

The Epistle
To the
Ephesians

Daily Bible Reading Notes
January – March 2025

1st January (Circumcision of Christ)

Ephesians 1 v1

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.

What's in a name? This would have been the day, the date of His circumcision, on which our Lord formally received His Name – the Name the angel gave Mary & Joseph before He was born, the Name which is above every name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow. When Paul became a Christian, He changed His name from Saul. Formally, we were given our Christian names at our christening.

Question. Who gave you this Name?

Answer. My Godfathers and Godmothers in my Baptism; wherein I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.

Our name is who we are, what we are. We are CHRISTians, which means that our hearts & all our members are to be set free from all worldly & carnal lusts that we may obey God in all things.

ALMIGHTY God, who madest thy blessed Son to be circumcised, and obedient to the law for man; Grant us the true Circumcision of the Spirit; that, our hearts, and all our members, being mortified from all worldly and carnal lusts, we may in all things obey thy blessed will; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

2nd January

Ephesians 1v1

To the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.

Some manuscripts leave out the bit about this epistle being addressed to the Ephesians. It has been thought that this might be the epistle written to Laodicea, referred to in Colossians 4¹⁶, where Paul tells the Colossians to share his letter to them with the Laodiceans and to read the Laodicean letter in the Church at Colossi. It seems to me to be likely that these precious words which Paul wrote to the churches would be widely circulated. After all, they've been copied, passed round and passed down so that we're reading them today, as are people all over the world.

It was 2nd January 1987 that I was instituted Rector of Cuxton & Halling. Now that ministry is over for me, I still hope to share the Word of God as I'm trying to do now, wherever these words may reach.

3rd January

Ephesians 1v1

Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints.

Elsewhere Paul says, *By the grace of God, I am what I am.* So he was. Jesus met him on the road to Damascus when he was intending to destroy the Christian community there if he possibly could. Jesus set Paul (then known as Saul) free from sin and appointed him to be an apostle, sharing the Good News with the nations. We're all what we are by the grace of God. We are saints. We are made holy. We are sanctified. Each one of us has a place in God's plan, our vocation. We each have our own part in achieving God's purposes such that His Will is done on earth as it is in heaven. As many of you know, I have been struggling with retirement. What is my calling, my vocation now? Did my calling to be a priest cease on my 70th birthday? Did God take away the gift which was given me by the laying of hands all those years ago? I don't think so, but what does He want me to do now? What does He want you to do now? We all have a vocation. What we are called to do may change as our talents develop and our opportunities alter, but all Christians are called to be full time ministers of Christ and to do His Will whatever our circumstances. Part of the responsibility of bishops and other ordained ministers is to guide Christians in their seeking to discern God's purposes for their lives. Pray for those who are called to advise and direct other Christians in their calling.

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.*

4th January

Ephesians 1v2

Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

So Paul addresses his fellow Christians. It isn't always easy to behave towards and to think about our fellow Christians in accordance with the principles Paul lays down here. Sometimes, they upset us a lot. Nevertheless, we have to live by our Lord's words & love one another as He loves us.

5th January (Christmas 2 same readings as 1st January) Ephesians 1 v3

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We're thinking about a baby boy, less than a week old. *He was little, weak and helpless; tears and smiles like us He knew.* The birth of any baby is a sort of miracle. A new born child evokes all sorts of emotions in us – wonder, the imperative to protect, love. That's potentially any and every child. Yet, *that child so dear and gentle is our Lord in heaven above.* Makes you think, doesn't it?

January 6th (Epiphany)

Ephesians 1 v3

Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.

O GOD, who by the leading of a star didst manifest thy only-begotten Son to the Gentiles: Mercifully grant, that we, which know thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of thy glorious Godhead; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

And he leads his children on to the place where he is gone.

January 7th

Ephesians 1 v4

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.

God is eternal. He is infinite. Time and space are His creation. God is not limited by time or space. They (like everything else) are defined by Him. It follows that His purposes are eternal, including His purposes for you and me and for all creation, everything which exists, no matter how seemingly insignificant. Jesus says, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father." God could be said to dwell in an eternal present, though we should hesitate to say anything which might presume to define Who or what God is. He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps that is all we can say with certainty, everything we know about God being dependent on this one Truth. Anyway, in His eternal purposes, you and I (as Christians) have been chosen by Him eternally and He has made us holy and without blame in love, not for our merits, but for His. God's grace is that He gives us what we do not deserve. His mercy is that He does not give us what we do deserve.

January 7th

Ephesians 1 v5

Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ in himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.

I recently read a book on quantum physics, the discipline which strives to describe the nature and behaviour of atoms and subatomic particles. There was much of it I didn't understand and there are people in the world who comprehend a great deal more of these mysteries than I do. However, one of the author's recurring observations is that no human being is capable of fully comprehending or even of imagining the nature and behaviour of the atom and its constituent parts. The atom is like nothing else we know of. We can't see it, touch it, smell it, hear it or taste it and it is quite unlike any of the things which we can experience via our senses. You might imagine the atom as being like a tiny solar system in which electrons circulate around the nucleus as planets circle the sun, but it isn't a bit like that really. Another model of the atom is like a plum pudding in which neutrons and protons (the plums) are located in a force field of electrons. The atom isn't like that either. We cannot comprehend the atom and the behaviour of subatomic particles because it is utterly different from what we do know in the world of experience – “common sense”! We can, however, make observations and take measurements which give us an inkling of what these infinitesimally tiny particles are up to. They are not so dissimilar from the world we know that we cannot know anything at all about them – though our theories have to be extremely provisional and open to revision when new information comes to light. Given then the fact that it is impossible to understand more than a very little about the atoms which make up our material world, but that we can at least catch glimpses which bear some relation to the truth, how much more is this the case with regard to our understanding of heavenly things. God, the spiritual realm, heaven are utterly beyond our understanding, but there is sufficient analogy, enough in common, between earth & heaven, between the mortal & the immortal, between God and human beings made in His image & likeness, for us to catch some glimmer of the Infinite Truth which is utterly beyond our comprehension.

Save that thought for tomorrow & if all this seems too daunting, just celebrate the fact that you are an adopted child of God by Jesus Christ.

January 8th

Ephesians 1 v6

*To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us
accepted in he beloved.*

For centuries scientists argued about the nature of light. Is it a wave? Is it a stream of particles? Most of what we know about light rays makes sense whether we regard it as a wave or whether we regard it as a stream of particles. The problem is that there are properties of light which only make sense if it is a wave and other properties which only make sense if it is a stream of particles. Most scientists now believe that light rays are not exactly a wave or a stream of particles in the classical sense. They are something different (something unlike anything else we know; they are electromagnetic waves which also include ultraviolet light, radio waves, X rays, etc.)

Similarly, for centuries, religious people have debated whether we genuinely have free will and whether chance plays a part in the world or whether everything is predetermined by God. If we have free will, good people could boast that it is by their own merit that they have been saved. They didn't need God. They made the right choices themselves. Even if they made those right choices following God's guidance it was their own personal wisdom which taught them to follow God's prescription. Moreover, if everyone were free to choose and freely chose to be evil and if there were too many unlucky chances, God's purposes for the universe might be thwarted. The devil might win.

On the other hand, if God is in control of everything, if there is no chance, if we have no real choice but to enact the part He has assigned to us, then we are puppets or robots. If that's the case, how can it be fair to hold us responsible for our actions, to reward the good and punish the evil? If there is no such thing as chance, if everything is controlled by God, why do undeserving people win the Lottery? Why do quantum physicists insist that it is impossible to know which nucleus in a sample of radioactive material we decay next? We can only explain the world in a way which both allows us free will and also accommodates chance but also affirms that everything that happens happens within the providence of God – just as light behaves both like a wave and like a stream of particles.

January 9th

Ephesians 1 v7

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.

We are free to choose. Do we walk with God? Or do we take our own way through life? If we don't walk in the Light, we get lost. Yet we all choose to go our own way. We freely choose, but we all make the wrong choice. Except Jesus. He freely chooses the right course, to walk with God. What happens is predictable. It is prophesied in the Old Testament. It was determined before time began. It is predestinated in the eternal present of God. The one man Who made the right choice suffers the penalty due to all His brothers and sisters who have freely chosen to walk in the ways of darkness and, by doing so, redeems us from the consequence of our folly. Mary had to bear Him. Judas had to betray Him. But they both chose freely, the one to accept God's Will for her life, the other assist those who would destroy Jesus.

January 10th

Ephesians 1 v8

Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence.

I have found myself praying a lot lately for wisdom. What ought I to do? How should I feel about things? How do I make sense of what is happening to me? What is my appropriate reaction towards those who I think have not treated me right? *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.* The wise man builds his house on the Rock, which is Christ, the Word of God. Wisdom consists in walking in the ways of God's Law. What I always come back to eventually is that God's Law is summarised as love. When we pray for wisdom, we pray for the grace to love, both our neighbours and those whom we construe (sometimes falsely perhaps) as our enemies.

January 11th

Ephesians 1 v9

Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.

Before his conversion, Saul had believed that the Jesus movement was a bad thing. Jesus and His followers appeared to be undermining the principles on which religion was based. Their understanding of the Law and the Prophets (the OT) was different from that of the Sadducees

and Pharisees. The people of the Way were dangerously lax in their application of the finer points of the Law, insufficiently concerned about purity, too generous towards sinners and worryingly open to the admission of Samaritans and Gentiles into the people of God. So Saul set out to destroy the nascent Church. Then God revealed to Saul the truth that the Way of Jesus is the Way of God, that the Kingdom of Heaven is open to all peoples, that all the commandments have to be read in the Light of love, that *This is a true saying, and worthy of all men to be received, That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*, of whom Paul acknowledged that he was chief. Are you & I too set in our own understanding of God's Will for the world or are we open to the possibility that He may be teaching us something new?

January 12th (Epiphany 1)

Ephesians 1 v10

That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather into one all things in

Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.

O LORD, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people which call upon thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

A friend is very fond of this collect. We desperately desire to do what we ought to do, but we often feel that we don't know what that is and that even when we do know what our duty is we don't know how to go about doing it. We need God's grace if we are to play our part in His plan for the world.

Pause for a moment and think about this verse. This tiny baby we remembered only a week ago, this baby Who grew up to be the man Jesus Christ, Who suffered and died for us, and rose again on the third day is our Lord in Heaven above. *All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made...All things were created by him and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.* This too is Who Jesus is and we *are the body of Christ, and members in particular.* We each have our part in this cosmic salvation of which Paul writes. We pray therefore that we may both perceive and know what things we ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same.

January 13th

Ephesians 1 v11

In whom we also have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.

I know I risk both feeling & sounding superior, but I often think, when I hear about the troubles people get themselves into by their own folly or sin – addictions, sexual immorality, excessive love of money & material things, over consumption, risky cosmetic medical procedures, selfishness, greed, violence – that these problems have their origin in a sense of purposelessness in people's lives. They don't know what they're here for. They don't know where life is leading. If only they could understand what St Paul is saying in today's verse about why we are here, what is our purpose in life and where we shall be eternally, they wouldn't feel the need for things like drugs, casual relationships, wealth, power, etc. It is the Church's task to tell the world where true wisdom may be found. But I must be careful in judging others. There, but for the grace of God, go I.

January 14th

Ephesians 1 v12

That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. Why do we try to get people to join the Church? Is it because, if we don't, our churches will die because there are too few people to do the work, too little money to pay the bills and an increasingly ruthless management approach in the Church of England which is ready to pull out the rug from under struggling churches and invest in areas where the bishops think our resources might be better spent? No, no & no.

We share our faith with others because it is to the glory of God that people acknowledge Him and worship Him. We share our faith because we love other people. If people come to know Jesus, they have a better life here on earth and an eternity in heaven to look forward to. We share our faith because the world would be a better place if a greater proportion of us honoured God and obeyed His Commandments. Numerical growth may or may not follow from our sharing of our faith, but numbers aren't the point. The point is to love God and, by His grace, to do His Will in the world.

January 15th

Ephesians 1 v13

In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.

Following his conversion and as he fulfilled his vocation to be an apostle, Paul's life was to the glory of God. We have come to know Jesus through many different means, but if we know Him and seek by His grace to fulfil our calling whatever it might be, our lives are as much to the glory of God as was Paul's. We're not all called to be apostles. We are all called to be faithful and *to do [our] duty in that state of life, unto which it shall please God to call [us]*

January 16th

Ephesians 1 v13

In whom after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.

The Holy Spirit moved on the face of the waters at the creation of the universe. He is one with the Father and the Son in the divine work of Creation, Salvation & Sanctification. It was the work of the Holy Spirit to bring us to faith. He gave us the people who taught us about Jesus, the people who prayed for us. He opened our eyes to the wonder of God's work in the world. He taught us to pray & supported us in our prayers. By His grace, in Baptism we received *death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness: for being by nature born in sin, and the children of wrath, we are hereby made the children of grace.* As members of God's Church, we are members of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. He reveals Christ to us, He supports us in our Christian lives in so many diverse ways. Having brought us to know Jesus, the Holy Spirit is the confirmation, the seal of our faith.

January 17th

Ephesians 1 v14

Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

As I'm writing these notes, I'm going through the travails of purchasing a house. When we exchange contracts, I shall have to pay a deposit of 10% of the purchase price. At completion, I shall pay the rest and the house will be wholly mine. Between contract & completion, the vendors will have the use of that 10%. After completion they will have it all. Under the terms of God's covenant with us, when we sign up, we receive a deposit, an earnest of what will be our inheritance and we can enjoy that deposit now, in anticipation of receiving everything at completion.

January 18th (Week of Prayer for Christian Unity)

Ephesians 1 v15

Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints.

We used to make much more of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity than we tend to now. We used to attend one another's churches or invite preachers from other churches to preach in our own. There has been a lot of progress since the days when we distrusted one another as potential rivals or even as opponents. National & international discussions have resulted in a deeper understanding of what we believe such that some of the doctrines which divided us no longer do so so much. Different denominations of the Church work together in missionary & charitable work. There is more in common than there used to be in the way we conduct our services, though most of us probably prefer what we're used to when we go to Church. The basis of Church unity is, however, that faith in Jesus demands *love unto all the saints*, meaning here all Christian people.

More especially, we pray for the good estate of the Catholick Church; that it may be so guided and governed by thy good Spirit, that all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life.

January 19th (Epiphany 2)

Ephesians 1 v16

Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.

I know that I am not always as appreciative of other people as I ought to be. Some people are difficult. Some people are easy to get on with & it is too easy to take them for granted. It is good to be thankful for other people & to hold one another in our prayers. Peace is not merely the absence of strife. Peace is about being at peace with God and God is love.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth; Mercifully hear the supplications of thy people, and grant us thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

January 20th

Ephesians 1 v17

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.

When I pray for people, it may be because they are sick or bereaved or they are facing problems in their lives – perhaps with work or in their family life. I may pray that they may come to the knowledge of God if they don't already know Him or that their relationship with Him may be deepened if they do already know Him. I can't say that I often pray as Paul prays here for the Ephesians, but maybe we should pray for one another like Paul more often. We all need wisdom. We all need to grow in the knowledge of God Whom to know is to have eternal life.

January 21st

Ephesians 1 v18

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.

We are indeed not always as appreciative of other people as we ought to be. We take them for granted. We can be quite casual in our relationships, forgetting the Golden Rule: *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.* We may also be quite casual in our relationship with God, taking for granted Who He is and what He has done for us and being insufficiently mindful both of the coming judgment and of the good things which await those who believe in Him.

January 22nd

Ephesians 1 v19

And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power.

Another sickening report of child abuse within the Church has just been published. A very powerful man with a prestigious position in the Church abused powerless young people over a period of many years & other powerful people within the Church failed to stop Him. Ultimately, all power derives from God & God is love. So where does God stand in all this, on the side of those who abuse their worldly power to inflict pain on others or on the side of those who are powerless in worldly terms and the victims of the powerful? The answer is obvious. So why don't we, the Church, act on what we know?

January 23rd

Ephesians 1 v20

Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.

As the Son of God, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, Christ's power is limitless, yet He gave all that up and made Himself powerless in solidarity both with the victims of human wickedness and the perpetrators. *My strength is made perfect in weakness.* How does that work out in practice?

On Remembrance Sunday last year, one of the readings was from the Book of Jonah. Assyria was an evil empire with Nineveh its capital city. God told the prophet Jonah to go to Nineveh and pronounce its much deserved destruction, an event which would set free its subject peoples and put an end to its wars of aggression. At first Jonah was afraid to go and attempted to flee away from God and his duty by sea. A storm and a specially created sea monster brought him back and Jonah then obeyed God and proclaimed Nineveh's doom. To his astonishment and anger, the people of Nineveh then repented of their sins and God forgave them. We might wage a just war against an evil empire. It would be good if our forces proved more powerful than theirs and we won the victory by force of arms, ending oppression, setting captives free, etc.. It would be better still, however, if the evil empire repented and voluntarily ended oppression and set the captives free, also thereby saving themselves from the defeat which would have been justly theirs. But how would we achieve such a victory as that? Jesus overcame the evil one by the sacrifice of Himself.

January 24th

Ephesians 1 v21

Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. In the aftermath of war, there is desolation. More people died of the flu at the end of the Great War than in the fighting. Crops are not planted or are destroyed in the fighting. People are displaced, homes and essential infrastructure destroyed. Medics struggle to care for the sick and injured in what is left of hospitals and other services. Too often, war deepens hatreds which are passed onto generations yet to come and the whole sorry business keeps repeating. Yet the victory one by Christ's sacrifice of Himself in love brings glory to Him & to those who follow.

The Son of God goes forth to war,
A kingly crown to gain;
His blood-red banner streams afar:
Who follows in His train?
Who best can drink His cup of woe,
Triumphant over pain,
Who patient bears his cross below—
He follows in His train.

A noble army, men and boys,
The matron and the maid,
Around the Saviour's throne rejoice,
In robes of light arrayed.
They climbed the steep ascent of Heav'n,
Through peril, toil and pain;
O God, to us may grace be giv'n,
To follow in their train.

January 25th (Conversion of St Paul)

Ephesians 1 v22

And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church.

What a change in perspective. Saul the persecutor had regarded Jesus and those who followed Him as a menace, a rabble rouser, a false teacher and a political threat. And then he actually met Jesus and, by the grace of God, came to recognise Jesus as *the head over all things*. Only God could bring about such a conversion. Only God could bring about anyone's conversion to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is all of God. It requires our freely offered acceptance of the grace which makes faith possible. Pray for the conversion of your non-believing friends and, insofar as you are able, teach them the Truth which is in Christ by your words and your example.

O GOD, who, through the preaching of the blessed Apostle Saint Paul, hast caused the light of the Gospel to shine throughout the world; Grant, we beseech thee, that we, having his wonderful conversion in remembrance, may shew forth our thankfulness unto thee for the same, by following the holy doctrine which he taught; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

January 26th (Epiphany 3)

Ephesians 1 v23

Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

God dwells in Christ. Christ dwells in us. We are His Body. We, the Church, are filled and animated by His Spirit. Never forget that.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth thy right hand to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

January 27th

Ephesians 2 v1

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.

Both the old and the new testament offer us two choices and only two. There is the way of life and the way of death. Life is to know God and to keep His commandments. As Christians, we know that we have a friend who will always be with us, a friend to whom we can take all our troubles and who shares in all our joys. We have a moral code – the only perfect moral code – in the Bible. We live in the knowledge that the joys of this life are but a foretaste of what is to come. The way of death is the half life, the existence of people who don't know what really matters in life, who have no omnipotent friend to whom to turn, who have no sense of purpose or meaningful direction in their lives, who rely on the world for their moral code, and who have no expectation of an eternal rest in our Father's house. Life – both mortal and eternal – is the gift of God. It is He Who quickens us. But we who know Him, like St Paul, can be His instruments in quickening others when we share what we know with those who don't yet know or who have rejected what they do know. The Word of God is the Word of life.

January 28th

Ephesians 2 v2

Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world.

There is poster which asks the question, *If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?* Human beings are basically herd animals. Like our near relatives, such as gorillas and chimpanzees, we feel the need to belong to the group. As we grow up, we absorb what the people around us expect of us. Generally, we conform to society's expectations. If we don't, we may find ourselves ostracised or even punished. Society looks after us and we look after other people, informally in the family or as neighbours, more formally we are protected by the army, the NHS, etc. We go through school & maybe college. We look for a job. We form relationships. We're not too eccentric in our choice of clothes, our taste in the arts & entertainment, sport, etc.. Most of us are naturally drawn to a narrow range of possibilities when it comes to politics. If we were all individuals going our own way irrespective of the needs or wishes of other people, we'd all be in trouble. And yet, isn't it too easy to run with the herd? Doesn't Jesus ask us to be something more than good citizens?

January 29th

Ephesians 2v2

According to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.

Can we think of generally accepted social conventions which are actually diabolical? It is easiest to start with the past. Slavery, sending boys up chimneys, state administered torture, public executions and numerous other practices which we regard as abhorrent were once generally accepted and it was a brave person who challenged them. Or we might look overseas to countries in which the oppression of women, the suppression of dissent and the ruthless exploitation of migrant labour are normal. If we can't see any commonly held beliefs and practices in modern England which fail to conform to God's Law of Justice and Mercy, is that because we have already established heaven on earth or could we be blind to our own failings?

January 30th

Ephesians 2 v3

Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

In one respect, Paul had it easy. After his conversion, he was an entirely different man from what he had been before. He moved in a Gentile world, surrounded by pagans who worshipped idols, ruthless Romans, licentious Caesars, etc.. He found himself ostracised from the Jewish community to which he had belonged and which he still loved. He had become a leader in what was still a minority religion, still finding its feet. Paul's life changed entirely when he became a Christian. He had to think everything through, how much of the Law of Moses still applied, how far he could compromise with contemporary pagan society, and give a lead to others who were much less able than he was to work out the significance of what Jesus had done in their lives, when *he quickened*, [those] *who were dead in trespasses and sins*. Now most of us were brought up in a nominally Christian society. We might have been baptised as babies & brought up by a Christian family and belonging to a local Church. It can be much harder for us to see what difference it makes to be a Christian. Doesn't Jesus ask us to be something more than good citizens?

January 31st

Ephesians 2 vv 4&5

But, God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together in Christ Jesus.

God loves us just as we are. He loves sinners. He loves those people who deliberately reject Him; He loves those who are indifferent to Him. Active opponent of religion or just indifferent; militant atheist; agnostic or complacently conventional Christian, God loves us. Without Him, we are effectively dead, but He quickens us by His life-giving Holy Spirit when He gives us the gifts of faith & repentance, signed and sealed in the waters of Baptism. He raises us from the death of sin with Christ, Who, having taken on Himself the sins of the whole world and suffered the penalty of sin, death, on our behalf, rose again from the dead. We are risen with Him and in Him. The community to which we truly belong is the Body of Christ, the Church.

1 Alleluia, alleluia!

Hearts to heav'n and voices
raise:

sing to God a hymn of
gladness,

sing to God a hymn of praise.

He, who on the cross a victim
for the world's salvation bled,
Jesus Christ, the King of glory,
now is risen from the dead.

2 Now the iron bars are broken,
Christ from death to life is
born,

glorious life, and life immortal,
on the holy Easter morn.

Christ has triumphed, and we
conquer

by His mighty enterprise;

we with Him to life eternal

by His resurrection rise.

3 Christ is risen, Christ, the
first-fruits

of the holy harvest field,
which will all its full

abundance

at His second coming yield.

Then the golden ears of harvest
will their heads before Him
wave,

ripened by His glorious
sunshine

from the furrows of the grave.

4 Christ is risen, we are risen!

Shed upon us heav'nly grace,
rain and dew and gleams of

glory

from the brightness of Thy face,
that we, with our hearts in

heaven,

here on earth may fruitful be,

and by angel hands be

gathered,

and be ever, Lord, with Thee.

5 Alleluia, alleluia!

Glory be to God on high!

Alleluia! to the Saviour

who has gained the victory!

Alleluia! to the Spirit,

fount of love and sanctity!

Alleluia, alleluia

to the Triune Majesty!

February 1st

Ephesians 2 v5

By grace ye are saved.

And that's it. Salvation is God's free gift to us. We don't have to earn it. We don't have to deserve it. We don't have to be especially good people. God loves us as we are and Salvation is His free gift to us. All we have to do is to repent & believe.

February 2nd (Candlemas)

Ephesians 2 v6

And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

ALMIGHTY and everliving God, we humbly beseech thy Majesty, that, as thy only-begotten Son was this day presented in the temple in substance of our flesh, so we may be presented unto thee with pure and clean hearts, by the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* Mary & Joseph brought the 40 day old Jesus to the Temple to present Him to God as the first born Son & for Mary to go through the rites of purification. He was recognised by two faithful old people, Simeon and Hannah. Simeon blessed the Holy Family and spoke of Christ in prophecy. Hannah also gave thanks and spoke of Jesus to all who looked for redemption.

For that child so dear and gentle is our Lord in heaven above

And he leads his children on to the place where he is gone.

He was once a seven week old baby, just as we were. Now He reigns in glory, as shall we through His grace.

February 3rd

Ephesians 2 v7

That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

When Moses was addressing the Children of Israel at the end of the forty years wandering in the wilderness, just before they entered into the Promised Land, he reminded the people, ⁷The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye *were* the fewest of all people: ⁸But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. It's the same in the New Testament. God does not redeem His people because they're anything special. He redeems us because He is God.

February 4th

Ephesians 2 v8

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.

Many years ago, when I lived in college, someone thanked me because, when he heard me through the open windows laughing at a radio comedy, he too switched on, tuned in and enjoyed the programme. The programme was provided by the BBC – the actors, producers, directors, technicians, etc.. All we had to do was to tune in. In order to tune in, we had to know that the programme was available. At some stage, someone must have taught us how to switch on our radios and tune in. We might even have read the manual!

February 5th

Ephesians 2 v9

Not of works lest any man should boast.

Rabbi Lionel Blue used to tell a story about one Day of Atonement service in a synagogue. The Rabbi prostrated himself before the congregation and cried out, “O Lord, I am but dust and ashes in your sight, a sinner who is unworthy of the least of your mercies.” The President of the Synagogue then prostrated himself before the congregation and cried out, “O Lord, I am but dust and ashes in your sight, a sinner who is unworthy of the least of your mercies.” The synagogue cleaner then prostrated himself before the congregation and cried out, “O Lord, I am but dust and ashes in your sight, a sinner who is unworthy of the least of your mercies.” Someone was heard to mutter, “Who is he to call himself but dust and ashes unworthy of the least of God’s mercies.” Spiritual pride can many forms – for Christians as well as Jews.

February 6th

Ephesians 2 v10

For we are his workmanship, created into Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. God has done all the work in creating us, redeeming us & sanctifying us. We are His workmanship. He has, however, created, redeemed & sanctified us for a purpose – that we should live righteous lives, not in order to earn His love, but simply because He loves us & we love Him. Similarly in Deuteronomy 7, God had redeemed Israel just because He loved them, but they were then expected to walk in His way.

February 7th

Ephesians 2 vv 11&12

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

One of the divisions in the Roman world was between Jew and Gentile. Between them there was often suspicion & sometimes much worse. The Jews were privileged to have had the revelation of God which we call the Old Testament. Christ was born a Jew. It was a powerful temptation to feel superior to the Gentiles. On the other hand, to the Gentiles, the Jews appeared an odd lot of people who refused to integrate fully with the world around them, the Roman world. These tensions persisted in the early Church which had both Jewish & Gentile members. Gentile converts, who came quickly to outnumber Jewish Christians must not forget their debt to the Jewish heritage of the Church. Neither must the Jewish Christians think of themselves as superior to those who had been pagans before they came to know Christ.

February 8th

Ephesians 2 vv 13&14

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

By His Death on the Cross, Christ breaks down the barrier between heaven and earth, between God & humanity. In Him, we are one with God & He with us. If Jewish Christians are one with God in Christ & Gentile Christians are one with God in Christ, it follows that Jews and Gentiles within the Church, the Body of Christ, are one with one another. Christ breaks down all the barriers. If we are His people, we are one with one another.

Christian unity is essential in every sense of that word. It is of our essence, our nature, our being that we are one with one another in Christ. It is also essential to our mission. A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

February 9th (Epiphany 5)

Ephesians 2 v15

Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace.

The Jews had the Law of Moses. The Gentiles didn't. Under the terms of the Old Testament, the Jews were obliged to obey the Law. God is holy. God's people are called to be holy. Human holiness would be manifest in obedience to God's Law, summarised in the twin commandments to love God & neighbour. God is holy; God is love. Holy people keep God's law and, in that respect, they become like Him. Humanity, however, is incapable of keeping God's Law. We are all sinners. We cannot justify ourselves before God by claiming to keep His Law. Only Jesus kept the Law and it is only in Him that we are justified. That is true for Jews who knew the Law & for Gentiles who didn't – though conscience and a rational appreciation of nature go a long way towards teaching even those without law what is right & what is wrong. If we don't obey the Law, the Law condemns us. Good people don't steal. When bad people steal, they are condemned by the Law. Judged by the Law, then (perfect love), we are all condemned. Dwelling in faith in Christ (perfect love made flesh) we are set free from sin. Whether Jew or Gentile, we are justified in Christ alone. The twain (Jew & Gentile) are one in Christ. There therefore ought to be peace between Jew & Gentile and the fact that there so often isn't is an indication of how much we still have to learn about God.

O LORD, we beseech thee to keep thy Church and household continually in thy true religion; that they who do lean only upon the hope of thy heavenly grace may evermore be defended by thy mighty power; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

February 10th

Ephesians 2 v16

And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.

The Cross is the key. What Christ suffered on the Cross is the ultimate expression both of divine love and of human love. The self-sacrificial love of Jesus breaks down the barrier (sin) between us and God. It therefore breaks down the barriers between human beings. The fact that there is disunity within the Church of God is a scandal & a denial of what it means to be a Christian – but how hard it is to be in love & charity with all our neighbours.

February 11th

Ephesians 2 v17

And came and preached peace to you which were far off, and to them that were nigh.

When He was on earth with His human body, He engaged almost exclusively with Jews. Before He ascended into Heaven, He commanded His Church to proclaim the Gospel to all nations – the Gentiles.

Where do we stand with regard to mission? Do we pray for mission? Do we support missionary societies or specific mission partners? Do we support agents for mission at home, such as the Church Army? What about ourselves personally? Do we share our faith with the people around us?

February 12th

Ephesians 2 v18

For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

One of the things you notice reading the Bible is that sometimes people seem to converse with God almost as though He were a human friend or a neighbour and sometimes they are almost overwhelmed by fear and awe in His Presence. Both are aspects of our relationship with God. We talk to Him in prayer as a friend. We are swept up into the heavens in holy worship. There is a danger that we may feel so overwhelmed by the thought of Who God is and how unworthy we are that we don't feel able to approach Him at all. On the other hand there is the danger, I think the greater danger, of becoming so casual in our relationship with God that we lose our sense of what a privilege it is to come into His Presence and worship Him.

That it may please thee to give us an heart to love and dread thee, and diligently to live after thy commandments; *We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.* That it may please thee to give to all thy people increase of grace to hear meekly thy Word, and to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit; *We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.* That it may please thee to bring into the way of truth all such as have erred, and are deceived; *We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.* That it may please thee to strengthen such as do stand; and to comfort and help the weak-hearted; and to raise up them that fall; and finally to beat down Satan under our feet; *We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.*

February 13th

Ephesians 2 v19

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.

Someone remarked to me the other day that we now have a third generation of people who know very little about the Church. They don't know even what we think of as the most popular Bible stories. They don't know our hymns or prayers. They're not sure how they are expected to behave or dress. Sometimes this puts people off coming at all. If they do come, they may feel awkward. They may even subconsciously assert their own personalities by going against our "rules". It can be difficult if regular worshippers are put off concentrating on what they are doing by people behaving unconventionally. It is unconscionable to make people feel unwelcome or unwanted in Church. Paul is dealing with Jews and Gentiles in the Church at Ephesus. Do they all feel that they belong? In C21 Britain do lifelong traditional Christians, new young believers and people who come occasionally for christenings, weddings and funerals all feel that they have an equal right to be here, the simple fact that Christ died on the Cross for us.

February 14th

Ephesians 2 v20

And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.

As Christians, we are both creatures of the flesh and of the Holy Spirit. We have been baptised. We have faith. We do repent of our sins. We seek, by God's grace, to live good lives, growing more Christlike as the years go by. But we are not yet made perfect and shall not be so until we *put off this tabernacle*. Then we shall be like Him. For now, our flesh (basic human nature) lusts against the Spirit.

The Church too is a divine creation (the Temple of the Holy Spirit) and a human institution, all too often subject to the temptations which beset all human institutions: the love of money & power; the propensity to abuse the vulnerable; the willingness to cover up, to tell lies; to protect the institution and senior management at the expense of justice; to judge success by the world's standards (numbers, profitability, etc.) rather than by God's standards.

February 15th

Ephesians 2 v21

In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord.

Obviously, we have to use the resources with which we are entrusted efficiently. Both volunteer and professional staff have the right to be treated with respect. There has to be accountability with regard to money and other tangible assets. A certain amount of administration is unavoidable. However there is a danger of putting the cart before the horse with out mission action planning, our diocesan strategies, our parish profiles, our obsession with statistics, etc.. People like to talk about running the Church as a business but many of us Christians feel uneasy about this kind of talk. Doesn't the Good Shepherd leave the 99 sheep in the wilderness & go and seek for the one that was lost? The Church of England feels very different from the Church of Christ as described here by St Paul.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who alone workest great marvels; Send down upon our Bishops, and Curates, and all Congregations committed to their charge, the healthful Spirit of thy grace; and that they may truly please thee, pour upon them the continual dew of thy blessing. Grant this, O Lord, for the honour of our Advocate and Mediator, Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

16th February (Septuagesima)

Ephesians 2 v22

In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

It used to worry me that PCC meetings generally began with the accounts, moved on to reports on the buildings, maybe took a look at our social programme and received reports from various synods. There was never any time or enthusiasm (at least on my part) to talk about mission or pastoral care or community engagement and discussions about worship were more likely to focus on our differences of opinion than on the glory of God. I stopped worrying about this because I came to accept that the role of PCC meetings (at least in this parish) was to deal with these mundane issues and we dealt with mission, pastoral care & community engagement outside PCC. But there remains the thought that, not only in our parish but in the C of E in general the mundane receives a higher priority than it ought considering Whose Body we are.

O LORD, we beseech thee favourably to hear the prayers of thy people; that we, who are justly punished for our offences, may be mercifully delivered by thy goodness, for the glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

February 17th

Ephesians 3 vv 1-6

We've reached a point where we sometimes need to take several verses at a time. So I can't print them out for you. Please see your own Bible. It is implicit in the OT that God would include all nations (the Gentiles) in His Kingdom. This was not generally understood, however, until the coming of Jesus and, even then, it took a while before the penny dropped. The most notable person to come to this understanding was Paul, the result of his vision on the Road to Damascus. He then became one of the most effective and energetic in proclaiming this Good News to Jew and Gentile alike. This really is Good News. We are heirs of God's Kingdom. We are members of Christ's Body. We all share in God's promises.

The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ, her Lord
She is His new creation
By water and the Word
From heaven, He came and
sought her
To be His holy bride
With His own blood He bought
her
And for her life He died

Elect from every nation
Yet one o'er all the earth
Her charter of salvation
One Lord, one faith, one birth
One holy name she blesses
Partakes one holy food
And to one hope she presses
With every grace endued

February 18th

Ephesians 3vv 7&8

Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Two amazing things. The obvious one is that *the unsearchable riches of Christ* are offered to absolutely anyone who is open to receiving them. The slightly less obvious amazing truth is that this Gospel is proclaimed so effectively by one who had actually been a persecutor of the Church. God calls the most unlikely people for the most amazing tasks and His grace is always sufficient for us.

3. O Wisdom ord'ring 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 your employ
Than he, till now so furious
Your building to destroy?

4. Lord, teach your Church the
lesson,
Still in her darkest hour
Of weakness and of danger,
To trust your hidden power:
Your grace by ways mysterious
The wrath of Earth can bind,
And in Thy boldest rival
Your chosen saint can find.

February 19th

Ephesians 3v9

And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ. The teaching which may be derived from these somewhat convoluted words is that everything is working out in accordance with God's eternal purposes. The Christ Who was there at the beginning worked with the Father & the Holy Spirit to create everything that is. It was also the case that He would die for the sins of the world and rise again. With the Father & the Son, the Holy Spirit is eternal. *God is working His purpose out* as Father, Son & Holy Spirit. Jews & Gentiles always would be reconciled to God in Christ. Human beings always would be reconciled to one another, *a great multitude of all nations, and kindreds, and people*, reconciled to God & to one another. It was always the case that you & I would be reconciled to God & to one another in Christ. There is still a long way to go before all the world's people are reconciled to God & to one another? Pray, *Thy Kingdom come, Thy Will be done.*

February 20th

Ephesians 3 vv10 & 11

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God. According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What are the principalities & powers in heavenly places to whom the manifold wisdom of God is made manifest by the Church's foundation, worship & witness? Some people think that Paul means earthly rulers, the Jewish and / or Roman leaders. They see God's power made perfect in weakness. They kill the Messiah, but God raise Him from the dead. The Holy Spirit works in the world to create thousands of Christians. The more they persecute the Church, it seems, the more she grows. Some think that Paul means by the principalities Satan and all his minions. When Jesus was rejected by those He came to save & crucified, it would have appeared that they had won. But not so, His Death and the deaths of Christian martyrs actually served to defeat the powers of darkness. Some people think that Paul means that God's holy angels themselves came to greater understanding of the love of God in the Crucifixion of Christ and the Atonement of sinners.

Tis myst'ry all: th' Immortal dies:
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries

To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.

February 21st

Ephesians 3 v12

In whom we have boldness and access by the faith of him.

When I was a small child my parents (and grandparents if I was staying with them) used to say prayers with me when I was put to bed. This is a very good thing to do for a child. It teaches the child about God. It teaches the child to pray. It encourages us to think of whom & what we should pray for and for what reasons. It binds together families, friends and other people for whom we are praying in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and who may well be praying for us.

When I was older, I started to pray for myself. But I think I was well into my teens before it struck me what an enormous & wonderful privilege it is to be able to talk to Almighty God. And we can and do through the faith of Him, our faith in Him, His faithfulness to us.

I was older still when one Sunday in St Paul's Church Herne Hill at an 8.00 Communion service I was suddenly struck by the awesomeness of what we ask and expect to receive in Holy Communion:

Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.

February 22nd

Ephesians 3 v13

Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

The Ephesian Christians must have been very worried about Paul probably in prison in Rome when he wrote this letter to them. How was he being treated? Would he be let go? Would he be executed? They would have been concerned for their friend. They might also have wondered whether God was really looking after Paul. If not, was the Gospel he preached true? They needn't have become dispirited. God's power is made perfect in our human weakness. Paul's faithfulness to the Gospel in the face of persecution is a witness of its truth both to the Church & to the world outside the Church. We are privileged to belong to a community of faithful Christians some of whose members have been faithful unto death in the most literal way. The Church is a fellowship of love of self-sacrificing love. Where we fall short of this ideal what is required is repentance – individual as well as corporate.

February 23rd (Sexagesima)

Ephesians 3 vv 14&15

*For this cause I bow my knee unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.*

The catechism begins by asking the candidate *What is your name?* Good teachers start from what the pupil knows already before assisting them to deepen their understanding. *What is your name?* Who are you? How do you think of yourself? How do other people recognise you? How do they attract your attention? How do they include you in their conversations and enterprises? Doesn't it hurt when you are called rude names? Names are important. The catechism establishes the child's Christian name and then goes on to draw out what it means to be a Christian in terms of faith, of loving God & neighbour, keeping His commandments, doing our duty, prayer, attending to His Word, participating in the Sacraments, judgment & redemption, this life & the next.

Am I being fanciful in suggesting that Paul in this verse is thinking about our surname, our family name? To which family do we belong? I'm a Knight. Maybe you're a Smith or a Jones. I know that my family would support me as I would support them. I'm proud & grateful for my heritage. Even more profoundly, I belong to the family of God – a family which all human beings are invited to belong, including those who may have very little in the way of human family or who are not proud of those they've got.

O LORD God, who seest that we put not our trust in any thing that we do; Mercifully grant that by thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

February 24th (St Matthias)

Ephesians 3 v16

That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with his might by the Spirit in the inner man.

Matthias had a challenging job. After Christ had risen into heaven, commissioning His Church to tell the good news to the whole world, a replacement for Judas had to be found to restore the number of apostles to 12 and to share in the task of bearing witness to what Jesus had said & done in His ministry from His Baptism onwards & especially of the Resurrection. It must have been a daunting task for Matthias & he

would certainly need to be *strengthened with his might by the Spirit in the inner man*. This is a grace we all need whatever our position in Christ's Church. Paul prays for this grace for all Christians, not just for apostles, clergy, missionaries and other "special" people. And what a privilege it is that that mighty, life-giving Spirit, does indeed dwell in ordinary people like you & me, giving us the strength we need to live our lives here on earth and to bring us home to heaven.

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.*

February 25th

Ephesians 3 vv 17-19

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye being rooted and grounded in love.

According to the prophet Jeremiah (17⁹), *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?* I don't know whether it's my advancing years, whether I am becoming more sensitive or whether the world is getting worse, but I find myself more and more horrified by what is going on the world – the depths of wickedness to which human beings (made in the image and likeness of God, for whom Christ died) frequently sink. I should not be surprised, I suppose. Original sin is humanity's default setting since the beginning. So maybe things aren't getting worse; it's always been this way. Perhaps we didn't know so much about it. Perhaps I hadn't learned to care so much.

But it could all be so different, if we human beings would only accept Christ into our lives and, by God's grace, co-operate with the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. *That Christ should dwell in our hearts by faith.* Insofar as we live in Him and He in us, we grow more like Him – *rooted & grounded in love.*

Jeremiah (31³³) prophesies: *After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God and they shall be my people.*

February 26th

Ephesians 3 v18

May be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length, and breadth, and depth, and height.

It's worth taking time to think about what Paul is praying for here for us Christians. It's a huge ask, but nothing is beyond God. He can and does answer all our prayers in accordance with His Will. It is certainly His Will that we and all the saints (all Christians) should *comprehend what is the length, and breadth, and depth, and height*. This prayer will not be fully answered until we get to heaven, but there is progress on earth. By His grace, co-operating with His Holy Spirit, we can and do grow to know Him better.

February 27th

Ephesians 3 v19

And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

To know God is to have eternal life. Jesus is the Way, the Truth & the Life. God is love. Christ is God. To dwell in Him is to dwell in God, to dwell in love, to have eternal life. To have Him dwell in you & me by faith is for you & I to dwell in God, to dwell in love, to have eternal life. That being the case, we are filled with the fulness of God. I must quote Colossians 1^{15ff} on the subject of Christ & Who He is. ¹⁵ *Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;*

The fulness of God dwells in Christ. In our Ephesians verse, Paul prays that the fulness of God should dwell in us. Think about it. As His Body, the Church, we are included in all those wonderful things about Jesus which Paul enumerates in Colossians. This is why I find it so difficult to understand how we can be half-hearted about our faith. If what we believe were untrue it would be irrelevant to life on earth, possibly even harmful. But, given that it is true, *Love so amazing, so divine, demands, my soul, my life, my all.*

February 28th

Ephesians 3 v20

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

God hears our prayers and there is no limit to His power. He cares for us. We can cast our cares on Him. We ought to cast our cares on Him. Given that not a sparrow falls outwith God's Providence, I don't think that there is anything too petty to ask Him. If it's worrying you, God cares and it's right to ask for His help, even if you've got yourself into a mess by your own stupidity or sin.

1 What a friend we have in
Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!

2 Have we trials and
temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be
discouraged;
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Can we find a friend so faithful

who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every
weakness;
take it to the Lord in prayer!

3 Are we weak and heavy
laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Jesus only is our refuge--
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do thy friends despise, forsake
you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and
shield thee;
Thou wilt find a solace there.

March 1st

Ephesians 3 v 21

*Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages,
world without end. Amen.*

The prayer book ideal is Morning & Evening Prayer daily plus Holy Communion on Sundays & other major holy days. This has always been more honoured in the breach than in the observance, but the serious minded have tried hard and many parish churches in our lifetimes would have a pattern of daily services usually said and two or three Sunday services of which two would be sung. Some no doubt still do, but a diminishing number. In my time in Cuxton & Halling, Holy Communion diminished from almost daily to Sundays & very major holy days only, sung Evensong fizzled out on Sundays and, post -

CoViD, Mattins was said in the Rectory rather than the Church. How often should we meet as a Church to worship God together? How high a priority ought it be for us to attend the public services in our own churches? Are our individual prayers said at home sufficient? Or is our worship mainly expressed in the way we live our lives – work, school, shopping, golf, gardening, housework, etc.? Individual prayer and treating our work as an offering to God are good, but I feel that we are missing something important if we don't meet together with other Christians for worship regularly & frequently. If we don't, we are spiritually diminished. Moreover, if we don't commit ourselves to our Church, we may find that we have no Church to attend when we do feel like it.

March 2nd (Quinquagesima)

Ephesians 4 vv 1-3

O LORD, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth; Send thy Holy Ghost and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee; Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen.*

Love / charity is what it's all about. Love really does make the world go round absolutely literally because God is love and nothing happens outside of His Providence. Love is the foundation of our Christian life. Love is our motivation for keeping God's Commandments. All God's Commandments are summarised in the Commandment to love. We speak of the *fellowship of the Holy Spirit*. That fellowship is a communion / community of love. Love, therefore, is what binds the Church together and the motivation for her to worship God, to proclaim the Gospel, to care for people in need and to play her part in transforming the kingdoms of this world into the Kingdom of God. Insofar as our love is lacking in these respects, this is sin and sin must be repented of, both our individual sins and our corporate sins as a Church and as a nation.

March 3rd

Ephesians 4 v4

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling. That Body includes Anglicans & Roman Catholics, Orthodox & Pentecostals, Baptists and Christians of any denomination you can think of. It also includes the people we've fallen out with, the ones who don't

share our taste in worship & the ones who have different ideas from ours about doctrine and Christian ethics or morality.

March 4th

Ephesians 4 v5

One Lord, one faith, one Baptism.

We are all called, united in the hope of our calling, by that one Holy Spirit. But is there a limit as to who should be included? It does trouble me, for example, that the Salvation Army doesn't practise Baptism or celebrate Holy Communion. No-one should doubt that Salvationists are true Christians, but I'd be more comfortable if they did what Jesus told us to do regarding the Sacraments. What about Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, Spiritualists & Unitarians? Most Christians are of the opinion that these groups have strayed too far from the basics as set out in the Bible, proclaimed in the Creeds and to which the historic formulae of the Christian Churches bear witness, that they are not part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. In the end, however, God is their judge, not you or I. In Church history, there have been schisms (splits) over issues which many of us find hard even to understand. Christians have excommunicated & even persecuted one another over issues such as the relationships within the Trinity and what is means for Christ to be both fully human and fully divine. These issues are sometimes very far from unimportant, but the truly important point has been lost if Christians are hating one another because they have different understandings of the nature of God Who is love. Whatever our differences, we are called to love one another & that includes people of other religions and of none as well as those who call themselves Christians.

March 5th (Ash Wednesday)

Ephesians 4 v6

One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. *We believe in one God* begins the Creed. God is one. What divides us from God is sin. The remedy for sin is atONement. Christ's Death on the Cross supplies the atONement for all our sins. Our part is to have faith in God in Christ & to repent of our sins. Lent is a preparation for Easter as life on earth is a preparation for heaven. We are invited at this time of year especially to examine ourselves so that we may discern & repent of the sins which divide us from God and from one another – that

we may be at one with God and with our fellow Christians, with humanity in general and with the whole Creation.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent; Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

March 6th

Ephesians 4 v7

But unto ever one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

Note that *every one of us*. Each of us has a place within God's Church, a vocation and we don't have to feel unworthy or inadequate to fulfil our calling because God supplies each & everyone of us with the grace that we need to fulfil His purpose for our lives.

March 7th

Ephesians 4 vv 8-10

⁸ Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. ⁹ (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?¹⁰ He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

He led captivity captive is a quotation from Psalm 68. By His Death on the Cross, Jesus overcame all the power of the Evil One, all his hosts. They were effectively prisoners of war, whose capture emphasis the totality of the victory and the might of the Victor, might made manifest in self-sacrificial love. Before we were redeemed in Christ, we were slaves to sin. We were in thrall to the temptations of the devil & the weakness of the flesh. It was like we were in captivity to evil. Jesus sets us free by His Blood. Poetically put, our captivity is now captured by Christ. Our gaolers are now His prisoners. The conquering Hero ascends to heaven and displays His Triumph. He then distributes His largesse to His followers – the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

1 Conquering kings their titles
take

from the thousands he hath
freed.

from the lands they captive
make;

Jesus, from a nobler deed,

2 Yes: none other name is given
unto mortals under heaven,

which can make the dead arise
and exalt them to the skies.

3 That which Christ so hardly
wrought,
that which he so dearly bought,
that salvation, brethren say,
shall we madly cast away?

4 Rather gladly for that name
bear the cross, endure the
shame;

joyfully for him to die
is not death but victory.

5 Jesu, who dost condescend
to be called the sinner's friend,
hear us, as to thee we pray,
glorying in thy name today.

6 Glory to the Father be,
glory, Holy Son, to thee,
glory to the Holy Ghost,
from the saints and angel-host

March 8th

Ephesians 4 v11

And he gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers.

I remember being a student and preaching on this passage at St Mark's Headington on St Mark's Day when it is the epistle. I remember struggling over St Paul's Greek to get the exact meaning. Was the congregation interested in my scholarly efforts? Were they edified by them? Their Church being where it is, perhaps they were blessed by or had to endure many sermons by Theology students. We were keen. The congregation wanted to encourage us. How did we help them? The preacher's task is to understand the Word of God insofar as, by God's grace he is able to, to apply its eternal truths to the present circumstances of both the Church & the world, & to do so in an intelligible manner. No small task! Pray for preachers. On the particular issue of explaining the underlying Greek or Hebrew, discussing a variety of scholarly opinions and addressing the historical context, it depends on the congregation! Some congregations really appreciate that sort of detail & derive personal satisfaction from following the preacher's logic to its conclusions. Others would not have the background to take all that in & would want the preacher to come straight to the point. Most congregations are probably like that latter, but a good preacher does not patronise them & he certainly doesn't present as Gospel truth what are in effect nothing more than his own opinions.

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.*

March 9th (Lent 1)

Ephesians 4 v12

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

So what are all these apostles & prophets, evangelists & pastors & teachers for? What are bishops for? And archbishops? Popes? Parish clergy? What are they all for? To enjoy other people's admiration & respect? To impress people with their holiness, wisdom, pastoral manner & eloquence? Pau tells what all these prominent people in the Church are for and it is not for self-aggrandisement or the adulation of the masses.

O LORD, who for our sake didst fast forty days and forty nights; Give us grace to use such abstinence, that, our flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may ever obey thy godly motions in righteousness, and true holiness, to thy honour and glory, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

March 10th

Ephesians 4 v13

Till we all come in the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

I can think of three aspects of Church growth. The first is the obvious one, that our churches should grow in number. We need more people to keep the show on the road. Less self-centredly, we might consider that it is very much to the advantage of human beings to become members of God's Church and that it is to His glory when they do. The Good Shepherd finds the lost sheep. The prodigal son returns home. The lost coin is found. The tax-collector leaves the receipt of custom & follows Jesus. The despised sinner washes His feet and finds forgiveness for her many sins. Paul isn't referring to that kind of Church growth here. What he means is that both individual Christians and churches ought to grow up. It is in our DNA to mature into the likeness of Christ. God sends all these ministers to help us. He give us the life-giving Holy Spirit to promote our growth.

But too often we prefer to remain children in the faith. We are content as we are & don't seek for more. We don't want to accept more responsibility. We may even indulge ourselves in childish tantrums when we don't get our own way, a kind of sibling rivalry. Yet we are nourished by the Bread of Life & we are what we eat.

March 11th

Ephesians 4 v14

That we henceforth may be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

Suppose you're taking a group of young children for a walk. At least at the beginning, they will be full of enthusiasm. In fact you might have to rein them in a bit to stop them running in the road, climbing on walls or trees, running off the path possibly into danger. They are likely to take a lot of interest in what they see and may want to pick up and take home some of the things they find, some not entirely suitable because they are dirty or bulky or ought not to be taken away such as flowers. They may play games on the way. You'll have to comfort those who get stung by nettles or insects. There may be teasing and play fights which sometimes turn nasty. They might challenge your authority.

Depending on the age of the children, there will very likely come a time when they are tired. You might even have to carry them. What about a group of Christians walking in the Way? Hopefully, they have the enthusiasm, the desire to explore, the inquisitive nature of children. Hopefully they trust the Leader and accept His authority. But what if they don't? What if they quarrel among themselves, argue about the route, get lost, fall out over what activities they want to perform, pick up and want to take home dirty rubbish or things that don't belong to them? What if they quarrel among themselves, make an excessive fuss about minor matters and tire before they reach journey's end? This mess of a Church seems like a job for apostles & prophets, evangelists & pastors & teachers, bishops for, and archbishops, Popes & Parish clergy to sort out. But, if these ministers have been successful and if they have enjoyed the respect of their congregations, things ought never to have got to this stage, because their flocks have actually become mature Christians & don't behave like children.

March 12th

Ephesians 4 v15

But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into all things in him, which is the head, even Christ.

ALMIGHTY and everliving God, who by thy holy Apostle hast taught us to make prayers, and supplications, and to give thanks for all men; We humbly beseech thee most mercifully to receive these our prayers, which we offer unto thy Divine Majesty; beseeching thee to inspire

continually the Universal Church with the spirit of truth, unity, and concord: And grant, that all they who do confess thy holy Name may agree in the truth of thy holy Word, and live in unity, and godly love.

March 13th

Ephesians 4 v16

From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part maketh increase of the body unto the edifying itself in love.

One of the world's great miracles is the way a baby develops in the womb. Sure the child is nourished by the mother, but how is it that the limbs and organs take shape and become a fully functioning human being? One of the biggest factors is the embryo's / foetuses' DNA. Somehow, the DNA organises the growing person within the womb. Similarly, the Church is capable of building herself. Her DNA is love. Her nourishment is the Bread of life.

March 14th

Ephesians 4 v17

This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind.

I was preaching recently on the subject of the Church of England's terrible failures – specifically in the area of safeguarding, but in other aspects of church governance too. The Church fails, I observed, for the same reason that all human institutions – empires, mighty civilizations, political philosophies, commercial enterprises, etc. – also fail. Many human lives fail for the same reason. The answer is to be found in Psalm 127. *EXCEPT the Lord build the house: their labour is but lost that build it. Except the Lord keep the city: the watchman waketh but in vain.* Nothing can succeed unless it is firmly rooted in God's Providence. The house built on sand will inevitably collapse. The house founded on the Rock will endure whatever happens to it. God is our Rock. That Rock is Christ out of Whom flows the life-giving Holy Spirit. The Rock on which we must build is the teaching of Jesus. Jesus teaches us to be more than conventionally good – to be good not only to those who are good to us, but also to be good to those who mistreat us – in fact to be like God. Being a Christian is far more than just being nice. It sometimes requires us to be radically different from the people around us. Ultimately our lives are based on different values from those of the world.

March 15th

Ephesians 4 v18

Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their heart. Sometimes there is something the matter with a human embryo's DNA. In such cases, the embryo may not survive or may not develop into the healthy child the parents were expecting. Let's not push this analogy too far. Human beings who may have what we describe as genetic defects have as much right as all other human beings to be respected, cared for & loved. But the point I'm trying to make here is that, without a relationship with God, human beings cannot fulfil their potential to be His children. If our hearts are not aligned with His Heart (in perfect love), then we are incomplete, disfigured, disabled. We cannot be the people we are meant to be if God isn't in our DNA. Because so many people in the world don't know God authentically, their motivations are all wrong and they look for fulfilment & satisfaction where they cannot be found and that explains much of what is wrong with the world.

March 16th (Lent 2)

Ephesians 4 v19

Who being past feeling have given themselves over to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

St Augustine wrote of God, *You have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.* That's the plain truth. We were made for the love of God & if we don't know God, there is a great void in our lives, which we try to fill with drugs and sex and rock & roll or whatever. Nothing but God can satisfy our longing. The idols with which we try to replace Him are destructive both to ourselves & to the people around us.

ALMIGHTY God, who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves; Keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

March 17th

Ephesians 4 v20

But ye have not so learned Christ.

Well, how have we learned Him? Surely as the One in Whom we have eternal life, a life founded on the love of God & of our neighbours.

March 18th

Ephesians 4 v21

If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.
When your child is growing up, before he goes to school, you have to teach him how to tie his shoelaces. You might tell him how to do it. Better still, you will show him how to do it. But the chances are it takes him a while to get it. He keeps trying, practising & then suddenly he can do it. Once you've got the knack, you tie shoelaces without even thinking about it & you'd have to stop & think if you wanted to explain the process. Your brain has changed in a small way. You have become a person who ties shoelaces.

Now we can learn about Jesus. We can witness the example of Christian people. But it is only when He becomes part of us, when we are adapted to His ways, that we can actually practise being a Christian.

March 19th

Ephesians 4 v22

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.
The old man is what you were before you became a Christian. It is not enlivened, sustained & guided by the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. The old man is led by the desires of unredeemed humanity: wealth, power, illicit sex, addictions, excessive ambition, greed, selfishness, indifference to the needs of others, ingratitude, etc..

March 20th

Ephesians 4 v23

And be renewed in the spirit of your mind.
You've been working hard in the garden all day. You're hot, tired & dirty. One option would be to put together a basic meal and go straight to bed. That's the lazy option. The other option is that – before or after the meal, but before bed – you take a bath or a shower or at least a strip down wash. It might have taken some self-persuasion to take this option, but don't you feel better? Not only are you clean, but you feel fresher as well. Not only that, you won't make the sheets dirty. You might even feel so invigorated that you get on with another job or go out for the evening.

The Holy Spirit is a spirit of renewal, of cleansing, of healing, of deep rest, of action, of eternal life. Don't take the lazy option.

March 21st

Ephesians 4 v24

*And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in
righteousness and true holiness.*

How much ritual ought there to be in a Baptism service? The essential is that water is administered in the Name of God, Father & Holy Spirit. The candidate is normally signed with the sign of the cross. In recent decades, we have done this using oil blessed for the purpose by the Bishop on Maundy Thursday, but this is not necessary. The custom has also arisen of giving the newly baptized a lighted candle, which is generally lit from the Paschal Candle. The newly baptized may be dressed in a new robe. He or she is given a Christian name, though the significance of this is somewhat obscured when, as is usually the case, the candidate has already been known by this name. Of course, the candidates (or godparents on their behalf) express their faith in the triune God, their repentance for sin & their commitment to follow Jesus.

Faith & repentance are absolutely necessary. So is the use of water and the Name of God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit. The water signifies cleansing, rebirth, death to sin & burial with Christ, participation in the Resurrection, the Holy Spirit, a new beginning. It effects what it signifies. In other words, God makes all this true for us when we are baptised despite our frailty. Our calling, by the grace of the Holy Spirit is to live up to what God has done, is doing & will do for us.

Jesus died for us on the Cross. What He did on the Cross overcomes all evil, the devil & all his works. We are called to walk in the way of the Cross.

Anointing with oil signifies anointing with the Holy Spirit. Messiah means anointed One. Kings and priests are anointed in the Bible. In Christ (=Messiah), we receive the Holy Spirit, we are one with Christ, we constitute a royal priesthood. Oil is also used in healing and by athletes in training. The symbolism is very rich. Using oil blessed by the Bishop is a reminder that we are not baptised only into our parish Church but into the whole Church of God.

Jesus is the Light of the World. The Paschal Candle is lit at Easter in celebration of His Resurrection. As Christians, our lives are lit up by Him. As Christians, we are called to shine as lights in the world.

The Christian name signifies who we now are. If we are given a new, white robe to wear, this has the same significance.

Baptism makes all the difference.

[Confirmation was originally part of the Baptism service. In the course of history, for various reasons, it got separated. In the C of E, confirmation normally takes place when a person is capable of understanding the basics of our faith. As a matter of our Church's discipline, people are not usually admitted to Communion until they have been confirmed. Confirmation requires the same commitment as Baptism. If you take your Baptism seriously, I would appeal to you to get confirmed. Then you can take part in Holy Communion as Jesus told us to do.]

March 22nd

Ephesians 4 v25

Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man in truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

Being born again in Christ has implications. One of these is that we are honest. After all, Jesus is the Way, the Truth & the Life.

Christians are obviously called to be honest in their private lives, but what about in their public lives? What does God think about all these cover ups of wrong-doing in the Church? The secrecy masquerading as confidentiality? Non-disclosure agreements designed more to protect the reputations of powerful sinners rather than to serve the interests of their victims? Obviously such behaviour is most reprehensible in the Church, but that doesn't mean that it is acceptable in politics, government, industry or commerce and Christians who work in these fields also need to keep themselves unspotted from the world.

March 23rd (Lent 3)

Ephesians 4 v26

Be ye angry & sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.

It is hard not to be angry sometimes. Other people can be so frustrating, so inconsiderate. Even people we love (especially people we love?) can really get on our nerves. Sometimes the universe seems out to get us. The milk boils over just as the toast burns. After forty minutes listening to banal music on hold, the voice on the other end claims not to recognise our password and disconnects us. But sometimes we may feel that anger is justified – at the terrible wrongs which go on in the world & the wicked people who perpetrate them. After all, Jesus was angry when He came across a market in the Temple. He doesn't spare the religious hypocrites who despise people poorer and less learned than themselves but who themselves act in opposition to the basic principles of God's Law. Surely, it's reasonable to be angry where there is injustice even if that injustice has been directed towards oneself. Who would blame the postmasters or those wrongly convicted men who have served long prison sentences or abuse victims who have been accused of lying for being angry? I get angry on their behalf just hearing their stories. But be careful. We are warned, *The wrath of man accomplisheth not the purposes of God*. It is hard not to get angry sometimes, but being angry can be dangerous. Retaining anger rots us from within, If our actions are inspired by anger, we may not behave rationally. Paul recognises here that it is very difficult never to get angry, but advises us on how we can control that anger. Don't let the sun go down on your wrath. And if you can't sleep for anger, take your concerns to God in prayer.

WE beseech thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of thy humble servants, and stretch forth the right hand of thy Majesty, to be our defence against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

March 24th

Ephesians 4 v27

Neither give place to the devil.

Get thee behind me Satan, said Jesus to Peter, who had just recognised Jesus as the Son of God and been given the keys of the Kingdom, but now was trying to talk Him out of the necessity of Christ's Crucifixion. *Thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.* You have to feel sorry for Peter. No-one would want to see a friend

crucified. Surely Death on the Cross cannot be the vocation of the Son of God, Peter must have thought. He really did not understand how the purposes of God work out, *Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts*. When we're considering how we should live, what we should & should not do, we have to open to what God wants of us. We find the answers in prayer, in the Bible, in the teaching & fellowship of the Church. But it's all summarised in the command to love.

March 25th (The Annunciation)

Ephesians 4 v28

Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. God's infinite mercy on sinners can be misconstrued as a licence to sin. We might say, *It doesn't matter what we do because God will always forgive us*. Or we might think that sin doesn't have consequences. But sin does have consequences. The reason that God forbids us to do certain things is that they hurt people. If we truly repent, not only do we resolve, by God's grace, not to sin again, but also to put right the wrong which we have done if at all possible, to live in future worthwhile lives to the benefit of society in general.

WE beseech thee, O Lord, pour thy grace into our hearts; that, as we have known the incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel, so by his cross and passion we may be brought unto the glory of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

March 26th

Ephesians 4 v29

Let no corruption communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. There is a good deal of corrupt communication on the internet: fake news, insults, threats, mockery, conspiracy theories, pornography, hideous violence, scams & swindles, bullying, temptation & encouragement to do wrong or to take foolish risks. Ganging up on individuals, making people feel small, etc.. We've always done it: by word of mouth, in scurrilous publications, poison pen letters, on radio or TV, etc.. Human beings are sinners. Maybe it's worse on the internet because its reach is so broad and rapid and we haven't yet fully adapted to its possibilities. We haven't developed an etiquette of the

internet to protect ourselves. But like all forms of communication, the internet could and should be used *to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers*. Communication is not intrinsically evil. Jesus is the Word of God and we can use all media to proclaim that Word. Yesterday, we celebrated that Word made flesh, *incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary*.

March 27th

Ephesians 4 v30

And grieve not the holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

I can remember often being told not to grieve the Holy Spirit. But how would one grieve God's Holy Spirit? How does a child grieve a parent? By behaving in a way which fails to live up to the standards which the parents have tried to inculcate, by bringing disgrace to the family and to the child himself by harming others, by behaving unworthily, by embarking on a course in life which will ultimately be self-destructive. Parents may do their best, but, ultimately as a child grows up, your progeny have free will & make their own decisions. You can't do more than your best. Even if they reject your love, you still pray for them. You don't stop loving them even if their behaviour has been such that society in general has rejected them. Our relationship with God parallels our children's relationship with us. We grieve Him if we don't live up to our family values. He sets us an example. He teaches us. He may punish us. But, in the end, we are free to reject His love, though He never gives up on us. The Prodigal Son *came to himself [and], he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!* ¹⁸ *I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,* ¹⁹ *And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.* ²⁰ *And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.*

March 28th

Ephesians 4 v31

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking,, be put away from you with all malice.

As I typed those words, I was trying to think of situations in which my readers might be bitter & angry, cause trouble, say nasty things and feel malicious towards other people.

On reflection, however, I realise how easily I have been known to sink into those vices. I have had a real internal struggle with the devil's temptations to be bitter, angry, rabble-rousing, slanderous & malicious. I have felt that justice is on my side – many other people have agreed with me – but, even if that is so, no Christian is justified in being angry, bitter or malicious. So how does one deal with these temptations? Obviously pray. Obviously repent of sin. Put the best construction possible on other people's attitudes & actions. Pray for them. Trust God for outcomes.

March 29th

Ephesians 4 v32

And be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God forgave you.

Be kind to one another. Such a simple thing to say. So obviously right. And yet so often people are not kind to one another. It's worth pondering why. Is it because we don't realise how much God has forgiven us that we don't recognise the naturalness of being kind to one another?

March 30th (Lent 4 Mothering Sunday)

Ephesians 5 v1

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.

The ideal human relationship is unconditional love – that, like God, we love one another no matter what happens. It's the love which couples promise when they marry. There are many close human relationships, but probably the nearest to unconditional love that human beings are capable of is the love between a mother & her child & even that is not universally the case.

Can a woman's tender care cease towards the child she bare?

Yes, she may forgetful be,
yet will I remember thee.

Mine is an unchanging love, beneath,
higher than the heights above, free and faithful, strong as
deeper than the depths death.
God's love for us is unconditional. He is our Father. We are His
children.

GRANT, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil
deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of thy grace
may mercifully be relieved; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus
Christ. *Amen.*

March 31st

Ephesians 5 v2

*And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself
for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour.*

That's a good verse on which to finish the quarter.

1 Love divine, all loves
excelling,
joy of heav'n to earth come
down,
fix in us Thy humble dwelling;
all Thy faithful mercies crown!
Jesu, Thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love Thou
art;
visit us with Thy salvation;
enter every trembling heart.

2 Breathe, O breathe Thy loving
Spirit
into every troubled breast!
Let us all in Thee inherit,
let us find Thy promised rest.
Take away the love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
end of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.

3 Come, Almighty to deliver;
let us all Thy life receive;
suddenly return and never,
nevermore Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always
blessing,
serve Thee as Thy hosts above;
pray, and praise Thee without
ceasing,
glory in Thy perfect love.

4 Finish then, Thy new
creation;
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see Thy great salvation
perfectly restored in Thee.
Changed from glory into glory,
till in heav'n we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before
Thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise.