

I Am The LORD

יהוה

EIM

Bible Notes

October - December 2014

50p

October 1st

Genesis 1 vv1-5

I thought we would do things differently this quarter and ponder on the nature of God. Now, of course, God is beyond our comprehension. There is always the danger that the way we imagine God becomes an image and it is forbidden to make images. Images of God are necessarily false because God is beyond our imagining. Yet we love Him. We love Him because He first loved us. We cannot conceive of who or what God is and yet we can know Him. To know God is to have eternal life.

If we want to know God, look to Jesus. He is the very image of God. If we want to know Jesus, read the Scriptures. They bear witness of Him. If we want to know Jesus, pray to God through Him, immerse yourself in Him in Baptism, feed on Him in the Bread and Wine of Holy Communion, encounter Him in the fellowship of the worshipping community of the Church.

October 2nd

Genesis 1 vv 6-23

The Bible doesn't start by trying to prove the existence of God. Nor does it try to describe God. The Bible starts with God. God is. Everything starts with God. God is and everything else which exists is the creation of God. We know God in His mighty works. He has made heaven and earth. We know God in everything which He does. So we know God in the ordinary things of life. We know God in prayer. We know Him in the Bible. We know Him in our membership of His Body, the Church.

October 3rd

Genesis 1 vv 24-31

We cannot make an image of God. But God made an image of Himself. He made us human beings. In ourselves we can see something of God – our creativity, our capacity to love and to be loved. In other people we can see something of God. The image of God in human beings is marred by sin. For all that, human beings are made in God's image. That is the worth of human beings. This is something to remember when dealing with people society regards as the dregs – the grotesquely poor, the worst criminals, people with terrible diseases of mind or body, especially the incurable. It is also something to remember when people are puffed up in their pride – their physical prowess, their good looks, their power and wealth, their popularity or success in worldly terms. We are made in the image of God.

October 4th

Genesis 2 vv 1-3

We can prevaricate till the cows come home about Christian attitudes to the Sabbath. Saturday or Sunday? Whether one day should or could be held to be holier than other days? What work if any is permissible on Sundays? What leisure activities are suitable? However we prevaricate about the Sabbath, however, it remains the case that a very significant aspect of our personal knowledge of God depends on our spending time with Him, contemplating Him, enjoying a quiet time with Him. *Be still and know that I am God.* If we are always active (even on church activities) we will miss out. It was Mary who was commended for spending time with Jesus, not Martha who *was cumbered about with much serving.* We need space, we must take time, time and space to get to know eternity. *Thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful.*

If we cannot bear to be quiet and still we might ask ourselves why not? Are we afraid to contemplate reality, the reality about ourselves, the reality of God? *Be still and know that I am God.* The Sabbath rest is a foretaste of what God has laid up for those who love Him.

October 5th (Harvest Festival)

Psalms 148

We wonder at the marvels of Creation and we praise God for them. But this goes further. It exhorts every part of creation to praise the LORD. We can think of the angels as praising God. They are sentient beings like us. Animals, maybe, just about. But inanimate objects like fire and hail and snow? They glorify God by just being themselves, *fulfilling his word* as it says. The same could be said of us. We praise God by fulfilling His word for our lives.

October 6th

Genesis 4 vv 25&26

Then men began to call on the name of the LORD (יהוה)

To me, this indicates a more personal knowledge of God. So far in Genesis, He has appeared as Creator, Friend, Lawgiver, Judge, Redeemer, Saviour. Now people come to know and to use His holy Name, this mysterious Name which is so sacred that it is scarcely spoken, this Name which tells us something about Who He is and who we are. We are the people of the LORD. *Thy Name is love.*

October 7th

Song of Solomon 2 vv 1-17

Meditating on the names or titles for God or Jesus deepens our knowledge of God and therefore our love for Him. I was taught this many years ago at youth club when we learnt this hymn. It is based very much on the Bible and particularly on the Song of Solomon – a book of love poems which have come to be understood as a metaphor for the love which binds God and the believer, Christ and the Church. Not having sung it for forty years, I tracked it down to use at St Michael's on 27th July. Saying Morning Prayer in my garden first thing that day, I was delighted to find that this chapter was the reading appointed as the Old Testament lesson. Do you believe our lives are ruled by chance or guided by Providence? It goes to the tune of *Onward Christian Soldiers.*

Thou the Rose of Sharon, Let Thy praises roll;
Lily of the valley, Flower of my soul;
Chiefest of ten thousand, Round my heart entwine;
I am my Beloved's, My beloved's is mine.
*Thou the Rose of Sharon, let Thy praises roll;
Lily of the valley, Flower of my soul.*

Lead me by still waters, Hold me by the hand;
And upon the mountains, Give me grace to stand;
Wind and storm and fire, Raging, but my choice
Ever is to listen For Thy still, small voice.

Jesus, Lord and master, Glorious Nazarene;
Close behind Thy reapers I would humbly glean:
But Thy grace hath brought me, To Thy house above,
And Thy banner o'er me, Evermore is Love.

Water cannot quench it, Floods can never drown;
Substance cannot but it, Love's a priceless crown:
Oh, wondrous story, Mystery divine;
I am my Beloved's, My Beloved's is mine.

October 8th

Matthew 1 vv 18-25

Thou shalt call his name JESUS:

Another hymn which enumerates and meditates on the names and titles of Jesus is *How Sweet the Name of Jesus sounds*.

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

October 9th

Genesis 15 vv 1-4

I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.

What is God like? This is what He tells Abraham He is like. He is Abraham's shield and exceeding great reward. Abraham is the father of many nations. He is the father of all those who have faith in God. God's promises to Abraham are His promises to all the people of God, to all who share in the faith of faithful Abraham. God's promise to us is that He is our shield and our exceeding great reward.

Do you doubt that you have faith like faithful Abraham? Faith is not something you have to achieve. It is the gift of God. *For by grace are ye saved through faith*. Just trust God. Let go and let God. He is your shield and your exceeding great reward.

October 10th

Genesis 15 vv 5&6

Look now toward heaven and tell the stars.

The sheer number of the stars is an indication of the number of Abraham's descendants, the number of people who will put their faith in God and thereby become heirs of God's promises. I think that there is also another thought here. If Abraham wonders why he should trust God, isn't the creation itself evidence of what the Creator can do? How can you doubt the God Who made all those stars?

Maybe we do lose out relative to Abraham: living in houses, not tents; travelling inside vehicles, rather than walking or riding; the night sky dimmed relative to the glow of street lamps. Is that an excuse for our blindness to the things of God? It's a pretty poor one!

October 11th

Genesis 15 v7

*Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not;
As thou hast been Thou for ever wilt be.*

We know we can rely on God from our own experience and from the experience of all the people of God. God has always proved faithful in the past. We know that He is faithful in the present and that He will be faithful in the future. We can trust His promises because faithfulness is of God's very Nature. *For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself,... That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into the veil.* (Hebrews 6). That means we can trust God not only for this life, but for that which is to come.

October 12th

Genesis 15 vv 8-21

I'm afraid I really like this story. I think that it is the sense of mystery when the lamp passes among the portions set out for the sacrifice that appeals to me. Abraham walks and talks with God in his daily life. He also experiences God in the mysteries of worship. That is true for us as well. God is always with us. He walks with us. We can talk to Him any time about anything. But there is much more to our relationship with God than this mundane daily walk with Him. There is awe-inspiring worship. There is mysticism.

*Great things He hath taught us, great things He hath done;
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son,
But purer and higher and greater will be,
Our wonder, our worship, when Jesus we see.*

Our worship on earth is a foretaste of the worship of Heaven, an authentic experience of God which assures us of His faithfulness.

October 13th

Genesis 28 vv 10-15

Jacob has robbed his brother Esau of both his birthright and his blessing. The twins' mother Rebekah has heard that Esau has said that, when their aging father Isaac dies, he will kill Jacob. So Jacob is fleeing to Padan-aram, where his family come from. On the way God appears to him in a dream. God makes Himself known to Jacob as the God of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac, and repeats the promise He has made to them. We know about God from our parents or other people who have led us to Him. We know about God from the experience of the community of faith. Tradition is a word with negative connotations, but what it really means is what one generation gives to another. Christian tradition is the knowledge of God passed down from generation to generation. You are not on your own. You are part of a community of faithful people – the Church of God. You can draw on their insights and experiences. You can ask for their prayers. We are part of something much bigger than ourselves – the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Body of Christ. We are the family of God and, as His family, we know that we can trust Him and we know that we share our experience of Him with our brothers and sisters who help to support us in our faith and to build us up into the full stature of Christ just as we can help to support them. Being a Christian is being part of a fellowship, the worshipping community, not something we do on our own.

October 14th

John 1 vv 43-51

In the Jacob story, God makes Himself known to Jacob. In the dream a ladder connects heaven and earth. God makes Himself known in Jesus. Jesus makes Himself known to Philip. Philip responds to the knowledge of God by telling his friend Nathanael. Knowing God is good news we are bound to share. St Paul says, *The love of Christ constraineth us*. We can't help but share the resurrection joy. Nathanael is suspicious. People very often are suspicious of Jesus. Is He for real? Are we really ready to yield our lives to Him? Nathanael is impressed that Jesus knows him. Well, Jesus knows us all. Does Nathanael worship Jesus because he knows that Jesus knows him or because it seems like a miracle *I saw thee under the fig tree* (when Jesus wasn't even there)? Miracles don't convince. What is needed is faith. The faithful recognise Jesus as the ladder between heaven and earth, revealing God to us and exalting us into God's presence.

October 15th

Genesis 28 vv 16-19

Bethel means "house of God". Jacob recognises the place where he has met God as holy and he makes it into a shrine. Maybe he would return there to worship. Certainly in later years the Israelites worshipped at Bethel. What to think about this? The Church is the people, not the building. *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*. Jesus tells the woman at the well that it will not matter whether people worship on Mt Gerizim or in Jerusalem, but that *they worship in spirit and in truth*. So, what do buildings or holy places matter? God is everywhere. He is closer to us than our hands and feet. And yet places where God has made Himself known to us will be precious to us as Luz was to Jacob. Places where people gather to pray will be precious. It means something to me that we pray where people have prayed for a millennium and a half. A church building in the countryside or in a city says something about the presence of God in that place. But if it isn't used, if nobody worships there, if it's boarded up, pulled down or converted to some other use, what does that indicate? It isn't a sign that God has given up on the inhabitants of that place, but it is often a sign that the inhabitants of that place have given up on God – unless of course they have found that they do not need premises in which to worship or serve or they have found better, more satisfactory premises, better suited to the needs of the twenty first century?

October 16th

Genesis 28 vv 20-22

Jacob was a most undeserving character. In fact, in the New Testament, St Paul uses Jacob as an example of someone (anyone, everyone) whom God calls in His own inscrutable purposes despite the absolute unworthiness of the recipients of his blessings. This is Romans 9¹³ and Paul wrestles for three chapters with this problem of God's justice, God's mercy, God's faithfulness and God's essentially being so far above us that we cannot understand. Even Paul, in the end, can only simply marvel in praise, *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out!* (Romans 11³³)

And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's Blood?
Died He for me who caused his pain? For me who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be that Thou my God shouldst die for me.

October 17th

Genesis 28 vv 20-22

God loved Jacob even though Jacob didn't deserve to be loved. God promised Jacob that he would return to the holy land and prosper. God blesses Jacob, not because Jacob deserves blessing, but because God loves him. The same is true of you and me. We don't deserve to be loved by God. He just loves us as we are. He pours out His blessings upon us. In response to God's love, we love Him and offer back to Him the blessings He has poured out on us – praise and worship; our time, talents and money; our love. We are good because God is good. We are not good as a bargaining tool to use to get God to be good to us. Because He is good to us, He has made us good and enabled us to use our goods for the good of others. I am writing this in the week of Trinity 7. The collect is: *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.* At Mattins this morning I was pondering the words *nourish us with all goodness*. We are what we eat. If we are nourished with the goodness of God, we are good. If we are good people, well, *by their fruits ye shall know them*.

October 18th (St Luke)

II Timothy 4 vv 5-15

Triumph or sadness? Paul knew from his own experience what it was to have Christ make Himself known to him even though he himself was entirely unworthy, having been a persecutor of the Church. Jesus meant everything to Paul and Paul offered his life back to Jesus as a living sacrifice. You can read in the New Testament about what Paul suffered and endured for Jesus. You can read many of Paul's own words as he strives to understand and to explain the Good News to the Church and to the world. For all his labours, Paul is the one who teaches us to *Rejoice in the Lord alway* and he writes from his own experience. In today's reading he is drawing near to the end of his life on earth. Probably he was a prisoner at the time. Many of his friends and helpers have left him and at least one has *done him much evil*. Yet he is confident in God's promises. There is a crown of righteousness for all those who *love his appearing* – that is the coming of Jesus. Paul has received everything from God and offered his whole life back to God. He knows that God will not let him down in the end.

October 19th

Genesis 28 vv 20-22

Back to Jacob. Everything Jacob expects to receive is the gift of God. Having received everything he has from God, as God's unmerited blessing, as God's grace to him, Jacob promises to give back a tenth of what God has given him to God. This is the first reference in the Bible to tithing. Does a tenth seem painfully small? After all, we owe absolutely everything to God. Offering back a tenth doesn't seem like much. On the other hand, if we think about it, giving God £10 out of every £100 of our income might seem quite a lot. We would be putting £15, £20, maybe £50 some of us, in the collection plate each week or otherwise giving away those sorts of sums to missions or charities. £20 in the church collection, a lot of money? How far does £20 go in a pub or restaurant or when we're out shopping? How far do you get on a train journey for £20? Is £20 really so much? If God is worth less to me than a return to London via the high speed train, can I really continue to maintain that He is the most important thing in my life? We might well say that feeling obliged to give a fixed proportion is legalistic and more Jewish than Christian, more OT than NT. We might say that our taxes now pay for a lot of things that in the past would have been paid for by charity – education, health care and welfare, for example. You might ask whether you should tithe your net or your gross income. If you are living on a pension or benefits, you might wonder whether you should be giving any of it away. You might feel that giving your time and talents pays a proportion of your tithe.

As Christians, we probably shouldn't be legalistic, assigning a fixed proportion of our income, the same proportion of everyone's income, as an obligation. We wouldn't want to forget, however, that *it is more blessed to give than to receive* or that *God loves a cheerful giver*.

I would make two practical points. One is, that short of a miracle, our parish cannot survive on its current income. Not only are we not contributing our share to the diocesan budget, we are relying on the diocese to pay the rector's stipend instead of meeting it ourselves as we are supposed to. Are our members really giving as much as we ought to give? Answers in prayer! My other point is that the Church is a good cause! When we decide to hold a collection for or give money to a charitable cause, why do we so seldom choose the Church as the beneficiary?

October 20th

Genesis 32 vv 24-32

Jacob is again in trouble. Since yesterday's reading he has been staying with his Uncle Laban, labouring for twenty years for the privilege of marrying Laban's two daughters and earning his own flocks and herds as wages from Laban. Laban is also something of a trickster and Jacob has now fallen out with Laban and Laban's sons and is heading home to Canaan, only too aware that his brother Esau has threatened to kill him. He has sent the rest of his party across the River Jabbok and now he is alone and he has another experience of God. This time, it seems that he wrestles with God. This story resonates with many Christians. They speak of wrestling with God in prayer. Maybe their faith has been challenged by some dreadful thing that has happened. Maybe they are very fearful or uncertain about something. Maybe they are asking God for something really big, maybe for some one they love, perhaps that they will be cured from a terrible disease. A lot of people have this experience of wrestling with God. The key, perhaps, is that Jacob does not let go of the man. Whatever happens, however remote we may feel from God, the key is to hold on, to hold on even when we can't see or hear Him, to hold on when we can barely feel Him, but to hold on. In the end Jacob is blessed.

Come, O Thou Traveller unknown,
Whom still I hold but cannot see;
My company before is gone,
And I am left alone with Thee;
With Thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day.

I need not tell Thee who I am,
My sin and misery declare;
Thyself hast called me by my name,
Look on Thy hands, and read it there;
But who, I ask Thee, who art Thou?
Tell me Thy name, and tell me now.

In vain Thou strugglest to get free;
I never will unloose my hold;
Art Thou the Man that died for me?

The secret of Thy love unfold;
Wrestling, I will not let Thee go,
Till I Thy name, Thy nature know.

Yield to me now, for I am weak,
But confident in self-despair;
Speak to my heart, in blessings speak,
Be conquered by my instant prayer;
Speak, or Thou never hence shalt move,
And tell me if Thy name be Love.

'Tis Love! 'tis Love! Thou diedst for me,
I hear Thy whisper in my heart;
The morning breaks, the shadows flee:
Pure, universal Love Thou art;
To me, to all Thy mercies move;
Thy nature and Thy name is Love.

[Incidentally there is a good story about a couple getting married who asked for hymn 774 at their wedding. 774 was Love Divine in the book used by their home church but in the church where they were getting married 774 was this hymn, which is open to misinterpretation at a wedding!]

October 21st

Genesis 45 vv 1-16

This quarter's readings are about the Nature of God and what we can know of Him. We've looked at the way the wonders of creation bear witness. We've spoken about individual walks with God. Ritualised worship. Dreams and visions. Prayer. Scripture, tradition and fellowship. Above all Jesus. The Joseph stories discern God in the way our lives pan out. Apart from Pharaoh's dreams and the dreams of his butler and baker, there is very little about divine intervention in the last ten chapters of Genesis. Indeed Joseph behaves badly. His brothers behave worse. Joseph suffers a good deal in Egypt before being brought out of prison to become viceroy. Apart from the dreams and their interpretation, there is nothing obviously supernatural or divine about the story of Joseph. It would make a good novel or film or musical – as indeed it has! But the point is that God was working providentially in the ordinary things of life to achieve His purpose.

October 22nd

Exodus 3 vv 1-6

I guess that we are more likely to discern God working providentially through the ordinary events of our lives, as He does in the Joseph story, than to encounter Him in a burning bush, as Moses did. Two things. As we have seen before, God introduces Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses knows Who God is and what He has done. So Moses can trust God. God is unchanging. His nature is eternal. We can always trust Him. We know that we can trust Him based on our past experience and the experience of the people of God through the ages. The God of Jesus is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jesus too is unchanging and therefore eternally dependable: *Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever* (Hebrews 13⁸).

Yesterday, today, for ever, Jesus is the same:

Friends may change, but Jesus never, Glory to His Name!

Glory to His Name! Glory to His Name!

All may change, but Jesus never, Glory to His Name!

The other thing is that God requires reverence. Moses is told to remove his shoes because he is on holy ground. However we show our reverence, we must come into the presence of God reverently.

October 23rd

Exodus 3 vv 7-10

Depending on the circles we move in, we may or may not have a strong sense of vocation. Most Christians think in terms of God calling people to be monks or nuns or priests. Also missionaries, evangelists and lay workers. Maybe doctors, nurses, teachers. I believe that we may be under valuing other people and diminishing God if we think like this. God holds the life of every one of us in His Hands. He cares for each one of us and it matters to Him what we do with our lives. How do we know what God is calling us to do? Certainly, we should consult God in prayer before we make major decisions like marriage, college courses or career choices. We would know from the Bible and the teaching of the Church generally what might please Him and what might displease Him. We could turn to family members and Christian friends for more specific guidance about what we ought to do. Sometimes, however, God interrupts our lives unexpectedly as He did the life of Moses. Discerning what God be saying to us is a careful and prayerful task.

October 24th

Exodus 3 vv 11&12

Whatever our calling in life, it is certain that we are inadequate to fulfil it. Whatever we have to do in life, like Moses, we are wholly dependent on God to enable us to do it. Like Moses, we can also be confident that what God is calling us to do, He will also enable us to do. He does not promise to make it easy, but He does promise, *My grace is sufficient for you*.

God gives Moses a sign. It isn't a sign which will dispel all doubt before he commences his task of setting the people free from Egyptian slavery. It is a sign that will be given when they are a free people. God will make Himself known to them on Mt Sinai.

October 25th

Exodus 3 vv 13&14

Today's meditation and tomorrow's are really the heart of this quarter's study. Who is God? What is God? God simply is. *I am what I am*. Meditate on why there is no more to be said.

October 26th

Exodus 3 v15

God gives Moses His Name. This is rendered in most English Bibles as the LORD. Jewish people consider the Name too holy to pronounce and Jehovah or Yahweh (especially the latter) maybe offensive and the use of Yahweh instead of the LORD in some modern translations of the OT at least to me) makes Him seem like one of the petty tribal gods of ancient Canaan and not at all the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In Hebrew the Name is written יהוה. If you don't read Hebrew, you can still see that it is just slightly different from I am אהיה. The holy Name is closely connected with the verb to be. God is the One Who is. God exists in and for Himself. God depends on nothing else for His existence. God is the One Who causes everything else that exists to exist. God is the source of all being, the only One Who simply is.

Wonder and worship. It is this God with Whom we have to deal and this God Who makes Himself known to us in Jesus Christ.

October 27th

I Corinthians 10 vv 16&17

We've been thinking about some of the myriad ways in which God makes Himself known to us. Above all, He makes Himself known to us in Jesus Christ. Jesus gave us the Sacrament of Holy Communion as a remembrance of what He has done for us, as a sign and seal of our participation in Him in the world today, and as a foretaste of what is to come when *we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*

Yesterday and the day before we were meditating on the Being of God. Christ is *the image of the invisible God. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.* Christ is God. Christ is Man. In Him we are made to partake of the divine Nature. We are what we eat. In Holy Communion we eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood. We are therefore one with Him and He with us. We are caught up in the mutual love of the Trinity. We are one with the Lord and one with one another in the Lord.

October 28th St Simon and St Jude

John 15 vv 17-27

Thy Name is Love.

God is love and love is the unity of the Trinity. Love is the unity of the Church. Love is the unity between God and the Church. This creates a distinction between those who are God's people and those who are not, the Church and the world. The difference may provoke the world to persecute the Church. Christ in the world cannot but reveal the world's failings by contrast with His love. The more Christ-like the Church, the more the Church threatens the complacency of the world. All human beings were made in the image of God and deep down inside all human beings know that they are lacking if they do not love God and other people. Sin – self-centred living – is inescapably appealing to the unredeemed, but it never satisfies and that is the unbeliever's experience. He is convicted by the perfection of Christ as He is convicted by the existence of the Church insofar as the Church is Christ-like. The world may hate us, but we are not to hate the world. *God so loved the world that he sent his only-begotten Son.* The Son of God sends us so that the world *through him might be saved.* The Spirit bears witness to us of the Nature of God and, in the power of the Spirit, we bear witness to the world. (See next page for prayer.)

O Almighty God, who hast built thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the head corner-stone; Grant unto us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine,, that we may be made an holy temple acceptable unto thee: through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

October 29th

Psalms 93

One of the manifestations of the greatness of God in Creation is His power over the mighty ocean. He creates dry land out of the primeval seas. He brings a flood on the earth and brings the flood to an end. He leads His people through the Red Sea out of Egypt and brings them through the River Jordan into the Promised Land. His power over the sea is a testimony to His faithfulness in history,, to the fact that He holds the nations (especially His own people) in His Hands and determines their destiny. God's work in Creation and Salvation is inextricably bound up with His Law, which is an expression of His Love. *Thy Name is Love.*

*God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm.*

October 30th

Matthew 14 vv 22-33

Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.

The Greek for *it is I* is Εγώ εἰμι, which could also be translated *I am*. The Greek version of the Burning Bush story translates God's words to Moses *I am what I am* as Εγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν, *I am the One Who is*. I am sure that it is often the case that when Jesus says *I am* we are to think of God Who "defines" Himself as *I am*. As God, Jesus *plants his footsteps in the sea, and rides upon the storm*. Peter acknowledges Him as *Lord*. Lord represents the Greek Κύριος, which could mean *Sir, or Lord*, but is also the way the Greek Old Testament represents the Holy Name יהוה. At the end of the story, the apostles worship Jesus and affirm that He is the Son of God. The miracles are signs of Who Jesus is, signs of the Kingdom of God, signs of what God is doing in the world.

By the way, they mistake Jesus for a spirit, a phantom. He answers, *Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid*. Don't worry about ghosts tomorrow night. The Holy Ghost is more powerful than any other spirit, good or evil.

October 31st

Exodus 17 vv 1-7

The Exodus is the key event in the formation of Israel as the people of God. In fulfilment of His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God sets His people free from slavery. In a sense, they are baptised in the Red Sea as they pass safely through its waters while the pursuing Egyptians are drowned. But the people never seem to be happy. They never learn to trust God. Here the problem is that they are thirsty in the wilderness of Massah and Meribah – the very names meaning tempting and strife. God meets their need with the water which flowed from the rock.

[Some of you who came on the parish outing to the Holy Land, may remember that at Wadi Mousa (Petra) we were shown a powerful flowing spring which the inhabitants believe is the very one described in today's reading.]

November 1st (All Saints)

Psalms 95

Worship God. He is the maker of Heaven and earth, the Lord of the sea and of the dry land. He is not only our Maker; He is also our Salvation. We are His people and He cares for us as a shepherd cares for his sheep. God is infinitely greater than the gods of the heathen. Men and women foolishly worship what they themselves have made, material goods which can neither create nor save. We are the people of God. We have to attend to His Word and not behave like the people behaved in the day of provocation (Massah) and temptation (Meribah). They tempted God by their unbelief and complaining. They tested Him, when they should have trusted Him. God will never let us down.

O Almighty God, who hast knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord; Grant us grace so to follow thy blessed Saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys, which thou hast prepared for them that unfeignedly love thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

November 2nd

John 4 vv 1-14

Water is vitally important. Without it we would soon die in an agony of thirst. If we only had enough water to drink, but not too wash, we should soon become filthy. Without water, the crops wouldn't grow. Water also bears us up when we swim in it and the sea both sets boundaries to the land and forms the highway for our shipping. The water in oceans is vitally important for maintaining the temperature and climate of our planet and the creatures which live in maintain the balance between carbon dioxide and oxygen so that we can breathe. All these blessings which we receive through physical water point us to the infinitely greater blessings we receive in Christ.

November 3rd

John 4 vv 15-26

The woman at the well begins to grasp that Jesus is someone special. It was unusual for Jews to speak to Samaritans or men to speak to women. This woman was probably fetching water in the heat of the noonday sun to avoid meeting the other village women who quite probably despised someone who had had five husbands and was now living with yet another man. In spite of all this, Jesus cared for her, spoke to her and allowed her to care for Him. He also brought her the Word of God. She began to understand. Jesus helped her to advance in her understanding. He pointed her towards the infinity of God and lifted her eyes to the possibilities of worship in spirit and in truth. He brought her to the point where she could recognise Him as the Messiah, the Anointed One, Who would *tell us all things*, i.e. reveal God to us.

November 4th

John 4 vv 39-42

When the woman at the well came to know Jesus, she just had to tell the people in the village, even though, as I said yesterday, they might not have been very kind to her. They obviously saw the effect Jesus had had on her and seeing her opened up to them the possibility of Christ. Then they came to meet Him themselves and, Samaritans though they were, they recognised Him as the Saviour of the world. Christ makes God known in the world. Christians make Christ known in the world.

Open now the crystal fountain whence the healing stream doth flow;

Let the fiery cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through:

Strong deliverer, Strong Deliver,

Be thou still my strength and shield.

November 5th

I Corinthians 10 vv 1-17

St Paul draws out the parallels between Israel and the Church. We are both the people of God and there are many parallels between Israel's experience and ours. It might be thought that because the ancient Israelites had witnessed marvels like the parting of the Red Sea and water flowing from the rock, they might have had more reason to honour God than we have, whose religious experiences may seem much more mundane. Again, it might be thought that the God of the Old Testament was a wrathful Lawgiver, eager to punish each and every transgression, whereas the God of the New Testament is a God of grace, Who won't mind too much if His people are half-hearted in their love for Him and for one another. On the contrary, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Death of Jesus for the sins of the whole world is an infinitely greater wonder than the parting of the Red Sea. Christians should not be looking to get away with low standards which would have been unacceptable in the Old Testament, thinking of God as a nice, old grandfather, who is willing to overlook quite a lot of bad behaviour on our part simply because we are family and because sometimes we come to see him. If we know God in Jesus Christ, nothing but the best ought to be good enough for us in our relationship with Him and with other people..

November 6th

Ezekiel 47 vv 1-12

When we were in the desert, it was incredibly noticeable how the desert bloomed where there was water. Hence Ezekiel's vision. Water flows from the Temple at Jerusalem down through the Judean desert to the Dead Sea. Trees grow on either side. Their fruit is food. Their leaves are medicine. The barren waters of the Dead Sea are transformed so that they teem with fish. The marshes are left to provide the very necessary preservative salt. What a picture of the activity of God in the world – the coming of Jesus, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

November 7th

John 7 vv 1-31

It had become the custom that, at the Feast of Tabernacles, the high priest poured out a jug of water in the Jerusalem Temple as sign of faith in Ezekiel's vision. Jesus comes up to this feast and there is a lot of uncertainty about what it all means. First of all, He lets His brothers think

that He isn't going. His time is the supreme revelation of the love of God. That is the Cross. It is not yet time for Him to be crucified. That will be at Passover and in another year. He does not court arrest. The people are expecting Jesus, wondering Who He is, what He will do? He tells them to use their common sense. What does God really want of us? What would a man of God be like, given that God is love? Evidently Jesus fills all the criteria, but still people cannot believe. Original sin is the twist in our nature which leads us always to deny the Truth. We foolishly believe that our own interests are incompatible with surrendering ourselves to God, whereas, in fact, the only way in which we can be fulfilled as persons is to take up our cross and follow Christ.

November 8th

John 7 vv 32-39

Without water, our material bodies die. Without Jesus we cannot live; we cannot have life in all its fulness; we cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. Without Jesus, we are eternally dead. But the Holy Spirit is His free gift, made available through His Death on the Cross, the Spirit Who gives life, nourishment and healing, the Spirit Who makes us Christ-like agents of the Kingdom of God so that the stream of living water flows out from us too, bringing life and nourishment and healing to the world.

November 9th

John 19 vv 28-37

That is why I put a little water in with the Communion wine – blood and water, redemption and sanctification, the Word and the Spirit. Washed clean in His Blood, our thirst quenched by the divine Spirit, we are empowered to live, to live Christ-like lives of self-sacrificial love for the redemption of the world.

November 10th

Revelation 21 vv 1-7

I often read these verses at funerals. *I will give unto him that is athirst of the water of life freely.* What more is to be said of what God has prepared for those who love Him?

November 11th

Revelation 22 vv 1-7

So John the Divine is granted a further vision of how Ezekiel's vision will be finally fulfilled in the consummation of all things. This is the Promised Land to which we are heading. For now, we walk the way of God by faith.

November 12th

Deuteronomy 8 vv 1-20

Most of the Book of Deuteronomy is taken up with Moses speaking to the people of Israel when they are just about to enter into the Promised Land. Moses, of course, does not get to enter the Promised Land. He dies on Mt Pisgah, having seen the Promised Land laid out before him. This is because Moses himself failed to trust God at the waters of Massah and Meribah. In chapter 8, the Israelites are reminded how God has fed them on the manna since first they came out of Egypt, as He has looked after them in other ways too. The Israelites have had many direct experiences of God working. Now, they are about to enter the Land of Canaan. This too is God's gift to them, but, as they prosper in this new and fruitful land, they may forget about God. Who needs to pray for healing when they've got the NHS? Why say grace over meals if our food comes from Tesco's? What's the point of taking part in public worship when there are many more interesting leisure activities and educational opportunities? Why give to the Church when there are many more fashionable good causes? Why bother about the biblical commandments in post-Christian, multicultural, secular democracy? Why thank God for what we've got when we've earned it all ourselves? You will find that Moses has the answers (vv 19&20).

November 13th

John 6 vv 1-14

It is Passover, when the Israelites remember the Exodus. More than that, they remember their solidarity with the Exodus generation. Every generation is the people of God. The LORD's commandments are passed down from each generation to the next. His promises are everlasting. The people belong to God. They belong to one another. They honour their fathers and their mothers. Every Israelite is a neighbour whom they are commanded to love as they love themselves. So, when Jesus feeds five thousand people in the wilderness, this is the context. At another Passover, He will institute the Last Supper – a memorial of what He has done, a shared meal in which we are one with Christ and one with each other, a statement of who we are as the people of God, commanded to love one another as He loves us, an earnest of our inheritance, the fulfilment of the eternal covenant. The new commandment and the old commandment are one. *Thy Name is Love*. Jesus does not destroy the Law and the Prophets; He fulfils them by including all the nations in God's eternal covenant.

November 14th

John 6 vv 24-35

Jesus sent the crowds away, but the next day they caught up with Him, wanting more. They still haven't got it. Maybe they hope that Jesus will set them free from the Romans as Moses set their ancestors free from Egypt. Maybe they'd just like a more reliable food supply than scratching a living in C1 Palestine. Again Jesus asks them to consider what they really need. If they think what they really need, the answer is right in front of them. All that is required of them (and us) is that they believe.

Guide me. O thou great Redeemer, pilgrim through this barren land;

I am weak, but thou art mighty; hold me with thy powerful hand:

Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,

Feed me now and evermore.

November 15th

John 6 vv 36-47

The crowds still don't get it. They seem to be slower on the uptake than the Samaritan woman at the well and the Samaritan villagers in chapter 4. Could it be that, as Jews, they think they know? They don't need Jesus to tell them about God. They have Moses and the prophets. It is a risk that we need to be aware of. Is it possible that, having been Christians for years, we've made up our minds about things and are unable to listen when God is teaching us something new? Jesus doesn't destroy the Law and the Prophets; He fulfils them in an infinitely greater way than could ever have been imagined. In the same way, I am quite sure that God will not discard the Bible and what He has shown us over the millennia, but it is perfectly possible that He will fulfil what Scripture says in wonderful ways which are at present beyond our understanding. In our individual lives too, it is quite possible that we have fixed ideas about the Church and faith and religion which may well not be wrong in themselves but which might blind us to greater possibilities if we cannot look beyond what we have already seen.

Ultimately, it is only God Who can reveal the things of God to anyone. That is why prayer is a vital aspect of evangelism. When we pray we work with God to effect His purposes.

The promises are sure *him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out...He that believeth on me hath everlasting life*.

November 16th

John 6 vv 47-51

Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness and are dead.

I can't quite believe what I'm hearing sometimes on Radio 4. Some expert is pontificating away about how many deaths could be prevented by banning this or by making that compulsory or by the government doing some other thing. Can they hear themselves? Death is not preventable. Death is inevitable. Death may be postponed by taking sensible precautions, but that is all. We all die. When that happens, we shall all be judged. There are sheep and there are goats. Whether you are a sheep or a goat depends on how you treat other people. Whether you are a sheep or a goat determines your eternal destiny – everlasting life or everlasting death. Moses exhorts us to choose life. Jesus says, *I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.* If you want to live eternally, choose Jesus.

November 17th

John 6 vv 52-58

You can't read this without thinking of Holy Communion. Surely it appears from this that Holy Communion is a vital part of our Christian lives. I do not think that it can be right to opt out of Confirmation or whatever preparation your particular denomination of the Church requires for you to become a communicant. Neither do I think it can be right to opt out of attending and participating in Holy Communion on a regular because you might prefer some other services instead. Neither can I think that it is right lightly to say *you can be a Christian without going to church* and thus to opt out of participating in public worship altogether. I believe that the Church of God has weakened herself down through the ages by going to Mass, but not receiving Communion, as so many Roman Catholics have done, or substituting Mattins, Evensong, mission and family services for the service Jesus gave us, as so many Protestants have done. At the most solemn moment, the night before He died, Jesus said, *Do this in remembrance of me.* Having said that, however, celebrating the Sacrament is not a substitute for reading, preaching and teaching the Word. Word and Sacrament are equally essential. Neither is it good enough to approach either Word or Sacrament casually, not expecting to encounter God, unrepentant, unforgiving, unloving, hearts hardened against the gentle rain of the Holy Spirit. Worship is the most serious thing we do and the most joyful.

November 18th

I Corinthians 11 vv 18-34

Communion is fellowship – fellowship with God in Christ, fellowship with one another in Christ, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Holy Communion remembers and proclaims that God is love by recalling the greatest act of love in all of time and in all of eternity – the Death of Jesus on the Cross. It sets the standard by which we are judged, the standard by which we must judge ourselves. Are we worthy to come into that Presence? Only because His Death availed for me. Given that Jesus opens the way for us into the Presence of the thrice holy God, what sort of people must we be? We must be people of love. To be self-righteous, self-centred, selfish, quarrelsome, divisive, greedy, careless of the needs of others, is to miss the point. It is to fail to discern the Body. The Body is the crucified Body of Christ, manifest in bread and wine. The Body is the Church of God. To fail to discern the Body is to eat and drink our own damnation. It is Christ, however, manifest in the Eucharist Who cleanses, heals and nourishes us, pouring into us the life-giving Spirit, making us fit to come into His Presence, making us fit to serve Him.

November 19th

Isaiah 6 vv 1-8

Ye that do truly and earnestly repent you of of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways, Draw near with faith, and take this holy Sacrament to your comfort; and make your humble confession to Almighty God, meekly kneeling upon your knees.

November 20th

Luke 5 vv 1-11

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

November 21st

Revelation 19 vv 1-10

Holy Communion proclaims the Lord's Death until He comes. It symbolises and seals, it signifies and effects, our present eternal life as members of the fellowship of God's Church. It inspires and sustains our Christian service. It anticipates and prepares us for what is to come, the good things God has laid up for those who love Him.

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

November 22nd

Matthew 22 vv 1-14

Parables of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is like a great banquet. It is the marriage feast of the Lamb, the marriage feast of the Son of God. Many are called, but make excuses and refuse the invitation. The invitation is extended to the whole cosmos. But a place at the wedding feast is priceless not valueless. Anyone may come, but all those who come must take it seriously and put on the marriage garments of faith and repentance. Holy Communion prefigures the marriage feast of the Lamb. All are invited, but many make excuses and refuse the invitation. Some come, but do not put on the marriage garments of faith and repentance. Those who refuse God or dishonour Him thrust themselves into outer darkness. Those who come to Him in faith, He will in no wise cast out.

When I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death and hell's destruction, land me safe on Canaan's side:
Songs and praises, Songs and praises

I will ever give to thee.

November 23rd

Psalm 27

Psalm 27 is one of my favourites. *The Lord is my light, and my salvation; whom then shall I fear: the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?* One of the reasons why I have been trying to re-establish psalms as a regular part of our services is that they put into words our emotional responses to God. Faith is not merely a matter of knowing about God. Faith is knowing God. Of course, hymns and prayers also put our emotional responses to God into words, but the psalms are Scripture. They are the very Word of God. In the Book of Psalms, God has give us the words with which to address Him. The psalms cover the whole gamut of emotions from despair to exaltation, from deepest uncertainty, to confident faith. Some of the words are horrible and have to be thought about in the light of Jesus the Word made flesh. Some of them are hard to understand and the temptation is always to give up on what is difficult, perhaps making the excuse that children or newcomers will be put off. It is of course true, that education has to start where people are (including children and newcomers) but if it leaves them where they are, there is no point in education. Children have to grow up. New believers have to mature. In fact I sometimes suspect that one of the reasons teenagers and adults see no reason to come to Church is because the Church has nothing to offer in their real difficulties, concentrating instead only on the nice and simple aspects of the Gospel story, rather than making available the vast resources of Scripture and Christian experience to meet every eventuality of human experience, of which we are the custodians.

Psalm 27 gives me God to cling onto no matter what happens to me. It reminds me of what a privilege it is to be in His presence and to worship Him. As a clergyman, I am privileged to spend a lot of time in public worship in church and I thank God for that. The church is of course open for everybody except perhaps for those who live in countries where Christians are persecuted. We are always in the Presence of God even when we are alone. If we can remember that, all our thoughts can become prayers, our whole life can be an act of worship.

I have particularly valued v12 since I became an orphan – not that my parents voluntarily left me – but it matters a great deal to know that God is there for me even if all human help fails me.

November 24th

Psalm 119 vv 105-112

Thy word is a lantern unto my feet: and a light to my paths.

It was the Word of God Who said *Let there be light* at the beginning of Creation. The Word of God is God's promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Word of God is the Law given to Moses. The Word of God is what God puts into the prophets' mouths to warn, to encourage, to judge, to promise mercy, to build up kingdoms and to destroy them. The Word of God is Jesus. The Word of God is the Bible. The Word of God is engrafted into the hearts of believers and indeed is the Word of truth by which we are begotten into His family as the children of God. The Word of God is a lantern which shows us the way and saves us from the darkness.

November 25th

John 1 vv 1-9

Jesus fulfils everything. He is One with the Creator and He becomes One with the Creation. Creation in rebellion against God reverts to *primaeval* darkness and watery chaos. Creation redeemed by the Word which created it, the Light of the world, sanctified. Jesus became human so that we might become divine. *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.* (II Peter 1⁴).

Holy Jesus, every day keep us in the narrow way,
And, when earthly things are past, bring our ransomed souls at last
Where they need no star to guide, where no clouds thy glory hide.

In the heavenly country bright need they no created light;
Thou its light, its joy, its crown, thou its sun which goes not down;
There for ever may we sing alleluias to our King.

November 26th

John 8 vv 12-32

Light and Truth. *Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.* Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is one with the Father and God the Father is One with Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the redemption and sanctification of the cosmos. He is one with us and we are one with Him as He dwells in us and we dwell in Him. Jesus says, *I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.* He says of us also, *Ye are the light of the world.* (Matthew 5¹⁴).

November 27th

John 9 vv 1-41

Jesus is the Light of the world. The blind man sees, but the religious people who think they see are in fact blind. What do you make of that?

November 28th

Revelation 3 vv 20-22

This passage does not mention that Jesus is the light of the world, but it was the inspiration for the famous Holman Hunt painting – the Light of the World – which depicts Jesus holding a lantern and standing knocking at a door surrounded by briars. The door is the human heart. When we open our hearts to Jesus, our lives are flooded with His light. The truth sets us free, free from sin, the world and the devil, free from the fear of death. We are partakers of the marriage feast of the Lamb. We are exalted to the Right Hand of God. Our prayers come to God through Him. We are lifted up by Him Who has opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. Christ in us and we in Him. It follows: *Ye are the light of the world....Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.* [That verse was on the free will offering envelopes in the Church where I grew up. How generous we are with our money isn't a bad test of how far we have taken the Gospel to heart.]

November 29th

Psalm 67

Psalm 67 is appointed as an alternative to the Nunc Dimittis in BCP Evensong. In the Nunc Dimittis, Simeon hails Christ as a light to lighten the gentiles (nations) and the glory of God's people Israel. Psalm 67 proclaims a virtuous circle. God blesses us with the Light of His countenance. We bless Him for His goodness towards us. He further blesses us and we bless Him again.

Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name (יהוה) upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them. (Numbers 6²²⁻²⁷).
Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

November 30th (S Andrew)

Romans 10 vv 9-21

If there were no God, of course none of this would matter. Given that God is, however, nothing is more important. In fact everything else that is can only be properly understood and appreciated in the Light of God. Given that God is, He is infinitely beyond our comprehension, and yet, over the last couple of months we have seen some of the ways in which He makes Himself known in Creation, Redemption and Sanctification, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, through Moses and the prophets and *hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;* (Hebrews 1²). God has made Himself known in Christ. To know God is to have eternal life. It is to share in all these blessings, all these promises which God has made known to us. But we have to confess Him. *Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord* (יהוה, Jesus) *shall be saved.* But we have to believe and we cannot believe unless we have heard and we cannot hear unless someone has proclaimed the faith to us. There is an imperative for the Church to preach the Gospel to the whole world. *For the love of Christ constraineth us.* (II Corinthians 5¹⁴). Worldwide evangelism is the responsibility of the whole Church of God as well as that of those who are called specially to be missionaries and evangelists. So we pray that God will raise up more people to preach the Gospel. We pray for and otherwise support those whom He has called. And we each play our part in witnessing to Christ in the world by being the very people we are as Christians.

Almighty God, who didst give such grace unto thy holy Apostle Saint Andrew, that he readily obeyed the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him without delay; Grant unto us all, that we, being called by thy holy Word, may forthwith give up ourselves obediently to fulfil thy holy commandments; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

December 1st

Exodus 33 vv 12-23

Never lose that sense of awe and wonder, of fear even, in approaching the Presence of thrice holy God. It is only in this context that we can even begin to appreciate Jesus and the Christmas story which we shall soon be celebrating. *For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.* (John 1^{17&18}).

December 2nd

Exodus 34 vv 29-35

The thought is that entering into the Presence of God, even though he was allowed only a restricted vision, made Moses' face shine and, when he came out from the Presence, to speak to the Israelites, the light was more than they could bear. I Corinthians 13, that great hymn to love, is understandably popular for weddings, although people ought to understand that the love Paul describes there is not merely the love which there should be between husband and wife, but the love which ought to unite all believers in Christ. I Corinthians 13 is also a suitable reading for funerals, not least because it concludes, *For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity (love), these three; but the greatest of these is charity.* When we die, we shall experience what Moses experienced, but permanently, not temporarily. We shall see God face to face and reflect His glory to the point that we know as we are known, that we are made like Him. Thy Name is love.

December 3rd

II Corinthians 3 vv 1-18

This is Paul's riposte to anyone who might think that the Christian revelation was mundane relative to the revelation to ancient Israel and that therefore Jesus could somehow be taken less seriously than Moses. What God has done in Christ, the Word made flesh, the Bread of Life, the Source of Living Water, the Light of the world, the Good Shepherd, the Resurrection and the Life, the Way, the Truth and the Life, Christ crucified, Risen, Ascended, Glorified, out of Whom flows the Holy Spirit to cleanse, to heal, to nourish and to quicken, is infinitely more wonderful even than the giving of God's perfect Law of Love on Mount Sinai. If you cannot see how wonderful Jesus is, it is as if you had a veil over your face, just as the veil prevented the Israelites from seeing Moses' fading glory. If we turn to the Lord, the veil is removed. The Lord is the Holy Spirit and the Spirit is the spirit of freedom. When the veil is removed and we gaze upon Jesus, we become like Him; we become perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation: pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see thy great salvation, perfectly restored in thee;
Changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise.

December 4th

II Corinthians 4 vv 1-7

Paul says “we” and “us”, not “I” and “me” in these verses. He is not just talking about himself. Maybe he is talking about himself and his companions on his missionary journeys. Rather, I think, by extension and application, he is talking about the whole Church, about all Christian people. This is our inheritance – yours and mine. This is our privilege. This is our burden. We are the children of light. We are called therefore to be true. We have integrity. Christ’s light enlightens us and our calling is to enlighten the world. *The love of Christ constraineth us*, all of us to be witnesses of the Light, to be the Light. Our Christian lives proclaim not ourselves, but Christ. We are indeed frail earthen vessels, but the excellency of the power is of God. If we are true, there will be a response from those who are seeking the Truth. Those whom God is calling will respond. If we are true, we shall be rejected by those who have been blinded by the Father of lies, the devil. What is required of us is *that a man be found faithful*.

December 5th

II Peter 1 vv 16-21

Peter is referring back here to the Transfiguration of Jesus when he and James and John saw Jesus’ face shine and “his raiment white as light”. Moses and Elijah spoke with Him on the mountain top and God spoke to them out of the cloud: *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him...That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.* (John 1⁹). Peter speaks to the authenticity of God’s revelation of Himself through Moses and the Prophets and absolutely in Jesus. Faith is not subjective – what you or I happen to think and find meaningful. Faith is objective, God’s revelation of Himself

December 6th

Psalms 19

On 10th August, pilgrims from St Thomas Becket Church Salisbury joined us for Evening Prayer at the Jubilee Hall and stayed the night on their way to Canterbury and the site of Becket’s martyrdom. As we came out of the *White Hart*, we saw what is known as a super moon, when the full moon is as near as it gets to earth. *The heavens declare the glory of God* and the same God Who enacts the laws of Physics and Chemistry which make these phenomena possible, regulating the movements of the heavenly bodies, also enacts His perfect Law of Love to regulate our lives to His glory.

December 7th

Psalms 23

My mother used to speak of the fact that when my father’s father died, his sister (who was married to a Pentecostal pastor) read this psalm at his bedside. I did the same for her when my mother died at the hospice and again for my sister when she died a few days later in the same place. Understanding that God is our shepherd is a very precious thing. This psalm was used at funerals so much when I was a curate that I used to be concerned that it was the only psalm people would know and I would deliberately choose another one of the appointed psalms in an effort to broaden people’s knowledge of Scripture – the resources for life which God has given us in His Word. Nowadays, I fear, people do not even know any psalms, even Psalm 23. For some families, favourite hymns may be used in place of psalms – good, but not the best. Too many families don’t know any hymns either and request favourite or sentimental pop songs which do not look beyond the things of this world for the comfort which is indispensable for human beings and only to be found in God. People who call themselves Christians complacently stay away from public worship. They think they are far too busy to read the bible or to pray regularly. Their values are the values of contemporary society rather than the teaching of Jesus. Passing on the faith to their children is a low priority relative to all the other things which fill young people’s lives today. We are making of ourselves shallow people who will have no resources with which to meet the genuine challenges which we all inevitably eventually face.

December 8th

Ezekiel 34 vv 1-31

People who exercise authority – whether secular or religious – do so under God. God is our King. The King is a Shepherd. He is responsible for the welfare of the people he rules. The LORD is my shepherd. The King or Queen is answerable to God. So are *all that are put in authority under him or her*. So are the bishops and other clergy. Where ministers (of state or Church) neglect the people or exploit them for their own ends, God will judge them. He Himself will be Shepherd to the people who have been let down by those who ought to have been their pastors. The true Shepherd will be the Son of David. *I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.* (I Timothy 2^{1&2}).

December 9th

John 10 vv 1-6

He calleth his own sheep by name... for they know his voice.

It is that intimacy between Christ and the believer – the sense that *He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way... You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart.* If this is our experience of God, how can we be indifferent to Christ and His claims on our lives? If this is not our experience of God, why not?

We know that we have to work at human friendships. We have to make the effort to keep in touch, to meet. We have to accommodate our wishes to theirs when we do things together. We have to pay our way. If we don't bother to call or write or meet or whatever people do on social media, our friendships lapse. If we selfishly demand our own way all the time or if we're not prepared to give as well as to take, friendships quickly go stale. If we try to exploit our friends or let them down or are unkind about them behind their backs, they may not wish to continue as our friends. Even if our friends are loyal to us despite our treating them with indifference or worse, it is likely that the friendship will lapse as a result of our own neglect. Jesus is a good friend Who will never let us down and never stop caring for us, but if we treat Him with indifference or worse, isn't it our fault if we do not enjoy a good relationship with Him?

December 10th

John 10 vv 7-10

Jesus as door is harder to picture than Jesus as shepherd. Maybe we should think of this in the same way as we think of Jesus as the Way. Jesus is the One Who gives us access to the Father. He is the Way to God. Jesus is the One Who teaches us how to live and shows us how to live. Jesus is our way of life. Please take that two ways. Jesus is our way of life. He is the way we ought to live. He is the way to which the only alternative is death. Jesus is the way into abundant life. We access eternal life by Him. Religious leaders who do not themselves follow Jesus may exploit the flock. (Send me your money and I will pray for you.) They will certainly obscure the true way if they preach falsehoods.

Religious teaching which denies that Jesus is the Way and worldly ways of thinking which do the same will all lead to death. Only Christ is light and life.

December 11th

John 10 vv 11-15

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

There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin;

He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in.

O dearly, dearly has he loved, and we must love him too,
And trust in his redeeming Blood, and try his works to do.

December 12th

John 10 vv 16-18

The obvious assumption is that, talking to Israelites, *the other sheep, I have which are not of this fold*, are the Gentiles who will come to faith in God through Jesus and will therefore become heirs of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They will be one fold – the Jews and all the gentile nations. *For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.* (Galatians 3²⁷⁻²⁹). What makes us one is Christ and His commandment that we should love one another as He loves us. When we think of centuries of persecutions of other people for their religious or racial origins or beliefs, when we think of the divisions within God's Church, the contrast between what is and what ought to be can only make us ashamed. If we are ashamed, the question is what can we do about it ourselves in terms of loving one another as Christ loves us and we can only start where we are in our own Christian fellowship, our own family and our own community.

December 13th

Galatians 6 v10

This might seem like a bit of a digression from our study of the Nature of God, but it isn't. It is puzzling. Why didn't Paul leave it at doing good to all? Charity (love, *αγάπη*) begins at home. We are the family of God. We (ought to) love one another as Christ loves us. Love originates in the Trinity. It expresses itself in the family. But love has to overflow beyond the boundaries, even of the unity of the Trinity. That is the nature of love, of God. So our love for one another in the Church obliges us to treat absolutely everyone the way our faith leads us to treat our brothers and sisters in the Church – to love one's neighbour as oneself, as Christ.

December 14th

John 11 vv 1-16

Thomas is best known for saying that he would not believe in the resurrection of Jesus until he had seen for himself. This story introduces the theme of Christ's victory over the grave and, it seems to me, Thomas has a better grasp on things than the other disciples have at this stage. It will be dangerous for Jesus and His followers to go into Judaea because there are powerful people there who want to kill them. But Jesus is the Light of Life. If disciples (we) walk with Him, we shan't stumble. There is work to do and we ought to get on with it while we can.

December 15th

Genesis 2 vv 4-9

This is the context for what follows in the Lazarus story. It is God Who gives life. Especially for us human beings, it is God Who breathes into us the breath of life so that we are living souls. All life, of course, comes from God, including plant and animal life, but we are special. We are made in the image of God. It is worth remembering this before we move too quickly from saying that we would put down an animal in pain to saying that human beings in similar circumstances should be offered voluntary euthanasia. There is a case to be made and discussed, but it is not the same for animals as it is for people. We are distinct and different. It is God Who breathes into Adam (who represents all humanity) the breath of life. It is God Who plants the Garden of Eden for Adam to enjoy and Who also grants Adam that freedom which allows him to choose death rather than life – a disastrous choice, but without genuine choice there cannot be freedom and I very much doubt that true love is possible if it is not freely given.

December 16th

John 11 vv 17-27

Jesus' words to Martha introduce the Prayer Book funeral service. It is on Christ that we depend entirely for our life in this world and the next. For Martha, the resurrection seems to be a distant prospect which is not much comfort when her brother has just died. In Christ, however, the Resurrection is present reality. Life is the eternal now. To know God is to have eternal life. So we have eternal life now if we know Him. We are therefore one with those who have gone on before. The Church militant here in earth is one with the Church triumphant in heaven. Lazarus' resurrection is not a forlorn hope for the distant future, but a present reality, as is the resurrection of all those who are in the Lord.

December 17th

I Corinthians 15 vv 20-23

I Corinthians 15²⁰⁻⁵⁸ is the set lesson in the Prayer Book funeral service. We seldom hear it read nowadays. Modern congregations are considered by many clergy to be unable or unwilling to listen to anything long or difficult to understand. I wonder how much of what God has provided for us in the pages of Scripture we miss out on because of such benign censorship and how much weaker the Church is than she might otherwise be if she took account of the full counsels of God? Young Moslem men in this country pray to Allah five times daily and learn Arabic so that they can read the Koran in its original language, whereas in Christian churches the poor little loves are not expected to make any effort at all and are carefully shielded from anything difficult or challenging and (do you know what?) the mosques are flourishing and the churches are dying. If you want to follow this up, read Jeremiah 2¹⁻¹³.

December 18th

I Corinthians 15 vv 20-23

After yesterday's rant over these verses, to make the point that Jesus fulfils the human destiny. Jesus is what Adam ought to have been. Jesus is what you and I ought to be. Because of what Jesus has accomplished on the Cross, Adam's sin is undone, and human beings in Christ may come into their inheritance as the children of God, eternal life in Him.

O loving wisdom of our God! When all was sin and shame,
A second Adam to the fight and to the rescue came.
O wisest love! That flesh and blood, which did in Adam fail,
Should strive afresh against the foe, should strive and should prevail;
And that a higher gift than grace should flesh and blood refine,
God's presence and his very self, and essence all divine.

December 19th

John 11 vv 28-37

Jesus wept is the shortest verse in the Bible. For all that He is God, Jesus is fully human and shares all our sorrows, our joys, and our temptations. He understands us because He is one of us. Yes, He could have prevented Lazarus from dying. Yes He could bring any of our loved ones back from the grave. But it doesn't work like that. It couldn't work like that. People have to die. Yet we do know that He shares our sorrow. He understands our grief and we find comfort in Him in as well as hope for the resurrection.

December 20th

John 11 vv 38-46

Well the rest of the story demonstrates that Jesus can resuscitate Lazarus (and indeed anyone else if He chooses to). Lazarus' resuscitation must have been a great comfort to Martha and Mary, albeit a temporary one. Lazarus would die eventually in the normal way. The point of this miracle or sign is not to give us hope that against the odds our loved ones will always get over any disease they may have and continue to live this life for ever. The raising of Lazarus is in fact a sign that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life. Nobody, when you think about it, would want to live for ever on earth. To know God is really to live. To know God is to have eternal life. *I am come that they might have life, and they might have it more abundantly* (John 10¹⁰). This is the point of the Lazarus story – that everyone can have eternal life through faith in Jesus.

December 21st (St Thomas?)

John 20 vv 24-29

Traditionally St Thomas' Day was kept on 21st December. Vicars used to say that it was good to have an Easter Gospel as we were preparing for Christmas because it reminded us that the Incarnation, the Life, Death and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ are a unity, God's great action in redeeming Creation. More recently, the view (among experts) has been that the solemn season of Advent, preparing for Christmas and our Lord's Coming again at the end of time, ought not to be interrupted by festivals. The Advent hangings are purple, the church sparsely decorated, we don't say the *Gloria*, we light the red candles week by week until everything comes together in our celebration of Christmas – white hangings, flowers and a Christmas tree, a crib, joyful music and bell ringing and the white candle is lit on Christmas morning. (For a similar reason St Matthias has been moved from 24th February in Lent to 14th May. One year I celebrated Matthias twice because my church followed the modern calendar but I helped out at a church which followed the traditional calendar.) Anyway, Thomas is convinced of the Resurrection of Jesus because he could see and touch. Jesus speaks of the blessings received by those who accept the witness of believers, believe themselves without seeing, and experience the resurrection for themselves.

Almighty and everliving God, who for more confirmation of the faith didst suffer thy holy Apostle Thomas to be doubtful in thy Son's resurrection; Grant us so perfectly, and without all doubt, to believe in thy Son Jesus Christ, that our faith in thy sight may never be reproved. Hear us, O Lord, through the same Jesus Christ, to whom, we thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for evermore. Amen.

December 22nd

John 20 vv 30 & 31

Over the last quarter, my aim has been that we should become a little bit more sensible of the sheer wonder of Who God is, that we should apprehend, therefore, something of the miracle of Who Jesus is, that we should therefore marvel all the more at what His promise means – that we shall be like Him – and that we should therefore live in that sensibility.

It is obviously beyond us. Ezekiel is forced to describe what he is shown of the glory of God in such oblique terms as these: *And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of a throne was the likeness of the appearance of a man above upon it. And I saw as the colour of amber, as the appearance of a fire about within it, from the appearance of his loins even upward, and from the appearance of his loins even downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the glory of the LORD, And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake.* (Ezekiel 1²⁷⁻²⁹). Then, speaking of Jesus, the Son of God, and the human race, His brothers and sisters, it says *For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.* (Hebrews 2¹¹).

That's something to ponder as we anticipate the Christmas festivities!

December 22nd

Psalm 29

I am writing these notes in August, but we have just had Psalm 29 in the daily office. It struck me as extremely apt for this project of trying to deepen our awareness of the sheer greatness of God. The whole world is in God's Hands. It is by His Word that Creation operates. He is not a distant God, looking down from afar on a mechanism which He created long ago. He is indeed transcendent, but He is also imminent, intimately involved in the day to day, minute by minute, working of the "machinery". *Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.* (Luke 12^{6&7}).

December 24th

Psalm 33

Another of my favourite psalms! *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made.* It is through Jesus that God creates heaven and earth. His greatness is beyond our understanding. He made everything by His Word. The universe runs by His Word. Jesus is the Word of God. His Word will endure though heaven and earth pass away to make way for the new creation in which righteousness dwells. He lays down the great and eternal principles of justice and mercy. The LORD is worthy of all praise. Then the second half of the psalm speaks of His goodness to His people, His concern for our lives, His interest in us. It wasn't alien to His Nature that the Word became flesh. Human beings were made to be the children of God and it is perfect sense that the Son of God became human. The relationship between us and Him is that intimate. No wonder we love the Christmas story.

December 25th (Christmas Day)

Luke 2 vv 1-10

The human face of God.

Hark! The herald-angels sing Glory to the new-born King,
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.

Joyful, all ye nations, rise, join the triumph of the skies;
With the angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem,"
Hark! The herald-angels sing Glory to the new-born King.

December 26th (St Stephen)

Acts 7 vv 1-60 or vv 54-60

Stephen was appointed deacon to help with the dole of food to the believers. He was *full of faith and power, and did great wonders and miracles among the people*. This stirred up the antagonism of the enemies of the faith who dragged him before the council. As the hostile crowd of judges and prosecutors looked at Stephen, it says, *they saw his face as it had been the face of an angel*. If you read from v1, you will see how Stephen explains God's revelation of Himself in Christ as the fulfilment of all that God has already revealed of Himself in the Old Testament. In fact Acts 7 is a quick guide to the OT. Reading from v54, Stephen turns his face towards Jesus. Seeing Jesus, Stephen becomes like Him. He receives the grace to forgive his enemies and to commend himself to God in all eternity.

*Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in his wonderful face;
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.*

December 27th (St John the Evangelist)

I John 1 vv 1-10

Jesus is the Word of God. *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made.* Yet John speaks of seeing and touching Him. The Word is Life, life for all who believe. Those of us who know the Word are constrained by the love of God, by the Holy Spirit, to preach, teach and share the Word, to bear witness to the Word in every way that we can. *Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings*. All those who believe (whether or not they have seen and touched) are one in communion and fellowship (κοινωνία), one with one another, one with Christ and the Father, one in the Holy Spirit. Walking in the Light, we experience the fulness of joy. Sin brings darkness, dirt, death and misery. Through the blood of Jesus Christ we have the forgiveness of our sins and are cleansed from all unrighteousness.

Merciful Lord, we beseech thee to cast thy bright beams of light upon thy Church, that it being enlightened by the doctrine of thy blessed Apostle and Evangelist Saint John may so walk in the light of thy truth, that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

December 28th (Holy Innocents)

Psalm 8

Herod's murder of the firstborn in Bethlehem has two biblical precursors – Pharaoh's order that the Hebrew baby boys should be thrown in the Nile (from which Moses was providentially saved) and the deaths of all the innocent children put to the sword when Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian army ransacked and pillaged the Holy Land in C6 BC. So what Herod did fulfils prophecy. Indeed, in a way, it fulfils the Law and the Prophets. The BCP collect for today links this story to Psalm 8. Psalm 8 celebrates the glory of God and wonders at His care for humanity. Psalm 8 celebrates what human beings were created by God to be. The actions of Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar and Herod demonstrate the gulf between what we are meant to be and what we so often are. It is not difficult to think of horrible wars in the world today where innocents suffer – Iraq, Syria, the Holy Land itself, much of Africa. It has been so throughout human history because men and women reject God's perfect Law of Love. We are all guilty of original sin, of humanity's propensity always to rebel against God. Jesus came to redeem those innocent victims. That is easy to believe. But He also came to redeem the Pharaohs, Nebuchadnezzars and Herods. That is much harder to believe. He also came to redeem us. Can we believe that?

December 29th

John 18 vv 1-14

As soon then as he had said unto them I am he, they went backward and fell to the ground.

Jesus says *I am* (ἐγώ εἰμι). They fall to the ground. Surely this resonates with God speaking to Moses at the Burning Bush. Moses asks God his Name and God says יהוה, I am - ἐγώ εἰμι (ο Ων) in Greek. Jesus is the One Who is. Jesus is God. God is love. *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* [Jesus goes on, *Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you.* Just before that, He said, *This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.* Before that He says, *These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.*] God's fullest revelation of Himself to us is the Cross of Christ. The Cross is the glory of Jesus. The Crucifixion is the hour for which He came. This is why, as He dies, He exclaims, *It is finished.* It is accomplished. He has done what He came to do. He has made known in His own Body the infinity of God's love for us. The Word has indeed been made flesh and subjected to all the vicissitudes of our flesh, up to and including mortality, and He has overcome all the forces of evil by His love in order that we might become immortal in Him.

'Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies; who can explore His strange design?

In vain the first-born seraph tries to sound the depths of love divine!

'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore, Let angel minds inquire no more.

He left His Father's throne above - so free, so infinite His grace -
Emptied Himself of all but love, and bled for Adam's helpless race.

'Tis mercy all, immense and free; for, O my God, it found out me.

I'm musing here. I can't help noticing how, in our multicultural society, Sikh men are permitted to wear turbans and Moslem women wear veils, but commercial firms and public authorities often seem to try to stop Christians wearing crosses. The cynic in me wonders whether the secular powers would really like to ban all religious symbols, but daren't offend militant religious groups which might be ruthless in defence of their rights, or if it is a matter of political correctness to defend the rights of immigrant communities but not the "natives". I sometimes wonder, however, if it is more than that? The Cross is a greater threat to the secular authorities and commercial interests than any fatwa or jihad. The Cross contradicts the very idea that worldly power and wealth matter at all.

December 30th

John 18 vv 28-40

What is truth? said jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer.

Francis Bacon 1601

What is truth is a very good question. Some people don't think that there is an answer. There is no such thing as objective truth or absolute truth – only what people think. One person's opinion is as good as another's. Who am I to say that you are wrong? Modern Western culture supports equal rights for women and minority groups. Traditional cultures do not. Nobody can say one is right and the other wrong. That would be cultural imperialism. Tolerance is the only moral absolute. In practice, this moral relativism tends towards *might is right*. The most powerful and influential individuals in society determine what *all right thinking people think*, and those who think otherwise are coerced into agreement.

Other people would say that there is such a thing as truth, but that the only truth is scientific truth – phenomena that can be observed, measured and tested, theories that can constantly be checked and rechecked against experimental evidence.

Other people might say that there is truth but that it is only to be found in the realms of mathematics and pure logic. Mathematical statements may be true insofar as they are logically consistent, but maybe they correspond to nothing in what we usually think of as the real world.

Instinctively, we know that this is not the case. We know that some statements are true and some are false, even though it is not always easy to know which are which. Some scientific theories have been proved to be false. None has been proved to be absolutely true, because the true scientist always keeps an open mind. However good the evidence for a particular theory, some new evidence might come to light which would falsify it. Furthermore, we cannot prove the premises on which Science or Mathematics or Logic rest.

Unaided human reason always ultimately finds itself arguing in a circle. Yet we are convinced that there is Truth out there. Ultimately, Truth is revealed to us. Christ is the Word (in Greek Logos, Λόγος). In Christ the Truth is revealed. He is *the Way, the Truth and the Life*.

December 31st

John 14 vv 1-6

This is another reading we often have at funerals. I suppose funeral services are one of the occasions when we really want to be sure of what is ultimately true. And Jesus is the answer. I've tried, in preparing the notes for this quarter, to deepen our sense of the reality of God, that ultimately God is reality and that all other reality depends on Him. It follows that we can understand nothing without God. Without God, our philosophy, our ethics, our science, all our knowledge is incomplete. It is lacking the one thing needful. Without God, our human relationships are lacking. The brotherhood of man depends on the fatherhood of God. The marriage bond reflects the bond between Christ and His Bride, the Church. Human friendship blossoms in the knowledge that Jesus says to us *Ye are my friends* as we seek to keep His commandment that we love one another. We cannot appreciate what we have in this world unless we remember that *all things come from thee, O Lord*. We cannot be good stewards of our time, talents and possessions if we do not remember Who gives them to us and to Whom we are answerable for what we do with them. What we do with our lives makes no sense unless we *do the good works he has prepared for us to walk in*. Our lives would make no sense at all if they were extinguished in death, if there were no final accounting and if there were no redemption in Christ. If we do not live our ordinary human lives in time and space in the light of eternity, we walk in the dark. On the other hand, to know God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent is to have eternal life. If we know the truth in Him, if we walk in His Way, if we live His life, our lives on earth are joyful, thankful, useful and filled with love, and we live in the joyful anticipation of our final consummation in the Beatific Vision.

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

Te Deum Laudamus.

WE praise thee, O God : we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.
All the earth doth worship thee : the Father everlasting.

To thee all Angels cry aloud : the Heavens, and all the Powers therein.

To thee Cherubin and Seraphin : continually do cry,
Holy, Holy, Holy : Lord God of Sabaoth;

Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty : of thy glory.

The glorious company of the Apostles : praise thee.

The goodly fellowship of the Prophets : praise thee.

The noble army of Martyrs : praise thee.

The holy Church throughout all the world : doth acknowledge thee;

The Father : of an infinite Majesty;

Thine honourable, true : and only Son;

Also the Holy Ghost : the Comforter.

Thou art the King of Glory : O Christ.

Thou art the everlasting Son : of the Father.

When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man : thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb.

When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death : thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.

Thou sittest at the right hand of God : in the glory of the Father.

We believe that thou shalt come : to be our Judge.

We therefore pray thee, help thy servants : whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood.

Make them to be numbered with thy Saints : in glory everlasting.

O Lord, save thy people : and bless thine heritage.

Govern them : and lift them up for ever.

Day by day : we magnify thee;

And we worship thy Name : ever world without end.

Vouchsafe, O Lord : to keep us this day without sin.

O Lord, have mercy upon us : have mercy upon us.

O Lord, let thy mercy lighten upon us : as our trust is in thee.

O Lord, in thee have I trusted : let me never be confounded.