

Easter 5/6 2021 9th May

9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton	Isaiah 55 vv 1-11 p742 Acts 10 vv 44-48 p1105
11.00 Holy Communion Halling	I John 5 vv 1-6 (not read) John 15 vv 9-17 p1083

OLORD, from whom all good things do come; Grant to us thy humble servants, that by thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be good, and by thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

Traditionally, the patron of a parish was the person who presented a priest to be its rector. The bishop would then institute the patron's choice to the living and the archdeacon would induct him. It's all become a bit complicated and the balance of power has shifted in recent years, giving more say to the bishop and, importantly, to the parishioners but that's basically the process of appointing a new rector. I was instituted and inducted at St John's Church on 2nd January 1987. At the Institution, the bishop shared with me the spiritual duties, responsibilities and powers that go with being a parish priest. At the induction, the archdeacon gave me the temporal resources to support me in carrying out my spiritual ministry – mainly the freehold ownership of the two parish churches. You may remember that we processed to the different parts of the church to reflect on what each part was for – for example, the font for Baptisms, the pulpit for preaching, the altar for presiding at the Eucharist. Halling's patron is actually a corporate body, the Dean and Chapter of Rochester Cathedral. The patron of Cuxton is the Bishop and he and the Dean and Chapter have joint patronage of the united Parish of Cuxton & Halling. It is for this reason that, when the cathedral chapter used to arrange study days for the clergy of the parishes of which they are the patrons, I was invited. On one occasion, we were thinking about how the lessons ought to be read in church – obviously in such a manner that the hearers would best understand them. They need to be read clearly, loudly enough to be heard and, if possible, in a manner which brings out the meaning. So that means that the reader ought to understand what he or she is reading and that is not always easy. Some passages are very hard to understand. Some lessons have more than one possible meaning. The congregation need to concentrate too! When COVID allows, it's good to follow the readings in the pew bibles. Scripture should always be read and listened to prayerfully.

Just as we were finishing, one of the clergy present raised the question of the following reading, which comes up around this time of year. In the BCP, it's part of the Gospel for the third Sunday after Easter. The words are actually very simple. The punctuation is jolly difficult. But what did Jesus mean? He is speaking to His disciples at His Last Supper a little after what we heard Him say today. **John 16:** ¹⁶ *A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.* ¹⁷ *Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father?*

These are the meanings which seem possible to me. The very next day after saying these words, Jesus will be crucified. On the cross, He will commend His spirit into God's hands, as He gives up the ghost. The disciples and the world will see Him no more. The world will rejoice, but the disciples will mourn and weep. However, His disciples will see Him again in just three days. On that first Easter Day and in the forty day period following, they will

rejoice once more in the company of the Risen Lord. He will eat and drink with them. He will commission them to complete His work, nothing less than the salvation of the world. He will share with them the authority God has given Him, breathing on them and saying, *Receive ye the Holy Ghost*. His mandate is that we should love one another. His purpose for us is that our joy might be full. His gift to us is eternal life.

On several occasions during His time with them, Jesus had foretold to His disciples that He would die and rise again. They had never been able to take it all in, but now they had seen it all for themselves. They had experienced the Death & Resurrection of Jesus.

On that fortieth day of Easter, however, Jesus will lead His disciples out to the Mount of Olives and again be parted from them. Again, He commissions them to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Again, He promises them the Holy Spirit Who will make all this possible. He will not leave His children orphans. He will send us another Comforter, another Advocate, another Jesus. Jesus ascends to the Father. We see Him no more, but we are filled with His Holy Spirit.

The coming of the Spirit is revealed on the fiftieth day of Easter, Pentecost, what for centuries Christians have called Whitsunday. With a mighty rushing wind and in flames of fire, the Spirit comes on the apostles and they are empowered to preach the Gospel. On that one day, three thousand believe and are baptised. As we have it, S Mark's Gospel concludes, *And they went forth and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the Word with signs following*. Jesus has ascended to the Father, but He is still with us. Jesus is the Vine; we are the branches. In Him we live. His life in us is eternal life, eternal joy, eternal love.

Our Acts reading is the end of that long story in which God shows Peter that the Good News is for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews. The Roman centurion Cornelius asks Peter to go to his house. God tells Peter to go. Peter preaches the Gospel to Cornelius and his household. They all believe and manifestly receive the Holy Spirit. Peter directs that they should all be baptised. *Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed*.

He has not left us comfortless. He is with us, *even unto the end of the world*. And we shall see Him. We shall see Him as He is and we shall be made like Him on that great and glorious day, when He shall return to judge both the living and the dead. When our time on earth is over, we shall be with Him in all eternity. We often read these words of Jesus at funerals: **John 14:** *Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.*
² *In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.* ³ *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.* So what does Jesus mean in John 16 when He says, *A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me?* He means that He will die on the Cross and rise again on the third day. He will ascend into heaven and send the Holy Spirit on His Church. He will receive us into Heaven when we have no more to do for Him here on earth. He will come again on the Last Day. *Every eye shall see him. The kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.*