

Exodus

Bible Notes

July - September
2025

July 1st

Exodus 1 vv 1-6

When I moved into 5, May St, I was curious about the history of the house. Who had lived here before? What alterations had they made to the structure? I was told that one can find these things out by getting hold of the relevant census data. That proved to be more difficult and expensive than I thought was worthwhile and the websites I looked at tried to divert me on to investigating my own personal family tree. I wasn't really sufficiently interested to pursue this. I knew all my grandparents. From them I know a little bit about my great-grandparents. Why go back farther than that? I guess I wouldn't gain anything more than a list of names. I suppose I might have some illustrious ancestor or be the heir to a fortune. On the other hand, I might be thoroughly ashamed of what my forefathers did. And yet without them I would not exist. Everyone of them made their own contribution to the world in the time in which they lived – great or small, for good or ill. They were all known to God. I hope that they are in heaven and that one day I shall meet them, that their names, as I trust that mine is, are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

The Bible includes long lists of the names of the people who make up the bible story. Some of them we know a lot about. Of others we only know who begat them and whom they begat. Yet they are all links in the chain, all part of God's plan for the world, as we are. As Christians *we most humbly beseech thee , O heavenly Father, so to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in;*

July 2nd

Exodus 1 vv 7&8

There arose a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. This verse saddens me. Things move on. People move on. Gratitude doesn't last. Favours are forgotten. Debts go unpaid. What seems certain turns out to be doubtful. As I am writing these notes, NATO and the western military alliance is in danger of losing its strongest member and the world economic order is in chaos. I don't know how things will be when you read the notes. But individuals and institutions in which we trusted only too often prove to have feet of clay. There is, however, One in Whom we can always trust whatever happens.

July 3rd

Exodus 1 vv 9&10

The Israelites had come into Egypt in order to escape the effects of the famine in their own land. We might refer to them as immigrants or refugees. They initially settled in a particular part of Egypt, the Land of Goshen, some of the best land in Egypt, and they did not integrate with the Egyptians. They kept their own culture. They multiplied to the point where the indigenous Egyptian population feared that they would be outnumbered. The Egyptians doubted where the loyalty of these immigrants lay. Whose side would they be on if there were a war? Would they fight for Egypt or would they feel more closely akin to any potential invaders?

We know what is coming and our instincts are to support the Israelites, but we may also, if we think about it, have some understanding of the Egyptian position. Immigration is high on the political agenda in contemporary Britain. There are the immigrants whom we invited to come here and work after the War and their descendants. There are refugees from persecution and wars going on overseas. There are students and academics. There are those who come here to do jobs which there aren't enough British people prepared to do – such as agricultural labour and working in care homes and the NHS. As well as all these legal immigrants – many of whom do not intend to stay – there are illegal immigrants. A fair proportion of these immigrants live in their own communities with their own culture and little desire to integrate with our wider society. In war time, especially if the conflict is with the country from which immigrant families have come or with the co-religionists of immigrant communities, there may be some doubt as to whose side they would be on. Enemy aliens were interned during the War, sometimes with good reason, sometimes not.

The fears of the Egyptians were understandable and not to be casually dismissed, but those fears led them to mistreat the Israelites which brought disaster on their own nation. They found themselves in conflict with the God of Justice. The concerns of many British people about mass immigration are not to be dismissed as though they don't matter, but neither must those fears be allowed to result in the mistreatment of immigrants.

July 4th

Exodus 1 vv 11-14

The Egyptians thought that they could keep the Israelites down by harsh treatment. I remember walking down Brick Lane in East London in the 1970s. It was a very poor place then. The inhabitants were mostly people of colour and, at least on the occasion I was there, sitting out in front of their houses looking very miserable. I understand that Brick Lane is now totally transformed. There were many places where large numbers of poor immigrants settled in the least desirable parts of towns and, often because of prejudice, found themselves unable to obtain decent employment. There are still parts of this country in which immigrants or their descendants are forced to work in abominable conditions for very little pay. For some it is so bad as to be described as modern slavery. We have tried. We have legislation outlawing discrimination. At least in theory we are trying to create an equal society. There has been tremendous progress, but we are not there yet. Pray for wisdom for yourself and for our politicians as we seek to build a just nation in which everyone is fairly treated and everyone is respected and that we find solutions to the tensions arising from the mass movement of peoples and the clash of cultures.

July 5th

Exodus 1 vv 15-22

Normally, it is our duty to obey the law and to tell the truth. Yet the Hebrew midwives are commended for disobeying Pharaoh's commandment to kill the boy babies and they were very likely being economical with the truth when they claimed that the Hebrew women experienced so much shorter labour than the Egyptians that the midwives were too late to do what Pharaoh demanded. You wouldn't tell the Gestapo where the Jewish children were hiding. Would you go so far as to lie about their whereabouts if you thought you could get away with it? If you were a soldier, would you obey an order to commit a war crime? If you lived in a country where it is illegal to meet for Christian worship, would you risk disobeying the law? Ought you to risk disobeying the law? The principle underlying God's Law is love – to love Him with all our hearts, souls, minds & strength and our neighbours as ourselves. Occasionally that principle overrides normal standards, but how do recognise such occasions? Prayerfully, I hope, and with reference to the Scriptures.

July 6th (Trinity 3)

Exodus 2 vv 1-4

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

What a terrible order it was of Pharaoh's to demand the drowning of the boy children! If we know the story well, we may, to some extent, be inured to the horror. It doesn't come as a shock any more than Herod's Massacre of the Innocents in the Christmas story. When you stop and think seriously about some of these Bible stories, you must ask yourself how people could be so wicked. Yet, while hopefully things like these don't happen to us or in the communities where we live, if we pay any attention at all to the news, we cannot but be conscious of the reality of great evil in the world. Sometimes, we're tempted to leave out the atrocities when we're reading the Bible or teaching it to others. The trouble is that, if we only read the nice bits of the Bible, we rob it of its power to speak to us when the worst happens and the worst does happen, if not to us, then to others. What can we do? We can preach and teach the Gospel. We can try to live lives that set an example. We can seek to ameliorate the effects of evil in acts of personal kindness, in the way we do the work we are paid for, in the way we vote, in support for charities & missions and in prayer.

When we pray, we pray for ourselves and we pray for the whole family of God, for our brothers and sisters, who may be facing the consequences of war, oppression or poverty, *whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.* We are in solidarity with our fellow Christians throughout the world, with humanity. We pray with those who pray and they pray for us. We pray even for those who do not pray themselves. We also need to remember that, while we enjoy the blessings of peace & freedom from want and may be in a position to donate material goods to people less well off than ourselves, very often people who are poor and oppressed have great spiritual gifts to share with us who have grown too complacent.

July 7th

Exodus 2 vv 5-10

When Pharaoh's daughter saw the baby Moses for herself, she was moved with compassion. If we get to know people better, we are more likely to recognise our common humanity with them and to treat them decently. So getting to know other people, other communities, other countries is always a good thing. We can have stereotypical ideas about Muslims or Chinese people or northerners or the working classes or people who drive 4x4s, but, if we get to know them, they are not all the same as one another. Neither are they so different from us.

Miriam was a resourceful child. Behind, of course, what she and Pharaoh's daughter do is the Hand of God, as we all live out our lives within His Providence.

July 8th

Exodus 2 vv 11-14

The presumption must be that Moses' mother, acting as his nurse in Pharaoh's court, brought him up to know who his own people were and to believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob.

This incident is mentioned in two other places in the Bible. In Acts 7²⁵ when St Stephen summarises the history of God's dealings with His people in order to demonstrate to the elders that Jesus is the fulfilment of God's purposes for the whole of Creation, he says, Moses *supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not*. They didn't recognise that God was at work to save them and rejected God's servant. Fairly typical human behaviour! We pray for missionaries & evangelists.

At first sight, Hebrews 11²⁷, appears to contradict what it says in our passage. *By faith he (Moses) forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured as seeing him who is invisible*. The brave soldier is the man who understands the reasons to be afraid and overcomes those fears. It is the foolhardy soldier who rushes into battle without any true understanding of the situation he is facing. Similarly, one can, at the same time be fearful of what one is facing, and yet, through faith in God, find the courage to do one's duty. Jesus in Gethsemane?

July 9th

Exodus 2 vv 16-22

Back in the oil crisis of the 1970s, Sheikh Yamani, who was one of the leaders in the Organisation of the Petrol Exporting Countries which had put up the price of oil fourfold, was at a meeting in London. He looked out of the window and, as it does much more often in London than it does in Saudi Arabia, the sheikh's home country, it was raining. He commented that there was a much more valuable liquid than oil on which we all depend. In the biblical lands, water was scarce, husbanded, rationed and sometimes fought over. So the priest's daughters would have had to take what water they could get when bands of male shepherds were determined to take what they wanted first. There are many places in the world today without dependable supplies of clean water. It makes a tremendous difference to a community to have a reliable source of water and the digging of wells and piping water to people's homes and businesses is a major project for governments and charities. Take a look at the Water Aid website. <https://www.wateraid.org/uk/what-we-do>

July 10th

Exodus 2 vv 23-25

The Israelites sojourned in Egypt 430 years. I don't know when there arose a Pharaoh who knew not Joseph and their slavery began. 430 years seems a very long time. But the Atlantic slave trade lasted over 300 years. The Greeks and Romans kept slaves for hundreds of years. In fact, the institution of slavery has disfigured human history for millennia. There is modern slavery even in countries like ours where vulnerable people are forced to work hard under harsh conditions for a pittance or for nothing. The Uyghurs in China are forced to work in conditions akin to slavery and there are too many parts of the world where workers are not much better treated, from some of whom we buy cheap goods such as clothing & shoes. There has rightly been a lot of condemnation of the Atlantic slave trade in recent years, but that particular atrocity is far from unique. Why did God wait so long to hear the cries of the Hebrew slaves? Why has He waited so long in the past, why does He wait so long now to put an end to the evil of slavery? Something perhaps to do with His respect for human freedom? All I know is that we should keep praying and do what we can to work with God to bring in His Kingdom of justice, mercy & peace.

July 11th

Exodus 3 vv 1-6

It appears that, after the setback of Pharaoh finding out about his killing of the Egyptian and the rejection of his offer to mediate between the two Israelites, Moses set aside any ambition of delivering the Israelites and settled down in a new land as a shepherd and family man. It is easy to be discouraged by setbacks and sometimes rightly so. Maybe we have attempted something which is not for us. We haven't got the skills. It's not what God intends for our lives. But, if whatever it is is God's will for our lives, then we shouldn't allow any setbacks to put us off. How do we know what is God's will for our lives? We pray. We read the Bible. We ask the advice of people we respect. And sometimes, as with God speaking to Moses from the burning bush, God gives us a nudge – though not usually as dramatic as this.

July 12th

Exodus 3 vv 7-12

God has introduced Himself to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob. Moses knows Who God is. He knows what God has promised. So Moses ought to have the faith just to get on with what God wants him to do. It's the same for you & me. We know that we can trust God. We know that His service is perfect freedom. We know that He doesn't ask of us anything that we cannot do because His grace is sufficient for us. But what God wants of Moses is daunting. He's to go back to Egypt and return to Pharaoh's palace. There may be people there who remember him. He might still be on a wanted list. He's got to talk this mighty potentate into setting free his huge army of slave labourers. The task would be impossible except that God promises Moses, *Certainly I will be with thee*. Nothing is impossible with God. Jesus, God the Son, promises, *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world*. It is unreasonable for a Christian to be daunted. We might with reason be afraid, but still, through faith in God, find the courage to do what He's telling us to do.

July 13th (Trinity 4)

Exodus 3 v13

Pharaoh & the Egyptians are far from being Moses' only problem. Will the Israelites accept his leadership? Those two fighting one another in the last chapter didn't respect Moses. Time after time in the Book of Exodus and in the following three Books of the Law we shall find the

Israelites rebelling against Moses. Moses' authority comes from God. So, when they rebel against Moses, they rebel against God. So, how do we recognise spiritual leadership? Those leaders whom we can trust must be close to God, holy, obedient to God, living, insofar as human beings may, in imitation of Christ. God reveals Himself to Moses and Moses glows with the glory of God (Exodus 34²⁹⁻³⁵). In the words of the collect, God is the only source of holiness and He is our ruler & guide. Christian leaders must be followers of Him so that we can follow them. St Paul says, *Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ*. So we pray for the selection of a new Archbishop of Canterbury and for other bishops and clergy.

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

July 14th

Exodus 3 v14

I am that I am.

Possible meanings.

- God is quite simply beyond our understanding. It is presumptuous of us to think that we can comprehend God.
- God just is. Everything thing else that is derives its existence from Him.
- God is the One Who causes everything else to be.
- When you can put a name to someone or something you have a degree of understanding, a certain power over what you can name. We can't do that with God. He is infinitely beyond our understanding. His power is infinite.

July 15th

Exodus 3 v15

God gives Moses a name. Traditional English versions of the Bible write it as the LORD. If you are reading the original Hebrew out loud, when you come to this Name, you say *Adonai* which is Hebrew for Lord. The Name is sometimes written in English as Yahweh. I don't like doing that because the Name really is holy. It must not be taken in vain. English translations which call God Yahweh make Him sound like the false gods of the Gentiles with names like Chemosh or Milcom.

July 16th

Exodus 3 vv 16-18

Moses has received a new and very wonderful revelation of the nature of God. *I am that I am. I am the LORD.* He is still the God Who made Himself known to Abraham, Isaac & Jacob. He is true to the promises He made to them. But now there is a further revelation, a guarantee of God's faithfulness, a confirmation of His eternal Word.

Fast forward to Jesus. *God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.* (Hebrews 1^{1&2}). How privileged are we!

July 17th

Exodus 3 vv 19&20

We're at the limit of human understanding here. Pharaoh, like all of us, has free will. He makes choices and those choices have consequences. However, everything that happens happens within the Providence of God. Our choices cannot thwart God's plans. Our choices are intrinsic to His plans for the world even when we make the wrong choices. Judas shouldn't have betrayed Jesus. The Jewish leaders should have recognised & welcomed the Messiah. The crowds shouldn't have demanded the cruel execution of a prisoner. Pontius Pilate ought not to have crucified an innocent man. But Jesus said, *For this cause came I unto this hour.* It was because of what Judas, the Sadducees & Pharisees, the mob and Pontius Pilate did, that the world was saved – in accordance with God's eternal plan.

July 18th

Exodus 3 vv 21&22

Eventually, the Egyptians would be glad to get rid of the Hebrews – after the ten plagues. They would send them away with many precious gifts. Probably, these treasures are at least part of what the Israelites would use to make the Ark of the Covenant & the Tabernacle.

July 19th

Exodus 4 vv 1-9

Moses thought that the Israelites wouldn't follow him. So God gave him these signs to convince them. Jesus says that it is an evil generation which demands a sign. We ought to have faith.

July 20th (Trinity 5)

Exodus 4 vv 10-17

Moses really doesn't want the job of going back to Egypt, entering into the presence of Pharaoh and setting the Hebrew slaves free. He complains that he is no speaker. The LORD responds, *Who hath made man's mouth? Or who maketh the dumb, or the deaf, or the seeing, or the blind?* St Paul puts it like this. *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.* (Philippians 4¹³). Whatever God requires us to do, He supplies us with the means to do it. God does, however, allow Aaron to do the talking at least at first. Moses has plenty to say later on. If you & I want to see the answer to the prayer in today's collect, we've got to do our bit.

GRANT, O Lord, we beseech thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by thy governance, that thy Church may joyfully serve thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

July 21st

Exodus 4 vv 18-23

Out of Egypt have I called my son.

This comes in the Christmas story when God warns Joseph to take Jesus and His mother to flee to Egypt because Herod will seek to destroy Him. In Hosea 11¹, it says, *When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.* Pharaoh, like Herod, killed the boy babies. Jesus, like Israel, is called out of Egypt. Abraham was ready to sacrifice his son Isaac, but God spared them both and substituted a ram caught in a thicket in the place of the boy. The Egyptians, however, defying God, experienced the deaths of their own first born sons. It all ties in. Christ fulfils the prophecies of the Old Testament. He is the Son called out of Egypt. He is the Son Whose life is offered as a sacrifice for sin, including sins such as those committed by Pharaoh & Herod.

July 22nd

Exodus 4 vv 24-26

This incident is hard to understand and we often leave it out of our readings. Jewish boys were (and are) required to be circumcised and Moses' son by his wife Zipporah had not been. This story is perhaps a reminder that we can't take God for granted. He's not Father Christmas. There is danger in entering into the Presence of the Holy One presumptuously. *Our God is a consuming fire.* (Hebrews 12²⁹).

July 23rd

Exodus 4 vv 27-31

Behold, how good and joyful a thing it is: brethren, to dwell in unity!
That's the first verse of Psalm 133. Brothers dwelling together in unity. It is very sad that there appears to be so much enmity between the Prince of Wales & the Duke of Suffolk. It is an issue I remember in my prayers for the royal family. In praying for the royal family, we pray for all families, that their members may be united in love. We pray for the unity of the Church – brothers & sisters in Christ. We pray for the unity of the human race – children of the same heavenly Father. Moses and Aaron accomplished so much when they worked together for the glory of God, each bringing his God-given talent to the task at hand.

July 24th

Exodus 5 vv 1&2

Who is the LORD that I should obey his voice?

The fool hath said in his heart: There is no God.

The second quotation is Psalm 14¹. The fool denies that there is a God of justice and mercy in Whom we live and move and have our being. The arrogant fool does not believe that we are ultimately accountable for our actions. And why does he believe that? Precisely because he is a fool.

July 25th (St James)

Exodus 5 vv 3&4

Where do our loyalty and our duty of obedience lie? To God or to the King? When I was a boy scout, we promised to do our duty to God & the King, but what happens when these duties conflict? The King of Egypt orders us to make bricks. The King of Kings commands us to head out into the wilderness and offer sacrifice. Governments tend to be a bit wary of religion, either suppressing it or trying to co-opt religion to support its secular goals. The ideal is a government which seeks to do God's Will. The apostle James was martyred by King Herod Agrippa. James was faithful to God even unto death

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 carnal affections, may be evermore ready to follow thy holy commandments; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

July 26th

Exodus 5 vv 5-9

Pharaoh's answer to the complaints of the Israelites was to increase their burden. If they had to work harder & longer, they would not have the time & energy to think about anything else but their work. If complaining only made things worse, they would learn the hard way to keep quiet. So the tyrant doubles down on oppressing the people. In the long run, it won't do him any good, however. The message for the oppressed is to keep praying and never to give up hope.

Psalm 52: **WHY** boastest thou thyself, thou tyrant : that thou canst do mischief; 2. Whereas the goodness of God : endureth yet daily? 3. Thy tongue imagineth wickedness : and with lies thou cuttest like a sharp razor. 4. Thou hast loved unrighteousness more then goodness : and to talk of lies more than righteousness. 5. Thou hast loved to speak all words that may do hurt : O thou false tongue. 6. Therefore shall God destroy thee for ever : he shall take thee, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling, and root thee out of the land of the living. 7. The righteous also shall see this, and fear : and shall laugh him to scorn; 8. Lo, this is the man that took not God for his strength : but trusted unto the multitude of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness. 9. As for me, I am like a green olive-tree in the house of God : my trust is in the tender mercy of God for ever and ever. 10. I will always give thanks unto thee for that thou hast done : and I will hope in thy Name, for thy saints like it well.

July 27th (Trinity 6)

Exodus 5 vv 10-19

The situation of the Israelites was desperate. Being a slave making bricks in the hot sun had been bad enough even before Moses had arrived to set them free, but now, after his intervention, they were forced to work even harder. Suppose you were in a similar situation. Do you think that what we pray for in this week's collect would provide you with sufficient solace?

O GOD, who hast prepared for them that love thee such good things as pass man's understanding; Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

July 28th

Exodus 5 vv 20-23

When Winston Churchill became prime minister in May 1940, he warned his cabinet, parliament and the British people at large, *I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat*. Before the Second World War, many people had advocated a policy of appeasement, of not challenging the Nazis. They remembered only too clearly the horrors of the Great War. It is unsurprising that they did not want to repeat the experience. It was not impossible that, if we left Hitler to his own devices in continental Europe, he might form some sort of pact with us so that we retained our empire and avoided conflict with Germany. Doing so would have been immoral in that it would let down our allies and permitted an evil regime to persist in its wickedness and it would have meant trusting a man who had already broken promises. But it wouldn't have been the first time we had let down the people we had promised to defend, we would co-operate with Stalin's evil regime in order to defeat Hitler's and we do, even today, put our trust in presidents and governments who really shouldn't be trusted. We do so in order to preserve peace & the balance of power & in the interests of international trade. The world would be a more uncertain place and we should all be poorer if we didn't collaborate with some pretty unsavoury regimes. So, at what point, do we do a Churchill and accept the pain which will inevitably follow from taking the principled course of action? When we have no alternative?

MOST gracious God, we humbly beseech thee, as for this Kingdom in general, so especially for the High Court of Parliament, under our most religious and gracious King at this time assembled: That thou wouldest be pleased to direct and prosper all their consultations, to the advancement of thy glory, the good of thy Church, the safety, honour, and welfare of our Sovereign and his Dominions; that all things may be so ordered and settled by their endeavours, upon the best and surest foundations, that peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety, may be established among us for all generations. These and all other necessities, for them, for us, and thy whole Church, we humbly beg in the Name and Mediation of Jesus Christ, our most blessed Lord and Saviour. *Amen*.

O GOD, the Creator and Preserver of all mankind, we humbly beseech thee for all sorts and conditions of men: that thou wouldest be pleased to make thy ways known unto them, thy saving health unto all nations.

July 29th

Exodus 6 vv 1-27

When I was building the Lego model bus which I was given when I retired, there were several occasions when things were not working out as expected & I had to dismantle what I had done most recently & get back to what was certain – to reset & to rebuild. Something like that seems to be happening here. The plans haven't worked out. Not only has Pharaoh not let the people go, he has added to their burdens and the people themselves have turned against Moses & Aaron. So back to first principles. God has made Himself known in a new way – by His Name which is too holy even to pronounce – and He has confirmed His age-old and eternal promise. Trust in God. God is faithful. Ultimately, He is the only One in Whom we can trust.

I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God.

This is God's promise, a promise extended to all who come to Him through faith in Jesus Christ. *I will be your God; you will be my people. Be ye holy because I am holy.*

July 30th

Exodus 6 v28 – 7 v7

Moses feels utterly unfit for the task God has given him. He is not alone in that! Many of us may feel that we can't cope with what is expected of us. But God doesn't demand of us the impossible. He supplies the means. So, in this case, Moses' brother Aaron will do the talking, which Moses doesn't feel able to do. A prophet is God's messenger. He speaks the Word of the LORD. So God will speak to Moses (who is a great prophet), but Aaron will deliver the message as though Moses were God and Aaron his prophet. God repeats the warning that Pharaoh will not heed the message that God imparts to him via Moses & Aaron. I'm reminded of Isaiah 6 in which the prophet Isaiah has a wonderful vision of God, is cleansed & empowered by God to take on the role of God's messenger & yet he is warned that the people's hearts will be hardened against the message. Jesus, the Word made flesh, takes up the same theme in Mark 4¹², *that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them.* Being hardened against God is a vicious circle, the harder we are, the harder we become – unless God's life-giving Spirit intervenes and breaks the circle.

July 31st

Exodus 7 vv 8-25

A recurring theme of the Exodus is that Pharaoh's magicians are not without power, but that their power is always inferior to that of God. Never mind about magical powers. There are many powerful forces and powerful people in the world. The devil himself is not without power. But we don't have to be afraid. The power of God is always greater. *Greater is he that is in you than, he that is in the world*, I John 4⁴. *What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?* (Romans 8³¹).

August 1st

Exodus 8 vv 1-15

Didn't God love the Egyptians too? Why did He have to smite them with all these plagues? Was it because they deserved to be punished for enslaving the Israelites? Was it possibly the only way to make the Egyptians set the Hebrews free? The Israelites were indeed the chosen people – chosen to be the nation in which would be born the Saviour of the world. The destinies of all nations are in God's Hands, not merely that of Israel. *God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation* (Acts 17²⁶). More is expected of those who know Him, but God cares for us all.

Most people believe that sometimes war is unavoidable if we are to defend ourselves, to protect the innocent, to maintain a world order in which peace and prosperity may flourish. Most of us accept that the police and other authorities may use force, sometimes lethal force, in the performance of their duties. We support the courts in punishing the guilty.

Sometimes the harsh application of force is the only way to achieve justice- like Royal Navy warships using force to suppress the Slave Trade in Victorian times.

But I'm writing these notes in Holy Week. Isn't there a more excellent way, a better way of overcoming the power of evil than fighting fire with fire? There is, but it is incredibly costly.

August 2nd

Exodus 8 vv 16-19

The Egyptian magicians had to admit that they could not produce lice and concluded that the plague of lice must, therefore, be the work of the finger of God. Do we think that there are some things which we can do without God? Do we think that we can effectively act in opposition to God? Do we think that whenever God acts, human hands are not involved? If so, we are wrong on every count. We cannot achieve any good purpose unless we work with God. We work best when we acknowledge that truth and commit our work, whatever it is, in prayer to God. We cannot finally thwart God's purposes. While God can and does work without human assistance, He very often does use us to achieve His purposes. If we live prayerful lives, we are open to the possibilities of working with God to achieve His purposes in the world.

The expression *Finger of God* is used in two other contexts in the Bible. The Ten Commandments are inscribed by the Finger of God on the two stone tablets. Jesus said (Luke 11²⁰): *If I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.* Powerful stuff!

August 3rd (Trinity 7)

Exodus 8 vv 20-32

There is a division, a distinction between the Israelites and the Egyptians, the people of God and the heathen, Jew and Gentile. In the New Testament this division or distinction is expressed as Church and world. We are for Christ or we are against Him. If we are not against Him, we are for Him. One or the other. We belong to Jesus or we are of the world. Belonging is a great blessing and demands total commitment on our part. Not belonging means that we are lost. But the Good News is that it is God's Will that the lost should be found, that those without faith should come to know God, that the people of the world should become, through faith & repentance, the people of God.

1 Amazing grace (how sweet the
sound)
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am
found,
was blind, but now I see.
2 'Twas grace that taught my
heart to fear,

and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace
appear
the hour I first believed!
3 Through many dangers, toils
and snares
I have already come:
'tis grace has brought me safe

thus far,
and grace will lead me home.
4 The Lord has promised good
to me,
his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion
be
as long as life endures.
5 Yes, when this flesh and
heart shall fail,

and mortal life shall cease:
I shall possess, within the veil,
a life of joy and peace.
6 The earth shall soon dissolve
like snow,
the sun forbear to shine;
but God, who called me here
below,
will be forever mine.

LORD of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things; Graft in our hearts the love of thy Name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

August 4th

Exodus 9 vv 1-12

The plagues continue. Pharaoh will not let the people go, as God had forewarned Moses. The latest humiliation for Pharaoh's magicians is that they not only cannot reproduce what God is doing through Moses, but that they cannot even stand before him because they themselves have become victims of the boils. No human being can withstand the power of God. Jesus said (Matthew 12³⁰), "*He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.*" Far better to work with God in achieving His good purposes than attempt to oppose Him and do nothing but harm including to yourself.

August 5th

Exodus 9 vv 13-35

Some of the Egyptians have learned their lesson. They have observed the consequences of disobeying God. They have learned to fear God. So they sensibly pay attention to Moses' word and bring their cattle indoors before the hail comes. The innocent cattle belonging to those Egyptians too obdurate to hear the Word of the LORD suffer. Very often, the innocent do suffer because of the sin & folly of the wicked. The fear of the LORD, the beginning of wisdom, may be the first step on the road to that love which casts out fear.

Come Lord, come Wisdom, Love and Power, open our ears to hear; let us not miss the accepted hour; save, Lord, by love or fear.

August 6th (The Transfiguration)

Exodus 10 vv 21-29

I've swapped round the 8th & 9th plagues. Today, we mark the Transfiguration of Jesus, the Light of the World. Jesus took Peter & James & John up a high mountain. His face shone. Even His clothing was white as the light. Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke with Him of His exodus, His departure or death. A bright cloud overshadowed them and the Voice of God spoke, *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.* Psalm 119¹⁰⁵: *Thy word is a lantern unto my feet: and a light unto my paths.* What a contrast to the thick darkness which engulfed those whose hearts were hardened against the Word of God.

August 7th

Exodus 10 vv 1-20

When people think about the plagues of Egypt, it seems to me that it's the locusts which they think of. Maybe it's because, even though most of us haven't seen swarms of locusts in action, we have seen film of them. We've seen how they eat up every scrap of vegetation. By and large, we live in very controlled environments. Our food comes reliably from the shops. If there are shortages, prices may rise or we may not be able to have exactly what we want, but we shan't go without what we need. Our homes are mostly comfortable and warm. It is eighty years since those of us on the home front were threatened with the effects of war. These are things for which to be thankful. There are millions of people who do not enjoy the blessings we have received. If we are thankful, we praise God. If we acknowledge God, we accept our responsibility to share with other people, to respect & take care of the people whose work supplies our needs and to look after the planet. This means in our personal and working lives, in prayer & our involvement in politics, including the way in which we vote.

August 8th

Exodus 11 vv 1-3

We often overlook this part of the Exodus story. After all these plagues, especially the last, the Egyptians were glad to see the back of the Israelites. They provided them with all this treasure, which presumably contributed to the building of the Tabernacle, the Ark & its furnishings.

Psalm 105: 35. He smote all the first-born in their land : even the chief of all their strength. 36. He brought them forth also with silver and gold : there was not one

feeble person among their tribes. 37. Egypt was glad at their departing : for they were afraid of them.

August 9th

Exodus 11 vv 4-10

Sometimes, when telling this story to a group of people, I've asked those who are first born sons to raise their arms. My arm went up. It is quite salutary to consider how many people must have died in this plague (together with the first born of the animals) and of the grief which those who were left must have experienced. No wonder *Egypt was glad at their departing!* We've thought before about whether the slaves could have been set free without God inflicting these horrors on the Egyptians. But we bombed Berlin & the Americans bombed Hiroshima & Nagasaki. We maintain the armed services with a view to protecting ourselves from aggression and, to some extent, imposing order on a disordered world. In fact, we are planning to spend more on defence because we are afraid that there are dark powers in the world today which threaten our freedom & our values &, indeed, our wealth and security. God smote the Egyptians. As a Christian country, we smote the Nazis.

Can we avoid violent conflict and still defend the principles of peace? Galatians 4^{4ff}: *But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*

God spared not His own Son. By His Death He redeemed us, He set us free from slavery to sin and the fear of death, the frantic and futile endeavour to justify ourselves, so that we should be His children by adoption and heirs of His Kingdom.

Hebrews 2:¹⁴ *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;*

¹⁵ *And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

August 10th (Trinity 8, St Laurence)

All in the April morning,
April airs were abroad;
The sheep with their little lambs
Pass'd me by on the road.

The sheep with their little lambs
Pass'd me by on the road;
All in an April evening
I thought on the Lamb of God.

The lambs were weary, and
crying
With a weak human cry,
I thought on the Lamb of God
Going meekly to die.

Exodus 12 vv 1-6

Up in the blue, blue mountains
Dewy pastures are sweet:
Rest for the little bodies,
Rest for the little feet.

But for the Lamb of God
Up on the hill-top green,
Only a cross of shame
Two stark crosses between.

All in the April evening,
April airs were abroad;
I saw the sheep with their
lambs,
And thought on the Lamb of
God.

If you've never heard this beautiful poem sung, Google it and play one of the choral versions.

O GOD, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth; We humbly beseech thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

August 11th

Exodus 12 vv 6-10

The Passover lamb is eaten together with your household. It is a common meal. If households are too small for one lamb or kid, they share with others. There must be none left over to go off because this a holy meal. The blood of the lamb identifies the people of God. The angel of death passes over their homes without harming them. God is setting His people free from slavery and bringing them home to the Promised Land.

You can hardly miss the New Testament parallels. Jesus is the Lamb of God. The Church is the household of God. We participate in a common meal with Him & with one another. We are delivered from death & set free from sin.

August 12th

Exodus 12 vv 11-14

God's people participate in the Passover meal in anticipation of their liberation. They are dressed ready for their journey. In Holy Communion, we remember how God has liberated us from sin & the fear of death through the Blood of the Son of God. We participate with Him in table fellowship on every occasion when we celebrate these holy mysteries. Strengthened by this food, we are made ready for our journey through whatever this world may bring us to our Promised Land. The Israelites were commanded to do this yearly. Jesus does not say how often we should *do this in remembrance of me*, but the biblical precedent is to meet on the Lord's Day to perform this rite.

August 13th

Exodus 12 vv 15-17

The first explanation given for eating unleavened bread is quite simply that there was not time to let the bread rise in the normal way. But there is a second explanation. Leaven (yeast) came to symbolise sin. Jewish families thoroughly clean their houses before passover to make sure that there is not a trace of leaven to be found there. In the same way, when we approach the throne of God, we must be completely cleansed of sin.

The Easter Anthems

CHRIST our passover is sacrificed for us : therefore let us keep the feast; Not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness : but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 1 *Cor.* v. 7

Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more : death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once : but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin : but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Rom.* vi. 9

Christ is risen from the dead : and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death : by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die : even so in Christ shall all be made alive. 1 *Cor.* xv. 20.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end.

Amen.

August 14th

Exodus 12 vv 18-20

Assuming that the Last Supper was a Passover meal, which it almost certainly was, there are two schools of thought about what kind of bread we should use for Holy Communion. The Book of Common Prayer direction is *And to take away all occasion of dissension, and superstition, which any person hath or might have concerning the Bread and Wine, it shall suffice that the Bread be such as is usual to be eaten; but the best and purest Wheat Bread that conveniently may be gotten.* So presumably that is leavened bread. We receive Christ's Body in the consecrated Bread, but it is not magic or superstition; it is by God's grace that we are nourished by Christ in the Sacrament. Using ordinary bread is symbolic of the way in which Christ infuses and transforms our ordinary lives – so that we might become like Him. Symbolically, the bread is broken in the consecration prayer as Christ's Body was broken for us on the Cross. But, if you look at old Communion patens (plates used in HC), they are often scored where the bread has obviously been cut. The other view is that, given that Jesus & His disciples would have used unleavened bread at the Last Supper, so should we at Holy Communion. Hence the wafers, which are unleavened bread. It is also true that the wafers are more convenient than ordinary bread. They don't make crumbs, which require reverent consumption, having been consecrated, and they are easier to count in a statistics obsessed Church. Nevertheless, leavened bread was used for Holy Communion universally for the first few hundred years of Christianity. HC derives from but is not the Jewish Passover. Some Christians believe that the bread rising symbolises Christ rising from the dead. All Christians are called to serve as the salt of the earth, the light of the world and, as citizens of the Kingdom of God, the leaven which transforms the world. It is carbon dioxide gas produced by leaven or yeast which makes the sticky dough rise. Am I pushing the analogy too far if I suggest that it is the Holy Spirit, the Wind of God, sent into the world by Christ the Bread of Life which causes the clay of the earth to rise to life eternal? Perhaps, I am pushing it too far, but you see what I mean. The Body of Christ, broken on the Cross, unleashes the Holy Spirit, Who inspires the world with the Gospel of the Resurrection. Yeast also produces the alcohol in wine which *maketh glad the heart of man*, which is also consecrated in Holy Communion.

August 15th

Exodus 12 vv 21-28

Children are very much part of the Passover celebration. It is a family thing. They search the house beforehand to make sure that there is no leaven. One of the boys asks the questions which introduce the telling of the story of the Deliverance from Egypt. They hunt out the afikomen, which is a piece of unleavened bread hidden away, to be used as the very last thing which will be eaten. They look for the coming of the prophet Elijah. The children are included in the celebration. They learn about what God has done for His people and what He requires of them. And that is what we Christians have failed to do, to include the children in the life of the Church, to tell them the Gospel story, to teach them the way God wants us to live.

August 16th

Exodus 12 vv 29-42

At last Pharaoh saw sense and let the people go.

At the Lamb's high feast we
sing
praise to our victorious King,
who hath washed us in the tide
flowing from his pierced side;
praise we him, whose love
divine
gives his sacred Blood for wine,
gives his Body for the feast,
Christ the victim, Christ the
priest.

Where the Paschal blood is
poured,
death's dark angel sheathes his
sword;
Israel's hosts triumphant go
through the wave that drowns
the foe.
Praise we Christ, whose blood
was shed,
Paschal victim, Paschal bread;
with sincerity and love
eat we manna from above.

Mighty victim from on high,
hell's fierce powers beneath
thee lie;
thou hast conquered in the
fight,
thou hast brought us life and
light:
now no more can death appal,
now no more the grave enthrall;
thou hast opened paradise,
and in thee thy saints shall
rise.

Easter triumph, Easter joy,
sin alone can this destroy;
from sin's power do thou set
free
souls newborn, O Lord, in thee.
Hymns of glory and of praise,
Risen Lord, to thee we raise;
Holy Father, praise to thee,
with the Spirit, ever be.

August 17th (Trinity 9)

Exodus 12 vv 43-51

In debates in the media about immigration and asylum seekers, some Christians point to the Bible & particularly the Old Testament as a model for us, that we should welcome people of other lands, races & cultures. It is certainly true that the Israelites were told to treat fairly the foreigner living among them and not to oppress him. But it's far from as simple as that. The people of God are a holy people. The Bible teaches that they must not intermarry with the heathen, they must not worship the gods of the heathen, nor adopt their cultural practices. The Israelites / the Jews must not assimilate. In fact, the Canaanite tribes already living in the Promised Land were to be annihilated. In the New Testament, it is clear that God's invitation is open to people of every race & culture. All anyone has to do is to repent and to believe in Jesus Christ. When he does so, he becomes a member of the people of God, a citizen of heaven. But we are called to live up to our calling, to live our lives in imitation of Christ. We cannot compromise with sin, the world or the devil. *You shall be holy as I am holy*, says God to Jew & Christian alike. This does mean treating immigrants & asylum seekers fairly & generously. It does mean that we must not oppress those who come to us for refuge or for work or for whatever reason. It does not, however, mean accepting every culture & every form of belief as equally valid. Jesus is the Way, the Truth & the Light. We proclaim Christ crucified. If we know these things, we cannot treat immigrants & refugees with anything but Christ-like love, but neither can we compromise the Truth which God has revealed in Jesus.

GRANT to us, Lord, we beseech thee, the spirit to think and do always such things as be rightful; that we, who cannot do any thing that is good without thee, may by thee be enabled to live according to thy will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

August 18th

Exodus 13 vv 1&2

The Egyptian first born died before Pharaoh would set free the Children of Israel. The nation of Israel is described as God's first born son. The King of Israel was referred to as God's son. Jesus embodies the people of Israel, the Servant of God (Isaiah 48²⁰ & 49⁵), as He embodies the Church. He is the King of Kings. He is the incarnate Son of God, Whom God did not spare in order to redeem us so that we might be His children.

August 19th

Exodus 13 vv 3-10

There are three great feasts in the Jewish calendar – Passover, Weeks & Tabernacles. Closely associated with Passover is the Feast of Unleavened Bread & the Feast of Firstfruits, the beginning of the (barley) Harvest. Seven weeks later is the Feast of Weeks, the First Fruits of the (wheat) harvest. The seventh month of the Jewish year (around October) begins with Trumpets, on the 10th is the Day of Atonement, and on 15th Tabernacles, when Jewish people dwell for a week in tents in memory of their 40 year trek to the Promised Land, the Firstfruits of the grape & olive harvest are offered and the Law of God is proclaimed.

Passover & Weeks correspond with the Christian Easter & Whitsun (Pentecost) and the symbolism is brought out in the NT. Jesus may have been born at Tabernacles, in which case it would correspond with our Christmas. Our understanding of Good Friday is undergirded by the account of the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 23.

The point of the yearly observance of these feasts, whether Jewish or Christian, is that we identify with the people to whom the events commemorated happened in history. We are the same people of God as those people who knew Jesus in the flesh, as St John says of himself, *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life..* God has richly blessed us as He blessed those who went before us in the faith. God requires of us that we live up to what He has done for us. *I will be your God; you will be my people.* It is incumbent on us to incorporate generations yet to come into our Christian family. So don't let commercial interests squeeze the Christ out of Christmas or the story of His Death & Resurrection out of Easter. And don't disregard Pentecost because it is no longer a bank holiday weekend.

August 20th

Exodus 13 vv 11-16

I've never really felt comfortable with this commandment to sacrifice the first born of the animals. Unless we are vegetarians, however, we accept that sheep & cattle will be killed. Notice that the first born of an

ass can be redeemed with a lamb. The donkey is ritually unclean and is not suitable either for sacrifice or food. The sacrificed lambs would have been cooked & eaten by the priests, no worse than what we meat eaters do. In fact, in a sense, whenever an animal was killed, there was an element of sacrifice. The blood was poured out signifying that the life returns to God. God does permit us to kill and eat animals, but with a spirit of reverence and humility. Even animal life is a gift from God. Animals intended for food should be farmed humanely and killed with a minimum of fear & pain. There's something more wrong about wasting meat than wasting plant food – though wasting food is always reprehensible.

August 21st

Exodus 13 vv 17-19

Joseph had been dead c400 years, but they took his bones with them back to the Promised Land where he was born. The symbolism was powerful. Many Christians venerate relics such as the preserved body parts of saints, fragments of the Cross or either items especially associated with the holy. There is very good reason to question the genuineness of many of these relics. Some people are very exercised about where their loved ones are buried or where their ashes are buried or scattered. Memorials and churchyard maintenance are a big part of a vicar's life. We feel strongly about what happens to our mortal remains. Yet isn't what happens to our immortal souls very much more important. Joseph's bones were taken to their final resting place in the Promised Land. What matters much more, surely, is that the final resting place of our souls should be in heaven.

August 22nd

Exodus 13 vv 20-22

I once heard some interesting evidence that human beings are instinctively dualists. In other words, we naturally believe that we are both souls & bodies. The evidence offered was the way that even young children quickly understand that Granny is both in the churchyard where they can visit her grave and in heaven where she is with the angels before the Throne of God & we shall see her again one day. Just as God led His people out of Egypt too Mt Sinai, through the Wilderness & onto the Promised Land, so He leads us by His Spirit to our eternal home.

August 23rd

Exodus 14 vv 1-9

Thinking back to the first chapter of Exodus, the Israelites were enslaved and treated harshly in order to keep down their numbers because the Egyptians were concerned about all these “foreigners” living in their land. Whose side would they be on if there were a war? But, they got used to having this source of cheap labour. They didn’t want to let them go and, when they did finally allow them to depart, after ten terrible plagues, they determined to go after the Israelites and force them to return to bondage in Egypt.

It’s worth examining the logic of the decisions we take and the actions we pursue, not only individually, but in the realm of politics. Immigration furnishes an example. After the Second World War, we encouraged people to come from the Empire, especially the West Indies, to live & work here. Often, they were not well treated, but they took on a lot of important jobs. Then we started worrying about the numbers of immigrants coming here, especially when the EU adopted the policy of freedom of movement. We then left the EU & found ourselves short of people to work in agriculture, in the care sector, etc.. I’m not saying that there are always answers to these conundrums, but it would help if we considered them rationally, consistently and with proper respect for all the parties involved.

August 24th (Trinity 10, St Bartholomew)

Exodus 14 vv 10-14

The Children of Israel needed to hold their nerve, but it couldn’t have been easy when they saw Pharaoh’s army in pursuit. Better, they thought, to have lived as slaves in Egypt than to die in the desert. It wouldn’t be easy to hold your nerve in such circumstances. I can imagine myself feeling overwhelmed and desperate in far less dangerous circumstances. So what is the secret to holding your nerve in the face of insuperable odds? The answer is faith. *Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.* (I John 4th).

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

Exodus 14 vv 15-18

Moses must have had a lot of confidence in God to believe that, when he stretched his rod out over the sea, the waters would part. Why should he have such confidence? He knew about God's promises to His people through Abraham, Isaac & Jacob. He knew what God had promised Moses and what God would do in his generation. He had been commanded by God. He had seen God's power at work in the world. God had spoken to Moses and Moses had conversed with God.

Can we have the same confidence to step out in faith & take a course of action which many people would regard as hopeless & futile, simply because we believe that it is what God is telling us to do? We know the Scriptures. We know what God has promised. We know what He has done in the past. We know what He has done in our own lives. He speaks to us and we speak to Him in prayer. I doubt if any of us will be called to part the seas, but God does call us sometimes to step out in faith and do what we and our friends would believe to be beyond our capabilities. We have to be reasonable, not to confuse our own devices and desires with the Voice of God, but we also have to be open to the possibility that He will tell us to do something out of what would be the ordinary for us. *My grace is sufficient for you*, He says.

August 26th

Exodus 14 vv 19 & 20

We can think of the Exodus story as a type of the Christian Gospel. Jesus is the Passover Lamb, Whose Blood protects us from death & the fear of death and sets us free from slavery to sin. Jesus is the Bread of Life, the unleavened bread of the feast and the manna which sustains the people of God through the wilderness of this world. The crossing of the Red Sea prefigures Christian Baptism. On Mt Sinai, Moses is granted a vision of heaven and is instructed to construct the Tabernacle & the Ark of the Covenant, which signify God's Presence with us, illuminates our way, and holds the promise of our eternal destination. The Ten Commandments on the tablets of stone represent God's perfect Law of Love which is inscribed on our hearts. We may think of the pillar of fire by night & cloud by day as a type of the Holy Spirit, Who guides us and protects us on our journey.

August 27th

Exodus 14 vv 21-31

This year, we celebrate the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War? Are you glad we won? I am. I shouldn't like to live under Nazi domination. There are every year fewer people alive who remember the Second World War, but if you can remember the War, do you remember how you felt about the news? I am sure that you were sad to hear of casualties on our side and probably pleased to learn of casualties on the other side. How would we have won if we had not shot down their planes, sunk their ships, killed their soldiers and bombed the factories & railways which sustained their war effort? You may have been a pacifist, willing to face defeat rather than fight, but, if you were not a pacifist, you would necessarily do your best to defeat the enemy & rejoice in the successes of our own side.

I mention this because many of us are squeamish about what God did to the Egyptians. Does it make sense to feel sorry for the slave-owning tyrants of ancient Egypt while rejoicing in the death & destruction which brought us victory in the Second World War? I take it that we do not wish to be hypocrites.

And yet we should feel sorry for the Egyptians and also for the Nazis, though the Nazis might be harder to feel sorry for than the Egyptians for those of you who remember the War & for those of us who are the children of the wartime generation & know something of what our parents suffered and how much worse it could have been. *God desireth not the death of a sinner.* As Christians, our calling is to be like God. *Be ye holy, for I am holy.* How do we resolve that paradox? Justice & mercy, winning the war against evil, but loving our enemies. The Cross is the answer, but it is not an answer we can easily comprehend, still less an example which we can easily follow.

August 28th

Exodus 15 vv 1-19

One year at Spring Harvest (that annual seaside meeting of thousands of Christians for praise, prayer, study & fellowship), one of the leaders read Moses' song to the assembled crowd in a very triumphalist manner, which made some of us feel uncomfortable. There is a Jewish legend that the angels themselves were initially overjoyed at the safe

passage of the Israelites and the drowning of the Egyptians. The story is that God told them to remember that the Egyptians were also His children. In the Book of Jonah, the prophet has to go and warn the Ninevites of their city's imminent destruction on account of the wickedness of its inhabitants. The Ninevites repent. God forgives them. Their city is not destroyed – much to the chagrin of Jonah who rightly believed that destruction was what they deserved and who had been through a great deal on his way to delivering God's just judgment (not exactly a whale of a time!). But *God rejoiceth not in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live.* God's last words to Jonah in the book are, *And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle.* God has mercy on the Ninevites (who know not what they do?) and even the cattle.

August 29th

Exodus 15 vv 20-22

I'm writing these notes on the Bank Holiday on which the VE Day celebrations were recapitulated, with a reading from Churchill's speech, a military procession started by Alan Kennett, a 100 year old veteran, band music, a fly past, the King & the Royal Family, cheering crowds. There was much to celebrate on VE Day. After our victory in the Falklands War, there was a service in St Paul's Cathedral.. The prime minister was Margaret Thatcher. The Archbishop of Canterbury was Robert Runcie. According to reports (which are not always accurate or fair), there was tension between them. The PM supposedly wanted an unalloyed celebration of our victory. The Archbishop apparently wanted to remember also the gallantry and the sufferings of the Argentineans. That was in 1982. About sixteen years after that, my mother & I took a cruise around South America. We saw the cemetery in Buenos Aires where the Argentine war dead are buried and the cemetery at Port Stanley in the Falklands where our war dead are buried. All those young lives! I'm glad we won, but how much better it would have been if there had been no war.

Give peace in our time, O Lord. Because there is none other that
fighteth for us, but only thou, O God.

O God, make clean our hearts within us.

And take not thy Holy Spirit from us.

August 30th

Exodus 15 vv 23-27

A branch of the Pentecostal Church is known as Elim. I believe that it was an Elim Pentecostal Church of which my great uncle was the pastor at Northfleet many years ago. Water is essential to life. It is horrible to die of thirst. Water refreshes. Water cleanses. Water bears us up when we swim or float. Many of the things we need come to us by ship. Water is also dangerous if we don't treat it with respect. Ships sink. Swimmers drown. Boiling water scalds. Drinking impure water can lead to us being poisoned or suffering from water borne diseases such as cholera.

Water is a symbol of the Holy Spirit manifest at the Feast of Pentecost (Whitsun), poured out freely as God's gift of Himself to us, when Jesus yields His life on the Cross an atonement for sin, the Comforter Who comes when Christ ascends into heaven, promising not to leave us comfortless. The Holy Spirit is the Lord and Giver of Life. He refreshes & cleanses us. He guides, sustains us and bears us up. He must also be treated with respect. *Quench not the Spirit*. Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is the unforgiveable sin. You have so far rejected God that you are no longer even seeking a way back or caring. So, if you are worried that you might have committed the unforgiveable sin, you can't have, because you're still seeking a way back & Jesus does not cast out those who come to Him.

Another symbol of the Spirit is the dove, a symbol of peace. We can't have peace without God's Spirit.

Give peace in our time, O Lord. Because there is none other that
fighteth for us, but only thou, O God.
O God, make clean our hearts within us.
And take not thy Holy Spirit from us.

August 31st (Trinity 11)

Exodus 16 vv 1-3

The King James Bible translates the Hebrew for what the Israelites were now missing as the flesh pots of Egypt. This has given rise to misunderstanding. People think that *fleshpots* means red light districts & houses of ill repute and that's what it has come to mean in modern English. What the Bible means by flesh pots are pots containing some kind of meat stew. What the Israelites are complaining about is that

there is nothing to eat in the Wilderness. At least when they were slaves they got fed. It's a calculation, isn't it? Would you rather be safe or free? Had the Nazis occupied England as they occupied so much of Europe, would you have joined the resistance, kept a low profile & hoped not to be noticed, or collaborated. Knowing that the Nazis ultimately lost the war probably makes that calculation easier now than if you had lived, say, in France in 1942.

O GOD, who declarest thy almighty power most chiefly in shewing mercy and pity; Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace, that we, running the way of thy commandments, may obtain thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

September 1st

Exodus 16 vv 4&5

Give us this day our daily bread.

What did Jesus mean when He gave us this prayer to say? Is it an open-ended request that we may always receive whatever we need (or want?) of this world's goods? Is it a more limited request that God will give us enough for our needs today, that we won't worry about tomorrow, but trust God for whatever tomorrow brings forth, when we shall say this prayer again? If so, why do we save & invest & take out insurance? Is the prayer really about meeting our spiritual needs? Jesus is the Bread of Life. We are nourished by Him in Holy Communion.

I think that there is something to be said for all three of these interpretations. It is right to acknowledge our dependence on God for everything that we need. I don't think that it is wrong to save or invest or insure. These may be the ways in which God makes provision for us in the days or years to come. But we shouldn't obsess about savings or investments. We should know that we can trust God for our lives whatever happens. Our priority ought never to be looking after number one.

Spiritual food matters more than material goods. *Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life.* It is also true that I have been very blessed when it has been possible for me to be a daily or almost daily communicant.

September 2nd

Exodus 16 vv 6-8

Murmuring is typical of what the Children of Israel do during their forty year sojourn in the Wilderness. They are not thankful for what God has done for them. They are dissatisfied. They do not trust God.

Murmuring is pretty typical of many Christians & Christian congregations as well. They are never satisfied. Rebellion against Moses is understood as rebellion against God. Moses is God's servant – the one He has appointed to lead the people. It is tempting for rectors & vicars to equate murmuring against themselves with murmuring against God. On the one hand, that would be a very arrogant assumption on the part of the clergy. On the other hand, we do believe that God has called particular people to the ministry of leadership. To that extent, rebelling against those whom God has called to serve us by exercising authority over us is rebelling against God. On one or two issues, when I was Rector of Cuxton & Halling, I was confident that I was leading the parish in the way God wants it to go and that therefore those who opposed me on those issues were (unknowingly) going against God. But I certainly don't believe that I was uniquely inspired & right about everything. All Christians are members of the priesthood of all believers. All Christians are inspired by the Holy Spirit & all Christians have their own contribution to make in discerning God's Will for His Church. I'm a bit of a rebel myself. I've no problem obeying the bishop when I am confident that he is speaking with God's authority. But I don't believe that bishops (or any human beings except Jesus) are infallible. I can envisage, therefore, occasions when it might be my Christian duty to disobey the Bishop. But there is a huge grey area of things that are not of ultimate importance and one ought to obey despite disagreeing and also of things where one might disagree with the Bishop but have to accept that he might be wiser & better informed than I am. For an example of the former, I think it would be wrong if the bishops were to ban the use of the 1662 prayerbook in public worship, but were I still Rector, I'd have to accept it. As an example of the latter, if the bishops said we must drop the words *and the Son* from the words in the Creed about the Holy Spirit, thus adopting the same doctrine as the Orthodox, I wouldn't be happy, but I don't understand the issue sufficiently to put up an argument against doing so.

September 3rd

Exodus 16 vv 9&10

Is it just me or have we lost our sense of awe in the Presence of God? *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom*, but we hesitate to speak about fearing God. Yet He is our Judge. His holiness is all consuming. I John 4 ¹⁸ *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.* Love overwhelms fear, but fear is integral to the package of faith. Without that element of awe, of fear, God is basically Father Christmas for grown ups.

1 Amazing grace (how sweet the sound)
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.

2 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed!

September 4th

Exodus 16 vv 11-18

He that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack. St Paul quotes this verse in II Corinthians 8¹⁵ when writing about the Sunday collection. The Gentile Christians in places like Corinth took a collection for the benefit of poor Christians in Jerusalem, which Paul would deliver. Paul's point is that the aim is equality. Give what you truly can afford, not being selfish and looking only to your own interests, but you're not expected to impoverish yourself in order to enrich others. The only prayerbook service in which a collection is mentioned is Holy Communion when the deacons, churchwardens or other fit persons are to take up *Alms for the Poor, and other devotions of the people*. Tithes, endowments & fees would have supplied the rector's income &, to some extent, paid for maintaining the building. Those days are not likely to return, but I am slightly uneasy that the bulk of our collection is spent on quota, stipends, building, etc. and only a small fraction on *Alms for the Poor*, though of course many of us give separately as individuals to missions and charities as well as putting money in the church collection.

September 5th

Exodus 16 vv 19-21

Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.
Trust God for your life.

September 6th

Exodus 16 vv 22-26

Lord Mackay of Clashfern is an eminent lawyer who served as Lord Chancellor from 1987-1997. He is also a serious Christian who declines to work on the Christian Sabbath (Sunday). He maintains that, with a proper Sunday rest, he is able to achieve far more on the other six days. We do need rest. We do need a change from the daily round. We need to spend time with God. We need to spend time with other Christians. We need to spend time with family & friends.

September 7th (Trinity 12)

Exodus 16 vv 27-31

In the not so distant past most shops & work places were closed on Sundays as were many places of entertainment and there were reduced services on the railways and elsewhere – as there still are. People complained about being bored, but I don't remember going without anything we actually needed. It just took a bit of planning to make sure we'd got what we couldn't do without by Saturday. We can debate forever whether Sunday should be kept as a special day and, if so, what work ought to be permitted on Sundays, but I am sure that we have lost a great deal of what makes life worthwhile by treating Sunday just like any week day and going to work, shopping, going to places of entertainment, etc. and neglecting our spiritual needs. The devil persuades us that going to Church, reading the Bible & praying are unnecessary & boring, but it is safe to say that the devil does not have our best interests at heart.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we are to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire, or deserve; Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy; forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. *Amen.*

September 8th

Exodus 16 vv 32-36

Provision is made to remember, to remember all that God did to set the Israelites free from slavery in Egypt, to protect & sustain them in the Wilderness and to bring them safely to the Promised Land. *This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat...to be kept for your generations.*

Do this in remembrance of me.

September 9th

Exodus 17 vv 1-7

We can't do without water. Our bodies are about 60% water. We soon die horribly if we don't have access to drinkable water. Jesus promises, *whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.* He means the Holy Spirit. Christ is our Rock. When He dies on the Cross, blood and water flow mingled from His side – the Blood which washes away our sins and preserves us from death, the water which cleanses and enlivens us, the water of life, the Holy Spirit, the Lord & Giver of Life.

Lord, enthroned in heavenly
splendour,
first-begotten from the dead.
Thou alone, our strong
defender,
lifest up thy people's head.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
Jesus, true and living bread!
Jesus, true and living bread!

Here our humblest homage pay
we,
here in loving reverence bow;
here for faith's discernment
pray we,
lest we fail to know thee now.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
Thou art here, we ask not how.
Thou art here, we ask not how.

Though the lowliest form doth
veil thee
as of old in Bethlehem,
here as there thine angels hail
thee,
branch and flower of Jesse's
stem.

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
We in worship join with them.
We in worship join with them.

Paschal Lamb, thine offering,
finished
once for all when thou was
slain,
in its fullness undiminished
shall for evermore remain.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
Cleansing souls from every
stain.
Cleansing souls from every
stain.

Life-imparting heavenly Manna,
stricken Rock with streaming
side,
heaven and earth with loud
hosanna
worship thee, the Lamb who
died.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
Risen, ascended, glorified!
Risen, ascended, glorified!

September 10th

Exodus 17 vv 8-16

The Israelites prevailed over the Amalekites so long as Moses kept praying. Moses wasn't weaving a magic spell. The magician strives to use his power to achieve his own ends – good or evil. Moses is praying. When we pray, we seek God's ends, not our own, and we rely on the power of God, not on any power or authority that we might have. Prayer is not about changing God's Mind. Prayer is aligning our wills with His Will. When we pray, we are serving God's purposes. So Moses' prayer contributed to the victory which God gave Israel over the Amalekites.

Jesus tells us not to use vain repetition in prayer. God doesn't hear us better if we shout. He's not a weak parent who gives in to pester power. He's not going to change His plans if only enough people ask Him to. God knows what He is doing & He doesn't need us to tell Him how to run the world. But it is our privilege to be able to talk to Him about everything which concerns us and to join our feeble powers with His infinite power in accomplishing His purposes.

Sometimes, we feel that we have been praying for a good outcome which we believe surely must be God's Will for a very long time and God doesn't seem to be doing anything in response. The war in Gaza continues. We haven't so far discovered a cure for cancer. Young Billy is still drinking too much. The drought in East Africa continues. Don't give up. Like Moses, keep praying. You are contributing to God's work which will be completed in accordance with His Wisdom, not yours or mine.

September 11th

Exodus 18 vv 1-12

It's good to catch up with the family news. We want to know how our family are and what they are up to. It's good to pray for them, to pray generally for them (Eg *God bless my brothers*) and particularly (*Please may Fred's operation be successful. Please help Gordon to give that presentation he's worried about, Be with Horace on his wedding day next Saturday.*) Don't forget to be thankful for answered prayer. It is good to talk about what the Lord is doing in our lives and how He is using us – good to do, but not easy. We're too shy. We don't want to appear to boast.

September 12th

Exodus 18 vv 13-27

Isn't it difficult to delegate? We might believe that nobody else can be trusted to do the job as well as we do. We might be afraid that they'll turn out to be better at it than we are or that they will try to undermine our position. It may be that, however confident we are that we can trust our lieutenants, we might still feel that the responsibility is ours. But we have to be prepared to delegate. Not even Moses could do everything. Besides, we're denying other people the opportunity to use their gifts if we won't trust them. Then there's the question of succession. What's going to happen when we pass on if nobody else has any experience of leadership?

The men to whom Moses was advised to delegate his authority were to be people of good character and to be properly trained. Moses wasn't abdicating all responsibility when he appointed officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. He was responsible for the officers as well as the rank & file, for supporting them, guiding them and maintaining their authority.

A modern army recognises the importance of soldiers of all ranks from private to general and in the different specialities, infantry, cavalry, mechanised, airborne, catering, engineering, communications, etc.. They are all needed and in a well-constituted army they all play their part in the whole, looking after one another, enabling everyone to perform his function for the benefit of the whole enterprise.

Sadly, it has been remarked that the Church of England does not nowadays function like this. The power has become too centralised and the *other ranks* (clergy and laity) are neither respected nor cherished. This unhappy state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue.

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.*

September 13th

Exodus 19 vv 1-6

Ten days ago, we were thinking about the appropriateness of awe, of fear even, when we contemplate God & what He has done. The Children of Israel had had some astonishing experiences since God sent Moses to deliver them from slavery in Egypt. Their vocation was to obey God's voice & to keep His covenant. They would then be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Now, if we think of what God has done for us in Christ, how much more wonderful are His Incarnation, Life, Death & Resurrection, and their eternal significance for all believers, Jews & Gentiles, than any of the miracles He performed to set the Israelites free from slavery in Egypt & to bring them to the land of Canaan. We Christians are indeed a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We have an even greater incentive than the Israelites of old to obey God's voice and to keep His covenant.

September 14th (Trinity 13, Holy Cross Day)

Exodus 19 vv 7-9

In the light of these words & yesterday's meditation & the fact that it is Holy Cross Day, pray this week's collect.

ALMIGHTY and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service; Grant, we beseech thee, that we may so faithfully serve thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly promises; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

September 15th

Exodus 19 vv 10-25

Can I ask you, please, also today to read Hebrews 12 vv 18-29? This is what I have been trying to say. What God did for the Israelites under the leadership of Moses was amazing. But what He has done for the whole of humanity in Christ is infinitely more so. It follows that, if we know these things, our sense of wonder is without limit, our obligation to walk in the ways of the Lord is absolute.

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

September 16th

Exodus 20 vv 1-3

Everybody knows the Ten Commandments. We were taught them at home and at school. They are included in the Catechism. At a 1662 Communion service, the Ten Commandments are always read after the Lord's Prayer & the Collect for Purity. They are that important.* But does everybody know the Ten Commandments? Test yourself. Often the commandments to love God and neighbour are thought to be among the ten. They're not, though love summarises the whole of God's Law. Jesus says, *On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets*. This Summary of the Law is often read at services of HC in place of the ten which God gave to Moses. But love has to have a practical outworking. To love God & our neighbour is not just a matter of feeling warmly towards them. If we truly love God and our neighbour, our conduct – what we leave undone and what we do – are determined by that fact. I John 3^{17 & 18}: *But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him,, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.*

There is only one God. Everything else depends on Him: our coming into being, our continuing to exist, all that we are, all that we have – *our creation, preservation & all the blessings of this life, the redemption of the world, the means of grace and the hope of glory*. To worship is to devote your very being. To devote ourselves to anything less than the one true God is both foolish & wicked.

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

* Traditionally, the service of Holy Communion has three readings: one from the Old Testament, one from the Epistles, Acts or Revelation, and a Gospel reading. Cranmer assumed that communicants also attended Mattins & Evensong, where they would hear the Old Testament read (as well as the New). He included the Ten Commandments as a fixed OT lesson at HC. The Communion service also traditionally included a nine fold Kyrie Eleison, Christ have mercy. Cranmer made it a tenfold Kyrie Eleison with *Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law*. Said after each of the first nine commandments and *Lord, have mercy upon us, and write all these thy laws in our hearts, we beseech thee*. after the tenth.

September 17th

Exodus 20 vv 4-6

The point about idols is that they are false. There is nothing like God. So any attempt at representing Him is bound to fall far short of the reality. The only true image of God is a perfect human being – Jesus. It is as, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we become more like Him, that we come into our inheritance as made in His image, as children of God who bear the likeness of our heavenly Father.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

To worship an idol is to offer our lives for what is false. The devil is the father of lies. The sins of the fathers are visited on the children if the children themselves are ill-treated and are not taught to walk in the ways of the LORD.

September 18th

Exodus 20 v7

Apart from the obvious, there are many ways of taking the LORD's Name in vain. Some people try to use the holy Name in magic – to achieve their own purposes rather than His. Some people claim to be acting with the authority of God when actually they are serving themselves. It's too easy for powerful people in Church & state to rely on the authority which God has given them for their own purposes rather than to serve God & the people whom He has entrusted to their care. As CHRISTians, we bear the Name of Christ. We received our Christian names when we baptized in the Name of the Trinity. In a sense, we take His Name in vain when we fail to live up to our Christian calling.

September 19th

Exodus 20 vv 8-11

Take a day off to spend with my family, to go to Church, to do something different from my daily routine! To be still & know Who is God ! Quite impossible! I've got far too much to do.

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

September 20th

Exodus 20 v12

What was the biggest influence in your life? What in your past did most to make you the person you are today? Apart from faith, surely most likely your family, your upbringing. For many of us indeed, from our families is where we derived our knowledge of God. I hope you came from a good family who nurtured you and taught you right from wrong. Sadly, you may, for one reason or another, have had an unsatisfactory upbringing. You may have spent your life capitalising on the blessings you received as a child or living with the consequences of a tough start in life. Either way, for good or ill, family has a huge influence on the way we turn out. So we try to be good parents, brothers, sisters, children, grandparents, etc.. We pray for family life. We may support bodies such as the Mothers' Union. We encourage government to pursue family friendly policies. God is our Father, Jesus our Brother, the Holy Family our example.

September 21st (St Matthew)

Exodus 20 v13

Thou shalt not kill.

Probably *Thou shalt do no murder* is a better translation. There are circumstances such as war when Christians may actually have the duty to kill, but any such situations are in serious tension with the commandment to love one another. We pray for peace. We try to settle conflict amicably through negotiation. Taking the life of our fellow human beings is a last resort.

Most of us are never put in that position where we might have to kill, but Jesus warns us against a murderous disposition. We are not to hate. We are not to be angry with our brothers and sisters, to call them names, to resist evil with evil. We are to be as generous towards other people as God is generous to us.

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

Exodus 20 v14

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

What is love? We are, after all, commanded to love one another. Some people try to justify adultery on the grounds that they love the person with whom they are having the affair and no longer love the person they married. But husbands and wives make promises to one another – an unconditional commitment to forsake all others and to care for one another *till death us do part*. The breakdown of a marriage will have implications for other people too – most obviously children, but also other family members, friends and maybe others. Love is much more than that excitement which we feel when we fall in love. Love is the giving of oneself to the beloved. Moses allowed divorce because of the hardness of human hearts. Jesus says that it isn't meant to be like that. What God has joined together, man must not put asunder. I'm not going to say that there are no circumstances under which a couple might part, but it really must be the very last resort.

September 23rd

Exodus 20 v15

Thou shalt not steal.

A lot of stealing is against the law & it's obvious that we shouldn't break the law. There are ways of stealing, however, which are not against the law, such as taking advantage of someone's naivety or ignorance to take from them what is rightfully theirs. An example might be conning someone into having unnecessary building work done or charging them a high price for shoddy workmanship. Another might be making out that a special offer is much better value than it actually is. Another is selling train, plane or concert tickets, gas & electricity, insurance, etc., with complex pricing structures that result in some customers paying far more than they need to. It's stealing in a way if you're morally but not legally obliged to help someone & you choose not to.

September 24th

Exodus 20 v16

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

It's obvious what this means. It applies formally in courts of law. It applies informally in all walks of life. No swindling, no malicious gossip, no false accusations, no nasty insinuations.

September 25th

Exodus 20 v17

Thou shalt not covet.

This brings us back full circle to the beginning of the Ten Commandments. Covetousness is idolatry (Colossians 3⁵).

Covetousness is worshipping material things. It is believing that your life would be more fulfilled if you had what your neighbour's got or if you could afford a mansion or jewellery or a sports car, if you were smarter or better looking. Covetousness will always leave you feeling dissatisfied. The advertising industry depends on that fact.

Covetousness undermines your own sense of self-worth and poisons your relationships. To worship, to devote your life to, anything less than the one true God is both foolish & wicked.

September 26th

Exodus 20 vv 18-21

John Keble wrote this marvellous hymn to compare and contrast the way God made Himself known to the Israelites and the way in which the Holy Spirit came down at Pentecost to inspire the apostles & God's whole Church to proclaim the Good News of Christ to the whole world. Both revelations of God are authentic & must be heeded – but the New Testament version is more complete – salvation not just for the Jews, but for the whole world, eternal life in Heaven, not just life in the land of Canaan, the Justice of God and the Mercy of God reconciled in the Cross of Jesus Christ.

When God of old came down
from heaven,
in power and wrath he came;
before his feet the clouds were
riven,
half darkness and half flame:

But when he came the second
time,
he came in power and love;
softer than gale at morning
prime
hovered his holy Dove.

The fires, that rushed on Sinai
down
in sudden torrents dread,

now gently light, a glorious
crown,
on every sainted head.

And as on Israel's awestruck
ear
the voice exceeding loud,
the trump that angels quake to
hear,
thrilled from the deep, dark
cloud;

So, when the Spirit of our God
came down his flock to find,
a voice from heaven was heard
abroad,
a rushing, mighty wind.

It fills the Church of God; it fills
the sinful world around;
only in stubborn hearts and
wills
no place for it is found.

Come Lord, come Wisdom, Love
and Power,
open our ears to hear;
let us not miss the accepted
hour;
save, Lord, by love or fear.

September 27th

Exodus 20 vv 22-26

The man who makes an idol, the man who makes a god for himself is putting himself in charge. He is the creator of the image. His idol is the way in which he imagines God. Whether he seeks to placate his god or to cajole his god into doing what he wants him/her/it to do, the inventor of the image is the one in whose mind his notions of deity originate. Maybe the maker of the idol is a powerful priest or king (like Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3), who imposes his image of God on the masses. Even so, these idols are either the invention of human imagination or diabolical illusions. The one true God can only be truly known insofar as He makes Himself known – which He does through the wonders of Creation, the Law & the Prophets, and above all in the Word made flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit who bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

September 28th

Exodus 33 vv 1-11

Moses remained on Mt Sinai for 40 days & forty nights., during which time he received God's Law (the Torah), summarised in the command to love & also was granted a vision of heaven, which was the model for the Ark of the Covenant, the Tabernacle & later the Temple at Jerusalem. During those 40 days, the Israelites lost faith & hope in Moses and God Who had revealed Himself through Moses and persuaded Moses' brother Aaron to make them a golden calf which they proceeded to worship in place of the Unseen God. This led to a terrible time of reckoning which you can read about in chapter 32. Following their repentance and Moses' pleading, order is restored and the journey to the Promised Land begins afresh.

September 29th (St Michael & All Angels)

Exodus 33 vv 12-30

Moses could only lead the people to the land of Canaan so long as God was with Him. Moses was very privileged in his close relationship with God. It says that God *spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend*. Even Moses asked for more, that he should see the glory of God, but no-one, no sinful human being can see God's face & live. Only Jesus can look God in the eye, so to speak. Jesus is the human face of God. Moses is given a true but partial vision of God. There is the promise that God's angel will be with him. We can only fulfil God's purposes for our lives by the grace that He gives us. He reveals to us something of His glory. We converse with Him in prayer. His angels surround us. What God requires of us we can perform because He supplies us with the grace we need.

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

Exodus 34 vv 29-35

When we spend time with God – perhaps in prayer or meditation, in reading the Bible, in participating in Holy Communion, we come to reflect His glory. As we spend time in His Presence, we come to do more than reflect His glory; we are transformed. We come to share in His glory. His Light shines from within us as well as being reflected from outside of ourselves.

Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

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.

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 heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

