

9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton	Amos 7 vv 7-15 p922 Ephesians 1 vv 1-14 p1173
11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Mark 6 vv 14-29 p1008

O GOD, who hast prepared for them that love thee such good things as pass man's understanding; Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

All that we can desire. What do people desire? Let's think about it for a moment. There are things which we desire and strive to attain. Maybe what we desire is a fulfilling career or a nice home or a happy family. Perhaps what we desire earnestly is good health for ourselves or for someone we love. We might desire things which are beyond our own personal capacity to achieve such as world peace, to make poverty history and to see an end to the current COVID pandemic. We cannot bring about such desirable ends by ourselves, but we can all play our own parts, however small – praying for peace and justice and an end to poverty and disease, seeking peace in the way in which we live our own lives, caring for other people, supporting missions and charities and obeying the rules sensibly drawn up to protect us.

Those are big desires. We might also have smaller desires. We'd like to get away on holiday or to change the car. We'd like to see Gillingham win the FA cup. We wish people would be more considerate about not dropping litter or that people driving on our highways would be more attentive to the safety and well-being of other road users. We'd like chips for tea. There are plenty of things we might desire – minor and major. We entertain some hopes for things which are mainly for our own benefit and we also indulge more altruistic aspirations for the common good.

Some of our desires are realistic. I can have chips for tea. Some of what we might hope for is almost certainly not going to happen. I don't suppose I shall ever be as successful a preacher as Billy Graham.

There might also be things which we would desire if only we could know about them. Think of all the things which have come into the world in our lifetimes: all the gadgets and labour-saving devices, advances in medicine and dentistry, a much wider range of available foodstuffs, more comfortable homes, the opportunity for travel. Our great grandparents didn't desire home computers or avocados or frequent foreign holidays, not because they just didn't want them, but simply because they couldn't even conceive of them being possible. They might well have desired all those things if only they had known that they could happen.

I wonder what might be available to future generations which we haven't even thought of yet but would very much desire if only we knew what was possible?

Today's collect talks about God's promises *exceeding all that we can desire*. Pause for thought. What can that mean that God's promises exceed *all that we can desire*? It surely

must mean that what God promises us is so great that it is beyond us, with our feeble minds and limited experience, even to begin to imagine. Everything we could desire, everything we could conceivably desire for ourselves, is exceeded by what God promises us. In fact, God's free gift to us is of infinitely greater value than anything we can achieve for all our striving. What we hope for as Christians is infinitely better than the best we can imagine.

In today's Epistle, Paul blesses God: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.*

What are the benefits of religion? I've been thinking very much lately about three of them, What do we gain from having faith in God in Jesus Christ?

The first gain is that God is our companion and friend as we live our lives on earth. We don't have to worry about things. God knows what we need before we even ask Him. *But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

The second is that Christian faith teaches us how to live our lives on earth, what we should do, what we should not do. *God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.*

The third of course is our eternal life in Him. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.* An eternity beyond our imagination is God's promise to us. The Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts here on earth is an earnest – a foretaste and a guarantee – of what is yet to come in *the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life.*

Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire. At the beginning of this sermon, I talked about the desires we might strive for. What God promises us exceeds everything we can desire. God's promises are not our reward for being good. What God promises us follows from our loving Him above all things. All the things we might strive for pale into insignificance in the light of God's free gift to us of eternal life. Our strivings cannot achieve what God promises to give us for nothing.

*Not the labour of my hands
Can fulfil Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,*

*Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.*

We receive God's promises *loving thee above all things*. We enjoy what God promises us in the context of faith and hope and love. Faith and hope and love are what are called the three theological virtues. They are themselves God's gift to us and so we pray that God will *pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire.* It is all of God.