer and perpetrators get away with it. The public is not well served if people in positions of influence, authority and power, effectively kowtow to the mob, doing what is popular rather than what is right. Science and Mathematics have proved to be much more difficult as guides to the way things really are than was assumed a couple of hundred years ago, but give up on the belief that ultimately there is an absolute Truth which it is our goal to discover, and higher maths becomes nothing more than a clever game and science ceases to be anything more than a theoretical basis for technology.

OK. The whole of life's cake is permeated by God. Our response to the universe and everything in it is conditional on our response to God. Truth (like everything that is good) has its origin in the nature of God. God makes Himself known in Jesus, Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of Truth. The devil is the father of lies – whether dishonesty in government, misleading PR & ads, the abuse of confidentiality & official secrecy to cover wrong doing, or in undermining our faith that ultimately the world makes sense. Christians know that the world ultimately makes sense because it is the creation of the all wise God. It is this faith which inspires our seeking after Truth not only in religion but in every aspect of our lives.

July 23rd

John 16 v14

Glorifying Jesus. There is a story about an old Christian who knew that he was dying. He asked a friend to read a particular bible verse. The friend began..."Jesus". The old man said that was all he needed to hear and quietly slipped away to glory.

O GOD, who hast prepared for them that love thee such good things as pass man's understanding; Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that wee, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

July 24th

John 6 v15

Tomorrow is S James' Day. It is also S Christopher's Day. My last position was as curate with special responsibility for S Christopher's Ramsgate. It was a lively church on a relatively poor housing estate within the parish of S Laurence in Thanet. There were some very dedicated people, but not much money. As in so many churches, the workers were getting older, and, with declining numbers of clergy, it became harder to staff. Last time I saw it (2019), the building was in a poor state of repair, the grounds were unkempt, the clergy house was untenanted and there were few Sunday services. It can all seem so difficult. And yet Jesus has all the resources of God. The Holy Spirit sets before His Church the infinite resources of God. There is no work too hard for Him. Now, it is not for me to say after more than thirty years what went wrong for S Christopher's. Many churches, including our own, are struggling to flourish in C21 Britain when so many people have concerns other than faith in Jesus Christ dominating their lives and the way they think about things. But we should never be discouraged. When we are doing God's work, all His infinite resources are available to us. What is required of us is faith. Everything else follows from faith. Pray for discernment as to what God wants of us as churches in this parish, in our diocese and in our land. Pray for discernment of what He is asking of you. Pray for grace that you may identify and make good use of the resources He has put at your disposal and pray for me and your fellow Christians that we too may recognise what God wants of us and the gifts He has give us in order that we should fulfil His Will for our lives.

July 25th (S James the Apostle)

John 16 vv 16-18

What does Jesus mean, *A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.?*

This question certainly puzzled the apostles and I think it has more than one answer. The obvious meaning is that He will be crucified the next day and rise again on the third day when they will see Him once more. They will lament and Christ's enemies will rejoice on Good Friday, but it will be the apostles who rejoice on Easter Day. He also promises, however, that when He leaves us, He will send the Comforter, another Comforter. Remember that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are called Paraclete. He will not leave us comfortless. He breathes His Spirit into His apostles that first Easter Sunday evening. He will be with us to the end of the world. The return is the coming of the Paraclete. The departure is His being lifted up on the Cross on Good Friday and His Ascension into Heaven forty days after Easter. At the Ascension, He promises to send the Holy Spirit on His Church so that we can fulfil His commission to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth. The Spirit of the Risen Christ comes on His disciples ten days after the Ascension at Pentecost. At the Ascension, angels assure the waiting apostles that *this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven*. He has gone to prepare a place for us and has promised, *I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead*. Jesus departs and returns in different ways. Our calling is to follow Him: to take up our cross and follow Him; to live His risen life here on earth, walking in His footsteps; to take our place at His side in the heavenly Kingdom.

Soar we now where Christ has led, Following out exalted Head;
Made like him, like him we rise, Ours the cross, the grave, the skies.

GRANT, O merciful God, that as thine holy Apostle Saint James, leaving his father and all that he had, without delay was obedient unto the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him; so we, forsaking all worldly and carnal affections, may be evermore ready to follow thy holy commandments; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

July 26th (Trinity 7)

John 16 vv 19-22

There was a public school chaplain who used to tell the boys that being a Christian was much the same thing as being an English gentleman. Is it? I suppose that depends on what you mean by a gentleman. If a gentleman is someone with property, who dresses well, speaks nicely and knows which fork to use when eating fish, much of that has at best tangential relevance to being a Christian. If, on the other hand, a gentleman is someone who is always courteous & thoughtful, instinctively helpful and kind and respectful to everyone, especially to those less well endowed than himself, then there is a considerable overlap between being an English gentleman and being a Christian. What I am getting at is that, living in a supposedly Christian country, it can be too easy to equate without question being a good citizen with being a good Christian. But Jesus makes a huge distinction between the world (those who are not His disciples) and the Church (those of us who are His disciples). There is always potentially a radical difference between being a conventionally respectable person and being a follower of Jesus.

LORD of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things; Graft in our hearts the love of thy Name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

July 27th

John 16 vv 23&24

Through Jesus Christ our Lord is a phrase which rolls off the tongue as a kind of conventional ending to our prayers and we may not stop to think about what it means. Yet, if you think about it, it really is extraordinary that we can talk to God. Just consider for a moment Who God is. And yet we can speak to Him. He listens to what we say. He acts in response to our prayers. If we hadn't been doing this since infancy, we'd be amazed that we are able to pray at all. And yet we can. God loves us. God knows all about each one of us. He cares for every detail of our daily lives. St Peter writes about you (and me) *Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.* Here Jesus extends to us His invitation to pray to the Father. It is a wonderful privilege to speak to God and it is a gift to us that we can and no-one and nothing can take this gift from us.

July 28th

John 16 vv 25-27

Here are some more traditional prayer endings. Please think about them and consider what they say about the fellowship of Father, Son & Holy Spirit within the Blessed Trinity and our relationship with God in Christ, in a communion of eternal love in which we are included in the love that the three divine persons have for one another and for us.

Through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord.

For the honour of our Advocate and Mediator, Jesus Christ.

Through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

For the love of thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Through our only Mediator and Advocate, Jesus Christ our Lord.

For the love of Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, now and for ever.

We humbly beg in the Name and Mediation of Jesus Christ our most blessed Lord and Saviour.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, world without end.

Through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever.

(and in one of the few prayers addressed to Jesus rather than the Father directly) who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end.

July 29th

John 16 vv 28-32

Faith seeking understanding. That's good. That's what Theology is really about. Defining God, defining what we mean by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, defining the Incarnation, defining the Trinity – impossible, presumptuous and probably blasphemous. We can and must reach out towards these eternal truths, but we cannot grasp them. They are the light which shows us the way, but we cannot grasp them till we come to journey's end.

July 30th

John 16 v33

1 Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin?

The blood of Jesus whispers peace within.

2 Peace, perfect peace, by thronging duties pressed?

To do the will of Jesus, this is rest.

3 Peace, perfect peace, death shadowing us and ours?

Jesus has vanquished death and all its powers.

4 Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown?

Jesus we know, and he is on the throne.

5 It is enough: earth's struggles soon shall cease,
and Jesus call to heaven's perfect peace.

July 31st

John 17 v1

I think this is my favourite chapter in the Bible. Jesus consecrates Himself as high priest and sacrifice. He consecrates His Church. I often use this chapter in preparing candidates for Confirmation. As we come to know Jesus, He consecrates us in His service. We are members of His Church. As we come to know Him and to love Him, we consecrate our lives to Him.

I have heard confirmation referred to as the ordination of the laity.

When ministers of religion – bishops, priests and deacons – are ordained we are consecrated to God's service and He supplies us with the heavenly gifts we require in order to fulfil our vocations.

Confirmation also involves the laying on of hands (normally one hand actually) with prayer, consecrating the candidate to God's service, welcoming the Holy Spirit Who makes it possible for the confirmed person to do all the good works God has prepared for him or her to walk in. This is all true in the practice of churches such as the Church of England. I do have an important reservation, however. What has been said here about ordination and confirmation is even more importantly to be said of baptism. When we are baptised, Christ consecrates us to His service. When we are baptised we are consecrated to Him. He endows us with the Holy Spirit so that we, as baptised people, can fulfil our vocations to do all the good works He has prepared for us to walk in.

There are not three levels of Christian commitment: Baptism, Confirmation and Ordination. The calling of all the baptised is to live wholly for Jesus in whatever *state of life unto which it pleases God to call us*.

August 1st (Lammas Day)

John 17 vv 1&2

In England, Lammas was traditionally the feast of first fruits. (In the warmer Holy Land, that's Pentecost a few weeks earlier). Traditionally, a loaf was made of the first wheat of the year and used to make bread for Holy Communion – the loaf mass, lammas. Jesus is the Bread of life. John 6²⁷: *Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you, for him hath God the Father sealed.* Get your priorities right. The firstfruits of the year are a foretaste and a pledge (an earnest to use S Paul's language) of the full harvest which is to come. The harvest comes at the end of the world when God will send His angels to separate the wheat from the tares and despatch each to their eternal home. Scripturally, we can think of the resurrection of Jesus in terms of His being the firstfruits of the heavenly harvest. I Corinthians 15²³ (Speaking of the resurrection of us all, Paul writes,) *But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.* We can also think of ourselves as Christians as the firstfruits in God's plan for the salvation of the world. James 1¹⁸: *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.*

Come, ye thankful people,
come,
Raise the song of harvest home;
All is safely gathered in,
Ere the winter storms begin;
God our Maker doth provide
For our wants to be supplied;
Come to God's own temple,
come,
Raise the song of harvest home.

For the Lord our God shall
come,
And shall take His harvest
home;
From His field shall in that day
All offenses purge away;
Give His angels charge at last
In the fire the tares to cast;
But the fruitful ears to store
In His garner evermore.

All the world is God's own field,
Fruit unto His praise to yield;
Wheat and tares together sown,
Unto joy or sorrow grown;
First the blade, and then the
ear,
Then the full corn shall appear:
Lord of harvest, grant that we
Wholesome grain and pure may
be.

Even so, Lord, quickly come,
Bring Thy final harvest home;
Gather Thou Thy people in,
Free from sorrow, free from sin,
There, forever purified,
In Thy garner to abide;
Come, with all Thine angels
come,
Raise the glorious harvest
home.

August 2nd (Trinity 8)

John 17 v3

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

What can I say about that? Just let the meaning of our Lord's words sink into your heart and mind and soul. This really is what it is all about!

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

August 3rd

John 17 vv 4&5

So what is glory? When I think about the glory of God, I think of something like the vision of the prophet Isaiah who says: **6** In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. **2** Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. **3** And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. **4** And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.

But is that the glory of Jesus? It is in His heavenly glory Philippians 2⁶: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God. But how does Jesus glorify God on earth? He finishes the work God gave Him to do? And when does Jesus say, *It is finished*? When He is hanging on the Cross about to give up the ghost. So what is glory?

August 4th

John 17 v6

Isaiah's response to the glory of God is *Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.* That is Peter's response to Jesus on another occasion. It is surely our natural human response to the glory of God. *We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness.* Isaiah continues: **6** *Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: 7 And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.* God purges Isaiah. He cleanses the prophet and sends him to proclaim God's Word to the people – a word of warning, demanding repentance, which will be beyond his hearers to achieve. Jesus, however, is the Word of God made flesh and Christians keep His Word.

August 5th

John 17 vv 7&8

It is all about relationship. Christians know Jesus as our friend and brother. We know that He is the Son of God. It follows that we are children of God too. We know God as our heavenly Father. We speak with Him. We cast our cares on Him for He cares for us. This is what makes all the difference from being of the world.

August 6th (The Transfiguration)

John 17 v9

This always strikes me as a harsh verse. Jesus prays for His own (the Church). He does not pray for the world outside. But how does this makes sense in the light of what is probably the best known verse in the bible: *So God loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* St. John iii. 16? I think this is the same phenomenon as in Isaiah 6. God's opponents have gone so far as to commit the unforgiveable sin. Their hardness of heart amounts to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. There is therefore no hope for them, no point even in praying for them. Now what follows is hard to understand. Because God is absolutely sovereign, everything, even humanity's rejection of God, occurs within His Will and purpose. That's pretty dreadful, but now consider these words from the Christmas Gospel (John 1): ¹⁰ *He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.* ¹¹ *He came unto his own, and his own received him not.* ¹² *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:* ¹³ *Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.* The world, His own, received Him not, but as many as received Him. So some did receive Him and He gave them power to become children of God. God is absolutely sovereign and, for that very reason, our human language is unable to find words in which to describe or explain ultimate reality. These things really are beyond our understanding. We can find words, the Bible gives us words which point us towards the Truth, but that Truth remains beyond our grasp until we shall at last go to heaven to see Him as He is and to be made like Him ourselves. ⁴ *In him was life; and the life was the light of men.* ⁵ *And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.* (His own I take to mean the world in general, the people of Israel & even His family.)

August 7th

John 17 v10

All this has been a bit deep. So let me recall a rumbustious children's chorus we often sang at Halling. *I am glad I belong to Jesus* (3x), *Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!* Then opposite sides of the Church sing *Praise the Lord. Amen, Amen.* (5x jumping up & down) *Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!* So we should be glad to belong to Jesus & celebrate that we do. Seriously, though, how is He glorified in us? He is glorified in us because He has made us God's children. He is glorified in us when we behave like God's children.

August 8th

John 17 v11

In the world, but not of the world.

Given *So God loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son*, Christians, as children of God, surely have to love the world too. We proclaim the Gospel to the world. We care for the world & its peoples, especially the poor, the sick & the oppressed. We are lights of the world, the salt of the earth, the leaven which leavens the lump. Yet Jesus clearly distinguishes the Church from the world. The world quite often mocks Christians, opposes the Gospel & persecutes us for who we are & to Whom we are faithful. Christians are called to a much higher standard of behaviour than is generally considered to be acceptable in the world & are repeatedly told not to be seduced by the temptations of the world. James 1²⁷: *Pure religion & undefiled before God & the Father is this, To visit the fatherless & widows in their affliction, & to keep himself unspotted from the world.* At our Baptisms, we renounce sin, the world & the devil. So how do we reconcile this tension between living in the world, being good citizens, caring & praying for the welfare of the world & yet being distinct from it & unspotted by it? The catchphrase to remember is: *In the world, but not of the world.*

August 9th (Trinity 9)

John 17 v11

Jesus prays that His followers will be one as He is one with the Father. That is an astounding unity, a union of absolute, unconditional love. Not so long ago, what we called the Ecumenical Movement was a lot more vibrant than it seems to be now. We used to meet in one another's churches – Baptist, Anglican, Roman Catholic, United Reformed, Methodist, etc. – especially in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in

January. National and international conferences discussed the issues which divide us with the intention of bringing us back together as one Church. It was hoped that we would all joyfully worship together, share the same ordained ministry, work together in mission and charitable work, present a common vision of the Kingdom of God to the world and merge our governing bodies. A lot of progress has been made and work is still going on, though mostly behind the scenes these days. There is something of a feeling that we have got as far as we are likely to get on the path to organic unity. Jesus wasn't actually talking about any of this at the Last Supper. There, there were no Baptists, Methodists, Roman Catholics or Anglicans – only the people Jesus called His friends. True unity starts here. That we are friends of Jesus – His brothers and sisters even – is the basis on which we are one in the Church, members of one another, as St Paul puts it. It is in loving one another as Christ loves us that we can truly progress towards complete unity despite the issues which divide us, some of which will continue to do so until the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth. **GRANT** to us, Lord, we beseech thee, the spirit to think and do always such things as be rightful; that we, who cannot do any thing that is good without thee, may by thee be enabled to live according to thy will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

August 10th (S Laurence)

John 17 v12

Laurence was a martyr. He was archdeacon of Rome in the third century. The pagan Roman Emperor Valerian ordered Laurence to give him all the Church's treasure. Laurence gave the Church's material wealth to the poor and then presented the emperor with a group of poor people whom Laurence said constituted the true wealth of the Church. Laurence was tortured and then put in prison where he baptised some of his fellow prisoners. Finally, he died a martyr's death. So was Laurence lost? Jesus says that not one of those entrusted by God to Him has been lost except Judas who was always going to betray Him. Was Laurence lost? Revelation 7^{13et seq.}: And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

August 11th

John 17 v13

When I was first ordained and curate of All Saints Orpington, when I had nothing else to do, I used to visit people's homes door to door. This is something clergy used to do as a matter of course. I was probably one of the last. I did it at Ramsgate, and to begin with here. But times change, clergy are expected to look after more than one parish. There is far more paperwork than there used to be and more meetings. There is nobody in all day in many houses. People no longer expect unannounced visits from the clergy. In recent years, we are constrained by what are probably over the top safeguarding policies. So how do clergy and other members of church congregations reach out nowadays into the wider community? As St Paul says in Romans 10, *1³ For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. 1⁴ How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?* Anyway, one day I was visiting in a rural part of the parish, rather cut off from the town. A woman in late middle age recalled how, as a child, she used to attend a certain church where everybody seemed to be sober, stern and severe. Once she dared to ask an elder about Christian joy. He replied in a deep and solemn voice that faith brought a deep joy. So it does, and it may well have done so to that elder, but not he been better able to share that joy if it was more obvious in his demeanour?

August 12th

John 17 vv 14-16

It is a good question why so many Christians have been martyred. The standard that Jesus sets (and that his followers set if they live up to their calling) does embarrass the world. It calls into question the things that many people live for: status, wealth, prosperity, power, selfishness really, self-centredness. The world rejects Jesus and what He and His followers stand for (pure love, the very opposite of self-centredness) and crucifies Jesus and too often persecutes the Church. So far, so obvious, but why is it that so many Christians have preferred a martyr's death to renouncing their faith? Presumably, because Jesus has the words of eternal life, because of that deep joy which faith in Him brings with it. We remain in the world and we have the task of giving the world the Good News of Jesus. He prays that we shall be protected from the evil (the devil).

August 13th

John 17 v17

God's holy gifts for God's holy people.

When we introduced Common Worship in the year 2,000, I remember one member of the congregation feeling unsure about calling us Christians *holy*. We are all only too well of how far short we are of the standard set by Christ. Yet we are holy. He sanctifies us. He hallows us. He consecrates us. He makes us holy. His righteousness is imputed to us. We are made holy by the Truth. His Word is Truth. Jesus is the Word of God. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. This is why truth matters so profoundly and there is no place for lies and falsehoods nor for obfuscating or the difference between truth and falsehood or questioning that there really is a difference. It is the difference between Jesus & Satan. I didn't have room for this verse yesterday, but it is just as relevant today. Matthew 10²⁸: *And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

August 14th

John 17 v18

We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

An apostle is one who is sent. Jesus is the first apostle. *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.* He sends the twelve to continue the work God sent Him to do. As we shall see tomorrow, this mission (from the Latin for sent as apostle is Greek) is inherited by all who share the apostles' faith in Jesus.

August 15th (The Blessed Virgin Mary)

John 17 vv 19-21

After the angel Gabriel told Mary that she was to be the mother of the Son of God, she went to visit her cousin Elisabeth, who said, *Blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her of the Lord.* Mary's place in God's plan for the salvation of His creation was unique. She played the part which He, in His infinite wisdom, had assigned to her because she believed. All those of us who believe are one in Christ as we are one with Christ. We each have our part to play. Without faith we cannot play our part. With faith we can do anything which God requires of us.

August 16th (Trinity 10)

John 17 v22

We're back to the question of what we mean by glory. Jesus on the Cross is glory – the absolute sacrifice of self in total obedience to God in unreserved service to the world. The LORD high and lifted up in Isaiah's vision is also glory. Jesus talks about His servants being where He is – on the cross, in heaven. I think both. We are called to take up our cross daily and follow Him. He promises to prepare a place for us.

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

August 17th

John 17 v23

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.

I was in training for the ministry and worshipping at an 8.00 am service at St Paul's Herne Hill when I suddenly realised how much more these words mean than anything I had previously considered. No doubt there is a great deal more in them which we shall only apprehend when, by His grace and that alone, we attain to Heaven.

August 18th

John 17 v24

Insofar as divinely inspired human words can, this passage from Revelation 5 gives us an idea and note that we too are there. ⁶And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. ⁷And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. ⁸And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. ⁹And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; ¹⁰And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. ¹¹And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round

about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; ¹² Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. ¹³ And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. ¹⁴ And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.

August 19th

John 17 vv 25&26

No way is knowing Jesus the icing on the cake. To know Jesus is to have eternal life. It is to have joy in abundance. It is to dwell in love.

August 20th

John 18 vv 1-6

After five chapters of what Jesus taught His Church at the Last Supper (which shows how important this teaching is), we return to the narrative. Jesus, knowing what is to happen, goes out to the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas, knowing where Jesus is likely to be, brings the soldiers and the police. They ask Him if He is Jesus of Nazareth. He responds *I am he*. They fall to the ground overawed. I'm sure that we are to think of God speaking to Moses at the Burning Bush when God says *I am what I am*. This is Who Jesus is, one with the Father.

August 21st

John 18 vv 7&8

The second time Jesus replies, *I have told you that I am he*. This time they take it in the sense that any man might use these words. *It's me*. Jesus is both Son of God and Son of Man – human and divine. I'm writing these notes on Ascension Day when the Quicunque Vult is said instead of the Apostles' Creed at Mattins. It tries to put this great truth into words thus.

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; Who suffered for our salvation : descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead.

He ascended into heaven, he sitteth at the right hand of the Father, God Almighty : from whence he will come to judge the quick and the dead.

August 22nd

John 18 vv 9&10

We had a big youth club at Newington and we used to put on dramatic presentations of Gospel stories. In those days, children were allowed out on their own and a lot came, not only to the club but sometimes to services, on their own. One young boy who was also quite small for his age had the part of Malchus in our Passion Play. He came along on his own without any parental support to our evening Eucharist on the Wednesday in Holy Week. I have never forgotten the expression on his face when, reading the Gospel, I got to this bit about Malchus having his ear cut off by Peter & restored by Jesus. That boy must be around 40 now. I wonder what he thinks about Jesus now & I wonder too how we reach out to children in these very different times? We were trying to do this with XKids, but, at least for now, Covid 19 has messed up Messy Church. Do encourage families to look up online resources.

August 23rd (Trinity 11)

John 18 vv 11-14

Jesus will drink of the cup the Father has given Him. What is about to happen is the eternal purpose of God. Annas was very much the power behind the throne, but Caiaphas was the high priest. He was therefore in a position to be used by God to prophesy what was in God's eternal purpose and state that it was expedient that one man should die for the people (and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.) What is happening is God's Will which Jesus freely accepts for Himself as a man as well as the Son of God.

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

August 24th (S Bartholomew)

John 18 vv 15-18

It was from this date in 1662 (till 1966) that the Book of Common Prayer was required to be used exclusively in English churches and I'm fairly sure that some of you wish I didn't love it so much (or the King James Bible, come to that). A lot of people believe that old fashioned language etc. puts off new people and especially young people. I'm not convinced. I've used the traditional words very successfully with children and young people in the past. I just don't get the chance now. Nobody could say that bringing in new forms of service and more modern translations of the Scriptures over the last fifty or so years has resulted in large congregations full of children and young people. There are people who believe that we have lost people because we have taken away what older worshippers valued and not offered to younger people the full range of resources that we have (ancient as well as modern). You can point to flourishing traditional churches and thriving churches which almost exclusively use modern materials for worship and up to date translations of the Bible. There are evangelical parish churches with large congregations of young people centred on informal worship. But cathedral congregations are also growing, possibly because, in a cathedral, you can still experience traditional worship and hear a sermon aimed at adults rather than children. I don't think that there is conclusive evidence one way or the other as to what works in terms of public worship styles. What I am convinced of is that the real point about worship is that it is offered *in spirit and in truth*. Do we really mean what we say? If we do, it is much less important whether we speak to God as *Thou* or *You*. It is insincerity not *happy clappy* choruses or Tudor English that makes it hard for people to find Jesus in our midst. I will, however, defend my love of the BCP and the KJV, but, before I do so, let me reassure you that I am virtually certain that *Common Worship* (what we use now) is right for our 9.30 & 11.00 services. I'm not going to try to persuade you to change to BCP, although think we are right to be prepared to incorporate some BCP material in with the other resources that we use.

So, why do I value the BCP & the KJV? It's partly familiarity. I've known them since infancy. They have been a big factor in forming me as a Christian. When I've been under pressure particularly (with all the

stresses with which a parish can burden its rector), I've found comfort (in both senses of the word) in the Bible and Prayer Book I have known and loved all my life. Millions of other Christians have found the same. It is cruel to take these resources from them and to deny them to those who might learn to value them.

Secondly, I think there is a value, not only in what is said, but also the manner in which it is said. The meaning is carried by the quality of the poetry or prose as well as the basic meaning. Instead of *I wandered lonely as a cloud That floats on high o'er vales and hills, When all at once I saw a crowd, A host, of golden daffodils; Beside the lake, beneath the trees, Fluttering and dancing in the breeze*, Wordsworth could have written, *Walking alone one day, I saw a lot of yellow flowers blowing about down by the lake*. It would both have meant the same and not meant the same. It's what teachers call register when they are explaining to their pupils why you don't use the same style when writing an essay as you do when writing to a friend.

Lastly, for now, *Common Worship* and many new translations of the Bible often seem to me to be less robust than the traditional versions, more wishy washy. Somehow *Common Worship* doesn't seem to demand that uncompromising belief in a sovereign God which the BCP does. Bible translations which read like the light reading you pick up at the airport lack *gravitas*!

What has all this to do with John 18? I was thinking the other day about the wonder of the Bible. We read the same passages on numerous occasions and there is always something new in them. God uses them to speak to us in a fresh way through the old familiar words. John's Gospel particularly, in the KJV which closely echoes John's own Greek – extremely simple, yet infinitely profound – we find that we know passages like this almost by heart when we come across them in our daily readings and they can therefore speak to us at the deepest level.

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

August 25th

John 18 vv 15-27

One of the disciples, presumably John himself, has connections in the high priest's house. He gets Peter in. As Jesus foreknew, Peter denies that he knows Him. Would we deny Jesus if we thought that we might be crucified for admitting that we know Him? Many years after this, when John was quite an old man, a young man called Polycarp followed John in following Jesus. Many more years later, when Polycarp was an old man himself, the Roman authorities tried to make him deny Jesus. His reply was, "86 years have I have served him, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?" and he died the martyr's death. The trial of Jesus was of course a travesty with the verdict decided before any evidence had been considered, witnesses heard or the Accused allowed to speak. Not only was Jesus unjustly convicted and wrongly sentenced, throughout the trial He was insulted and abused. It is surely evident that those accused of crimes should always receive a fair trial. What is not always so readily realised is that defendants should be treated with respect. Even if they are guilty, the sentence of the court is all they ought to have to suffer. The sentence should reflect the severity of the crime. It should deter others. It should, if at all possible, contribute to the rehabilitation of the offender. The offender should not face insults and abuse either from the general public or from the officers responsible for bringing him to trial and keeping him in custody. Compassion extends even to sinners. If it didn't, we should all be condemned.

August 26th

John 18 v 28

I was at a weekday Mattins at All Saints Orpington when this passage was being read. One of the congregation actually snorted with indignation at the hypocrisy of people who thought they would be defiled by entering Pilate's Judgment Hall but were conniving in the cruel punishment of an innocent man. Religion has forms and observances and they have their place in forming us as Christian people and in honouring God, but it does not honour God to go through rituals such as hymn-singing & praying, sharing in the Sacraments, keeping Sunday special, listening with a pious demeanour to sermons and readings, carrying a bible about with you and frequently quoting it, if you don't act as someone who loves God and his fellow human beings.

August 27th

John 18 vv 29&30

The Jewish authorities want to get rid of Jesus. They don't want to take the responsibility for doing so, because He is popular with the crowd. They want at least a semblance of legality. So they bring the case before the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. But, even in those days, there were proper legal frameworks. Definite charges had to be brought under the law. There needed to be evidence. It is not enough to say that someone is a nuisance or an embarrassment to those in authority or even a potential threat to society. Despite the cynical saying that what you get in court is law, not justice, the aim is that the law delivers justice. Whether it is parliament (or the king or the president or whoever in whatever political system) enacting the law or the police and courts enforcing the law, the aim is to deliver justice – that people get what they deserve. If they have done nothing wrong, they go free. If they have done something wrong they are punished in proportion to the wrong-doing. Mercy might lead to a lighter sentence. The authorities have no warrant to impose a heavier one, not even to deter others, not even to protect society from a dangerous criminal or terrorist. Corrupt regimes have always abused legal processes to get rid of opponents. Even in a society like ours, there is always the danger of imposing sentences which reflect public anger, official nervousness or the laudable desire to protect society from someone generally regarded as a wrong'un. We need to pray for law makers, for the courts and all those involved in the administration of justice & for the police.

That it may please thee to bless and keep the Magistrates, giving them
grace to execute justice, and to maintain truth;

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

August 28th

John 18 vv 31&32

There were parallel jurisdictions. Roman Law was enforced by imperial might but the Jewish authorities were permitted considerable leeway to run their own legal affairs. Neither wanted to take responsibility for executing a popular teacher against whom there were no proper charges or evidence. The Jews insist that this is a capital case and that they do not have the authority to execute anyone. They do stone Stephen, but that an informal rather than a judicial execution. The Jews did not, however, ever crucify. It was by handing Jesus over to the Romans that they fulfilled His own prophecy as to how He would die.

August 29th (The Beheading of S John the Baptist)

John 18 v33

Herod had executed John the Baptist in the portion of the Holy Land the Romans allowed him to administer (his tetrarchy in technical terms). King was an informal courtesy title for this Herod (one of the sons of the King Herod who killed the boy babies in Bethlehem). He was really Tetrarch of Galilee. But who was the King of the Jews? And what does *King of the Jews* mean. God is the true King of Israel. The Kings of Israel & Judah we read about in the Books of Samuel and Kings from Saul and David onwards were really vice-regents. They ruled on God's behalf. They were supposed to be familiar with the Law of God (Torah) and govern in accordance with it. They were responsible to God for the good government of Israel. Sometimes (eg Psalm 2⁷), they are referred to as *sons of God*. When Jesus is baptised and anointed with the Holy Spirit, God's Voice from heaven says to Jesus, *Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*. When Jesus dies on the Cross, the centurion says, *Truly this man was the Son of God*. So who is the king of the Jews and what does it mean to be King of the Jews?

August 30th (Trinity 12)

John 18 v34

What possible understanding could Pilate have of all this? His most likely assumption would be that a self-styled King of the Jews might be a rabble-rouser or terrorist who intended to start a revolution. Quite possibly, the Sadducees would have thought something similar – that a man, especially a descendant of David, could convince himself and others that, with God's help, he could free the Holy Land from Roman rule and re-establish the Kingdom of Israel. Judas Maccabeus had achieved something like this rebelling against the Greek successors of Alexander the Great a couple of hundred years previously. More recently, other charismatic figures had set themselves up against Roman rule with very bloody consequences which the authorities were very anxious should not be repeated. So there is no straightforward answer that Jesus could give and Pilate understand.

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

August 31st

John 18 vv 35&36

My Kingdom is not of this world.

People have taken this to mean that Jesus (and therefore the Church) is concerned only about spiritual matters – the life of the soul, prayer, sacraments, etc., and with getting people to Heaven when they die. This is very convenient for some. Christianity, they claim, has nothing to say about justice, commerce, politics, war, poverty, etc.. These are matters for the peoples of the world (especially the rich & powerful) and Christians should keep their noses out and concentrate on the things of the spirit. However, nobody who has read the Bible could believe that God is not concerned with every aspect of our lives on earth – material as well as spiritual – and that we shall answer to Him for our injustice, selfishness, corruption, violence, indifference to the needs of others, etc.. In the light of His teaching about the Church and the world in earlier chapters, Jesus is saying that His Kingdom rests on an entirely different foundation from the kingdoms of the world – the Word of God. It is not based on physical force or money or human power. God's Kingdom consists in love which is the basis of its laws.

I vow to thee my country, all
earthly things above,
Entire and whole and perfect,
the service of my love.
The love that asks no question,
the love that stands the test,
That lays upon the altar the
dearest and the best.
The love that never falters, the
love that pays the price,
The love that makes undaunted
the final sacrifice.

And there's another country
I've heard of long ago,
Most dear to them that love
her, most great to them that
know.
We may not count her armies,
we may not see her king,
Her fortress is a faithful heart,
her pride is suffering.
And soul by soul and silently
her shining bounds increase,
And her ways are ways of
gentleness and all her paths
are peace.

September 1st

John 18 vv 37&38

What is truth? is a fundamental question. Maybe Pilate was being ironic. Maybe he was being profound in asking it. But the point is that the answer to his question was standing in front of him. To know Jesus is know the Truth. As we gaze into His Truth, we are changed into His likeness.

Sun of my soul, Thou Saviour
dear,
It is not night if Thou be near;

Oh, may no earthborn cloud arise
To hide Thee from Thy servant's
eyes.

September 2nd

John 18 vv 39&40

Pilate cannot see any reason to execute this man. Neither does he feel able to go against the powerful people on whom even he depends to maintain order and preserve his reputation as a competent administrator. So he finds a compromise. He thinks that the crowd will ask for Jesus to be released. But crowds are easily influenced, fickle and unpredictable. They choose to release the undoubted violent rebel Barabbas and demand that Jesus is crucified. Integrity and an ability to compromise are both virtues. They are virtues we look for in our leaders. But there are times when compromise and integrity seem to be incompatible. You can't do what you are sure is the right thing without alienating the people whose support you need if you are to achieve anything at all. Politicians do need our prayers and our support and our understanding.

September 3rd

John 19 v1

It was on this day (a Sunday) in 1939 that Britain declared war on Germany. Many people learnt of this in Church, where they were gathered to worship the Prince of Peace, the Prince of Peace Who suffered such terrible violence at the hands of the Jews and Romans (representing the whole human race in fact). It was Trinity 13 and the Gospel reading at Holy Communion was the story of the Good Samaritan, told by Jesus to illustrate what it means to love your neighbour as yourself. Throughout the war, these people would have looked to God for courage and strength. They would have prayed for victory. They prayed that they and their loved ones might be kept safe. They commended those who had died to His eternal love. They may even have found the grace to pray for their enemies. *My Kingdom is not of this world*, but how we need its values to survive in this world.

September 4th

John 19 vv 2&3

And it's this additional, unnecessary cruelty to the condemned man which underlines the truth of original sin, humanity's propensity for wickedness. This action on the part of the soldiers demonstrates our need for a Saviour and at the same time is the opportunity for our Saviour to demonstrate the full extent of His love & thereby to us.

September 5th

John 19 vv 4&5

Behold the Man. What do we make of Pilate's words? The appearance of Jesus, flogged, crowned with thorns, dressed in a soldier's cloak, is a parody of human majesty. Do we mock Him? Do we pity Him? Or do we glorify Him. *Behold the Man.* This is the man, the man who is everything that every man ought to be, the One Who represents the whole of humanity before the Throne of Grace.

September 6th (Trinity 13)

John 19 vv 6&7

Pilate seems to have had the sense that there was much more to Jesus than met the eye. Even his wife had a warning dream about Jesus. The chief priests insisted that Jesus' claim to be the Son of God was false, blasphemy, and according to their law, deserving of death. *Son of God* could have been to their mind synonymous with *King of Israel*, a messiah or false messiah intending to start a revolt. Or maybe they took it more as we might take it as meaning a claim about Jesus and His relationship with God which to them was not only blasphemous, but, in their eyes, also impossible. Either way, according to their lights, Jesus had to die. But for Pilate, although he could not grasp it, there was something more mysterious, a profound truth about Jesus that made him uneasy in doing what he believed he had to do.

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

September 7th

John 19 vv 8&9

Whence Art Thou? That is the key question. Where does Jesus come from? Is He Joseph's son? Is He the former village carpenter from Nazareth? Is He a rabbi or teacher? Is He a faith healer, an exorcist, some kind of prophet? Is He a potential rebel leader? Is He the Messiah? Or does He come from God? If He comes from God, what does that mean for the way people ought to respond to Him? IN the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

September 8th (Mary's Birthday)

John 19 vv 10&11

Today, in some places, is celebrated as the birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mary assented to God's plan for her life. She therefore played a crucial role in God's eternal plan for His entire creation. *The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.* He was first made flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who rejoiced to be chosen to effect God's purposes.

Pilate claims to have the power to release Jesus or to crucify Him. Jesus reminds him that the power he has has been given to him. By whom? The Roman emperor certainly. Also by the troops who defended him against rebels and criminals. Also by fellow administrators who were prepared to work with him. Also by the people. If a majority of the people really combine to withdraw their support from their rulers, eventually those rulers must fall. But, ultimately, all power comes from God. Whatever were the earthly factors in appointing Pilate to his position, all power comes from God and that is something we should all remember both when we are entrusted with power over other people and when we are called upon to be loyal to the powers that be. Pilate ought not to have been crucifying an innocent man and would answer to God for doing so. (I should say that crucifying a guilty man was also a great crime against God for which those in authority who kill or torture their subjects must answer to God.) I think that the reason the high priests were more guilty than Pilate is because they ought to have known better. Christians ought to know better and are therefore more culpable, not less blameworthy, than people in the world when we commit the same sins.

But, interestingly, while Mary plays her part in God's plan for the salvation of the world willingly and joyfully, Pilate does so blindly, in ignorance and unbelief, wickedly even. But, either way, God's Will is done. Nevertheless, let us pray for grace to be working with Him so that we too, like Mary, shall have a place in His Kingdom.

Take my life and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my
days, Let them flow in endless
praise.

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

September 9th

John 19 vv 12-15

We have no king but Caesar.

But who is the King of Israel? God is the King of Israel. It was considered an act of rebellion against God when the Israelites first demanded a king perhaps 1,000 years before this – so that they should be *like the nations*. They justifiably distrusted the sons of the Prophet Samuel the last Judge to rule Israel. They thought they needed a king to lead the fight the Ammonites. They did not trust God to provide for them. They wanted to be like everybody else and rely on worldly wealth and power. They were warned that kings would oppress them, conscripting the boys into their armies and their girls into service in their palaces and that they would tax hitherto free Israelites for their wars and grand projects. But they persisted in their demands and God gave them kings. These kings, however, were meant to rule as God's viceroys and in accordance with God's Law. The fact that most of them didn't brought about the series of disasters which culminated in Roman rule. So, *We have no king but Caesar* was a truly terrible thing to say. But do we trust God to look after us or do we want to be like everyone else and trust to the ways of this world to provide for our needs?

September 10th

John 19 vv 16-22

Pilate doesn't drop it. He knows that there is something about Jesus. The chief priests have stitched Him up somehow. Pilate makes sure everybody knows that something is going on. Without knowing it, Pilate proclaims that Jesus is the Messiah – in fact the Son of God.

Now we do know and it is our calling deliberately and knowingly to proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God. There are many ways we can do this, but the most effective of all, is to live Christian lives.

Jesus said (Matthew 7¹⁶), *By their fruits shall ye know them*. S Paul says in Galatians 5 ²²: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,* ²³ *Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*

September 11th

John 19 vv 23&24

When I first went to Medical School, the guy in the next room was of a Jewish family, but, I believe, an atheist. What happened to Jesus on the Cross is prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament. What happens in today's reading is prophesied in Psalm 22. I tried to persuade my neighbour that this proved that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the Son of God, and that we should believe in Him. I know that I didn't convince him at the time. It is possible that I might have been part of a process by which God made Himself known to this guy so that he would eventually come to faith. Faith is reasonable. Belief is logical. Christianity makes sense. And it is helpful to try to discuss why this is so with other people, so long as we are respectful and properly humble, willing to listen as well as to talk. But, however good our reasoning and however helpful we may be in preparing for someone to accept the Gospel, it is God Who reveals Himself to a person and elicits a response in love. So, as well as talking to, we need to pray for people that they may come to know Jesus. As we said yesterday, a vital part of the process is that they see what Jesus means in our lives.

September 12th

John 19 vv 25-27

Jesus suffered this horrible punishment even though He was innocent. Millions of guilty people in the history of the human race have suffered terrible punishments which are so cruel that no crime, however dreadful, could justify them. Even when people are genuinely guilty and the punishment is reasonable and in proportion to the crime committed, we cannot be comfortable about inflicting even deserved penalties on our fellow human beings. As we see here, there is also the matter of their families if someone is executed, imprisoned, heavily fined or whatever. Justice ought to be the first principle of the legal system. No innocent person should suffer punishment. No guilty person should receive a greater punishment than he deserves (not even to deter others, to protect the public against future crimes he might commit, or to compel him to accept treatment). If at all possible, punishment should lead to rehabilitation. The families and friends of offenders and their welfare must be considered in the way we deal with those convicted of crimes. There's a lot to pray for: law makers, judges & juries, police, prison officers, probation officers, chaplains, welfare workers, etc..

September 13th (Trinity 14)

John 19 vv 28-30

Giving Jesus vinegar or sour wine to drink fulfils the prophecy in Psalm 69. He then says, *It is finished*. Jesus has accomplished what He came to do. In perfect love for God and for us, He has offered Himself, *a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world*. This is the glory of Jesus. This is the glory of God. This is our glory. This is the very moment in which the whole history of the human race is transformed. It is the pivot on which God's purposes turn, the fulcrum that moves the earth. Our eternity is assured in this one moment of time. The infinite breadth of God's love is concentrated in perhaps four square feet of a hill far away. It is our glory in that, through what Jesus has done, we are heirs of eternal life. It is our glory to follow Him, that where He is, there shall His servants be.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain that which thou dost promise, make us to love that which thou dost command; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

September 14th

John 19 vv 31-37

The first prophecy referred to is Psalm 34²⁰ about God protecting the righteous and maybe that the bones of the Passover Lamb were not to be broken. Jesus is the Lamb of God sacrificed at Passover. The prophecy about looking on the son of David whom they have pierced is Zechariah 12¹⁰. The Jews don't want the dead to hang on a tree overnight. That was forbidden in their law. This, moreover, was a very special night, the night of the Passover. Those who were put to death by hanging on a tree were regarded as cursed. S Paul says: *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, for it is written, Cursed is everyone that is hung on a tree* (Galatians 3¹³). For their different reasons, the Jews and the Romans unknowingly fulfilled these prophecies concerning Jesus. The effect was the shedding of the Blood of the Passover Lamb which protects from the angel of death, the shedding of the Blood of the sacrificial Lamb, which saves us from sin, and the pouring out of the river of God, the Holy Spirit, Who brings life to all. Galatians 4⁴: But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his

Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

September 15th (Battle of Britain Day)

John 19 vv 38-42

It was Nicodemus, who right at beginning of Jesus' ministry, came to Him by night to find out about Jesus. It was to him that Jesus explained about the need to be born again, the need to be born of the Holy Spirit. It was to Nicodemus that Jesus declared that He would be crucified in order to save all who come to Him in faith. It was to Nicodemus that Jesus spoke about God's gift of eternal life to all believers and that the world through Jesus might be saved.

2,000 years later, the Battle of Britain. We honour those pilots who risked and suffered so much to protect this country from Nazi invasion. We are heartily thankful that they succeeded. Yet surely we, the human race, with the example and teaching of the Word made flesh before us ought to be able to find a better way than war to settle our differences. **O GOD**, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed; Give unto thy servants that peace which the world cannot give; that both our hearts may be set to obey thy commandments, and also that by thee, we, being defended from the fear of our enemies, may pass our time in rest and quietness; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour. *Amen.*

September 16th

John 20 vv 1&2

When people are trying to cover up a crime, they conspire together to make sure that their accounts completely agree, whereas honest witnesses tend to remember things slightly differently from one another. This is so much true that, if you hear two accounts of the same thing in almost exactly the same words, you should be suspicious that the witnesses are not telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. So, it is not surprising that the accounts of the Resurrection in the four Gospels and in Paul seem to differ in detail. Honest witnesses are doing their best to give a true account of something previously outside their experience which transformed their lives, something which shook them to the very core of their being, something essentially inexplicable in human terms. So it is not surprising that they differ about the details.

September 17th

John 20 vv 3&4

In the mediaeval mystery plays, they used to make a bit of a joke of this scene – the athletic John easily outpacing a more stolid Peter. The mystery plays were both entertaining and educational. Putting them on was an act of worship in itself and an act of witness to the truth of the Gospel. There is a danger of lacking reverence when expounding these great mysteries, but there is also a danger of concealing their abundant joy behind an excessively sober, and sometimes disapproving, mien.

Which reminds me of a funny story of a modern day long presentation of the mystery plays with breaks for meals. One retired lady had determined to see the whole thing from very early in the morning, but others could only come for part of the time. On returning from the tea interval, the old lady discovered a man just finished work sitting in her seat. “Young man,” she said (in a voice reminiscent of Dame Edith Evans as Lady Bracknell), “I sat in that seat for the Creation, the Flood, the Exodus and 40 years wandering in the Wilderness, Daniel in the Lion’s Den and Belshazzar’s Feast, for our Lord’s Birth, Death, Resurrection and Ascension into Heaven and the coming of the Holy Spirit, and I intend to be still sitting in that seat for the Last Judgment!”

September 18th

John 20 vv 5-7

My feeling is that John had a greater sense of reverence than Peter and that is why he hesitated to enter the tomb. Or maybe he was afraid. When does awe become fear? We talk about the fear of the LORD being the beginning of wisdom. In the Litany, we ask that God will rule the Queen’s heart *in thy, faith, fear and love*. We also ask God to give us *an heart to love and dread thee, and diligently to live after thy commandments*. On the other hand, we are told: *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.* (I John 4¹⁸). Do we fear the God we love? We sometimes get round this by saying that what we feel towards God is awe rather than fear, but I’m not sure that is enough. Certainly, we ought to be awed, overawed even, at the very thought of God. Certainly, our hearts should be on fire with love for Him. I think there is a place too for remembering that God is just. Sin deserves punishment and we sinners would be punished if it were not for the

offering of Christ on the Cross for our salvation. The fact that we love God ought not to lead us to treat Him with disrespect. In fact, I remember someone talking about human marriage saying, “When the respect goes, the love soon follows.” The same could well be true for our relationship with God.

Come down, O love divine, seek
thou this soul of mine,
and visit it with thine own
ardour glowing;
O Comforter, draw near, within
my heart appear,
and kindle it, Thy holy flame
bestowing.

O let it freely burn, till earthly
passions turn
to dust and ashes in its heat
consuming;
And let thy glorious light shine
ever on my sight,
and clothe me round, the while
my path illuming.

Let holy charity mine outward
vesture be,
and lowliness become mine
inner clothing;
True lowliness of heart, which
takes the humbler part,
and o’er its own shortcomings
weeps with loathing.

And so the yearning strong,
with which the soul will long,
shall far outpass the power of
human telling;
For none can guess its grace,
till they become the place
where-in the Holy Spirit finds a
dwelling.

September 19th

John 20 vv 8-10

John believed. John believed that Christ is risen from the dead. It would, however, be possible to believe that Jesus has risen from the dead, but not to believe in Him. John believed in Him.

It is so important that Christ rose in accordance with the Scriptures that S Paul stresses the point in I Corinthians 15 when he is insisting to the Corinthian Christians that belief in the Resurrection is the essence of our faith and we say it week by week in the Nicene Creed at Holy Communion.

And yet, you don’t find it spelt out unambiguously in so many words anywhere in the Old Testament (what John & Paul mean by the Scriptures) that the Messiah will rise again from the dead. It is not obvious to an unbeliever that the OT predicts the Resurrection of Jesus. Reading the Bible without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit is like reading the Bible with a veil partially hiding it from sight, but, if we

know Jesus, if we have received His Holy Spirit, not only do we discern the true meaning of the OT as witness to the Gospel proclaimed in the NT, we ourselves are transformed from glory into glory.

II Corinthians 3: ¹² Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: ¹³ And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: ¹⁴ But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. ¹⁵ But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. ¹⁶ Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. ¹⁸ But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

September 20th (Trinity 15)

John 20 vv 11-18

The story of Mary Magdalene and the man she at first believes to be the gardener is very moving. We can only try to imagine her feelings. Her best friend had died a cruel death. She had seen Him buried in haste and had now come to make things as nice as possible for His poor mangled body. Instead, she found the body gone. There were angels in its place. What was she to do or even think? And Jesus said her name. “Mary”. The Good Shepherd knows His sheep. He calls them by name and His sheep hear His voice. Mary has been called the first apostle. She is witness to the Resurrection. The Lord sends her to tell the others. Jesus speaks of His Father and our Father, His God and our God. I often repeat those words at funerals as we think of Him Who went to prepare a place for us and commend ourselves and all our loved ones, living and departed, into His Hands. The God Who made heaven and earth is Jesus’ God and our God, Jesus’ Father and our Father.

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

September 21st (S Matthew)

John 20 20-23

My family moved to Wigmore in 1963. We went at first to the Church dedicated to S Matthew in Woodside, which is quite a small building and was not adequate for the needs of the growing parish. So, a new Church was constructed in Drewery Drive and I remember its consecration by Bishop David Say at Easter in 1965. It was a very impressive service, possibly the first time I'd seen a bishop. He knocked loudly on the door with his staff for admission and entered in all the splendour of his episcopal robes. He consecrated the building to God's service. The sanctuary lamp was lit from the Easter flame, which proclaims the Resurrected Christ, the Light of the World. He preached the Gospel, presided at the Holy Communion and commissioned us to carry on with Christ's Mission in the world. In a way it was like what happened on the first Easter Day as described in today's reading. Jesus comes into the fellowship (no need for Him to knock or for the door to be opened). The Light of the World is among His disciples. He teaches them from the Scriptures and they share a meal. (See Luke 24³⁶⁻⁴⁹). He commissions us to do His work in the world and endues us with the Holy Spirit to enable us to obey His commandments.

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

September 22nd

John 20 vv 24-29

Does the Bible speak to you? It does to me. When I read the Bible everyday, I read it as talking to me. One has to be careful about this. When, for example, God is telling David to lead the Israelites into battle, that doesn't mean that you or I necessarily are being told to go to war. We read the Bible in the light of the Church's teaching and our own intelligence. We read the Bible in the Light of Jesus. But the Bible does address us. It is the Word of God and the Bible is one of the means by which God speaks to us. Thomas was not there when Jesus manifested Himself to the apostles and commissioned them on that first Easter Day. A week later, Thomas was there. Jesus uses Thomas' doubt and then coming to faith to teach we are all His brothers and sisters in God's family, not just those physically present in the Bible.

September 23rd

John 20 vv 30&31

Christ's commission is to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world. Those who know Him have eternal life. Those who have eternal life must share the Truth with those who do not yet know Him. John is playing his part in this by writing up the story of Jesus in this gospel. We all have our part to play in sharing the Good News with the world.

September 24th

John 21 vv 1-3

This incident feels to me like an anticlimax. The last chapter was about the Risen Christ commissioning His Church to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth. He breathes on us the Holy Spirit; He gives us another Comforter; He does not leave us; He inspires us. And what do we do – or rather our representatives, Simon Peter, Thomas (of all people), Nathanael, James and John, and two others? We go fishing. We revert to the normal, the ordinary. Now there is nothing wrong with being a fisherman. It's a perfectly respectable occupation which many Christians have followed. Most Christians have to do ordinary mundane jobs, whether paid like fishing, or unpaid like housework. There is nothing wrong in that, but where's the spark? Where is the sense that our everyday occupations are an aspect, and only one aspect, of what we do for Jesus, of lives lived to the glory of God?

Teach me, my God and King,
In all things thee to see;
And what I do in anything
To do it as for thee!

thy sake',
Will not grow bright and clean.

A man that looks on glass,
On it may stay his eye;
Or if he pleaseth, through it
pass,
And then the heaven espy.

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine;
Who sweeps a room, as for thy
laws,
Makes that and the action fine.

All may of thee partake;
Nothing can be so mean,
Which with this tincture, 'for

This is the famous stone
That turneth all to gold;
For that which God doth touch
and own
Cannot for less be told.

September 25th

John 21 vv 4-14

I was once told in a sermon that fishermen in some parts of England still follow the practice of casting their nets on the right side of the ship because that is what Jesus told the apostles to do. When they

recognised Jesus, Peter, especially, got excited. Here is the spark which makes all the difference, Jesus there with us. He provides for them. They bring what they have to share with Him. A good model for us to think about.

September 26th

John 21 vv 15-19

Having denied Christ three times, Peter is given the opportunity to confess Him three times, to repeat three times that he loves Him. Since Peter loves Jesus, he must take care of Christ's people. Peter had a special responsibility in the New Testament Church, but again this is generally true of all us Christians. If we love Jesus, we must take care of one another. Despite all his weakness and failures, Peter's love for Jesus will lead him to a martyr's death. Peter was very ordinary like all of us, but, by God's grace, he made the ultimate sacrifice. Again, a general truth about us Christians.

September 27th (Trinity 16)

John 21 vv 20-25

I should think that it was very frustrating for Jesus. He'd rehabilitated Peter. He'd appointed him shepherd of the flock of God. He'd spoken of his death as a Christian martyr. And Peter wanted to know what was in store for John. Focus, Peter, focus. How often do we get sidetracked! How often do Church meetings and Church programmes get sidetracked as we wander off into irrelevancies! Focus on your Christian calling. Focus on what God wants you do with your life. Focus on what God wants for this Church. Focus on God. Don't judge other people. Don't judge yourself by other people. Just get on with what God is calling you to do.

O LORD, we beseech thee, let thy continual pity cleanse and defend thy Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without thy succour, preserve it evermore by thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

September 28th

Galatians 6 vv 1-18

Having finished John, the last three days of the month, I'll look at what I'll be reading in church these days (or at home if we still aren't allowed back). Paul starts this chapter with some of the same thoughts we've been looking at. Our calling is to care for one another, bear one another's burdens. But don't think too highly of ourselves and

arrogantly judge others. The law of Christ is fulfilled in that we love one another. We begin at home with the family, fellow Christians, the Household of faith, but, as charity begins at home, it certainly does not end there, and we are to do good to all. Get on with your own Christian calling, not comparing yourself with others and finding fault with them. There is judgment but there is no condemnation for those who live in the Spirit of God. Our only glory is the Cross of Christ and that glory is to us the glory of heaven.

To the old rugged cross I will ever be true; Its shame and reproach gladly bear;

Then He'll call me some day to my home far away, Where His glory forever I'll share.

September 29th (Michaelmas)

Acts 12 vv 5-17

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

Three things to bear in mind when we are in trouble. They prayed.

God sent his angel to protect Peter. Having prayed, neither Peter at first nor his fellow Christians praying in the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, could believe that God had answered their prayers, but He had and He does.

September 30th

Luke 4 vv 16-44

Jesus fulfils the Old Testament. He proclaims the Kingdom of God – justice, mercy and peace. He is rejected by His own. God is sovereign.

Miracles are His gracious gift to us, not something we can demand.

What is required of us is faith. Unable to understand Him, they try to kill Him, but God delivers Him out of their hands. His hour has not yet come. He teaches with authority the Word of God. Jesus is the Word.

Signs and wonders bear witness to Who He is. He overcomes all the power of evil. He heals. Those who are healed by Him of whatever malady, spiritual, mental or physical, are set free to serve. Those who know their need of God are drawn to Him. His mission is to all.

LORD, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace : according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen : thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared : before the face of all people; To be a light to lighten the Gentiles : and to be the glory of thy people Israel.