

Trinity 5 2021 4th July

9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton	Ezekiel 2 vv 1-5 p831 II Corinthians 12 vv 1-10
11.00 Holy Communion Halling	p1165 Mark 6 vv 1-13 p1008

GRANT, O Lord, we beseech thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by thy governance, that thy Church may joyfully serve thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

II Corinthians 12⁹: *My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*

Today is *Thank You Sunday*. The idea is to say thank you to all the people who have helped us over the period of the COVID pandemic. Obviously, there are the professionals – the doctors, nurses and carers and all those in the healing and caring professions. There are the scientists who have carried out research into ways to restrict the spread of the virus and to treat those infected – and those who have produced and distributed effective immunisation. There are the politicians who have had to take very grave decisions under tremendous pressure and without sufficient information. There are probably millions of people in so many other normally ordinary occupations who have carried on with their usual work in conditions of difficulty and sometimes at some risk to themselves - people like shop workers and bus drivers. Then there are all the very many ordinary men, women and children who have simply looked out for one another – for family, friends, neighbours and for the whole community. It is always good to be thankful and to let other people know that we are grateful to them. It cheers them up to know that they are appreciated for doing something worthwhile. I'm sure that I've left out many and maybe you are thinking of some of them now.

In the languages of the bible the concepts of thanksgiving and blessing are very closely related. We bless one another by being thankful for one another. We seek ways to reciprocate – to be kind to those who have been kind to us, to be kind to everyone who needs our kindness. We pray for the people who care for us even if they don't know to pray for themselves.

As Christians, we thank God for one another and for all the good that people do.

In today's Gospel, at first the people of Nazareth demanded to know what was so special about Jesus? To them, Jesus was just an ordinary guy. They knew His family. They remembered Him as a boy. Because their minds were closed to His potential to help them, it says, *he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid hands on a few sick people, and healed them.*

I think that ordinary people are only too often underrated. We don't appreciate their potential. In the context of COVID in particular, I think of those care home workers, many of them on the national minimum wage, taking care of residents when the virus swept through care homes, infecting people who were already frail and vulnerable.

As a parish priest and pastor, I am often deeply impressed by the way in which seemingly ordinary people cope with their own suffering and by how much families and friends are capable of doing and willing to do in order to care for one another.

When I have to preach on occasions such as Remembrance Sunday or Battle of Britain Day, I'm reminded again and again of how resilient apparently ordinary people very often turn out to be under the most awful conditions - their courage and fortitude, their ability to undertake gruelling and dangerous tasks in the service of their country and of humanity in general.

Those are just a few examples. There is nothing ordinary about ordinary people.

After the incident in the synagogue at Nazareth, it says that Jesus sent out the twelve apostles in pairs to do the same kind of things as He was doing in the villages roundabout. He actually tells them not to prepare for their journeying, just to get on with it. I'm reminded of the early stages of the pandemic when health service staff were expected to go to work without personal protection equipment. I'm not saying that we shouldn't prepare. I'm certainly not saying that people working till they drop and putting their own lives on the line to look after others shouldn't have PPE and any other equipment which would make their lives easier and safer. They should have the best that is available and we should be prepared to pay for it. What I am remarking on is this, that the apostles – twelve ordinary men – just did what Jesus said and got on with the job. There is nothing ordinary about ordinary people.

*All may of thee partake,
Nothing can be so mean
Which, with this tincture, For thy sake
Will not grow bright and clean.*

*A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine divine;
Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,
Makes that and the action fine.*

In our epistle, Paul speaks about a wonderful vision of heaven. He writes circumspectly and in the third person. He is very cautious about seeming to boast, but he surely means himself. It is Paul who has had this wonderful vision. He is very circumspect talking about it, partly I'm sure from a sense of unworthiness and awe that God has shown him these things, but also because they are really not the point. The true glory is to take up one's cross and to follow Christ. It's not Paul's strength which accomplishes God's purposes. It is God's power working through Paul which achieves God's plan. Paul may indeed suffer. God says to him, *My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness*. Paul's experience is *for when I am weak, then I am strong*. It doesn't depend on Paul's strength or on my strength or on your strength. It all depends on God. So we ordinary people can bear a great deal and achieve great things. His grace is sufficient for us. Our strength is made perfect in weakness.

Our OT lesson is the beginning of Ezekiel chapter 2. Ezekiel 1 describes the extraordinary vision which the prophet experienced – the glory of God revealed as far as could be to mortal man. His task is a hard task, to bring God's Word to a people who don't want to hear it. But God's grace is sufficient and Ezekiel will fulfil his vocation. We human beings can bear a great deal and achieve great things. His grace is sufficient for us. Our strength is made perfect in weakness.