

Advent 3 2020 – Sunday 13th December

13 th December Advent 3	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Isaiah 61 vv 1-11 p748 I Thessalonians 5 vv 16-28 p1188 John 1 vv 6-28 p1163
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OLORD Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit ever, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.

Do you ever find yourself feeling discouraged? There are times when life seems to be getting on top of us. Perhaps we have problems we don't know how to solve. We may be afraid for the future, half expecting that there will be difficulties which we shall not be able to overcome. Perhaps it's the people we care about. Maybe we are anxious about them and their troubles or our relationships with them are going through a difficult phase. And, of course, there may be people who do not have our best interests at heart. Are we afraid of what they might do to make our lives more difficult?

If you are gardener, you might well feel discouraged when the slugs eat up your young plants. At work, despite your best efforts, you might not be able to achieve the results which are expected of you. You may feel sometimes that you've done your bit but then been let down by the team. Other people just haven't been bothered to put in the effort to capitalise on your good work. Sometimes, through ignorance or even malice, your colleagues sabotage your best work. I remember an incident when an accomplished artist produced a Christmas card for an organisation – not the Church I'm glad to say. The design represented the Christmas message with elegant simplicity. Unfortunately, the committee of the organisation concerned didn't appreciate it. Each of them wanted to add his or her own yuletide symbol to the artist's concept. The result was an incoherent mess of superfluous clutter which destroyed the elegant simplicity of the design and ruined the artist's original creation.

I was talking recently to a parish councillor about how discouraging he found it that the council put so much effort into making the village a nice place in which to live, only to have their efforts undermined by litter louts and vandals. The reason why the shrubs on my dogs' graves are *Pyracantha* with its vicious thorns is that vandals pulled up and threw away the gentler plant which was there before.

Two things discourage me. If I can't get a response from the business or commercial organisation I am trying to do busy with, I tend to get discouraged and give up. So I do, when I think I have solved a problem, only to find that I haven't - those occasions when you change the bulb and the battery in your bike light and still it doesn't work.

We're all only to aware of the frustrations and causes for discouragement which the corona virus has brought. So I am not going to enumerate them again, but we all must keep them in our prayers.

Finally, and most importantly, do you ever feel discouraged in your relationship with God? You might not feel His Presence as you used to. You perhaps feel that He has let you down in some way. You've done your best and still everything has gone wrong. Your prayers don't seem to have been answered. There is so much injustice in the world. The wicked apparently prosper. Good people suffer. They get sick and die. Faithful Christians are persecuted in so many parts of the world today. Why corona virus? Why wars? Why poverty and hardship? Why doesn't God do something about all these evils? For some Christians, the Church herself is majorly discouraging. I've had a couple of retired clergy tell me that, the way the Church has behaved, they no longer want to belong. Lay people too sometimes despair at the failures of the institutional Church. How can a body which claims to be the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit so often get so much wrong?

I'm not going here to try to answer individually or particularly any of the questions in that last paragraph. You might be relieved to hear that if you've got the dinner on. People have been discussing issues like these for millennia and still come to no definitive conclusions. We've got about ten minutes, not thousands of years to mull over what human beings don't understand about God. I'm not saying that these questions don't matter or that it isn't worth discussing them. God gave us minds as well as hearts and we do seek understanding of the faith we hold. But we can discuss them on other occasions when we have more time and we are freer to meet together.

What I want to hold onto today is what S Paul says in our NT lesson. *Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.* Whatever our discouragements in life – our ordinary day to day living, COVID 19, our doubts about what God Himself is up to – we can nevertheless trust God. God has called us. God is faithful. We can trust Him. There is a very great deal that we don't understand about God, the world and ourselves. We may sometimes feel almost overwhelmed by the darkness. We just can't cope. We cannot withstand the forces working against us - whether its slugs in the garden, unhelpful colleagues at work, the need to pay our bills, difficult family members, chronic sickness, disappointment in the institutional Church or a challenging relationship with God – but, however we may feel, the truth is that God is faithful. He has called us. He will accomplish His purposes in our lives. We can trust God. I'll finish with the psalm for today – Psalm 126.

WHEN the Lord turned again the captivity of Sion : then were we like unto them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter : and our tongue with joy. Then said they among the heathen : The Lord hath done great things for them. Yea, the Lord hath done great things for us already : whereof we rejoice. Turn our captivity, O Lord : as the rivers in the south. They that sow in tears : shall reap in joy. He that now goeth on his way weeping, and beareth forth good seed : shall doubtless come again with joy, and bring his sheaves with him.