

Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton		
7 th August Trinity 11	9.30 Family Communion	Genesis 15 vv 1-6 p15 Hebrews 11 vv 1-16 p1209 Luke 12 vv 32-40 p1045
14 th August Trinity 12	9.30 Holy Communion	Jeremiah 23 vv 23-29 p783 Hebrews 11 v29 – 12 v3 p1210 Luke 12 vv 49-56 p1046
21 st August Trinity 13	8.00 Holy Communion	Epistle & Gospel BCP
	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 58 vv 6-14 p745 Hebrews 12 vv 18-29 p1211 Luke 13 vv 10-17 p1046
28 th August Trinity 14	9.30 Holy Communion	Proverbs 25 vv 6&7 p660 Hebrews 13 vv 1-16 p1211 Luke 14 vv 1-14 p1047
Services at St John the Baptist Halling and the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling		
7 th August Trinity 11	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	II Corinthians 1 vv 1-22 p1158 Mark 7 vv 24-30 p1010
	11.00 Holy Communion & Holy Baptism	Genesis 15 vv 1-6 p15 Hebrews 11 vv 1-16 p1209 Luke 12 vv 32-40 p1045
14 th August Trinity 12	11.00 Holy Communion	Jeremiah 23 vv 23-29 p783 Hebrews 11 v29 – 12 v3 p1210 Luke 12 vv 49-56 p1046
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Isaiah 28 vv 9-22 p711 II Corinthians 8 vv 1-9 p1162
21 st August Trinity 13	11.00 Holy Communion Stop! Look! Listen!	Isaiah 58 vv 6-14 p745 Hebrews 12 vv 18-29 p1211 Luke 13 vv 10-17 p1046
28 th August Trinity 14	11.00 Holy Communion & Holy Baptism	Proverbs 25 vv 6&7 p660 Hebrews 13 vv 1-16 p1211 Luke 14 vv 1-14 p1047

Holy Communion at Cuxton Wednesdays at 9.30 am		Holy Communion at Halling Thursdays at 9.30 am	
3 rd August	Jeremiah 31 vv 1-7 Matthew 15 vv 21-28	4 th August	Jeremiah 31 vv 31-34 Matthew 16 vv 13-23
10 th August St Laurence	Ezekiel 9 vv 1-22 Matthew 18 vv 15-20	11 th August	Ezekiel 12 vv 1-12 Matthew 18 v21 – 19 v1
17 th August	Ezekiel 34 vv 1-11 Mathew 20 vv 1-16	18 th August	Ezekiel 36 vv 23-28 Matthew 22 vv 1-14
24 th August St Bartholomew	Acts 5 vv 12-16 Luke 22 vv 24-30	25 th August	I Corinthians 1 vv 1-9 Matthew 24 vv 42-51
31 st August	I Corinthians 3 vv 1-9 Luke 4 vv 38-44	1 st September	I Corinthians 3 vv 18-23 Luke 5 vv 1-11

Copy Date September Magazine: 12th August 8.30 am Rectory

Forthcoming Attractions

17th August: 2.00 Teddy Bears' Picnic Rectory.
31st August: 3.00 Afternoon Tea with Strawberries for Church Funds at 95, Pilgrims Road, North Halling.
17th September: 7.30 Quiz for Christian Aid at St Nicholas.
25th September: Sister Gill Martin of Church Army addresses us at 9.30 & 11.00 services.
29th September 7.30 pm St Michael's Patronal Festival – preacher the Rural Dean.

2nd October: 6.30 pm Harvest Praise at St Michael's, followed by Harvest Supper in Church Hall.
15th October: 7.30 pm Quiz for Church Funds in Church Hall.
19th October: Mothers' Union Tea in Church Hall.
10th December: 10.00 Christmas Coffee Morning in Church Hall.

Quote: "I really don't see why you should be surprised at the conduct of your fathers-in-God. After all the sign of a Bishop is a crook and of an Archbishop a double-cross." Dom Gregory Dix OSB.



Captive in Iran

Captive in Iran is the title of a remarkable book by two Christian young women who were imprisoned in Tehran in 2009. Their names are Maryam

Rostampour and Marziyeh Amirizadeh and theirs is an extraordinary story of how faith and hope and love shone through the terrible ordeal they underwent. The background is complex. Apparently, technically it is not illegal to be a Christian in Iran, but it is against the law to convert from Islam to any other religion or to share your Christian faith with other people. To do either can lead either to execution or imprisonment. Maryam and Marziyeh were not brought up as Christians, but they had come to know Jesus and to love Him very dearly. A church group met in their apartment and they used to distribute New Testaments on the streets of Iran. You can buy a Bible openly in Iran, but the official versions are edited to discredit the story of Christianity. Many people in Iran are afraid even to read the Koran because the penalties are so severe for in any way dirtying or damaging a copy. This means that even many Muslims are ignorant of what their religion really teaches or even what it says about Jesus and Mary.

One day, they were both separately roughly arrested and their apartment searched. The conditions in the holding prison at the police station were appalling. Later, they were moved to the notorious Evin prison. Both prisons were filthy and overcrowded – especially after the controversial presidential election of that year, when the government rounded up and imprisoned thousands of people who had protested against the corruption and fraud which enabled President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to be re-elected for a second term in office. The food in the prisons was disgusting and there was not enough of it. Conditions were cold and insanitary. When prisoners were sick, as they often were, given the conditions, medical treatment was grudging and inadequate. Some guards were casually cruel. The regime was designed to humiliate and disorientate. Torture was commonly used to obtain evidence and extract confessions. Executions were frequent and, to a degree, arbitrary. Access to lawyers was uncertain and at the whim of the prison authorities. Letters were censored or withheld, telephone calls strictly

limited. It is in this context that we see Maryam's and Marziyeh's faith, hope and love shine through.

But, before we come to that, a look at the other inmates. Some of them had committed what would be regarded as serious crimes in any part of the world. There were murderers and thieves. It has to be stated that, even though people who do things like that deserve to be punished, they are still human beings made in the image of God and for whom Christ died. They do deserve to be punished, but it is our responsibility, as people who have (by the grace of God) not gone down that road, to give them the opportunity to receive forgiveness, to start again and to live good and useful lives in prison and when, if ever, they are released. Whilst in prison, society (we) has a duty to provide humane, rather than dehumanising, conditions even for really evil people.

As in this country, there were also people imprisoned because they were addicts or mentally ill. It seems obvious that such people should not be in prison, but that would mean deciding how else to deal with them and providing whatever resources might be necessary in the way of treatment, including, where necessary, humane, secure hospitals.

It is also true that people who would remain healthy in normal life develop symptoms of mental illness under the pressures of prison life. That is true in this country and all the more so when prisoners suffer the sort of ill treatment which is characteristic of the Iranian penal system. Prisoners who are mentally ill should have access to mental health services, which is far from always the case even in Britain.

Many prisoners, including Maryam and Marziyeh, were being held on remand, awaiting trial and either acquittal or sentence. This is also true in this country and innocent people may be held in prison for months or even years waiting for the courts to decide their fate. Generally, justice delayed is justice denied and cases ought to come to trial as quickly as is consistent with giving both sides time to produce their evidence and prepare their case. In Iran, there is an additional sadistic twist. Sometimes they will let prisoners go without waiting for a trial. Then it hangs over them indefinitely that they can be brought back to

prison at any time if they annoy anyone in authority.

Then there were prisoners who were there for offences under Iranian Law which wouldn't be offences under British Law. Some people seemed to be in prison for debt. In the women's prison, quite a lot of the inmates were there because of the way Sharia Law treats women as generally inferior to men. Rape victims find themselves charged with sexual immorality. Then there is the whole gamut of things you might do which can be construed as an insult to Islam.

This does raise a question. Why should the law differ from country to country? Is the law simply whatever the people in power in any particular culture say that it is? Is it simply what any given culture has passed down as tradition? Or are the principles of justice universal? Ought the law to be the same throughout the world? If we don't believe in universal principles of justice, we have no right to criticise the legal systems of other cultures such as that of Iran. If we do believe that justice is universal, then there are limits to our multiculturalism. We cannot condone that in anyone else's culture (or our own) which we believe to be fundamentally unjust. I do sometimes wonder whether our laws in this country have gone beyond universal principles of justice as we have become less religious, more pragmatic (unprincipled!) and more inclined to legislate in ever greater detail with regard even to relatively trivial matters.

If the principles of justice are universal, where do they come from and how do we know what they are? I believe the same as Maryam and Marziyeh – that God makes known His Truth in Jesus Christ.

Then there is the way that the law is administered. Some of the police and prison guards in Maryam's and Marziyeh's story were slack in carrying out their duties, corrupt or just cruel. Obviously, that is unacceptable. So it is, when justice is delayed by inefficiencies in the system or when judges or officials get to make arbitrary decisions without regard to the law. It happened. There are extraordinary oddities in the Iranian system. One married couple were accused of being involved in a murder. The system offered them a choice. The

man could hang and his wife go free or they could both serve life sentences in prison. Justice isn't only a matter of reaching the right verdicts and deciding on appropriate and proportionate punishments. It is also about how those verdicts are reached and those punishments administered.

So now we come to Maryam and Marziyeh. What was their response to being imprisoned in the dreadful conditions of an Iranian gaol on suspicion of being guilty of what no sensible person would regard as a crime – faithfulness to Jesus Christ? Naturally, there were times when they were afraid. There were times when they were shocked and disgusted. They were sometimes lonely and sad. They were cold. They were hungry. They were sick. They worried about their families and their many Christian friends on the outside who could also have found themselves in that terrible place. Yet, in all that, they had faith; they had love; they had hope. They trusted God that they were there for a reason. They knew that He would not forsake them. They knew that He was with them and would enable them to face whatever trials and temptations He allowed to come their way. This faith was nurtured by a deep love for Him and a wonderful sense of His love for them. This was a love that extended, not only to their families and to their Christian friends, but also to their fellow prisoners and gaolers. This was a hope which would not make ashamed. They committed themselves and their situation to God in prayer. When they were first in the holding prison, they cleaned the toilets which were overflowing with what wouldn't flush away. They preserved their dignity as human beings and, as a result, they were able to improve conditions for themselves and for their fellow prisoners. Their morale gave hope to others. They shared their food. They tried to look after people who were sick. They tried to befriend prisoners who were especially unpopular or especially desperate. They offered to pray for other prisoners and, later, for their captors. When they had the opportunity, they witnessed the Truth of Jesus to fellow inmates. Some of them were Muslims. Some had little real faith in or knowledge of God at all. Some were Christians who were afraid to admit it. Many were interested in the story of Jesus but had no access to the Bible or to churches. It was a great joy when a New Testament was discovered in a

box left behind by a former prisoner. Maryam and Marziyeh kept their self-respect and would not compromise with what they knew to be wrong or acquiesce in shabby deals, such as when it was suggested to them that, if they pretended to renounce their faith they could be released, whereas if they didn't, they might be hanged. It was noticed that God answered their prayers and many prisoners and prison staff came to ask to be prayed for. Marziyeh was sometimes vouchsafed dreams about what was in store for other prisoners and could tell them what they could expect. She emphasised that she wasn't in any way a fortune teller but that God sometimes used her in this way to help other people. Maryam and Marziyeh came to thank the Iranian authorities for giving them more opportunities to witness for Jesus than they would have had on the outside and, of course, to some of the most needy people.

What they did not know at first, was that there was a tremendous campaign going on in the outside world for their release. Thousands of people were praying. There were petitions and letter-writing campaigns. Important people made representations. It was all becoming a huge embarrassment for the Iranian government. So, eventually, after two hundred and fifty nine days, the charges were dropped and they were released. As they would always have been watched in Iran and therefore unable to engage in any Christian work, they emigrated to America, where, I believe, they still live.

It does make you think, however, about what some people are suffering for their faith in the world today and how much Jesus means to them and how He uses their sufferings to spread the knowledge of God's Love to the whole of the world. Roger.

Psalm 138.

I will give thanks unto thee, O Lord, with my whole heart : even before the gods will I sing praise unto thee.

2 I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy Name, because of thy loving-kindness and truth : for thou hast magnified thy Name and thy word above all things.

3 When I called upon thee, thou heardest me : and enduedst my soul with much strength.

4 All the kings of the earth shall praise thee, O Lord : for they have heard the words of thy mouth.

5 Yea, they shall sing in the ways of the Lord : that great is the glory of the Lord.

6 For though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly : as for the proud, he beholdeth them afar off.

7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble, yet shalt thou refresh me : thou shalt stretch forth thy hand upon the furiousness of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me.

8 The Lord shall make good his loving-kindness toward me : yea, thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever; despise not then the works of thine own hands.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. **Amen.**

Some Wise Words of Pope John XXIII

Death is the future for everyone. It is the Last Post of this life and the Reveille of the next. Death is the end of our present life. It is the parting from loved ones. It is the setting out into the unknown. We overcome death by accepting it as the will of God, by finding Him in it. Death, like birth, is only a transformation, another birth. We we die we shall change our state. That is all.

Friends of Kent Churches Ride and Stride

This takes place on 10th September this year. If you would like to ride, run or walk to as many churches as you can and be sponsored (half to our church, half to FKC), please ask Rector for a form. It is also good if our churches are manned to welcome visitors and maybe to give them some squash. You can also be sponsored for this. Please let me know if you can help. You could kill two birds with one stone, manning the church and getting on with something like cleaning, polishing the brass or weeding the churchyard!

SPONSORED
RIDE AND WALK



From the Registers

Baptisms:

1 st May	Vincent Anthony Sharkey	Gravesend
	Henry Ellison Grimwood	Larkfield
7 th May	Ryan Mark Ely	May Street
29 th May	Charlotte Christina Roser	Vicarage Close
11 th June	Parker William Adams	Jackdaw Way
12 th June	Mollie Rose Chubb	Bush Road

Wedding:

25 th June	Michael James Melford and Lesley Ann Bland	Halling
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Wedding Blessing:

18 th June	Alan and Christine Murray	Cuxton
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Funerals:

26 th April	Elgar Hedger (73)	Ladywood Road
1 st June	Marion Joyce Hitchcock (89)	Vicarage Close
15 th June	Estelle Wallace (91)	Marsh Lodge Farm
16 th June	Barbara Ashdown (79)	William Road
29 th June	Ellen (Bly) Darnell (87)	Bush Road
1 st July	Marion Lear (72)	Rochester Road Halling
7 th July	Derek Roy Moyes (82)	Charles Drive

The “White Hart” and Halling School

Copies of “Cuxton Remembered” by Lillian Bennet, mainly concerning her life in the “White Hart” during both world wars, but covering other subjects as well, are still in terrific demand. You can secure your copy for a donation of £1. It appears that we shall also shortly be able to supply reprints of the centenary history of Halling School. These will also be available for a donation of £1. They are a fascinating insight into the difficulties of setting up and running a school and some of you will remember it and for some of you your parents and grandparents may have been among the early pupils.

From Halling Ringers

We thank the Cuxton Ringers for a very interesting outing to West Sussex. Wet at times, but an enjoyable day, including the cricket match at Bolney. Yours Old Chimer, P Silver.

No Notes

It has not been possible for a couple of months to include our usual Nature Notes feature. One idea was to ask readers if they had noticed any changes from year to year. For example, Spring has been getting earlier across the whole country for several years now, possibly a sign of global warming. This year, however, things have been later once again with all the cool, wet weather we have been enjoying. To start you off locally, three things I have noticed. There seem to have been very few anemones in the woods this year, though more than usual wild garlic. I haven't heard the usual woodpeckers and only one cuckoo and that only once. I do see the ravens quite frequently. Whereas last year, in my garden, the white Philadelphus (mock orange) made a beautiful display above and behind the yellow Hypericum (especially with the evening sun on them), this year it was nearly over before the latter came into bloom. Have you noticed anything interesting or unusual in the countryside or your gardens this year? Roger.

How Do You Feel About the EU Referendum Result?

There seem to be very strong feelings on both sides in the aftermath of our voting to leave the European Union. I don't remember such strong feelings in 1975, but perhaps I was too callow a youth then to notice how other people felt or maybe we were less emotional or less willing to display our feelings in those days before social media connected us across the globe with millions of other people. In a few days, we shall be hosting a meeting at St John's for people on both sides and of all faiths and none to share any anxieties and insights they may have. If people wish, we shall continue to hold these meetings for as long as is necessary. Here I shall try to consider some of people's concerns and how we might answer them. I'll start with how I feel as a Leave voter and then I'll go on to try to think why a Remain voter might be troubled.

As a Leave voter, I resent the caricature which I continually encounter in the press and online that: we who voted Leave are all stupid, old bigots; that the leaders of the Leave Campaign were cheats and liars; that we have undermined the future prospects of younger people; and that we somehow created a poisonous atmosphere which was in some way responsible for the murder of the MP Jo Cox and a rise in the number of racist attacks. I'm also concerned that, having lost the vote, the establishment is stalling in the hope of thwarting the democratically expressed will of the people.

To take these one at a time, it's not for me to say whether or not I am stupid. It is, however, arrogant to label everyone who disagrees with you as an idiot, and possibly dangerous to do so. Jesus warns, *but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire* (Matthew 5²²). Thinking about democracy, the whole point is that everybody gets a vote. Would you want to live in a country where there was some sort of intelligence test when you registered to vote or where only people with college degrees could take part in elections? It would surely be unfair and I don't believe it would result in any better government!

It is perfectly true that older voters were more likely to vote Leave. It is also true, however, that they were much more likely to vote. Only 36% of 18-24 year olds voted and only 52% of those 25-34. The turnout was much higher than that in all the other older age group categories. It is not fair to blame us older Leave voters for the result if Remain voters couldn't be bothered themselves to attend a polling station on the day or appoint a proxy or obtain a postal vote. The EU referendum had a much higher turnout (72%) than most elections. It would be a very dangerous precedent to set that election results could be overturned because non-voters subsequently complained at outcomes they didn't like. Again, democracy depends on everybody having a say. It would be quite wrong to take the vote away from older people. I confess to being somewhat stunned by people who didn't trouble to vote the first time now demanding another chance to express their opinion. If they win next time, will it be best of three referendums?

Are Leave voters bigots or racists? First, not everybody who voted Leave did so mainly because of fears about immigration. For me, it was principally a question of sovereignty. Do we make our own laws or are they imposed on us by other nations? Should laws be made by a democratically directly elected parliament whose proceedings are open to the public or by appointed Commissioners and an indirectly elected Council of Ministers meeting in secret? Some business people voted Leave because they believe that our economy will actually do better once set free from the over regulation and tariffs imposed by the EU customs union which misleadingly calls itself the single market. Some military experts advocated Leave for fear that the EU's growing military pretensions could damage NATO and undermine our ability to defend ourselves.

Even for the many who are concerned about immigration, they are not necessarily racists. Very few people support unregulated migration. Almost everybody wants some control, but there is no magic cut off. You can't say that it is all right to set the desired level of immigration at 100,000 per annum, but racist to set it at 99,999! You could argue that it is racist (or at least cultural imperialism) to treat European would be migrants differently from would be migrants from the rest of the world. I think you should also examine yourself for hypocrisy if you live in an expensive area where poor migrants could never afford to live and you profit by being able to employ cheap labour willing to work unsocial hours, if you send your children to the best schools and take advantage of private medicine and then castigate as racists much poorer people

because they are worried about their neighbourhoods being transformed by a huge influx of people from different cultures, because they feel that their jobs are at risk and the public services they rely on are in danger of becoming overwhelmed by sheer numbers.

Were the leaders of Leave cheats? That seems to me a very unfair charge. We had been led to believe that the government would be neutral. In fact they worked hard for Remain, spending £9,000,000 of taxpayers' money on a booklet sent to every household telling us not to vote Leave. They introduced emergency legislation changing the rules on voter registration to help potential Remain voters who hadn't bothered to register over the previous few months or years. They inveigled all sorts of important people at home and abroad into backing Remain with public statements. It wasn't the Leave campaign that cheated. Given the sheer overwhelming might of the opposition, we would still have been doing well if we'd come second!

Did the leaders of Leave tell lies? Both sides said things in the campaign which have subsequently proved to be untrue. What did you expect? They are all politicians. There are different kinds of untrue statement which carry different degrees of culpability. A politician might say something which he genuinely believes to be true and then it turns out that he is mistaken. That is neither a crime nor a sin. A politician might make statements recklessly, hoping they are true, but not really being sure. That is morally blameworthy. Finally, a politician might deliberately make a false statement and that is lying. Both sides were more or less guilty of dishonesty. Where Leave did let us down, I believe, is in failing to present a vision of what life would be like outside the EU. That is one reason why I think we should soon have a general election. The present House of Commons has no mandate to deal with this situation. If we wanted to think again and remain after all, we could vote for MPs who agree with us or, assuming we haven't changed our corporate mind, we could vote for MPs who share our vision of Brexit.

I'm a bit concerned about the future of free speech in this country. Increasingly there is social pressure and sometimes even legislation to stop us saying what some people might find offensive. It's easy to see why we try to regulate free speech in this way, but it's dangerous. You don't have to know much history to know how human progress has often depended on brave individuals saying things which people in their own day found unsettling, things which other people thought were wrong and dangerous. Jesus is the supreme example of someone who came with a message which people really didn't want to hear. It is highly regrettable if our talking about leaving the EU has in any way given encouragement to mentally unstable or wicked people to perpetrate horrific acts, but, even if it is true that it has, that is not a reason for preventing people from saying what they truly believe about Britain's membership of the EU, or anything else for that matter.

Now for the concerns of the people who wanted us to remain in the EU. This follows on directly from the last paragraph. It surely goes without saying that it is utterly unacceptable, whatever your political beliefs, to insult, abuse, threaten or attack anyone. If immigrants living among us are feeling threatened, we all (whatever we think about our membership of the EU) need to show them that we love them and, where necessary, to take action to protect them. No one should feel unloved or afraid.

I am sorry that EU nationals already living in Britain may have been made to feel insecure about their future here. As I understood it, during the referendum campaign, both sides were absolutely clear that EU migrants here legally now would be welcome to stay. I am horrified that some senior figures in government have now called that into question. If I had a vote in the election of the next prime minister, it would be one of the main factors determining whom I would support. Is it right that only Conservative party members will have a say in the choice of our prime minister for the next four years at a time when there are such momentous decisions to be made? This is another reason for my thinking that we should have a general election soon.

I am less concerned about the anxieties of British people who have chosen to live in Europe. If they would rather live there than here and their host country is willing to welcome them, they should take out citizenship there and become full members of the communities where they have chosen to live.

Some people are worried about our economic prospects outside the EU. Of course, we just don't know. But we shouldn't be too worried. We shan't starve. Wealth isn't the only route to happiness. Personally, I think the quality of our lives would be considerably improved if we had fewer material goods and if our countryside were to be spared major infrastructure projects such as the Lower Thames Crossing and its associated road system.

Another concern is whether Brexit will precipitate the break up of the United Kingdom, with Scotland demanding independence from England. It may do. The Nationalists have been looking for a reason to call another referendum since they lost the one in 2014. They are not likely to give up whether we're in the EU or out of it. Whether a majority of Scots agree with them, however, and whether the EU would admit an independent Scotland are other questions to which the answers are less predictable. Again, the point is that we remain friends whatever our political differences. I certainly wouldn't want to force Scotland to remain in the UK if the majority of Scots wanted independence anymore than I would want England to be constrained within the EU if we don't want to be.

Some people are also worried about the possible loss of our cultural links with Europe. We should be very foolish if we allowed this to happen. We've been culturally bound to Europe since Stone Age times. Trade and the exchange of ideas don't depend on the EU! There were "no passport" day trips to France from Margate on offer long before we joined the EU. We'll find a way if we want to.

Perhaps, however, all the above is not the real reason why some people feel so strongly. What really matters deep down inside to more people than you might think is a sense of identity. I saw on television after the referendum a very distressed apparently English young woman wearing a tee shirt bearing the slogan, *I'm not British. I'm European.* I must admit that my first thought was, *Well go and live in Europe then.* If pressed, I would probably say, *I'm not European. I'm British.* There is of course no reason why we can't be both, but I think that the real reason for such strong emotions is that many of us have a very strong feeling that we are one or the other, not both. We can, however, surely agree that we are all human. Our common humanity transcends nationalisms, patriotisms, ethnicities and continental identities. However strongly we feel about our English, British or European identity, we must find a way to love one another and to live together with mutual respect. The point about the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10²⁵⁻³⁷) is that Jews and Samaritans in those days had very distinct and antipathetic identities, but the Samaritan was there for the Jew when he needed him and the Jew was gracious enough to accept his help.

There's so much more to be said, not least about the brotherhood of man depending on the fatherhood of God, but I really think I have to leave it at this point for now! Roger.

Riddles?

How do you start a milk pudding race?

Sago

Why did the butterfly flutter by?

Because it saw the dragonfly drink the flagon dry.

What's the difference between a railway locomotive and a deciduous tree?

One sheds its leaves, the other leaves its shed.

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August Specials

Wednesday 17th

**Teddy Bears'
Picnic**

Rectory Garden 2.00 pm
It's all free. Just come along with
your teddy to enjoy games and tea.

Wednesday 31st

**Afternoon Tea
with strawberries**

Malia
95, Pilgrims Road
North Halling
3.00 – 5.00 pm

Parish Lunch August

On the first Wednesday of each month we hold a parish lunch for everyone who cares to join us at 12.00 in the Church Hall, Cuxton. Normally, this is very generously catered by Christine Eede and we enjoy a lavish menu of hot and cold main courses and scrumptious desserts. All we ask from those attending is a donation towards costs. It's usually a good laugh as well. In August Christine won't be with us, but we still want to enjoy the company. So we're still holding the lunch but inviting participants to bring something to share. There's bound to be a surplus. So don't think you can't come if you're not in a position to bring anything, but, if you are, please do. These things often seem to work like the loaves and fishes. We finish up with more food than we started with – which could be good news for Tommy!

Clerical Clothing

Would you like to see your vicar taking the service wearing a mankini? This was a subject which was raised at the last parish lunch. What is a mankini? I'm not sure you would want to know. I didn't, but someone showed me a picture of one on a smartphone. I should say that wearing a mankini is possibly more indecent than wearing nothing at all. After all, God designed our birthday suits!

How this came up was that General Synod has been debating whether clergy should have to wear robes when we take services. We'll come back to that, but this naturally raised the question, if we didn't wear robes, what would we wear when leading worship? Would, for example, a mankini be considered a suitable garment for a preacher or the celebrant at Holy Communion?

It's not unlike what happened when someone sillily raised the question in General Synod whether it was legal to allow animals to graze in churchyards instead of just getting on with it as parishes have been doing for centuries. You can have too many rules and too little common sense and Synod came up with lists of animals permitted to graze churchyard grass, such as sheep, and creatures forbidden to masticate the holy herbage, such as camels. I did promise to own up at once in the unlikely event that a passing camel helped itself to a mouthful of pasture from amidst the gravestones – though I would think that such a thing could only be regarded as a blessing, given the way our churchyard and cemetery have got so out of hand this year.



Thirty five years ago the “Church Times” experienced one of its most extensive correspondences ever on the subject of whether clergy should wear clerical collars all the time. People obviously feel very strongly about these things. Do you find it surprising that a majority of the clergy seemed to be in favour of ditching the collar except on formal occasions and a majority of the laity (at least of those who read the “Church Times”) thought that clergy should wear a dog collar whenever they go out? The clergy find them hot and uncomfortable and don't like being different, whereas the laity sometimes seem to think that the clergy are somehow different and ought to be distinguishable. There is the good point that someone who needs to speak to a minister might see a clergyman in a clerical collar on the bus or shopping in the Co-op and confide in him. There was the more doubtful point that some people would want to moderate their language or be more careful about what jokes they told if they knew that there was a clergyman in the room. Some clergy reported (and I can vouch for this) that a clerical collar can get you a compartment to yourself on a train or a free drink in a pub. When I first came here, I used to say to my dog, Bobby, “Come on, we'll put our collars on and go out.” Bobby didn't wear his collar indoors in case he didn't feel the benefit when he went out. As time has gone by, I've had less cause to say that. It has become less expected that I will always wear a clerical collar, there are more and more silly rules about where you can't take man's best friend and my spaniels tend to keep their collars on all the time as they are more likely to run off than their sainted canine predecessor.

However, we still wear robes to conduct worship and this is what General Synod is in the process of changing – to give clergy the option to wear ordinary clothes when presiding or preaching. The argument is that some people may find formal robes off-putting and alienating when they come to a service. The opposite argument of course is that church is something special, the minister is doing something special and that it is therefore appropriate for him to dress accordingly.

The Old Testament prescribes the appropriate robes for the high priest in great detail. That was, however, the Old Testament under which the high priests of Aaron's line mediated between God and ordinary human beings. Under the New Testament (under which all Christians fall) there is no need for any merely human high priest to act as our mediator and advocate before God. Jesus has done everything necessary to open the way for every believer to enter into the Presence of God. Everyone who comes to God in faith in Jesus Christ is accepted. He is the atoning sacrifice Who makes us at one with God. Our prayers come to God through Him. God pours out His blessings on us through Jesus Christ. We don't need anyone to come between us and God. All our sins are forgiven in Him. So long as we have faith, we shall enter Heaven through His merits alone. Jesus is the only priest Christians need.

The New Testament recognises the need for Christian ministers, however, and describes how they are called by God and endued with the Holy Spirit in order to perform their ministry, but it says nothing about Christian ministers having any particular distinctive dress. I think it is very unlikely that ministers dressed differently from anyone else in New Testament times, including when they were conducting worship.

Nevertheless they probably dressed smartly for what is a very special thing to do – to lead a congregation in celebrating Holy Communion, to preach the Word of God. The robes or vestments which the clergy of different Christian denominations wear tend to be the clothes that were considered smart in the early years of that denomination. The style then becomes fossilised. The robes I wear for Communion are the clothes people would have worn in the Middle East 2,000 years ago and the smart suits of Roman gentlemen. The vestments I wear for other services are basically the academic dress worn by scholars at the Reformation.

But should I? I'm no better than you. I'm no closer to God than you. Why should I dress distinctively? I wouldn't mind celebrating in tee shirt and shorts, though I'd drawn the line at a tankini. And yet, it is a special occasion. I do have a special role in public worship. There are prayers to say as I put them on, part of my preparation for worship. On balance, I think I should dress accordingly, but it's not something I'd go to the stake for. What do you think? Roger.



Tommy's Talking Points

We're really enjoying these long, light days, especially when it isn't raining – early walks, late walks, even midday walks if there's time. Heavy rain doesn't entirely dampen our enthusiasm. In fact it got me an extra walk a week or two ago. One Tuesday, Master's coat got so wet that it took several days to dry. On the Thursday, he panicked because he couldn't find his garage keys. So he couldn't get out either his bike or the car to go to Halling and we had to walk. Result! Still, when we got home, he didn't find the keys and began to worry that he wouldn't be able to cut the grass or do the washing because the mower and the washing line are also kept in the garage. On Saturday, he thought the wet coat had dried sufficiently to be put away and the keys fell out of it. He still doesn't understand how as he'd checked it several times along with every other nook and cranny in the house.

The other evening, I had a great time having a mike around the garden while Master burned the rubbish. He was very pleased that he got it to burn without too much smoke even though it had only been cut down the day before. Once or twice a year he has to go right round the boundaries of our garden cutting back the encroaching wilderness. The best part is when he gets out his scythe and does his Poldark impersonation. I tried to remind him that last year he was sorry he had been quite so ruthless with the brambles in June when, in August and September, he was looking for blackberries, but he doesn't listen to a word anyone says including me. We had another go yesterday evening and I had a good time barking at and chasing the wheelbarrow. It is fun to start a tug of war with the weeds he is trying to pull out and to scatter round the garden the ones he has put in a bucket with a view to putting them on the compost heap.

Our walk from Wrotham to Otford has been postponed. I'll tell you about it later. Meanwhile, we'll keep up the good work around Cuxton and Halling. Tommy the Rectory Spaniel.