The Gospel According to St John

Bible Notes January-March 2027

January 1st (The Circumcision of Christ) John 1 v1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Today is the eighth day of Christmas. It is the day on which, in accordance with the Law, the baby Jesus was circumcised. It is the day on which He was formally given the Name Jesus, the Name which the angel declared before His conception. Today is also known as the Naming of Jesus.

Jesus is God. Jesus is a fragile week old infant. Through Him Heaven & earth were created. Through Him we are created. He is one of us. He knows what it is to be human because He is human. He fulfils the Law's demands. He embodies the Godhead because He is God.

To the Name of our salvation,
laud and honour let us pay,
which for many a generation
hid in God's foreknowledge lay;
but with holy exultation
we may sing aloud today.

Jesus is the Name we treasure;
Name beyond what words can tell;
Name of gladness, Name of pleasure,
ear and heart delighting well;
Name of sweetness, passing measure,
saving us from sin and hell.

'Tis the Name for adoration,
Name for songs of victory,
Name for holy meditation
in this vale of misery,
Name for joyful veneration
by the citizens on high.

'Tis the Name that whoso preacheth
speaks like music to the ear;
who in prayer this Name beseecheth
sweetest comfort findeth near;
who its perfect wisdom reacheth,
heavenly joy possesseth here.

Jesus is the Name exalted
over every other name;
in this Name, whene'er assaulted,
we can put our foes to shame;
strength to them who else had halted,
eyes to blind, and feet to lame.

Therefore we in love adoring,
this most blessèd Name revere;
holy Jesus, thee imploring
so to write it in us here,
that hereafter, heavenward soaring,
we may sing with angels there.

January 2nd John 1 v2

The same was in the beginning with God.

God is beyond our imagination. The very word *imagination* suggests that we are trying to make an image. And we know that images of God are forbidden by the Second Commandment. Any image of God we may construct falls infinitely far short of the Truth & is therefore a lie. You can't worship, you can't commit your life to a lie. If you do, you will perish. The devil is the father of lies. But Jesus is the Way, the Truth & the Life. He, with the Father & the Holy Spirit, is eternally God, and it is through Him alone that we can come to the Father, through Him alone that we can know God, Whom to know is eternal life.

January 3rd (Christmas 2) John 1 v3

All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.

We tend to think of God the Father as the Creator, God the Son as Redeemer and God the Holy Spirit as the One Who dwells in us – our advocate & comforter. God is, however, one. God is not divided. The Holy Trinity is One in Creation, Redemption and in Sanctification. As the *Quicunque Vult* puts it, *For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son : and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one : the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son : and such is the Holy Ghost*. This is beyond our understanding but must be so given that every person of the Trinity is wholly God.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.
Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! all the saints adore thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea.
Cherubim and seraphim,
falling down before thee,
Which wert and art and evermore shalt be.

Holy, Holy, Holy! though the darkness hide thee,
Though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see,
Only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,
Perfect in pow'r, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy name, in earth, and sky, and sea;

Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

January 4th — John 1 v4

In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

There is so much darkness in the world: war, crime, domestic abuse, addiction, poverty, hardship, disease, homelessness, a general sense of dissatisfaction with life. How much of this darkness results from humanity's predilection for seeking satisfaction in the wrong places. We don't find our fulfilment in material things. That doesn't mean that all material things are necessarily bad. Some are, but there are many good things in the world for which to be thankful. *We thank thee then, O Father, for all things bright & good, the seed-time and the harvest,: our life, our health our food,* as the hymn says. But it is only in our love for Jesus, the Light of the World, that we discover what life is truly about.

January 5th — John 1 v5

And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

The Greek word translated here *comprehended* can mean either *understood* or *overcame. Grasped* and *mastered* are also both suggested translations. The darkness doesn't overcome Jesus, He faces opposition throughout His ministry. He is betrayed. He is the victim of perjury. He is let down by His friends, He is wrongfully convicted. He is rejected by those He came to save. He is mocked, spat upon, flogged & killed. But He is not overcome. He forgives His enemies even as He is hung on the Cross. He is risen from the dead & has opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. The Light shines in the darkness. Neither is Jesus understood. Surely if people understood Jesus, they would follow Him.

January 6th (The Epiphany) — John 1 vv 6&7

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

Christ makes God known. In various ways, Christ is made known to the world. The angels tell the shepherds. The Holy Spirit revealed Him to Simeon. A star led the wise men to His cradle. John the Baptist prepared the way for Him, pointed Him out to the crowds & to the first apostles. Our Lord's miracles are signs of Who He is. All of us who know Jesus have a part to play in bearing witness to Him in the world, that people *might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing* [they] *might have life through his name.*

January 7th John 1 vv 8&9

He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.
John was a great preacher & he attracted vast crowds. At John's preaching, huge numbers of people came to repent of their sins, to prepare for the coming of the Kingdom of God and to be baptized. Some became disciples of John & not all of John's followers were ready straightaway to follow Jesus. They were happy as they were, following John. John was quite clear that he had come to prepare the way for Jesus, but we humans do get set in our ways sometimes!

There is always a danger in Christian circles that people will come to lionise certain very gifted priests or preachers. Sometimes this goes very wrong when the power which apparent success bestows on a Church leader goes to his head and he abuses the vulnerable people who look to him for spiritual support & guidance. Even if things don't go that far, we should always ask ourselves whether we are entranced by particular people in the ministry of the Church rather than by our own personal relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. John says that Christ must increase & that he must decrease. St Paul is very clear that the success of the Gospel depends on God, not on him, nor on any other Church leader.

January 8th John 1 v10

He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.
In many ways, this verse encapsulates the Gospel message. Human beings do not recognise their Creator. We do not follow our Maker's instructions. The result is that we mess up our own lives & we mess up the world. God's Love for us is such that He enters into our world. In

Jesus we see what God is like. We see what we human beings ought to be. If we know Him, we have eternal life. But far too many of us do not recognise Him. The more Christ-like our lives as Christians, the more we bear witness to His Truth in the world, but we are warned that we should expect to be treated as He was treated in the world.

January 9th — John 1 v11

He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

Jesus came into His world, the world which belongs to Him. He became a member of the human race, the race made by God in God's own image. He came to the people of Israel, the Chosen People, the People of God, and was rejected by the mass of them & their leaders – those who should have been open to the coming of the Messiah. On one occasion, the people of His own village, tried to kill Him (Luke 4[16-30]). There were times when His disciples & even His own family failed to recognise Who He is & what He had come to do. Jesus accepted every insult for the sake of those who insulted Him. Isaiah 53: ***3*** *He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.* ***4*** *Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.* ***5*** *But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.*

January 10th (Epiphany 1, Baptism of Christ) — John 11 v12

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.

In the Prayer Book, today's Gospel is the story of the 12 year old Jesus remaining in the Temple when Mary & Joseph returned to Nazareth. They were upset because they feared that they had lost Him. He explained that He must be about His Father's business. Also this day is commemorated as the Baptism of Christ. When He was 30 years old, He was baptized in the River Jordan. God acknowledged Him as His Son & poured out the Holy Spirit on Him. All those who believe in Him & are baptized in His Name are the children of God, filled with the Holy Spirit crying to God, Abba, Father. (Galatians 4[6]).

January 11th John 1 v13

Which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of men, but of God.

Our re-birth through faith as the children of God into eternal life, is not like the natural birth of our physical bodies dependent on human agency or on biological processes. Eternal life is God's gift to us. *For by grace ye are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.* (Ephesians 2^8).

January 12th John 1 v14

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.

How can we appreciate what that means? Awe! How can we express what we are able to understand of the mystery of the Incarnation? In some Churches, the person reading the Christmas Gospel will pause at this point for contemplation and adoration, just as the reader of the Passion Gospel on Good Friday will pause at the words *He bowed his head and gave up the ghost.* In many Churches, the congregation bows or kneels at the words *And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, And was made man* in the Creed. Archbishop Michael Ramsey used to say that, if we bow for the Incarnation, we should continue to bow for the following words, *And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate*. Many Christians find these gestures meaningful. Others might regard them as unnatural, even theatrical. However we express our understanding of these mysteries & our appreciation of what Jesus did, even our best efforts will be inadequate for these sublime truths,

Crown him the virgin's Son,
the God incarnate born,
whose arm those crimson trophies won
which now His brow adorn;
fruit of the mystic rose,
as of that rose the stem;
the root whence mercy ever flows,
the Babe of Bethlehem.

Crown him the Lord of years,
the Potentate of time,
Creator of the rolling spheres,
ineffably sublime.
all hail, Redeemer, hail!
For thou has died for me;
thy praise and glory shall not fail
throughout eternity

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The mystic rose is Mary, created by God & Mother of God.

January 13th — John 1 v14

(and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth.

John and the other apostles, the disciples and thousands of other people were privileged to know Jesus in the flesh. They saw Him. They heard His Words. They witnessed what He did. They could touch Him. The apostles and hundreds more were witnesses of His Resurrection. An astonishing privilege, Years later, however, John would write in a letter (I John 1^3): *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.* John and the other apostles & disciples who had seen & heard these things with their physical eyes & ears bore witness so that through their testimony we who have not known Jesus in the flesh might know Him as our Lord and Saviour – which is what really matters. You & I, if we are Christians, have fellowship with God the Holy Trinity & with all other Christians. Knowing Christ after the flesh isn't what matters eternally. What really matters is to know Him after the Spirit.

January 14th — John 1 v15

John bare witness of him, and cried, this was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.

John was the greatest of the prophets. Prophets are God's messengers. They receive the Word from God and deliver God's Word to the people for whom it is intended. All the prophets in the Bible before John to some extent prepare the way for Jesus and this was especially what John was sent to do. Jesus not only proclaims the Word of God; He is the Eternal Word of God.

Because Jesus is the eternal Son of God begotten before the worlds as well as the Son of Man born in the world, He was before John. Jesus existed eternally before any of us, before time began in fact. That is why He is *fruit of the mystic rose, as of that rose the stem.* He was born of Mary & He is the Creator of Mary.

January 15th — John 1 v16

And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.

It is the fulness of God which dwells in Christ. The apostles and all of us who have believed their testimony, all Christian people, partake of this fulness, the fulness of God. We dwell in Christ and God, Father, Son & Holy Spirit (the indivisible Trinity) dwells in us.

This is all very difficult to understand. I remember well my moment of revelation when I grasped something of what this means. It was 1976 or 1977 & I was kneeling in St Paul's Church Herne Hill at 8.00 am Holy Communion. We came to these words in the Prayer of Humble Access and suddenly I realised.

Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. *Amen.*

January 16th John 1 v17

For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the fulfilment of the Law & the Prophets. The Law (the Ten Commandments & all the other commandments which God gave to Moses on Mt Sinai) is the Gift of God. If we kept God's Law, summed up in the commandments to love Him & one another, the world would be a very much happier place & we would be much more satisfied people. But we don't. If we keep close to God, it is in our nature to keep His commandments, but humanity in general does not keep close to God. We need the Law to restrain us from wrong-doing, to inform our consciences. We are judged by the Law. We are condemned by the Law because of our failure to love as we ought to love. Jesus sets us free from the condemnation of the Law. He forgives us our offences against the Law. As we are remade in His image, it increasingly becomes our nature to keep God's Law. Romans 12^{2}: *But be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.* Romans13^{8}: *Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.*

January 17th (Epiphany) John 1 v18

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the Bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth; Mercifully hear the supplications of thy people, and grant us thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

How we long for peace, peace in the world, peace in our land, peace in our homes, peace in our hearts. The world cannot give peace. Only God can give peace. God's resources are unlimited. He governs all things in heaven and earth. How can we know God? How can we draw on His resources? It is Jesus Who has declared Him. We come to god in prayer through Jesus.

REJOICE in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians $4^{4et\ seq}$).

January 18th — John 1 vv 19-23

The Old Testament prepares the way for the coming of Jesus. In Jesus' time people were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah who would bring in God's Kingdom of justice and peace. Many believed that the prophet Elijah would return from heaven to proclaim God's Word. Moses had promised that there would be a prophet who would take his place (Deuteronomy $18^{15.}$). Could John be one of these? No, he was not any of them. Jesus is the Messiah, King & High Priest. He is the One Who fulfils the Law of Moses & the Prophets. John's task was to prepare His Way, in accordance with the prophecy in Isaiah 40. In a sense, we are called to prepare the way For Jesus to enter the hearts of men, women and children. By God's grace, our lives declare Jesus. We tell our friends. We teach our children. We prepare their hearts to welcome Jesus.

January 19th — John 1 vv 24-28

John pointed not to himself, but to Jesus. We need preachers. We need leaders in Church & state. We need, clever, talented & skilled people. We may all have our function. John's was to baptise with water. But, however important we may be, it is Jesus Whom we serve. It is He Who gifts us our gifts. It is He Who baptises with the Holy Spirit.

January 20th John 1 vv 29-34

John the Baptist was specially born for the task of preparing the way of the Lord. He didn't know all the particulars, but he knew that he had a job to do and he knew enough that he was able to get on with it – calling people to repentance, baptising, proclaiming the imminent coming of the Kingdom. He was at first reluctant to baptise Jesus, thinking rather that Jesus should baptise him (Matthew 3^{13-17}). John obeyed Jesus and baptised Him. Then John saw the sign of Who Jesus truly is and was able to proclaim Jesus to the people. We all have our task to perform for Jesus, to live our lives for Him. There may be a lot we don't understand. But if we are faithful we shall be enabled to fulfil our calling.

1. Lead, kindly
Light, amid th'
encircling gloom;
O lead me on!
The night is dark,
and I am far from
home;
O lead me on!
Keep firm my feet;
I do not ask to see
The distant scene,
one step enough
for me.

2. I was not ever
thus, nor prayed
that you
Should lead me
on.
I loved to choose
and see my path,
but now,
Lead thou me on!
I loved the garish
day, and spite of
fears,
Pride ruled my
will; remember not
past years.

3. So long your
pow'r has blest
me, sure it still
Will lead me on,
O'er moor and fen,
o'er crag and
torrent, till
The night is gone,
And with the morn
those angel faces
smile,
Which I have loved
long since, and
lost awhile

January 21st John 1 vv 35-39

Come and See.

John pointed out Jesus to two of his disciples. John had disciples before Jesus came. When Jesus came, John's disciples should have followed Him - though not all of them did straightaway. We might try to point our friends towards Jesus, but many don't want to know. They're invited into His House. If they came to know Him, they would love Him. How can we invite people to come & see? Some might respond to an invitation to Church, perhaps a special service. Some might come to know Jesus through socialising with Christians or working with Christians on a community project. How do we make the personal connexion?

January 22nd John 1 vv 39-43

Andrew is sometimes described as the first missionary. When he came to know Jesus, he straightaway told his brother. It turned out that Jesus had great plans for Simon, who, as Peter, would be the Rock on whom Christ would build His Church. If we can introduce people to Jesus, we are giving them the greatest gift possible. It may be too that God has great plans for them to build His Church & to do His work in the world.

January 23rd John 1 vv 44-51

Jesus sought out Philip & Philip told Nathanael about Him. So the Church grows as the Holy Spirit teaches us to know that God is our Father & Jesus our Lord. The Holy Sprit leads us then to share our faith.

Nathanael initially wasn't impressed with Jesus – a carpenter's son from Nazareth. What was special about Him? People who value human culture - art, science, music, politics, wealth, etc. – more than the truths of religion have been called cultured despisers. But they are missing the point. Only Jesus knows us through & through and it is only in Him that we can know what life is really all about.

V51 refers to the story of Jacob's Ladder (Genesis 28). Jacob had a dream in which heaven and earth were connected by a ladder. In the real world, it is Jesus Who is the link between heaven and earth. Through Him God, blessings flow from Heaven. Through Him our prayers ascend to Heaven. Has opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.

24th January (Septuagesima) John 2 vv 1-12

Today (Septuagesima), the focus shifts to preparation for Easter. This is one of my favourite Easter hymns.

1 At the Lamb's high feast we sing
praise to our victorious King,
who hath washed us in the tide
flowing from His piercéd side;
praise we Him whose love divine
gives His sacred blood for wine,
gives His body for the feast,
Christ the Victim, Christ the Priest.

2 Where the paschal blood is poured,
death's dark angel sheathes his sword;
Israel's hosts triumphant go
through the wave that drowns

the foe.
Praise we Christ, whose blood was shed,
Paschal Victim, Paschal Bread;
with sincerity and love
eat we manna from above.

3 Mighty Victim from the sky,
pow'rs of hell beneath Thee lie;
death is conquered in the fight,
Thou hast brought us life and light;
hymns of glory and of praise,
risen Lord, to Thee we raise;
Holy Father, praise to Thee,
with the Spirit, ever be.

Our Lord's first miracle is to turn water into wine. When He blesses the wine at the Last Supper, He says *This is my Blood.* Over the bread He says, *This is my Body.* The Last Supper was a Passover meal. Passover re-enacts the last meal of which the Hebrews partook as slaves in Egypt. They sacrificed a lamb & dined on its meat. Its blood on the doorposts signified that the Angel of Death should pass over their houses. That night, they were saved from death and set free from slavery. They passed through the Red Sea & were fed on manna in the Wilderness (which they called the Bread of Heaven) until they came to the Promised Land.

That was all very wonderful, but more wonderful still is what the Lamb of God accomplished for us on the Cross. By the shedding of His Blood, He frees us from the fear of death and from slavery to sin. We pass through the waters of Baptism. We are fed with the Bread of Heaven. By His grace we are brought to eternal life.

January 25th (Conversion of St Paul) John 2 vv 13-17

The Temple of God was to be a house of prayer for all nations. Instead it had been made into a den of thieves. In the New Testament the Christian Church owned no buildings made of brick or stone, cathedrals or what we call churches. The Church was the House of God. The Church was the Temple of the Holy Spirit. St Paul was a wise master builder, preaching the Gospel & establishing Christian churches, bodies of believers. Christ is the cornerstone. The apostles are the foundation. We build on Christ, according to our calling.

As believers, then, we are witnesses to the nations, a place where humanity may find God.

January 26th — John 2 vv 18-22

The Temple was very precious. It was modelled on the Tabernacle which Moses had made in the Wilderness. The Tabernacle & the Ark of the Covenant for which it provided a sanctuary were modelled on the vision of Heaven which God granted to Moses on Mt Sinai. King David brought the Ark to Jerusalem and his son Solomon built the Temple to house it. The temple was precious, a house of prayer for all nations. But God cannot be confined to any building made by human hands. Heaven cannot contain him, not even the heaven of heavens. Heaven and earth are the creation of God. Yet God dwells in Jesus Christ. And He dwells in us through faith in Jesus.

Think back to Christmas.

Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him
Nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When He comes to reign:
In the bleak mid-winter
A stable-place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty,
Jesus Christ.

Enough for Him, whom cherubim
Worship night and day,
A breastful of milk
And a mangerful of hay;
Enough for Him, whom angels
Fall down before,
The ox and ass and camel
Which adore.

January 27th — John 2 vv 23-25

People were amazed at Christ's miracles. No doubt they were inspired by His teaching. They seemed to believe. Maybe they themselves thought that they believed, but the religion of many of them was superficial. They'd give up when the going got tough. They'd drift away from Jesus when they became absorbed by the things of this world. It can be like that for us. We go to a Church because we are inspired by the preacher & we are comfortable with and even inspired by the way the services are conducted. We belong to a Church where we feel we belong because we like the people or because we have always been members. That's all good, but habit can disguise superficiality. I remember going away to college and attending a Church where I didn't know anyone & the service was quite different from what I had been used to. I didn't immediately feel at home there. I had to ask myself whether I was in love with St Matthew's Wigmore or with Jesus Christ. How deep is our commitment to the Lord?

January 28th — John 3 vv 1-3

The Pharisee Nicodemus was a sincere seeker after truth. He must have remained close to Jesus because he assisted three years later in His burial. Likely, he came to Jesus by night because he didn't yet want it to be known that he was open to Jesus. He had been impressed by the miracles. Our Lord's miracles are signs of Who He is. Miracles aren't a sufficient ground for faith but they point us in the right direction. They bear witness of Jesus. What is needed is a radical transformation. We need to make a completely fresh start, to be born again, to be born from above. (The Greek means either or both). Another way of looking at is that we are baptized into His death; the old you & me are buried with Him, so that we might rise with Him & share His Resurrection to eternal life.

January 29th — John 3 vv 4-8

Nicodemus doesn't get it at all. The very idea of experiencing physical birth a second time is absurd. Jesus explains that our rebirth as Christians is the work of the Holy Spirit. We are washed clean in the water of Baptism. Our thirst is quenched with the Water of Life. We are inspired by the Breath of Life, the wind of the Holy Spirit. We don't understand how these things can be. How could we? But this is the reality. Think of our physical birth as being like a caterpillar hatching out of the egg of a butterfly. It is only when the caterpillar becomes a chrysalis (apparently dead to the observer) that it completes its metamorphosis and is born again as the butterfly it was always meant to be.

January 30th — John 3 vv 9-13

We are all limited in our understanding of God & of what matters in life – including our religious leaders & teachers. The only human being in whom we can find the fulness of God is Jesus. We all have access to God in Him. We are guided by the Holy Spirit, by His Word written in the Bible, by the teaching & the fellowship of the Church. Necessarily, there are some who are called to ministries of leadership in the Church. Those who are called are no doubt provided by God with the appropriate grace which includes the grace of humility so that, like Nicodemus, they may recognise their own limitations.

January 31st (Sexagesima) John 3 vv 14&15

One theme of the Exodus story is that the Israelites always seemed to be complaining. They were often ungrateful for what God had done for them. They were fearful. They did not trust God's promises. They were disobedient to His Commandments. They doubted His ability or His willingness to take care of them. They refused to advance. They questioned Moses' leadership. How many Christian congregations are like that? On one occasion (Numbers 21) they complained about the lack of water & food in the desert. They were fed up with manna God sent them every day. They rebelled against Moses & they rebelled against God. God sent a plague of snakes. When the people repented, God told Moses to make a bronze figure of a serpent and to set it up on a pole. Those who were bitten by the live snakes had only to look at the snake on the pole to be saved. Jesus was lifted up on the Cross. Those who turn to Him are saved from *that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world*.

Ye choirs of new Jerusalem,
your sweetest notes employ,
the Paschal victory to hymn
in strains of holy joy.

For Judah's Lion bursts his chains,
crushing the serpent's head;
and cries aloud through death's domains
to wake the imprisoned dead.

Devouring depths of hell their prey
at his command restore;
his ransomed hosts pursue their way
where Jesus goes before.

Triumphant in his glory now
to him all power is given;
to him in one communion bow
all saints in earth and heaven.

While we, his soldiers, praise our King,
his mercy we implore,
within his palace bright to bring
and keep us evermore.

All glory to the Father be,
all glory to the Son,
all glory, Holy Ghost, to thee,
while endless ages run.

January 31st John 3 vv 16 & 17

John 3 v16 is probably the best known verse in Bible, but v17 isn't to be overlooked Those of us who know Him Whom to know is to have eternal life are not to be smug. The Gospel is for everyone.

February 1st John 3 vv 18-21

Reading the newspaper can be quite depressing. Some of what people get up to is so disgusting that I don't read through to the end of the story. There is so much evil in the world & there is only one remedy. What is that twist in human nature that so many of us will try anything but the narrow road which leads to life & instead follow the broad way which leads to destruction? Why is it that, instead of coming to the Truth and finding peace in Him, too many people listen to the devil who is the father of lies & base their lives on his "principles" – greed, selfishness, avarice, lust, dishonesty, violence, etc.? It is what we call original sin & the only remedy is faith & repentance. It is the Church's task to proclaim this Gospel to the world so that through the Son the world might be saved.

February 2nd (Candlemas) John 3 vv 22 – 30

Candlemas is The Presentation of Christ in the Temple, Commonly Called, The Purification of Saint Mary the Virgin. It is when the 40 day old baby Jesus was brought to the Temple & the appropriate rites were performed for the birth of a first born son & for a new mother. Thirty years later, there was a debate about purification between John's disciples and the Jews. Rites are not a substitute for purity of heart. They were prescribed to make the point that holiness is required of God's people. Carrying them out demonstrates that we belong. They play their part in forming us as God's family. But they are useless if there is no intention to live as the children of God. The opponents of John & Jesus tried to set their followers one against the other, but John repeats that his purpose was to point people to Jesus. Jesus is the One Who brings us eternal life. If we are pure in heart, we put Christ first. We don't create division and try to score points off one another. We love one another as He loves us. No amount of religious observance or ritual means anything if we do not keep His Commandments.

Blest are the pure in heart,
for they shall see our God;
the secret of the Lord is theirs,
their soul is Christ's abode.

The Lord who left the heavens
our life and peace to bring,
to dwell in lowliness with men,
their pattern and their king.

Still to the lowly soul
he doth himself impart
and for his dwelling and his throne
chooseth the pure in heart.

Lord, we thy presence seek;
may ours this blessing be:
give us a pure and lowly heart,
a temple meet for thee.

February 3rd John 3 vv 31-36

I'm conscious that there is a lot in these first three chapters of John's Gospel which is very hard to understand. But faith isn't an intellectual puzzle. Faith is a loving relationship with God. How can we know God? God makes Himself known to us in Jesus. We may have been introduced to Jesus by our parents & our upbringing. We may have come to know Him through lessons at school, from friends, from going to Church. Maybe you have met Him when contemplating the wonders of His Creation. Perhaps He has spoken to you – unexpectedly out of the blue so speak, or in response to your reaching out to Him. Knowing God in Jesus is to have eternal life. It is incumbent on us Who know Him to be the Way, the Truth & the Life to share what we know with other people.

February 4th John 4 vv 1-3

John is careful to point out that it was His disciples, not Jesus Himself, Who performed the Baptisms. In his first Letter to the Corinthians, St Paul points out that he did not perform many Baptisms. Baptism is Baptism, no matter who administers the Sacrament. We are all baptized into Christ, not into Paul or an other minister. If Jesus had when He was in the flesh on earth baptized people, their status would have been no different from that of other baptized people. I make this point because some people even today speak as though it were somehow more special to be baptized by a Christian celebrity such as the pope or a bishop or some well known Christian preacher or leader. It isn't the minister that counts. It is what God does for us in Baptism.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has told us that to enter the kingdom of heaven we must be born again of water and the Spirit, and has given us baptism as the sign and seal of this new birth. Here we are washed by the Holy Spirit and made clean. Here we are clothed with Christ, dying to sin that we may live his risen life. As children of God, we have a new dignity and God calls us to fullness of life. (Common Worship).

February 5th John 4 vv 4-6

As is well known, the Jews & the Samaritans didn't get on. There've been times when Catholics & Protestants have failed to get on. Shia & Sunni Muslims often don't get on. We human beings are apt to be tribal. Jesus teaches us by His example to transcend these divisions.

February 6th — John 4 vv 7-9

Jesus was tired & thirsty. He is fully human & knows exactly how we feel from personal experience. Our prayers to Him & through Him are met with understanding. Nevertheless, it was surprising that He asked a Samaritan woman to give Him water. It requires a degree of humility to ask someone for help, especially to ask a stranger, especially if that stranger belongs to a "tribe" with whom your people wouldn't normally have dealings. Think about whom you might ask if you needed assistance in, say, London. Whom would you trust? Who would you think might be prepared to help you? There's a surprising number of Good Samaritans, but how do you identify them?

February 7th (Quinquagesima) — John 4 vv 10-15

The woman is curious & intelligent. She engages with Jesus & He responds. He points out to her what really matters. Water is essential to our mortal life. We need water. Eternal life is what really matters. We cannot have eternal life unless we receive from Jesus the water of eternal life – the Holy Spirit. In Christ, God meets all our needs. The woman doesn't quite get this. Does she really think that Jesus is going to give her some sort of magic bucket which refills itself and saves her coming to the well? Or does she not quite know how to respond like when Nicodemus asks whether he has to go back to his mother's womb in order to be born again.

Today's BCP Collect & Epistle are about love.

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.*

1. Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of Heav'n to Earth come down,
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,
All thy faithful mercies crown;
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
Pure, unbounded love thou art;
Visit us with thy salvation,
Enter ev'ry trembling heart.

2. Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit
Into ev'ry troubled breast;
Let us all in thee inherit,
Let us find thy promised rest;
Take away our love of sinning;

Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith as its beginning,
Set our hearts at liberty.

3. Come, Almighty to deliver;
Let us all thy grace receive;
Suddenly return, and never,
Never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve thee as thy host above,
Pray, and praise thee without ceasing,
Glory in thy perfect love.

4. Finish, then, thy new creation;
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in thee;
Changed from glory into glory
Till in Heav'n we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise!

February 8th — John 4 vv 16-19

This woman has had an eventful life. It is probable that her neighbours thought her scandalous. It is likely that this is the reason why she went to the well alone in the midday heat instead of going in the cool of the morning with the other women from the village. Jesus knew all about her, but He didn't condemn. He came not *to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.* Jesus us knows us through & through including all our faults, but He doesn't reject us. He invites us to come to Him, whatever burdens we may bear.

Hear what comfortable words our Saviour Christ saith unto all that truly turn to him.

COME unto me all that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you. *St. Matth.* xi. 28.

This is a true saying, and worthy of all men to be received, That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. 1 *Tim.* i. 15.

February 9th — John 4 vv 20-26

There are far too many arguments in churches about worship. We have our own tastes & preferences, our own ideas about what is right. Some (but not all) of the points on which we disagree are important. But no disagreement is so important that it overrides our responsibility to love one another. God wants us to worship Him in spirit & in truth. We can only approach God's Presence because Christ opens the way by washing away our sin & purifying us. We are one in Him & His commandment is that we love one another.

February 10th (Ash Wednesday) John 4 vv 27-30

The woman recognised that Jesus knew everything about her & loved her. He knows all about us too – the good and the bad. He loves us too. There is no point in trying to hide our faults from Him or from ourselves. As the Prayer Book says we should, *acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness; and that we should not dissemble nor cloak them before the face of Almighty God our heavenly Father; but confess them with an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart; to the end that we may obtain forgiveness of the same, by his infinite goodness and mercy*. To do so brings us forgiveness & peace. As we love Jesus, we desire to grow more like Him, to love as He loves us. We examine ourselves, turn away from sin & turn to God. We are renewed. Born again as the children of God, we seek, by God's grace, to become what we are. That means to act like the children of God which we are by virtue of our Baptism in faith.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent; Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

February 11th John 4 vv 31-34

It's not that Jesus didn't get hungry, thirsty or tired. It's not that He didn't feel pain. It's not that He didn't feel joy or sorrow as we do. Hebrews 4^{15}: *For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.* It wasn't that Jesus didn't want His dinner when the disciples returned. It was simply that it was more important for Him to do God's work – in this case teaching the woman at the well & the apostles. Like Jesus when He was physically on earth, we need food & water, rest, etc.. Some Christians have impaired their ability to serve God by their failure to look after themselves properly. I'm sure that is God's Will that we take care of ourselves. But there are times when doing God's work does require a preparedness on our part to go without food or sleep or whatever.

February 12th John 4 vv 35-38

All Christians are called to share the faith. By word & deed, we are witnesses to the truth of the Gospel. But some people are particularly called to vocations such as priests & missionaries. They are urgently needed in the Church & the world today, at home & abroad. So we pray for vocations. We encourage people to ask themselves whether God is calling themselves to a particular ministry. We support and encourage them. Others have gone before us. Others will come after us. Each generation has its part to play in the bringing in of the Kingdom of God.

Thy hand, O God, has guided
thy flock, from age to age;
their wondrous tale is written,
full clear, on every page;
thy people owned thy goodness,
and we their deeds record;
and both of this bear witness;
one Church, one Faith, one
Lord.

Thy heralds brought glad
tidings
to greatest as to least;
they bade men rise, and hasten
to share the great King's feast;
and this was all their teaching,
in every deed and word,
to all alike proclaiming
one Church, one Faith, one
Lord.

When shadows thick were
falling,
and all seemed sunk in night,
thou, Lord, didst send thy
servants,
thy chosen sons of light.
On them and on thy people
thy plenteous grace was
poured,
and this was still their
message,
one Church, one Faith, one
Lord.

Through many a day of
darkness,
through many a scene of strife,
the faithful few fought bravely,
to guard the nation's life.
Their gospel of redemption,
sin pardoned, man restored,
was all in this enfolded:
one Church, one Faith, one
Lord.

And we, shall we be faithless?
shall hearts fail, hands hang
down?
shall we evade the conflict,
and cast away our crown?
Not so: in God's deep counsels
some better thing is stored;
we will maintain, unflinching,
one Church, one Faith, one
Lord.

Thy mercy will not fail us,
nor leave thy work undone;
with thy right hand to help us,
thy victory shall be won;
and then, by men and angels,
thy name shall be adored,
and this shall be their anthem:
one Church, one Faith, one
Lord.

February 13th — John 4 vv 39-42

We don't always find it easy to talk to people about our relationship with Jesus, but perhaps the hard part is getting them to *taste & see*, to open themselves up to a relationship with Jesus. He promises that, if we seek, we shall find. He stands at the door & knocks. What is it that will encourage people to open the door & let Him in? We can & should pray for them. We can tell them what He means to us. Hopefully, our lives will show people what it means to be a Christian.

February 14th (Lent 1) — John 4 vv 43-45

Why does a prophet have no honour in his own country? In the case of an ordinary prophet it might be that people know him only too well – faults and all. Perhaps he drank too much as a young man. Maybe he gets impatient too easily with people who annoy him. Maybe he's inconsiderate when he lights a bonfire just as his neighbours have hung out their washing. God doesn't choose only perfect people to be His ministers. If He did, there would only ever have been one prophet, preacher, priest or pastor.

In the case of Jesus, however, it is more likely that people thought that they knew Him when in fact they didn't. They thought that He was the son of Joseph and Mary, a good boy, precociously religious, a carpenter, who had set himself up as something special. They found it hard to believe that he was really different from the other boys & men his age. They got really angry when he didn't do for them what they thought he ought to have been able to do if he was who he said he was.

Looking back to yesterday's reading, I think that many of the people who won't come to Jesus or open the door to Him are reluctant to do so because they have the wrong idea about Him. Where have they got these wrong ideas from? How can we bear witness to the world of Who Jesus truly is?

February 15th — John 4 vv 46-54

Then Jesus said unto him, Except ye seen signs and wonders, ye will not believe.

Why did Jesus say this at this point? The miracles are witnesses of Who Jesus is, but they are not the most important witnesses. Other witnesses

are the Scriptures, John the Baptist, the apostles & other Christians, & God Himself, the Father & the Spirit.

Moreover, we can't expect to receive miracles whenever we want them. One of God's great gifts to us is the dependability of the world. The universe is subject to the Laws of God, which are the laws of nature, the laws of science. We shouldn't expect God to disrupt the natural order because we think it would help us if He did.

For Jesus in His three years of ministry, teaching was more important than working miracles.

Nevertheless, miracles do sometimes occur as happened in this case. I ask God in prayer for what I believe is good & try to trust Him for the outcome – whether by miraculous intervention or by nature taking the course God has laid out for her.

February 16th John 5 vv 1-9

The pool of Bethesda was a place where the sick congregated in the hope of a miraculous cure. Many of them were probably suffering from conditions which the medicine of the day couldn't do much about. Verse 4 doesn't appear in the most respected ancient manuscripts & it may not appear in the version you are reading now. *For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.* Presumably people believed something like this about the waters of the pool. The man in the story had been waiting & praying for 38 years and had no-one to help him make it to the healing waters. Jesus healed him. Healing the man was an act of compassion. God is love. The miracle bore witness to Who Jesus is. We can't expect miracles all the time, but we can care for the sick. We can pray for medical professionals & support them in their work.

February 17th John 5 vv 10-13

Sabbath observance is one of the Ten Commandments which God gave to Moses. The Sabbath is a good thing, a gift from God, a break in the

monotony of daily life, a day of rest & recreation, a day to spend time with family & friends, a day to spend time with God. Keeping one day a week as a holy day reminds us that we must consecrate every day of our lives to God. But Jesus is far from a strict Sabbatarian. He heals on the Sabbath. He defends His disciples when they are criticised for picking ears of corn on the Sabbath. He points out that farmers have to feed & water their stock on the Sabbath & to rescue any animals which have accidents. If boys are born on the Sabbath, they are circumcised on the following Sabbath.

Sabbath is not meant to be a burden. Keeping the Sabbath strictly is not a way of showing off how holy you are. Sabbath observance must never stand in the way of doing God's work. We have to decide for ourselves how to keep the Christian Sabbath, Sunday. Some people have been so strict that they have made Sunday a burden rather than a blessing. Nowadays, we are probably more likely to make the opposite mistake & treat Sunday as an ordinary day, losing that time for worship, for spending time with the people we love & rest.

February 18th — John 5 v14

Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee

There's another delicate balance to be struck here. Some people believe that we straightforwardly get what we deserve. So if we are sick or suffer some misfortune, it must be because we have done something sinful, something wicked or stupid. Such people might go on to assert that, if our prayers for healing do not result in a cure, we lack faith and we have failed to repent of our sins. This is clearly not true. Sometimes the wicked flourish in this world. Sometimes the righteous suffer. God hears our prayers, but He doesn't always give us what we want. Sometimes, He gives us the grace to bear a pain which is not taken away. (See II Corinthians 12^{7-10}). The final & complete healing is death, when there *will be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be amy more pain* (Revelation 21^{4}). There will be a final Judgment & we shall all get what we deserve – except through the grace of God which is in Christ Jesus, But it would be facile to deny that there is a connection between sin & pain. In a perfect world, there would be no sickness nor suffering.

February 19th — John 5 vv 15-18

Our Lord's opponents thought that He could not possibly be a good man, because He didn't keep the Sabbath in the way in which they thought it should be kept. In fact, they thought that He was a menace & ought to be killed. More shocking still to them was that He claimed to be the Son of God, equal with God. Shocking indeed that a human being should be a child of God. But He is the Son of God. God acknowledges Him as His Son. He teaches everyone who believes in Him to pray to God, *Our Father.* In Him, all believers are adopted into God's family as His children. Jesus is God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, being of one substance with the Father. He is also the Son of God as the Son of Man, descended like us from the archetypal man Adam (Luke 3^{38}).

February 20th — John 5 vv 19-21

Sometimes, people are apt to think of God the Father as the God of Justice, a harsh Judge, Who punishes us sinners and God the Son, Jesus, as the merciful One, Who atones for our sins by His own Death, Who pleads for us before an implacable Father. But God is one. God Father, Son & Holy Spirit is just and merciful. He is both our judge & our advocate. He is our Creator & our Redeemer. The Trinity is undivided in His purposes. As the Athanasian Creed puts it: *Such as the Father is, such is the Son: and such is the Holy Ghost.* The three persons of the Trinity are united in everything. What Jesus does is what God does. God raises Jesus from the dead. In Jesus, God gives eternal life to those He calls His own. The Holy Spirit is the Lord & giver of life.

February 21st (Lent 2) — John 5 vv 22&23

Jesus is both God the Son & the Son of Man - *God of the Substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds: and Man of the Substance of his Mother, born in the world. He is one Christ, wholly human & holy divine.* The man Jesus Christ is wholly at one with God Father, Son & Holy Spirit in all the purposes of God, including judgment.

ALMIGHTY God, who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves; Keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

February 22nd — John 5 v24

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

We've been thinking about some difficult doctrines over the last few days. But faith isn't a puzzle. We don't qualify for a place in heaven by passing a theology exam. The point of all this is that it is of the very nature of God that He loves us & that He reaches out to us so that we should love Him too. As a husband and wife are one flesh, so long as they both shall live, so the believer is one with God in all eternity. As we pray in Holy Communion: *Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us.*

February 23rd — John 5 vv 25-30

There will be judgment for all. That judgment will be just. Our Judge is God. Our Judge is one of us, a fellow human being, the Son of Man. He has experienced all the trials & temptations that we experience. He knows what it is to be us. He understands. If we put our trust in Him, we have eternal life. If we reject Him, I am sorry but He will honour our choice.

February 24th (St Matthias) — John 5 vv 31-35

Matthias was the one chosen to replace Judas Iscariot as one of the Twelve. Matthias had followed Jesus since the Baptism of John. With the other eleven, he was a witness of the Resurrection. It is the duty & the joy of all Christians to bear witness to the life which Jesus freely offers to all who come to Him.

ALMIGHTY God, who into the place of the traitor Judas didst choose thy faithful servant Matthias to be of the number of the twelve Apostles; Grant that thy Church, being alway preserved from false Apostles, may be ordered and guided by faithful and true pastors; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

February 25th John 5 vv 36-38

The works of Jesus are the works of God. The works of Jesus are signs of Who He is. The miracles are signs. Who but Jesus could do the miracles which He did? He heals the sick, cleanses lepers, gives sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, makes the lame walk, feeds the multitude, quietens the storm, walks on water, casts out demons and raises the dead.

It is not just the miracles, however, which demonstrate Who Jesus is and set an example for those who would follow Him. There is His compassion, His concern both for the crowds & for individuals, His kindness, His preaching & teaching.

At His Last Supper, however, (John 14[12]), He will say*, Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father*. It is true that some Christians have worked miracles. Most of us don't. We are all called like Him to show compassion, concern & kindness & to preach & teach the Gospel. Jesus does these things because He is the Son of the Father. All Christians are sons and daughters Of God. We are all in the family business – proclaiming the Gospel by word & deed. Jesus ascends into Heaven & sends the Holy Spirit Who teaches us to call God *our Father* and empowers us to do even greater works than Jesus did. There are millions of us. There was one of Him.

February 26th John 5 v 39

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

It happens that I am preparing these notes on 2nd November, All Souls Day, when we especially remember those who have died in the Lord. At Morning Prayer, I was thinking about departed members of my family, those who brought me up, those I grew up with. The NT reading was II Timothy 3 in which St Paul writes: *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*. Paul thanks God that Timothy was brought up from childhood to know the Bible, especially mentioning

the roles of his mother Eunice & his grandmother Lois. That made me think about what my parents & grandparents taught me – the teachings of the Bible, the habit of daily prayer, Sunday School & Church. Pray for Christian parents & for the Church bringing up children in the faith.

February 27th John 5 vv 40-47

What's not to like? What's not to like about Jesus? I don't know. What do you think? I guess that we may fear that Jesus will take away our freedom to do what we want & to be the people that we want to be. God's service is perfect freedom, but maybe we have to come to a point where we recognise that nothing else but God can satisfy us, that we are actually in servitude to sin, before we will come to Him & accept Him as our Lord & Saviour.

In Luke 16 vv 19-31, Jesus tells a parable about a rich man in his castle who was indifferent to the poor man who begged at his gate. The poor man went to heaven when he died, but the rich man finished up in hell. It was too late to save himself, but he did ask if anything could be done to save his brothers. The punch line is, *If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.* If hearts are hardened & minds closed, neither the Bible, nor miracles, nor even the coming of the Son of God will soften them. But when sinners do turn to Him, they receive power to become the children of God (John 1^{12}).

February 28th (Lent 3) John 6 vv 1-4

It was a time of great excitement. It was Passover time – the greatest of the Old Testament feasts. God set His people free. He kept them safe from the angel of death. He brought them though the Red Sea. He fed them on manna in the wilderness. They drank water from the rock (which Paul teaches is a type of Christ). He gave them His Law. He led them to the Promised Land. This year there was the additional excitement of Jesus. They didn't yet apprehend Who He is. They didn't understand the significance of His works and teaching. But they knew that He was very special.

WE beseech thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of thy humble servants, and stretch forth the right hand of thy Majesty, to be our defence against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

March 1st John 6 vv 5-14

We know this story very well: the perplexity of the apostles as to how all those people could be fed in the wilderness, the parts played by Philip, Andrew & the boy who at least had some food. Trust Jesus. Offer Him what we have, however insignificant we may feel that our contribution is. He will accomplish His good purposes.

Just as this story looks back on the events commemorated at the Passover & the way in which God looked after His people in the wilderness, so it looks forward to Holy Communion. Jesus takes the Bread. He gives thanks. He breaks the Bread. He gives it to His people. It is what He did at the Last Supper. It is what the priest does at the celebration of Holy Communion. (I have to confess that, much as I love BCP, this is clearer in Common Worship Order 1. I'm happy to discuss it if you would like to.)

Who, in the same night that he was betrayed, (*a*) took Bread; and, when he had given thanks, (*b*) he brake it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take, eat, (*c*) this is my Body which is given for you: Do this in remembrance of me. Likewise after supper he (*d*) took the Cup; and, when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of this; for this (*e*) is my Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins: Do this, as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me. *Amen.*

(a) Here the Priest is to take the Paten unto his hands: (b) And here to break the Bread: (c) And here to lay his hand upon all the Bread. (d) Here he is to take the Cup into his hand: (e) And here to lay his hand upon every vessel (be it Chalice or Flagon) in which there is any Wine to be consecrated.

March 2nd John 6 v15

When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.

This explains why He dismissed the crowds & the apostles so abruptly. They had seen the sign, the miracle, but they had misunderstood what it meant. Jesus is indeed the King, but He is not the sort of king who would raise an army in revolt against the Romans and to establish Himself as an earthly ruler in Jerusalem. His Kingdom is not of this world. *The King of the Jews* is the superscription of His Cross. Now He reigns in glory. PTO.

Conquering Kings Their Titles Take
From The Foes They Captive Make;
Jesus, By A Nobler Deed,
From The Thousands He Hath Freed.

Yea, None Other Name Is Given
Unto Mortals Under Heaven,
Which Can Make The Dead Arise,
And Exalt Them To The Skies.

That Which Christ So Hardly Wrought,
That Which He So Dearly Bought,
That Salvation, Brethren, Say,
Shall We Madly Cast Away?

Rather Gladly For That Name
Bear The Cross, Endure The Shame;
Joyfully For Him To Die
Is Not Death But Victory.

Jesus, Who Dost Condescend
To Be Called The Sinner's Friend,
Hear Us, As To Thee We Pray,
Glorying In Thy Name To-Day.

Glory to the Father be,
Glory Holy Son to thee,
Glory to the Holy Ghost,
From the saints and angel host.

March 3rd John 6 vv 15-21

Psalm 77: 11. I will remember the works of the Lord : and call to mind thy wonders of old time. 12. I will think also of all thy works : and my talking shall be of thy doings. 13. Thy way, O God, is holy : who is so great a God as our God? 14. Thou art the God that doeth wonders : and hast declared thy power among the people. 15. Thou hast mightily delivered thy people : even the sons of Jacob and Joseph. 16. The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee, and were afraid : the depths also were troubled. 17. The clouds poured out water, the air thundered : and thine arrows went abroad. 18. The voice of thy thunder was heard round about : the lightnings shone upon the ground : the earth was moved, and shook withal. 19. Thy way is in the sea, and thy paths in the great waters : and thy footsteps are not known. 20. Thou leddest thy people like sheep : by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

These verses from Psalm 77 are a meditation on the Exodus story, when God brought the Children of Israel through the waters of the Red Sea. Jesus does what God does through Moses but infinitely more so. Jesus effects a much more powerful deliverance than Moses. In Christ we are set free from slavery to sin. The life He brings is eternal life.

March 4th John 6 vv 22 -27

The crowds had seen the miracle, but had missed the point. Jesus hadn't come to give out free food any more than He was miraculously going to save the Woman at the Well the trouble of drawing water each day. He is the Bread of Life. He is the Water of Life. He is the Rock from which the Living Water, the Holy Spirit, flows.

Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.
(Meat means any food in this context.)

March 5th John 6 vv 28&29

This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

I enjoy fresh bread. I like to try out different kinds of loaf. I sometimes make bread & I try a variety of flours. I have a bread machine. So it isn't too much trouble for me to make bread. Even so, I usually buy it ready made from the shop. Without a bread machine or at least a food mixer, making bread is quite hard work. It needs to be kneaded twice. It takes a while to prove. So you have to plan ahead. Fresh bread without preservatives doesn't keep long. A housewife in first century Palestine would have put a lot of time and effort daily into making enough bread for the family. But what would she (or anyone else) have to do to labour *for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life?* She, anyone, would simply have to believe on the Son of God. What would follow from that, of course, would be to devote one's whole life to Him. Matthew 11: ***28*** *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* ***29*** *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.* ***30*** *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*.

March 6th John 6 vv 28&29

I have a reason for sharing some other thoughts on these two verses. During CoViD our churches were closed. We could not gather for Holy Communion. The bishops told us clergy that we must not even pray alone in our churches (though we should pop in occasionally to check that the building was OK). It turned out that they were acting ultra

vires in this matter & ought not to have told us that we couldn't pray alone.

We were given the option of celebrating Communion at home on our own. This is an odd thing to do. Communion is something you do together. I was glad to do this for myself and because I was asked by some people in the parish to do so on behalf of us all. I was very glad when we could meet again.

People could of course join in online services or listen on the radio or watch on TV.

We were reminded of a rubric from the Prayer Book service *The Communion of the Sick.*
But if a man, either by reason of extremity of sickness, or for want of warning in due time to the curate, or for lack of company to receive with him, or by any other just impediment, do not receive the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood, the Curate shall instruct him, that if he do truly repent him of his sins, and stedfastly believe that Jesus Christ both suffered death upon the Cross for him, and shed his Blood for his redemption, earnestly remembering the benefits he hath thereby, and giving him hearty thanks therefore, he doth eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ profitably to his Soul's health, although he do not receive the Sacrament with his mouth.
In other words, if you can't receive the Sacrament physically, you can receive it spiritually if you truly repent & steadfastly believe as we must always when we come to Communion.

I do think that it was almost certainly right to stop meeting. CoViD really spread in South Korea following a big Church service, but I am slightly uneasy. There is another rubric which says:
Forasmuch as all mortal men be subject to many sudden perils, diseases, and sicknesses, and ever uncertain what time they shall depart out of this life; therefore, to the intent they may always be in a readiness to die, whensoever it shall please Almighty God to call them, the Curates shall diligently from time to time (but especially in the time of pestilence, or other infectious sickness) exhort their Parishioners to

the often receiving of the holy Communion of the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ, when it shall be publickly ministered in the Church; that so doing, they may, in case of sudden visitation, have the less cause to be disquieted for lack of the same.

People, it says, should come to Church frequently to receive Communion, especially in times of plague. (It doesn't say that they should stay in lockdown.) The implication is that we are all going to die & we should do so having received the Bread of Life. What do you think?

March 7th (Lent 4 Mothering Sunday John 6 vv 31-33

God's love is unconditional. Couples getting married promise unconditional love – *for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health.* Our dogs' love for us is apparently unconditional. A mother's love for her children is normally unconditional. The signs of her love are the care she gives them, including feeding them. But, as with Lois & Eunice above, there is nothing better that she can offer them than the knowledge of Jesus, the Bread of Life. Pray for them & encourage them to pray. Bring them for Baptism. Teach them the Bible stories. Incorporate them in the life of the Church.

March 8th John 6 vv 34-40

Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.

I always pursued an open Baptism policy. In some churches, the candidates or the parents of child candidates are expected to comply with a lot of rules & protocols devised by the vicar or PCC. Now, I'm not saying that Baptism isn't to be taken seriously. When we are baptised we yield our lives to God. But all that He requires of us are faith & repentance. There's nothing about attending the vicar's Baptism classes or coming to Church a certain number of times. Preparation & Church attendance are good things, but they are not required by God & the Church has to beware of putting off people who are taking a tentative step towards faith. There is grace in the Sacrament. God makes us His own. Baptism is not an award for meeting the Vicar's expectations. It is not the end of our Christian formation, but the beginning.

March 9th — John 6 vv 41-45

A man that looks, that looks on glass,
On it may stay his eye;
Or if he pleaseth, through it pass,
And then the heav'n espy.

What you see depends on how you look at things. The Jews who didn't want to believe in Jesus looked at Him and saw a carpenter's son – nothing special about Him. Those who had eyes to see clearly recognised that Jesus is *the bread which came down from heaven.* It is only by the grace of God that we see things the way they really are. So we pray for grace to do so ourselves. And we pray that those of our friends & families who do not yet recognise Him will receive the grace to do so.

March 10th — John 6 v46

Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father.

There is a prayer *That it may please thee to give us an heart to love and dread thee, and diligently to live after thy commandments.* It comes naturally to us to pray for a heart to love God, I'm less comfortable with praying for a heart to dread Him. After all, *perfect love casteth out fear* (I John 4^{18}). Other people may have felt the dread without appreciating the depths of His love. We call God *Father,* but this is in the context of a society in which fathers & mothers are honoured by God's commandments. God isn't the daft dad of the TV ads who can't manage the washing machine until his wife shows him how simple it is. When we address God as *our loving heavenly Father* we must be careful not to lose sight of the fact that He is the thrice holy Creator, Redeemer & Sanctifier of all that is. *Our God is a consuming fire.* Only Jesus knows God fully. Only Jesus makes God fully known. It is only through Jesus that we may approach the Throne of Grace. It is a privilege to address God in prayer, to read His Word, to meet in His Name, to sing His praises and to receive His grace in the Sacraments.

March 11th — John 6 vv 47-58

The Feeding of the Five Thousand is the only story, apart from the events of Holy Week & Easter, which features in all four Gospels. It looks back to the Exodus, the forty year sojourn in the wilderness & the entry into the Promised Land. It prefigures Holy Communion. It looks

forward to Heaven, which is described as the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in Revelation 19[9]. So Holy Communion looks back. *Do this in remembrance of me.* We are nourished for our journey through this world to that which is to come. *Take, eat, this is my body.* In this fellowship meal with Christ & with one another, we look to the future, to our eternal life in Christ. *For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.*

March 11th John 6 vv 60-71

The Exodus was about deliverance in the physical world, the world of flesh & blood, the world of time and space. The LORD is God of the physical world. He cares for us in our daily lives in this world. Of infinitely greater importance, however, is the realm of the Spirit, the realm of eternity. Jesus bears witness, He reveals the realm of eternity. It is through faith in Him that we are citizens of heaven. Not everybody can see that, only those whose eyes God has opened.

What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? He was lifted up on the Cross, *a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world,* to draw all men to Himself. The water mixed with the blood which flowed from His side when the centurion stabbed Him with his spear, signifies the gift of the Holy Spirit. Forty days after His Resurrection, His disciples would see Him ascend bodily into Heaven and His Holy Spirit would be poured out on His Church at Pentecost. It is by the Spirit that we know who we are – the children of God. It is by the Spirit that we are enabled to do God's work in this world. It is by the Spirit that we are heirs of the world to come.

Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendour,
first-begotten from the dead.
Thou alone, our strong defender,
liftest up thy people's head.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Jesus, true and living bread!

Here our humblest homage pay we,
here in loving reverence bow;
here for faith's discernment pray we,
lest we fail to know thee now.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Thou art here, we ask not how.

Though the lowliest form doth veil thee

as of old in Bethlehem,
here as there thine angels hail thee,
branch and flower of Jesse's stem.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
We in worship join with them.

Paschal Lamb, thine offering, finished
once for all when thou was slain,
in its fullness undiminished
shall for evermore remain.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Cleansing
souls from every stain.

Life-imparting heavenly Manna,
stricken Rock with streaming side,
heaven and earth with loud hosanna
worship thee, the Lamb who died.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Risen, ascended, glorified!

March 12th — John 7 vv 1-13

The Feast of Tabernacles is when Jewish people remember that their ancestors lived in tabernacles (or booths or tents) in the wilderness, They make booths to sleep in for the duration of the Feast. Tabernacles follows the Day of Atonement, a day of fasting when sins are remembered and repented of. In biblical times, there were sacrifices. The scape goat carried the sins of the people into the wilderness. Tabernacles also follows Harvest Festival. It is associated with the coming of the Messiah. Water (signifying cleansing & the Spirit, the coming of the Kingdom of God) & light are celebrated as part of the ritual. Every seven years the Law of God (Torah) was proclaimed at Tabernacles. It is a highly significant feast. Our Lord's hour is His crucifixion. That hour had not yet come. So He did not court arrest.

March 13th — John 7 vv 14-17

When I was preparing for ordination, I studied for a degree in Theology. I'm a Bachelor of Divinity & an Associate of King's College & I hold an Oxford Certificate in Theology. Had I not had qualifications recognised by the Church of England, I wouldn't have been ordained. But Jesus had never been to college. He hadn't studied formally. His "qualification" was that He received His commission from God, which a lot of people failed to recognise because God had not (yet) opened their eyes to the Truth. I don't regret my studies. I'd hesitate to commend a preacher who hadn't studied, but any authority I (or any other minister) has depends on my relationship with God.

March 14th (Passion Sunday) John 7 v18

He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him.

Lord Acton said that power corrupts & absolute power corrupts absolutely. Religious power is particularly dangerous. Powerful priests and others in positions of authority in any religion may confuse their own power with the power of God. Some such leaders are very charismatic. The crowds adore them and follow them almost slavishly, even offering them unconditional obedience. Cults may take over the lives of devotees, cutting them off from their families & former friends, subjecting their wills to the will of their leaders. There may be sexual coercion. There may be suicide. There may even be murder. Mainstream religion too can be infected by the temptation of bishops & other clergy to abuse their positions. There've been the abuse scandals & many examples of bullying both by clergy & by powerful lay people. Mark 10: ***42*** *But Jesus called them* (the apostles) *to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them.* ***43*** *But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister:* ***44*** *And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.* ***45*** *For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many*. Philippians 2: ***5*** *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:* ***6*** *Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:* ***7*** *But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:* ***8*** *And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*

March 15th John 7 vv 19-24

The Sabbath was not only a day of rest & a day for worship. Keeping the Sabbath was a mark of belonging to the people of God. The Sabbath had become distorted by legalism & self-righteousness, though it remains something of value. Jesus didn't observe the Sabbath in the way in which many people thought it ought to be observed and this was one of the reasons why they wanted to get rid of Him. Jesus demonstrates the absurdity of legalism. *The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.*

March 16th John 7 vv 25-31

As you would expect, there was a lot of speculation about Jesus. Was He a good man? Was He even the Messiah? Or was He a charlatan, a deceiver, a threat to the Jewish faith? Where had He come from? He was born in a stable in Bethlehem. He was brought up in Nazareth. Bethlehem was promising as the birthplace of the Messiah. But where did He really come from? They thought that Joseph was His father, but Who is His Father? Many of them knew His family, but was there anything special about them?

March 17th John 7 vv 32-36

The Pharisees and the Sadducees (the chief priests) didn't want any trouble. These discussions among the crowds about whether Jesus was the Messiah could lead to rioting and violence. It doesn't take much for an excited crowd to riot. So they decided to remove Him from the scene. But He kind of slipped out of their fingers. He wouldn't be around much longer. But where was He going? To preach to other nations? No. He would ascend to where He was before – something the religious but unspiritual couldn't grasp.

March 18th John 7 vv 37-39

Each of the seven days of the Feast of Tabernacles, the high priest would bring a golden vessel of water from the Pool of Siloam. A jubilant procession accompanied him, singing psalms (113-118). The high priest would then pour the water on the altar. This could be taken as signifying the water from the rock which the Israelites drank during their forty year sojourn in the wilderness and the rain they prayed for to make their crops grow in the Promised Land. This *last 7 greatest* day of the feast might be the 8th day when no water was poured. The rules for the feast are confusing. If so, it seems even more pertinent that Jesus summons the thirsty to come to Him for drink. The water of life is the Holy Spirit, Whose coming is symbolised by the water which flowed mingled with blood from our Lord's side, when He was pierced by the Roman soldier's spear on the Cross. Visions in Ezekiel & Revelation portray the River of Life flowing from the Temple to the Dead Sea, healing the salty water & nourishing trees giving fruit for food & leaves for medicine. Christ's Body is the Temple of God. The

Church is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit flows out into the world to nourish & to heal, to bring eternal life. What is your part in this mission?

March 19th John 7 vv 40-44

The Christ is the Messiah, the King or High Priest. In the Old Testament, these are simply human beings like you and me – though anointed with holy oil signifying the gift of God's Holy Spirit Who enables them to fulfil their vocation. The Prophet referred to could be the prophet promised in Deuteronomy 18^{15} to take Moses' place. This could mean a prophet in every generation or one particular great prophet. The Prophet the crowd in Jerusalem were thinking about could be Elijah who was expected to return before the coming of God's Kingdom. Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, anointed by the Holy Spirit at His Baptism. He is as fully human as you or I. He is also as fully divine as God the Father & the Holy Spirit. He is King of Kings. He is the great High Priest Who performs the atoning sacrifice & presents us to the Father. Through Him our prayers ascend to Heaven. Through Him God's blessings flow to us on earth. Jesus is the Prophet. He proclaims the Word of God. He is the Word of God. He is the fulfilment of the Law of Moses & of the Prophets of the Old Testament. He proclaimed the Gospel for three years on earth. He appoints His Church to proclaim the Gospel in every generation until the end of the world.

Jesus! my Shepherd, Husband, Friend,
My Prophet, Priest, and King;
My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
Accept the praise I bring.

March 20th John 7 vv 45-53

There was something about Jesus which restrained the officers from arresting Him. His hour (the preordained date of His Crucifixion) had not yet come. When that hour came, He would submit Himself to those who came to arrest Him.

Nicodemas wanted to be fair. Find out the facts & judge rationally. The other Pharisees shout him down with prejudice. They wrongly thought that Jesus had come from Galilee. Their minds were closed to the possibility that He was the Messiah.

March 21st (Lent 6 Palm Sunday) John 8 vv 1-11

This much loved passage about the woman taken in adultery seems to be an interpolation into St John's Gospel. It is in a different style of writing from the rest of John. It interrupts the flow of the story. It is not included here in the oldest manuscripts. In some versions of the Bible, it is included elsewhere. Nevertheless, it is very much in accordance with what we know of Jesus. He comes to forgive sinners, to give us a fresh start. He does not tolerate religious hypocrites who scorn other people & abuse their power.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who, of thy tender love towards mankind, hast sent thy Son, our Savoir Jesus Christ, to take upon him our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all mankind should follow the example of his great humility; Mercifully grant, that we may both follow the example of his patience, and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

March 22nd John 8 vv 12-15

Psalm 119[105]: *Thy word is a lantern unto my feet: and a light unto my paths.*

Are we open to the possibilities of Jesus? The Pharisees were determined not to believe in Him. So many people are. They won't let go & let God. They won't yield themselves to Him. They cling to the thought that they are better off without God. They totally miss the point. We are made for the glory of God & we can never be at peace until we rest in Him.

I Want To Walk With Jesus Christ,
All The Days I Live Of This Life On Earth;
To Give To Him Complete Control
Of Body And Of Soul.

Follow Him, Follow Him,
Yield Your Life To Him –
He Has Conquered Death,
He Is King Of Kings;
Accept The Joy Which He Gives To Those
Who Yield Their Lives To Him.

I Want To Learn To Speak To Him,
To Pray To Him, Confess My Sin,
To Open My Life And Let Him In,
For Joy Will Then Be Mine.

I Want To Learn To Speak Of Him –
My Life Must Show That He Lives In Me;
My Deeds, My Thoughts, My Words Must Speak
All Of His Love For Me.

I Want To Learn To Read His Word,
For This Is How I Know The Way
To Live My Life As Pleases Him,
In Holiness And Joy.

O Holy Spirit Of The Lord,
Enter Now Into This Heart Of Mine;
Take Full Control Of My Selfish Will
And Make Me Wholly Thine!

March 23rd — John 8 vv 16-20

It's a virtuous circle. If you know God, you know Jesus. If you know Jesus, you know God. How do you get to know God? You talk to Him. Pray that He will make Himself known to you. Join a Church. Read the Bible. God makes Himself known in many ways.

Repent of the sin which divides us from God.

March 24th — John 8 vv 21-24

Where is Jesus going? He is going to the Cross. He is ascending into Heaven. He calls us to take up our Cross daily & to follow Him. The way of the Cross is the path to life. Following Jesus in the way of the Cross, we shall come to dwell with Him forever in glory. Those who can't or won't see this will die in their sins.

March 25th (Maundy Thursday) — John 8 vv 23-32

If this were not Holy Week, we should be keeping the Feast of the Annunciation today, when the Angel Gabriel appeared to the Blessed Virgin and announced to her that she would conceive by the Holy Spirit & become the Mother of the Son of God. This is the Incarnation. The Father sends the Son into the world. The Son enacts the works of God. He is lifted up on the Cross. This is His glory. In the Crucifixion it is known that *I am He.* As God said to Moses at the Burning Bush, I am that I am.

[Jesus*} Who, in the same night that he was betrayed, took Bread; and, when he had given thanks, he brake it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take, eat, this is my Body which is given for you: Do this in remembrance of me. Likewise after supper he took the Cup; and, when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of this; for this is my Blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for*

many for the remission of sins: Do this, as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me.
WE beseech thee, O Lord, pour thy grace into our hearts; that, as we have known the incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel, so by his cross and passion we may be brought unto the glory of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

March 26th (Good Friday) John 8 vv 33-42

He came to his own & his own received him not. It was the Jews, more especially their leaders, who handed Jesus over to the Romans to be crucified. Scandalously, this fact has been used by people who call themselves Christians as a justification for antisemitism. There is no justification for antisemitism. There is no justification for prejudice against any race or faith. We are all sinners. All human beings are children of God who have gone astray and therefore become slaves to sin. Jesus came to set us free. There is no-one & nothing else that we can rely on – not our ancestry, our status, our knowledge, nothing. Only Jesus can save us. *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.*

1 Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee;
let the water and the blood,
from thy wounded side which flowed,
be of sin the double cure;
save from wrath and make me pure.

2 Not the labours of my hands
can fulfill 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.

3 Nothing in my hand I bring,
simply to the cross I cling;
naked, come to thee for dress;
helpless, look to thee for grace;
foul, I to the fountain fly;
wash me, Savoir, or I die.

4 While I draw this fleeting breath,
when mine eyes shall close in death,
when I soar to worlds unknown,
see thee on thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
let me hide myself in thee.

March 27th (Holy Saturday) John 8 vv 43-49

Because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.

There's a paradox. It can be only too easy to believe lies, easier often than acknowledging the truth. You hear about these romance frauds. Someone you've only met on line claims to love you dearly. They ask you to send them a large sum of money. You family, your friends, even your bank tell them it is a scam. But whom do you believe. We're told all sorts of lies and they are believed. The worst lies are the lies the devil tells, the lie that we don't need God, that we're better off without Him. In the garden of Eden, the devil told Eve that it would be fine to eat the forbidden fruit. We should be as gods and live forever. Eve and her husband Adam believed the devil & look where that has God us. The only way to be made like God & to attain to eternal life is to believe the truth which Jesus brings. Repent & Believe.

GRANT, O Lord, that as we are baptized into the death of thy blessed Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, so by continual mortifying our corrupt affections we may be buried with him; and that through the grave, and gate of death, we may pass to our joyful resurrection ; for his merits, who died, and was buried, and rose again for us, thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

March 28th (Easter Day) John 8 vv 50-59

Before Abraham was, I am.

Jesus is eternal. He is the God Who appeared to Moses at the Burning Bush. He is the God Who created heaven and earth. He is the first & the last. He is Alpha & Omega. It was He Who promised Abraham a home in the land of Canaan. It was He Who sent the prophets to proclaim the Word of God. He is the Word of God. He is the fulfilment of the Law & the Prophets. He died for us and rose again. He ascended into heaven, He is with us always, even unto the end of the world. He shall come again to judge both the quick & the dead. He has prepared a place for us. He will come again & receive us to Himself.

1. Jesus Christ is ris'n today, alleluia!
our triumphant holy day, alleluia!
who did once, upon the cross, alleluia!
suffer to redeem our loss, alleluia!

2. Hymns of praise then let us sing, alleluia!
unto Christ, our heav'nly King, alleluia!
who endured the cross and grave, alleluia!
sinners to redeem and save, alleluia!

3. But the pains which He endured, alleluia!
our salvation have procured; alleluia!
now above the sky He's King, alleluia!
where the angels ever sing: alleluia!

March 29th (Easter Monday) John 9 vv 1-7

Why is their evil in the world? I'll attempt a brief summary of the theories that have been advanced, none of which is entirely satisfactory.

1. There is no evil in the world. What we think of as evil is merely the absence of good – but evil seems real enough to those who suffer it.
2. Pain has an important part to play in keeping us safe. People who can't feel pain (like sufferers from leprosy) injure themselves.
3. Evil in the world is a consequence of the devil's machinations.
4. Evil is the consequence of human sin, going right back to the beginning, to Adam & Eve. There is a twist in human nature (original sin) which believes the devil's lies & rebels against the Truth of God which alone can set us free,
5. All suffering in the world is a consequence of the Fall. There will be no more pain in the Kingdom of God (cf Isaiah 11).
6. A certain amount of suffering builds character.
7. It's one of God's gifts to us that the world plays by the rules. The Laws of Science always prevail. God doesn't switch off gravity when a poorly packed parachute fails to open.
8. What seems to be evil in the natural world such as volcanic eruptions is part of the process of creation. Volcanic soils are very fertile.
9. Maybe prey animals don't suffer as much as they appear to suffer. When he was mauled by a lion, the missionary David Livingstone said that it didn't hurt as much as you'd expect.
10. People get what they deserve.

11. God cannot prevent evil either because He is not after all omnipotent or because He is omnipotent but He chooses not to intervene in the affairs of this world because he respects our human freedom and the freedom of the rest of His Creation.

None of these theories is entirely satisfactory. Some things are beyond our understanding. What we do know is that, as we see in this story, anyone's suffering is an opportunity to do good.

ALMIGHTY God, who through thine only-begotten Son Jesus Christ hast overcome death, and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life; We humbly beseech thee, that, as by thy special grace preventing us thou dost put into our minds good desires, so by thy continual help we may bring the same to good effect; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

March 30th John 9 vv 8-25

Who was blind in this story? The man who had been born blind experienced a wonderful miracle. He had been unable to see physically. He had now received the gift of sight.

Surely anybody would rejoice at such a miracle – the man himself, His parents, his friends & neighbours. But wouldn't anybody rejoice that the blind man could now see? Not the Pharisees, because to give thanks to God for the miracle would be to accept that Jesus had come from God – and that they were not prepared to do. They were spiritually blind. Their determination that Jesus should not be recognised as the Messiah was such that they threatened to cast anyone who said that He was the Messiah out of the synagogue. What should have been unalloyed rejoicing on the part of the man's parents was spoiled. They badgered the man to deny the power of Christ, but he stood his ground.

1. The day of resurrection!
Earth, tell it out abroad;
the passover of gladness,
the passover of God.
From death to life eternal,
from earth unto the sky,
our Christ hath brought us over,
with hymns of victory.

2. Our hearts be pure from evil,
that we may see aright
the Lord in rays eternal

of resurrection light;
and listening to his accents,
may hear, so calm and plain,
his own "All hail!" and, hearing,
may raise the victor strain.

3. Now let the heavens be joyful!
Let earth the song begin!
Let the round world keep triumph,
and all that is therein!
Let all things seen and unseen
their notes in gladness blend,
for Christ the Lord hath risen,
our joy that hath no end.

March 31st — John 9 vv 26-41

The Pharisees failed to make the formerly blind man deny Christ's healing power. As we see in this passage, the man didn't know much about Jesus, but he did know in Whom he had believed. He had received the grace of God & stubbornly cleaved to Jesus whatever anybody else said or did – even these powerful Pharisees with all their book learning and their power to cast the man out of the synagogue.

The Pharisees claimed to be followers of Moses, but in John 5[46], Jesus had said that Moses had written of Him. The punch line of the story of Dives & Lazarus is: *If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.* If hearts are hardened & minds closed, neither the Bible, nor miracles, nor even the coming of the Son of God will soften them. But when sinners do turn to Him, they receive power to become the children of God (John 1[12]).

The formerly blind man put his trust in Christ. The Pharisees failed to recognise Him. If only these religious leaders could have recognised their need for God.

Christ the Lord is risen again,
Christ hath broken every chain.
Hark, angelic voices cry,
singing evermore on high,
Alleluia.
He who gave for us his life,
who for us endured the strife,
is our paschal Lamb today;
we too sing for joy, and say
Alleluia.

He who bore all pain and loss
comfortless upon the cross,
lives in glory now on high,
pleads for us, and hears our cry:
Alleluia.

He whose path no records tell,
who descended into hell,
who the strong man armed hath bound,
now in highest heaven is crowned.
Alleluia.

He who slumbered in the grave
is exalted now to save;
now through Christendom it rings
that the Lamb is King of kings.
Alleluia.

Now he bids us tell abroad
how the lost may be restored,
how the penitent forgiven
how we too may enter heaven.
Alleluia.

Thou, our paschal Lamb indeed,
Christ, thy ransomed people feed;
take our sins and guilt away:
let us sing by night and day
Alleluia.