

The Revelation of St John the Divine

Bible Notes
October – December
2020

Revelation is an interesting book to study. Some people, including quite a lot of people who are not Christians in a conventional sense, are fascinated by it. Others are appalled. Revelation contains some of the most beautiful, awe-inspiring passages in the Bible and some of the most terrifying. When does awe shade into terror? Was the John who received the revelation the same John as was the apostle? John was a common name in those days as it is today. Traditionally, the apostle John has been regarded as the author of the Gospel we have been studying in earlier quarters and of the three letters of John in the New Testament. Many scholars don't think that the apostle could have been the author of the Gospel or the letters or Revelation. They find it hard to believe that a Galilean fisherman wrote such beautiful and profound writings. They have a pre-conceived idea that Jesus was more like the Jesus described in Matthew, Mark & Luke and that, therefore, the rather different portrayal of Him in John must have developed after the original apostles were no longer around. Personally, I see no such objection. John's Gospel complements the other three, as I believe that the Holy Spirit intends it to, giving us a fuller picture and a greater understanding of Who Jesus is. I wouldn't go to the stake for the proposition that the John who wrote the Gospel was the brother of James and son of Zebedee, but I think it makes to sense to proceed on the assumption that he did. The three letters of John are written in the same style as the Gospel. Either they are by the same author or by someone very close to him. The style and language of Revelation are very different. It could be that this book is the work of someone other than the author of the Gospel and letters – and yet the same themes are emphasised. Maybe there was a school of John, a group of people who met together, prayed together and talked about Jesus together and it was these people who gave us the five New Testament books which bear the name of John – his brand if you like.

BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

October 2nd

Revelation 1 vv 1-3

This was a time of persecution. The authorities were determined to put down this Christian movement which threatened the established order. Christians had a reputation for turning the world upside down. They refused to take part in emperor worship which was a shared ritual of loyalty to the Roman state that helped to bind the empire together. They had different values from pagans with regard to violence, sexual relationships and slavery. Like the Jews, Christians rather kept themselves to themselves in order to avoid having to participate in pagan behaviour and that made people suspicious and jealous of them. As we think about persecution in times past, two points. Point number one is that there are many Christians in the world today facing persecution for their faith. We should pray for them & their persecutors. Their persecutors are our persecutors too, because we are all one in the Lord. The second point is to ask ourselves the question, *If Christians were facing persecution in England today, would there be enough evidence to convict me?*

October 3rd

Revelation 1 vv 4-6

The next two chapters of Revelation consists of letters to seven churches in Asia Minor facing various trials and temptations and responding more or less adequately. Like S Paul's epistles in the NT, these letters are the Word of God. God is the One, Which is, Which was & Which it is to come. The sevenfold Spirit is the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the faithful witness, the first-begotten from the dead and prince of the kings of the earth. These letters, the Word, are from God, the Holy Trinity. *Glory and dominion* to Him Who loved us, washed away our sins in His Blood & made us kings and priests.

October 4th Trinity 17

Revelation 1 v7

Awe and terror, justice and mercy. God will judge the earth. We shall give account to Him for our lives. If we welcome Him into our hearts in faith, we shall reign with Him in glory. But, if we stubbornly reject Him and act hatefully or indifferently towards other people, we can only look for judgment, as we sing in the hymn Charles Wesley based verse 2 of which on these words.

LORD, we pray thee that thy grace may always prevent and follow us, and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

October 5th

Revelation 1 v8

Pause and reflect on these words. God, the Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit: *I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and ending, saith the Lord, which is, which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.*

God is the origin of everything and the reason for everything. God is love.

*Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea,
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
Which wert and art and ever more shalt be.*

October 6th

Revelation 1 vv 9-11

John describes himself as a companion in tribulation and the brother of his readers. He is a prophet. He may well be an apostle. He is a witness. He is also a companion and a brother. Christians are members of one another. We are brothers and sisters of Jesus and therefore of one another. By God's grace, we are all kings and priests. There is no hierarchy in which some are closer to the Lord than others or more important in the Church. *And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.* Presumably, by the Lord's Day, John means Sunday, that special day which has become the Christian Sabbath, the day Jesus rose from the dead, the day especially when Christians meet around the Communion Table to do this in remembrance of Him. Worshipping God in spirit & in truth, John was vouchsafed this wonderful vision. If he could, I expect he was gathered together with other Christians. If that was not possible, he would have been worshipping alone as some of us have had to do as a result of COVID 19. Whether he was physically with them or not, John was still a brother & a companion to all his fellow Christians.

October 7th

Revelation 1 vv 12-16

How do you think of Jesus? There has been a certain amount of controversy lately because, in western art and church decoration, Jesus is often depicted as white and European. In Africa and Asia, He is

sometimes pictured as African or Asian, though very often as white European because of the missionary influence. When S Matthew's Church, Wigmore, was built just over fifty years ago, an artist painted Jesus looking like a Palestinian Jew, which is probably how He did look. You might have in your mind pictures of Jesus from the Bible, healing the sick, raising the dead, teaching the multitude, walking on water, hanging on the Cross, appearing to His disciples after the Resurrection. Some churches depict Jesus as Judge on Judgment Day, separating the sheep from the goats. There are also depictions of the Risen Christ on the Cross, proclaiming His victory and how it was achieved. A very popular picture of Jesus shows Him in a flowery meadow surrounded by children. There are many ways of thinking about Jesus, which contain some, but only a tiny fraction of the truth about Him. There are many such pictures in the Book of Revelation. It is good to think on them, to have our understanding opened so that our worship may become ever deeper. You can sing the words following to the same tune as *Onward Christian Soldiers*.

Thou the Rose of Sharon,
Let Thy praises roll;
Lily of the valley,
Flower of my soul;
Chiefest of ten thousand,
Round my heart entwine;
I am my Beloved's,
My beloved's is mine.
*Thou the Rose of Sharon,
let Thy praises roll;
Lily of the valley,
Flower of my soul.*

Lead me by still waters,
Hold me by the hand;
And upon the mountains
Give me grace to stand;
Wind and storm and fire
Raging, but my choice
Ever is to listen

For Thy still, small voice.

Jesus, Lord and master,
Glorious Nazarene;
Close behind Thy reapers
I would humbly glean:
But Thy grace hath brought me
To Thy house above,
And Thy banner o'er me,
Evermore is Love.

Water cannot quench it,
Floods can never drown;
Substance cannot but it,
Love's a priceless crown:
Oh, wondrous story,
Mystery divine;
I am my Beloved's
My Belov'd is mine.

October 8th

Revelation 1 vv 17-20

The vision of God inspires awe, fear, even terror. Moses is told *You cannot see my face and live*. John says: *No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father; he hath declared Him*. To fall on one's face before God, before Jesus, before the Spirit, is the natural thing to do. But God cleanses us. Jesus says, *Fear not*. The Spirit stands us on our feet. We are fit to serve Him, because He makes us fit. He has done all things. Our calling is to follow Him & to do His work in the world. We don't know much about angels, but it is good to think of each Church having its own angel.

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 always do thee service in heaven, so by thy appointment they may succour and defend us on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

October 9th

Revelation 2 vv 1-6

Chapters 2 & 3 are letters or epistles to the seven churches of Asia Minor. Jesus cares about each local Church, as He cares about every Christian. He cares for everybody, but not all hear His voice. Verse 1 depicts the awesome presence of Christ. As we said a couple of days ago, there are many right ways of thinking about Jesus. *Gentle Jesus, meek and mild*, is certainly one of them, but so too is this of the awesome Son of God. We need to keep all these aspects of Jesus in our minds as we worship Him within the glory of the Trinity and talk with Him as our brother as we walk life's narrow way. The churches of Asia Minor are under threat from without, persecution, and from within, heresy, division & internal power struggles. Sadly, we don't know who these Nicolaitans were or what they did wrong. Jesus commends the Ephesians for their faithfulness, but rebukes them because they have left their first love. There is a cynical view that the word *honeymoon* derives from the fact that you only get one month of honey in a life-long marriage, the rest being at best boring and at worst downright miserable. I'm sure that's not true, but it is true that we are often much more passionate at the beginning of a relationship with God or with another person than subsequently. Obviously, we change as we mature and our relationships go through different phases, but what we hope and pray for is that love will deepen as we change, not go off the boil.

October 10th

Revelation 2 v7

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

What do we think God is saying to us at St John's and St Michael's today? How do we discern God's Will for us? Certainly, we *look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged*. We look to what God has taught us in the Bible and in the teaching of the Church. We look to the history of our churches and of other churches. We draw on our own experience of church life here in Cuxton and Halling. But what is God saying us today? What are His plans for us for tomorrow? How do we hear His Voice today? Ask Him? Pray. Think prayerfully. Listen to what other people have to say. Share what you believe to be your insights. When we meet together, especially when we meet to make decisions, seek God's Will, not ours. Be open to what He is teaching us, speaking directly into our hearts, addressing us through other people, recalling us to what He has already taught us in ages past. And be sensitive to what other people have to offer. Don't quench the Spirit God has given them.

October 11th (Trinity 18)

Revelation 2 vv 8-11

The Christians of Smyrna were poor materially. Yet they were rich. They had richly spiritual lives. One of the dangers of living in a rich society such as our own is that we become spiritually poor. The Christians of Smyrna were in danger of imprisonment and persecution – a despised minority. Yet Jesus promises them the gift of eternal life, a crown indeed. Again, living in a society in which we are free to practise our faith, it is easy to become complacent.

Our prayers ought to include those who are poor and those who are persecuted and their persecutors. They also to include ourselves that we might use the wealth and freedom we enjoy to God's glory and for the good of the Church and the world.

LORD, we beseech thee, grant thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow thee the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

October 12th

Revelation 2 vv 12-17

The reference to Satan's seat isn't clear. Pergamos was the place where the cult of worshipping the Roman emperor had its origin. It was also a centre of worship for the pagan gods Zeus and Aesculapius and an important centre of Roman power. All these facts might make life difficult for members of a new, unpopular, minority religion like Christianity. They've already seen the martyrdom of one of their number. I wonder how we'd feel if one of us had been executed for being a member of the Church we belong to? Nervous? Determined to carry on regardless? Think it prudent to deny Christ? It's difficult to know how we would react, but the person to turn to would be Jesus. He would be the One Who could give us the resources to withstand. Despite facing persecution and holding fast, the Christians of Pergamos still face judgment for their failures. The story of Balaam stretches over chapters 22-24 in the Book of Numbers. It is a strange story. The King of Moab (Balak) is appalled by the twelve tribes of Israel coming into his land from the Sinai desert. He asks the holy man Balaam to curse the Israelites for him. At first, Balaam wisely refuses to do so. Eventually, however, he agrees to go with Balak's messengers. The donkey he is riding warns him that what he is doing is wrong and God tells Balaam to carry on and meet Balak, but to bless the Israelites, rather than to curse them. To Balak's considerable frustration, this is what Balaam does and there is even what some people have taken as a prophecy of the coming of Jesus in what he says (Numbers 24¹⁷: *There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel*). And this is where the OT leaves it, Balaam a somewhat ambiguous figure, who does the right thing under divine duress. In the NT, Balaam is used as an example of wrongdoing – greedy for the gifts Balak had promised him, someone who led the Israelites into idolatry. Anyway, the point is that Christians are called to be pure and single-minded in their allegiance to Jesus. If we are, whatever trials we may go through in this life, we are promised an eternal reward, to feed on the Bread of Life, to bear a Christian name.

October 13th

Revelation 2 vv 18-29

This woman Jezebel calls herself a prophetess. I guess her real name wasn't Jezebel, given the reputation of the Jezebel in the OT. This was what she was called because she was a wicked woman. But she called herself a prophetess and obviously some of the Thyatiran Christians were impressed by her. Sometimes in churches today people claim to be speaking the Lord's word to us. How do we know whether they are genuine? We pray thoughtfully in the light of what God has already disclosed of Himself in Jesus Christ and in Holy Scripture. It would appear that this Jezebel encouraged people to compromise and to take part in pagan worship. This might have had the effect of making them stand out less in a pagan society and mean that they were less likely to be persecuted by the pagans. But Christians are called to stand out for what is right even if that does lead to a martyr's death. Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. There will be justice. He will reign over the nations for ever and we shall reign with Him. The wicked will get what they deserve. Those who have tortured and killed God's people will suffer for it. That is justice. The victims of evil people crave justice. Yet, there is also mercy. The wicked can always be saved. They can repent and believe. *The vilest offender, who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives!* We, the people of God, rejoice with the angels in heaven over every sinner who repents. But mercy isn't cheap. Grace isn't cheap. The price of forgiveness is the shedding of Christ's Blood on the Cross. We are bought with a price and that same price pays also for the setting free of the vilest of humanity if only they accept what Jesus has done for them.

October 14th

Revelation 3 vv 1-6

The Church in Sardis had a splendid reputation, but they did not deserve it. Jesus knows what we are like on the inside. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows churches too, which may have a very good reputation in the world, but which inside may be cold and lacking in love. Judgment will come suddenly. We can die at any time. Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead at a time when He is not generally accepted. We may be called to answer for our lives at any time. It is vital that we live as always ready to meet our Lord.

October 15th

Revelation 3 vv 7-13

Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Nothing can withstand Jesus. He comes in judgment with justice and mercy. The Christians of Philadelphia may only have had a little strength, but Christ's grace is sufficient for them, as it is for us. *I am weak, but Thou art mighty, Hold my with Thy powerful hand.* Who were these people who claimed to be Jews but were not? Maybe they were Jews who opposed the Christian Church, because they did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah and that the promises in the OT were now made freely available to all nations – to gentiles as well as Jews. Maybe they were Christians who believed in Jesus but taught that it was also necessary to observe the OT law in order to be saved. Although the Romans were uncomfortable with a religion which believed in only one God and refused to worship the emperor or the gods of Rome, they were prepared to tolerate Judaism to some degree. If Christians could pass themselves off as Jews by being circumcised and keeping the Jewish Law, maybe they could avoid persecution. But there are some things on which Christians cannot compromise. We are justified by faith, not by keeping the Law. God's promises are freely offered to all believers *Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.* We can't compromise, but we have no need to fear. Christ has reserved for us places in the heavenly Temple, the Holy City.

Blessed city, heavenly Salem,
vision dear of peace and love,
who of living stones art builded
in the height of heaven above,
and, with angel hosts encircled,
as a bride dost earthward
move;

From celestial realms
descending,
bridal glory round thee shed,
meet for him whose love
espoused thee,
to thy Lord shalt thou be led;
all thy streets and all thy
bulwarks

of pure gold are fashioned.

Bright thy gates of pearl are
shining;
they are open evermore;
and by virtue of his merits
thither faithful souls do soar,
who for Christ's dear Name in
this world
pain and tribulation bore.

Many a blow and biting
sculpture
polished well those stones
elect,
in their places now compacted

by the heavenly Architect,
who therewith hath willed for
ever
that his palace should be
decked.

Christ is made the sure
foundation,
Christ the head and
cornerstone,
chosen of the Lord, and
precious,
binding all the Church in one,
holy Zion's help for ever,
and her confidence alone.

To this temple, where we call
thee,
come, O Lord of Hosts, today;
with thy wonted loving-

kindness
hear thy servants as they pray;
and thy fullest benediction
shed within its walls always.

Here vouchsafe to all thy
servants
what they ask of thee to gain,
what they gain from thee for
ever
with the blessed to retain,
and hereafter in thy glory
evermore with thee to reign.

Laud and honour to the Father,
laud and honour to the Son,
laud and honour to the Spirit,
ever Three, and ever One,
consubstantial, co-eternal,
while unending ages run.

October 16th

Revelation 3 vv 14-19

Jethro Tull: The ----- *Church of England in chains of history,*
Requests your earthly presence at the vicarage for tea.

Many people have felt that there is something Laodicean about the Church of England – neither cold nor hot, too complacent and comfortable as the established Church. We're not persecuted. We're not zealous. We're not truly poor. We're not heroic in our missionary activity or pastoral care. We compromise with power rather than speaking truth to power. Criticisms I was regaled with as a child were that the C of E sees the ministry as a profession, rather than a vocation. The C of E gets its money from fund-raising rather than free will offerings and voluntary tithes. The C of E says beautiful prayers, but doesn't mean them. The story is told that when John Wesley (then a member of the Church of England) approached Bishop Butler of Bristol to recount Wesley's conversion, the Bishop responded, "Enthusiasm, sir, is a horrid thing; a very horrid thing indeed". What the bishop meant by enthusiasm was dramatic and emotional manifestations of the Holy Spirit. I hope you that, as you read this, you are protesting that these criticisms are far from the whole truth, but there is a reason why people make them.

October 17th

Revelation 3 vv 20-22

Behold I stand at the door & knock.

These are the words of Jesus which inspired Holman Hunt's famous painting the Light of the World. Jesus stands at the door holding a lantern. The door is surrounded by weeds & thorns. It has obviously not been opened for a long time. The only door handle is on the inside. Jesus would love to come in, but the person inside must open the door & invite Him in. If he will only do that, he will enjoy table fellowship with Jesus & abide with Him for ever. This is what we have received as Christians & it is what we are commissioned to share with family & friends & with the whole world.

October 18th (S Luke)

Revelation 4 vv 1-11

This is a tremendous chapter & we'll take it over two days. John is granted a vision of Heaven. There is God the Father seated on the Throne of grace. Seven lamps stand for the sevenfold Spirit of God. The 24 elders probably represent the old Israel, twelve tribes begotten of the 12 sons of Jacob, & the Christian Church, the new Israel, founded on the 12 apostles. The ambience of heaven is worship. Four wonderful beasts lead God's praises perpetually before the Throne. These are often taken as representing the four evangelists who wrote the Gospels: Matthew the man, Mark the lion, Luke the calf or ox, John the eagle. The evangelistic or missionary task of the Church, which all Christians share, is to proclaim the Word of God, the glory of God to the ends of the earth so that the whole creation might join in singing, *Holy! Holy! Holy!*

ALMIGHTY God, who calledst Luke the Physician, whose praise is in the Gospel, to be an Evangelist, & Physician of the soul; May it please thee, that, by the wholesome medicines of the doctrine delivered by him, all the diseases of our souls may be healed; through the merits of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

October 19th

Revelation 4 vv 1-11

We enjoy birdsong. We're told that birds sing to mark their territory & to attract a mate. Scientists are now saying that birds also sing for cheer joy, which is a very heartening thought. We praise God for Creation & the whole of Creation praises God. KJV v11 is pushing it a bit with & *for thy pleasure, they are & were created.* The Greek is *through your will*, but when you come to think of it, it's not pushing it much.

October 20th

Revelation 5 vv 1-14

Chapter 4 praises God the Father for creating everything that is, in accordance with His Will and pleasure. Chapter 5 praises Jesus, God the Son, for redeeming creation which, by disobedience to God, had sold itself into slavery to sin. God the Father and God the Son are one with God the Holy Spirit in creating, redeeming and sanctifying the world. The scroll is God's plan for His creation and its redemption and sanctification: the Book of Life, the events disclosed to John in the Revelation, the fulfilment of the OT Scriptures, God's all encompassing plan disclosed in Jesus. (I confess I'm borrowing from and modifying G B Caird's excellent commentary here.) Jesus is the Lion of Judah and the Root of David. He is also the Lamb of God Who was slain for us, but now stands in Heaven, risen, ascended, glorified. Incense in heavenly represents our prayers ascending through Jesus to the Throne of Grace. By His grace, we are redeemed, kings and priests, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. The Christian Gospel is Good News for the whole world and it is ours to share.

October 21st

Revelation 6 vv 1-8

The scroll or book has seven seals. As each seal is opened, there is a revelation of what is to come. The first four seals unleash the four horseman of the Apocalypse. (Apocalypse is another word for Revelation.) The four horsemen represent the disasters which human sin brings upon the world: war and violence, famine, disease. We are only too familiar with the reality. We rightly pray: *From lightning and tempest; from plague, pestilence, and famine, from battle and murder, and from sudden death, Good Lord, deliver us.* We do depend entirely on God. We pray that human beings will be granted the will and the wisdom to seek after peace and justice, health for all, freedom from want and enlightenment, and that we shall be granted the means to achieve these goals.

We can aspire to such things. In 1942, Sir William Beveridge produced his report which identified the five 'Giant Evils' the government should fight namely: 'Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness.' From that date, UK governments endeavoured to slay these giants, focusing on welfare for the poor, the NHS, education for all, building a

sufficiency of decent, affordable housing, and seeking to ensure that everyone who could work had the opportunity to get a decent job. I believe that it is because we are a Christian country that we developed this vision.

I also fear that this idealism faded with the passage of the decades since the Beveridge Report. I said so once when preaching at a Battle of Britain service at Ramsgate. Afterwards, the mayor said to me, *A bit political, Padre*. When she'd gone, her chauffeur said to me, *A bit political, Padre, but you were right!* For a time, the War gave us the sense of being members one of another. Important as is the individual, we must lose sight of the fact that we belong to one another and to God. Our essential unity is not derived from fighting a common enemy together (though that is an expression of our unity). Our essential unity derives from the fact that we are God's creation, made in His image and that Christ died for every one of us.

October 22nd

Revelation 6 vv 9-11

Though with a scornful wonder men see her sore oppressed,
By schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed,
Yet saints their watch are keeping, their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping shall be the morn of song.

Things will happen in God's good time. Things will work out because God is working His purpose out.

I'm not comfortable with the martyrs' demand for justice, but it ought not to be dismissed too glibly. *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* asked Abraham. From infancy, we have a powerful sense of what is fair. We feel instinctively that people should get what they deserve. As I'm writing these notes, in the news are the cases of the mother whose son was knocked off his motorcycle and killed by a woman who escaped justice by claiming diplomatic immunity and returning to America and the widow of the police officer who was so cruelly killed in the line of duty by men whose sentences the widow believes do not match the enormity of their crime. Can you or I say that it is their duty to forgive, how ever strongly we may believe they ought?

October 23rd

Revelation 6 vv 12-17

What do these verses describe? Many people interpret them as the end of the world, the day on which Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead. You could read them as describing nuclear war or the worst possible effects of climate change. If either of these is the correct interpretation, maybe we can escape by repentance, giving up war, treating God's creation with more respect. Or maybe, nuclear war or climate change is the foreordained end of our world, or an asteroid strike, or solar explosion, or whatever. Perhaps Jesus will return simultaneously with some such catastrophic event. We don't know. What we do know is that we should always seek to live our lives in accordance with God's Will and be ready to meet Him whenever and however that is.

October 24th

Revelation 7 vv 1-17

What we do know is that, through faith in Jesus Christ, we are kept safe. That is not to say that we will not go through tribulation, but, if we remain faithful, God will keep us safe. Jehovah's Witnesses in particular focus on the 144,000 who will be saved from the twelve tribes of Israel. Whatever this means (and I doubt if anyone in the world today really knows what it means) the verse to focus on is v9. The saved, the redeemed of the Lord are a multitude which no man can number. All the faithful are saved. We may well pray for everyone to repent and believe and to be saved. God does not desire the death of a sinner.

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.

October 25th (Trinity 20)

Revelation 8 vv 1-5

O ALMIGHTY and most merciful God, of thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech thee, from all things that may hurt us; that we, being ready both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that thou wouldest have done; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The collect puts all this rather well. Rely on God in prayer for both our mortal and our eternal life. Seek His grace to live as He would have us live.

October 26th

Revelation 8 vv 6-13

It is verses like these which put a lot of Christians off the Book of Revelation. Other people are fascinated by them. What do they mean? Are they about things happening today or perhaps in the near future.? Some people's fascination with Revelation is downright unhealthy. It is tempting not to read and study Revelation at all. On the other hand, I am a loyal member of the Church of England and I believe that God has *caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning*, all holy Scriptures, not just the parts of the bible we find congenial. So I have to wrestle with passages like this as well as basking in the chapters which I do like. My view is that every generation should take them as a warning. Previous generations may have thought that they prophesied the Black Death or the Hundred Years War or the First World War or Hitler, or nuclear destruction, or environmental catastrophe, or horrors yet to come. I believe that it is better if every generation examines itself and asks itself how it is contributing to the possible devastation of our earthly home and then repents of its sins and turns to God for salvation.

October 27th

Revelation 9 vv 1-21

When there is some sort of calamity in our own time, journalists often speak lightly of plagues and catastrophes *of biblical proportions*. I find this rather annoying. My guess is that they don't know the Bible very well themselves but are parroting a phrase which has been handed down in a sort of folk memory. I find it annoying when people who don't really know what they are talking about carelessly traduce the Bible in this way. There are terrible judgments. If there is justice, there is judgment. We should be fearful of judgment if we lead wicked lives. It is only fair. But, if only people would read the whole of the Bible, and pay attention to what the Church teaches, and cultivate a genuine relationship with Jesus, they would know that, not only is God's Justice very real and to be feared by wrongdoers, but also that it is inextricably bound up with God's mercy, which assures us of our salvation in Christ.

1 There's a wideness in God's mercy,
like the wideness of the sea.
There's a kindness in God's justice,
which is more than liberty.
There is no place where earth's
sorrows
are more felt than up in heaven.
There is no place where earth's
failings
have such kindly judgment given.

2 For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind.
And the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.
If our love were but more faithful,
we would gladly trust God's Word,
and our lives reflect thanksgiving
for the goodness of our Lord.

October 28th (S Simon & S Jude)

Revelation 10 vv 1-11

The seventh angel is awesome. What is now revealed to John is too wonderful and mysterious to be disclosed yet to the Church and to the world. We are talking about the glorious consummation when time shall be no longer. The Word of God is in the little book or scroll and must be proclaimed to the world. Good News. Repent and you will be saved from the wrath to come. The prophet or evangelist eats the scroll on which the Word is written so that it becomes part of him. Caird thinks that the Word is bitter because it will ultimately be established by the martyrdom of God's messengers, just as the Word of God was crucified on Calvary, to overcome all the power of evil and to rise again in glory. He may be right but I wonder if the Word is bitter because it is a word of condemnation on those who refuse to return to God. God doesn't desire the death of a sinner and neither do God's faithful messengers. But in the end, God does respect our freedom to reject Him, with all its terrible consequences. So God and we grieve over the fate those who reject God's love bring on themselves.

O ALMIGHTY God, who hast built thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the head corner-stone; Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made an holy temple acceptable unto thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

October 29th

Revelation 11 vv 1-14

Like Revelation in general, this chapter draws heavily on the OT. In the OT, the physical temple is measured out as something to be built and protected by God. The temple here is the Church of God – all Christian believers. We are God's workmanship. He is our salvation. But He does not promise that we shall avoid tribulation, only that we shall be brought safely through. The two olive trees and the candlestick, represent the King and the High Priest, both anointed with olive oil, to signify the Spirit, Who is also represented by the light. Jesus, the Messiah, is both King & High Priest. Those who are baptised in His Name are kings and priests too. He was persecuted and so may we be. He died and so shall we. He rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven, and, with Him, so shall we. Christ is victorious over sin, the world and the devil &, as Christians, we share His victory.

October 30th

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

When the roll is called up
yonder,
when the roll is called up
yonder,
when the roll is called up
yonder,
when the roll is called up
yonder, I'll be there.

Revelation 11 vv 15-19

2 On that bright and cloudless
morning
when the dead in Christ shall
rise,
and the glory of his
resurrection share;
when his chosen ones shall
gather
to their home beyond the skies,
and the roll is called up yonder,
I'll be there.

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

October 31st

Revelation 12 vv 1-9

These verses are very familiar to us at S Michael's because they are read at our Patronal Festival. We can understand the symbolism in a variety of linked ways. We might think of Eve, mother of the human race. Satan, the dragon or serpent, successfully tempts us at the very beginning of creation to reject God and bring death upon ourselves. We might think of Mary. Herod tried to kill the infant Christ. Mary & Joseph took refuge in Egypt. Several times in His life, people wanted to kill Jesus. *He was crucified under Pontius Pilate.* We might think of Mother Church, persecuted, hounded into the wilderness, but kept safe by God. We might think of the Church, Christians baptised into Christ to be kings and priests with Him, to share His suffering and to share His victory. Michael in heaven, as Christ on earth, overcomes Satan, the good angels victorious over Satan's hosts. The brothers, the Church, share Christ's victory. They conquer, not through the exercise of violence and hatred, but through the Blood of the Lamb, Christ's offering of Himself on the Cross. They overcome evil because they love, like Jesus loves, even to death.

November 1st (All Saints Day)

Onward, Christian soldiers,
marching as to war,
with the cross of Jesus
going on before!
Christ, the royal Master,
leads against the foe;
forward into battle,

Jesus has won the decisive victory on the Cross at Calvary. Satan is cast out of heaven by Michael & his angels. Here on earth, Satan continues to rage. The Church is persecuted. There are wars and rumours of war, famines, earthquakes. Christians (The NT calls all Christians saints) are called to remain faithful, trusting in God, and contending for the Kingdom, not *overcome of evil, but overcoming evil with good*, taking up our cross to follow Christ.

ALMIGHTY God, who hast knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord; Grant us grace so to follow thy blessed Saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys, which thou hast prepared for them that unfeignedly love thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

November 2nd (All Souls)

Traditionally, we remember on this day those who have died in the Lord. Today's reading speaks of terrible power opposed to the Christian Gospel. This power extends over all those whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Jesus, the Lamb, says we are either for Him or against Him. Those who are for Him are saved for eternal life, whatever tribulation we may face on earth. Those who are against Him are enslaved by the beast. The way you set a slave free in the ancient world was to redeem him. You paid a price – manumission – and the slave was set free. Jesus has redeemed us. The price of our redemption – our manumission – is His Blood shed on the Cross. What those who are enslaved to the beast (evil and death) need has already been done for them. Christ has died. The manumission has been paid. Freedom is now God's free gift. It is only necessary to receive it in faith.

Revelation 12 vv 10-17

see, his banners go.

Refrain:

*Onward, Christian soldiers,
marching as to war,
with the cross of Jesus
going on before!*

Revelation 13 vv 1-10

November 3rd

Revelation 13 vv 11-18

These visions in Revelation draw much of their imagery from the OT. In Daniel, the beasts coming up out of the sea represent great empires which persecute the people of God. They are ruthless and cruel. They claim a higher allegiance than our allegiance to God. They might expect you to worship the emperor as a god. They might require you to bow down to an image they have set up. More subtly, and this is as true today here as it was in the Mediterranean world thousands of years ago, the state or public opinion might try to force you to put modern “British” values above Christian values or to show a greater loyalty to the British state than to God.

November 4th

Revelation 14 vv 1-5

The mark of the beast showed who was on his side. The saints bear the Father’s Name. We are on His side. These marks are not generally anything visible on your skin. People can recognise which side you are on by the sort of person you are. If, through faith, you bear the Christian name, this ought to be evident in the way you live. These 144,000 are perhaps to be conceived of as the special forces of the army of the saints, virgin martyrs on the roll of God’s army. I don’t want to speculate too much, however. Celibacy is a vocation to which some are called, but marriage is an honourable estate in no way inferior.

November 5th (Guy Fawkes)

Revelation 14 vv 6-12

Babylon is fallen. In the OT original this was the literal city of Babylon, whose armies had conquered Jerusalem and taken its leading citizens captive. Babylon gets what it deserves at the hands of the Persians and the captives are set free to rebuild the Holy City. Here, Babylon is used as a metaphor for corrupt wealth and power used to oppress the poor and the righteous. The obvious reference here is to imperial Rome, but some think it means Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified and the persecution of the Church began. Protestants have read *Babylon* as standing for the Roman Catholic Church as it became corrupted by wealth and power and persecuted those whom it considered to be heretics. The Guy Fawkes plot and its ruthless suppression reflect this terrible division within the Church, Catholic against Protestant, Protestant against Catholic. Who is on the Lord’s side? Those who follow the example of Jesus Who overcomes with self-sacrificial love. Wealth & power can always be abused. The poor and the righteous may always face persecution, but God is on the side of justice and mercy and His is the Victory.

November 6th

Revelation 14 v13

And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.

We say these words (except the last 6) at funerals straight after we have committed the body to be buried or to be cremated. I find these words wonderfully comforting, especially if the person has had a tough time on earth.

November 7th

Revelation 14 vv 14-20

In my daily readings, I am currently reading the Book of Ezekiel. More than once God tells Ezekiel that it is his calling to warn the wicked of the consequences of their actions. If the wicked man carries on his wickedness to the point of bringing about his own destruction, not only is he guilty, but also God's messenger is guilty for not warning him. I was once racing a friend on our bikes. He noticed that the route I was taking I'd have run full tilt into a spiked chain and he warned me. It would have been my fault if I'd hit the chain, but it would have been his fault too, if he had realised what was happening and had not warned me. This is why, uncongenial though they might be, we still have to read these warnings in Scripture and to preach on them and teach them. There will be a judgment. Justice is intrinsic to the Nature of God.

November 8th (Trinity 22)

Revelation 15 vv 1-8

LORD, we beseech thee to keep thy household the Church in continual godliness; that through thy protection it may be free from all adversities, and devoutly given to serve thee in good works, to the glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Song of the Lamb is for Christ's redemption of us sinners by the Cross and His victory over evil and death. The Song of Moses is the song he sang when the children of Israel were redeemed from slavery in Egypt and the Egyptians drowned in the Red Sea. The Jerusalem Temple was modelled on the heavenly Temple, the true dwelling place of God. The Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies is open. What comes forth is judgment. The glory of the just God fills the Temple like smoke and none can approach.

November 9th

Revelation 16 vv 1-21

It is often said that the world is divided into optimists and pessimists. Optimists always look on the bright side and are convinced that things can only get better. Pessimists are much more gloomy and expect the worst. Optimists believe that progress is inevitable. Humanity will find the solutions to the problems that face us – COVID 19, global warming, the rise to power of oppressive regimes, world poverty, worsening natural disasters. In the long run, we shall all be healthier, wealthier and even wiser. The people optimists call doom mongers maintain that one day there will come along a global pandemic we can't beat, that global warming is inevitable, as are famine and war, that the future lies with ruthless powers like China rather than with the increasingly effete western democracies, and that, even if none of that happens, we shall be wiped out by an asteroid strike or solar flares or some other cosmic event we cannot control. Both optimists and pessimists can give reasons for their beliefs, but neither can produce compelling reasons. Optimists might well say that things have generally got better over the millennia. Pessimists can point out that many great civilisations have collapsed and that there is no reason to think that one day the whole of human civilisation will go the same way. What both optimists and pessimists lack is the faith that the story of the Universe is in the Hands of the Almighty God. He knows what will happen. Everything is in His plan. A chapter like this is very hard to take in, but the fundamental point is that the future (like the past and the present) is in the Hands of God. Isaiah 45¹⁸: *For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited: I am the LORD; and there is none else.*

November 10th

Revelation 17 vv 1-18

Again, most likely the immediate reference here is to Rome. The Roman Empire had brought prosperity and peace, though a ruthlessly enforced peace. Millions were slaves. It had brought roads, aqueducts and other technological advances. It was also capable of great cruelty, giving short shrift to rebels and persecuting the Church of God. Persecuted Protestants have interpreted this as the RC Church. I've even seen the interpretation that this is the EU, founded by the Treaty of Rome (1957).

The horrors of the First World War compare with the horrors of the destruction of the wicked city. When we read Revelation and shrink from horrors to come, it is worth considering that there have been plenty of horrors already in world history and there are atrocities going on in many parts of the world today. Evil must be overcome. Justice must be done. Mercy must prevail. But how can we be not *overcome of evil, but overcoming evil with good*? The Treaty of Versailles laid a very heavy burden on Germany. See v6 of today's reading. But what happened at Versailles played a very big part in what followed – the rise of Nazism and the Second World War. St Paul says, *Yet shew I unto you a more excellent way*. His famous chapter XIII of I Corinthians follows. Without love (charity) we are nothing. Love is the rule by which we are called to live on earth. Love brings us home. Perfect love is our end.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become *as* sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, they shall fail; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

November 12th

Revelation 18 vv 7-19

Rome brought prosperity. Babylon brought prosperity. The streets of London were once said to be paved with gold. But at what cost? Cities are very often places where great wealth sits cheek by jowl with grinding poverty. In the ancient world, much of the work was done by slaves. It is said that the Greeks invented the gymnasium because they were getting flabby and unfit when all the manual work was done by slaves. While slavery in England was abolished long ago, you only have to read Dickens to know that much of the work which paid for the lifestyles of the Victorian middle & upper classes was done by people working in appalling conditions for wages insufficient to pay for food and accommodation. There is great poverty and hardship in our cities today and much worse in many other parts of the world. How many of the goods on sale in our shops are so cheap because they are made by poorly paid exploited workers – overseas and even in this country? COVID spiked in Leicester in garments factories where people worked in cramped conditions and sometimes were paid less than the living wage. Inequality is growing in western society. There will be a judgment for all these things.

November 13th Revelation 18 vv 20-24 & 19 vv 1-4 (continues next page)

The wealthy city which exploits and oppresses the poor and maintains its power by ruthless cruelty no doubt deserves to be destroyed. My first thought, however, on reading that the martyrs are to rejoice at the punishment of their oppressors is that such rejoicing is inconsistent with what Jesus did when He was crucified. He prayed, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*. The first martyr, Stephen, followed his Master's example: *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge*. Jesus Himself taught us that we should: *Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you*. My second thought is that it is easy for me to say that other people should forgive when they have suffered worse torments than anything I can imagine. Forgiveness is not glibly saying, *It doesn't matter*. Forgiveness is accepting the enormity of what the person has done and finding in oneself the grace, the price which Jesus has paid, to continue to love the sinner. My third thought is to ask myself what do I do that other people might find hard to forgive in me.

VE Day. We celebrated the 75th anniversary last May. I thought we did so very well, considering the COVID restrictions. But, of course, what we did was nothing compared with the celebrations on VE Day in 1945. Victory was definitely something to celebrate. Nazism was clearly evil. Yet victory came at a terrible price, the casualties the allies sustained, and, if we accept the Christian teaching we thought about yesterday, we also lament the casualties suffered by the Axis powers. Many ordinary Germans and Italians were just caught up in it and had very little choice but to fight for their country, but there were many who were really sincere Nazis and fascists. It would be hard for those celebrating victory on our side, perhaps having lost loved ones in the conflict, suffered serious injury, or seen their homes and businesses destroyed, to feel too sorry for the defeated fanatical fascists. After the war, of course, many were tried at Nuremberg and those guilty of the worst war crimes were executed. Justice. Who wouldn't rejoice in justice? God is a just Judge. We rejoice in His Judgment. People get what they deserve. Alleluia! And yet, as Christians, shouldn't we be praying with Jesus for even the vilest offender to be shown mercy? *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* God is as merciful as He is just.

November 14th

Revelation 19 vv 5-9

This well loved and well known hymn seems to summarise the message of Revelation.

1. The church's one foundation
is Jesus Christ her Lord;
she is his new creation
by water and the Word.
From heaven he came and
sought her
to be his holy bride;
with his own blood he bought
her,
and for her life he died.

2. Elect from every nation,
yet one o'er all the earth;
her charter of salvation,
one Lord, one faith, one birth;

one holy name she blesses,
partakes one holy food,
and to one hope she presses,
with every grace endued.

3. Though with a scornful
wonder
men see her sore oppressed,
by schisms rent asunder,
by heresies distressed,
yet saints their watch are
keeping;
their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping
shall be the morn of song.

4. Mid toil and tribulation,
and tumult of her war,
she waits the consummation
of peace forevermore;
till, with the vision glorious,
her longing eyes are blest,
and the great church victorious
shall be the church at rest.

5. Yet she on earth hath union
with God the Three in One,
and mystic sweet communion
with those whose rest is won.
O happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we
like them, the meek and lowly,
on high may dwell with thee.

November 15th (Trinity 23)

Revelation v10

O GOD, our refuge and strength, who art the author of all godliness;
Be ready, we beseech thee, to hear the devout prayers of thy Church;
and grant that those things which we ask faithfully we may obtain
effectually; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Quite a lot of couples are uncomfortable with the traditional marriage service in which the bride promises to *love, cherish, and to obey* her husband. *Obey* is nearly always omitted when using the more modern forms of the service. Also troubling, however, but much less commented on is the husband's words when gives the bride her ring, *with my body I thee worship*. As today's verse makes clear only God is worthy of worship. To worship is to offer yourself utterly and unconditionally in love. You can only offer yourself utterly and unconditionally to God. So, for example, if there appeared to be a conflict between your duty to your wife and your duty to God, it would be your duty to God which would have to take precedence. In fact, in doing your duty to God, you would be doing your duty to your wife, even though she might not see it that way.

Christ does give Himself utterly and unconditionally in love to His bride, the Church. So you could say that the Christian bridegroom, who is called to imitate Christ, offers himself utterly and unconditionally to his bride. In that sense the bridegroom does worship the bride. All Christians, the Church (which is composed of men and women) are called to offer themselves utterly and unconditionally to God. That is worship. What a man owes his wife then is what he owes to God and perhaps in that sense can be called worship, but we have to be very careful what we mean by it. Read Ephesians 5²²⁻³³ if you want more.

November 16th

Revelation 19 vv 11-16

You probably realise that I am struggling with some of these passages in Revelation. Some people just write off the passages of Scripture with which they feel uncomfortable or with which they disagree. They make themselves, by doing so, judges of the Word, rather than allowing themselves to be judged by the Word. That's a slippery slope which ends in making up your own religion. I am absolutely sure that we have to persevere with the Scriptures, even the ones we find very difficult. That's how we grow in our understanding.

The huge difficulty in reading Revelation for me has been reconciling God's Justice and His Mercy. It must be that we get what we deserve, that the victims of sin & crime & war are vindicated. But God does not and cannot (because He is love) deny the death of the sinner. I don't understand all this, but I do know that God's Justice and His Mercy are resolved in perfect love in the Cross of Jesus.

November 17th

Revelation 19 vv 17-21

I'm writing this note on September 3rd, the date the Second World War broke out. Thankfully, since 1945, we have been spared the sights of battlefields, bombed out cities and concentration camps, but they are there on film for the record. There is appalling devastation in every generation as a result of human sin. In Revelation it culminates in a last great battle. What this will mean we cannot yet know. All we can do is to pray *Give peace in our time, O Lord. Because there is none other that fighteth for us, but only thou, O God.*

November 18th

Revelation 20 vv 1-6

And his kingdom will have no end. These words were inserted into the Creed to counter the teaching of those who insisted that Christ would reign for just 1,000 years before handing over to God. Christ is eternal and there can therefore be no limit to the length of His reign. In I Corinthians 15^{24ff}, S Paul talks about the last enemy to be destroyed being death and says, *Then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.* I suggest that this means that Christ's human nature in which we share is subject to the divine nature He shares with God.

November 19th

Revelation 20 vv 7-15

There has been a great deal of speculation about the thousand years between the first and second death, Gog and Magog, and this final conflict between good and evil, overwhelmingly won by God Most High and the forces of good. Honestly, it isn't clear what this passage is about and we ought not to be dogmatic about what we cannot prove from Scripture. What we do know is that nobody knows the date of the end of the world, except God Himself, and that we should be living our lives as though we might be called to account for them by God at any time.

November 20th

Revelation 21 vv 1-7

I can quote these verses almost by heart. I do love them. We very often use them at funerals. In fact, if bereaved families ask me to choose a funeral reading, I usually suggest this passage or John 14¹⁻⁶. *God will wipe away all tears from their eyes*, our tears for the loss we have suffered, their tears for the pains and sorrows they may have endured in this life. *He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he will be my son*. What more could we hope for?

November 21st

Revelation 21 v8

But what about those excluded from the new heaven and the new earth? What about the wicked and the faithless? A terrible punishment awaits them. Justice, maybe, but where is God's Mercy in this? God, the Old Testament tells us, does not desire the death of a sinner. How is it that the New Testament speaks in several places not only of the death of sinners, but of eternal death and everlasting fire. Jesus Himself warns of this possibility in Matthew 25^{31ff.}. So what do we say about it? Maybe hell exists, but it is empty. God finds ways to bring everyone to the point of accepting His love, having their sins forgiven and spending eternity with Him? Catholics may think of Purgatory as an intermediate state after death from which it is possible to progress to Heaven. Protestants generally believe that you have to have decided one way or the other before you die, but maybe we see the two possibilities at the point of death and, shrinking from Hell, we all choose God's Way after all. Maybe, but should the person who suffered in the concentration camp have to share Heaven with his tormentors, who only themselves came to repentance through fear of eternal torment? I suppose, in heaven we shall be made like Him, and therefore we shall not desire the death of sinners, even those who have sinned against us. I'm not going to deny justice or mercy. It may be that all will be saved as S Paul states is God's Will (I Timothy 2⁴), but I would never suggest that sinners ought to be complacent about their (our) eventual deliverance.

November 22nd (Last Sunday after Trinity)

Revelation 21 vv 9-14

The Holy City. How would you go about describing Heaven. *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*

Jerusalem the golden,
with milk and honey blest,
beneath your contemplation
sink heart and voice
oppressed.

I know not, O I know not,
what joys await us there;
what radiancy of glory,
what bliss beyond compare.

They stand, those halls of
Zion,
all jubilant with song,
and bright with many an
angel,
and all the martyr throng.
The Prince is ever in them,
the daylight is serene;
the pastures of the blessed
are decked in glorious
sheen.

There is the throne of David;
and there, from care
released,
the song of them that
triumph,
the shout of them that feast;
and they who with their
Leader
have conquered in the fight,
forever and forever
are clad in robes of white.

O sweet and blessed
country,
the home of God's elect!
O sweet and blessed country
that eager hearts expect!
Jesus, in mercy bring us
to that dear land of rest;
who are, with God the
Father
and Spirit, ever blest.

I think all we can do is to contemplate what God has in store for us in His love. Our troubles are put in perspective. We receive the strength to go on. We have confidence for those whom we love but see no longer. We have confidence for our own eternal end when our task on earth is complete.

STIR up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

November 23rd

Revelation 21 vv 15-27

Older readers may remember the Jezreels Tower near the top of Canterbury Street, Gillingham. The sect which built it were trying to build the equivalent of the Holy City with the intention of hastening the coming of the Kingdom of God. It can't be done, at least not like that. The new Jerusalem is a heavenly city, not constructed by human hands out of wood and stone. The way to work for the coming of God's Kingdom is to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth and to live by its perfect law of love in our dealings with all.

November 24th

Revelation 22 vv 1&2

The prophet Ezekiel had a similar vision in the OT. Water makes life possible. It cleanses. It slakes our thirst. It is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Water flows from the side of Christ on the Cross, mingled with blood, when the centurion stabs His Body to prove that He is dead. Life springs from death. Water makes growth possible. Trees with fruits and leaves, nourishment and healing – the healing of disease, the healing of relationships. The healing of relationships brings peace because it brings reconciliation, between God and man, between man and man. The Water of Life flows from the Throne of God, from the Cross of Christ.

November 25th

Revelation 22 vv 3&4

As Christians, we bear His Name. Our Christian name is more than merely what we are called. Our name identifies us. *A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches.* We receive our Christian name at Baptism. It is who we are, members of Christ, children of God, inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven. Putting your name to something is a sign of integrity. We don't trust the motives of people who write anonymous letters. Anonymous posts on the internet are only too often false or malicious. *Hallowed be thy name.* Jesus taught us to pray that God's Name is hallowed. One aspect of hallowing God's Name is that we who bear His Name behave in a way worthy of Him. *Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord Thy God in Name.* Don't dishonour God's Name by acting in a way which is unworthy of Him. God's Name isn't a curse. It's not magic. It's not to be abused to support a false oath or to pretend God's backing for our misplaced attempts at authority.

November 26th

Revelation 22 v5

Once, visiting a coalmine, we were plunged briefly into absolute darkness. It is a very disagreeable experience. Moonlight and twilight can be peaceful, but, even so, depending on the circumstances we may feel uneasy even in these. Is someone creeping up on us? I can't find the way. I can't see what I might trip over. Personally, I think we can be too quick to dispel the darkness. We miss out on the beauty of the shades of night. We also disrupt the life rhythms of God's creatures which are adapted to come out at night. *Then said Solomon, the LORD hath said that he will dwell in thick darkness.* There is something about absolute darkness – fear, awe, mystery – which is proper aspect of our experience of God. But, by and large, we are creatures of the light. Psalm 104: 20. *Thou makest darkness that it may be night : wherein all the beasts of the forest do move. The lions roaring after their prey : do seek their meat from God. The sun ariseth, and they get them away together : and lay them down in their dens. Man goeth forth to his work, and to his labour : until the evening.* The eternal light which comes from God is a welcome promise to the redeemed of the Lord.

November 27th

Revelation 22 vv 6-9

What guarantees have we? How do we know that these things shall come to pass? How do I know that I am doing the right thing by seeking to live my life here on earth in the Light of Christ? The answer is that God is the guarantor.

1. God is love: his the care,
tending each, everywhere.
God is love, all is there!
Jesus came to show him,
that mankind might know him.

Sing aloud, loud, loud!
Sing aloud, loud, loud!
God is good!
God is truth! God is beauty!
Praise him!

November 28th

Revelation 22 10-12

The time is short. The time is always short. I find it hard to account for how quickly the time goes by, even now when COVID is preventing us from doing so much of what we usually do. We don't know what will happen tomorrow, how long we have left. The Lord could return at any time. We could die at any time. Are we ready? Would He be pleased with us if He came to call us today? Repent & believe the Gospel.

November 29th (Advent Sunday. For collect see 14th Dec) Revelation 22 v13

At the name of Jesus
every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him
King of Glory now.
'Tis the Father's pleasure
we should call him Lord,
who from the beginning
was the mighty Word:

Bore it up triumphant
with its human light,
through all ranks of creatures
to the central height,
to the throne of Godhead,
to the Father's breast;
filled it with the glory
of that perfect rest.

Mighty and mysterious
in the highest height,
God from everlasting
very light of light:
in the Father's bosom
with the Spirit blest,
love, in love eternal,
rest, in perfect rest.

Name him brothers name him,
with love strong as death,
but with awe and wonder,
and with bated breath;
he is God the Saviour,
he is Christ the Lord,
ever to be worshipped,
trusted and adored.

At his voice creation
sprang at once to sight,
all the angel faces
all the hosts of light,
thrones and dominations,
stars upon their way,
all the heavenly orders
in their great array.

In your hearts enthrone him;
there let him subdue
all that is not holy,
all that is not true:
crown him as your captain
in temptation's hour;
let his will enfold you
in its light and power.

Humbled for a season,
to receive a name
from the lips of sinners
unto whom he came,
faithfully he bore it
spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious
when from death he passed.

Brothers, this Lord Jesus
shall return again,
with his Father's glory,
with his angel train;
for all wreaths of empire
meet upon his brow,
and our hearts confess him
King of Glory now.

30th November (S Andrew)

Revelation 22 vv 14&15

It is the custom to pray for mission and missionaries on S Andrew's Day. Both the Church and the world need the message of the Christian Gospel. On the one hand, there is the blessedness of the redeemed; on the other hand there is the terrible fate which awaits the wicked and impenitent. (See next page for collect.)

ALMIGHTY God, who didst give such grace unto thy holy Apostle Saint Andrew, that he readily obeyed the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him without delay; Grant unto us all, that we, being called by thy holy Word, may forthwith give up ourselves obediently to fulfil the holy commandments; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

1st December

Revelation 22 v16

I think it was this verse which a dying Christian asked his friend to read to him. The friend got as far as *I Jesus*. The man said that was all he needed to hear and surrendered his soul to his Maker, Defender, Redeemer & Friend.

2nd December

Revelation 22 v 17

Though the dark is
overwhelming
And the brightest lights grow
dim
Though the Word of God
Is trampled on by foolish men
Though the wicked never
stumble
And abound in every place
We will all be humbled when
we see Your face

And we'll taste Your kindness
when we see Your face

We will see, we will know
Like we've never known before
We'll be found, we'll be home
We'll be Yours forevermore

All the waiting will be over
Every sorrow will be healed
All the dreams it seemed
Could never be will all be real
And You'll gather us together
In Your arms of endless grace
As Your Bride forever when we
see Your face

And the demons we've been
fighting
Those without and those within
Will be underneath our feet
To never rise again
All our sins will be behind us
Through the blood of Christ
erased

And You'll gather us together
In your arms of endless grace
As Your Bride forever when we
see Your face

3rd December

Revelation 22 vv 18&19

Scripture is a given. We read the Bible, all of it, as it is and it is one of the things which God uses to form us as Christians. It is one of the means of grace. There are parts of the Bible which we receive as sublime, quite evidently the Word of God. And there are parts of the

Bible with which we struggle – like much of the Book of Revelation. How can some of what the Bible says be the Word of God? But the Bible is the Word of God and we have to ask ourselves what He is saying to us today in these difficult words. It is too easy, too glib, to dismiss the parts of the Bible we find uncomfortable as not His Word as if we were God's judges, not He ours, as if we were so confident in our knowledge of God that we could decide what He may or may not have said or done. So what is to be done with these passages which seem incompatible with what we believe about life? The answer is that we read the Bible in the Light of Christ. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. To a very great extent, we understand Jesus in the light of God's Word written. He fulfils the OT prophecies. He fulfils the Law. He is the Wisdom of God. The Gospels bear witness to us of what He said and did. Acts tells the first part of the story of the proclamation of the Word to the whole world. *So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.* Paul and the other epistle writers explain the significance of Christ. We know Jesus through the pages of Scripture. We know Jesus personally as our Lord & master, friend and brother. We know Him in the teaching, fellowship and Sacraments of the Church. We must not add to Scripture, but we understand Scripture in the Light of our knowledge of Jesus. The hard passages challenge our complacency and we ought not to disregard them, but the key to understanding them is not our own cleverness, but Jesus Himself.

I Corinthians 1¹⁸ For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

4th December

Revelation 22 v20

In my teens, I often used to visit in a family who lived out in the country. The man of the house was a convinced atheist. If I stayed after dark, I used to walk home via the lanes rather than walk through the woods, even though it was rather longer. My friend used to tease me that, for someone who believed that I was going to a better place after death, I was remarkably concerned for my own safety. I think I'll leave that thought there.

5th December

Revelation 22 v21

See How These Christians Love One Another.

A well known saying of Tertullian the C2 & C3 theologian and martyr, but it has its origin in the NT and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. *See how these Christians love one another.* Nearly all the NT epistles begin and end with loving words and greetings. Revelation is no exception. Remember it started off as an epistle to the seven Churches of Asia. The basic greeting *The Lord be with you* is repeated time and again in our services. Love is the characteristic of Christians. Our love for God heals and nourishes us and sustains on our way. Our love for one another builds us all up, edifies us, in the fulness of Christ. Our love is our most effective witness to the world of the Truth of Jesus Christ and the abundant life He brings. Any falling short of perfect love is sin, which impedes our personal development, the growth of our churches and out witness to the world. The remedy is repentance. God's promises are sure.

ALMIGHTY and most merciful Father; We have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare thou them, O God, who confess their faults. Restore thou them that are penitent; According to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesu our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake; That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, To the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.

6th December (Advent 2) See October 1st for Collect.

I John 1 vv 1&2

We might start our study of John's letters by asking whether the author is the John who wrote the Gospel and the John who experienced the Revelation and, if so, whether he is the apostle, son of Zebedee and brother of James? There are similarities in the Gospel, the three letters and the Revelation which some scholars take to imply that there was a school of John – that John didn't necessarily write all five works, but that they were written by people who were close to him. In the same way, we may say a painting is of the school of Rembrandt, meaning it was painted by one of Rembrandt's close colleagues. The letters and Gospel are much closer in style to one another than to the Revelation. It could be that the Gospel & letters are by the same John & the Revelation by another John. These two verses seem to me to imply that the author was someone who (unlike Paul) had known Jesus in the flesh. In that case, surely, he was the apostle John and probably also author of the Gospel and possibly of the Revelation too.

7th December

I John 1 vv 3&4

John, then, knew Jesus personally in the flesh. He has seen and touched the Word made flesh. What an amazing privilege! And what does he do with that knowledge which he has? He shares it? Why? So that his readers (we) may know the truth about Jesus, live in fellowship with the Holy Trinity and with our fellow Christians and so that thus our joy may be full. We then experience the Word made flesh and, no less than those who saw and touched Him on earth, have this gospel message to share with the Church & the world.

8th December

I John 1 vv 5-7

No less than in Revelation, there is no compromise. Either you are a Christian or you are not. You are for Christ or you are against Him. If you are a Christian, you are whole-heartedly a Christian.

Luke 9: ⁵⁷ And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

9th December

I John 1 vv 8-10

Some Christian sects have come to believe that the saints on earth (all Christians, or at least the members of their sect) are already made perfect. This can cut either of two ways. You can sink into despair because you are only too aware that you are far from perfect and conclude that you must be damned. Or, the opposite in some ways, you can assume that, because you have been made perfect by Christ, you can do no wrong. Everything you want is right because you are a perfect person. John makes quite clear that he doesn't mean either of these preposterous alternatives. So long as we are on earth, we are tempted to sin and, sadly, all of us yield sometimes to such temptation. If we say we don't, we are telling lies. God knows us and judges us and we make Him a liar too if we claim not to be sinners. But, if we honestly confess our sins, God forgives us. The priest sometimes reads the first two of these verses before the invitation to confession at Morning & Evening Prayer (BCP). He is able to pronounce this absolution when, in the light of Christ's invitation, we confess our sins to Almighty God.

ALMIGHTY God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness, and live; and hath given power, and commandment, to his Ministers, to declare and pronounce to his people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins : He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel. Wherefore let us beseech him to grant us true repentance, and his Holy Spirit, that those things may please him, which we do at this present; and that the rest of our life hereafter may be pure, and holy; so that at the last we may come to his eternal joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

10th December

I John 2 vv 1&2

As Christians, then, we seek not to compromise with sin, the world or the devil. We aim, by God's grace, to live the life of heaven on earth, a life of perfect love. When we fail, as we all do fail, we turn to God for forgiveness. These verses are quoted after the Confession & Absolution at Holy Communion (BCP) and may be used before the Confession in the new HC service. Jesus is our advocate, speaking on our behalf at the Throne of Grace. The word for advocate is Παρακλητος, Paraclete, also used for the Holy Spirit, Who is the Spirit of Jesus and the Father & performs the same function, creating & sustaining us.

11th December

I John 2 vv 3-6

I once had one of those difficult telephone conversations with someone who was trying to insist on her understanding of what it means to be a Christian over and against what the Bible and the Church teach. She vehemently asserted that the Jesus she believed in did not issue commandments. I don't know where she got her ideas of Jesus from. The only reliable information we have about Jesus is what we read in the Bible and, in the Bible, Jesus clearly gave us commandments, supremely that we should love one another as He loves us. All the other commandments follow from the command to love. I suspect that the woman in question was trying to assert that Christians are free to do as they please, not bound by the law, but this would be a misunderstanding of what the law is, what freedom is and Who God is. God's service is perfect freedom. The law is summarised in the command to love. If we love, we do as we like, and what we like is to act lovingly, which is to keep God's commandments. As S Augustine said, *Love and do what you will. Or, as S Paul said, Love is the fulfilling of the law.*

12th December

I John 2 vv 7&8

John writes in very simple Greek. If you are trying to learn NT Greek, John is a very good place to start. The grammar is simple, the vocabulary quickly becomes familiar. Simple, yes, but infinitely profound. I doubt if we shall ever sound the depths of John's meaning until we get to heaven. He speaks of the love of God, the love of God which enfolds us, the love of God of which we are conduits into the world. The command to love is both old and new. God creates the world in love. He gives the Law which is summarised in love. He sends the prophets in love to recall His people to the paths of the Law. He sends Jesus because He so loves the world. Jesus offers Himself in love on the Cross. He commands His followers to love. Love is as ancient as eternity and yet it is ever new. Every second of our lives is a new opportunity to show love.

New every morning is the love
Our wakening and uprising
prove;
Through sleep and darkness
safely brought,
Restored to life and power and
thought.

day,
Hover around us while we pray;
New perils past, new sins
forgiven,
New thoughts of God, new
hopes of heaven.

New mercies, each returning

If, on our daily course, our
mind

Be set to hallow all we find,
New treasures still, of countless
price,
God will provide for sacrifice.

Old friends, old scenes, will
lovelier be,
As more of heaven in each we
see;
Some softening gleam of love
and prayer
Shall dawn on every cross and
care.

We need not bid, for cloistered
cell,
Our neighbour and our words
farewell,
Nor strive to find ourselves too
high
For sinful man beneath the
sky.

The trivial round, the common
task,
Will furnish all we ought to
ask;
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us daily nearer God.

Seek we no more; content with
these,
Let present rapture, comfort,
ease
As heaven shall bid them, come
and go:
The secret this of rest below.

Only, O Lord, in Thy dear love,
Fit us for perfect rest above,
And help us, this and every
day,
To live more nearly as we pray.

13th December (Advent 3)

I John 2 vv 9-11

O LORD Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit ever, one God, world without end.
Amen.

We think particularly about S John the Baptist at this time of year, preparing the way for Jesus, as we think about getting ready to celebrate His First Coming at Christmas and preparing for His Second Coming at the End of the World to Judge the living & the dead. John proclaims the Kingdom of God. Repent, he says, and be baptized. And he is practical. If you repent of your sins, you share with those in need, you are honest, you refrain from violence. If we love Jesus, it follows that we must love one another and that we must act accordingly.

14th December

I John 2 vv 12-14

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Walking in the light. Jesus is the Light of the World. If we know Him and love Him, our sins are forgiven in Him, and we walk in the light. We are people of love. An American Church adopted the letters PTL. *Praise the Lord / People that love.* The two go together. To worship God is to yield our lives to Him in perfect love. If we follow the BCP, we say this collect every day in Advent and come to know it very well. Its sinking into our consciousness is one of the means of grace by which God answers our pray *that we may cast away the works of darkness and put upon us the armour of light.*

15th December

I John 2 vv 15-17

It might look as if John's *Love not the world* were in conflict with the best known verse in the Bible *God so loved the world*. Surely, if God so loved the world and we are called to be like Him, made in His image, we too ought to love the world. But there is no conflict. God loves the world so much that Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, *God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God*, yields up His life in love for the salvation of the world. We are witnesses and, if necessary, martyrs to the truth of God's love for the world, which we share, longing for the world's conversion. What we must not love in the world is what has brought about the world's condemnation, sin: self-centredness, selfishness, materialism, greed, dishonesty, violence, lust, folly, infidelity, disloyalty, and so on and so forth.

Who is on the Lord's side?
Who will serve the King?
Who will be His helpers, other
lives to bring?
Who will leave the world's
side? Who will face the foe?

Who is on the Lord's side?
Who for Him will go?
By Thy call of mercy, by Thy
grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side—
Saviour, we are Thine!

16th December

I John 2 v18

This is another puzzle, not unlike those in Revelation. What is meant by the Antichrist? One obvious answer is Satan, but he is always around. Perhaps, John meant one of the Roman emperors who particularly persecuted the Church, possibly Nero or Diocletian. Over the course of two millennia, there have been many cruel tyrants whom Christians have identified as the Antichrist. The plain meaning of the verse is that THE Antichrist is yet to come, but that there are already many lesser antichrists who persecute the Church & oppose the Gospel. This is true in every age, including our own. Their very presence is an indication that we are in the last time. The devil has been cast out of heaven and is now rampaging on earth in opposition to God and the coming of God's Kingdom. Persecution and the horrors of the Apocalypse ought not to confound the faith of us Christians, but rather to give us hope. Jesus says: *And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.*

17th December

I John 2 v19

Years ago, I attended a conference on Church growth. People join churches for different reasons. There are cradle Christians born to Christian families and brought up in the faith. There are new converts. Some come seeking faith. Some come seeking friendship. People who are already Christians move into an area and join the local Church. Some people start coming to Church following a big event in their lives – the birth of their children, a wedding, a bereavement. People who have drifted away may come back to the Church. I even knew someone who came to Church craving respectability, having lived a life of which she felt other people disapproved, and God can give us a new start with a clean sheet. New members may be drawn initially by the kindness of the pastor, the power of the preaching, the quality of the music, or through bell-ringing or the youth club, the meeting for older people, or whatever. People also leave for different reasons. They may be promoted to glory. They may leave the area. Perhaps they find a Church which meets their needs better or (more dangerously) suits their tastes. A few lose their faith for one reason or another – such as intellectual difficulties or feeling let down by God. Some drift away as they get involved in other activities which take up all their time. Some may become disaffected with the minister or with other members of the congregation. But some people who leave the Church never really belonged and that really is troubling. They all need our prayers, those who might join us and those who leave us for whatever reason.

18th December

I John 2 vv 20&21

My grandmother should have left school on this date in 1914. It was her 14th birthday & they were quite strict about that then, but she begged the headmistress and was allowed to stay on for the Christmas celebrations. Well, it was a church school! Christmas, when the Truth of God is made manifest in the birth of a child. The word translated *unction* or *anointing* is *chrisma*, χρίσμα, in the Greek, the word from which we get *chrism* & *Christ*. The anointing is the anointing by the Holy Spirit Who is in all who believe in Jesus. John says we know all things. We know what matters, or rather Whom. We know Jesus, Whom to know is to have eternal life.

19th December

I John 2 vv 22&23

Liar is a very ugly word and we don't feel very comfortable using it even when we are talking about someone whom we know to be saying things which are not true. Jesus is the Truth. The Father of lies is the devil. We can all think of occasions when it would seem right to tell a lie - from the very serious like when the Gestapo ask you where the Jewish children are hiding, to the trivial, but kind, such as when your friend asks you what you think of her new hairstyle. Even so, we are not comfortable with lying. We feel instinctively that there is something wrong about it. Jesus is the Truth. To deny Jesus is to deny God. So, is the antichrist a Roman emperor who demands that people acknowledge him as Lord and God as some emperors did? Jesus is the only human being Who can be truthfully acknowledged as Lord & God. Or is the antichrist one of those who claim to be Christians, but deny either the divinity or the humanity of Christ? Both meanings are possible and John might mean both in the course of this epistle.

20th December Advent 4 (See next page for collect) I John 2 vv 24&25

What about people who do not know God in Jesus Christ? How does God deal with atheists, agnostics and believers in non-Christian religions? Only He knows the answer to that. We know that God is just and merciful and we can trust Him that what He does will be right. There is good reason to believe that He will judge those who do not know Him in accordance with their consciences. We don't know how God deals with others, but what we do know of Him, we have to share.

O LORD, raise up (we pray thee) thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honour and glory, world without end.
Amen

21st December (S Thomas)

I John 2 vv 26-29

ALMIGHTY and everliving God, who for the more confirmation of the faith didst suffer thy holy Apostle Thomas to be doubtful in thy Son's resurrection; Grant us so perfectly, and without all doubt, to believe in thy Son Jesus Christ, that our faith in thy sight may never be reproved. Hear us, O Lord, through the same Jesus Christ, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for evermore. *Amen.*

Famously, Thomas only believed in the Resurrection of Jesus when he had seen for himself and been allowed to touch Christ's wounds. *Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.* That's us - *they that have not seen, and yet have believed.* The anointing of the Holy Spirit which we have confirms us in our faith in Jesus, Who is the Way, the Truth & the Life. How do we know that we have the Spirit of Christ? Because we recognise God as our Father & Jesus as our Lord. It is only through the Spirit that anyone can know God. This is good news to share. John says of the Gospel: *These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*

22nd December

I John 3 vv 1&2

When you really think about them, these two verses are amazing. By His grace and by His grace alone, we are already the children of God. We cannot imagine the life of Heaven, what God has laid up for those who love Him. But we do know this. We shall be made like Him.

When the heavens shall ring, and the angels sing, At Thy coming to victory, Let Thy voice call me home, saying "Yet there is room, There is room at My side for thee."
My heart shall rejoice, Lord Jesus, When Thou comest and callest for me.

23rd December

I John 3 vv 3&4

CHRISTians. We bear the Name of Christ. We are CHRISTened.

Jesus has dealt with sin once and for all on the Cross. Our calling is to live up to our calling.

Thou camest, O Lord, with the
living word
That should set Thy people
free;
But with mocking scorn, and
with crown of thorn,

They bore Thee to Calvary.
O come to my heart, Lord
Jesus,
There is room in my heart for
Thee.

24th December (Christmas Eve)

I John 3 5-8

We're either for Christ or we are against Him. We are either Christians or we are not. If we are Christians, the fact that we belong to Jesus defines who we are, the sort of people we are, the way we behave in all circumstances. Sin is the failure of love. Sin is of the devil. The perfect love of Christ in dying for us on the Cross overcomes all the power of sin, the world and devil. We are called to be People That Love. Praise The Lord.

The foxes found rest, and the
birds their nest In the shade of
the cedar tree; But Thy couch
was the sod, O Thou Son of

God, In the deserts of Galilee.
O come to my heart, Lord
Jesus, There is room in my
heart for Thee.

25th December (Christmas Day)

I John 3 v9

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure Virgin; Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. *Amen*

Jesus, obviously, is born of God. So are all who have put their faith in Him. We are the children of God. We don't know how we shall celebrate this Christmas with the uncertainty due to COVID, but this is what Christmas is all about. We are the children of God, brothers of the Son of Man.

Heaven's arches rang when the
angels sang, Proclaiming Thy
royal degree; But of lowly birth
didst Thou come to earth, And

in great humility.
O come to my heart, Lord
Jesus, There is room in my
heart for Thee.

26th December (S Stephen)

I John 3 vv 10-14

Grant, O Lord, that, in all our sufferings here upon earth for the testimony of thy truth, we may stedfastly look up to heaven, and by faith behold the glory that shall be revealed; and, being filled with the Holy Ghost, may learn to love and bless our persecutors by the example of thy first Martyr Saint Stephen, who prayed for his murderers to thee, O blessed Jesus, who standest at the right hand of God to succour all those that suffer for thee, our only Mediator and Advocate. *Amen.*

Stephen was the first martyr for the Christian faith. He faithfully followed the example of Jesus, forgiving His tormentors and commending himself to God. Adam and Eve rejected God & were cast out of the Garden of Eden. Theirs was the original sin. Since then mankind has consistently rebelled against God's perfect law of love. Cain slew his brother. Thousands of years later, the religious leaders who thought themselves righteous, slew S Stephen. The sinful world is apt to reject violently the Gospel Truth & yet we are called to follow the example of Jesus Who died for us while we were yet sinners.

Thou didst leave Thy throne
and Thy kingly crown, When
Thou camest to earth for me;
But in Bethlehem's home was
there found no room For Thy

holy nativity.
O come to my heart, Lord
Jesus, There is room in my
heart for Thee.

27th December (S John the Divine)

I John 3 v14

MERCIFUL Lord, we beseech thee to cast thy bright beams of light upon thy Church, that it being enlightened by the doctrine of thy blessed Apostle and Evangelist Saint John may so walk in the light of thy truth, that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

How many of the things you would normally do are you prepared to give up in order to reduce the spread of COVID 19. Would you happily stay indoors and not visit the places you love? Would you be content not to see your family and friends? Did you spend Christmas alone to avoid the virus? Should people be willing to risk infection in order to go to work or school? I suppose it depends on how important their job is – to themselves or to the well-being of others. I ask this to illustrate that living is not merely a matter of staying breathing as long as you can. Life is much more than that. Life is love. Love is eternal. We're truly alive when we really love, whether we're breathing or not!

28th December (Holy Innocents)

I John 3 vv 15&16

O ALMIGHTY God, who out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast ordained strength, and madest infants to glorify thee by their deaths; Mortify and kill all vices in us, and so strengthen us by thy grace, that by the innocency of our lives, and constancy of our faith even unto death, we may glorify thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

One Christmas Midnight, I really upset one member of the congregation by saying that God would forgive Ian Huntley who murdered two ten year old girls, Holly Wells & Jessica Chapman at Soham in 2002 if he truly repented. *No murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.* Huntley's crimes were too terrible ever to be forgiven. Huntley must be lost for ever. What about King Herod? He too was a murderer of children. Is it at all possible that God could in any circumstances forgive Herod or is Herod doomed to an eternity in hell? Whether either of these two men ever repented, I don't know. If they did, whether we like it or not, the Gospel message is that God has forgiven them and we shall see them in Heaven. We sing about it in one of our favourite hymns. Do we really mean what we sing?

Every failure to love amounts to sin and any sin disqualifies us from heaven where only the perfect have the right to dwell in the Presence of the thrice holy God. Jesus laid down His life for us so that our sins could be washed away in His Blood, however vile our sins are, making us clean, perfecting us in His image and likeness so that we may, by His merits not ours, join Him in *the highest place that heaven affords* [which] *is his, is his by right, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, And heaven's eternal Light.*

To God be the glory, great
things he has done!
So loved he the world that he
gave us his Son,
who yielded his life an
atonement for sin,
and opened the life gate that we
may go in.
[Refrain] Praise the Lord, praise
the Lord,

let the earth hear his voice!
Praise the Lord, praise the
Lord,
let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father thro'
Jesus the Son,
and give him the glory, great
things he has done!

O perfect redemption, the
purchase of blood!
To ev'ry believer the promise of
God;
the vilest offender who truly
believes,
that moment from Jesus
forgiveness receives. [Refrain]

Great things he has taught us,
great things he has done,
and great our rejoicing through
Jesus the Son;
but purer and higher and
greater will be
our wonder, our transport,
when Jesus we see. [Refrain]

29th December

I John 3 vv 17&18

When I was at college, I remember, I chalked the words of v17 on the blackboard of the room in which we were going to hold a meeting about supporting Christian Aid and other overseas charities working for the relief of hardship and poverty. The original meaning of the word charity is, of course, love and one of the ways in which we can show our love as Christians is to support charities, whether by donations of money or goods, by volunteering to work for charities, or praying for them and their work. We can support charities as individuals or corporately as local congregations and churches. The care of the poor and the sick has always been a big part of what Christians do.

It would be a big mistake, however, to limit Christian love to the support of charities. Christian love is unlimited. If we have the love of God in us, we love as He loves. It follows that the way we treat absolutely everybody else is inspired by love.

As many readers of these notes know, I'm not really a *touchy feely* kind of person. I was one of those who did not really welcome the idea of exchanging the Peace in the Communion service with handshakes, hugs and actual kisses. Talking once to a fellow sufferer at Ramsgate, I said, surely the test of whether I love my fellow Christians, is whether I'm prepared to let them have £10 if they are hard up, not whether I shake their hand before the offertory hymn on a Sunday. I still think that's largely true, even though I'd grown used to showing love by touch until COVID came along. There's no point in reciting the Ten Commandments, it's no good telling people you love them, hugs and kisses are worthless, unless you act on what you profess to believe. If love is genuine, it is manifest unselfish and generous actions, caring for others as we would hope to be cared for.

30th December

I John 3 vv 19-21

All this sublime talk about perfect love could be depressing. We are often only too aware that we do not love perfectly: we do not love God perfectly; we do not love other people perfectly and we do not even love ourselves without reservation. *Weak is the effort of my heart, and cold my warmest thought.* We are hopeless. We are doomed. *There is no health in us.* There may be times that we feel condemned by our own hearts. But *God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things.* We are not required to justify ourselves before God. *It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*

Just as I am, without one plea,
but that thy blood was shed for me,
and that thou bidd'st me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, and waiting not
to rid my soul of one dark blot,
to thee, whose blood can cleanse each
spot,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about
with many a conflict, many a doubt;
fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;
sight, riches, healing of the mind,

yea, all I need, in thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, thou wilt receive;
wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve,
because thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, thy love unknown
has broken every barrier down;
now to be thine, yea, thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, of that free love
the breadth, length, depth, and height
to prove,
here for a season, then above:
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

31st December

I John 3 vv 22-24

There are times when I pray for things which I believe to be good and God doesn't do what I ask Him – like taking away this virus (unless He does so between me writing these notes and you reading them). What am I to make of these promises that He will give us whatever we ask when I don't get what I ask Him for, even though two or three or more other Christians agree with me? I think the answer is that, insofar as we are people of faith, hope and charity, our wills are at one with God. All our prayers amount to *Thy Will be done*. We are praying for what is the best possible and we receive what we pray for. God's Will is done. When we don't receive what we ask for, it is because here on earth our wills are not yet aligned with His Will & so we are asking for the wrong things. In His mercy, He doesn't give them to us. We continue to do our best & pray in faith as best we can for what we believe to be good. The closer we grow to God, the more we will find that our prayers are answered in the way that we hope for. We shall be asking what it is God's perfect Will to give us.

Happy New Year!