

# The Acts of the Apostles

Bible Notes  
April – June 2026

*The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.*

The beginning of Acts echoes the beginning of the Gospel According to St Luke. It is generally believed that they both had the same author who was, most likely, Luke the physician, companion & friend of St Paul, who appears both in the Book of Acts & in Paul's letters. The inference from Luke 1v2 is that Luke had not personally witnessed the events of Jesus' life on earth and relied on the testimony of others when writing his history. We don't know who Theophilus was. Maybe he was an actual individual, but the name Theophilus means *lover of God*. So maybe the dedication to *Theophilus* is Luke's way of offering these two works to anyone who loves God & wants to know more about Jesus.

Some scholars think it surprising that Acts finishes before the martyrdom of St Paul. Maybe, the Book of Acts was completed before Paul was put to death – possibly even as something which could provide evidence to be used in his defence. Most modern scholars reject this hypothesis. Paul was beheaded on the year 64. Acts was presumably written after Luke's Gospel and scholars generally date the gospels after 70. There isn't space here to go into the whys & wherefores of Gospel dating – a highly controversial subject!

Another possibility is that Luke intended a third volume beginning with Paul's execution and then detailing what happened next as the Church grew and spread across the world.

Today, is April Fool's Day. The Bible says, *The fool hath said in his heart: There is no God*. Most people have some idea of God or about Him. That being so, we need to know the Truth. God makes Himself known in Jesus and the Scriptures bear witness to Him.

**ALMIGHTY** and everlasting God, who, of thy tender love towards mankind, hast sent thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, to take upon him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility; Mercifully grant, that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

2<sup>nd</sup> April (Maundy Thursday)

Acts 1 vv 4 & 5

On Maundy Thursday, we remember the Last Supper – that Passover meal at which Jesus washed His disciple's feet, instituted the Holy Communion, told them that He was going to the Father (which would be good for believers because He would send the Holy Spirit upon us), when He promised that He would return and take us home to God the Father, that He would dwell in us & we in Him, the meal at which He commanded us to love one another as He loves us, when He consecrated Himself as priest & victim and commissioned those who believe in Him to continue the work which God the Father gave Him to do in the world.

Until I wrote yesterday's note, I hadn't really appreciated the significance of the words *all that Jesus began both to do and teach*. Jesus began the work and the Holy Spirit, through us, continues the work which God the Father entrusted to Jesus – to bring about the salvation of God's Creation.

In today's reading, nearly six weeks after the Last Supper, Jesus encourages His followers who were obviously overwhelmed by everything that had happened to stand firm and to fulfil their calling because God's Holy Spirit would inspire & sustain them.

Alleluia! sing to Jesus!  
His the sceptre, his the throne.  
Alleluia! His the triumph,  
his the victory alone.  
Hark! the songs of peaceful  
Zion  
thunder like a mighty flood.  
Jesus out of every nation  
hath redeemed us by his blood.

Alleluia! not as orphans  
are we left in sorrow now;  
Alleluia! He is near us,  
faith believes, nor questions  
how;  
Though the cloud from sight  
received him

when the forty days were o'er  
shall our hearts forget his  
promise,  
'I am with you evermore'?

Alleluia! bread of heaven,  
here on earth our food and  
stay!  
Alleluia! here the sinful  
flee to thee from day to day.  
Intercessor, Friend of sinners,  
earth's Redeemer, plead for me.  
Where the songs of all the  
sinless  
sweep across the crystal sea.

Alleluia! King eternal,

thee the Lord of lords we own;  
Alleluia! born of Mary,  
earth thy footstool,  
heaven thy throne.  
Thou within the veil hast  
entered,

robed in flesh, our great High  
Priest.  
Thou on earth both Priest and  
Victim  
in the Eucharistic Feast.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> April (Good Friday)

Acts 1 v6

*When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying,  
Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*

What happened on Good Friday is God's decisive victory over sin, the world & the devil. *It is finished*, Jesus said, as *he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost* (John 19<sup>30</sup>). Quite what God's victory means humanity has never entirely understood. The disciples in today's reading seem to think that Jesus will establish a kingdom on earth, based at Jerusalem, along the lines of what David & Solomon had achieved in their time, but possibly extending the Messiah's benign reign over the whole world, not merely over the Jews. You could read some of the prophecies in the Old Testament in that way. But Jesus said, *My kingdom is not of this world*. The Kingdom of God is indeed for people of all nations, Gentiles as well as Jews, a kingdom of justice, mercy & peace, but it transcends our world of time & space. It is an eternal Kingdom in which God's people (all believers) will reign as kings & priests for ever. We don't yet know what God's Kingdom will be, but we do know that we all have a part in it. The question is how do you and I respond to the love of God which we experience in our crucified Saviour?

When I survey the wondrous  
cross  
On which the Prince of glory  
died,  
My richest gain I count but  
loss,  
And pour contempt on all my  
pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should  
boast,  
Save in the death of Christ my  
God!

All the vain things that charm  
me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands,  
His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled  
down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow  
meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a  
crown?

His dying crimson, like a robe,  
Spreads o'er His body on the  
tree;  
Then I am dead to all the globe,  
And all the globe is dead to me.

Were the whole realm of nature  
mine,  
That were a present far too  
small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my  
all.

**ALMIGHTY** and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified; Receive our supplications and prayers, which we offer before thee for all estates of men in thy holy Church, that every member of the same, in his vocation and ministry may truly and godly serve thee; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

April 4<sup>th</sup> (Holy Saturday)

Acts 1 vv 7&8

What must the Blessed Virgin, the Apostles, His disciples, His friends, all those who had *trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel*, have been thinking when Jesus was dead & buried? Some were concerned that He had not been buried decently and planned to take spices and make things right when the Sabbath was ended. They must have been afraid that they might be next to be arrested and crucified. They had not comprehended His promise that He would rise again. They must have been perplexed like John the Baptist earlier in Christ's ministry. Was He the one that should come or should we look for another? The One in Whom they had placed their hopes was dead. In today's reading, Jesus is speaking with them 40 days after His Resurrection. There is still a great deal that the disciples do not understand. There is still a great deal that we do not understand. Like them, we are to wait on the Holy Spirit and bear witness of Jesus wherever we have the opportunity.

**GRANT**, O Lord, that as we are baptized into the death of thy blessed Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, so by continual mortifying our corrupt affections we may be buried with him; and that through the grave, and gate of death, we may pass to our joyful resurrection ; for his merits, who died, and was buried, and rose again for us, thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

April 5<sup>th</sup> (Easter Day)

Acts 1 vv 9-11

At His Last Supper on that first Maundy Thursday, Jesus spoke both of leaving this world and going to the Father & of returning again. What did He mean? He left this world when He was crucified. His sacrifice of Himself on the Cross opened a new way in which the life-giving Holy Spirit of God would work in the world. *Christ is risen from the dead : and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death : by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die : even so in Christ shall all be made alive.* When Christ died on the Cross He overcame death & the fear of death. On Easter Day, He returned to this world and to His disciples.

Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son;  
endless is the victory, thou o'er death hast won;  
angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,  
kept the folded grave clothes where thy body lay.

*Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son,  
Endless is the vict'ry, thou o'er death hast won.*

Forty days later, He again left this world in His glorious Ascension into Heaven. He ever lives to make intercession for us. He bestows upon us His Holy Spirit. He will come again in glory to judge both the quick and the dead.

**ALMIGHTY** God, who through thine only-begotten Son Jesus Christ hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life; We humbly beseech thee, that, as by thy special grace preventing us thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

April 6<sup>th</sup>

Acts 1 vv 12-14

It is important to be together. We comfort one another, both in the sense of strengthening one another & in the sense of consoling one another. Family is precious. Friends are precious. The Christian congregation to which we belong is precious. It is too easy to be parted from the people who support us, the people whom we may support. We may just drift apart. There may be quarrels. We judge one another fairly or unfairly. We lose patience with one another's foibles. Sometimes we behave very badly towards those whom we should love and they may

treat us very badly too. We are all only human – only too human. There is, thank God, the possibility of forgiveness. Relationships ought not to be given up on easily. Rather we should thank God for one another.

April 7<sup>th</sup>

Acts 1 vv 15-20

Judas Iscariot was a mate. He was a member of Jesus' support group. He was part of the apostolic band. He shared in their mission to the people of Galilee and Judaea. It all went so wrong. We can speculate as to why Judas handed Jesus over to those who intended to destroy Him. We can speculate as to why Judas did not return to Jesus for forgiveness & restoration. Jesus prayed for the forgiveness of those who crucified Him. He restored Peter who had denied Him. I am sure that He would have forgiven Judas if Judas had asked Him to. The other apostles obviously felt very let down by Judas.

As I was writing yesterday's meditation, I was thinking at what point does a close friend or a family member become impossible to continue in a relationship with? We don't expect an abused wife to continue to live with her abusive husband. Former friends of Jeffrey Epstein are expected by the public to disown him. Those who remain loyal to Epstein are regarded as complicit in his crimes. But the abused wife may still love her husband. She may even forgive him though she could not go back to living with him for her own safety. I can't help thinking that Jesus would have wanted to keep a way open for Epstein to repent in which case he would have needed at least some friends to stay loyal.

April 8<sup>th</sup>

Acts 1 vv 21-26

The person who took Judas' place had to be a witness of everything from our Lord's Baptism until His Ascension. The apostolic foundation of the Church is based on faithful witness, as must be the whole building, of which you & I are living stones. Jesus Christ Himself being the cornerstone.

**O ALMIGHTY** God, who into the place of the traitor Judas didst choose thy faithful servant Matthias to be of the number of the twelve Apostles; Grant that thy Church, being alway preserved from false Apostles, may be ordered and guided by faithful and true pastors; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

April 9<sup>th</sup>

Acts 2 vv 1&2

Yesterday, I used the analogy of a temple to lead us into a consideration of the nature of God's Church. A temple is a building in which God is believed to dwell – at least metaphorically. The Christian Church is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. We are Temples of the Holy Spirit as individuals. All together we make up God's Temple. He dwells in us & we in Him. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone. On Him everything depends. The apostles are the foundations. We saw yesterday the importance of sound foundations. We each have our own place as a living (or lively KJV) stone in the construction. The Spirit is in us as Christian individuals. He is in our meetings and in the places where we meet for worship – albeit less dramatically than what follows in the verses we shall read tomorrow.

April 10<sup>th</sup>

Acts 2 vv 3&4

God makes Himself known in many ways – above all in the Life, Death & Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ & in sending the Holy Spirit. The apostles, the whole Church of God, are commissioned to preach the Gospel to all nations and are empowered by the Holy Spirit to fulfil their / our commission. This is the Church's birthday, a birthday to remember. Childbirth is pretty dramatic (and indeed traumatic). The child grows and develops into maturity. Mostly, it is a natural, incremental, steady progress. Often there are setbacks, but a healthy body survives and continues to develop. Sometimes there are further dramatic events in our lives, successes, crises, miracles even, and in the life of the Church, but we carry on towards the end of our life on earth and the final Consummation when the Lord returns in glory.

Let us labour for the Master from the dawn till setting sun,  
Let us talk of all His wondrous love and care,  
Then, when all of life is over, and our work on earth is done,  
And the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there.

April 11<sup>th</sup>

Acts 2 vv 5-12

The Jews were supposed to go to Jerusalem three times a year for the great feasts of Passover, Pentecost & Tabernacles. Even those Jews who did not live in the Holy Land – the diaspora – would try if possible to attend these pilgrim feasts. What we celebrate at Easter took place at



Passover – liberation from slavery (to sin) and the fear of death (for those marked with the Blood of the Lamb), Baptism (the NT font taking the role of the OT Red Sea) into God's covenant, the commencement of life's journey through the wilderness of this world to the Promised Land under the guidance and protection of God. 50 days later, the Feast of Pentecost celebrates the first fruits of the Harvest, thanksgiving for what God has done for us, sharing what He has given us, in the knowledge that He will always take care of us. Jews from all over had gathered for this Pentecost. The Holy Spirit enabled the apostles to preach the Gospel and those who were called to respond. The pilgrims who believed and were baptised became the first fruits of God's Harvest, thanking God for what He has done, putting their trust in Him for all that is needful, sharing the Good News with the world.

April 12<sup>th</sup> (Easter 1)

Acts 2<sup>13</sup>

*Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.*

Some people are determined to reject the Gospel and to deter other people from believing. They mock. They argue. They belittle. They persecute. Ultimately, of course, they do not prevail. God says to believers, *Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world* (1 John 4<sup>4</sup>). Jesus says: *Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it* (Matthew 17<sup>18</sup>).

**ALMIGHTY** Father, who has given thine only Son to die for our sins, and to rise again for our justification; Grant us so to put away the leaven of malice and wickedness, that we may alway serve thee in pureness of living and truth; through the merits of the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

April 13<sup>th</sup>

Acts 2 vv 14-20

What the apostles experienced on that Feast of Pentecost was a foretaste of what shall be at the end of the world. All God's people will experience His unalloyed blessing. We shall fully worship in spirit & in truth for the first time in our lives. We shall know perfect love, perfect, the fulfilment of all our faith & hope. We shall know as we are known. We shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is. The Way is open to all who have faith and repent of their sins, but there is judgment for those who persist in rebellion against God.

April 14<sup>th</sup>

Acts 2<sup>21</sup>

*And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*

It is worth reflecting on that verse and learning it by heart. Whoever calls on the name of the Lord is saved. This is not just salvation from death & hell, though obviously that is the most important thing to be saved from. But all life's difficulties, all life's troubles, our fears, our sins, when we call on the name of the Lord we are saved. He doesn't promise to give us everything we want. He doesn't promise to take away all our troubles and pains. But He does promise always to hear our prayers & to take care of us. *For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee* (Hebrews 13<sup>5</sup>). But St Paul says (Romans 10<sup>14</sup>): *How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?* You see the importance of sharing the blessedness of your knowledge of God with your family & your friends and neighbours, people of every nation to the uttermost parts of the earth.

April 15<sup>th</sup>

Acts 2 vv 22-24

Peter explains the Gospel. Jesus is the fulfilment of the Law & the Prophets – the Bible as his hearers know it. The coming of Jesus, especially His Death & Resurrection, is God's eternal plan for the salvation of the whole of His Creation. The events that occurred seven weeks before Peter delivered this address are decisive for the fate of the universe & everything in it, for the whole of the created order. Being God's plan, what happened to Jesus was inevitable. Nevertheless all those who took part in what happened were responsible for what they did. Those who would be saved must dissociate themselves from the wickedness of this world both by acknowledging their part in it & by repenting of their own personal sins. In token of this they must be baptised which both signifies & effects their re-birth in Christ. Peter explains this to people who knew the Scriptures and who were sufficiently religious that they attended the Feast. How do we explain this liberating Gospel to our friends & neighbours today? The Spirit enabled Peter to speak in the language of his hearers. We pray for grace to speak in such away that our contemporaries will grasp this same truth.

April 16<sup>th</sup>

Acts 2 vv 25-28

These verses are a quotation from Psalm 16. The psalmist, King David, is putting into words his firm faith in God. For many readers of the Old Testament, the assumption would be that David is expressing his hope for this mortal life, that God would always be with him, as we can trust that God is with us & that His promises are sure. Another way of reading David's words, especially in the light of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, is that he trusts God, not only for this life, but in all eternity.

That too is true for all believers. The last verse of the psalm is sometimes used at funerals. *Thou shalt shew me the path of life; in thy presence is the fulness of joy: and at thy right hand there is pleasure for evermore.* I think that St Peter here, in this exposition of the psalm, is thinking of these words as on the lips of Jesus – great David's greater Son, the One in Whom all the promises to David are fulfilled. Jesus would have prayed the psalms. If we think of these words of Psalm 16 as being the words of Jesus, the Word of God, the meaning is that Jesus, the Messiah, the anointed King, is eternally with God. *He is not here* (in the tomb); *He is risen.*

April 17<sup>th</sup>

Acts 2 vv 29-36

King David was quite definitely dead and had been for hundreds of years. He was buried at Jerusalem. So, if the Messiah does not experience the corruption of death, Who is He Who does not experience the corruption of a corpse? Not David, but Jesus. The OT prophecy of the resurrected Messiah must be fulfilled, but it is not fulfilled in King David, but in Jesus. This is affirmed by the quotation from Psalm 110 in v34, a verse which Jesus refers to Himself (Mark 12<sup>35-37</sup>).

April 18<sup>th</sup>

Acts 2 vv 36-40

Jesus, then, is the longed for Messiah, the Son of God, and God's chosen people had failed to recognise Him & had handed Him over to the Romans to be crucified. *He came unto his own & his own received him not.* The Jews? The previous verse (John 1<sup>10</sup>) says: *He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.* We all failed to recognise Jesus – Jew & Gentile alike. We are all culpable for the Crucifixion. Our sins brought Him to the Cross. What ought we to do? *Repent and be baptised every one of you.*

April 19<sup>th</sup> (Easter 2)

Acts 2 vv 41&42

*Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his Name, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

The Church is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. These newly baptised Christians, filled with the Holy Spirit, loved to be together in fellowship with their fellow followers of the Way. Where two or three are gathered together in Christ's Name, He is in our midst. They paid close attention to the preaching of the Word. They prayed together. They broke together (a Holy Communion?) I wonder why there is a reluctance in the world today, an indifference, when it comes to meeting together with our fellow Christians for worship?

My God, And Is Thy Table  
Spread,  
And Doth Thy Cup With Love  
Overflow?  
Thither Be All Thy Children  
Led,  
And Let Them Thy Sweetness  
Know.

Hail, Sacred Feast, Which  
Jesus Makes,  
Rich Banquet Of His Flesh And  
Blood!

Thrice Happy He Who Here  
Partakes  
That Sacred Stream, That  
Heavenly Food.

Why Are Its Bounties All In  
Vain  
Before Unwilling Hearts  
Displayed?

Was Not For Them The Victim  
Slain?  
Are They Forbid The Children's  
Bread?

O Let Thy Table Honoured Be,  
And Furnished Well With  
Joyful Guests;  
And May Each Soul Salvation  
See  
That Here Its Sacred Pledges  
Tastes.

Let Crowds Approach, With  
Hearts Prepared;  
With Warm Desire Let All  
Attend;  
Nor, When We Leave Our  
Father's Board,  
The Pleasures Or The Profit  
End.

**ALMIGHTY** God, who has given thine only Son to be unto us both a sacrifice for sin, and also an ensample of godly life; Give us grace that we may always most thankfully receive that his inestimable benefit, and also daily endeavour ourselves to follow the blessed steps of his most holy life; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

April 20<sup>th</sup>

Acts 2 vv 43-47

Three thousand believed and were baptised that Pentecost. What a start for the Church! Gathering in the first fruits of the harvest of the Holy Spirit. Miracles were performed. Outsiders were awestruck. The new believers were enthused to sell their possessions, to pool their resources and to live as a family – sons & daughters of God, brothers & sisters of the Lord Jesus Christ, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. It couldn't continue forever for a good reason & a bad reason. The good reason was that the Church continued to grow. They couldn't all live together in some sort of commune. Most Christians would need to live in their own homes with their own kith & kin. They would need to work to support themselves and their own families. They would have to manage their own property and finances. Miracles wouldn't become routine. God does perform miracles for special reasons, but we can't expect Him to do so regularly. If He did, they wouldn't be miracles. Opposition would gather. It wouldn't be possible to continue at that level of excitement indefinitely. Honeymoons don't last for ever, but the marriage is just beginning, not drawing to a close, when you return from Bognor, unpack the suitcases & put the washing on., prior to going to work on Monday. The bad reason why things couldn't continue as in today's reading is human nature, what St Paul calls the *flesh* which lusts against the spirit. We are not made perfect when we are baptised. Christians can be & are selfish, bad-tempered, dishonest, etc. and we can't live without some rules & conventions, some structure. We shall see how things go badly wrong when we reach chapter 5.

April 21<sup>st</sup>

Acts 3 vv 1-11

This is a much loved bible story, often taught to children. You might even know the chorus which goes with it. It's mid-afternoon. This man, lame from birth, could only survive by begging every day in the Temple. Peter & John had no money to give him, but, in the power of Jesus Christ, they could cure him. As we said yesterday, we can't demand miracles or expect them to be frequent. We can all, however, show kindness to other people. We can pray for them. The care, treatment and, where possible, healing of the sick is God's work, whether performed by doctors and nurses, prayer or simple kindness.

April 22<sup>nd</sup>

Acts 3 vv 12-18

Certain Christians seem to have a particular gift for healing. There are certainly places (such as Lourdes) where healing is experienced more than in other places. The healing, however, is always of God. It is a mistake to lionise those who have the gift of healing or to think that God is not with us wherever we may be. The Bible tells to summon the elders of the Church to pray for the sick and to anoint them with oil. We are to confess our sins to one another. Healing & forgiveness, health & salvation are very closely connected (James 5<sup>13-20</sup>). It may not always be God's Will to relieve us of our physical weakness here on earth, but our final healing is our salvation, our eternal life in the eternal Presence of God. I do like the prayer for the sick in Common Worship: *Give them courage & hope in their troubles & bring them the joy of your salvation.*

April 23<sup>rd</sup> (St George)

Acts 3 v19

*Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.*  
There's a word for us on England's national day! What do we as a nation have to repent of? I'll leave that one to you.

April 24<sup>th</sup>

Acts 3 vv 20-26

Peter speaks of the sins of Israel. Jesus will come again in glory to judge both the quick and the dead. Shall we be ready to stand before Him? The Jews had the prophets of the Old Testament. They had Moses. He led them out of slavery in Egypt and gave them God's Holy Law. Moses promised that there would be another great prophet, as great as he himself. In fact God sent Jesus an infinitely greater prophet than Moses. Israel, people of all the nations of the world, will be judged by their response to Jesus. Do we keep His commandments? Do we come to Him in penitence & faith? Do we receive Him as our Lord and our God?

April 25<sup>th</sup> (St Mark)

Acts 4 vv 1-4

*His own received him not.* The people who should have recognised Jesus, the priests whose vocation was defined by the Law, failed to recognise Jesus. In fact, they were so much against Him, that they handed Him over to the Romans to be crucified. Why was that? Were

they just too set in their ways to recognise that God was doing something new? Were they too arrogant to think that they could learn from a humble carpenter? Were they concerned for their own position? Were they afraid that the popular excitement around Jesus would lead to a revolt by the Jewish people which would be savagely crushed by the Romans? *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.* Is there anything which holds us back from wholeheartedly receiving Jesus?

**O ALMIGHTY** God, who hast instructed thy holy Church with the heavenly doctrine of thy Evangelist Saint Mark; Give us grace, that, being not like children carried away with every blast of vain doctrine, we may be established in the truth of thy holy Gospel; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

April 26<sup>th</sup> (Easter 3)

Acts 4 vv 5-12

It could have been overwhelming for two fishermen to be questioned by the high priest & the other priests of the Temple. The priests were highly respected, experts in their subject, important, powerful & wealthy people. Not only were they the spiritual & temporal leaders of the Jewish people, these were the men who handed Jesus over to be crucified. But Jesus had promised that, when His followers were called upon to testify before potentates, the Holy Spirit would teach them what to say. What did they say? They gave Jesus the glory, acknowledging that they could have done nothing without Him. They preached the Gospel.

**ALMIGHTY** God, who shewest to them that be in error the light of thy truth, to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness; Grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's Religion, that they may eschew those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

April 27<sup>th</sup>

Acts 4 v13

*They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.*

What a difference it makes if we know Jesus. We have His Holy Spirit. We have meaning & purpose in our lives. We have hope. We have forgiveness. We have healing. Though often with much backsliding, our lives are transformed by our friendship with Jesus. He is with us in prayer. He is with us in the pages of the Bible. He is with us in

Christian fellowship. He is with us in the Holy Sacrament. He is always with us, but we make the most of His Presence with us when we take the time to get to know Him better.

April 28<sup>th</sup>

Acts 4 vv 14-17

We might sometimes think that, if only God would do some great miracle, everybody would have to believe in Him. But that is not the case. Miracles are indeed signs that God is at work in the world, but you have to be open to the possibility of God, in order to appreciate their significance. People whose minds are closed to God may deny that a miracle has occurred. Or they might admit that something they can't explain has happened but deny that God was involved. Or they might, as the chief priests seem to have done here, believe that a miracle has occurred but stubbornly refuse to accept what God is telling us through the miracle. We must be open to God if we are to recognise what He is doing in our lives and in the world in general. We pray for the grace of discernment.

April 29<sup>th</sup>

Acts 4 vv 18-22

I've always questioned authority. Does this teacher, manager, archdeacon, policeman, council warden, planning officer or whoever really have the power to tell me what I may and may not do? Ought he to have this power? Is he using his power correctly? Does he himself always play by the rules? It is good to question. *I was only obeying orders* is no defence in a war crimes trial. On the other hand, if we didn't respect authority, there would be anarchy in which everyone would suffer. There is arrogance in believing that one knows better than those set in authority over us. Arrogance is one of my besetting sins! Even if one really does know better than the boss, it is generally better to do what he says, for your own sake and the sake of everybody else.

But what about those rare occasions when you are truly sure that what the authorities are demanding of you is contrary to God's Will? Then you have to disobey like Peter & John, but you also have, like them, to take the consequences.



April 30<sup>th</sup>

Acts 4 vv 23-30

Peter & John report back to their fellow Christians. It is good to talk. Their experiences would have been an encouragement to the rest of the Church and also a warning that it's not always easy to live as a Christian and to do the good works God has prepared for you to walk in. Peter and John would have been strengthened by the support of the Church – the prayers of other Christians, their company, their sharing of their goods & talents, their love.

V24. Thinking about Who God is, what He has done, praising Him, is a great source of strength for us Christians.

Vv25&26 are a quotation from Psalm 2. The apostles knew their Bible. If we know our Bibles well, we have a tremendous resource, the Word of God in our heads & in our hearts. Peter, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, then applies what was already an ancient text to contemporary events. That's something we can & should do too, humbly seeking what God is saying to us today in the Bible, not looking for proof texts to bolster our own prejudices. We must be open to the Holy Spirit and pay attention to the Church's teaching & our fellow Christians, as well as prayerfully & rationally making up our own minds.

From thanks & praise & a thoughtful examination of Scripture, they proceed to pray for God's blessing on the work they are seeking to do in His Name. Not a bad model for PCCs & synods.

May 1<sup>st</sup> (St Philip & St James)

Acts 4 vv 31-37

In those very early days, Christians sought to live in a community which reflected the values of the Kingdom of Heaven. In practice, it didn't work out in the world as it then was. We're not in heaven yet. Knowing Jesus, we have everlasting life but we need to follow the Way in order to receive life in all its fulness. How might we live by Heaven's values in our world today?

**O ALMIGHTY** God, whom truly to know is everlasting life; Grant us perfectly to know thy Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life; that, following the steps of thy holy Apostles, Saint Philip and Saint James, we may stedfastly walk in the way that leadeth to eternal life; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

May 2<sup>nd</sup> (St Athanasius)

Acts 5 vv 1-11

Athanasius was a great thinker & theologian in the early Church. He was of great assistance in the Council of Nicaea (the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of which we celebrated last year). Jesus is truly divine & truly human, *God of the Substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds: and Man of the Substance of his Mother, born in the world.* His purpose in becoming human is that we should be made divine. He died so that we might live. What is required of us is that we put our faith in Him & repent of our sins. Through His grace, the baptised are citizens of Heaven here on earth, seeking by grace to live by Heaven's values here & now, on our way to that great day when we shall see Him as He is & be made like Him in all eternity. There are, however, casualties on the way, sinners, hypocrites, liars like Ananias & Sapphira. The devil is the Father of Lies. Yes, like Judas, they could have repented and would have been forgiven, but they didn't. There is a choice.

May 3<sup>rd</sup> (Easter 4)

Acts 5 vv 12-16

**ALMIGHTY** God, who shewest to them that be in error the light of thy truth, to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness; Grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's Religion, that they may eschew those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Amen.* Last week's collect would have been very suitable for yesterday's reading. If only Ananias & Sapphira had eschewed all things that were contrary to their profession! Apart from those two, life in the Jerusalem Church in those early days appears to have been idyllic. Let's think again. What would the Church we belong to be like if we all lived by Heaven's values, eschewing all things which are contrary to our profession as Christians? I might be wrong, but personally I wouldn't expect such an abundance of miracles as they experienced. I think that *signs & wonders* are special & occur on special occasions. They are not routine. Neither would I expect such a rapid growth in numbers as happened in these early chapters of Acts. I do think, however, that we could do better than we actually do to love God wholeheartedly & to live by His Commandments in our personal lives & in the way our churches are run. If we did we might see more effective evangelism & more effective healing of bodies, minds, spirits & relationships.

May 4<sup>th</sup>

Acts 5 vv 17-26

The authorities in Jerusalem were frustrated. Their prison couldn't contain the apostles. The apostles couldn't be deterred from preaching the Word of God to the people.

Again, we cannot believe that there will always be miracles. There are many people imprisoned for their faith whom God does not miraculously set free. No doubt, some are deterred by punishment & the threat of punishment. I wouldn't blame them! Others, no doubt, have the grace to remain faithful. What can we do? We can pray for prisoners of conscience. We can write to our own MPs etc., asking them to intervene on behalf of those who are being persecuted. We might write to the governments of those powers which do persecute. It might be possible to communicate ourselves directly with such prisoners or their families & support them emotionally or even with small gifts of practical necessities. We are also required to pray for the persecutors. In persecuting any of us, they persecute us all. I Corinthians 12: <sup>25</sup> *That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.* <sup>26</sup> *And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.* <sup>27</sup> *Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.*

That it may please thee to forgive our enemies, persecutors, and slanderers, and to turn their hearts;  
*We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.*

May 5<sup>th</sup>

Acts 5 vv 27-42

*Not all Pharisees!*

The Pharisees have rather a bad press in the Bible. They, along with the Sadducees (the priestly party) are often the principal opponents of Jesus and the Gospel. But they were not all like that. Some like Nicodemus & Gamaliel were open minded and prepared to listen. If what the apostles were doing was of God, it couldn't be stopped. If it wasn't of God. It would fizzle out. Paul, of course, was a Pharisee.

*He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to*

*them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

**O ALMIGHTY** God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men; Grant unto thy people, that they may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

May 6<sup>th</sup>

Acts 6 v1

The people here described as Grecians and Hebrews were all Jews. The mission to the Gentiles had not yet commenced. The distinction is between those Jews who naturally spoke Greek – very possibly not brought up in the Holy Land – and those who naturally spoke Aramaic, the language Jesus normally spoke – who had probably lived in the Holy Land all their lives.

It is horrifying how easily, even within the Church, we split into factions, perhaps identifying ourselves by social class, wealth or the lack of it, race, age, heritage, tradition. Christ prayed that we should be one. He commanded us to love one another as He loves us. Once we see ourselves as a group within the Church, it is only too easy to feel hard done by. How come the vicar has particular friends? Why does nobody listen to us? Why are certain people always singled out for praise?

May 7<sup>th</sup>

Acts 6 v2

Like the apostles, some people within the Church are called to the specific ministries of preaching the Gospel, teaching the faith, leading worship & pastoral care. God has given them the gifts of the Holy Spirit to enable them to fulfil their calling. They ought not to be distracted from their God-given task by petty quarrels within the Church or excessively burdened with administrative tasks.

May 8<sup>th</sup>

Acts 6 vv 3&4

Making peace between the different factions within the Church & administering the daily dole efficiently & fairly are still the work of God – just not the work of the apostles. Suitable men are to be chosen.

They cannot perform their function without the grace of the Holy Spirit. The seven men chosen were the first deacons, a term derived from the Greek word for a servant. There are many different jobs which need to be done in the Church. They are all God's work – from churchwarden to sidesman to PCC member to tea lady to odd job man (or tea gentleman to odd job woman). Suitable people, suitably gifted are required for everything which needs doing in the Church. All should be honoured & the contribution of each respected.

May 9<sup>th</sup>

Acts 6 vv 5-8

God is a God of surprises. He cannot be contained by our pre-conceptions. The Church thought it was appointing seven men to wait at tables, an honourable job which needed to be done. But God had plans for these men which went way beyond waiting at tables. Tea lady or gentleman, churchwarden or chorister, they are all honourable and worthwhile roles, but we shouldn't assume that God doesn't have other plans for the people whom we see as doing no more than making the tea, managing the parish when there is no rector, or singing in the choir. We are all *fearfully & wonderfully made* (Psalm 139).

May 10<sup>th</sup> (Easter 5)

Acts 6 vv 9-15

How often in the history of the Church is early success in a new venture in the Lord's Name met with hostility. Maybe Stephen's opponents were jealous of the attention he was receiving. It seems that (like Saul of Tarsus) they believed that the new Christian movement, founded on the Death & Resurrection of Jesus, was a perversion of their ancestral faith and a political risk. The Romans had after all crucified the Church's founder! They misunderstood Stephen. They also deliberately mis-represented his words. They were not open to the truth. When our ideas are challenged, it is necessary for us to be open, fair & generous as we seek the Truth into which the Holy Spirit leads us.

**O LORD**, from whom all good things do come; Grant to us thy humble servants, that by thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be good, and by thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

May 11<sup>th</sup>

Acts 7 vv 1-5

Today, tomorrow & Wednesday are the Rogation Days when it is customary to pray for God's blessing on the growing crops. The Church of England is considering a proposal to add a Feast of God the Creator to the liturgical year in which we commemorate & celebrate the great events of our redemption: Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost. There has been some controversy about this, some insisting that Redemption is what it is all about & the sacred history of Redemption (heilsgeschichte), beginning with Abraham, has priority. I disagree. God's work of Creation, Redemption & Sanctification are inextricably joined together – three in one if you like. God creates the universe including human beings who use the freewill with which He has created us to rebel against Him & reject His love. God redeems us through the Life, Death & Resurrection of His Son. He sanctifies us, He makes us holy by the operation of His Holy Spirit.

Abraham would indeed be the one in whose seed (Jesus) all the families of the earth would be blessed, but he would live in the land which God promised him. He and his family would be sustained by the flocks & crops which the land would support.

That it may please thee to give and preserve to our use the kindly fruits of the earth, so that in due time we may enjoy them;

*We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.*

May 12<sup>th</sup>

Acts 7 vv 6-10

There has been an interesting Radio 4 series about progress. The series' understanding is that, over the last three hundred years or so, the human race has had faith in progress, that things over time will inevitably get better. As humanity advances in understanding, agriculture becomes more productive, industry makes possible a standard of living unimaginable to our ancestors, medical advances alleviate suffering & prolong our lives, we progress towards greater freedom & democracy, we become less intolerant. The question the series raises is Have we lost faith in progress? Looking at the state of the world around us, do we believe that progress has come to an end? That's debatable.

Where I am sure that the series is wrong, however, is in its assertion that belief in progress stems from the Enlightenment in the eighteenth

century. The presenters believe that the dominance of religion over thought until then held us back. Human beings, they allege, accepted that things were as they were, nothing much was likely to change & you could only get through this world of misery with God as a kind of crutch.

I strongly disagree. The Gospel prepares the way for us to be enlightened. If the world were only here by chance, if there were no God in overall control, what would be the motivating power which could assure progress? Why could things only get better if there were no powerful force for goodness directing history? It is religion (especially Judaeo-Christian religion) which gives us a timeline. The universe had a beginning & it is progressing towards its end. Things don't stay the same. They don't just keep recycling. Progress is meaningful & purposeful towards the end which God has in store for us.

God led Abraham's family to the Promised Land. He predicted & provided for their descent into Egypt. He had made provision for the seven years of famine. His Hand guided the History of Israel to the point that Jesus was born a Jew.

The destiny of other nations too was & is always in His Hands, but we're not told so much about them (Amos 9<sup>7</sup>, Acts 17<sup>26</sup>).

May 13<sup>th</sup>

Acts 7 vv 11-29

Progress isn't always easy. There are times when we may feel that things are going backwards rather than forwards. We have lost our way. The world seems to have lost its way. We cannot see the solution to our problems. Has God forgotten us? Why did that part of the world have to endure a terrible famine which would bring the Israelites to live in Egypt? Why did they have to suffer persecution & enslavement there? I'm writing this on Holocaust Memorial Day. Why didn't God stop Hitler earlier? Why hunger? Why disease? Why war? Why don't we learn our lessons and progress more quickly? I don't know but I do know Who is in charge & He is infinitely wiser than I am.

May 14<sup>th</sup> (Ascension Day)

Acts 7 vv 30-36

God commissioned Moses and sent him to set the Israelites free from slavery in Egypt. Moses would be their ruler & judge. He would give them God's Law and bring them to the brink of the Promised Land.

God sent Jesus to the world to set us free from slavery to sin & the fear of death. He is our ruler & judge, our example, our companion on the road. He teaches us God's Law by precept & example. He leads us to the Promised Land.

At His Ascension, Jesus sent His apostles, His Church, to proclaim the Good News of everything which God has done in Jesus & to invite all the peoples of the world to enter into fellowship with Him through Baptism, to obey His teaching, to enjoy His Presence, to be filled with His Holy Spirit & to enter His perfect rest.

**GRANT**, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe thy only-begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ to have ascended into the heavens; so we may also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with him continually dwell, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

May 15<sup>th</sup>

Acts 7 vv 37-39

Moses interceded with God on behalf of the people. He represented God to the people & the people to God when God made His (Old) Covenant with them. He judged their legal cases. He directed their battles. He was instrumental in providing manna & the water from the rock. Who was going to make God's Word known to the Israelites after Moses' death. Moses promised that God would raise up a prophet like him. There are many prophets in the Old Testament who proclaim God's Word to the Israelites. The complete fulfilment of the prophecy is the One Who not only proclaims the Word of God but actually is the Word of God.

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



May 16<sup>th</sup>

Acts 7 vv 40-43

The Israelites had witnessed the Ten Plagues of Egypt. They had passed through the Red Sea. They had been fed on manna and drunk from the water which streamed from the rock. In response to Moses' prayers, God had enabled them to defeat the Amalekites who had attacked them in the wilderness. They had stood before Mt Sinai and seen Moses ascend into the Presence of God. They had experienced the lightning & earthquake and heard the thunder. Moses had presented them with the Ten Commandments. It didn't take long, however, for them to lose faith in the God Who made them. Instead they made their own gods who would do what they wanted them to do and enacted an immoral pagan style of worship.

It is only too easy for our first love to grow cold. We may have had wonderful experiences of God, but there may come a time when our spiritual life has become arid, or we doubt that God still cares for us, or perhaps we are just very busy or distracted from following God by the things of this world. We may lose faith in the one true God, make up our own minds about what principles we'll follow in our lives and seek satisfaction in life-style choices which can never truly satisfy.

But faith is about fact, not feeling. However we may feel, the fact is that God loves us and will not let us go.

**1.** O love that will not let me go,

I rest my weary soul in thee;  
I give thee back the life I owe,  
That in thine ocean depths its flow

May richer, fuller be.

**2.** O Light that follows all my way,

I yield my flick'ring torch to thee;  
My heart restores its borrowed ray,  
That in thy sunshine's blaze its day

May brighter, fairer be.

**3.** O Joy that seekest me thru' pain,

I cannot close my heart to thee;  
I trace the rainbow thru' the rain

And feel the promise is not vain  
That morn shall tearless be.

**4.** O cross that liftest up my head,

I dare not ask to fly from thee;  
I lay in dust life's glory dead,  
And from the ground there blossoms red

Life that shall endless be.

May 17<sup>th</sup> (Sunday after Ascension)

Acts 7 vv 44-50

Instructed by God on Mt Sinai, Moses constructed the Ark of the Covenant which symbolised God's Presence with His people. Also instructed by God, he made a tabernacle or tent in which the Ark was kept & where the people assembled to worship. The tabernacle accompanied the Israelites on their journey to the Promised Land. When David established Jerusalem as the capital of the Kingdom of Israel, he decided to build a temple to replace the tabernacle as the house of God. The Ark would abide in the Holy of Holies of the Temple. But all this is symbolic. God dwells in heaven but heaven cannot contain Him. God made everything that there is and fills the universe. God is everywhere but everywhere cannot contain Him. He dwells in us. Above all, He dwells in Jesus Christ. We dwell in Him. We mustn't think that God has limits. We certainly mustn't think that He is constrained within our temples or their rituals. We can only wonder.

**O GOD** the King of glory, who hast exalted thine only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph unto thy kingdom in heaven; We beseech thee, leave us not comfortless; but send to us thine Holy Ghost to comfort us, and exalt us unto the same place whither our Saviour Christ is gone before, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

May 18<sup>th</sup>

Acts 7 vv 51-60

From the time when Adam & Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, humanity has always rejected God's overtures. The story of the Old Testament is humanity's, then Israel's failure first to receive God's blessings with thankfulness, then to love Him & keep His Commandments. Time & again God forgives them. Time & again they fail Him. We thought about the other nations God has made whose histories are not in the Bible. Many of them were worse than Israel. At Stephen's preaching, the rulers of Israel hardened their hearts & became more angry. Stephen clung onto God. You notice how much his martyrdom was like that of Jesus Himself – forgiving his enemies & commending himself to God.

May 19<sup>th</sup>

Acts 8 vv 1-4

The effect of the persecution following the death of Stephen was that the Gospel spread farther more quickly. God achieves His purposes in many ways. It may be our privilege to work with Him as Stephen did. He sometimes achieves His purposes despite our well-meant mistakes. And sometimes He effects His Will not only in spite of but by means of our human rebellion against Him. One way or another our Lord's Prayer *Thy Will be done* is answered.

God is working his purpose out  
as year succeeds to year:  
God is working his purpose  
out,  
and the time is drawing near;  
nearer and nearer draws the  
time,  
the time that shall surely be,  
when the earth shall be filled  
with the glory of God  
as the waters cover the sea.

From utmost east to utmost  
west,  
wherever foot hath trod,  
by the mouth of many  
messengers  
goes forth the voice of God;  
give ear to me, ye continents,  
ye isles, give ear to me,  
that earth may filled  
with the glory of God  
as the waters cover the sea.

What can we do to work God's  
work,  
to prosper and increase  
the brotherhood of all  
mankind--  
the reign of the Prince of  
Peace?  
What can we do to hasten the

time--  
the time that shall surely be,  
when the earth shall be filled  
with the glory of God  
as the waters cover the sea.

March we forth in the strength  
of God,  
with the banner of Christ  
unfurled,  
that the light of the glorious  
gospel of truth  
may shine throughout the  
world:  
fight we the fight with sorrow  
and sin  
to set their captives free,  
that earth may filled  
with the glory of God  
as the waters cover the sea.

All we can do is nothing worth  
unless God blessed the deed;  
vainly we hope for the harvest-  
tide  
till God gives life to the seed;  
yet nearer and nearer draws  
the time,  
the time that shall surely be,  
when the earth shall be filled  
with the glory of God  
as the waters cover the sea.

May 20<sup>th</sup>

Acts 8 vv 5-8

I assume that this was Philip the deacon, one of the six chosen with Stephen. If so, he must have been extremely brave to go out preaching the Gospel, knowing what had happened to his fellow deacon. The Sadducees & the Pharisees, the people who knew their Bibles back to front, who regularly participated in worship & who prided themselves on being leaders of the people & scholars, failed to recognise Jesus. They rejected Him & persecuted those who followed Him. The Samaritans, despised by the Jews, paid attention to the Gospel Philip preached. There were signs & wonders. Many believed. The city was filled with joy. It makes you think, doesn't it? With whom should we be sharing our faith? With those who might be expected to receive the word? Or with those who, in our eyes, are far from God?

May 21<sup>st</sup>

Acts 8 vv 9-13

This Simon must have been a charismatic leader. Hitler was a charismatic leader. There have been plenty of rabble rousers in human history. Sadly, in the Church, there have been and are apparently very successful preachers & church leaders, who have attracted congregations of thousands. Then it has turned out that they have been enriching themselves from the offerings of the faithful or abusing women & children. Apparent success is no guarantee of authenticity. It says that Simon was baptised. Had he honestly misunderstood what it means to be a Christian or had he cynically seen an opportunity – that, if he went along with Philip, he himself could become more powerful & acquire even greater prestige?

May 22<sup>nd</sup>

Acts 8 vv 14-17

It must have been the Holy Spirit Who brought the Samaritan converts to Baptism. Nobody can affirm that Jesus is Lord or know God as Father except by the prompting of the Holy Spirit. But, it seems, that sometimes those who were baptised did not straightaway experience the Holy Spirit & sometimes they actually experienced the Spirit before Baptism and that is how they came to be baptised (eg Acts 10<sup>44-48</sup>). At that time, experiencing the Holy Spirit was often accompanied by phenomena such as speaking with tongues. Some people think that this is the origin of Confirmation, the laying on of apostolic hands after Baptism.

May 23<sup>rd</sup>

Acts 8 vv 18-25

Whether wilfully or in ignorance, Simon had badly misunderstood how the Holy Spirit works. God's grace is free. It is priceless. There is nothing we can do to deserve or to earn God's love. It is an insult to Him to offer payment for His gifts. *Seek and ye shall find*, and that is all we can or need to do. Simon wanted to buy the power the apostles had for his own glorification. The proper use of the gifts God gives us is to glorify Him & to the benefit of other people. Our peace follows from unselfish service. I'd like to think that Simon's repentance (v24) was genuine, but he had a bad reputation in later years,

Simony is charging for God's free gifts of grace. We certainly don't charge for Baptism or Holy Communion & I have never been entirely comfortable with charging fees for weddings & funerals.

May 24<sup>th</sup> (Pentecost / Whitsun)

Acts 8 vv 26-28

Twice in the last few days it has happened, apparently by chance, that I have run into someone who is seeking a way to God and wanting to ask my advice. The Holy Spirit works in the world. We cannot direct Him. Nor can we predict what He will do, Neither can we be sure of the outcome of anything we might do. I pray that these particular encounters will bear fruit. The Spirit doesn't only work through retired clergymen! Maybe, you will experience an opportunity to do some good in the world today. Pray for the grace to be alert to what is calling you to do, for the grace to play your part in God's plan & for the outcome of any intervention you may make.

**GOD**, who as at this time didst teach the hearts of thy faithful people, by the sending to them the light of thy Holy Spirit; Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgement in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

May 25<sup>th</sup>

Acts 8 vv 29-31

The Ethiopian Eunuch was either a Jew himself or drawn to the Jewish faith. He had presumably been to the Temple, though, as a eunuch, he would not have been able to take a full part in its rites. He was reading the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. People who are interested in the faith

may well read the Bible – a good way to learn more about God, to come to know Him. I believe that sales of Bible have recently been going up in this country. The Gideons perform a great service by making the Bible available to people in hotels, hospitals, schools, etc.. We do need help in understanding the Bible. We need Christian fellowship. We need the Sacraments. So it is good if the seeker starting to read the Bible confides in a Christian friend or takes himself off to Church, where hopefully he will be made welcome.

May 26<sup>th</sup>

Acts 8 vv 32-35

Philip explains about Jesus – Who He is, how He humbled Himself & suffered for us, how in Him our sins are forgiven & our souls are healed, how we are made acceptable to God and welcomed into His Kingdom. This message may have been especially meaningful for the eunuch. Although he was an important & presumably a wealthy man, treasurer to the Queen of Ethiopia, he could not enjoy a normal family life, he could not participate fully in public worship or join in completely with community & social life. But Jesus breaks down all these barriers. Eunuchs, all people, all those who have been excluded for whatever reason, are welcome through faith to belong to the people of God & to receive the fulness of His blessings. Isaiah 56 prophesies all this in more detail.

May 27<sup>th</sup>

Acts 8 vv 36-40

Jesus told us to preach the Gospel, to teach people to observe what He has taught us & to baptize, but who should be baptized? Some Christians believe that only adults should be baptized & only then when the Church is confident that they understand & are fully committed to what they are doing. Most Christians practise infant Baptism. Baptism is the rite of entry into the Church. God welcomes children into the family of God. Eternal life is not dependent on our understanding & effort, only on God's love. Of those who baptize infants, some Churches require a high degree of commitment from the parents – church attendance, preparation classes, etc.. Others baptize any child whose parents request Baptism. My inclination has always been towards that latter policy. Jesus welcomes us as we are & supplies us with the grace to grow in faith, but God is not mocked.

May 28<sup>th</sup>

Acts 9 vv 1&2

Do you ever think what it would be like to live somewhere where Christians are persecuted for their faith? Suppose our Church services might be interrupted by the police & some of us taken off to prison. What if possessing a Bible were a criminal offence that could land you in gaol? Would you tell other people about Jesus if it were against the law to do so? What if you were not a Christian but you wanted to be baptized and you lived in one of those countries where they execute people who change religion? Once, in Strood, I was asked by someone whether it was legal to change your religion in this country. I don't know where he came from, but his question made me think.

We need to pray for the persecuted & do anything else we can to support them. We also need to thank God for the freedoms we enjoy & to use them to His glory.

May 29<sup>th</sup>

Acts 9 vv 4&5

Saul was a very intense man. He was clever, well-educated, energetic & absolutely dedicated. He was a Pharisee. The Pharisees tried so hard to keep the Law, to please God. Saul described himself as of the very strictest sect of the Jewish religion. He believed that Jesus was a threat to what God wanted His people to be. Believing that, Saul also believed that those who followed Jesus were a danger to the faith revealed in the Law & the Prophets (the Old Testament). He therefore attempted to destroy the nascent Church. But it was *hard for him to kick against the pricks*. There was an inner turmoil. Might Jesus, after all, be the Messiah? That's a thought which Saul would have resisted with all his being. And then Jesus made Himself known to Saul & everything changed.

We sing the glorious  
conquest  
before Damascus' gate,  
when Saul, the Church's  
spoiler  
came breathing threats and  
hate.  
The ravening wolf rushed  
forward

full early to the prey;  
but lo! the Shepherd met  
him,  
and bound him fast today.

O glory most excelling  
that smote across his path!  
O light that pierced and  
blinded

the zealot in his wrath!  
O voice that spake within  
him  
the calm, reproving word!  
O love that sought and held  
him  
the bondman of his Lord!

O Wisdom ordering all  
things  
in order strong and sweet,  
what nobler spoil was ever  
cast at the Victor's feet?  
What wiser master builder

e'er wrought at thine employ  
than he, till now so furious  
thy building to destroy?

Lord, teach thy Church the  
lesson,  
still in her darkest hour  
of weakness and of danger,  
to trust thy hidden power;  
thy grace by ways  
mysterious  
the wrath of man can bind,  
and in thy boldest foeman  
thy chosen saint can find.

May 30<sup>th</sup>

Acts 9 vv 6-9

As I write these notes, the Parish of Cuxton & Halling is still without a Rector. The position has not yet been advertised. There are bureaucratic processes to go through. The parish, the wardens, the bishop, the archdeacon, the diocesan office, the Church's human resources department all have a role. Is it likely, do you think, that the person chosen will be someone who is currently actively persecuting Christians? How do you think HR will respond if an applicant claims to have had a vision of the Risen Christ? What will the bishop & the archdeacon think if someone comes forward for the post who has not yet even been baptized? Yet Saul of Tarsus, as the Apostle Paul, was possibly the most effective minister the Church has ever had. I know that there are reasons why the Church of England bureaucracy has developed as it has – not least the issue of safe-guarding – but are we in danger of quenching the Holy Spirit (I Thessalonians 5<sup>19</sup>)?

**ALMIGHTY** God, the giver of all good gifts, who of thy divine providence hast appointed divers Orders in thy Church; Give thy grace, we humbly beseech thee, to all those who are to be called to any office and administration in the same; and so replenish them with the truth of thy doctrine, and endue them with innocency of life, that they may faithfully serve before thee, to the glory of thy great Name, and the benefit of thy holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*



May 31<sup>st</sup> (Trinity Sunday)

Acts 9 vv 10-16

Yesterday, I was writing about the current employment & recruitment practices of the Church of England. I have often expressed my opinion that these are irrational, resulting in the loss of many ministers who could offer worthwhile service, lengthy delays in making appointments, unreasonable criteria regarding conditions of service, failure to consult all God's people & failure on occasion to recognise and support those whom God is calling to ministry.

Today, we read about Ananias whom Jesus instructed to do what was, from a human point of view, unreasonable. He was to restore the sight of a notorious persecutor of the Church, baptize him & commission him as an apostle & evangelist.

Ananias' initial reaction was what one would expect of a normal, rational human being. But Jesus revealed to him something much more wonderful than conventional prudence would ever be capable of realising. Is it possible that the Church of England, having studied modern management theory & immersed itself in "best practice" and adopted the same "human resources" policies as contemporary secular organisations such as commerce & government departments, is in danger of being unable to see the wood for the trees?

Today is Trinity Sunday. Charles Wesley's hymn looks forward to the end of our lives as *lost in wonder, love & praise?* This is the end to which we are progressing, our goal, towards which we are drawn by the love of God. Surely, we ought to draw our inspiration from our vision of God and only then use our human reason to work out how best to do God's Will in this world. We should not set up administrative structures based on human models & then expect God to work through them, accepting the constraints which we have devised.

**ALMIGHTY** and everlasting God, who hast given unto us thy servants grace, by the confession of a true faith to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity; We beseech thee, that thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith, and evermore defend us from all adversities, who livest and reignest, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

June 1<sup>st</sup>

Acts 9 vv 17-20

Ananias acted on what Jesus told him to do. He believed God & he did what Jesus told him to despite his own reservations. We need to pray for grace to discern God's Will for our lives – not to close our minds to the possibility that He is calling us to do something which we think is beyond us, but neither to imagine that God is telling us to do something dramatic, when in fact it is just our own minds urging us on to attempt the irrational. Read the Bible. Think prayerfully. Take note of Christian tradition. Take advice from Christian friends whom you can trust.

Saul was so enthused by his experience of Christ that he could not help himself but to share it. There's an example for us!

June 2<sup>nd</sup>

Acts 9 vv 21&22

People were amazed at Saul's conversion. That was in itself a witness of the power of God. Saul must have cut a striking figure in the congregation of Christians at Damascus. His joining would have shaken things up, challenged the dynamics of the congregation. Any Christian congregation might be wary of welcoming new people for reasons such as these, especially if the new people are able & energetic & perhaps insensitive to the existing fellowship. We have to be welcoming to new people and to receive joyfully the God-given gifts which they bring. If we are gifted, especially if we are gifted newcomers, we have to be sensitive to the feelings of others & to value the contributions they make – and may have been making for many years.

June 3<sup>rd</sup>

Acts 9 vv 23-25

Since long before he was converted, Saul had been a great Bible scholar. He was a Pharisee. When he became a Christian, he was able to use his existing knowledge and skill to preach the Gospel & to teach the faith. Jesus said, *Every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new & old.* You no doubt have many skills some of which you've picked up through your Church membership, but other things too which you've learnt from life in the world. All useful.

The Thursday after Trinity Sunday is traditionally kept as Corpus Christi, a Thanksgiving for the Gift of Holy Communion. It does not feature in the Book of Common Prayer. It is a major festival in the Roman Catholic Church. Anglican congregations vary in the importance they give to it. It is, these days, fairly generally transferred to the Sunday following. The Church is the Body of Christ. The consecrated Bread of the Eucharist is the Body of Christ. Holy Communion constitutes the Church. At the Last Supper, Jesus commanded us Christians to celebrate the Holy Communion, of which St Paul writes (I Corinthians 10<sup>16&17</sup>), *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread*, with the clear implication that we must live up to what God has made us, partakers of the Body & Blood of Christ. You are what you eat. Although the BCP doesn't mark Corpus Christi, the prayer of thanksgiving at Holy Communion puts into words what the Sacrament is for us.

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

It is this Eucharistic fellowship, the Church, which Saul seeks to join in Jerusalem. In order to be a Christian, you must be a member of the Church. You depend on your fellow Christians. You have your own part to play. Understandably, the Jerusalem Church was wary of welcoming Saul, but Barnabas was wise & generous.

June 5<sup>th</sup>

Acts 9 vv 29-31

Do you think that we live in a less forgiving world than we used to? When someone comes to public notice for good reason or bad, there is a trawling through of the records to check if they have ever said anything or posted on the internet anything which is now regarded as *unacceptable*. Prison sentences are getting longer. Safe-guarding checks show up not only real criminality but allegations of so called non-crime hate incidents (hen someone complains that you might have said something which could be construed as offensive). Of course, it is harder these days to erase from the record foolish indiscretions. That time you got hopelessly drunk when you were 18 may have been filmed and uploaded for any potential employer, client or customer to see years later when you have become a sober, hard-working, respectable member of society. We have been caught out when we've naively believed that sinners have repented. A senior Roman Catholic cleric told me how, back in the 1970s, psychiatrists & psychologists would assure the authorities that abusers had been cured and that they therefore posed no further risk, only to discover that they had not been cured & would go on to commit further offences. But could the pendulum have swung too far the other way? Can we not trust anyone with a second chance? Paul was converted. Paul repented of his terrible sins. Paul became an extremely effective missionary. What is the Gospel message if there is no forgiveness?

June 6<sup>th</sup>

Acts 9 vv 32-35

Back in 1988, I made a point of having a shoulder of lamb for one Sunday dinner. After I had eaten the meat, I thoroughly cleaned and boiled the bones. The next Sunday I took them to Church for the children's talk. I wanted to show the congregation what the bones of a shoulder look like. Sheep are made of much the same components as we are. I showed them where my shoulder had been broken. I also showed them the wires which the orthopaedic surgeon had inserted to keep the bones in place till they healed. There are three kinds of healing, I said. We are fearfully & wonderfully made. Our bodies have a terrific capacity to heal themselves. Most diseases clear up on their own. Secondly, there is the skill of doctors & other medical professionals which assist our bodies' natural healing processes. Then

there are miracles & all three are of God. We pray for healing & thank God for healing, however He heals us. And don't forget that the final healing is death when *God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain* (Revelation 21<sup>4</sup>).

June 7<sup>th</sup> (Trinity 1)

Acts 9 vv 36-43

I guess we've all been there. Someone we love very much has died. Maybe, like Dorcas, the person who has died was a much respected member of the community and did a lot of good works. If only, we might think, there was something we could do to bring them back! Send for the vicar, send for the bishop. Let one of them, like Peter, come to the house and raise the dead. In hospitals, when someone dies, families may demand that attempts are made to resuscitate the deceased. Sometimes that is appropriate and the person is "brought back" and is able to enjoy a few more months or even years of life on earth. But sometimes, it is not appropriate to try to resuscitate. Life really has left them and, even if they could be "brought back", it would only be to prolong their sufferings for a little longer. We shall all die (unless we are still here when Jesus returns). The world would be very crowded with old people if we didn't die. If we have faith, we know that an infinite joy awaits us through what Jesus Christ has done for us.

My grandmother knew a woman who, as far as anyone could tell, had died. She did come back to mortal life and described the beautiful place she had seen awaiting her. The doctor said that she was very blessed because she had seen where she would be in the hereafter.

There is a prayer in the Prayerbook Burial Service which is quite difficult to say. Is a funeral a time to be thankful? What if we think about how much better off they are, *delivered from the burden of the flesh, in joy & felicity*? For years, I found this prayer difficult to say, but I eventually realised that it was a big part of my job as Rector to support all my parishioners so that they & I, *with all those that are departed in the true faith of thy holy Name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in thy eternal and everlasting glory*; It's not just about foodbanks & other charities, trying

to help people in the *trials & tribulations of this transitory life*, building community, looking after buildings & administration, caring for the environment. These are all part of the job of the Rector, but the first priority is to lead the people in worship &, consequently, into eternal life.

**ALMIGHTY** God, with whom do live the spirits of them that depart hence in the Lord, and with whom the souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, are in joy and felicity: We give thee hearty thanks, for that it hath pleased thee to deliver this our *brother* out of the miseries of this sinful world; beseeching thee, that it may please thee, of thy gracious goodness, shortly to accomplish the number of thine elect, and to hasten thy kingdom; that we, with all those that are departed in the true faith of thy holy Name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in thy eternal and everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

June 8<sup>th</sup>

Acts 10 vv 1-8

Cornelius was seeking God. He was a Gentile, a Roman. He recognised the attractiveness of the Jewish religion. There is one God, Creator of everything that there is. He is just & merciful. He hears our prayers. His commandments are good. If we all kept God's commandments, it would be like heaven on earth. Yet Cornelius (like many God-fearing Gentiles) did not take the step of converting to Judaism. It would have meant being circumcised and observing all the rituals which are to be found in the Law which God gave to Moses. Peter, who was of course himself a Jew, described these requirements as *a yoke....which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear* (Acts 15<sup>10</sup>). God shows Cornelius that there is a way open for him to be saved. In the story of Cornelius, we see how God has opened the way to faith to all people - Jew & Gentile - through Jesus Christ.

**O GOD**, the strength of all them that put their trust in thee, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without thee, grant us the help of thy grace, that in keeping of thy commandments we may please thee, both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

June 9<sup>th</sup>

Acts 10 vv 9-18

Peter wasn't yet ready to receive this great truth. Peter had been brought up to believe that the Jews were special. They had a covenant with God. On His part, God had promised that He would be their God and that they would be His people. On their part, they would observe the Law which God had given to Moses on Mt Sinai. This included the food laws and, as a people set apart, there was a strong reluctance to mix with Gentiles and to socialise with them. To do so would be to risk becoming unclean and therefore unable to take part in the worship of the thrice holy God until one had been cleansed. It is not unusual for a hungry man to dream of food, especially if the aromas of cooking are wafting around him. But it was striking that a Jew should dream of eating "unclean" meat. God was powerfully making a point – not merely about food, but, much more importantly, about people. *What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.*

June 10<sup>th</sup>

Acts 10 vv 19-23

Peter pondered what the vision should mean. God was teaching Peter a principle. *What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.* What were the implications of that principle? Judging by Galatians 2<sup>11-16</sup>, it would take Peter some time to work it all out. However, today's story required *Action this day!* The Holy Spirit instructed Peter to set aside his doubts & fears & go with Cornelius' emissaries. We have to be prepared to act on our faith even though we haven't necessarily got everything straight in our minds. We shan't fully comprehend so long as we are on this earth. We just have to go forward in faith, humbly and confident in God.

June 11<sup>th</sup> (St Barnabas)

Acts 10 vv 24-33

Peter had received many gifts of the Holy Ghost. He was a witness to the Resurrection & Ascension. He was an apostle, the leader of the apostles in the early days, the rock on which Christ would build His Church. He had received the Spirit at Pentecost and was a great preacher. Through Peter, God healed the sick & raised the dead. Peter would suffer for his faith and remain faithful. All Christians have received gifts of the Holy Ghost in order that everyone of us can play his or her part as a member of Christ's Body, the Church. It is by the

Spirit that we know God is our Father & Jesus our Lord. We have different gifts to enable us to fulfil the different functions which He has assigned to us.

**O LORD** God Almighty, who didst endue thy holy Apostle Barnabas with singular gifts of the Holy Ghost; Leave us not, we beseech thee, destitute of thy manifold gifts, nor yet of grace to use them alway to thy honour and glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

June 12<sup>th</sup>

Acts 10 v34

*God is no respecter of persons.*

Years ago, it was apparently a status symbol to own a donkey. I'm not talking about centuries ago when donkeys were vital to the economy, but a few decades ago, when it was nice to have a well cared for donkey grazing your paddock. Many things have been regarded as status symbols – sports cars, big houses, private jets, duelling scars, prison tattoos, titles, honours, degree certificates, medals, etc.. Some of these things are worth being proud of. Some don't really matter much. Some are a bit silly. In the eighteenth century, it was thought that it was in fradig to eat vegetables and that anybody who was anybody would only eat meat. Gentlemen also wore wigs! People might expect to be respected, they might be respected, because they are brave, powerful, generous, rich. Kind, good-looking, well-spoken, well-educated, muscular, beautiful etc.. It might be thought by some people that Jews are superior to Gentiles or *vice versa*, or that one race of uman beings is superior to all the others or that it is better to come from one spot on the earth rather than another. *God is no respecter of persons.*

June 13<sup>th</sup>

Acts 10 v35

*But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*

In Christ there is no East or West,  
In Him no South or North;  
But one great fellowship of love  
Throughout the whole wide earth.

Join hands, then, brothers of the  
faith,  
Whate'er your race may be!  
Who serves my Father as a son  
Is surely kin to me.

In Him shall true hearts  
everywhere  
Their high communion find;  
His service is the golden cord,  
Close binding all mankind.

In Christ now meet both East and  
West,  
In Him meet South and North;  
All Christly souls are one in Him  
Throughout the whole wide earth.



June 14<sup>th</sup> (Trinity 2)

Acts 10 vv 36-48

The inference of v37 is that Cornelius and his household had already heard at least some of the story of Jesus. Peter recapitulates briefly the main facts of what Jesus did & why. They knew at least some of this already. Plenty of people know at least something of the story of Jesus. But, if it is to bear fruit, the Word must be fixed with faith. That is where the Holy Spirit comes in & that is why our sharing of the Gospel message must be supported by prayer – prayer for the preachers & prayer for the hearers,

**O LORD**, who never failest to help and govern them who thou dost bring up in thy stedfast fear and love; Keep us, we beseech thee, under the protection of thy good providence, and make us to have a perpetual fear and love of thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

June 15<sup>th</sup>

Acts 11 vv 1-8

The extension of the mission to the Gentiles was so controversial, that the story is told twice, once in the third person in chapter 10, then here in Peter's own words. Some of the Jerusalem Church were very suspicious of what Peter had done, socialising with Gentiles, sharing the faith with them and baptising them into the Body of Christ, the people of God. The doubters were convinced when they were informed about what God was doing in the world. Christians today may be challenged by new ideas for radical change. These ideas may be good or bad. How do we tell the difference? Prayerfully, in the light of the Scriptures & Christian tradition, respectfully of those whose ideas are different from our own, rationally, humbly before God, attentively to what He is doing in the world today.

June 16<sup>th</sup>

Acts 11vv 19-30

In Antioch, unnamed Christians began to share the faith with the Gentiles & there was a great response. The Jerusalem Church sent Barnabas to investigate & support what was going on. (You have to be cautious about new religious movements, even Christian ones, as various abuse scandals have made clear.) Barnabas affirmed & blessed what was happening at Antioch and had the sanctified good sense to fetch Saul to be part of it. The Church is one. If the Christians in Jerusalem suffer, Christians in Antioch are bound by love to help.

June 17<sup>th</sup>

Acts 12 vv 1-3

An obvious question is why God allowed James to be beheaded but saved Peter. I'm not sure how to answer it. In the end we just have to trust that God knows what He is doing. There is perhaps a clue in what St Paul wrote to the Philippians chapter 1 when he was in prison & didn't know whether he would be executed or released. <sup>21</sup> *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* <sup>22</sup> *But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not.* <sup>23</sup> *For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:* <sup>24</sup> *Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.*

June 18<sup>th</sup>

Acts 12 vv 4-11

Herod was determined that Peter shouldn't escape. Perhaps he had heard what had happened before when the chief priests put the apostles in prison and God let them out and they went back to preaching in the Temple. Nothing and no-one is more powerful than God. He sets us free, free from slavery to sin, free from the fear of death, free to serve Him Whose service is perfect freedom.

4 Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
fast bound in sin and nature's  
night;  
thine eye diffused a quickening  
ray;  
I woke, the dungeon flamed  
with light;  
my chains fell off, my heart was  
free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed  
thee.

5 No condemnation now I  
dread;  
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!  
Alive in him, my living Head,  
and clothed in righteousness  
divine,  
bold I approach the eternal  
throne,  
and claim the crown, through  
Christ, my own

June 19<sup>th</sup>

Acts 12 vv 12-17

When we were told this story in the youth group, it was remarked that they were all praying for Peter but apparently didn't expect their prayers to be answered. But, to be fair, most of the people who are imprisoned for their faith are not miraculously set free. Does God not answer the prayers of the people praying for them? Very likely the same people who prayed for Peter had also prayed for James. God always answers our prayers *as may be most expedient for us* and miracles would be inexpedient if they were routine. A miracle is special, a sign from God.

June 20<sup>th</sup>

Acts 2 vv 18-23

Herod Agrippa was a horrible man and he died horribly. He was arrogant, proud and cruel. We can think of many wicked people in history, many wicked people in the world today. Does justice demand that they are punished without mercy? Sometimes people whose families have been devastated by the wickedness of a child murderer, a serial killer, a paedophile or a terrorist say that they hope the villain will rot in hell forever. That seems to me a perfectly understandable reaction. Forgiveness is neither cheap nor easy. Yet the Christian Gospel is that none of us deserves heaven, but that Christ has brought about the possibility of forgiveness for every one of us sinners, paying the price of our redemption by His Death on the Cross. Even Herod could have been forgiven had he repented. So I cannot deny could Hitler, awful as that thought is to anyone who has any understanding at all of the wickedness of which he is guilty.

1 And can it be  
that I should gain  
an interest in the  
Saviour's blood?  
Died he for me,  
who caused his  
pain?  
For me, who him  
to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How  
can it be  
that thou, my  
God, shouldst die  
for me?

2 'Tis mystery all:  
the Immortal dies!  
Who can explore  
his strange  
design?  
In vain the first-  
born seraph tries  
to sound the  
depths of love  
divine.  
'Tis mercy all! Let  
earth adore,  
let angel minds  
enquire no more.

3 He left his  
Father's throne  
above —  
so free, so infinite  
his grace —  
emptied himself of  
all but love,  
and bled for  
Adam's helpless  
race.  
'Tis mercy all,  
immense and free;  
for, O my God, it  
found out me!

June 21<sup>st</sup> (Trinity 3)

Acts 12 v24 – 13v3

Barnabas & Saul had taken relief to the Christians in Jerusalem from the Church at Antioch in a time of hardship. When they returned to Antioch, the Holy Spirit had another task for them – to preach the Gospel. They were ordained, as ministers have been ever since, by the laying on of hands with prayer.

**O LORD**, we beseech thee mercifully to hear us; and grant that we, to whom thou hast given an hearty desire to pray, may by thy mighty aid be defended and comforted in all dangers and adversities; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

June 22<sup>nd</sup>

Acts 13 vv 4&5

It was on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1980 that I was ordained deacon by the laying on of hands with prayer. My calling was very different from that of Paul & Barnabas & John Mark, but the calling of bishops, priests & deacons today is just as authentic as was the call in the first century & as necessary to the well-being of the Church & her mission. We pray for vocations. We pray that those who are being called & that the Church at large may recognise God's calling, that those who are called will be fostered and supported by the Church. We pray for those in training, those about to be ordained and those in ordained ministry. We pray that the Church will be wise in using the talents of those whom God has called to ministry, We pray that the Church will be saved from ordaining those who are not God's choice, what this prayer (Following St Paul in I Timothy 5<sup>22</sup>) calls laying on hands suddenly.

**ALMIGHTY** God, our heavenly Father, who hast purchased to thyself an universal Church by the precious blood of thy dear Son; Mercifully look upon the same, and at this time so guide and govern the minds of thy servants the Bishops and Pastors of thy flock, that they may lay hands suddenly on no man, but faithfully and wisely make choice of fit persons, to serve in the sacred Ministry of thy Church. And to those which shall be ordained to any holy function, give thy grace and heavenly benediction; that both by their life and doctrine they may show forth thy glory, and set forward the salvation of all men; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

June 23<sup>rd</sup>

Acts 13 vv 6-13

There is a perversity in the human spirit. Jesus is Good News for the whole world, but wherever the Gospel is preached, there is opposition. People refuse to listen. They persecute the preachers. They make fun of the Word of God. They argue. They set imperfect human logic and understanding against the perfectly rational doctrines of the Christian faith. They ignore. They cultivate indifference. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1788-1834) spoke of the *cultured despisers*. Perhaps, worst of all, is when we domesticate religion. We observe the rituals and parrot the creeds but we don't suffer them to transform us into followers of Christ, what St Paul calls *having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof*. Mostly, we can't fight back as dramatically as St Paul did against Elymas, but the whole armour of God is there for our taking (Ephesians 6<sup>13-18</sup>).

June 24<sup>th</sup> (Nativity of St John the Baptist)

Acts 13 vv 14&15

After the readings from the Bible, Paul was invited to preach the Word in the synagogue. As you probably know, there is something of a quiet revival in this country. Young people are picking up the Bible & reading it and going to Church. This is wonderful & something to thank God for. However, we live in a culture in which the individual expects to be affirmed in whatever choices he or she may make. Some people, coming to the Bible for the first time, don't like what they read. They think that even Jesus has got somethings wrong. They want to be affirmed in their lifestyle choices, not judged (even by God) and told to repent of their sins. Some of the Churches which are attracting large numbers have set aside traditional hymns and choruses with their powerful message of repentance and forgiveness, of the Cross & the Resurrection, and replaced them with music designed primarily to make people feel good about themselves. Later in Acts, Paul speaks about the necessity for the preacher to *declare all the counsel of God*, not just what serves to make the preacher popular by telling people just what they want to hear (Acts 20<sup>27</sup>).

**ALMIGHTY** God, by whose providence thy servant John Baptist was wonderfully born, and sent to prepare the way of they Son our Saviour, by preaching of repentance; Make us so to follow his doctrine and holy life, that we may truly repent according to his preaching; and after his example constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the truth's sake; through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
*Amen.*

June 25<sup>th</sup>

Acts 13 vv 16-25

Paul delivered the counsel of God. He began his message with the Bible story. He explained how what was revealed in Scripture – the way God deals with His people is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Paul preaches the eternal Gospel. We may seek different ways of telling the story in order to attract a new audience. We may change the way in which we tell the story in order to make it more intelligible. We may find fresh resources in ancient tradition. If Marks and Spencer's find that the St Michael's brand of clothing is not selling well, they can sell something else. Food sales now make M&S more money than clothes.

But St Michael's Church cannot change the Gospel. We can present it differently, but we have nothing else to offer of any worth.

June 26<sup>th</sup>

Acts 13 vv 26-37

The other day, a young lad asked me how he good go about praying to God. I explained that we can just talk to God, silently in our hearts or out loud. God knows our every need and fully understands. We just have to trust him. I encouraged him to go to Church both to learn about prayer and to enjoy the fellowship of Christians. I said that he should pray every day. I began to suggest that he say the Lord's Prayer, but he obviously had never been taught it. I was taught the Lord's Prayer t home, at Sunday School, at Church, at primary & secondary school & as a cub. I expect many of you reading these notes learned the Lord's Prayer similarly. I was also taught the stories from the Old & New Testaments, prayed with every night before bed and encouraged to pray myself. We learned these things at school (although I did not go to church schools) and, of course, in Church.

The Church of England services of Mattins & Evensong (Morning & Evening Prayer) include psalms, an Old Testament Lesson & a New Testament Lesson. Prayerbook Communion doesn't include psalms & seldom includes an OT lesson. There is always a Gospel reading and usually a reading from the Epistles, Acts or Revelation. Cranmer expected that people would attend HC as well as Mattins & Evensong. The modern (Common Worship) Communion service does make provision for psalms and an OT lesson, but these are often missed out. Non-conformist services used generally to include both an OT & an NT lesson, but that is no longer always the case.

The point I am making is that many people (including many churchgoers) now lack the sort of foundation in the faith which Paul & preachers up until a few decades ago could build on. We really need to immerse ourselves in Scripture & prayer and to find ways of communicating the gifts God has given us to other people.

1 Praise we now the word of  
grace;  
may our hearts its truth  
embrace:  
from its pages may we hear  
Christ our teacher, speaking  
clear.

2 May the gospel of the Lord  
everywhere be spread abroad,  
that the world around may own  
Christ as King, and Christ  
alone.

June 27<sup>th</sup>

Acts 13 vv38-52

Paul delivered the full counsel of God. He expounded the Scriptures. He preached Jesus. Paul spoke the truth. He was not afraid to be controversial or to offend – even to offend those who were in authority. Paul was very successful in bringing many people – both Jews & Gentiles – to faith in Jesus Christ. He also stirred up a lot of opposition and was prepared to face the consequences of doing so rather than forebear to deliver the full counsel of God. Contemporary preachers take note.

June 28<sup>th</sup> (Trinity 4)

Acts 14 vv 1-7

Christ is the Prince of Peace. God is one and in Him we live & move & have our being. His Commandments are summarised as to love Him with all our hearts and our neighbours as ourselves. Christ prayed that His followers would be one and told us to love one another as He loves us. So you would expect the preaching of the Gospel to bring harmony. In fact, it is only in Christ that we can hope for Atonement, at-one-ment, with God and with the rest of humanity.

O come, Desire of nations, bind  
in one the hearts of all mankind;  
bid thou our sad divisions cease,  
and be thyself our King of Peace

Yet the preaching of the Gospel so often brings division. We are human. God has given us the precious gift of free choice. We can accept God's love or we can reject Him. Too many choose the latter. Confronted with the Truth, either we believe in Him or we ally ourselves with the Father of lies, the devil.

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

June 29<sup>th</sup> (St Peter)

Acts 14 vv 8-18

In recent years both Paul & Peter have been celebrated together on this date. Great apostles – the foundations of Christ’s Church. They wrought miracles. They preached the Gospel & taught the faith. Their stories, their wisdom & their example have come down to us in the Scriptures & in Christian tradition. They continue to bless us today. Yet, they are not gods! The pagans at Lystra were gravely mistaken. Only God is worthy of worship. Not angels, not saints, nor any created being; only God is worthy of worship. All things serve Him. In serving Him, we serve one another because the good of all is His purpose.

**O ALMIGHTY** God, who by thy Son Jesus Christ didst give to thy Apostle Saint Peter many excellent gifts, and commandest him earnestly to feed thy flock; Make, we beseech thee, all Bishops and Pastors diligently to preach thy holy Word, and the people obediently to follow the same, that they may receive the crown of everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

June 30<sup>th</sup>

Acts 14 vv 19-28

So Paul completes his first missionary journey, the first of three. It’s a bit confusing because there were two Antiochs. The Antioch in v19 is in Pisidia (now part of Turkey). From there Paul travels to what is effectively his home Church – Antioch in Syria. Paul survives stoning and is not deterred from preaching & offering pastoral support & encouragement to the Churches he had founded. His home Church rejoices in what God has empowered him to achieve. These things are an example for us.

1. For all the saints, who from  
their labours rest,  
who thee by faith before the  
world confessed,  
thy name, O Jesus, be forever  
blest.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

2. Thou wast their rock, their  
fortress, and their might;  
thou Lord, their captain in the  
well-fought fight;

thou in the darkness drear,  
their one true light.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

3. O may thy soldiers, faithful,  
true, and bold,  
fight as the saints who nobly  
fought of old,  
and win with them the victor's  
crown of gold.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!