

Easter 3 – 4 2021 Sunday 25th April

9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton	Genesis 7 vv 1-18 p 8 Genesis 8 vv 6-18 p9
11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Genesis 9 vv 8-13 p10 Acts 4 vv 5-12 p1095 I John 3 vv 16-24 (not read) John 10 vv 11-18 p1076

ALMIGHTY God, who shewest to them that be in error the light of thy truth, to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness; Grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's Religion, that they may eschew those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. (II Corinthians 4⁷)

When my mother was getting older, we had a couple of handrails put up in the Rectory for her to grip onto. As I'm getting older, there are times when I'm glad that they're still there. If I drop things on the floor these days, it's sometimes a strain to bend down and pick them up. I certainly can't run as fast as I used to – and that was never very fast. I don't suppose I could cycle as far as I once did, or even twice did, though I haven't tried lately to ride my bike much beyond the Medway Towns. A younger man recently helped me because I was struggling to shift an old television set which needed to go to the dump.

I don't suppose I'm the only one in this congregation noticing the challenges of aging. As for you younger ones, your time will come! But, however old we are, we've always been conscious of our limitations. There are many things we can't do and there always have been. Some we don't mind about. I never wanted to be a rocket scientist. Some things we might wish we could have done, but somehow never did. There are times when I've wished I could have played a musical instrument, if only to help out when we've been short of an organist. Former Archdeacon of Rochester Norman Warren was a very talented musician and played the organ also for us once when he came to preach at Halling. He did play the wrong tune to one of the hymns, but I think we can forgive him for that.

There are probably also things in your daily life which you wish you could manage better. There certainly are such things in my life. There are many respects in which I wish I were more effective in doing my job as Rector. I'd also like to be less helpless at domestic jobs such as decorating and carrying out minor repairs and sorting things out on the telephone.

We might wish that we could do more for our families. We might be facing health problems or financial problems. Perhaps we wish we were better at relationships, better at our jobs, better at school.

Certainly, we should all like to be better Christians – more Christ-like, more loving, more effective in His service. It often seems to be beyond us to be the people we should like to be, to accomplish the tasks we're expected to perform.

If we fail, when we fail, we shouldn't be surprised. We are, as S Paul says, earthen vessels. Quite literally, we are earthen vessels. The Book of Genesis says that God formed man from the dust of the ground. The Hebrew word for man or mankind is Adam. The Hebrew for the ground is Adamah. Human beings are adam made of adamah. We are what we eat and what we eat is vegetables grown in the ground and animals which eat plants which grow from the ground. *Dust thou art and to dust shalt thou return*, says the priest at the ashing ceremony on Ash Wednesday.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, says S Paul. What treasure is that? The treasure is Jesus. As Christians, Christ dwells in us and we in Him. We may well feel weak and overwhelmed, but Christ dwells in us. In our hearts, there is a love which is as strong as death. Nothing can vanquish Christ in us. We can always trust in Him whatever happens to us in our lives, however inadequate we may feel. There is always hope for us in Christ and Christ is in our hearts. There is no challenge which we cannot overcome in Him. *That the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us*. That's the Good News. It doesn't depend on us; it depends on God. It is not ourselves we have to rely on. We rely on God and we can always trust Him.

We certainly are earthen vessels, often unspectacular, always fragile, but the potter is God. It is God Who makes us the people we are. It is God Who dwells in us. It is God Who keeps us safe from the storms and floods which this world puts in our way. It is Jesus Who is the Good Shepherd, the One Who knows us His sheep. He knows us by name even. He came to bring us the gift of eternal life. The Good Shepherd loves us so much that He lays down His life for us His sheep. This sounds amazing, but it is true because Jesus says it Himself (John 10²⁹), we are God the Father's gift to Jesus. No-one is able to pluck us out of God's Hand.

Jesus is our treasure, our treasure to share with the rest of the world. His is the Name, *the only name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*. We have a very precious treasure to share with the rest of the world, a world made up of people like us, frail earthen vessels, who desperately need the treasure which has been entrusted to us.

This is what S John teaches in the reading we didn't have earlier from the third chapter of his first epistle.

¹⁶ Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷ But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? ¹⁸ My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. ¹⁹ And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. ²⁰ For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. ²² And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. ²³ And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. ²⁴ And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.