

9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton	Exodus 14 vv 10-31 p71 Exodus 15 vv 20&21 p73
11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Acts 4 vv 32-35 p1096 I John 1 ¹ – 2 ² (not read @ service) John 20 vv 19-31 p1089

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

Four scenes. There are four dramatic scenes in today's readings. First of all, there is the crossing of the Red Sea. The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt for 430 years. They had cried out to the LORD for deliverance and, at last, God sent Moses to set them free. Ten terrible plagues devastated the land of Egypt and finally Pharaoh acknowledged that he was beaten and said to Moses and Aaron, Moses' brother, (Exodus 12³¹): *Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the Lord, as ye have said.* ³² *Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone; and bless me also.* ³³ And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men. The Egyptians urged the Israelites to leave swiftly and they loaded them up with treasures of silver and gold to take with them. But, when the people reached the shores of the Red Sea, Pharaoh changed his mind and came after them with a huge army including cavalry and chariots. The Israelites were terrified and rounded on Moses, *it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.* But God protected the people that night with a pillar of cloud, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and during the night a strong east wind blew and made a highway through the Red Sea. In the morning, the people passed over, walking dry shod across the sea bed. When they had made it to the other side, Pharaoh and his army attempted to follow, but the waters of the sea returned and the pursuing host were drowned. S Paul describes this incident thus (I Corinthians 10²): *And [they] were all baptised unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.* They were one people, the people of God, members one of another, brothers in the LORD. They had been redeemed from slavery, delivered from death. They were a free people making a new beginning and on their way to the Promised Land.

The reading from Acts describes the Christian Church in its earliest days. Just before this reading, the apostles Peter & John had been imprisoned over night for preaching the Gospel in the Temple. In the morning, they were brought before the high priest and the high priestly family who ordered them to desist from preaching in the Name of Jesus. Peter & John responded boldly with the words (Acts 4^{19&20}): *Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.* ²⁰ *For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.* The powers that were had to let them go because of the crowds but they threatened them and warned them to stop talking about Jesus. Peter & John returned to the Church meeting and told everybody what had happened. This is where we came in (4³¹): *And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.* And then the author of Acts describes life in the early Church. These are the people who have heard the apostolic preaching, repented of their sins and put their faith in Jesus. They have been baptised in His Name, baptised into His Death, buried with Him, and raised up to

eternal life. Set free from slavery to sin and the fear of death, the Christian community are one people, the family of God, members of Christ, members one of another, born again, making a fresh start, on their way to the Promised Land. They were so deeply committed to Jesus and to one another that they even shared their possessions. They met daily for prayers and fellowship. They paid close attention to the apostles' preaching. They broke bread together. (Was this a kind of Eucharist or Holy Communion?). It says (2^{46&47}): *They did eat their meat with gladness and with singleness of heart, Praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*

The first scene in the Gospel reading is the evening of the first Easter Day. Four days before, the friends of Jesus had celebrated the Passover, the annual commemoration of the Exodus which was the subject of our first lesson. But what a Passover. The wonderful Man Whom they had trusted to be the One Who would redeem Israel, their friend, their teacher, the performer of so many amazing miracles, the apparent favourite of the crowds, had suffered a cruel death on a cross and all had seemed to be over. Perhaps even more disturbingly, there were now people claiming that He had risen from the dead. They didn't know what to think about Jesus and they were afraid for themselves. Would they too be rounded up and crucified? It was Sunday evening. Two nights before, they had been bereft. Christ was crucified. I doubt if they got very much sleep either on the Friday or the Saturday. Sunday had dawned with their womenfolk finding that the Lord's tomb was empty. The women reported visions of angels and Mary Magdalene said that she had seen Jesus herself. So had other women. Peter and John believed when they saw the empty tomb. It had been an incredible day. It is hard to imagine the emotions which they must have experienced: despair, depression, sadness, fear, tentative hope, inklings of joy. (John 20¹⁹: *Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. He showed them His wounds. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.* The fellowship is restored. Christ is in our midst. We are one with Him and He with us. He commissions us, His Church, to complete the work which God gave Him to do. He empowers us with the Holy Spirit, to perform this work. Matthew 28: ¹⁹ *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰ Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.* Those who come to faith through the apostolic preaching are one, one with Christ, one with God, one with one another – a unity of love through which our Lord's Prayer is answered: *Hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, As it is in heaven.* But Thomas misses out on meeting Jesus that first Sunday evening. He doesn't see and He doesn't believe. And so we come to our fourth scene – the same scene one week later and now Thomas is present. Now, Thomas believes and affirms, *My Lord and my God.* Jesus makes use of Thomas' doubt to teach that all of us who believe, even though we have not seen, yet share in the fulness of the blessing bestowed on those first apostles. We are all one in the Lord. We all have our own part to play in accomplishing Christ's work in the world. Today's psalm is 133. **BEHOLD**, *how good and joyful a thing it is : brethren, to dwell together in unity! 2. It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down unto the beard : even unto Aaron's beard, and went down to the skirts of his clothing. 3. Like as the dew of Hermon : which fell upon the hill of Sion. 4. For there the Lord promised his blessing : and life for evermore.*