

Sunday after Ascension – Easter 7 2021 23rd May

9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton	Ezekiel 36 vv 24-28 p868 Acts 1 vv 1-26 p1092
11.00 Holy Communion Halling	I John 5 vv 9-13 (not read) John 17 vv 6-19 p1085

O GOD the King of glory, who hast exalted thine only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph unto thy kingdom in heaven; We beseech thee, leave us not comfortless; but send to us thine Holy Ghost to comfort us, and exalt us unto the same place whither our Saviour Christ is gone before, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

I John 5¹²: *He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.*

Many of you probably remember the Royal Sea Bathing Hospital at Westbrook. It is a splendid building, founded in 1791 as a charitable institution to treat the poor of London. It specialised at first in the treatment of scrofula – a form of tuberculosis which affects the skin (and is also known as the king’s evil) and then the treatment of tubercular disease in general. It was an early specialist in orthopaedic care. The founders believed in the health-giving effects of seawater and fresh air. You may have seen patients lying in their beds on the veranda waving at passengers on the top deck of the open top buses which used to run along the sea road. The Sea Bathing Hospital continued to treat payments until about 25 years ago when all services moved to Margate Hospital and the building has now been converted for residential use.

When I was curate at S Christopher’s Ramsgate, we decided to repaint the interior of the church ourselves. In the process, I fell off a ladder and it eventually turned out that I had fractured a small bone in my wrist – the scaphoid bone, which is quite troublesome to set. Plastering it was insufficient and it was decided that I needed an operation to pin the bone together and to graft a piece of bone from elsewhere to encourage it to knit together. This was to be in the Royal Sea Bathing Hospital.

It was coming up to Ascension Day, a time of year which I love. The days are long. The weather is getting warmer. The crops are growing. Best of all are the horse chestnut trees, at this time of year sustaining displays of white or red “candles”, as their flower heads are commonly known. So I wasn’t pleased to be heading into hospital.

I shouldn’t have grumbled, however. I was only in there three days! And I quite enjoyed the experience. It was one of those old-fashioned Nightingale wards where you can see all the other patients and the nurses’ station and, if you are well enough, walk round the ward and chat with your fellow inmates. The atmosphere on men’s orthopaedics is generally good. Most of the patients aren’t feeling ill and mostly they are getting better. The way the ward was situated, you saw the sun rising up out of the sea in the mornings and setting low into the sea in the evenings. As an added bonus, the ward sister was a very nice person and the wife of the Vicar of Westgate. The baths were enormous and had three taps – hot, cold and seawater. I remember a lot of laughter with the other patients and staff. The operation was a success and I was able to go home and back to work, in time for Ascension Day if I remember rightly.

So why am I telling you all this? What are the themes? There's life. The natural growth of plants and animals is an aspect of eternal life (just as, if you're interested in that sort of thing, classical mechanics is an aspect of quantum mechanics). God is the source of all life – mortal life and eternal life. Our lives here on earth are all of a piece with our eternal life. Life is God's gift to us – life on earth and life in heaven.

There is beauty – natural and divine. The one points to the other. *For each perfect gift of thine, to our race so freely given, graces human and divine, flowers of earth and buds of heaven: Lord of all to thee we raise this our sacrifice of praise... God is good! God is truth! God is beauty! Praise him!.. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.* If we can discern something of the beauty of God in the world, in our hearts, even in heaven, it follows that the way we ought to live our lives must reflect the beauty of his holiness.

Then there is love or charity. The Sea Bathing Hospital was founded in order to care for the poor and the sick. God is love. His children are called to people of love.

There is laughter. There is joy. There is friendship.

There is healing. My wrist got better, though it still isn't perfect. If I'd been wise, I wouldn't have broken it. If I'd been prudent, when I broke it I would have gone to the doctor's straightaway instead of just hoping it would get better on its own until I finally had to admit that it wouldn't. But it is now pretty much OK, even if I get the odd twinge still. The surgeon's God-given skills combined with the efforts of the rest of the medical team and, most important of all, the fact that God has made our bodies in such a way that broken bones knit together, cuts heal and our immune systems fight infections, have resulted in my having greater use of my hand and much less pain than otherwise would have been the case over the last nearly forty years. Healing is of God. Healing of body, mind and spirit, healing of relationships, are all of God. When we care for the sick and when we endeavour to bring healing, we are working with God. That is true of healing sick minds or bodies, troubled spirits and fractured friendships.

Had I'd been wise, if I'd been prudent. *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.* I sometimes pray for grace to be a more loving person. Like Solomon, I sometimes pray for wisdom. But, more lately, I have realised that wisdom and love are very closely related. God is love. God is the source of all wisdom. God so loved the world that He sent His only-begotten Son. Christ is the power and wisdom of God. If we dwell in Christ and He in us, we are people of love. Christ is the Rock on which the wise man builds his life. I'll finish with the lesson we didn't have from John's first letter chapter 5, which I think summarises what I've been trying to say. *9If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. 10He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. 11And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. 13These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.*