

Services at St John the Baptist Halling & the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling		
Sunday 28 <sup>th</sup> March Palm Sunday	11.00 Holy Communion & Holy Baptism Preacher from MAF	Isaiah 50 vv 4-9a p737 Luke 23 vv 1-49
Thursday 1 <sup>st</sup> April Maundy Thursday	9.30 Holy Communion	1 Corinthians 11 vv 23-26 p1152 John 13 vv 1-35 p1081
	7.30 Passover Celebration	
Friday 2 <sup>nd</sup> April Good Friday	12.00 Three Hour Devotion	
Saturday 3 <sup>rd</sup> April Holy Saturday	11.30 pm Easter Midnight	Genesis 22 vv 1-18 p22 Exodus 14 vv 10-31 & 15 vv 20-21 p71 Ezekiel 37 vv 1-14 p868 Romans 6 vv 3-11 p1133 Luke 24 vv 1-12 p1061
Sunday 4 <sup>th</sup> April Easter Day	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	1 Corinthians 15 vv 19-26 p1156 Luke 24 vv 1-12 p1061
	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 65 vv 17-25 p752 Acts 10 vv 34-43 p1104 John 20 vv 1-18 p1089
Sunday 11 <sup>th</sup> April Easter 2	11.00 Holy Communion (Rev'd David Preston)	Acts 5 vv 27-32 p1097 Revelation 1 vv 4-8 p1233 John 20 vv 19-31 p1089
	5.30 Evening Prayer St John's (following tea at 4.30)	Isaiah 53 vv 1-12 p740 Luke 24 vv 13-35 p1061
Sunday 18 <sup>th</sup> April Easter 3	11.00 Stop! Look! Listen!, Holy Baptism & Holy Communion Ven Simon Burton-Jones	Acts 9 vv 1-20 p1102 Revelation 5 vv 11-14 p1237 John 21 vv 1-19 p1094
Sunday 25 <sup>th</sup> April Easter 4	11.00 Holy Communion	Acts 9 vv 36-43 p1043 Revelation 7 vv 9-17 p1238 John 10 vv 22-30 p1077
Sunday 2 <sup>nd</sup> May Easter 5	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Daniel 6 vv 1-23 p890 Mark 15 v46 – 16 v8 p1023
	11.00 Holy Communion	Acts 11 vv 1-18 p1105 Revelation 21 vv 1-6 p1249 John 13 vv 31-35 p1082
Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton		
Sunday 28 <sup>th</sup> March Palm Sunday	9.30 Holy Communion (procession from hall)	(at hall) Luke 19 vv 28-40 p1054 Philippians 2 vv 5-11 p1179 Luke 22 vv 14- 23 v56
Thursday 1 <sup>st</sup> April Maundy Thursday	7.30 am Holy Communion	
Friday 2 <sup>nd</sup> April Good Friday	10.00 Family Service	
Sunday 4 <sup>th</sup> April Easter Day	9.30 Holy Communion	Acts 10 vv 34-43 p1104 Luke 24 vv 1-12 p1061
Sunday 11 <sup>th</sup> April Easter 2	9.30 Holy Communion (Rev'd David Preston)	Acts 5 vv 27-32 p1097 John 20 vv 19-31 p1089
Sunday 18 <sup>th</sup> April Easter 3	8.00 Holy Communion <b>BCP</b>	Readings Easter 2 BCP
	9.30 Holy Communion (Ven Simon Burton-Jones)	Acts 9 vv 1-20 p1102 John 21 vv 1-19 p1094
Sunday 25 <sup>th</sup> April Easter 4	9.30 Holy Communion	Acts 9 vv 36-43 p1043 John 10 vv 22-30 p1077
Sunday 2 <sup>nd</sup> May Easter 5	9.30 Family Communion	Acts 11 vv 1-18 p1105 John 13 vv 31-35 p1082

We look forward to welcoming our new archdeacon, the Venerable Simon Burton-Jones to preach at our 9.30 & 11.00 services on 18<sup>th</sup> April.

[roger@cuxtonandhalling.org.uk](mailto:roger@cuxtonandhalling.org.uk) <http://www.cuxtonandhalling.org.uk>

On Thursday afternoons we have a **Mother & Toddler** service at Halling at 2.00 and at Cuxton every Wednesday also at 2.00. **Saints Alive!** (formerly Sunday School) is at Cuxton Church Hall at 9.30 (not first Sundays or school holidays). **After School Club**, Thursdays @ St John's.

**Copy Date** May Magazine: 9<sup>th</sup> April 8.30 am Rectory.

Wednesday Communion at 9.30 am at St Michael's		Thursday Communion at 9.30 am at St John's	
7th April (Rev'd David Preston)	Acts 3 vv 1-10 Luke 24 vv 13-25	8 <sup>th</sup> April (Rev'd David Preston)	Acts 3 vv 11-26 Luke 24 vv 35-48
14th April	Acts 5 vv 17-26 John 3 vv 16-21	15 <sup>th</sup> April	Acts 5 vv 27-33 John 3 vv 31-end
21 <sup>st</sup> April	Acts 8 vv 1-8 John 6 vv 35-40	22 <sup>nd</sup> April	Acts 8 vv 26-end John 6 vv 44-51
28 <sup>th</sup> April	Acts 12 v 24 – 13 v5 John 12 vv 44-end	29 <sup>th</sup> April	Acts 13 vv 13-25 John 13 vv 16-20

Holy Week: Holy Communion 9.30 am at St Michael's Monday 29<sup>th</sup> & Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup>, 7.30 am Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> & Thursday 1<sup>st</sup>. Good Friday & Holy Saturday Office Services at 8.45 am & 5.00 pm at St Michael's.  
Easter Week: Holy Communion Monday 5<sup>th</sup>, Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> & Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> 9.30 at St Michael's and Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> 9.30 at St John's. No other weekday services.

**The Easter Egg Hunt** will be held on Easter Monday, 5th April, at 2pm in the Rectory garden. Other activities: bunny hunt, Easter bonnet competition (to be judged on the day with a prize for the best adult's and child's entry), children's craft activities, raffle, refreshments. £2.00 entrance includes entry to all activities.



#### From the Rector

One very wet day in February Bishop Brian invited the clergy of Rochester Diocese to Orpington for an *Early Good Friday*. In the morning the Dean of Kings College, London, the Rev'd Professor Richard Burridge, gave a very powerful presentation of the story of the Crucifixion as told in the four Gospels. He pointed out that each Gospel tells the story in its own way and suggested that we should give each account its proper value, rather than scrambling them all together. The more we look at it, the more moving is the story of Jesus' Death on the Cross.

At the end of the morning, we celebrated the Eucharist together. This is the service Jesus gave us so that we should proclaim His Death until He comes again.

After lunch, we split into small groups for further study and to consider how our Good Friday services can, at the same time express and inspire the worship of Christians, and proclaim the faith to those who do not yet know the joy of Jesus. The effect is to tell the story and, as far as we can, to experience for ourselves what that story means.

Crucifixion is a horrible death. Even if I believed in the death penalty (which I don't) I couldn't countenance crucifixion as a means of execution even for the worst criminals. The execution of an innocent man is a terrible crime in itself. Jesus

was innocent not only in the technical sense that He had not been found guilty of any crime. Jesus was without sin. Before they crucified Him, one friend betrayed Him. Others deserted Him. Witnesses told lies at the hearings He was subjected to. Those who presided were on the prosecution's side. He was mocked and spat upon. They put a crown of thorns on His sacred Head. He was then flogged, which was enough to kill many people in itself. Then He was nailed naked to a cross and left to die of pain, thirst and respiratory failure in the full view of His persecutors and the general public. Crucifixion is a horrible thing and all the more horrible that it was done to Jesus.

So how can the Gospel be Good News? Why do we call this day Good Friday? We wouldn't, I hope, celebrate anyone's cruel death, even the cruel death of a major criminal. How can we celebrate the death of the best man Who ever lived, the only truly good man Who has ever lived?

The answer, of course, is found in the meaning of His Death. Jesus is the Son of God. He is fully human, but He is also completely divine. The Son of God offers Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. That is very hard to understand, but it does demonstrate two things with absolute clarity. God is deadly serious about sin and God's Love for us sinners is unlimited. Because God is perfect love, your sin and mine alienate us from God. We cannot expect to know God on earth.

We cannot expect to go to Heaven when we die. But, because God is perfect love, He will not leave it there. He demonstrates His Love for us in that He dies for us sinners. His overwhelming Love overcomes the power of sin and death. Because Jesus died on the Cross, our sins can be washed away. We can know God here on earth as

our heavenly Father. We can expect to spend eternity with Him in Heaven. What we have to do is to have faith - to believe and to repent. It is as easy as that. Jesus has done everything. All we have to do is to accept what He has done – to give our lives to Him, as He gave His life for us.

When I survey the wondrous Cross,  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And poor contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast  
Save in the death of Christ my God;  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to his blood.

See from his head, his hands, his feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down;  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

His dying crimson like a robe,  
Spreads o'er his body on the Tree;  
Then am I dead to all the globe,  
And all the globe is dead to me.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were an offering far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.  
Isaac Watts.

And how do we express all this in our Good Friday services in this parish? At Halling we keep the final three hours on the Cross, the period from 12.00 – 3.00. The service is divided into nine twenty minute sections, each with a hymn, a psalm and a Bible reading, a short address and time for meditation. This year the readings will be from Mark. You can come for part of the service and many do, though it is wonderful to be able to be there for the whole three hours.

traditional readings in the context of the traditional services of Mattins, Litany, Ante-Communion and Evensong. These are very moving. At 10.00 we hold an informal Family Service. This takes different forms in different years, but it is always an occasion to which you can bring children and invite your friends and neighbours. I hope you will all be able to come to at least one of these Good Friday services, to deepen your understanding of His Death, and then to return at Easter to celebrate the Resurrection with an ever greater awareness of what it is to live in Christ now and for ever. Roger.

At Cuxton, we keep the Good Friday Offices at 8.45 & 5.00. Usually we are very few, reading the

### Matters of Interest

The PCC Meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> February threw up a number of matters of interest. We confirmed that the **Annual Meeting** will be on 24<sup>th</sup> April at the Church Hall at 10.00. (Please see article elsewhere about possible changes to our constitution.) We were sorry to learn that Norman Head intends to resign from being churchwarden this year. He has performed fifteen years of stirring service and will be sorely missed. We thank him cordially and we also need to consider who could step into his shoes.

- The churchwardens of every parish shall be chosen from persons who have been baptised and —
- a) whose names are on the church electoral roll of the parish;
  - b) who are actual communicants;
  - c) who are twenty-one years of age or upwards; and
  - d) who are not disqualified.

The **Financial Report** was grim. We really are not paying our way and are heavily indebted to the Diocese. Some people believe that the state pays my wages and maintains our buildings, but it doesn't. The local Church does. People go on about the Church Commissioners' millions, but, just like everyone else's, the Commissioners' investments have gone awry and pensions look like swallowing up what's left. The reality is that a small proportion of our income comes from fees for weddings and funerals, social events, hall hire, a couple of lotteries and magazine profits, but the vast bulk of it is from what people give to the Church. Our membership is just 100 people, many of whom are pensioners. It is obvious that they cannot maintain two mediaeval buildings and pay a rector. We are getting away with it so far, because we are not paying the Diocese what we owe. We cannot get away with doing that for ever because the Diocese itself is in the same boat as we are – ever growing costs, ever diminishing resources to meet them.

It does help if people **Gift Aid** their donations. Please contact Marie Hendey about this. We are very grateful for any support we receive and we did discuss whether we might invite people who don't come to Church to give money on a regular basis. But we don't want to be beggars. And it's not your money we want; it's you. Perhaps the sad fact is that there are too few Christians left in England to maintain the churches we love.

The PCC was very pleased to receive a **bequest** from the late Mme Freda Fournier RIP. This will be a great help towards our expenses and we hope to purchase something for the Church Hall or St Michael's Church which reflects Freda's many interests – children and young people, music, education, poetry and languages, to mention but a few. Any suggestions, please, to PCC members or Rector.

The Social Committee reported some very successful events. In the immediate future, we are planning a **Passover Meal** on 1<sup>st</sup> April at St John's and an **Easter Egg Hunt** in the Rectory Grounds on 5<sup>th</sup>.

We were pleased to report that both churches and churchyards are in good condition. Necessary repairs are being carried out, particularly in the light of the Quinquennial Inspection at St John's. Churchwardens had received a notice from the Diocese reminding us that we can only carry out minor repairs unless we go through the proper (and potentially expensive) procedures. In particular we are under strong pressure to employ an architect even for minor works – which adds 15% to the bill. It is my belief that we should all make representations to government and local authorities to the effect that, if they continue to add to the regulatory burden, we shall be unable to continue in voluntary organisations and the small business sector.

The **Church Hall** is in good order and available for hire.

The report on the **Diocesan Synod** started with what Bishop Chad of Harare had told the Synod about what is going on in his diocese. Robert Mugabe's government is excluding Anglicans from their buildings, beating them up and using tear gas on them. The result has been that the **Church in Harare** is growing. People refuse to be put off attending worship and hold services in the open air. Other people (even Mugabe's police sometimes) see their faith and want to share what these Christians have got.

*Almighty God, Your son Jesus Christ suffered rejection, shame and death on the cross: Strengthen your people of the Anglican Diocese of Harare CPCA who are suffering at the hands of the police and those who hate them. Save them: From hatred, anger and revenge when teargas is thrown at them and they are driven from their churches; From bitterness when beaten, maimed and imprisoned for insisting on worshipping you in their churches; From despair when they worship you in the scorching heat, rain or smelly gullies. Give them grace and courage to hold on to the faith and not lose hope, Through our only true liberator Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Then the Synod heard a talk about **outreach in England**. Here the picture is much sadder. People are perfectly free to worship. There are churches in every community. Bibles are freely available. And yet only about 7% population attend Church with any frequency. Christians don't pass on their faith to their children or share it with their neighbours. There is thus a large, but declining, group of people who used to go to church and could come back. There is a largish and growing group of people who know very little about the faith, but could be interested. And there is a group of people who are quite set against what the Church stands for. As churches, we have to consider how we can reach all these people and, clearly, just inviting them to Sunday services is not enough. We need new ideas for meeting people where they are. This is what is meant by **Fresh Expressions**.

The Church in Zimbabwe is flourishing in the face of persecution and the Church in England is dying in the face of indifference. It makes you think.

Roger.

Church Hall Draw February: £5 to Grace Pearce, drawn by Shirley Crundwell

St John's Draw February: £25 each Miss H Thorne (14) & Mrs Cheeseman (134) & £10 to Mrs Catchpole (79) – drawn by Joyce Heighes.

### The Church at the Fun Day

As Halling Fun Day will fall on a Sunday this year, there is a suggestion that there could be an open air service on the field after the fête and before the concert. Watch this space!

### September Celebrations

Have you ever celebrated something special at St Michael's? Maybe you were married here or had your children christened. Maybe there is something else special which has happened in your life here. Perhaps you have photographs or other artefacts to remind you of these occasions. 26<sup>th</sup> September is *Back to Church Sunday*. 29<sup>th</sup> is Michaelmas. 3<sup>rd</sup> October is Harvest Festival.

We want to make this week a celebration of what St Michael's means to you and we'd be glad of anything you are prepared to lend to us for an exhibition in the church and hall that week. There will definitely be a Patronal Festival Eucharist on the Wednesday and a Harvest Supper on the Sunday. What else will happen that week depends on the ideas you have. So please note these dates in your diaries, turn out any old snaps or whatever and put on your thinking caps for ideas for a celebration.

If this goes as well as it should, we'll do something similar at Halling in 2011.

### Confirmation 2010

We are not due for a Confirmation in the parish this year, but I believe that there are people ready to be confirmed. I am planning to take our candidates for confirmation on 21<sup>st</sup> November to Frindsbury. Please let me know if you are interested. Roger.

### APCM 2010

The PCC has fixed the date and place of the Vestry Meeting & APCM as 24<sup>th</sup> April at 10.00 at the Church Hall, Cuxton. Please make sure you are on our Electoral Roll. As well as electing our churchwardens, sidesmen and PCC members, receiving reports and discussing general matters as usual this year, we shall have to look again at the way we elect our PCC. If we do not positively decide to leave things as they are, by default from 2011, we shall have to elect PCC members for three years instead of just one as at present and we shall elect only one third of members at any APCM. This was allegedly introduced to guarantee continuity on the PCC, though it is my belief that the people in the pews should be free to choose at the Annual Meeting whether you would prefer continuity or change, rather than having continuity forced on you by General Synod. Anyway we have to decide at this year's Annual Meeting which system to adopt from next year and I am strongly urging you to keep things the way they are. I have three reasons for this.

1. The proposed new system is less democratic than the present one. We should not be impressed if we were told that at the General Election only one third of seats would be contested this year, another third next year and another third the year following. I do not think we should like to be told that, in the interests of continuity, we ought not to be allowed to change the government all at once if we want to.

2. The new system requires that the number of representatives on the PCC is divisible by three. (Nine would be the number recommended for a parish our size.) For many years now, we have insisted on equal representation from Cuxton and Halling, which requires a total divisible by two. So we have ten PCC members, five from Cuxton and five from Halling. If we change to the new system we can either give up aiming to have equal representation from both ends (in which case I think one end would soon take over the whole parish) or we can set our total number of PCC members at a number divisible by both two and three. We could come down to six – which would mean electing only one person from Halling and one from Cuxton at each APCM – hardly worth coming to the meeting for – or we could go up to twelve in total. That twelve would have to be added to four wardens, three deanery synod representatives and one rector, bringing us to a total of twenty on the PCC at any one time. Human beings naturally work in teams of ten – twelve. So a committee of twenty is likely to be unwieldy and ineffective. On the other hand, if we only had six elected members to the PCC, they would only equal in number the *ex officio* members.

3. Either the APCM or the PCC would have to find someone to administer the new system, which is more complicated than it looks – mainly because people do not always complete their three year terms. In my experience, it is easy to make mistakes and people can be quite rude when you do! Anyway it will be up to this year's APCM to decide. Roger.

### Dare to be A Daniel

When Minister Joe Wright was asked to open the new session of the Kansas Senate, everyone was expecting the usual generalities, but this is what they heard:

*Heavenly Father, we come before you today to ask your forgiveness and to seek your direction and guidance. We know Your Word says, 'Woe to those who call evil good,' but that is exactly what we have done.*

*We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and reversed our values.*

*We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery.*

*We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare..*

*We have killed our unborn and called it choice.*

*We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable.*

*We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self esteem....*

*We have abused power and called it politics.*

*We have coveted our neighbor's possessions and called it ambition.*

*We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression.*

*We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment.*

*Search us, Oh, God, and know our hearts today; cleanse us from every sin and set us free. Amen!*

The response was immediate. A number of legislators walked out during the prayer in protest. In 6 short weeks, Central Christian Church, where Rev. Wright is pastor, logged more than 5,000 phone calls with only 47 of those calls responding negatively.. The church is now receiving international requests for copies of this prayer from India, Africa and Korea .



### Halling WI

The snow managed to stay away for our February meeting. Margaret was in the chair and we were back to normal, business first. Although our speaker and his wife had come early he didn't want to go first, I think he likes hearing our business and bantering. After the minutes were read Ann Hayward continued with the correspondence. Aylesford and Ryarsh W.I.s had sent us invitations to their parties, Notice of a forthcoming concert by the Gillingham Operatic Society, and an advert for some "cure all" medicine which we all thought sounded a bit dodgy. We decided we would leave that one well alone. The county outing to the Olympic site in London had been well over subscribed, but all of our members can now go as the County has laid on another coach. We had a thank you letter and recent activities by Blythswood Care, over 22,000 boxes had been sent to the needy countries. Well done to all of our girls who helped with that number. The best bit of news, the new supply of TEA had arrived and a newsletter from Yorkshire Tea for every member, telling us how the tree planting is going on. We who use Yorkshire tea

are now helping in some small way in saving the Rain forest in South America. Margaret then introduced our speaker, Mr Peter Sheran, who had come to tell us how he researched his and his wife's ancestors from way back and he had photographs to prove it. He told us how families in the past moved about the country to find work, met somebody, married and raised a family. He came to a dead end at some points only to discover some had been deported to Australia. More complications when some had more than one wife. It all sounded very complicated but he said it had become an obsession for him. It all fell into place like a giant jigsaw puzzle. After tea Mr Sheran judged our competitions. Flower of the Month was won by Eileen Buss with a very seasonal snowdrop and Sylvia Mitchell won the competition with a very old photograph of her great grandmother.

Next month's speaker is talking about a Golden Triangle, goodness knows what that will be about. The competition will be a decorated EGG, hard boiled, blown out, pigeon's or ostrich, decorated with anything you like, It will be very difficult to decorate a SCRAMBLED one. Phyllis.

### Friends of Kent Churches Cycle Ride

The 2009 total for the county was £150,500. This year's event is 11<sup>th</sup> September. Let's see what we can raise in this parish this year. (You can walk or run, if you don't cycle.)



### Cuxton WI

Despite the continuing very cold weather we were pleased to welcome 37 members to our meeting. Also, again despite the cold weather, it was obvious that the local WI branches had not hibernated and had been busy arranging interesting events for the coming year. There is to be a Polish evening telling us of its food, history and culture. A Samaritans Purse talk on May 25 at the Jubilee Hall. In October a demonstration of Medieval Cookery at Aylesford. Larkfield will organise a drama event in Sept. and already Kings Hill have the annual Carol Concert arranged. On June 25 we will all meet at Ryarsh for our annual district meeting.

Our own WI at Cuxton have also been busy with our usual monthly ideas Our art club studies water and china painting. The cookery club are concentrating on vegetarian food this year. Poetry

has a different theme each month and this month it is Animals. The brave walkers keep defying the elements and going for walks in the local area. What with Craft, Public Affairs and Home Economics we are all kept very busy. Chris Hall gave us a clear report on her day at the Emergency Disaster Day conference in Tonbridge. She felt that it had been very useful and showed how the WI could be best used in emergency situations.

Our speaker this month was a members of the team from the local Demelza House Hospice. What a wonderful place this is and a fitting tribute to Demelza whom a lot of us knew personally from when the family lived in the village. Our evening finished quite early and the hall emptied rapidly with everyone glad to be getting home to their firesides. But, next month we'll all be here again ready to enjoy a talk about Mystery Animals in Kent. If you fancy a warm and cheerful evening do come along, you will be most welcome. Sheila.



### Dickens' Country Protection Society

A barn dance will be held on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2010 at Buckland Farm, Cliffe – 7.30 for 8.00, till 11.00. Dancing to the Big Ian Petrie Band. Tickets £10 (£5 children) from 01474 824622. Ploughman's Supper included. Please bring own drinks. Kay Roots.

### **Nature Notes February 2010**

On the first day of the month heavy frost whitens roofs, gardens and trees and it remains very cold. As I put out fresh food for the birds I listen to their songs. The great spotted woodpecker flies into the garden during the afternoon. The evening skies are clearly lit up by a bright moon and stars. The next day is grey and damp but not quite so cold. The long tailed tits are still coming to feed, especially on the fat balls. I walk to the village then return across Church Fields. I see a young arum lily plant emerging through an ivy covered bank. Light rain falls during the afternoon. The following day is damp and cold with no sign of the sun. The great spotted woodpecker comes to look at the food then flies away. Three green finches arrive to join the great tits, chaffinches, robins, dunnock and wood pigeons. Light rain falls in the evening. There is still no sign of better weather. Rain falls overnight on the 5<sup>th</sup> so that in the morning, droplets on hedges and bare branches of trees glisten in the pale morning sunlight. The next three days are grey and damp and bitter north east winds blow. I notice, with pleasure, the snowdrops which are blooming in the garden. Their delicate beauty reminds us that Spring can't be far away. The 10<sup>th</sup> is bitterly cold because of the north east wind but the sun shines brightly. I take Murphy to the river which reflects the beautiful blue of the sky and which sparkles in the sunlight. The wind whips up white horses on the water. We walk along the path

for a while then along the pavements. Beneath the bridge the wind is very strong and biting. There are a few flurries of snow during the day. The next day snow falls in the east of the county but we are spared. Dark clouds drift across the sky during the afternoon. On the 12<sup>th</sup> I watch, on TV, "The Natural World" with Robert Macfarlane exploring the wild places of Essex. The photography is beautiful. For a while Murphy watches the foxes in a field and utters low barks as he recognises dog like creatures. The next day remains very cold with grey skies alternating with periods of blue skies and bright sunshine. I walk through the churchyard and Six acre Wood and hear the great tit's call. I notice a few hips then catkins hanging delicately from their fine twigs. Elders, sheltered from the wind, have burst into leaf. The old beech tree at the top of Dean Valley rises high in the sky as it spreads its intricate branches and twigs. When I emerge from Mays Wood and cross Church Fields I'm aware of shafts of sunlight beaming through grey cloud across the Medway Valley. Sunshine and blue skies reappear for a while until, once again the skies are enveloped in greyness Early morning skies of the 15<sup>th</sup> are clear as the golden sun rises over the hill and beams into the garden. The trees stand so still, silhouetted against the blue of the sky. Grey clouds drift across from the north east during the early afternoon. I watch six wood pigeons as they peck amongst the ivy on the

trees on the embankment and they look most industrious. A seventh pigeon pecks on seed on the patio wall. Rain falls all day on 16<sup>th</sup>. The 17<sup>th</sup> is warm and I feel this warmth as I stand in the garden for a while at mid day. The following day frost rests on the ivy and the grass beneath a grey sky. We walk by the river where I see three shelduck foraging on the mudflats and redshank flying and calling across the grey water. Rain falls as we drive to the river but ceases as we begin our walk. Rain falls in the afternoon. On the 20<sup>th</sup> white frost covers the grass and shrubs as a golden sun rises in a pale blue sky over the hill. The pond is frozen and birds are looking for their food which I replenish. Later in the morning, I walk to the village then up into Six-acre Wood until I reach the field where a steep bank is covered in frost for the sun cannot reach this area below the trees. Parts of the field of crops are frost covered. I walk soft, brown leaved paths in Mays Wood until I reach the fields where I listen to great tits' calls. The river

sparkles in the sunlight. As I look out of the window early next morning, the eastern sky is a fiery red. On 22<sup>nd</sup>, I walk by the river with Murphy as the rain drives into our faces and I'm aware of redshank as they call and fly across the mudflats. In the morning and evening of 24<sup>th</sup> I listen to a song thrush on the embankment. It is relatively mild the next day when heavy rain falls for a while in the late afternoon. Grey skies welcome the 26<sup>th</sup> but eventually the sun shines and by the afternoon the skies are clear. Cold westerly winds blow quite strongly and I watch silver birches near the river as they sway backwards and forwards. The sun lights up the garden but there is no warmth because of the wind. I'm very aware of the lengthening daylight. In the evening of 27<sup>th</sup> a hazy moon shines. Rain greets the final day of the month and it continues through the morning until mid afternoon. Grey clouds scud across the sky from the north east. The birds spend little time on the feeders but take shelter in the holly tree. **Elizabeth Summers**

#### Not Wasted Time by Alice Elder

Not wasted time this February day  
To sit and look in sun poured out  
Unstinting from a cup so Summer full  
And warm. To sit and look  
At velvet beech trunks, smoky-grey,

Their branches reaching up to stroke the sky  
With splayed and spayed-out twigs  
So intricate and interlaced  
No wasted time this February day  
To sit and be alive.

#### *Notes from Fuxton Infants' School*

*Dear Friends of our School,*

*So far we have raised £240 for the Haiti earthquake appeal, which will go a long way towards buying several Aquaboxes, supplying purified water. Our thanks to parents and children (from their pocket money), who gave so generously.*

*Mini Kickers for pre-school girls and boys has been running successfully in our school hall on a Friday afternoon. Dan the coach is a great teacher, and the children as young as 3 listen, respond and have fun.*

*I am also pleased that the library is able to house community midwives on a Wednesday, and last week there was a toy library and baby massage class. It is great news that these agencies are coming to Fuxton to serve folk in our community.*

*Each class entertained Mums at our special Mother's day assembly. We heard songs and poems about our Mums, and saw some lovely pictures that the children had made. Each child took home a posy of flowers for their Mum. Our children performed well at the Year 2 Infant School's music festival in Shatham. We were all very proud of how confident, well behaved and smart they were.*

*As we come to a close and break for the Easter holiday, next term we can look forward to thinking about local buildings and their use, caring for our environment, places of worship, materials and their use. In ICT children in Year 1 will be learning to save and retrieve their work, and use Photostory to record their school trip, and Year 2 children will be creating, sending and opening emails, and using Powerpoint to create presentations of the school trip.*

*Times have certainly changed! This is the way technology is going, and it is important we prepare our children for the advancing technological future. However, we still have to ensure our children learn to read and use paper and pen writing skills! They are fascinated with the old slates we have in school that were used 100 years ago!*

*We hope to 'bwin' with a school in Essex, and next time I will give you more information about this.*

*Take care and keep healthy. With love from all at Fuxton Infants.*



This year's Christian Aid Supper will be at St John's Halling on April 16<sup>th</sup>. The speaker is Laura Simpson. Please contact Steve Brown for tickets.

Virtue Ethics (preached Quinquagesima 2010)

Exodus 34 vv 29-35 p94, Ps 99, II Corinthians 3 v14 – 4 v2 p1160, Luke 9 vv 28-36 p1040

*Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine. (I Timothy 1 vv 9&10).*

*The law is not made for a righteous man.* I want to talk today about virtue ethics. I confess I am partly inspired here by Clifford Longley's *Thought For The Day* last Monday. You see, the rules don't seem to be working. There has been the scandal of MPs' expenses. Some MPs have been caught breaking the rules and have apparently been doing so over many years. Others have tried to justify conduct which most people would regard as distasteful by claiming that it was within the rules. Either way, the rules didn't work. In the one case, the rules were not obeyed; in the other case the rules were obeyed, but they allowed people to get away with behaving unethically. We are told that the banking crisis was brought about by a failure of regulation. The regulations permitted bankers to behave greedily, stupidly and irresponsibly. The rules didn't work. Then, this very week, we have seen the conviction of a senior police officer for attempting to pervert the course of justice. One of those people responsible for enforcing the rules has been caught out breaking the law. Rules alone can't work.

Virtue ethics takes the focus off the action. It does not start with the question whether an action is right or wrong? It starts with the actor. Is the person acting a good person or a bad person? Good people do good things. Bad people do bad things. You can tell a tree by its fruit. Jesus says *Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.* (Matthew 7 v17). *The law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless.* What matters is to be a person made in the image of God, a person filled with love. It is not what you do that counts, but who you are, because if you are good you will be good. St Paul puts it like this. *Owe no man anything, but to love one another; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* Romans 13 vv 8&9).

We need rules because some people, many people, aren't good people and because none of us is good all of the time. If we were good people, we would always want to do what is right, but, as we are not good people, there are times when we don't want to do what is right and we do want to do what is wrong. That is when we need rules and even the threat of punishment. *The law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless.*

Virtue ethics concentrates on the character. Are you virtuous or vicious? Very simply, if you want to be virtuous, you practise virtue. If you don't mind being vicious, you don't practise virtue. Practice makes perfect and, if you get into the habit of doing the right thing, it gets easier to do the right thing as you become a better person. *If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him,* as God said to Cain (Genesis 4 vv7).

There's been a lot of debate recently about whether we live in a broken society. It's hard to know. We form our own subjective impressions and subjectivity is no basis for certainty but the people who provide the statistics, the politicians and officials, are the very people we no longer trust because they have so often been caught out saying and doing what the rules might allow but what most ordinary decent people would regard as less than honest. The cynic says *You can prove anything by statistics*, and most of us half believe him. It is incontrovertible, however, that many people are bothered by the way things are in this country today. I recently had an e mail from a Moslem organisation deploring Britain's broken society and quoting a report by the Church of England Children's Society in support of their claims. Given the symptoms of a broken society, my diagnosis is that this disease is caused by a failure to develop character. People do bad things because they are bad people. They fail to do good things because they are not good people. And why do people fail to develop character? The answer is that the traditional institutions which supported the building of character are breaking down or at least changing at a rate faster than we can cope with. Our characters are developed by our families; the communities we grow up in, live in and work in; and our faith. Family, community and faith are all very much weaker than they used to be. They have less influence on individuals. They are less available to develop character. Family, community and faith have far less influence over individuals than they

used to and they have far less influence on society. Government regards itself as synonymous with Society and seeks to direct the lives of families and communities and to marginalise religion.

In a secular state we have no agreed moral absolutes and the bodies which traditionally developed character – family, community and Church – are weakened relative to politics, commerce and other less positive influences. It is not therefore, in my opinion, surprising that we have shifted from virtue ethics to rule based ethics. We no longer attempt to build character. We attempt to control people by keeping them under surveillance and regulating their lives for them. There have been 3,500 new laws, we are told, since 1997 and Britain is the most watched country anywhere in the world with far more CCTV cameras per head of population than any other nation. I've mentioned before that, when I was a teenager, I carried a knife. It was part of my scout uniform. We were taught to use knives responsibly. Nowadays, teenage boys are not taught how to use knives; they are forbidden to purchase them or to carry them. Yet there is far more knife crime on the streets now than when I was a teenager.

*The law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless.* We need rules because people aren't good, but they are a stop gap measure. What we need is good people who will choose freely to do what is right, not bad people cowed into obedience by fear the Law. St Paul likens the Law to a school master whose task is to keep the immature from doing too much harm to themselves or to other people until they grow up and learn self-discipline and self-respect.

Rules don't work in the long term because people don't obey them or because they find they can still get away with doing wrong even without breaking the rules. There are always loopholes. If our conduct is to be controlled by rules rather than by our own consciences and common sense, we need ever more rules to cope with ever greater complexity. Hence 3,500 new rules in 13 years. How ever comprehensive the rules, there will always be occasions when they don't cover the exact situation. Think of those scandalous cases where the emergency services have stood back and watched someone die rather than break some *health and safety* protocol devised for entirely different circumstances.

Moreover, human law, as opposed to divine law, is necessarily enacted and enforced by fallible human beings. Our law makers and our law enforcers are people just like us. If we can't be trusted to be good, neither can they. No parliamentarian, policeman or judge can be infallible or perfect. All are capable of making mistakes. Some are likely to be incompetent. It would be surprising if, in any large group of people, some at least were not actually corrupt.

Finally and most importantly, law doesn't transform us. Law cannot make us fully human. It cannot make us divine, which is what we are called to be. We can tick all the boxes and still not be a good person, a happy person. Or, as St Paul put it more poetically, *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.* (I Corinthians 13 v3).

There is more to developing good character than practice. The key is the contemplation of the divine. Moses' face shone when he entered the divine presence. He continued to glow when he returned to the world. Because he went into the divine presence, he mediated God's glory to the world. But Moses put on a veil. People didn't want always to be gazing at the divine glory. They hung back from being transformed again into the image and likeness of God. But St Paul speaks of the veil being taken away in Christ. If we come to Christ, we encounter the divine glory face to face. We are transformed. We are made like Him. We become love. We are set free to live by the Law of divine love, which is eternal life.

At our Lord's Transfiguration, three disciples are granted a vision of His Glory. He is transformed before them. They see Him as He really is – a foretaste of the Resurrection and Ascension into Heaven. The Body of Jesus is transformed by the Cross, the Resurrection and the Ascension. In Christ, we too are transfigured. By His Death, Resurrection and Ascension, we too are changed, no longer conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of our mind (Romans 12 v2). Our behaviour grows out of our character. Our character is the character of Christ. This is so because we worship Him.

Let's use the traditional collect for Quinquagesima.

O Lord, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth: Send thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee: Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

