

Easter 2021 – 4th April

9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton	Isaiah 25 vv 6-9 p708 Acts 10 vv 34-43 p1104
11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Mark 16 vv 1-8 p1024

ALMIGHTY God, who through thine only-begotten Son Jesus Christ hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life; We humbly beseech thee, that, as by thy special grace preventing us thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. *Amen*

But sanctify the LORD God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. (I Peter 3¹⁵)

S Peter tells us that we should *be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you* and that is just what I am going to do today. We need hope. These are my reasons for hope and I'm sure that many of you share them with me. We live in hope and it is our commission from God to share our hope with the world.

The source of my hope is faith. I hope because I believe. God won't let me down. He made me. He is always with me. He looks after me. He has prepared a place for me at His side for when my time here on earth is over. My life is in His Hands, as are your lives.

I'm thankful to say that I was taught to pray from a very young age, though it's never too late to start praying if it's not something you've done before. God is always listening out for our prayers. He loves to hear from His children, and we are His children through faith in Jesus Christ. *Only believe and thou shalt see.*

When I was a child, my parents and my grandparents said prayers with me when they put me to bed every night. When I was old enough, I started saying my own prayers every night at bed time. I still do. It is important to have some time each day when we stop what we are doing, tune into God and share with Him everything which is on our minds. We worship Him. We say we are sorry for when we have let Him down. We thank Him for all the good things He has given us. We ask Him for all the things we need. We expand our minds to encompass the needs of others and bring their needs to God in prayer together with our own needs. Wordless prayer, meditation is also good – though I'm not good at it myself. *Be still then, and know that I am God* (Psalm 46¹⁰).

As well as a fixed time of prayer each day, I am conscious that God is always with me – all the time, wherever I may be, whatever I am doing. I can always talk to Him in prayer. You don't have to kneel down and close your eyes or even talk out loud to God. God knows our thoughts. It is enough to remember that in order to turn our thoughts into prayers.

God cares about everything in our lives. There is no problem too big for Him. There is no matter too small to bring to the Throne of Grace. We can ask for whatever help we need. Our hearts ought always to be thankful. We should always be ready to acknowledge our sins. We ought to ask God's blessing on whatever it is that we undertake. If we don't feel able to ask God to bless something we are doing, we probably shouldn't be doing it!

It took me rather longer to learn to read the Bible every day. I was encouraged to do this from childhood, but I was probably in my late teens before it became a habit. It is never too late to start regular bible reading. The Bible teaches me how to live my life. It teaches me about God. It helps me to understand the world. The Bible gives me the strength and guidance to bring me through life's difficulties. It inspires my prayers and praises. The Bible pricks my conscience when I am in the wrong. It encourages me to do the things I ought to do and to refrain from doing the deeds, saying the words and thinking the thoughts which I ought not to do, say or think. I believe that reading the Bible prayerfully and thoughtfully serves to align my mind more closely with the Mind of God and makes me a better person than I would otherwise be.

Then there are the Sacraments. Holy Communion is enormously meaningful for me. It reminds me of how much Jesus loves me in that He was prepared to die that terrible death for me. In the Sacrament He is present in a special way, assuring me that He is always present with me, that I dwell in Him and that He dwells in me. This being true for all who receive the Gospel Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, our unity as Christian people, our membership one of another in the Church, our love for one another, is both affirmed and deepened by our participation in the Sacrament. And finally, there is the thought that all the blessings which we receive now from God are but a foretaste of the infinitely greater joy which He has stored up in Heaven for those who love Him – a foretaste and a promise that we shall one day see Him as He is and know Him as we are known.

Which brings me to the Church. Christians can have mixed feelings about the Church. I think that this might partly be because we expect the Church on earth to be perfect – or at least a lot better than she is. We are then disappointed when the Church fails to live up to the expectations of the Gospel. We forget that the Church is composed entirely of sinners, of people like us. It would be foolish to expect the Church on earth to be perfect when we know that we ourselves are very far from perfect and that we shall not be perfected until we reach Heaven. Nevertheless, also like us, the Church is on a journey, a pilgrimage. We have heard Christ's call and we are endeavouring, by His grace, to follow Him. The Church is not perfect but we are getting better. We have received the means of grace. So, the Church too is for us a reason to be hopeful. As members of the Church, we enjoy one another's fellowship. We support one another. We build one another up in our faith in Christ. We pray for one another. We laugh together. Sometimes we suffer together. We are here for one another and, in my experience, that has been even more apparent in the current crisis than it usually is.

And then there is the world with all its wonders, the Creation of God. The more we contemplate the miracle of the universe - the stars and planets; our own earth with its mountains and oceans, green pastures, deserts and forests; the marvels of the living world; the multiplicity of human beings, all made in the image of God – the more confident can we be that we are in good hands. *Our help standeth in the Name of the Lord: who hath made heaven and earth* (Psalm 124⁷).

There are indeed many reasons for the hope that is in us and all these reasons derive from God, Whose children we are. What more could we ask?