

The Gospel According to St John



Bible Notes
July – September 2009

50p

July 1st

John 1 vv 1-14

Only Matthew and Luke start with the Christmas story. Mark begins with the Baptism of Jesus. John commences with *In the beginning*. The point is that Jesus always was. He always is. He always shall be. He is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. The world and everything in it came into existence through Jesus. Everything exists for Jesus. Jesus is the end of everything, in both senses of the word "end".

The bitter truth is that the world rejects Jesus even though (if the world but knew it) it is only in Jesus that the world can be at peace with God and therefore with itself. Yet He so loves the world that He is made flesh in the world.

July 2nd

John 1 vv 15-18

You can only understand Jesus in the context of what God had already revealed of Himself in the Law and the Prophets. The New Testament is the fulfilment of the Old and makes no sense at all without it. By failing to teach the Old Testament, we have brought up a generation of biblical illiterates, who cannot understand what the New Testament means and therefore have made up their own religion, rather than believing in the revelation that God has given us of Himself in Jesus Christ. No wonder we have an etiolated Church whose very survival looks to be in doubt.

Moses had visions of God on Mount Sinai. God gave Moses the Law, the whole basis of the relationship between God and His people. It took Jesus, however, to see God as He is and truly to reveal God to sinful humanity. It took Jesus to make the Law flesh, to pour into the heart of every believer the Holy spirit, the Spirit of life and love.

July 3rd

John 1 vv 19-28

In many ways, John the Baptist is the bridge between the Old Testament and the New. He could be said to be the last of the Old Testament prophets. Like them, his message is very simple. God will judge His people. He will bring in His Kingdom. Repent of your sins.

And what are your sins? Your sin is that you do not love God with all your heart, nor your neighbour as yourself and therefore you selfishly hang on to what is yours rather than sharing with other people whose need is greater. John is a great prophet. His coming is foretold by Isaiah. He can be taken for Elijah. But, as John himself says, Jesus is infinitely greater.

July 4th

John 1 vv 29-34

There are many witnesses to Jesus – not only human beings, but also the Scriptures, the miracles and even God himself. John is one of those witnesses. He baptises Jesus and sees the Holy Spirit come upon Him. This is the anointing or chrism, which makes Jesus the Messiah or Christ. The Holy Spirit is His anointing. He is, then, the King, the High Priest, the Son of God.

This Jesus will baptise with the Holy Spirit. He will make us kings and priests and children of God when we believe and are baptised in His Name.

I believe that one of the great weaknesses of the modern Church is that we have lost the sense of what a privilege it is to be a Christian.

July 5th

John 1 vv 35-51

If you know who Jesus is, you tell the world. You tell your family. You tell your friends. If you are wise, when people speak to you about Jesus, you look for Him yourself. You may find Him in prayer or in the worship of the Church or in the pages of the Bible. *Seek and ye shall find*. If you find Him, there is much more that He will show you. Not least He will enrol you as a minister of the Kingdom of God. So open your heart to Jesus, if you have not already done so, and ask Him into your life.

July 6th

John 2 vv 1-11

Getting married is a transforming experience. You are a changed person. You remain the person you always were, but you also become one with another human being, another human being whom you love and who loves you. Your life is transformed. If it is your vocation to marry, marrying will change you just as Jesus turned the water into wine.

Of course, if it is not your vocation to marry or if you marry the wrong person for the wrong reasons, it might turn out more like hell than heaven. Marriage is to be entered into *reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly and in the fear of God.*

Becoming a Christian is a transforming experience. You remain the person you always were, but you become one with the Christ Who loves you and Whom you love. Your life is transformed.

The Good News is that, unlike marriage, faith is for everyone and that, unlike some human husbands or wives, Jesus never proves unfaithful.

July 7th

John 2 vv 12-17

Jesus was a good Jew and attended the pilgrim feasts at Jerusalem. Holidays are basically holy days. The community meets to celebrate, to remember what God has done for them, to affirm their identity as members of His covenant people, to anticipate His continuing love and care. Festivals are fun, but they also have a much deeper significance.

We have cut the links between our community festivals and our faith. Whitsun is no longer a holiday. Church is an optional extra to our yuletide feasting and exchange of presents. More often than not, families go away for Easter and there is no time to attend to worship. And we wonder why our nation no longer calls itself Christian and our children scarcely recognise themselves as members of the people of God. The moneychangers had secularised the sacred space of the outer court of the Temple. Jesus cast them out!

July 8th

John 2 vv 18-25

The Jews thought of the Temple as the dwelling place of God. It was where they could encounter God. But they knew that it was only a metaphor. God cannot be contained by anything. He fills everything that is and everything exists within Him. He is infinitely greater than the universe or anything that we can imagine. The Temple had a function in directing men's thoughts to God and Jesus dealt severely with those who impeded that function, but no temple built by human hands could contain God.

God does, however, dwell in Jesus, and, given that we are the Body of Christ, He dwells in us. It is important that we are a holy place for Him to live in, a place where other people may encounter God.

Blest are the pure in heart,
For they shall see our God;
The secret of the Lord is theirs,
Their soul is Christ's abode.

Still to the lowly soul
He doth himself impart,
And for his dwelling and his throne
Chooseth the pure in heart.

The Lord, who left the heavens
Our life and peace to bring,
To dwell in lowliness with men,
Their pattern and their King;

Lord, we thy presence seek;
May ours this blessing be;
Give us a pure and lowly heart,
A temple meet for thee.

July 9th

John 3 vv 1&2

Nicodemus came to Jesus because he saw something in Him. Unless he had come from God, no man could do the miracles or signs which Jesus did. John's Greek word is σημεια which means "signs" and the emphasis is on the fact that they were signs of Who Jesus is, rather than on their miraculous character. Now, given that we Christians dwell in Him and He in us, given that we make up the Church, the Body of Christ, people ought to be drawn to us because they recognise the signs that we are sent by God into the world. Occasionally, perhaps, these signs may be miraculous. What really matters, however, is that they are authentic signs. *They will know we are Christians by our love.* If they do, those genuinely seeking God, will be drawn to us and our Church.

July 10th

John 3 vv 3-7

So we come to the famous “born again” verses. People are puzzled as to why some Christians are described as being “born again” and some are not. There seems to be a particular type of Christian that bangs on about being “born again” and other Christians wonder whether they are missing something or whether in fact they want to be “born again”, if it means you have to walk round with a silly grin on your face, believe ten impossible things before breakfast and sing repetitive choruses whilst waving your arms in the air!

Read what Jesus says carefully. You are not a Christian unless you have been born again, but being born again has nothing to do with any particular outward manifestation such as belonging to a particular kind of church. John’s Greek is *αναθεν*. It means “born from above” as much as it means “born again.” When you become a Christian, you make a new start. You are crucified with Christ. Your sins are washed away in His Blood. You become a Temple of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of the risen Christ. You are born again and from above (from God) when you put your faith in Jesus and are baptised in His Name. The evidence that you are born again is not what kind of church you belong to, but that you bring forth the fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness & temperance.

July 11th

John 3 vv 8-13

I recently attended a lecture given by our bishop. His theme was that England has lost its values. Our standards, our law, our basic way of life all came from our character as a Christian nation. Having lost our faith, we live in a moral vacuum in which we no longer respect other people or ourselves. Hence so many of our problems: family breakdown; crime; uncertainty about our responsibilities to unborn children, the mentally hopeless and those at the end of their lives; our lack of clarity about civil rights and responsibilities; etc.. This moral vacuum enfeebles our public and private life and leaves us undefended against ugly ideologies. The only way back is to recognise the true nature of human beings and that is something we can only discover in Jesus.

July 12th

John 3 vv 14-17

You need to read Numbers 21 vv 4-9 if you want to understand Jesus' analogy here. What I want to concentrate on, however, is that Jesus came with the gift of eternal life. It is the eternal that is truly real. We behave only too often as if there were real life and then spiritual things or eternal things as an optional extra. At its crassest, this is clearly what people think when they drop participation in public worship because their lives are so full of other things. In reality, however, it is the eternal which is real and that gives meaning to everything else. England today lives in a moral vacuum because it treats the eternal as non-existent, or as, at best, an optional extra. You can only live a fully human life *sub specie aeternitatis*, in the light of eternity. Jesus is the human being Who lives as human beings are meant to live, in perfect unity with God, in Whose image we are made. Such a life is a life of love and it is necessarily eternal as God is eternal. He comes down from Heaven in order to reveal what life on earth is really about.

July 13th

John 3 vv 18-21

God sends Jesus into the world because He so loves the world. He does not send Jesus into the world to condemn the world. It breaks God's heart that the world is on the road to ruin, but, nevertheless, He respects our integrity. We are free to choose. We can come to the Light or we can turn away from the Light. If we turn away from the Light, we condemn ourselves to darkness. Think of that when you see all those cars driving past the church on Sunday mornings, their drivers and passengers hurrying off to do anything but connect with God in public worship.

You might say I am being small-minded in suggesting that those who stay away from public worship are choosing darkness rather than light. Many of them are good people, you may say, better than a lot who go to church. Surely, you insist, they will go to Heaven when they die. Maybe you are right and they are good people. It is up to God alone whether they go to Heaven. But do you really think that individuals or society as a whole can avoid the moral & spiritual vacuum without connecting with God in Jesus Christ? Can there be eternal life apart from Jesus?

July 14th

John 3 vv 23-29

John the Baptist and Jesus came with basically the same message, *Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand*. People were confused about them, thinking perhaps that they were rivals or that John, coming first, was more important than Jesus.

John, however, was the messenger. Jesus is the message. He is the Word incarnate.

You and I are messengers. Clergy and others are preachers and teachers of the Word. All Christians ought to be proclaiming God's Word, not only by what they say, but by what they do and, above all by what they are. Everything that you and I are reflects (or anyway ought to reflect) the Christ Who dwells in us and in Whom we dwell.

It is sad when immature Christians make personality cults of their clergy, follow their vicars, rather than their Saviour, and fall away from Christ's Body, the Church, when they don't like the ministers they've got.

July 15th

John 3 vv 30-36

In the Book of Genesis, it says that God formed humanity from the dust of the ground. He then breathed into the man the breath of life and the man became a living soul. We human beings have a foot in both camps – earth and heaven, but it is the heavenly part of us which is of infinitely more importance. The earthy and mortal part of us will be swallowed up in the heavenly and immortal; our corruptible selves will be swallowed up in incorruption as death is swallowed up in victory. Most of us are so obsessed with the earthy part of us that we renounce the heavenly. This is called sin. But Christ comes down from Heaven in order to raise us up to Heaven by the power of the life-giving Holy Spirit.

God's offer. Our choice. To walk in the Light or to allow ourselves to be overwhelmed in the darkness of the every day and the mundane.

July 16th

John 4 vv 1-9

When you were a child, you were probably told by your parents not to mix with certain people. They were dangerous or a bad influence. Quite a lot of people locally don't like gypsies. You may be uncomfortable with people of other races. Perhaps you feel apprehensive of groups of teenagers. Some of us are uncomfortable around the disabled or sick – especially the mentally ill.

We make distinctions between people and build barriers between communities for all sorts of reasons. Sometimes there are genuine reasons to be afraid of the outsider. Sometimes there is nothing more than ignorant prejudice. For everybody, I think, there are people we think we belong with and people we don't. And we reflect where we think we belong by the way we speak, the way we dress, the people we mix with, the jokes we laugh at and in innumerable other ways.

We feel obligations to the people who belong to the same community that we belong to and apprehension of those who do not. Most people would accept the principle *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*, provided that *neighbour* is defined.

The problem with Jesus is that when He says, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*, the word *neighbour* is not defined or limited in any way.

July 17th

John 4 vv 10-15

Jesus practises what He preaches and makes a neighbour of someone most of His friends and family would regard as someone He ought not to mix with – a woman, a Samaritan, a person with a scandalous lifestyle. They talk at cross purposes. Of course water from the well (or tap) is necessary for every day life, but it isn't the point of life – any more than food or clothes, houses or gardens, career, ambition or physical health, are the point of life. The point of life is to live in God and God in us. The woman is obsessed with drawing water to drink and wash, but she is missing the point. The point of life is Jesus.

July 18th

John 4 vv 16-19

God knows all about us – all the murky details of our lives. He knows all about the sins and mistakes which we commit and by which we foul up our own lives and the lives of other people. He knows. So there is no point in hiding. The answer to our problems is to bring our lives into His glorious light so that He can forgive and heal and give us His Holy Spirit so that we might truly live.

July 19th

John 4 vv 20-24

The woman raises her sights a bit higher than buckets of water and starts asking questions about forms of worship. Now, just as water is needed to sustain basic life, so we need authoritative teaching about what we ought to believe, how we ought to worship and how we ought to live. There are right answers. The reason the Jews had many right answers that the Samaritans didn't was that the Jews had the Bible – the Law and the prophets, God's Word written. Life on earth would be just as impoverished without the Bible as it would be without water.

She is still missing the point, however. Authentic worship, authentic life is about relating to God. It is worship in Spirit, our spirits exalted by the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life.

It is a practical necessity that we discuss and agree what hymns to sing, which prayer books to use, what kinds of ritual or ceremonial we do or don't practise. But how often do these discussions in churches miss the point of worship? If we truly desire to worship in spirit and in truth, how is it that our discussions about the form of public worship so often descend into acrimony and even schism?

July 20th

John 4 vv 25&26

When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush and told him to lead the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt, Moses asked God His Name. The Name of God is infinitely holy and God's answer was *I am*. This episode is always to be borne in mind when we read in the Gospel (especially John's) that Jesus solemnly states, *I am*.

July 21st

John 4 vv 27-38

This woman's life was a mess and Jesus was helping her to make sense of it – the only sense any human life makes, the sense of God. So His disciples want to know why He's talking to her. Sometimes Christians actually get in the way of people seeking Christ!

The disciples are as worried about food as the woman was about water. Jesus doesn't say that these material things don't matter, but He does say that they matter a lot less than God's mission to reach every human being with the good news of eternal life by grace through faith in Jesus.

July 22nd (St Mary Magdalene)

John 4 vv 39-42

The woman told her neighbours what Jesus meant to her and they came and encountered Him for themselves. Like Mary Magdalene, Jesus rescued her from sin and its enslaving power, setting her free to live His risen life and to join in the apostolic mission of telling the world.

Almighty God, whose Son restored Mary Magdalene to health of mind and body and called her to be a witness of his resurrection: forgive our sins and heal us by your grace, that we may serve you in the power of his risen life; who is alive and reigns with you in the power of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

July 23rd

John 4 vv 43-54

It can be harder to be a witness where everybody knows you than elsewhere. Obviously not for Jesus, but, for us, our nearest and dearest are only too aware of our failings. Familiarity breeds contempt – even, it seems, for Jesus. Yet the point is to be faithful. God is always faithful. He doesn't let us down. Neither does His Word return to Him void. The point is to be faithful in our Christian lives wherever God calls us to live and work and whatever He calls us to do. If we work with Christ, He works with us and we are instruments of His healing power.

July 24th

John 5 vv 1-9

Here's something weird. If you're reading this in a modern translation, some verses are missing. This is because most modern scholars don't believe that the explanation about the stirring of the waters, which you find in the traditional versions, is original, but, without some such explanation, what follows would be hard to understand.

The point I want to concentrate on is what healing means. It does mean things like enabling a crippled man to walk, but there is much more to it than that. Salvation and safety; healing, health and wholeness are all very closely related in the New Testament. We have got very clever at conquering bodily illness with drugs and surgical procedures. That is brilliant. I wouldn't want to have gone into hospital before anaesthetics and antibiotics were discovered! However, if we concentrate only on making the body well, we are missing the point again. Whatever wonders our doctors perform, eventually our bodies will finish up in the grave and, even this side of the grave, life isn't much if we have nothing but physical health and material well-being. True salvation, safety, healing, health and wholeness are only to be found in Jesus and we forget that at our peril. Might be worth remembering when arrogant people talking about euthanasia for those with "poor quality of life."

July 25th (St James)

John 5 vv 10-16

These Jews are missing the point. Sabbath observance is a good thing. It is one of the ten commandments. Sabbath observance keeps us right with God, refreshes our bodies and souls, rests those who work for us at least one day a week, and is a witness of what we believe. It is not, however, a badge of our piety or a stick with which to beat other people to whom we feel superior. The Jews here miss the point and, instead of fulfilling its role as a foretaste of heaven, their sabbath is only too firmly fixed in this world.

James, when Jesus called him, left his old life as a fisherman behind him. He was set free from the shackles of this world and its mundane concerns and, how ever imperfectly, followed Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life. It might be a harder trick for you to pull off, given that God hasn't called you away from an ordinary career and ordinary

family life. Your rôle in the home and in the work place may well be your Christian vocation, but don't let it stand between you and your God or even replace Him as the object of your life.

Grant, O merciful God, that as thine holy Apostle Saint James, leaving his father and all that he had, without delay was obedient unto the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him; so we, forsaking all worldly and carnal¹ affections, may be ever more ready to follow thy holy commandments; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

July 26th

John 5 vv 17-31

Jesus has the authority to teach about heavenly things because He is the one Who has come down from Heaven. He is perfect God and teaches with all the authority of God. His purposes are God's purposes – that the world through Him might be saved. He is perfect man. He is all that we ought to be – living in perfect and eternal harmony with God. It is He Who makes it possible for us to fulfil God's purpose for us – eternal life in Him.

July 27th

John 5 vv 32-47

How do we know that Jesus is Who He claims to be? John the Baptist was a witness. The works that Jesus does are a witness of Who He must be. God is Jesus' witness. The Bible (which at this point means the Old Testament) bears witness to Jesus. Unspiritual people can't or won't see it and that is one reason why evangelism must be grounded in prayer for the people with whom we hope to share our faith.

July 28th

John 6 vv 1-14

What are they among so many?

Often we feel we lack the resources to do God's work, both personally and as churches. But, when we offer what we have to God, nothing is too little.

¹ Carnal here means "to do with the flesh", ordinary, basic, human nature – not just sins to do with sex.

July 29th

John 6 vv 15-21

It is Passover time. The Jews are excited, remembering how God sent Moses to set their ancestors free from the Egyptians. Moses fed them with manna in the wilderness. Jesus gives them bread miraculously in the desert. They want to make Him their king to set them free from the Romans. But that is not the kind of King that Jesus is. He is, however, the King of Kings. *He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm. The wind and waves obey Him. Only He can truly say I am.*

July 30th

John 6 vv 22-47

Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.

Lives based on materialism are inevitably empty and unsatisfying. Even when they are not nasty and brutish, they are always short in the grand scheme of things. The only truly fulfilled life is life lived in Jesus and that life is eternal life. It is the gift of God. All we have to do is to believe and God does the rest. The astonishing thing is that so many reject Jesus the Way, the Truth and the Life, but it is only God Who can overcome human obstinacy.

July 31st

John 6 vv 48-71

This whole chapter is to be read in the light of the Last Supper. In Holy Communion, Jesus nourishes us with Himself, the Bread of Life. We proclaim the Death which sets us free from death. We experience the presence of the life-giving Holy Spirit in the unity of Christ's Body, the Church. We receive the pledge of the life which is to come. Sadly, Judas leaves the Eucharistic meal in order to betray Christ. God's offer of Himself the Bread of Life is open to everyone, but the choice remains ours, and it is our acceptance or rejection of Him that brings judgment and that creates the division between the saved and the perishing.

August 1st

John 7 vv 1-13

The Jews were supposed to go to Jerusalem three times in the year for the three pilgrim feasts: Passover, Weeks and Tabernacles. These feasts celebrated what God had done and was doing for His people. The feasts are a celebration of what it means to belong to the people of God. By taking part in the feasts, one expresses one's identity as a member of the people of God. Tabernacles is a kind of harvest festival. It also celebrates God giving the Law to Israel. During Tabernacles, Israelites live in tabernacles or tents or booths as a reminder and an expression of solidarity with the experience of living in tents for 40 years after the Exodus on the long journey to the Promised Land. Part of the ritual of Tabernacles was to pour out some water in the Temple. This reflects the vision of Ezekiel in which he sees a stream flowing from the Temple at Jerusalem through the desert to the Dead Sea. The water gives life and trees grow with fruit for food and leaves for medicine.

What has happened to our community festivals as Christians? We've separated the (bank) holiday from the holy day at Whitsun. Church is seen as an optional extra in the festival of consumption which is the secular Christmas. People are too tied up in holiday events to come to church on the holy day of Easter. The weekly community celebration on Sundays has become a low priority even for many who call themselves Christians. So we don't mark what God has done for us. We don't participate. We don't celebrate our identity as the people of God. And the result is that we have a feeble Church, which can barely sustain itself, let alone fulfil its God-given mission to the world.

August 2nd

John 7 vv 14-31

Rules are ultimately useless. To take one example – the scandal of MPs' expenses – you can claim truthfully to have kept the rules, even though you are doing the very thing the rules were supposed to prevent. Haringey Social Services got top marks on their rule-based assessment, but let down the children in their care. Likewise East Staffordshire NHS trust. These Jews are claiming to celebrate the gift of the Law, but they have turned it into a set of rules which they have manipulated to replace conscience. That is not what God intended the Law to be!

August 3rd

John 7 vv 32-39

The so-called guardians of the Law are seeking to kill Jesus. That is what He means about departing and returning. He will die on the Cross and rise again. He will ascend into Heaven and return in glory at the end of time. They cannot understand because their hearts are hardened against love – the love of God and of fellow humanity.

The Law is not bad. It is a wonderful gift from God. It is the Law of love and it comes from the God Who is love. To use the Law to self-justify, to use it to exclude other people from the community of faith, to use it to justify what can be justified by the letter though it is contrary to the spirit, to be depressed by the Law's demands, all these are abuses of the Law. In a sense, Jesus is the Law made flesh. He pours out the Holy Spirit. His Death satisfies all the Law's demands. He bears the punishment of us all. The life-giving Holy Spirit is there for every believer. It is only in the Holy Spirit that we can fulfil the Law's demand to love God and to love one another.

August 4th

John 7 vv 40-53

Jesus creates division. Either you believe in Him or you don't. Those who believe constitute the Church. They are the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Those who don't believe remain in the world. The Church has a mission to the world because *God so loved the world*. She cannot fulfil that mission if she attempts to fudge her distinction from the world.

August 5th

John 8 vv 1-11

This is one of the best loved stories about Jesus. The people who want to stone the adulteress are hypocrites. We have no right to condemn because we are all sinners. The only human being qualified to judge is Jesus, because He is without sin. He chooses not to condemn. Sinners condemn themselves because they refuse to come to the Light. This woman can be saved. Jesus rescues her from her persecutors and allows her a new beginning. *Go and sin no more*. She is set free.

August 6th (The Transfiguration of our Lord) John 8 vv 12-20
On the Mount of Transfiguration, His face and garments shone. Jesus is the Light, Who shows up everything that is wrong in our lives, cleanses us and purifies us, and reveals to us the Way. As Christians, we have His light within us. We are called to shine as lights in the world. We are changed from glory into glory. On the Mount of Transfiguration, God the Father bears witness: *This is my beloved Son: hear him.*

O God, who before the passion of thine only-begotten Son didst reveal his glory upon the holy mount: Grant unto us thy servants, that in faith beholding the light of his countenance, we may be changed into his likeness from glory to glory, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

August 7th John 8 vv 21-30
Unbelievers can't follow Jesus. They don't know the way, the way of the Cross which leads to eternal life. They do not understand and cannot understand because they are not from above. Jesus has already said that a man must be born *ἀναθεν* - born again or born from above. They are not able to make that fresh start in the Holy Spirit. They cannot recognise that Jesus is *I am* as God told Moses that He is *I am* at the burning bush. Yet God is always with Jesus. He works in Jesus and with Jesus for the salvation of the world. We Christians are in fact born again, born from above. God works in us and with us to complete that mission to the whole world. We have to pray that the Holy Spirit will soften the hearts of those resistant to the Word.

August 8th John 8 vv 31-36
We are bound by sin. We find we cannot but do what we know is wrong. We don't like ourselves for it. *The wages of sin is death* and death is a pall hanging over all our lives. But the Truth sets us free. Sin is forgiven. Death has no more dominion over us. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. The first step to freedom (which many of those in today's reading are too arrogant to take) is to admit that you are a sinner and that you do need Jesus.

August 9th

John 8 vv 37-59

Abraham is the ancestor of the Jewish people. God made promises to him and to his descendants. The Jews in this story are proud of their inheritance as Abraham's children.

What matters much more, however, is that Abraham is the father of all the faithful. Abraham had faith and it was counted to him for righteousness. His true descendants, those who will inherit the promises, are those who share Abraham's faith, not his DNA!

People who tell lies or plot the deaths of innocent people are the children of the devil, whatever their race or supposed religion. Abraham was a great man and Jews and gentiles do well to follow his example.

However, Jesus is infinitely greater. *Before Abraham was, I am.*

August 10th

John 9 vv 1-7

Evil is interconnected. Wrong-doing leads to suffering. Alienation from the Lord and giver of life leads to death. Failure to obey the Maker's instructions mucks up the Universe. But it is not a simple connection so that you can say that those who suffer are necessarily getting what they deserve. Sometimes we do suffer the consequences of our own sin or folly. Sometimes we are the victims of other people's wrong-doing or carelessness. Sometimes we just don't know why people suffer, why an earthquake hits a particular town, why one person catches a fatal illness and another does not. What we do know is that we are called to walk in the Light, to bear our sufferings in the light of Jesus and to bring light to those who exist in darkness.

August 11th

John 9 vv 8-23

Religious people can be the blindest. The authorities cannot see that Jesus has done a good thing because He has apparently broken the Sabbath. They don't understand what the Sabbath is for and can't comprehend Jesus. Their bullying pressurises the formerly blind man and intimidates his parents. Religious prejudice is extremely dangerous.

August 12th

John 9 vv 24-34

In chapter 8 the Jews claimed descent from Abraham. Here they claim descent from Moses. But they understand neither of these great men from the past. They were open to God. God revealed Himself to them and they obeyed God, but these people have closed minds and cannot recognise that Jesus is fulfilling all that Abraham and Moses stood for by completing the work of God on earth. The man born blind can see much better than they can. He can see that what Jesus does proves Him to have come from God. The spiritually blind religious leaders respond by what we should call excommunicating him! We need to be open to the Truth and to receiving the Truth in unexpected ways.

August 13th

John 9 vv 35-41

The blind man was open to the possibility of Jesus. He was brave enough to stand up for what he did know. Jesus found him and revealed to him the Way. What the man had to do was to believe, to believe on the Son of God. When he knew that Jesus is the Son of God, he worshipped Him. We can't do better than that.

August 14th

John 10 vv 1-7

A shepherd is responsible for the sheep. He leads them to pasture and fresh water. In pre-veterinary days, he looks after their injuries and ailments. In biblical times, the good shepherd would have known each of his sheep individually. The most famous King of Israel, David, began his life as a shepherd. Rulers – kings and priests – are regarded as the shepherds of God's people in the Old Testament. God Himself is described as the shepherd of His people. So all these ideas are in our minds when we think of Jesus as the Good Shepherd and ourselves as His flock. There are three bites at this particular cherry in John 10.

August 15th (St Mary)

John 10 vv 7-10

Given the dangers of wild animals and robbers, a fold would have been surrounded by walls and there would be one entrance. There is only one way into the fold of God's Church and that is through Jesus. He is the authentic pastor, teacher, prophet, messiah. He keeps His sheep safe. Unlike some religious leaders who seem to do what they do for the sake of their own egos, Jesus comes that we may have abundant life.

August 16th

John 10 vv 11-18

In the Old Testament, it was recognised that the hired shepherd might not be able to save the flock from attack by wild animals. If he could bring a bit of the mauled corpse to prove he had not stolen the missing lamb, he would not be blamed. The shepherd, who really cared about the sheep, however, wouldn't waste time carrying out a risk assessment; he would risk his own life to save them. Jesus, of course, takes this further. He loves us so much that He lays down His life for our salvation. He makes us His own because He loves us. And it is not just the existing flock for which He does this. There are people of all races and languages who are called to be His sheep. He lays down His life for them all. They all together constitute one flock – the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

August 17th

John 10 vv 19-42

A few days ago I lost my garage keys. I looked and looked and couldn't find them. Then they turned up on the front wall. I must have overlooked them several times. We can't always see what we're looking for, even when it's staring us in the face. We can certainly fail to see what we don't want to see, even though we tell ourselves we are looking for it diligently. These people kidded themselves that they were sincere seekers after God, but they could not or would not see what God was doing in Jesus. If they had come to Jesus, they would have received eternal life and nothing would pluck them from His hand. Again there was a division between those who believed and those who did not, those who accepted Jesus and those who didn't. It's still true today.

August 18th

John 11 vv 1-16

Jesus was friends with Lazarus and his two sisters. He often stayed at their place. A lot of people would expect that, when Lazarus fell sick, Jesus would cure him. We probably know good Christians, people we would describe as friends of Jesus, who fall sick and we expect Jesus to heal them. Why He doesn't is often a mystery, but it obviously wouldn't do if every sick person recovered just for the asking. The world would be very crowded! We wouldn't learn the lessons of suffering. The point of this bit of the story is that Jesus is in control.

August 19th

John 11 vv 17-32

Martha seems to have been the more active sister. She rushed out to meet Jesus and almost reproached Him. If he had been there, He could have done something. People may well feel that Jesus is absent in their troubles and could do more for them! She knows that her dead brother will rise again on the Last Day, but that is not comfort enough for her for the here and now.

Jesus tells her, *I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.* He asks her, *Believest thou this?*

Jesus is never absent from us. To know Him is to have eternal life. We can know Him in this life, pray to Him and feel His presence with us. We Christians have eternal life. Our bodily death is a casting off of the flesh which holds us back from pure communion with Him. In Him we are in communion with all the saints² on earth and in Heaven. So, when we are bereaved, we can trust Jesus both for ourselves and for our loved one who has died. We are one in Him, one in divine love in all eternity.

August 20th

John 11 vv 33-46

What follows is a demonstration of Christ's power over death. He is more powerful than anything. He overcomes death and conquers sin, the cause of death. His power consists in His self-sacrificial love. Love really does change everything, but "love" means much more than what Andrew Lloyd-Webber appears to mean in the song. True love is the love of Jesus offering Himself on the Cross in perfect obedience to God as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Such love does indeed change everything.

The miracles are signs of Who Jesus is and what He has accomplished. You can believe that He raised Lazarus from the dead and still fail to accept Him as the Saviour. If you want to, you can believe that Jesus is your Saviour and doubt the miracle. But, for John, the raising of Lazarus is a sign of the Messiah.

² By "saints" the Bible means "Christians"

August 21st

John 11 vv 47-57

The Jewish leaders knew that the miracles had taken place, but they did not, therefore, accept Jesus as the Saviour. They were afraid that they would have to give up their own power and importance. They foresaw a bloody war with Rome. Their solution to the Jesus problem was to have Him killed. That is what Caiaphas meant when he said, *It is expedient that one man should die for the people*. The astonishing thing is that the affairs of this world are so much in God's Hands, that even those who think they are working against Jesus are actually contributing to His mission. Caiaphas inadvertently prophesies that the Death of Jesus will be for the benefit of the people. He cannot realise how the crucifixion will bring salvation to faithful Jews and to faithful people of all nations. He does not realise that by helping to engineer the Crucifixion, he is actually helping to Jesus to fulfil His vocation.

August 22nd

John 12 vv 1-11

We're drawing near to the Crucifixion now. Like the other Gospels, John devotes nearly half of his book to the week from Palm Sunday to Easter and what follows. Jesus is a great teacher. He did remarkable miracles. His story had a terrific impact on people's lives. But none of those things is an adequate understanding of Jesus. He came to die and rise again. That is the great work of Jesus, which transforms eternally the relationship between humanity and God.

Mary anoints Him ready for burial. Even Judas, one of the twelve, misses the point. He thinks the ointment is wasted. He steals from the common purse. He does not "get" Jesus even after three years in His company. The Jewish leaders are so far gone that they even want to kill Lazarus because his being alive is a powerful testimony to Jesus.

Human sinfulness runs very deep in all of us, but that is precisely the reason why Jesus came and died on the Cross – so that we sinners could be forgiven and enjoy eternal life in the knowledge of God. There is no other way by which we could come to God.

August 23rd

John 12 vv 12-19

Behold the world is gone after him.

If only! Jesus came because God so loved the world and yet the world so often seems to be indifferent or even hostile to Jesus. In England, within my lifetime, people have deserted the churches, largely as a result of indifference. Faith has slowly expired, leaving a vacuum in its place. Now, even in this country, we find people in power hostile to Christianity. Of course, this is nothing new. The crowds may have cheered Jesus on Palm Sunday, but they shouted *Crucify Him* on Good Friday. It makes you wonder whether many people will be saved or just a faithful remnant. Jesus refuses to answer that question when Peter asks Him. Our task is to do the good works He has prepared for you and me to walk in. Our task is to be faithful in our generation. Only God knoweth the number of His elect, but it is our task to proclaim the Good News to the whole of humanity.

August 24th (S Bartholomew)

John 12 vv 20-35

In a way, this sees the beginning of the gentile mission. Some Greeks seek Jesus. What follows is an account of how life for all God's people will spring from the Death of Jesus. People will come from all nations. They will be baptised into His death and rise again with Him. Some of them will be called to be martyrs. All will be called to take up their cross daily and follow Him, to mortify their members which are upon the earth. All will be called to be faithful and all will be called to be witnesses. There will be trials and tribulations, but the answer is to live in the Light of Christ. Bartholomew was one of the apostles who fulfilled this vocation. All we Christians are members of the apostolic church and we each have our part to play in the apostolic mission.

O Almighty and everlasting God, who didst give to thine
Apostle Bartholomew grace truly to believe and to preach thy
Word; Grant, we beseech thee, unto thy Church, to love that
Word which he believed, and both to preach and receive the
same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

August 25th

John 12 vv 36-50

For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

Human beings are social animals. We like to feel we belong to the group. We go on about the effect of peer pressure on young people – to own the right trainers and so on and so forth – but we are all susceptible. We don't like to stand out, to be different.

That is one of the reasons why it is harder to believe in modern Britain and to practise a Christian faith. The fewer practising Christians there are, the harder it is to practise the faith yourself and to stand up for Christian values. We have to be prepared to make up our own minds about things and then to keep faith with what we believe. It is a matter of integrity.

Of course, if we do practise the faith ourselves, put Church first, speak up for Christian values, etc., we make it that much easier for other people to do the same. They don't feel so alone.

August 26th

John 13 vv 1-5

The four Gospels give rather different accounts of the Last Supper and John's (as so often) stands out most of all. Luke tells us that Jesus said to His disciples, *The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors; But ye shall not be so; but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief as he that doth serve.* John tells us that Jesus gave a practical demonstration of this principle.

This is why I am disgusted by power struggles in parish politics and by clergy who have career ambitions and by those who are placed in positions of authority in the Church and behave as if they had some personal glory that others should kowtow to.

The Church's hierarchy and authority structure ought to be moulded on the practise of the Son of God Who washed His disciples' feet and the Church ought to be teaching that principle to the state by word and example.

August 27th

John 13 vv 6-17

One of the surprising features of John's Gospel is that it never refers directly and explicitly to the institution of Christian Baptism or Holy Communion. Obviously these practices were well known in the early Church. John may have felt they were too holy to write about except circumspectly. Most of John's teaching on Communion is found in chapter 6 (the Feeding of the 5,000). The foot-washing teaches us about Baptism. Baptised people are in Christ and He in them. Their characters are being formed in imitation of His character and by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit. It is necessary humbly to accept what Jesus does for us. He makes us clean as He alone can. Baptised into Christ, we are bound to follow His example of loving service.

August 28th

John 13 vv 18-30

Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he.

Jesus is too much for us to comprehend. He fulfils everything. He recognises Him as the Son of God, as God the Son. We seek to understand Him in all kinds of biblical images – such as prophet, priest and king. After meeting God at Mt Sinai, the Israelites were so awed that they asked that God should not speak to them directly. It would be too much for them. God tells them not to turn to false gods, nor to practise divination. He will send them a prophet like Moses who will give them the Word of God. The test of whether the prophet is a true prophet of God is whether his words come true. Jesus is the true prophet Who fulfils all prophecy. He is the Word of God. He is *I am*.

August 29th

John 13 vv 31-38

The glory of Jesus is the cross. The glory of God is love. Love is the sacrifice of self. Those who believe and are baptised are crucified with Christ. They share in His glory. It is their calling to love as He loves.

A tall order. Peter promises to follow all the way, but Jesus knows he'll fail, but He doesn't give up on Peter. Inevitably we fail too, but our failure should never makes us give up or lower our aspiration to be like Jesus.

August 30th

John 14 vv 1-7

I often read these verses at funerals. They are particularly poignant because Jesus says these things on the night before His own Death. We can trust Him for this life and the next. He prepares a place for us by His own Death. He will receive us in Heaven. There is room for *all sorts and conditions of men*. We shall be with Him eternally. Indeed, we cannot find our own way to heaven or pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps, but we don't have to. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life; all we have to do is to follow Him.

August 31st

John 14 vv 8-14

From the very beginning, human beings were made in the image of God. So it is not inappropriate that the person of Jesus Christ is both divine and human, God and man. He is the human being each one of us is meant to be, living in perfect harmony with God. We are not fully human because we rebel against God and therefore the divine image is marred in us. What most people mean by "human" is human in the sense of natural humanity, still dwelling in original sin. But immortal, supernatural, real humanity is humanity dwelling in eternal life with God. That is what Jesus is and by His Death He restores our true humanity to us, we in Him and He in us. The better Christians we are, the more real our humanity. As members of the Body of Christ, we are energised, motivated by His Will. We are transformed by Him into His likeness from glory to glory. Thus our prayers become His prayers.

In C21 Britain, people (even Christians) act as though there were ordinary humanity – the life of home, family, career, hobbies, holidays, sport, etc. – with religious faith as an optional extra. It is actually our relationship with God that makes us as people and the life of home, family, career, hobbies, holidays, sport, etc. only make sense in that context.

September 1st

John 14 vv 15-31

Jesus is one person with two natures – the divine and the human, but God is one nature in three persons – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Whatever is true of each person of the Trinity is true of God. In the gift of the Spirit, Jesus incorporates us Christians in this mystery.

September 2nd

John 15 vv 1-6

When I was a young curate, I used to grow runner beans. I also used to look after the vicar's tortoise when he was on holiday. The tortoise, given the chance, would bite through the bean stalks just above the ground. Naturally, the result was that the leaves, flowers and beans would wither and die. Jesus is the source of our life and cut off from Him we cannot flourish, flower or bear fruit. In fact we die. How do we keep open those vital spiritual channels? Well, we pray, read the Bible and participate in public worship, especially Holy Communion. People will tell you that they can be Christians without going to Church. Gradually, they cease to read the Bible. They don't pass on the faith to their children. They pray less and less frequently. And finally, they are hardly Christians themselves in anything more than name; their children don't even trouble to call themselves Christians; and the Church is dying, because, after all, the vine is nothing without branches and all the branches are dropping off.

September 3rd

John 15 vv 7-13

Mired in original sin, we human beings have so perverted the notion of duty that we regard it as the antithesis of joy. Duty is something you have to do though you don't like it. Then, if you are lucky, you can start to enjoy yourself. I like the new Communion service where it speaks about "our duty and our joy". The Christian Gospel is that our duty is love and love has got to be very close to joy, hasn't it? Or else, what's the point?

September 4th

John 15 vv 14-17

I don't know about you, but sometimes (often, maybe) the words of our services – hymns, prayers, readings – wash over me. My mind wanders off on to something else or I know them so well I hardly think about them. But, *sometimes a light surprises a Christian when he sings*. Sometimes, when I think of what these words truly mean, I wonder that we dare to say them at all. There are a couple of thoughts like that in these verses – that you and I are personal friends of the Son of God and that He has chosen us!

September 5th

John 15 vv 18-27

God sent Jesus into the world because God so loved the world. The world of humanity had perversely rejected God, the Source of its life, the Purpose for which it exists, and the world therefore abode in a meaningless half-life, doomed to die. In His Love, God sent Jesus to redeem the world, but, by and large, the world rejected Him. Those who received Him themselves became children of God. They were redeemed. They lived life in all its fulness. They were filled with abundant joy. They were united in love with God the Holy Trinity and with one another. They therefore inherited God's mission to the world. It became their mission as they participated in the divine love which inspires it. It is a wonderful privilege to be a member of that people of God and to share that mission, but we must expect that the world will treat Christ's members as it treated Him.

September 6th

John 16 vv 1-4

Remember. The mark of the authentic prophet is that his words come true. So the fact that we experience, as a Church and as individuals, what Jesus said we would experience is in itself evidence that Jesus is the authentic prophet and that we can therefore have confidence in Him no matter what happens.

September 7th

John 16 vv 5-17

The apostles don't understand what Jesus is talking about. It is too hard for them intellectually. Some of it is too awful and some of it is too awesome for them emotionally to comprehend. In this life, there is a great deal that we can't understand, both about the way the world works and the way that God works. As St Paul says, it is as though *we see through a glass darkly*. Jesus does, however, promise illumination. He sends the Holy Spirit. Given that each member of the Trinity has all the properties of every member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, too, is the Light of the World. Jesus is the Truth and the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth. So, we walk with Jesus and trust Him no matter what, confident that He is with us now in the mission and that He is leading us home.

September 8th (Birthday of the BVM)

John 16 vv 18-33

A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come. The hour has come for Jesus. The hour for which He came is the crucifixion, the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. It is pain to Him. It is painful for all those who love Him. Having accomplished everything – the redemption of the entire cosmos – by His Death, Jesus will rise again. The apostles and all His friends will rejoice. Celebrate Easter.

He will, however, then ascend into Heaven. Maybe His friends will again feel comfortless. There will be persecutions. Terrible things will happen on earth: wars and rumours of war, famines and earthquakes in divers places. Yet He will not leave us comfortless. He sends His Holy Spirit, poured out on His friends, the Christian Church. He will return again and take us to the place He has prepared for us. Even in the mean time we are the children of God, entitled to call God, *Abba, Father*, because we have the Spirit of adoption, the Spirit of the Risen Christ.

September 9th

John 17 v1

I think this is my favourite chapter in the Bible. An old Christian friend used to joke that all the Bible is infinitely valuable, but some parts are more infinitely valuable than others. John 17 must be one of the infinitely valuable bits. It is the part where Jesus consecrates Himself as our high priest and as the *full, perfect and sufficient, sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.* He consecrates us too as a royal priesthood and a living sacrifice. This is the glory of Jesus – His offering of Himself in perfect love for God and for humanity. This is what He came to do and for this we and all the angels and archangels worship Him in all eternity.

September 10th

John 17 vv 2&3

We live a half life, alienated from God by sin, doomed ultimately to die. The paradox is that death is defeated by the Death of Jesus because His perfect offering of Himself of His own free will in perfect love is exactly how humanity ought to have chosen to relate to God and now can do once again in Him. This is eternal life, to know God through Jesus.

September 11th

John 17 vv 4-8

In His words and deeds, Jesus has communicated God to mankind. He is the divine Word. We reflect this when we stand and face the Gospel as it is read in church. The scriptures bear witness of Jesus and Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. He came from God because God so loved the world. He has called His Church out of the world to become His Body. He sends the Church to the world to complete His work of drawing all men to Himself.

September 12th

John 17 vv 9-11

Jesus' special prayer is for the Church. We are His Body, we in Him and He in us. We are sent into the world in order to proclaim the love of God and the world will react to us as it reacted to Him. We need His prayers. We need it that we dwell in Him and He dwells in us. Filled with the love of God, we Christians ought to be united as the Holy Trinity is united and it is sin that we are not. The Church is one because Christ is one.

I'm not referring only to the scandal of divisions between denominations. There is division within denominations, not least the Anglican Communion. There are divisions within congregations and rifts between individual Christians. Sometimes there are divisions on matters of principle. We cannot always see how to resolve them, but we ought to remain in love and charity with those with whom we disagree and strive to stay together to worship and to do God's work in the world. Sometimes Christians fall out for no better reason than those for which people in the world fall out. It ought to be obvious that we should repent of those sins.

September 13th

John 17 v12

It is a mystery that Judas chooses to betray Christ and is therefore responsible for his actions, but also that his act of betrayal was part of God's eternal plan for the salvation of the cosmos. What we can learn from this, however, is that Jesus keeps safe those who turn to Him (how ever weakly they do so) but that those who choose to reject Him choose their own perdition.

September 14th

John 17 v13

And now I come to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

I don't want to say anything about this, just to let you think about it.

September 15th

John 17 vv 14-16

Who is on the Lord's side? Who will serve the King?

According to this fine old hymn we are,

Chosen to be soldiers in an alien land.

Where do you feel at home and where do you feel an alien? A lot of people feel like aliens (or strangers) in church. They are alienated from God and His Church. They are shy to enter the building, shy speaking to church people, uncomfortable with vicars. When they come to weddings, christenings and funerals, they are afraid to join in and may act up in order to assert themselves. But where do we feel at home? Are we too at home in the world, deriving our values, attitudes and tastes from the world? Do we take it for granted that the ways of the world take precedence? Or are we quietly confident in Jesus, more at home in His Church and with Christian people than we are out in the world, living now as citizens of the heaven in which we hope eternally to dwell?

September 16th

John 17 vv 17-23

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

The Church is one because Jesus is one and we are His Body. The Church is holy because Jesus is holy and He sanctifies us by His Word of truth. The Church is catholic because Christ is all in all and we dwell in Him and He in us. The Church is apostolic because God sent Jesus into the world, the first apostle, and He sends, first the twelve, and then all Christian people to complete that apostolic mission.

September 17th

John 17 vv 24-26

I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Holy Catholic Church; The Communion of Saints; The Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the life everlasting. Amen.

Because of Jesus, the Holy Spirit lives in us. We therefore are one with Christ and with one another as members of God's Church. We are

therefore in communion (or fellowship or koinonia, if you like) with God and with all other Christian people on earth and in Heaven. We also therefore expect to be where Jesus is, to see Him in His glory, to be participants in His glory and to dwell in that glory in all eternity.

September 18th

John 18 vv 1-9

I guess you know better the accounts of Gethsemane in the other three Gospels. They stress very much more Jesus' vulnerability – His powerful prayer that, if it were possible, this cup might pass from Him, His acceptance, *not my will, but thine be done*. Maybe you could say that the synoptic Gospels lay the emphasis on His humanity, His perfect humanity, tempted as we are in every respect yet without the sin of rejecting God's Will for His life. John emphasises more His divinity. It is John who tells us that when Jesus said, *I am*, the guards fell to the ground. And then He changed *I am* to *It's me* (the same in the Greek, εγω εμυ) and they arrest Him. It makes you think, doesn't it?

September 19th

John 18 vv 10-27

It's all a bit of a mess. Simon tries armed resistance and Jesus stops him. One of their number is the betrayer. It appears that the soldiers can only arrest Jesus because He allows them to. The trial is a farce, informal and formal hearings before various dignitaries, but, despite bullying and lies, no charges can be made to stick. The apparent leader of the apostles denies the Messiah. It's all a mess like so much of human life is, but Jesus is there in the midst, redeeming everything.

September 20th

John 18 vv 28-40

Caiaphas the high priest has said that it is expedient that Jesus should die for the people – although he has not at all realised the full import of his words. According to the synoptic Gospels, they manage to push Jesus to the point where He confesses that He is the Son of God. Of course, that is the truth, but, because they don't know Jesus, they regard these words as blasphemy, which gives them a pretext for executing Him. They still have to convince the Roman governor Pontius Pilate and this they fail to do. Pilate knows that Jesus is a good man. If only when Pilate asked, *What is truth*, he had realised that the answer was standing in front of him.

September 21st (St Matthew)

John 19 vv 1-7

Pilate was concerned about his position as Roman governor. He would have to answer to Caesar for any mistakes. The chief priests were concerned about their own wealth and power and political expediency. The soldiers were obeying orders. The people in the crowds followed the crowd. They were all enslaved by the ways of the world. But Jesus came to set us free. Three years earlier, Matthew had given up the wealth, power, political privilege and dubious alliances of a Roman tax gatherer and found freedom in following Jesus.

O Almighty God, who by thy blessed Son didst call Matthew from the receipt of custom to be an Apostle and Evangelist; Grant us grace to forsake all covetous desires, and inordinate love of riches, and to follow the same thy Son Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

September 22nd

John 19 vv 8-12

Whence art thou?

This is the key question. Is Jesus a carpenter from Nazareth turned religious fanatic and political nuisance? Is He a descendant of David, setting Himself up as the new King of Israel? Or is He the One Who has come down from Heaven?

September 23rd

John 19 vv 13-22

Jesus stands before the crowds. He has already been mocked and scourged. He must have been a pathetic sight, but there is no sympathy. *Crucify Him*, they cry. Such is the depravity of human beings. Yet Jesus stands there at the judgment seat, *Behold your King!* Eucharistic Prayer F in Common Worship puts it so well. After we have joined the angels in heaven, *Holy, holy, holy*, it goes on.

Lord God, you are the most holy one, enthroned in splendour and light, yet in the coming of your Son Jesus Christ you reveal the power of your love made perfect in our human weakness. Embracing our humanity, Jesus showed us the way of salvation; loving us to the end, he gave himself to death for us; dying for his own, he set us free from the bonds of sin, that we might rise and reign with him in glory.

September 24th

John 19 vv 23-29

Jesus fulfils the Law and the Prophets. Everything that happens to Him is in God's eternal plan for the salvation of the world, manifest, among many, many other places, in the scriptures we call the Old Testament. The Books of the Old Testament enable us to comprehend Jesus and Jesus enables us to make sense of the Old Testament. That is why you have to read the whole of the Bible. It is the Word of God written to bear witness to the Word of God made flesh.

September 25th

John 19 v 30

It is finished.

Not *I'm finished* or *It's over* or any other admission of defeat. This is not an admission of defeat. It is a cry of victory. Jesus has accomplished what He came to accomplish. The Cross has a vertical pole, uniting Heaven and earth, God and creation, immortal and mortal, spiritual and natural, heavenly and earthy. The Cross effects the atonement with God. It redeems the Cosmos. Death is swallowed up in victory. The Cross has a horizontal pole, uniting men and women of every race and language, of every people and tongue. Because of the Cross, we are children of God and therefore brothers and sisters, one with another, so that there is neither male nor female, Jew nor gentile, bond nor free. Because of the Cross we belong to God and to one another. Sin is our failure to love God with all our hearts and our neighbour as ourselves. The Cross does away with sin so that we can be one in love with Him and with one another. It won't be perfect till we get to Heaven, but we are on the road now.

September 26th

John 19 vv 31-37

Sin alienates from God. So, although the Holy Spirit is always present in the world, indeed the world is present in Him, we do not relate to God's Spirit until the partition of sin is broken down. Sin divides us from God and makes it impossible for us to know Him and so to enjoy eternal life. The Cross destroys that middle wall of partition. It washes our sins away. It is a propitiation and an expiation. It redeems us. The Holy Spirit can live in us and we in Him because the Cross breaks down the barrier of sin. We therefore have eternal life in the Lord and Giver of Life and we are empowered to live the life of Jesus.

September 27th

John 19 vv 38-42

We mainly hear about poor people and tradesmen following Jesus, but He did have some rich and influential disciples like these two. There were occasions when they could use their wealth and privilege. The temptation, however, must always have been to play down the Christian loyalty for fear that it would lead to a loss of the worldly privilege.

September 28th

John 20 vv 1-18

I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; to my God and your God.
I love these words of Jesus and I very often quote them at funerals. What a thought it is that the God of Jesus is our God and that the Father of Jesus is our Father. Through what He has done for us, we are the children of God. We are the Body of God's Son. We have received the Holy Spirit of adoption. We are co-heirs with Christ. We address God as *Our Father*. To be a Christian in this mortal world is to be very privileged indeed.

But He ascends to God. He opens the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. He is the first fruits of the Resurrection. Where He is, there will His servants be.

What we have as Christians here on earth is marvellous, but, as St Paul says, *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*

September 29th (Michaelmas)

John 20 vv 19-31

The Risen Christ appears to His disciples. He is different now. He is present in a locked room. He is present wherever His people meet. In Luke's account of this event, He shares a meal with them and expounds the Scriptures. So we share the Eucharistic Feast every Sunday with Jesus and with one another and read the Scriptures in the Light of the presence of the Risen Christ. This Body of believers shares His peace and shares His mission. The Church receives the power – both the capacity and the authority – to complete His mission on earth because God gives us the Holy Spirit. We are inspired and enthused, energised by the life-giving Spirit of the Risen Christ. The story of Thomas

demonstrates that all this is true for those who have not seen Jesus in the flesh just as much as it is true for those who have. We are all caught up with all God's people, with the saints in Heaven and with all the holy angels in worship and service to God, the Church and the world.

O everlasting God, who hast ordained and constituted the services of Angels and men in a wonderful order; Mercifully grant that, as thy holy Angels alway do thee service in heaven, so by thy appointment they may succour and defend us on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

September 30th

John 21 vv 1-25

Some people think that John 21 wasn't originally part of the Gospel of John. It is written in a slightly different style and it might be felt to be a bit of an anticlimax after the latter part of cap 20. It tidies things up – but presumably that was necessary. After their encounter with the Risen Christ and the commission they received, the disciples seem to have drifted back into their ordinary, every day life as fishermen. You and I may well have done the same. We are inspired and enthused by an encounter with God and then we drift back into the mundane. Jesus reminds them of their calling by repeating the miracle with the fishes which He had performed at the very beginning when they first became fishers of men. When we are discouraged, it is good to go back to the roots of our faith, the things that made us Christians and sustained us in the past. Peter gets the chance to put behind him the threefold denial with a threefold expression of love. He is commissioned as pastor of the early Church. The Church still needs pastors and we pray for our bishops and clergy and for vocations to ordained ministry. All Christians share in the pastoral ministry – to one another and to the world outside. Great as Peter is, God's plans for John are not his business. Each one of us needs to get on with the good works God has prepared for us to walk in, not speculate about other people. Some, like Peter, may face martyrdom. All of us are witnesses to everything Jesus said and did – especially the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.