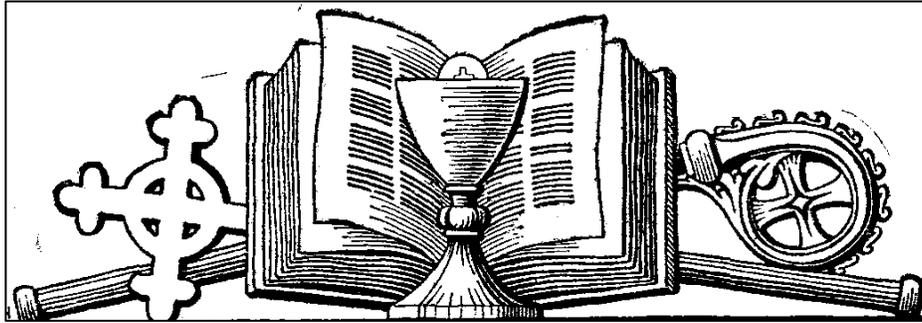


The Epistles of St Paul the Apostle to Timothy



Bible Notes
April-June 2008

50p

April 1st

1 Timothy 1 v1

The two letters to Timothy and one to Titus are generally known as the Pastoral Epistles. Some scholars do not believe that they are really the work of St Paul because they are, in many ways, different from epistles like Romans and Galatians, both in style and in theological emphasis. Others might point out that Paul was much older when he wrote the Pastoral Epistles and that they are intended for a different readership. Some of what is said in these letters is so personal that it is hard to believe that it is not from Paul to the persons named. It has been suggested that the older Paul might have employed a secretary to write his letters and that this explains the stylistic differences. I shall treat them as being the work of Paul. I do not know how else we can make sense of these letters!

Paul, of course, was a very active missionary and established Christian congregations throughout the Eastern Mediterranean region. These new churches were often very enthusiastic, but they needed pastoral support, guidance and discipline if they were to remain unified in love and faithful to the Gospel. After Paul left a city, he would often send letters to the Church there to help them deal with issues raised. He also sent emissaries and helpers and appointed leaders such as Timothy and Titus.

In the New Testament, all baptised Christians constitute a royal priesthood. All Christians have direct access to God the Father in Christ and all of us are mediators of His grace to the world. Some were separated for particular ministries such as deacons, prophets, missionaries etc. Some were designated elders (presbyters) or overseers (bishops) to lead particular congregations. Towards the end of the New Testament period, we see the beginnings of the threefold ordained ministry of bishop, priest (presbyter) and deacon, which has been characteristic of most of the Christian Church ever since. We could think of Timothy and Titus as early bishops, receiving their authority from the apostles and passing it on to selected suitable men who would also exercise an authority designed to promote love, unity and faithfulness.

April 2nd

1 Timothy 1 v1

Paul describes himself as an apostle. An apostle is someone who is sent. As Christians, we are all sent out into the world to do the work of God.

He believes that he is sent by the commandment of Jesus Christ. All Christians generally are commanded to do God's work in the world. God does, however, call individuals to certain forms of service. There are vocations to ministry of various kinds. If God has commanded us to take up such a ministry, we ought not to refuse. Where God has commanded other people to serve Him in particular capacities, we ought to respect their vocation.

How do you know if you have a vocation? If you feel prompted by God in a particular direction, pray to Him for guidance about what you should do. Ask the advice and prayers of Christian friends. If you believe your vocation is to ordained ministry or to some other "official" ministry, that vocation will have to be tested by the Church. Ask the Rector. If the Church believes that God is calling you, she will offer appropriate training and preparation and you will, in due course, be ordained or have your calling to ministry recognised in some other way.

April 3rd

1 Timothy 1 v1

Paul refers to God as our Saviour. I am not sure that we often think about what that means. Humanity needs a saviour. We mess up our own lives on earth. We mess up other people's lives. We mess up the earth itself. What messes up is sin. Sin is rebellion against God our Father. Sin is our inability – or our resolute unwillingness – to live in brotherly love with one another. The wages of sin is death. Our sin messes up our life on earth and denies us eternal life. We need a Saviour. The only One Who can save us is God Himself. So Jesus is our hope. We all need hope. We hope for good health. We hope for success in the world. We hope for good things for our families and friends. We need hope what ever happens, hope for time and eternity. Ultimately our hope is Jesus because in Him, the Word made flesh, we know that we are loved by the Father Who made us and everything that is.

April 4th

1 Timothy 1 v2

Paul refers to Timothy as his son (metaphorically, not biologically). Now Jesus us warns us against calling human beings “father” or “teacher” or any such honorific titles that imply that they stand between us and God, that we can only come to God through them. If we put our faith in Jesus, the Son of God, we become one with Him in His Body, the Church. We call God *Abba*, Father. The Holy Spirit is our teacher. Within the Body of Christ, however, I think that verses like this show that we can give honour where it is due, honour that comes from love. We do not need other people to mediate God’s grace to us as though we could not come to God except through them. God does, however, give us grace to share with one another. He makes us different and gives us different gifts. We are all one family, all of us equally, infinitely valuable. Possibly the young are more vigorous and the old wiser. We can honour one another and receive grace from one another. It is not inappropriate to think of the bishop as father to the diocese, so long as we do not exalt him in place of God.

April 5th

1 Timothy 1 v2

Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

That’s a better greeting than “Hi” or “Yo!” or even “Dear Timothy.” I suppose if we got into the habit of greeting other Christians like that all the time, it would cease to have any meaning. (How many people think *God be with you* when they say *Goodbye*, even though that is what it means?) It says something for our fellowship, however, if we think of Paul’s words as the natural greeting for two Christians meeting or writing letters to one another. It would be hard to launch into a tirade about something or to indulge in malicious gossip if we prefaced our remarks with *Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.*

April 6th

1 Timothy 1 vv 3&4

Now we come to Timothy’s mission. Some people have set themselves up as teachers in the Ephesian Church and what they are teaching is not in accord with the Christian Gospel. Timothy, acting with the authority of Paul who received his authority from God, has to put things right. The priesthood of all believers does not mean that we can make up the faith as we go along nor that we do not need authority to set us straight.

April 7th

1 Timothy 1 v5

What's it all for? We work very hard to maintain our local churches. We sometimes have quite sharp debates about what we ought to be doing. But what is it all about – all the effort to maintain buildings, increase numbers and raise funds, all the disputes about doctrine, worship or who should do what at the church fête?

What it is about, says Paul, is love – a good conscience and a sincere faith. We might ask ourselves whether what we are doing serves that purpose or not and, if not, why are we doing it?

April 8th

1 Timothy 1 v6

If our teaching from the pulpit or elsewhere, if our debates in PCC, synods and other fora, do not contribute to love, a good conscience and a sincere faith, Paul warns us that all our words are just empty talk. There is no point if there is no love.

April 9th

1 Timothy 1 v7

Obviously it is a good thing to want to be a teacher of the Law of God. The Law of God is, after all, love. We have established that, even though all Christians, as part of a universal priesthood, have access to God the Father and are taught by the Holy Spirit, there is a place for teachers within the Christian communion, people whom God has chosen and equipped with the necessary grace. The danger is always that people will put themselves forward and advance their own ideas, rather than responding to God's call and proclaiming the Gospel. We are to recognise the true prophet by his fruits. The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. We can test ourselves as teachers by these criteria as we can test those who set themselves up to teach us.

April 10th

1 Timothy 1 v8

It is a fairly common belief that you win God's favour by being good. It is not a big step from there to the belief that people who are not as good as you do not enjoy God's favour. If you have a sensitive conscience, it may lead you to feel that you can never be good enough for God and that you are therefore doomed to hell. Paul was brought up

as a Pharisee and Pharisees generally believed that God's favour was a reward for obeying the Law (Torah) found in what we call the Old Testament. This could make a Pharisee despise the ordinary Jewish people who did not obey the Law as strictly as they did and the gentiles who did not have the Law at all. It could also make a sensitive Pharisee like Saul (Paul) despair that he could ever be good enough.

Jesus revolutionises our understanding of the Law. On the one hand its demands are unlimited. We are to be like God Who unconditionally loves everybody, the bad and the good alike. Keeping the Law is not a matter of dutifully fulfilling the 600+ commandments found in the first five books of the Bible. Keeping the Law is following Christ's example of making your life a loving sacrifice. On the other hand, God's love for us does not depend on our fulfilling the Law. Christ has done that for us. Jew and gentile, rich and poor, men and women are all welcome. Christ has done everything to effect our atonement with God. We only have to accept what He has done in faith – which naturally leads to repentance and surrender to the demands of infinite love.

What then is the use of the Law? If it is not there to exclude people who are not as good as us, if it is not a way for us to earn God's favour, is there any point to it at all? Should we tear up our Old Testaments and just live lives of love? Not so fast. The law has a lawful purpose!

April 11th

1 Timothy 1 vv 9-11

The Law is not for the just person. We are justified by faith, not works. What the Law does is to set the standard. Love is the standard. This is the glorious Gospel of the blessed God with which Paul (and you and I) are entrusted. Certain life styles are incompatible with love and Paul lists quite a lot of them here. If you are any of the things listed in vv 9&10, you are not a person filled with the love of God. If you are not yet a Christian, the Law is a call to repentance. You will be saved, not by forcing yourself to conform to the Law's demands, but by accepting Christ's free gift of forgiveness and grace to become a better person. If you are a Christian and any of these things listed, you need to spend time in prayer and repentance! Freedom in Christ is not freedom to live an ungodly life! Why would you want to if you know the love of Jesus?

April 12th

1 Timothy 1 vv 9-11

I do not feel that I can gloss over the issue that, among the list of those condemned by the Law, Paul includes homosexuals. There is perhaps some ambiguity here and the reference could be specifically to rent boys. However, I do not think that there is any real doubt that the Church's traditional teaching has always been that people are free to choose to engage in sex or not to engage in sex (how ever strong the temptation) and that there are only two legitimate choices: celibacy and heterosexual marriage. All kinds of homosexual behaviour are wrong. So is fornication (sleeping around) including sleeping together before marriage and adultery. Divorce is either forbidden or a very last resort.

In the last 50 years, however, divorce has become much more freely available. Couples are much less dependent on one another economically. So, it can be argued, divorce is much less serious than it used to be. Sex before marriage is not regarded very seriously at all. Contraception avoids the risk of unwanted children. Our sex drive has come to be seen as an essential part of our nature so that it diminishes us as people if we do not yield to our needs. Many people think that we do not choose whether or not to be homosexual, but that some of us are just born that way. If we are born that way, some would argue, our lives are significantly diminished if we are not allowed, or if we choose not, to follow our inclinations.

So, what do you think? Are the biblical and traditional prohibitions and limitations on homosexuality, extra-marital sex and divorce valid for ever or were they framed in a totally different social milieu and inapplicable in C21 Britain? Is it more loving to allow young people to enjoy sex before they are well enough established in society to get married, to permit warring couples to divorce and to bless homosexuals in loving relationships, than to condemn, forbid and prohibit? Or is permitting all these things essentially contrary to the Law of Love because they all conspire to undermine the traditional family on which any civilised society must be based? I can't tell you the answer. If you want my advice, however, I would tell you to remain celibate or else choose a partner of the opposite sex, get married and then stay married for better or worse, till death do you part.

April 13th

1 Timothy 1 vv 12-15

It is this sort of personal touch which makes it hard to believe that this epistle is not by Paul himself. He just feels so privileged to be a Christian and to be chosen as an apostle! In his earlier life he had thought that Jesus was a bad man who had betrayed the Jewish religion with his radical teaching and his acceptance of sinners. Paul had actually persecuted the Church. Then Jesus appeared to him. The scales fell from his eyes. He knew that all his sins were forgiven. He was reconciled to God. He knew that this was good news for the whole of humanity and that no-one was excluded.

People like Paul who have experienced a very definite conversion know what it is to have their lives turned round by Jesus. Those of us who have been Christians for as long as we can remember have a great deal to be thankful for in our upbringing and early experience of God. We may, however, be lacking in a full appreciation of what a privilege it is to be a Christian and just how wonderful it is to be allowed to offer our lives to Jesus.

April 14th

1 Timothy 1 v16

There is meaning and purpose in our lives. God does what He does with us for a reason. In Paul's case he was converted so that he could show what it was to suffer and endure privation in this life in order to share the joy of being a Christian with the whole world? What was God's purpose in calling us, do you suppose?

April 15th

1 Timothy 1 v17

There is a hymn based on this verse which was one of one of my predecessor's favourites. When I came here, I was asked not to have it too often! Contemplating what God has done for him moves Paul to praise. He lists some of the attributes of God – His kingship, his eternity, his immortality, his wisdom. He acknowledges that God is beyond our apprehension or comprehension; He is "invisible". Paul offers God what is His by right – honour and glory for ever. Worship is what our Christian life is about, not doctrine or activity. Doctrine and activity follow, but worship inspires. Make room for worship.

April 16th

1 Timothy 1 v18

The Church is not a human organisation. It is made up of human beings, but it is essentially the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit. It is not that Paul is the managing director and Timothy a head of department, charged by Paul with bringing his department into line with company policy. Prophecy is the word of God. The prophets are God's messengers. Timothy is doing the job he is doing in the Church because God has told him to do it and He has told the Church to be prepared for Timothy's ministry. He shares this task with Paul and with all other Christian ministers. This is why we do not set about recruiting our clergy from the Job Centre, interview them to see whether they measure up to our criteria and give them contracts to make sure they fulfil their obligations as defined by us. We do need more ministers. So we pray God to call suitable men. We pray that they may have the grace to discern God's call and that the Church will have the grace to recognise those whom God is truly calling. Once recognised, trained and ordained, we seek to deploy ministers in accordance with God's Will – which means prayerfully as well as thoughtfully deciding where and how they should minister. Once in post, there is a balance between treating them as above criticism (which is to put ministers in the place of God!) and failing to recognise that they are divinely called and do operate with God's grace. I fear that the Church of England is moving towards a business management model of ministry. If it does, it will be in danger of quenching the Holy Spirit.

April 17th

1 Timothy 1 vv 19&20

We can see why Paul wants Timothy to hold the faith with a good conscience. We, no doubt, want that for our minister and for every member of our congregation. I find it shocking however that Paul is ready to consign Hymenaeus and Alexander to Satan. Christians are meant to be nice people. Churches are supposed to be welcoming, friendly places. How can we consign people to Satan? Paul is probably expelling these men from the Church. We can't imagine doing that to anyone. Rather, we try to get them back if they walk out! Paul seems to hope that this expulsion will bring them to their senses and they will stop their blasphemy and therefore be saved. Whether they do or not, however, their making a shipwreck of their faith isn't to be allowed to

sink everybody else. Does this say anything about internal discipline in our Church?

April 18th

1 Timothy 2 v1

An important role of the priest is to pray for others. This is one of the things priests do in the Old Testament. They pray and offer sacrifice on behalf of ordinary people, mediating between them and God. They mediate between God and the people by announcing answers to prayer and pronouncing God's blessing. In the New Testament, Jesus is the High Priest. He ever lives to make intercession for us at the Throne of God. He offers Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Baptised into His Body, the Church, Christians form a royal priesthood whose prayers are joined with Christ's and who offer themselves, their souls and bodies, to be a living sacrifice. Part of our responsibility as the apostolic Church is to participate in Christ's work of intercession for the whole world.

April 19th

1 Timothy 2 v2

There are no Christian kings when Paul is writing and very few Christians in positions of authority. We are very thankful for Christian rulers in our own age and we pray for them. But we also pray for rulers who are not Christians. They still derive their power from God. Without law and order, human society would be impossible and authority is one of God's gifts to the human race – marred though it is, like every other gift God gives us, by human sin. We pray that governors may govern well, whether they are Christian or not. We want to live in a peaceable and just society. That is good in itself and it also makes it much easier for us to live out our Christian calling. We pray for our rulers in their own personal life. They need our prayers and, in a sense, they personify the nation. When we pray for the Queen and the Royal Family, we are reminded to pray for every family. Where Christians live in non-Christian countries, praying for the government is a sign of good faith. We can be loyal to the country we live in as well as loyal to our faith. It is only when the law of the land coerces us to act in opposition to our Christian conscience that we disobey.

April 20th

1 Timothy 2 vv 3&4

The Jews saw themselves as the chosen people. Everybody else is a gentile. Generally speaking, the Jews have not been a missionary people. Far from encouraging gentiles to convert to Judaism, they have traditionally put up all sorts of obstacles. Jews may see being Jewish as a great privilege and some look down on the gentiles. Some Jews regard being Jewish as a hard vocation. They are a people who have suffered a great deal, but, maybe, some believe, their endurance will be a blessing not only to the Jews but to the whole world. Where Jews were unwanted by the rest of society, they could live in the ghetto, remaining faithful to their beliefs and customs and ignoring, as far as possible, the outside world.

Christians, on the other hand, believe that the Gospel is for everyone, for all races. We are the chosen people, but anyone who confesses Jesus Christ as Lord is one of the chosen, one of us. We cannot stay in the ghetto. We have to be the yeast, which, mixed in with the flour, makes the whole lump rise. We believe that God wants everyone to be saved. Some Christians think that this means that everyone will eventually go to Heaven because God's Will cannot be thwarted. Others believe that, much as God longs for everyone to be saved, He will respect the freedom of those who choose to go to Hell. Either way, we have to take a full part in society, to pray for the whole nation – the atheists, Moslems, Jews and whatever as well as the Christians – and to participate in the political, commercial and social life of the whole community, doing our bit to make the kingdoms of this world the Kingdom of our God and His Christ.

April 21st

1 Timothy 2 vv 5&6

I'm surprised these verses are not much better known. We could say them as a creed. They pretty well sum up what the whole Christian faith is. There is one God. There is one bridge between us humans and God. That bridge is Jesus Christ. The toll which has to be paid before we can cross that bridge is the life of Jesus Christ, paid by Him so freely and so generously, so that we could all cross over to our true home with God. What else do you need to know?

April 22nd

1 Timothy 2 v7

We have often seen Paul described as an apostle – one sent by God. Here he describes himself as a herald. Some versions in English say “preacher”, but the Greek work means herald. It gives a different nuance to the message – both an urgency and an authority. Paul is proclaiming the Word of God. He is also a teacher, something slightly different from a preacher. We preach a sermon, i.e. we proclaim the Word. We give an address or lecture or teach a class. The Church needs all those ministries, sometimes carried out by the same people, sometimes carried out by different people. Both preaching and teaching must, however, be carried out in faith and truth. We ought not to preach or teach in order to impress or to please our audience, but to impart the Word of God so as to help them to grow in the knowledge of God.

April 23rd

1 Timothy 2 v8

I guess most people reading this are a bit unenthusiastic about charismatic churches, where people pray standing up and with their arms in the air instead of kneeling with their hands together. It is not a new phenomenon. They prayed like that in Ephesus. Moses prayed like that in the Old Testament. Kneeling with your hands together is a sign of humility and I believe we are to think of God’s Hands enfolding ours in the manner of a feudal lord, who expects homage from his vassal at the same time as promising protection. It is a posture for prayer which has been found effective for many centuries and it should not lightly be abandoned. It can, however, seem to exclude other people so that we are a group of individuals who happen to be praying at the same time in the same place, rather than a congregation praying together. Standing up with our arms raised is a much more open gesture. Some people of course find either kneeling or standing excruciatingly uncomfortable and distracting from their prayers. Some people would say that prayer is more about where our minds are than where our bodies are. Nevertheless, so long as we are on this earth, we are bodies as well as souls and posture can both be part of our offering to God and have an effect on our mental disposition. For what it is worth, I pray privately on my own in bed, in a chair or wherever I happen to be. In Church, I kneel, hands together, if I am in the congregation and stand (sometimes with my arms in the air) if I am

leading worship. I think it is good for all members of a congregation to do the same things at the same points in the service, but I do not like to dictate what postures people adopt, nor to get people so worried about when to stand, sit, kneel etc that their attention is distracted from the worship. I know you can offer suffering to God, but I would rather you sat than stood or knelt in agony!

I am sure that what Paul means is really important is that those offering prayer are holy, without anger and sincere in their faith. *Wrath and disputes* might describe too many church councils and fellowships!

April 24th

1 Timothy 2 vv 9-15

For most of human history, men and women have been regarded as different. Different cultures have treated these differences in different ways, but the facts are that women have babies and men do not and there are many differences in their bodies and in their minds which follow from this. In the last 150 years or so, we have come to feel that women were not only treated differently, but also unfairly and the desire to be fair has led us to downplay the differences and treat men and women alike. The question (as it is with questions related to human sexuality vs. April 12th) is do look to the Bible to interpret cultural trends or do we interpret the Bible in the light of our culture? Actually, we inevitably do both. The question is where does the emphasis lie?

April 25th

1 Timothy 2 vv 9&10

For men as well as women, you could argue that fine clothes cost too much and that making yourself too attractive to the opposite sex could tempt them into sin. In any case, looking good really is missing the point. For men, as well, as women, the point is not to look good, but to be good. So we spend more time in prayer than in bathing, making up and dressing and we give more money to charitable causes than we spend on cosmetics and clothes. Yeah, right!

April 26th

1 Timothy 2 vv 11&12

I find it hard to understand why some people say that homosexuality is wrong just because a literal reading of the Bible says it is and yet maintain that it is perfectly acceptable for a woman to be a preacher or a

priest, which is also forbidden by a literal reading of the Bible. If you take the line that we must do what the Bible says as it is traditionally interpreted in the Church (the Spirit-filled community) then heterosexual marriage and celibacy are the only two options with respect to sex and women cannot lead Christian congregations. You can of course argue that the Bible is not always to be taken literally and that traditions change as the Spirit leads us to different perceptions of the Truth. If you do argue that, of course, women's ministry and homosexuality become open questions which need to be debated afresh in our generation. Having debated those open questions, you may or may not decide to go ahead with women's ministry and/or homosexual marriage. Different people may come up with different conclusions and you have to respect that. You cannot say tradition is absolute and binding when you happen to agree with it and that everything is relative and fluid when you wish to depart from tradition.

April 27th

1 Timothy 2 vv 13-15

I guess Paul took the story of Adam and Eve fairly literally. Taking it that way, Adam – the archetypal man – existed before Eve. God created Eve from one of his ribs to be a “help meet for Adam”. It was Eve who listened to the serpent, who first committed the original sin and then tempted the man to do the same. In Genesis, the difficulties women have in child bearing are seen as a consequence of Eve's rebellion against God and therefore salvation is associated with child bearing, faith, love, holiness and self control. This is the Genesis 2 & 3 perspective on the creation of the human race. The Genesis 1 perspective portrays men and women created together in the image of God. Both perspectives are valid and both tell us something about the relationship between humanity and God and men and women. I am tempted to define the latter as “equal but different” but that was the phrase used by some white Christians in the southern states of the USA to describe the relationship between blacks and whites. “Equal but different” turned out to mean segregation with the blacks generally getting the worst housing, jobs, education and public transport. That cannot be the will of God either for blacks or for women! So we tread carefully the path between strident feminism, which despises the

biblical picture, and arrogant male superiority, which claims to be following the Law (Torah) but is not doing so lawfully (vs.: 1 v8).

April 28th

1 Timothy 3 v1

The traditional response to the offer of a bishopric is *Nolo episcopari*, which means “I don’t want to be a bishop!” Being a bishop is a tremendous responsibility. One is answerable to God for the Church, the “flock” which was purchased by the Blood of Christ. In some periods of history and some parts of the world, it is an invitation to martyrdom. A bishop is entrusted with power and power tends to corrupt. In many cultures, a bishopric brings wealth and prestige. These also are powerful temptations. Any man would think very carefully before accepting a bishopric. The same goes for priesthood or any kind of Christian ministry. We are answerable to God. We have particular responsibilities and face particular temptations as we try to fulfil the “cure of souls” which is ours and the bishop’s. It is, however, a good work and a good man would desire to do it if that is God’s Will for his life.

April 29th

1 Timothy 3 vv 2&3

The qualities required of the bishop are fairly obvious, though the clergy are only human and it is easy to understand that many would fail to match up to these high standards. We need to support our bishops and other clergy by our prayers and our friendship and in every way we can. It is easy to criticise, backbite, gossip and drag down those who are called to occupy high positions. If we do, however, we destroy not only them, but endanger the very institutions they are called to lead.

April 30th

1 Timothy 3 vv 1-3

I cannot leave these verses without saying a bit more about what it is to be a bishop. We probably think of mitred prelates, thrones in cathedrals, episcopal palaces and seats in the House of Lords. To avoid this confusion, some translations have “overseer” rather than “bishop” here. Paul is writing about those who lead the Church. They are the focus of unity. They maintain order. They lead worship (especially the Eucharist). They preach and supervise the preaching of others. They are pastors and teachers and encourage others in those ministries.

Whether or not they need the traditional trappings of an English bishop is a moot point!

May 1st (Ascension Day)

1 Timothy 3 vv 4&5

Today is Ascension Day. I wonder if there is anything I can write that will bring most of you to church today? What a celebration! Jesus has accomplished all He came to do in 33 years of ministry on earth. He has done such wonderful things. He has suffered so much. He has conquered death and evil. He has redeemed the human race. He now ascends to the Father's side, where He will pray with us and for us for ever. He has opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. He pours out His Holy Spirit on His Church. What do you have to do this Thursday that is so important that you cannot come to any of our four Ascension Day services?

Our human relationships are formed by this divine relationship. Our parenthood, our family life, derives from the parenthood of God, the love which unites the Trinity and which unites the uncreate God with His creation. Our unity springs from the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the unity we have in Him and He in us. Our authority structures derive from His power. Our preaching and teaching are the exposition of His Truth. Our pastoral care is rooted in the goodness of the Good Shepherd. The Church reflects and is infused by the very nature of God and the Church exists to mediate God's nature in the whole of creation. The Church's structures, therefore, are called to reflect the divine nature. We are bound to fall short, but we are not bound to do less than the best we can.

May 2nd

1 Timothy 3 v6

Until recently, you could stand for PCC as soon as you signed up for the Church's electoral roll. Now you have to be on the electoral roll for at least 6 months before you can stand for PCC (unless you are a young person who has only just become old enough). I had my doubts about the change. Why hold back people who are keen to serve? There is, however, something to be said for waiting for new Christians to mature before they take positions of authority and responsibility. Otherwise they may harm themselves and the Church by becoming "puffed up".

May 3rd

1 Timothy 3 v7

I'm writing this at the time when the Archbishop of Canterbury has been savaged in the press for his remarks about Moslems in particular and religious people in general in an increasingly secular society. This controversy has provided an opportunity for those who dislike Rowan Williams anyway and for those who have a poor opinion of the Church of England. I am also aware that some clergy have acquired notoriety by their conspicuous failure to keep the Ten Commandments. Paul wants church leaders to be of good report. I am sure he does not want them to refrain from speaking unpopular truths or to avoid giving offence where offence is necessary to wake people up and examine themselves and the society they live in. He would recognise too, from his own experience, that none of us clergy is as good as he would like to be. Some of the best people shy away from offering for the ministry because they do not believe they are good enough. People also can be quite unreasonable in their expectations of the clergy and condemn us for petty or even bizarre things. He would, however, not expect a person to exercise a leadership role if his failings were genuinely scandalous. Pray for your clergy!

May 4th

1 Timothy 3 vv 8-10

Traditionally the first deacons are believed to be Stephen and six other men who were chosen in Acts 6 to distribute food to the widows who belonged to the Christian community at Jerusalem. They are not actually called deacons in the text and at least Stephen went on to do much more exciting things than wait at tables. He was a powerful and fearless preacher and the first Christian martyr. The word *deacon* means servant and it seems that the early Church had an order of deacons responsible for alms-giving and pastoral care. They took Communion to the sick who were unable to come to Church. A bit later on, the orders of ministry coalesced as deacon, priest and bishop and being a deacon was usually a step on the way to one of the other orders of ministry. In the C of E men are usually deacons for their first year and then ordained priest and the diaconate serves as a kind of probation. When deacons become priests or bishops, they do not cease to be deacons. They still have that servant role. Christ Himself came to serve!

May 5th

1 Timothy 3 v11

Is it the deacons' wives who must have all these virtues? Or is Paul talking about female deacons or deaconesses? The Greek is unclear. We do like our clergy to run orderly Christian households! On the other hand, there certainly were female deacons in the early Church. In fact the order of deaconesses became quite important. There were situations in which it was regarded as unseemly for male clergy to minister to women. Obviously, Paul did not believe that having women minister as deacons conflicted with his rulings about only men preaching and heading congregations. There was a time when the Church of England had male deacons who were regarded as clergy and deaconesses who were not. This enabled women to exercise a ministry which was obviously very important in the early Church without raising the question whether women could be clergy. More recently, of course, the C of E has ordained women to be deacons (clergy) and priests and is contemplating ordaining women as bishops. Whether or not you think this is right depends on your attitude to Scripture and the way the Church ought to interpret it.

May 6th

1 Timothy 3 v12

How many polygamists applied to be deacons? None, I should think. Paul objects to serial monogamists as deacons (and bishops), that is people who frequently divorce and re-marry or are widowed and remarried. Of course, there has never been any doubt that widowers and widows are free to remarry, but the early Church clearly believed that it was preferable to remain single. It is interesting that nowadays we think finding a life partner almost essential, whereas the early Christians obviously valued the single life even more highly than marriage. It challenges our thinking when we realise that what is "obviously true" to us is "obviously false" to other people. How do we decide who is right when we are jolted out of our cultural complacency by realising that other good people think differently?

May 7th

1 Timothy 3 v 13

While we would hesitate to put ourselves for office in the Church – we must feel humble in the face of serving God – it is nevertheless a great privilege and those who feel called ought not to hold back.

May 8th

1 Timothy 3 vv 14&15

I cannot see that we would get personal notes like v 14 if this letter were not actually by Paul to Timothy. What I want to emphasise, however, is not the probability of apostolic authorship, but what he says about the Church. We misuse the phrases *high church* and *low church*. Most of us mean by *high church* a church with elaborate decoration and ceremonial and think of a *low church* as being plain and simple. Paul is not talking about church buildings at all. There probably weren't any when he wrote. He is talking about the Christian congregation, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit. This is where God dwells. It is the assembly of the people of God. It is responsible for holding fast to and bearing witness to the truth of God. *High church* really means putting a high value on the Church. I'm not sure what *low church* really means, but it is obviously unscriptural!

May 9th

1 Timothy 3 v16

Wow! *Great is the mystery of faith!* Paul appears to be quoting an early hymn about Jesus. Just think what it means and worship with its original writers and those early Christians who sang it and all the millions of people who have shared it in the pages of the Bible and now worship in Heaven.

May 10th

1 Timothy 4 vv 1-7

As soon as the Church begins to grow, problems develop. This is foreseeable. Paul says the Holy Spirit has forewarned them. It would appear that, instead of focussing on God and the inward life, people are focussing on details of ritual, thinking to please God by various kinds of abstinence, rather than simply freely accepting His gift of forgiveness. Making a show of religion enables us to feel better than other people and at the same time seems to excuse us from the profound transformation required if we are to be truly Christian. People might think you are very holy if you fast in Lent, never miss a church service, do everything by the book, but, if you think God owes you or if you despise other people, you have missed the point. The point is that God receives you freely in His infinite love and what He wants from you is to love Him with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself.

May 11th (Pentecost)

1 Timothy 4 v8

The word for exercise Paul uses is the same word from which we get “gymnasium”. People spend hours on their bodies getting fit – slender waist, finely honed muscles to attract a mate, healthy Body Mass Index to put off the date of death for as long as possible. People spend hours dressing up and making up. Some people go in for religious fasting or detox diets or semi-religious bodily exercises like yoga and meditation. But what really matters? Today is Whitsun, the day we celebrate God giving us the Holy Spirit. This is the Spirit whereby we call God, *Abba, Father*. This Spirit is the Lord, the giver of life. So what are our priorities? Opening our minds to God’s Holy Spirit or vainly attempting to run off a few pound on the exercise bike?

May 12th

1 Timothy 4 vv 9&10

It is because it is the spiritual that really matters that Paul and all Christian ministers (which means all Christians if we believe that Baptism is our entry into Christ’s royal priesthood) work so hard and suffer so much for the Gospel. God so loved the world that He sent Jesus. He is the Saviour of all. People only have to believe, but they can’t believe if they aren’t told and they won’t be told if we Christians don’t tell them!

May 13th

1 Timothy 4 vv 11&12

It appears that some people might have taken no notice of Timothy because he was young. The Word of God requires us to change radically the way we live and the people we are. We are always looking for excuses not to make those changes and to continue to live worldly lives with just a veneer of Christianity. Any faults we can find with our ministers can be treated as excuses for not accepting their leadership. The good minister will preach God’s Word truly and set an example of a Christian life. If he does those things, we have no business rejecting his ministry because we don’t like his appearance or his voice or for any other trivial reason.

May 14th

1 Timothy 4 v13

You could understand this to say that Timothy, for his own spiritual development, should read the Bible and pay attention to preaching and teaching. Ministers do need to be fed themselves with fellowship they do not have to lead, services they do not have to take and to hear sermons they do not have to preach. I think the more obvious meaning, however, is that the minister has to attend to the public reading of Scripture to the congregation, preaching and teaching them. Of course we clergy are nourished ourselves by sharing with you what we have learnt, but we do need time to grow ourselves.

May 15th

1 Timothy 4 v14

We've said a lot about Christian ministers in this Bible study, but who is a valid minister and how do we know? The essential is that the man in question is called by God. He may feel the call himself and there are many ways in which God may call a man. Sometimes it may be that Christian friends will recognise that someone has a vocation to the ministry. If it is believed that a person may be called to holy orders, the next thing is to test that vocation. The Church will try prayerfully to discern whether God is indeed calling this person. If the Church believes that God is calling someone, there will usually be training and preparation. Then comes the ordination – which takes the form of the laying on of hands with prayer. As you see from this verse, this is a very ancient rite, going right back to the New Testament. At ordination, the minister does receive as a gift from God the grace he needs to fulfil his vocation. He should never forget that and attempt to act only in his own strength. The Church should never forget that and treat her clergy as though they were just managers, who happen to wear their collars back to front! We also believe that God honours what we do when we ordain. The Church is not infallible and may sometimes mistakenly ordain the wrong people. We believe that, when this happens, God still uses that person as a conduit of grace and that the sacraments he administers are valid. It is like when someone marries the wrong person. God still honours the vows and makes them husband and wife. They are validly married and if they co-operate with the grace of God, they can have a fulfilled marriage.

May 16th

1 Timothy 4 vv 15 &16

They say that no-one on his death bed wishes that he had spent more time in the office. When you die, what matters? If it is true that your life flashes before you as you drown, what about your life would make you feel that it was not wasted? What would make you feel that your life had all been worthwhile? I think the right answers are to do with relationships. What did your life mean to your wife or children? What did it mean to your friends? What contribution did you make that made things better for the human race? It might be the way you cared for neighbours. You might have been a great statesman who prevented a war or a scientist who developed a cure for a killer disease. What would be fulfilling for a Christian minister would be if he could believe that he had fulfilled the vocation to which God had called him. but wouldn't that be the hope of any Christian?

May 17th

1 Timothy 5 vv 1&2

Timothy has got to bring discipline to the Church in Ephesus, but he is not to lord it over the Ephesian Christians. He is to treat older Christians as though they were his parents and younger Christians as his brothers and sisters. So hard to get right. There is no room for domination in the Church, but, if those in authority are too mild, other people may not respect them and there may be anarchy. The service for the consecration of a bishop says, *Be so merciful that you be not too remiss; so minister discipline, that you forget not to be merciful.* That is what we are praying that God will give grace to His bishops and pastors to do.

May 18th

1 Timothy 5 vv 3-16

It appears that there was an order of widows in the early Church. Women who had been widowed were quite likely to find themselves unsupported in the ancient world. Their best hope might be to marry again, but Christian women would be unwilling to marry pagan men. The widows were supported by the Church. They were expected to support the Church with their prayers and to carry out good works. What has happened at Ephesus is what so often happens to any welfare scheme. People are abusing the system. Families are handing widowed parents over to the Church's care rather than looking after them

themselves. Perfectly fit widows are living on the Church's charity, refusing to do any work and making a nuisance of themselves because they are bored. Paul instructs Timothy to tighten the rules so that those who really need help receive it and the idle and the greedy don't. We're still trying to get that one right in the Welfare State.

May 19th

1 Timothy 5 vv 17&18

Obviously the original meaning of *elder* was an old man. It seems to have come, by this time, to denote an office. The word for elder is *presbyter*, which came to be rendered priest. In many modern churches some elders are young men and many priests are young men! We are inclined to think that people ought not to be paid for Christian service and that, if they are paid, they should be paid a minimum. St Paul did not agree! *The labourer is worthy of his hire!* My own view is that no-one ought to seek to be a minister for the pay and that, if called to ministry, one should serve whether one is paid or not. I do not believe that impoverished congregations should give large sums of money to keep their ministers in relative luxury. Neither, however, am I impressed with wealthy congregations who have convinced themselves that they cannot live without all the good things money can buy, but expect their ministers to live in poverty!

May 20th

1 Timothy 5 v19

The church of England has been trying to sort out the terms and conditions under which its clergy work. Traditionally, vicars and rectors have enjoyed what is called the parson's freehold. This makes it very difficult to get rid of them if they do anything wrong. On the other hand, it protects them when they are doing right but facing opposition. Clergy, who are not vicars or rectors, have very little legal protection and can, in theory, be dismissed with no redress at all. When goodwill breaks down, you need legal or at least official procedures, but legal procedures are often inflexible and seem to fit poorly with a fellowship which is supposed to be based on love. Paul allows that presbyters may need to be rebuked, but wants also to be sure that they deserve it! As I write, the Church of England is still trying to work out how to apply these principles in C21.

May 21st

1 Timothy 5 v20

This verse probably refers to publicly disciplining elders who go wrong, but it could also mean publicly disciplining any member of the congregation who does wrong. In James we read that early Christians were exhorted to confess their sins to one another. If people went really astray in the early Church, they were expected to do public penance. We are talking about a very close community where sin was taken very seriously and the sinner was to be restored through penitence and the fellowship of the Church. This only works in a close community where people feel they can trust one another. As the Church grows, confession is formalised – individual confession to a priest. Penance becomes more like punishment and public penance is determined by legal procedures. At the Reformation, all this is largely dropped and people are expected to sort out their own consciences with God. Some Christian denominations retain a public discipline, but most protestant denominations do not. Public discipline can lead to harsh measures, gossip and “holier than thou” attitudes, destructive rather than restorative to the sinner. Keeping it between the individual and God may lead to many people not taking sin seriously at all and a few not sure where to turn with their guilt. When you confess your sins to God, take seriously your lapses from perfect love. Be specific in telling God where you believe you have gone wrong. Ask Him to show you where you have gone wrong. Ask Him to forgive you and trust Him that He does forgive you. You may still feel you want to discuss your spiritual life with a minister of religion or a trusted Christian friend. If so, do not hesitate to do so.

May 22nd

1 Timothy 5 v21

Churches too easily form themselves into cliques and ministers may find themselves accused of favouring particular individuals or cliques. This is wrong. The ministry is to the whole congregation. In the Church of England, the it is there for the whole parish – not only the Anglicans, but also those of other denominations, of other faiths and none. It's hard to get right. We all find some people easier to like. There are some people we spend more time working with. We want friends. The other side of all this is that the people who are less easy to like, the people we see less often ought not to be treated as any less important.

May 23rd

1 Timothy 5 v22

Timothy was trying to establish order at Ephesus. So he would naturally be looking for people he could ordain to the ministry. Paul warns him not to be hasty. If he ordains the wrong people, he will share in the responsibility for the harm it may do them and the congregation at large. We pray for those who are called to discern vocations to ordained ministry. But perhaps a similar caution could be adopted towards appointing people to any leadership position in the Church. We are often so desperate to find people. But let's make sure we find the right people. I do believe that, if God has a task for the Church to perform, He also supplies the resources of personnel, money, etc. He is just waiting for us to say "Yes" to offering our time, talents or money.

May 24th

1 Timothy 5 v23

If this isn't a personal letter from Paul to Timothy, this is a surprisingly personal note to include! Timothy has probably been trying to discipline himself by, among other things, becoming a total abstainer. Paul tells him that there is no need for this. In fact, he would feel better if he did enjoy the odd tipple. Contrary to what some people think, the Bible regards wine as a gift from God and drinking it is not condemned. Drunkenness is what is condemned in the Bible!

May 25th

1 Timothy 5 vv 24&25

We are not supposed to judge other people at all, in the sense of condemning them (Matthew 7 v1). We do, sometimes however, have to take responsibility for discipline. We have to discern the right individuals for particular roles. Sometimes we are called to warn or to encourage our fellow Christians. So there is sometimes a necessity to judge and there is a requirement for some subtlety in judgment. Some people's failings or virtues are obvious, whereas some are not. Don't be too quick to judge either for or against someone! You might be pleasantly surprised or you might be disappointed.

May 26th

1 Timothy 6 vv 1-5

Slavery was an integral part of the social fabric of the Roman Empire. There was not much that the tiny minority of Christians could do about that. So the New Testament recognises slavery as a fact. In Philippians

2 v7 it says that Jesus took the form of a slave. Christianity turned the world upside down and the King of Kings became a slave! The implication of Christianity is that slavery must be abolished. The whole language of redemption comes from the notion of setting a slave free, buying him out of slavery. We were slaves to sin and death. We are redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb. We are all equal in Christ. But what can you do in a society in which slavery is a way of life for slaves and slave-owners alike? It would be good to think that Christians would set these slaves free. To do so came to be seen as a good work. Much later on, when Christians dominated the Roman Empire, slavery would be abolished, but not in Paul's day. Then, the best you could hope for was that slaves and masters would treat one another with respect. A rebellious slave might finish up being crucified. It must have been an anomaly, however, to be slaves and masters within a congregation. But then, not so long ago in England, the better off sat in rented family pews, while the lower classes sat on benches or stood. Are we free of social distinctions within our churches today?

May 27th

1 Timothy 6 v6

Masters wanted the wealth, social status and lives of ease that having slaves brought them. Slaves wanted the dignity of freedom. There are all sorts of things we might aspire to in this world because we think they will bring us contentment. But the only thing that will truly content us is a right relationship with God. That is what we were made for and, if we have that, we don't need anything else.

May 28th

1 Timothy 6 v7

This sentence is generally used at funeral services. It is a sober reminder, but, for all that, it is obviously certainly true. It ought to put things into perspective. For all our striving, we bring nothing into this world and we take nothing out. So what does that say about what we ought to do with our time on earth?

May 29th

1 Timothy 6 v8

I'm not really a very nice person because I can't help a certain sardonic amusement when I read articles about how we can save the environment. Wind farms, low energy light bulbs, diesel fuelled cars.

They make some difference, but often not much. No sooner does someone come up with an idea to reduce our carbon footprint, than somebody else comes up with a potential problem. Low energy light bulbs contain mercury. Wind farms muck up radar. Tidal barrages destroy wetland habitat. And while we fool around on the periphery of green this and green that, we build more motorways and airports and shopping centres. We find more and more things to spend our money on, luxuries rapidly becoming necessities. We prattle on about the environment, but we are not serious because we believe that our lives really are made up of what we consume and what we possess. We cannot really imagine a world in which we travelled less, bought less and owned less. Yet Paul told us 2,000 years ago that we could be content if we just had food and clothing and wasn't he right?

May 30th

1 Timothy 6 v9

Well isn't this obvious? You don't even need to be particularly religious to see the point. The pagan philosophers recognised that both poverty and riches unbalance a human being. The very poor man finds it hard to lift his thoughts above where the next meal is coming from and it may be hard for him not to steal. The rich person may find himself dominated by his riches, afraid they will be stolen, wanting more (maybe not always scrupulously obtaining them), not sure what to do with them, surrounded by sycophants and beggars. Religious thinkers and pagan philosophers have now been joined by social scientists. Experiments show that, once you've climbed out of abject poverty, increasing wealth does very little to add to happiness. We all know this, but how many of us behave as if we knew it?

May 31st

1 Timothy 6 v10

Another biblical verse which most people know, even though they may not know that it comes from the Bible. *The love of money is the root of all evil.* They don't know the next part so well – that the love of money leads many to err from the faith. Is this why a wealthy society like ours seems to have lost its ability to perceive the spiritual and eternal?

June 1st

1 Timothy 6 v11

Priorities again. If you are a man or woman of God, what are your priorities? The things of this world or the Christian virtues? Which takes up more of your time and energy? Seeking God or doing what everybody else in the non-Christian world does?

June 2nd

1 Timothy 6 v12

Fight the good fight. Another line from a hymn. What does it mean? It means laying hold of eternal life. It means living by God's values. It's the old JOY acronym again. Jesus first, Others second, Yourself last. You bear witness that you are a Christian when you participate in public worship and other church based activities. You may be brave enough to talk about your faith to people outside the Church. Paul wants us to live up to what we profess.

June 3rd

1 Timothy 6 v13

I don't know about you, but I find for myself that my understanding of God changes over time. It might be through experience or reading or other people, but my ideas about God change over time. That is hardly surprising. God is infinite and we can only understand a tiny part of Him and what we understand is bound to develop. I've been going through a bit of a phase of thinking of the infinite mystery of God. He is the One beyond time and space, the One Who creates and sustains everything that is, Whose ways are beyond our understanding. It struck me this morning, however, that I must not float off entirely into insubstantiality. The divine mystery is a person, manifest in Jesus Christ. He is a real man as you and I are real human beings. He is our inspiration to see God and to live godly lives.

June 4th

1 Timothy 6 v14

*When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound, and time shall be no more,
And the morning breaks eternal, bright and fair;
When the saved of earth shall gather over on the other shore,
And the roll is called up yonder I'll be there.*

This is the context in which we live.

June 5th

1 Timothy 6 vv 15&16

Paul slips from teaching into praise. If we think what we are saying when we speak about God we must be moved whether it is to praise, penitence or concern for other people. We live our lives conscious that we shall be judged by Jesus. He is not only the carpenter from Nazareth Who became a great preacher, teacher and healer. He is even not only the Man Who offered His life on the Cross as a sacrifice for sin and was raised by God from the dead. Jesus is God the Son. He will come again when this created order comes to an end and *time shall be no more*. He is immortal, essentially incomprehensible and worthy of all honour and power. Our lives will be judged in His Light.

June 6th

1 Timothy 6 vv 17-19

We are all rich in this world. We are fantastically rich by comparison with millions of people in the world today. We are pretty rich even by comparison with our parents and grandparents. We are dissatisfied with what we have precisely because we put our trust in riches to make us happy, to fulfil our lives. Money can't satisfy. If you think it can, the more you have, the more you want. We ought not to consider ourselves better than people with less money than ourselves. We should not look to material possessions to make us happy. The important thing is to live to God. That is the only way for a human being, made in the image of God, to live a fulfilled life. We can use our surplus wealth to help people who really have not got enough.

June 7th

1 Timothy 6 v20

What on earth are *oppositions of science falsely so called*? A less misleading translation is *knowledge falsely so called*. The Greek word is *gnosis*, which means *knowledge* (as does the Latin *scientia*, which is why *knowledge* is the original meaning of the English word *science*. You might like to ponder how *science* came to be restricted in meaning to knowledge derived through observation of the material universe, experiment and the framing and disproving of hypotheses, which used to be called natural philosophy?) The Gnostics were people who thought they had a special knowledge (*gnosis*) of the relationship between God, humanity and the natural world. Exactly when they started, what they believed and how they related to Christianity and

Judaism are debated topics. The main point, however, is that Gnostics tended to see the material world as something filthy, which had to be kept separated as far as possible from God in their thinking. Only those *in the know* had the path to salvation. Gnosticism looks superficially attractive from a Christian point of view and may well have been a competitor with the Church for souls. If you think about it, however, you cannot believe that the creation is filthy if you believe that God made it good and that the Word became flesh. And neither can you believe that salvation is restricted to insiders when Jesus promised to cast out no-one who comes to Him.

June 8th

1 Timothy 6 v20

A bit more on the true meaning of *knowledge* or *science*. In the last three hundred or so years, the intellectual discipline of Science has led humanity to a much deeper understanding of the way the physical universe works. On the foundation of that knowledge, there have been huge advances in technology, medicine etc. Science works. It is based on observation of the physical world, the use of human reason to form hypotheses to account for the phenomena observed and the use of experiment to confirm or disprove them. Science works so well that some people behave as though scientific knowledge were the only sort of knowledge. But Science does not help us much with art or music, relationships and many more aspects of what is important in human life. There is a great deal more to knowledge than can be included in *Science* as presently defined. The most important knowledge of all is the knowledge of God. To know God is to have eternal life. Science only helps us a little bit towards the knowledge of God.

June 9th

1 Timothy 6 vv 20&21

Sadly some people do start off well in the faith. Some of them may apparently be members of the Church for many years. What is important is to be faithful to the end!

June 10th

2 Timothy 1 v1

We were chatting the other day. One lot were going home to spend Saturday night watching a DVD. The other lot were going to their home to spend Saturday night watching a DVD. There must be more to

life than this, we thought. But what? Well one thing that is missing in this scenario is community. It would be more fulfilling to do something in community than to be alone. There all sorts of pros and cons to weigh up before going out on a Saturday night or on any other occasion. Not least, have we got the stamina? Can we afford it? Would we really enjoy what we have been invited to (or are planning to gate crash)? Real life is the life which is in Christ Jesus. If we have this life, all these other questions about what really matters and what we really want come into perspective.

June 11th

2 Timothy 1 vv 2&3

I was wondering this morning how we might get more people into church? How could we get the occasional attenders to come every week? How could we get out non-churchgoing friends to come at all? Well how about praying them in? I don't think gimmicks work, because gimmickry is essentially insincere. A genuine welcome certainly encourages people to stay. Adapting what we do out of a genuine concern to help newcomers to feel they belong is also worthwhile. Genuine attempts to make people welcome spring from love and loving people is inextricably mixed up with praying for them. So let's see if we can pray people into church.

June 12th

2 Timothy 1 v4

Commuting is a pain in the neck and bad for the environment. So, for the office worker, an unexpected day off due to points failure is a bonus. Most office workers can do a great deal of work from their home computers anyway. Yet not many of us would want always to work from home. We would miss the human contact. You can't live in virtual reality. TV and radio services, internet prayer groups etc are a very good thing. We can all take part in them and derive benefit from them. For the housebound, they can be a literal Godsend. Human contact is still missing, however. We ought to visit the housebound with our bodily presence, not just telephone them and fix them up with broadband! If we can get to church, we ought to for the human contact and the experience of shared worship. Sometimes we prefer not to because other people are awkward and we do not feel we have been treated right by the Church. It is easier to watch *Songs of Praise* than to

go to Church: no difficult people; no challenging sermon; no hard pews and nothing to stop you making a cup of tea during the boring bits. But something very important is missing if that's all we do by way of worship.

June 13th

2 Timothy 1 vv 5&6

Timothy was well brought up. Both his mother and his grandmother had brought Timothy up to know God. We are doing something very worthwhile when we bring up our own children in the faith or try to teach other children about Jesus through Sunday School etc. Maybe we have godchildren for whom we pray and with whom we can share what we know of Jesus. Timothy's family faith was very important. But they didn't keep their faith within the home. They joined the official public Church and, in due course, Timothy was ordained, by no less a person than Paul himself, to take part in the public, official ministry. It is important to bring your family to Church and to participate in the Church's worship and mission, as well as keeping the faith at home.

June 14th

2 Timothy 1 v7

People don't always realise that I'm quite a fearful person. That's why I get so worried when there's any trouble in the parish or when we find that we cannot, as a Church, fulfil all the expectations people have of us. I'd rather not attempt something than face a confrontation with some official or committee. Paradoxically, that's why I get so fierce sometimes when dealing with, e.g., the Council. I can't bear it when powerful people bully weaker people, act unfairly and don't obey the rules which are supposed to protect us all. I panic. And when I panic, I try to remember this verse: *For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*

June 15th

2 Timothy 1 v8

It is easy to forget that there are people in the world today who are persecuted for their faith. We ought to remember to pray for them. We usually pray for the persecuted in this parish at the Friday Eucharist, because Friday is the day on which Jesus died a martyr's death. We are not exactly persecuted, but I do think that people in Britain today may well come under pressure to keep their faith quiet. We have to be bold.

June 16th

2 Timothy 1 vv 9&10

Paul's conviction is that our salvation is God's eternal plan. God knows what He is doing eternally. It follows that, when He creates time, from the very beginning He knows that He will make human beings in His own image, to be loved by Him and to love Him in return. He knows that they will reject His love and, with it, the gift of life. He eternally knows that the Word will become flesh and dwell among us and that eternal life will be His gift to all who come to God through Jesus. This is the way things are eternally, but it is disclosed gradually in time, first in the Old Testament, then fully in the coming of Jesus in the New Testament and finally in the consummation at the end of the world.

June 17th

2 Timothy 1 v11

Paul has a complete conviction that he is doing God's work when he acts as an apostle and a teacher. He knows that he makes mistakes and gets things wrong. He knows that he sometimes lets God down, but that does not shake his essential conviction that God has made him what he is and will use him as an apostle until He takes him home. I guess that my married readers feel much the same. You are husbands or wives. Whatever happens, whatever mistakes you make, essentially husband or wife is what you are. I hope most clergy feel the same way about their ministry as Paul does. In fact I hope that all Christians would feel secure in the thought they are doing with their lives what God would have them do with their lives. It is vital to make the big decisions prayerfully.

June 18th

2 Timothy 1 v12

Paul's vocation includes suffering. We live in a world where it is often possible to avoid suffering. Even physical pain can be dealt with with a pain killer. Even today, however, we can't always avoid pain, and perhaps we shouldn't. We need a challenge. We can't grow if we never get out of bed – metaphorically as well as literally. Whatever happens in life, it is good to be able to say with St Paul, *for I know whom I have believed.*

June 19th

2 Timothy 1 v13

I guess when you read this, we shall be coming up to the Lambeth Conference. This is a meeting of Anglican bishops from all over the world which normally takes place every ten years. They meet for worship and fellowship and to discuss the issues confronting the Church. The Archbishop of Canterbury convenes the conference, but he is not in any sense his commander in chief. Neither does the conference instruct the dioceses and provinces what to do. It is a meeting of brothers. Sadly, it looks as if this year some provinces will stay away from Lambeth and hold a separate meeting in Jerusalem. This is because there are such sharp divisions, especially on the issue of homosexuality. It is important to hold on to sound doctrine and Christians have always been prone to get passionate about what they believe. But note that Paul also speaks of the importance of faith and love. If we trust God, we mustn't be made fearful because other people's disagreements with us make us feel insecure. Neither must we fall out of love with them.

June 20th

2 Timothy 1 vv 14-18

Churches have their ups and downs. Some people, a lot of people, turn out to be treasures. Some turn out to be disappointments. It is important that we value the "treasures" properly. Sometimes, like Paul, we sadly have to let the disappointments go. Whatever, you and I have to keep that good thing which was committed to us by the Holy Ghost which dwells in us.

June 21st

2 Timothy 2 vv 1&2

Hand it on. That's how the Church grows and continues. The original apostles were actual witnesses of the Resurrection. They knew Jesus in the flesh. They recalled what He said and did. And they passed it on. They told thousands of people. Thousands of people told thousands more. And they passed it on to the next generation. Millions of people, who never knew Jesus in the flesh, came to know Him in the Spirit, because they passed it on. So we know what we've got to do if we want our Church to continue and grow. Pass it on.

June 22nd

2 Timothy 2 vv 3-7

The Christian life isn't easy. It requires dedication. If we are dedicated Christians, we can't afford to be distracted by the things of this world anymore than a soldier can charge into battle wondering whether he's turned the gas out! I like the bit where Paul reminds Timothy that an athlete only receives the victor's wreath if he obeys the rules. It is so tempting to forget the rules, God's Law of Love, and try to advance the cause in less scrupulous ways. Well you won't get the medal if you cheat. Your church won't prosper if you follow the world's rules, rather than God's.

June 23rd

2 Timothy 2 vv 8&9

Paul is in prison when he writes this letter – probably in Rome in the period just before his martyrdom under Nero. Christians don't have to fear death because Jesus was raised from the dead. Whatever happens to us, the Word isn't bound. On the contrary, if we witness faithfully, despite adversity, the Word spreads and flourishes. As they say, *The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.*

June 24th (St John the Baptist)

2 Timothy 2 v10

John the Baptist was martyred. Paul was martyred. Many thousands of Christians have been martyred. Those whom God has called obtain salvation in Christ Jesus, eternal glory. Holding the faith and sharing the faith are more important than life itself.

June 25th

2 Timothy 2 vv 11-14

When we are baptised, we die to sin, we die to the flesh. We participate in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is why Easter is the perfect time for Baptisms and why we are invited to renew our baptismal promises at the Easter Vigil. Our physical death is then nothing to be afraid of. Indeed it is the time when Christ completes the work of our resurrection. The chains of the flesh are totally removed. When we suffer and die, we know He suffers and dies with us. We can hold on to Him whatever happens in our lives. He is faithful, whether we believe Him or not. But don't deny Him. He can't help you if you shut yourself up against Him. Always try to stay open to God, even if your faith is no more than a grain of mustard seed.

June 26th

2 Timothy 2 vv 14-16

Most of us were probably cradle Christians. We can't remember a time when we didn't believe in Jesus. Or we came to faith gradually, perhaps meeting Christians socially, or looking to the Church in some time of joy or sorrow. Some of us may be converts who came to faith very quickly. If so, we were probably very excited about it in the beginning. But how do we keep focussed on what really matters. The Devil so easily diverts us. The desire to worship in spirit and in truth may get us into arguments about forms of service of hymn tunes. The desire to have buildings worthy of the purpose to which we put them may result in all our energy being diverted into fund-raising and maintenance. The desire to consult widely with the whole people of God may result in arguments and deadlock. The desire to be clear in what we believe may lead to doctrinal disputes. One of the minister's jobs is to keep his congregation's noses to the grindstone!

June 27th

2 Timothy 2 vv 17&18

Some wrong teaching is corrosive. Individuals are discouraged and put off. Communion is destroyed. These two, Hymenaeus and Philetus, have shaken people's faith in *the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come*. Notice I quote the Creed to point out where they went wrong. In getting our beliefs right, we start with the Bible, but the Bible is a big book (rather collection of books) with many different insights, emphases and nuances. It is not difficult for the novice to go astray and for the arrogant to make a case that only he is right. The Devil quotes Scripture! It is a sound principle to remember that the Bible is entrusted by God to the Church and to interpret Scripture in the light of what the body of the faithful have always believed it to mean! We sometimes need a Luther to recall the Church to what Scripture actually says, but you and I are dangerously bold if we claim to know better than the Church and interpret the Bible in an eccentric or egocentric manner.

June 28th

2 Timothy 2 v19

The Lord knoweth them that are his.

That really is quite a thought. God knows you and me. He knows that we belong to Him. We know that we are part of His Church. And He has prepared for us a place in Heaven. It follows that He also knows those who are not His and, if there are people in our churches, who are not really His, not really believers, He knows them too. Given that God knows who is and who is not one of His people, we don't have to worry; we don't have to judge. In fact, it is dangerous to judge because we might get people wrong. What we have to do is to remain faithful and to encourage other people in their faith.

We sing a chorus at our After School Club which goes *I am glad I belong to Jesus, I am glad I belong to Jesus, I am glad I belong to Jesus, Hallelujah, Praise the Lord!* We usually sing it very loudly with a lot of jumping up and down, but the words are extremely profound.

June 29th

2 Timothy 2 vv 20&21

If all the baptised are saved, what does it matter what you do after Baptism? If we are saved by grace through faith, not by works, what does it matter whether we work or not? If we are members of the Church by reason of what Christ has done and not by reason of what we do, what does it matter what we do? If we all belong to Jesus, who cares whether we work hard for Him or whether we idly sit back and let other people get on with it? Paul points out that there may be many different vessels in a great house. Some are valuable. Some are not. Some are much more useful than others. Which do we want to be? Surely we want to be valuable members of the Church. We want to be useful to God. If we are filled with the love of God, surely we are overflowing with His love and cannot help ourselves but work to His glory, for the good of His Church and to care for people in the world.

June 30th

2 Timothy 2 vv 22-26

If all Christians comprise a royal priesthood, all baptised people are priests. All baptised people are ministers. All baptised people are full time servants of the Lord. How, then, do we justify having people like me? I was baptised. So I was a full time Christian for 25 years before the time, much later on, when I was ordained, first deacon and then priest. I am now recognised as a minister of religion. I am paid a stipend. But, if all Christians are full time ministers, why have people like me? One answer is that, within the Body of Christ, there are different limbs and organs. Some of us are eyes, some arms, some, no doubt, guts. We are all different. God has called us to different forms of service. We are all necessary to the health of the Body. The Holy Spirit gives us each the gifts that we require. So bishops, priests and deacons are particular organs of the Body of Christ, no more necessary than others, but, no less.

I think there is more to it than that, however. Ordained ministries epitomise the total ministry of the Church. Deacons epitomise servanthood. Jesus is the servant of God and of the world. The whole Church serves God and the world. Presbyters epitomise priesthood. Jesus is the High Priest, Who offer Himself as a sacrifice and opens the way to Heaven. The whole Church offers worship to God, offers itself as a living sacrifice and leads people to Heaven. The Bishop epitomises unity, authority, sound teaching and mission. Jesus is One. He is King of Kings. He is the living Word. He is the One sent by God. The Church is one. The Church is entrusted with the authority to bind and loose. The Church is commissioned to proclaim God's Word. The Church is sent into all the world.

Therefore it follows that, when Paul entrusts to Timothy, as "Bishop of Ephesus", the task of framing his own life so as to enable the Church to overcome its doubts and dissensions, to grow in faith and hope and love, and to carry out Christ's mission to the world, the message is not just for bishops and other clergy. The message is for all Christians to co-operate together in building one another up in the faith and sharing that faith with the world.

