

The First Epistle to the Corinthians



Bible Notes January – March 2018

50p

January 1st (The Circumcision of Christ)

I Corinthians 1 v1

Christ fulfilled the Law of God. On this New Year's Day, we might be thinking about resolutions, what sort of people we want to be, what we might hope to achieve in 2018. The Law of God is the perfect standard by which to measure ourselves. The Law of God is love. Are we people of love? Jesus is love made flesh. He is our example. Are we like Him? Paul's great insight is that, while this is all true, God loves us as the people we are, not only if we become the people we ought to be. The love of God sets the people we are free to become the people God meant us to be.

Almighty God, who madest thy blessed Son to be circumcised, and obedient to the law for man; Grant us the true circumcision of the Spirit; that, our hearts, and all our members, being mortified from all worldly and carnal lusts, we may in all things obey thy blessed will; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

January 2nd

I Corinthians 1 v2

God called Paul when he was on the road to Damascus intending to imprison the Christians there. In later life, Paul regarded himself as the greatest of sinners because he had persecuted Christ's Body, the Church, and had therefore persecuted Jesus. Paul's own experience of being set free from sin by the unconditional love of God, manifest in Christ's precious death on the Cross for every one of us, was the foundation on which he preached the Gospel to all those places in the eastern Mediterranean and still speaks to us today. It was Martin Luther's realisation that what was true for Paul was true for him and for everybody who comes to God in faith which sparked the Reformation 500 years ago. *Sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia* – by Scripture alone, by faith alone, by grace alone. That's all you need.

When I was at college, we were taught that today's verse tells us what the Church is. The local Church is that body of people in a particular place who call upon the Name of the Lord, who are made His people by grace and are called to live up to our calling as the people of God, united in love for Christ, with one another, and with all Christian people all over the world.

January 3rd

I Corinthians 1 v3

When I was at school, I was taught to begin a letter with the word “dear”. It bothered me a bit that this seemed to be merely a convention and that you might have to write “Dear” to someone who wasn’t at all dear to you – like the headmaster! I have had a bit of fun since then, thinking of ending harsh letters of complaint to council officers “I trust I have the honour to remain your humble and obedient servant.” I’m never sure how appropriate it is to start and finish emails with greetings or salutations. It seems overly formal to do so, but it looks bare and possibly rude if you just write the message and append your name.

In bible classes, however, we’ve usually made a big thing about the way the writers of the biblical epistles greet their readers. The implication is that “grace and peace” are not merely conventional but that they are the apostle’s sincere hope and prayer for his fellow Christians. That being so, such hopes and prayers for one another, ought to be the norm in all our relationships within the Church. I trust I have the honour to remain your humble and obedient servant and that you will be mine too.

January 4th

I Corinthians 1 v4

This is another familiar theme of Paul’s. He thanks God for other Christians. He thanks God for the work God is doing in them. Maybe it would be a good exercise to think of some fellow members of the congregation you belong whom you find difficult and to give thanks to God for those people and for what God is doing in them.

Psalm 133.

Ecce, quam bonum!

Behold, how good and joyful a thing it is : brethren, to dwell together in unity!

2 It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down unto the beard : even unto Aaron's beard, and went down to the skirts of his clothing.

3 Like as the dew of Hermon : which fell upon the hill of Sion.

4 For there the Lord promised his blessing : and life for evermore.

January 5th

I Corinthians 1 v5

Paul thanks God that the Corinthians are enriched in utterance and knowledge. To know God is to have eternal life. This is the knowledge which it is truly worth having. This knowledge is the gift of God to us. There seems to be a difference of opinion among translators as to whether Paul meant that the Corinthians were enriched by the great teachers of the faith who had taught them or that they were rich because they themselves were able to teach others about Jesus. Both would be true. We are enriched when we hear the Word and it takes root in our hearts. We are enriched when the Word rooted in our hearts bears fruit in our proclaiming the Christian Gospel. The word which really shone out to me today, however, was “enriched”. To be a Christian is to be enriched. I think it is often the reason we are so half-hearted in our discipleship that we don’t realise just how much God has given us.

January 6th (Epiphany)

I Corinthians 1 v6

Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you.

Today, the wise men visit the infant Jesus and give Him gifts. Obviously, Christ is in the cradle, not (physically at least) in the hearts of the magi. But what motivated them to come to Bethlehem? Yes, they saw the star with their eyes. They obviously used their brains to think about what the star might mean. But surely it was the Holy Spirit working within them Who gave them the desire to see Jesus, to come to Him and to worship Him. It is the work of God in us to bring us to faith in Jesus Christ and everything that follows from that in terms of the sort of people we are and what we do with our lives.

O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest thy only-begotten Son to the Gentiles: Mercifully grant, that we, which know thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of thy glorious Godhead; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Incidentally, it was this collect that for good or ill, led me back to using the 1662 collects. The Common Worship collect for today is just so badly drafted {probably by a committee!})

January 7th (Epiphany 1)

I Corinthians 1 v7

It's on days like this that you get caught if you try to take the best from both 1662 and Common Worship. Common Worship celebrates the Baptism of Christ today: when Jesus fulfils all righteousness; acts in solidarity with us whom He commands to be baptised in His Name; like us, at Baptism receives the gift of the Holy Spirit: and, like us at Baptism, is acknowledged as the child of God. 1662 takes the story of the 12 year old Jesus in the Temple at Jerusalem explaining that He must be about His Father's business to the confused and angry Mary & Joseph. If we baptised people know that God is our father, we know that we must be about His business too. The 1662 epistle is about our being members of the Body of Christ and offering ourselves to God as a living sacrifice. These are our thoughts regarding our own Baptism. So not so different after all. The same themes run throughout Scripture, the celebration of the Sacraments and the keeping of the Christian year. So, in today's verse, Paul give thanks for the gifts God gives us Christians in order that we may serve Him on earth as we await His Coming to take us home.

O Lord, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people which call upon thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

January 8th

I Corinthians 1 vv 8&9

“What did the Romans ever do for us?” They established peace and reasonable prosperity. They built roads, aqueducts and other public works. They brought order out of what was sometimes pretty chaotic and established reasonably efficient government. Yet they were pagans. They even worshipped their own emperor. They brought peace at the point of a sword. They brutally suppressed rebellion and dissent. They made a public spectacle of gross cruelty. There was still abject poverty in the Roman Empire. The economy depended on mass slavery. They persecuted Christians. There was a lot that was good about living in the Roman Empire. There was a lot that was bad. Christians have to live in the world as it is – living with the good and the bad – but we are not of this world. We are citizens of Heaven and that is why we are never without hope.

January 9th

I Corinthians 1 v10

The night before He died, Jesus prayed that His Church would be one. His new commandment at that very Last Supper was that we should love one another as He has loved us. What is love? *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* He tells us that we are His friends. We are brothers and sisters. We are members one of another. And yet. The Church is a divine institution and yet it is made up of fallible human beings who will not be made perfect until the Lord comes again and we see Him face to face. Till then, love is not perfected and divisions are inevitable. When we quarrel among ourselves, however, we should not be unaware of how far short we fall of what is required of us nor of how we grieve Him Who called us out of darkness into His own marvellous light. Division is something always to be repented of.

January 10th (William Laud Archbishop & Martyr) I Corinthians 1 v11

William Laud was briefly Rector of Cuxton in 1610 in the reign of James I. He went on to do great things in the University of Oxford and the Church of England and eventually became Archbishop of Canterbury. Unfortunately, he was also capable of great cruelty. He was on the side of Charles I in the King's disagreements with parliament. He was of the high church party, seeing Puritanism and non-conformity as a threat both to the Church and to the state. By 1645 he had made enough enemies to be executed after trial by parliament. Actually they couldn't find enough evidence to convict him and resorted to an ordinance of attainder, which meant they could kill him without going to the trouble of obtaining a guilty verdict. Religious differences were among the main causes of the English Civil War. There were so many deaths. There was imprisonment and torture. There was so much damage to property. Yet all sides claimed to be fighting for the Prince of Peace. There were actually many good people on all sides. They were certainly sincere. And somehow they lost their way and came to believe that it was their duty to destroy their fellow Christians. Looking back on it now, we can see that Puritans and Anglicans and Catholics all had valuable insights to share as well holding a variety of erroneous opinions. How much more could be

achieved if we met prayerfully together to discuss our differences than if we do battle with one another.

January 11th

I Corinthians 1 v11

There were contentions among the Corinthian Christians. We shan't know all there is to know of God until we see Him face to face. Until then, our knowledge is extremely partial. Different people have different true insights and we are all capable of being wrong. It follows that there are very likely to be differences of opinion within churches about God and His Will for us and for our fellowship. These matters ought to be considered in a prayerful atmosphere in the light of what the Bible teaches and the Church's experience of God over two millennia, treating everybody with respect, considering all the views expressed and examining the evidence rationally. In reality, however, we all fail. We are not sufficiently immersed in Scripture and the Church's teaching. We are less than wholly open to God in our prayers. We don't treat everybody with respect and we allow ourselves to be moved by emotions unworthy of Christian people instead of thinking logically as would befit people who follow Jesus, the Word of God, (Logos, Λογος in NT Greek). Just as faith and reason are not opposites but complementary, so passion and reason are not contrary to one another, but closely related. God is love; Jesus is Logos – two persons, three with the Holy Spirit - one God.

January 12th

I Corinthians 1 v12

Churches can split into factions around powerful people. Churches need strong leadership, but power is always dangerous except in the Hands of God. Successful church leaders may be tempted to draw disciples after themselves instead of after God. Even if leaders are good and intend no such thing, members of congregations may attach themselves to their leaders rather than to Christ. Some churches pay far too much attention to whether people like the vicar or not or make invidious comparisons with other clergy they've had in the past. In some churches, there are powerful lay leaders (maybe in official positions, maybe not) who lead factions or give their support to the clergy or withhold it from them or who exercise a malign influence in the congregation, putting down other people whose beliefs and needs they regard as less important than their own or dividing the flock. In

the end, Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Christian leaders work under Him and with Him and taking Him as their example, working together to build, not to destroy.

January 13th

I Corinthians 1 v13

One of the great movements of the C20 was what we call the ecumenical movement. It had come to be realised that it is a scandal that the Church of God is divided – Orthodox East and Catholic West, Roman Catholics and a huge number of Protestant churches, evangelical and charismatic. Christ's prayer at His Last Supper was that we should be one, that we should love one another as He loves us, and yet Christians had separated themselves from one another, learned to distrust and fear one another, doubted one another's sincerity, excommunicated one another and even tortured and killed one another. Schism (the rupture of God's Church) is a scandal. Let me mention three achievements of the ecumenical movement and one failure.

1. We Christians in the pews learnt to recognise one another as Christians, to trust people in other churches, to work with them and to enjoy fellowship with them. We no longer doubt that faithful people who belong to other churches will greet us in Heaven.
2. At an institutional level, the different denominations, to some extent, learnt to recognise the validity of other communions and to cooperate with one another nationally and internationally. One of the driving forces behind the Ecumenical Movement was world mission. We couldn't afford to export our sad divisions to countries where people had never heard the Gospel. We had to work together to the glory of God and for the benefit of all the peoples of the world.
3. The different churches sat down together to discuss the issues which theoretically divide us – matters of doctrine and the way we conduct our services. We didn't find that there are no important differences, but we did discover that we are closer to one another than people might have thought. Where possible, we agreed to work together and to do things in similar ways. If we Anglicans go into other churches these days, we can often recognise what is going on. We use similar words and often sing the same hymns.
4. Fifty years ago, at least in England, it looked as if we might merge some of our denominations. The Congregational and English Presbyterians did form the United Reformed Church, but progress towards Anglican/Methodist unity and even a covenant between Anglicans, Methodists and the URC stalled. There are important doctrinal issues on which some faithful people find it impossible to

compromise. I think there is also a desire on the part of most of us to remain within our comfort zones and worship with people like us. Nevertheless, we haven't given up and we are growing closer.

January 14th (Epiphany 2)

I Corinthians 1 vv 14&15

When Pope John Paul II first visited England, we were told that he would be carrying out a number of baptisms and performing various other functions which are normally carried out by "ordinary" clergy. I think the point was to emphasise that the pope is simply a minister of religion, not someone special in his own right, but the servant of the servants of God – as we all are. I was a bit bothered because I thought some people might think that it was somehow more special to be baptised by the pope than to be baptised by anyone else. The reality, of course, is that the people who administer Baptism are just that, administrators. It is God Who forgives our sins, washes us clean, causes us to be born again, adopts us His children bestows upon us the Holy Spirit, enables us to die to sin and empowers us to rise to eternal life. That is all of God. All we clergy do is to dip you in water. 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.

January 15th

I Corinthians 1 vv 16&17

You often get the impression that Paul writes his letters in a hurry. He's not sure whom he might have baptised at Corinth and he hasn't got time to check. You can imagine him writing these letters after busy days preaching or praying or sorting out problems in the churches or travelling. Writing letters is a means to an end. It isn't the end in itself. For us in the Church today, buildings maintenance, finance, meetings, administration, etc., are means to an end, not the end itself. The Church exists to glorify God. Priority number one is worship. From that there follow the tasks of pastoral care, evangelism and the transformation of society. So we really have to be careful that we don't spend time and energy on the means out of proportion to the effort we put into the ends. It is far more comfortable to sit indoors all day at the computer than it is to go out into the world and engage with its problems. All Christians have their own special roles within the Church. Paul's wasn't Baptism;

it was preaching. What's yours? We shouldn't waste people's talents by asking them to do what they're not good at rather than what they are.

January 16th

I Corinthians 1 vv 18-20

So you're trying to get people interested in a new religion. The main thing about the Founder of this new religion is that He was executed as a rebel and a criminal by the Roman state and that the method of execution was the particularly horrible and feared punishment of crucifixion. Moreover initiation into this new religion by Baptism is likened to death and believers are expected to give up everything they hold dear and, if necessary, to die on a cross the way their Saviour did. Why would anyone join your new movement? Surely it would be better to talk about the friendliness of the meetings, the wonderful charity work undertaken by the organisation, the erudite teachings of its fine professors, and the probability of worldly advancement if people would only observe its basic tenets of honesty and hard work. Such a religion would surely be a comfort and a source of spiritual well-being which anyone would want to join, with God on tap for all good people, especially if it was accompanied by a promise of a wonderful life after death.

January 17th

I Corinthians 1 vv 21-23

Intellectuals might like a sophisticated moral philosophy perhaps tied in with theoretical speculation about the nature of the divine. More down to earth people might like to see miracles. Many people are looking to self-improvement: getting smarter through reading and study; getting fitter through exercise; becoming healthier through diet; becoming emotionally more secure through yoga or therapy or therapeutic communities. There are hundreds of self-help books. "Every day, in every way, I'm getting better and better," taught the French philosopher.

But Paul sees that all this misses the point. We can't help ourselves. If we think we can perfect ourselves, we are doomed to disappointment. We will never be satisfied. We can carry on striving vainly or we can give up in despair, but, either way, we can't finally help ourselves. Ultimately, we are made in the image of God – to be loved by Him and to love Him. St Augustine had it right when he said, "you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you."

It is only in love with God that we become the people we are meant to be and it is only God Who can make us at one with Himself.

January 18th (Commencement of Week of Prayer for Christian Unity) I Corinthians 1 v24

The problem is that we have alienated ourselves from God. We are unquiet until we rest in Him but we can't rest in Him because we have rebelled against Him. A light bulb is useless if it isn't plugged into the main but we've wrenched the plug out and now we have no power. So we're in the cold and dark and we're useless to the world. Only God can re-establish the connection so that we become warm and bright and emit useful light, doing what we were made to do. But we're not inanimate objects made of wire and glass and filled with gas. We're sentient beings of flesh and blood. We're bodies, souls and spirits. We are responsible for our actions. If we're to be redeemed, we need a very much greater act of love on God's part than putting the plug back in. Our hatred and indifference towards God and to one another deeply wounds His infinite love and it is only an act of infinite love on His part which can forgive us and bring us atonement. His act of infinite love for us is to send His Son to become one of us and to die on the Cross for us. Thus our profound unity with all Christians – with all those who are redeemed by the Blood of Christ – and the scandal of our failure to love one another as He loves us. *Christ is our peace. He has reconciled us to God in one body by the cross. We meet in his name and share his peace.*

January 19th

I Corinthians 1 v26

We hear a lot about people being role models. If a footballer, actor or pop star is brilliant at football, acting or singing, but has a disreputable private life, we say that that person is being a poor role model to his or her fans. I've been called a poor role model because I don't wear a cycle helmet. I respond that I am a role model for personal freedom, not health and safety gone mad. Anyway, the people we are encouraged to look to as role models are usually people at the top of society – rich, powerful, talented, beautiful, athletic, or all of the above. These are the people other people tend to admire and hope to emulate. Apparently some young people just want to become celebrities, to be famous although they don't know famous for what. Yet, S Paul points out that it is not, by and large, these people who have come to Christian

faith. Thinking they have everything, they don't realise that they lack the one thing that is needful. They don't see their need of God.

January 20th

I Corinthians 1 vv 27&28

Many of the early Christians were slaves or other people who were generally despised by society. As far as the world was concerned, they were nothings, deluded nothings insofar as they worshipped a crucified criminal, gave away what little they had and were prepared to die themselves rather than join in the religious rites of civilised pagans. There must have been some satisfaction in knowing that they were the ones who had riches beyond the wildest dreams of their masters and their persecutors and yet, as Christians, they wouldn't have gloated at the thought that those who were rich in worldly goods were missing out on the true wealth, but rather would have wanted to share with them their knowledge of God.

January 21st (Epiphany 3)

I Corinthians 1 vv 29-31

I'm told that I tend to repeat the same message. Well, so be it. The message is vitally important and yet very few people seem to be able to receive it. Here it is. If you are proud of yourself and your achievements, remember that everything you have and are comes from God. Receive everything you have with humble thanks and seek the grace to use it unselfishly for the general good. If you feel inadequate, you are only being realistic. None of us is adequate. But we don't have to be. God loves us as we are. God supplies all our needs. In Him we have everything that we require to do the good works that He has prepared for us to do on earth. Once we have confessed our sins, they are gone forever. Don't trust in yourself. You'll always let yourself down. Trust in the Lord. He will never let you down. Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth thy right hand to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

January 22nd

I Corinthians 2 vv 1&2

One of the questions I frequently ask myself is, how do we convince people of the truth of the Gospel? I preach sermons, write in the parish magazine, teach groups, write these notes. The Fresh Expressions group tries to find other ways to convey the truth which is in Christ.

Yet the results are often disappointing. We preach Christ crucified and the best way to do that must be the living of Christian lives.

January 23rd

I Corinthians 2 vv 3-5

How is the power of God manifest in our preaching? Some charismatics believe that it is in the miracles which accompany some preaching. There is certainly biblical precedent for this. Sometimes, miracles accompany preaching and these signs and wonders build the Church. It is also true that you find in the Bible plenty of effective preaching without any accompanying miracles being mentioned and also plenty of people who witness miracles and who still don't believe. Paul specifically excludes the powerful personality of the speaker or the cleverness of the way he puts the case. I think the real keys are sincerity on the part of the preacher and openness of heart on the part of the hearers. Effective preaching depends on the work of the Holy Spirit both in the mouth of the preacher and in the ears of the congregation. Effective preaching is undergirded by everybody's prayers. A preacher may well be granted a powerful demeanour, a strong voice and a clever way of presenting the Gospel, but none of these things is the point. They are means, not ends. In fact, the preacher may become sinfully proud of his gifts and susceptible hearers may be more attentive to him personally than to the message. What matters is the work of the Holy Spirit in sincere preaching and an eagerness to receive the Word of God.

January 24th

I Corinthians 2 vv 6&7

Worldly wisdom tends to defer to wealth and power. Even if it doesn't, it believes itself to be self-sufficient. Too many human beings think that we have within ourselves all the resources to answer life's questions. Humanity believes that it can save itself. Only too often, we think that the answers lie in materialism or false religion. The reality is that it is only self-sacrificial love which can save us and the only source of that is God Himself in Christ Jesus.

All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance
he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown,

he alone
calls my heart to be his own.
2 Human pride and earthly
glory,
sword and crown betray his
trust;

what with care and toil he
buildeth,
tower and temple, fall to dust.

January 25th (Conversion of S Paul)

But God's power,
hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

I Corinthians 2 vv 8&9

Saul of Tarsus knew a lot, but he didn't have the wisdom of God. He knew the Old Testament very well, but he didn't understand that it is about Jesus. He accepted the world's wisdom that you deal with threats by persecuting the people whom you reckon to be a threat. So he went to Damascus intending to imprison those whom he believed to be perverting the Jewish religion in their faithfulness to Christ. On the road, he met Jesus, the Word made flesh, the power and wisdom of God incarnate. When Paul put his faith in Jesus, he knew the wisdom of God: self-sacrificial love; power made perfect in weakness; human salvation made possible by the Cross, only possible by the cross. And to know this wisdom was to enter into the unimaginable delights that God has prepared for those who know Him.

O God, who, through the preaching of the blessed Apostle Saint Paul, hast caused the light of the Gospel to shine throughout the world: Grant, we beseech thee, that we, having his wonderful conversion in remembrance, may shew forth our thankfulness unto thee for the same, by following the holy doctrine which he taught; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

January 26th

I Corinthians 2 vv 10&11

How many people really know you? You think you know your children, but how soon do children develop a private life? They don't tell you what's happened at school. Sometimes, on parents' evenings, you wonder whether teachers are talking about the same child. As they grow into teenage years, they may deliberately keep things from you, but, even when they do talk to you, they exasperatedly exclaim, *But you don't understand*. And you don't. You can never fully understand another person and nobody fully understands you. I'm sure this is true even of husbands and wives. Hence the misunderstandings in every marriage. We may often feel lonely and misunderstood. The Greek oracle said, Know thyself, but I'm not sure that we can fully achieve even that much. Only God knows us through and through. Much more so, only God can know God. Only the Spirit of God truly can know

God and God sends His Spirit into our hearts so that we can know Him too.

January 27th

I Corinthians 2 vv 12&13

Pantheism regards the whole universe as divine and equates God with everything that is. Panentheism regards the whole universe as divine but believes that God is greater than the material universe. Christianity, however, makes a distinction between God and the universe which He has created. He is in everything and everything is made by Him, but what is created is distinct from the Creator. The universe has its own autonomy. Human beings have their own autonomy. Although we are dependent on God, we are not God. [Some people think that it is this belief that the universe is distinct from God (though created and ruled by Him) that made science possible in Christian, Jewish and Islamic cultures. If you believe that nature is divine, you might think that it is blasphemy to experiment on it.] Having this autonomy or freedom, the world, as it is, is in rebellion against God. This means that what appears to the world to be wisdom (discounting God; absolute faith in humanity or false gods; excessive deference paid to cleverness, looks, power, wealth, etc.) is actually folly and what the world considers to be folly (faith, hope and love) is the true wisdom. We are utterly different from what we would be if we were not Christians and we see the world in an utterly different way from the way we would see it if we were still of the world – or at least we should!

January 28th (Septuagesima)

I Corinthians 2 vv 14&15

It's difficult for a clergyman to talk about religion. People you meet in the street either won't talk to you at all if they think you're going to talk about religion or else they discount what you're saying as saying what you have to say because it's your job to say it rather than because you really believe it. Even Christian people seldom want to talk about their faith to their minister. Maybe they're afraid of getting preached at. Before I was ordained, however, I had a lot of discussions, even arguments, with people about the Christian faith. If I say so myself, I think I came up with some pretty powerful reasons why we Christians are right and everybody else is wrong. (Well I was young at the time). But, in many ways, I was barking up the wrong tree. Yes you can (humbly!) help with people's intellectual objections to faith, but the key

is the work of the Holy spirit in their hearts. The key to evangelism, therefore is prayer and sharing in love, not cleverness. (Prayer next page).

O Lord, we beseech thee favourably to hear the prayers of thy people; that we, who are justly punished for our offences, may be mercifully delivered by thy goodness, for the glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

January 29th

I Corinthians 2 v16

When you read the bible, even if you've very often read the passage before, sometimes some words seem to jump out at you. You are excited by what you've suddenly realised by the grace of God. This verse, I remember, had that effect on me when I was curate at Orpington. I remember preaching a sermon on it. "But we have the mind of Christ." Just think about that. You and I have the mind of Christ!

January 30th

I Corinthians 3 vv 1&2

Christians are cradle Christians or converts. Either we were brought up in the faith or we came to know Jesus in later life. If we were brought up as Christians, we may have very precious memories of what we were taught as children, by our families and friends, in Sunday school, Church and maybe day school as well. If we were converted in later life, it may well be that coming to know Jesus for the first time was a very moving experience. We may have a deep affection for the people who brought us to know Him and perhaps for the Church or college or whatever setting in which we first experienced His love. A problem, which is mentioned more than once in the New Testament, is that we may get stuck there. We don't grow as Christians. We cleave to what we knew in our childhood or our first adult experiences of the Church. We don't grow in faith. We look backwards rather than forwards and resist change either to ourselves or in the Church. The Corinthians had had wonderful experiences when they first heard the Gospel. They were very excited about their faith. They were experiencing all kinds of signs and wonders. But they weren't maturing. They failed to see that

their initial enthusiasm wasn't sufficient on its own. Their genuine experience of the love of God required them to grow in love for one another and to become the people God meant them to be.

January 31st

I Corinthians 3 v3

The Church is a divine institution, but she is made up of human beings. Christians are redeemed but not yet made perfect. We have been crucified with Christ but the fulness of our resurrection with Him is yet to be perfected. The flesh still lusts against the spirit. Moreover, living in the world (even though not of the world), we need some of the organisation that human institutions in the world also need – meetings, accounts, minutes, staff, management, hierarchies even, buildings, decisions about mundane matters, etc.. It is only too easy to behave like the people of the world, engaging in petty politics, ego trips, factionalism, selfishness, greed, laziness, personal ambition, foolish resentments. We behave as though we were of the flesh not of the spirit. We act as if we belonged to the world rather than to Christ. This behaviour is immature and wrong. We're probably all guilty of it. I know I am sometimes, but it's not good enough and, when we catch ourselves behaving like it, we have to repent. We have the mind of Christ. We need to live accordingly.

February 1st

I Corinthians vv 4-6

It was Paul who first preached the Gospel at Corinth, staying there 18 months before going on to Ephesus. Apollos was a Jew of Alexandria in Egypt who knew the Scriptures very well and was an enthusiastic convert to Christ. At first, he hadn't got the whole Gospel, but two of Paul's co-workers, Aquila and Priscilla, further instructed him and then he went to minister at Corinth. It seems that some of the Corinthian Christians attached themselves to Apollos' way of doing things and some of them thought they were more loyal to Paul. The relationship between a minister and members of the congregation is a personal one. Traditionally, we address you as *Dearly beloved brethren*. We are brothers and sisters. Hopefully, we are friends. Love is the defining characteristic of a Church. And for that very reason, people cling to one minister rather than another within a Church. When there is a change of minister, some people welcome the new man. Others still prefer his predecessors. But we all have to work together as we are. We have to

love one another, the people God has given us. Different ministers have different God-given gifts to build the Church. We waste those gifts if we don't cooperate with one minister because we prefer another.

February 2nd (Candlemas)

I Corinthians 3 v7

It isn't the minister who builds the Church. It is God. God sends His Son into the world to redeem the world. He sends His Spirit to build His Church. All Christian people, including ordained ministers, are called to work in and with the Spirit. Today is the last day of Christmas, when we mark the occasion when Mary and Joseph took the 40 day old Jesus to the temple to present Him, the first born son, and to make the appropriate offerings, and for Mary's purification. By the Holy Spirit, Simeon and Hannah recognise Who Jesus is, the Light of the world, and bear witness to Him. This is our calling, to be presented to God in Christ and to be filled with His Spirit so that we shine as lights in the world – lights of love.

Almighty and everliving God, we humbly beseech thy Majesty, that, as thy only-begotten Son was this day presented in the temple in substance of our flesh, so we may be presented unto thee with pure and clean hearts, by the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

February 3rd

I Corinthians 3 vv 8&9

Sometimes, when there is more than one priest at a celebration of Holy Communion, they are all invited to join in the consecration of the bread and wine. This is called concelebration. Also, it has become the custom to invite all the priests present at an ordination to lay their hands with prayer on the candidate, not just the bishop. This is to symbolise the fact that we are brothers. We are a team. We are fellow labourers with one another. We are fellow labourers with Christ. We ought not to be rivals. We ought not to diminish one another's ministry. We ought not to let people set us off against one another. (It is tempting to do so when somebody criticises their vicar to you or even suggests that you might be a better preacher or leader of worship.) George Bernard Shore claimed that all professions were conspiracies against the laity (meaning that doctors look after doctors, lawyers look after lawyers, architects look after architects, etc., all to milk the general public and to protect themselves against fair complaints). This really ought not to be the case with clergy, however. Ordained ministers do have a special

role but only within the Body of Christ. All baptised people are equally valuable and equally responsible. Clergy and Christian laity are co-workers with one another and co-workers with Christ.

February 4th (Sexagesima)

I Corinthians 3 vv 10-15

You might have been taught at school not to mix metaphors, but Paul didn't go to your school and he changes from farming to building.

There is more to God's work than any single analogy can encompass.

The point is that it is God's work and all God's people are called to engage in it. We sow and reap. We build. We're the crop and the farmers. We're the building and the builders. There is only one

foundation and that is Christ. Our individual lives are built on Jesus.

The Church is built on Him. All God's work is through Christ and with Christ and in Christ. Creation, Redemption and Sanctification are all

three the work of every person of the Blessed Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and we are included in that work. We are both His

workmanship and His workers. Our salvation depends on Christ and on Him alone, but what do we build on Him? Surely we can't offer Him

less than our best. O Lord God, who seest that we put not our trust in any thing that we do: Mercifully grant that by thy power we may be

defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

February 5th

I Corinthians 3 vv 16&17

Holy and profane, clean and unclean. We are not pantheists. We do not equate God with the universe. There is a distinction between the

Creator & the created. God is infinitely holy. What is consecrated to

God is holy. Everything else is just ordinary. So six days are week

days when we do our ordinary work. The Sabbath is holy when we

worship and rest. We consecrate places where we worship & they

become special to us. We consecrate the Bread & Wine at Holy

Communion. People are set apart for particularly ministries within the

Church. But the fact that some times, places, objects and people are

holy, most certainly does not mean that other times, other places, other objects, other people don't belong to God. The fact that we treat

Sundays, church buildings, consecrated Bread & Wine, ordained

ministers as special, doesn't mean that we can sin on weekdays,

desecrate space which isn't consecrated, use ordinary objects to do what

we know is wrong or maltreat people who are not clergy. Marking

some things out as holy makes them signs as to how we should treat

everything that God has made. We Christians are a holy people. We are the dwelling place of God. We therefore are both highly privileged & tremendously responsible as signs of God's Will for the whole world.

February 6th (Accession of HM Queen)

I Corinthians 3 vv 18-23

Last year, when we celebrated the Queen's 90th birthday, many people were very moved by her personal testimony as a Christian. This was set out in the book published by the Bible Society, *The Servant Queen*. In many ways, her majesty has everything. Many people might envy her. She is one of the richest women in the world. She has a secure position. She is honoured by millions of people. She gets to live in castles and palaces. Yet what matters most about her is that she sees herself as a servant of God and a servant of the people over whom she reigns. In her faith, she finds the resources to carry out her duties. What is true for her majesty was true for Paul, Apollos and Cephas (that's Peter's Jewish name) and it's true for you and me. Chapter 1 ended with the words, *He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord*. Chapter 2 ended with the words, *But we have the mind of Christ*. This chapter ends, *All are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's*. Whoever put in the chapter breaks knew where to make us pause to praise God for what we are reading.

ALMIGHTY God, whose kingdom is ever-lasting, and power infinite: Have mercy upon the whole Church; and so rule the heart of thy chosen servant *ELIZABETH*, our Queen and Governor, that she (knowing whose minister she is) may above all things seek thy honour and glory: and that we and all her subjects (duly considering whose authority she hath) may faithfully serve, honour, and humbly obey her, in thee, and for thee, according to thy blessed Word and ordinance; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth, ever one God, world without end. **Amen.**

February 7th

I Corinthians 4 v1

There's a lot about authentic ministry in this epistle. We've seen how the Corinthians were inclined to split into factions, some following Paul, some Peter & some Apollos. Peter had seen Jesus face to face, heard His teaching and witnessed the miracles and His Death & Resurrection. Apollos was young and fresh and spending time with them after Paul left. It was, however, who had first preached the Gospel to them and was probably the best teacher. Different ministers bring different gifts to the Church. Some people may prefer one

minister over another. That's understandable. What is wrong is to divide the Church into factions or to undervalue the gifts God has given the minister you favour less. Ministers are stewards of the mysteries of God.

February 8th

I Corinthians 4 v1

This verse is just too wonderful to leave it there. Ministers are servants, assistants or helpers of Christ. They are stewards of the mysteries of God. What is a steward? In NT times a steward was a top servant or slave who was in charge of the household. He didn't own the household, but he was responsible for it. He looked after the property and the money. A large household included the master and his wife and children, plus a number of servants and slaves. The steward was responsible for the well-being of them all. A wise steward would earn the respect of the household and be maintained in reasonable comfort from his master's resources. The Church is the household of God. So, as stewards, ministers are both very privileged and have a very serious responsibility. What are the mysteries of God? Sometimes, the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion are known as the holy mysteries. Ministers are certainly stewards of the Sacraments, conduits of God's grace as He blesses people in Baptism and Communion. I don't think that Paul can mean that here, however. For Paul, the mystery disclosed in Christ is that God's salvation is freely and graciously given to all who come to Him through Christ in faith, whether they are Jews or gentiles, Greeks, Romans or barbarians, slaves or free men and women. This mystery is contained within the Scriptures, but is only fully disclosed to those who read the Law and the Prophets and the Writings in the Light of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ as revealed by the Holy Spirit. As stewards of the mysteries of God, ministers open the Scriptures when they preach the Gospel. Thus our ministry is word and sacrament. Word and sacrament are God's gift. They belong to Him. They belong to the Church. Ordained ministers are stewards of the Word and the Sacraments. But, of course, Christianity doesn't have a priestly caste somehow superior to the rest of the people of God. All Christians are stewards of the gifts God has given them.

Almighty God, the giver of all good gifts, who of thy divine providence hast appointed divers Orders in thy Church: Give thy grace, we

humbly beseech thee, to all those who are to be called to any office and administration in the same; and so replenish them with the truth of thy doctrine, and endue them with innocency of life, that they may faithfully serve before thee, to the glory of thy great Name, and the benefit of thy holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

February 9th

I Corinthians 4 v2

Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man may be found faithful. That gives me pause for thought. I as a minister must be found faithful. Likewise, all the baptised, whatever gifts God has given them, whatever their calling, whatever their stewardship, must be found faithful. Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified: Receive our supplications and prayers, which we offer before thee for all estates of men in thy holy Church, that every member of the same, in his vocation and ministry, may truly and godly serve thee; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

February 10th

I Corinthians 4 vv 3-5

We're often told that young people feel under huge pressure because of social media. They feel they are being judged all the time on their appearance, their life style, their success or otherwise at school. It's not only social media. There are always tests or exams at school. Some parents demand nothing less than perfection. There is tremendous pressure to conform to the standards set in magazines or on TV or whatever. And yet Paul says that it is a small thing to be judged by other people. He doesn't even judge himself. What a liberation! We don't have to live up to other people's standards. We don't have to compare ourselves with one another. We don't even have to feel bad about ourselves when we think about our own inadequacies. There is only one Judge Who matters. His judgment is based on what is really important – character, rather than appearance, wealth, power, success or celebrity status. And He is merciful. He knows our shortcomings and He loves us as we are. He knows our shortcomings and He forgives us. We are free in Christ. So don't worry!

February 11th (Quinquagesima)

I Corinthians 4 vv 6&7

The way to think about things is that everything anyone has is the gift of God. If we look at things that way, we celebrate other people's gifts,

rather than feeling jealous of them or comparing ourselves with them. We thank God for what He is doing in the lives of other people. We praise the God Who enables people to do great things, not the people who do them. We thank God for the gifts He has given us. We're not proud because we think we're better than other people. We don't feel inferior to other people because we think they are better than we are. Every one of us can say with St Paul, *By the grace of God, I am what I am*. Today's 1662 epistle is Paul's hymn to love in I Corinthians 13. Love is the greatest gift and love is what determines our relationships with one another and with ourselves.

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.

February 12th

I Corinthians 4 v8

What's Paul getting at here? It is true that Christians are fulfilled with the grace of God and that we are kings and priests. My diagnosis of what is wrong with the Church of England is that we just don't realise what a privilege it is to be a Christian. That is why we don't worry as much as we ought if we miss church services. It is why we don't read the Bible and pray as we ought. It explains the low level of giving of money in the C of E. It explains why we don't always feel the need to live by Christ's standard in the wider community. The Church of England can't fulfil her calling when her members don't offer their lives wholeheartedly to God in response to a wondering gratitude that everything we have is the gift of God. I think the problem in Corinth was rather different. They were well aware that they had everything and rather despised people who didn't seem to have as much as they had – including Paul. They're behaving as if they were already in heaven and looking down on those who haven't made it.

February 13th

I Corinthians 4 v9

Paul is only too conscious that he is not yet in heaven. He is working very hard for the Kingdom of God. He's preaching and performing miracles. He's undertaking arduous journeys and facing persecution for

the Gospel. So are other faithful workers of Christ. They are not to be disdained by those Christian life is easy, comfortable and immediately fulfilling. I reckon my life is pretty easy. So probably is your compared with what many people face in the world today. Remember them in your prayers.

February 14th (Ash Wednesday)

I Corinthians 4 vv 10-13

If you look at the racks of Valentine's Day cards, some of them are so explicit that one would not have thought that a person with any sensitivity would want either to send or receive them. Some of them are what I would regard as disgustingly mushy. I'm not trying to tell you what to think! Valentine's Day present tends to be soft things like flowers, sweets and cuddly toys. Another way of celebrating is an intimate dinner for two. This is one very important aspect of love – warm feelings, togetherness, the wish to be together always. Important as it is, however, this aspect of love is only a proportion of the totality. Real love, as St Paul says, includes the preparedness to endure hardship, insult and rejection. True love works hard. True love meets hatred with more love. It overcomes evil with good at the price of self-sacrifice.

February 15th

I Corinthians 4 vv 14-16

What's a disciple? A disciple is someone who learns from a master. A Christian disciple is someone whose Master is Christ. We learn from Him in order to become more like Him. But how are disciples made? This was discussed at a recent Archdeaconry Day and there are various possible answers. One answer is that we grow in knowledge of Christ. We study the Christian faith – the Bible, Church teaching, etc.. This is an intellectual approach to acquiring the mind of Christ. This is a good answer and we do well to grow in knowledge of the Gospel. It is, however, possible to know a lot about Jesus without knowing Him. Some professors of Theology are atheists! St Paul says he could understand all mysteries and all knowledge and still be nothing if he had no love. So another answer is that we grow as disciples by belonging to a loving community. This is the Church and part of our growth is to share in the love feast of Holy Communion with our fellow Christians. It might also mean belonging to a Sunday School, Bible Study or prayer or fellowship group. Another way of learning to be a

better disciple is to follow the examples and to enjoy the fellowship of Christians who are more mature than we are and whom we know we can trust. This is why Paul tells the Corinthians to follow him. He means them to follow him as he follows Jesus. He is not just boasting; he really is a better guide than some of the possibly more flamboyant guides they have been tempted to follow. And finally (for now) practice makes perfect.

February 16th

I Corinthians 4 vv 17-20

Practice makes perfect. I ran out of space yesterday. We are all called to be disciples of Christ to learn from Him and to become more like Him. Study the Scriptures. Pray. Enjoy Christian fellowship. Choose wise teachers to follow. If you really want to be a Christian disciple, however, you will have to practise Christian discipleship. Live lives of love for God, for one another in the church and for the world. Love the lovely and the unlovely because that is the love of our heavenly Father.

Now, to some extent, just like all churches, the Corinthian Church was failing to practise Christian discipleship. They had fallen out among themselves. They were paying attention to false teaching and declining to live by Christian standards. They thought they were too advanced to need to pay attention to a teacher like Paul and were “murmuring” against him as the children of Israel murmured against Moses in the wilderness. They felt emboldened because Paul was not actually there in Corinth. So Paul sent Timothy to sort things out. All the debates and discussions and arguments were in the end meaningless. The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power. It’s what the Holy Spirit does in and through the Church that matters, not our endless talking.

February 17th

I Corinthians 4 v21

Discipleship is about learning from the Master, but discipline is often associated in our minds with punishment, maybe, because a schoolmaster needs at least the threat of punishment to keep unruly pupils (or disciples) in order. Paul, here, warns that punishment (discipline in that sense) might be necessary in the Corinthian Church if it is the only way to restore the order which fosters true discipleship in love. Discipline is always a hard issue in a community of free people whose sole motivation is supposed to be self-sacrificial love.

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 18th (Lent 1)

I Corinthians 5 vv 1&2

Here are two ideas that can lead you astray. One is that, if we are saved by grace through faith and our works make no difference, it doesn't matter how we behave. So incest is OK for Christians! It shows that we're free of the constraints of the Law. We can do as we like because God loves us as we are and will forgive anything. Bring it on.

The other is that the only rule is love. So, if think that what we are doing is motivated by love, it must be good. We can sleep with our stepmother if we love her. We can steal from a bad person to give to the poor. We can give a child a savage beating because we believe it is for his own good. These ideas are perversions of the truth. It is true that God loves us as we are and that we are saved by grace through faith not works. We are set free from sin by God's grace. But we're set free from sin, not set free to sin. If we repent of our sins in faith, we seek God's grace to live good and virtuous lives. Moreover, love is the fulfilling of the Law. If we truly love, we keep God's commandments. It isn't loving to commit adultery or steal or whatever just because it makes us feel good. Love isn't only a feeling. It's a way of life. Jesus is the Way and the disciple walks in the footsteps of the Master. If you can't imagine Jesus doing it, don't do it.

O Lord, who for our sake didst fast forty days and forty nights: Give us grace to use such abstinence, that, our flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may ever obey thy godly motions in righteousness and true holiness, to thy honour and glory, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

February 19th

I Corinthians 5 vv 3&4

Authority belongs to the whole Church. It is another gift of God (John 20 vv 21-23). The local Church is part of the whole Church, the parish part of the diocese, the diocese part of the Church of England, the

Church of England part of *the whole state of Christ's Church militant here in earth*. The local Church therefore cannot decide itself just to disregard the rest of the Church and make up its own doctrines and rules. There may be variations between local churches to meet local different conditions. Different insights may be granted to different local churches but we cannot behave locally in a way which is inconsistent with the Body to which we belong.

February 20th

I Corinthians 5 vv 5-7

We remarked earlier how hard it is to deal with discipline in the Church - a community of free men and women whose sole motivation is supposed to be love. What do you do with those who break the rule of love? The local Church may be damaged by unloving people, people who break the rules, create divisions, undermine the leadership. Can bad people be allowed to harm the fellowship of a Church and render its ministry in the community less effective? If we threw out of the Church everyone who fails to reach the highest standard, there would only be Jesus left. We all have our faults, some of them serious. Part of the Church's ministry is to help us poor sinners to become better people. If people don't respond to kindness, some kind of punishment may be unavoidable, but the intention must always be to bring the sinner back into the paths of righteousness, not to condemn him for ever to outer darkness. If people prove impossible to love back into fellowship, excommunication may be necessary as a last resort to prevent damage to the Church. The underlying principle must always be love, but that may not mean letting bad people get away with things just to avoid a confrontation. It isn't good for them to be allowed to continue in sin. It isn't good for the Church.

February 21st

I Corinthians 5 vv 7&8

If you use the order for Mattins from the 1662 Prayer Book, you say Psalm 95 (the Venite) every day except Easter. At Easter, instead you say or sing the Easter Anthems of which these verses form a part.

CHRIST our passover is sacrificed for us : therefore let us keep the feast; Not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness : but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 1 Cor. v. 7

Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more : death

hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once : but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin : but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Rom. vi. 9*

Christ is risen from the dead : and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death : by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die : even so in Christ shall all be made alive. 1 *Cor. xv. 20.*

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. *Amen.*

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything for ever. We are participants in His Resurrection. Our lives on earth reflect who we are, the Easter people. In Lent we prepare for Easter. On earth we prepare for heaven.

February 22nd

I Corinthians 5 vv 9-13

You can judge a man by the company he keeps, according to Aesop's fables. So what kind of company ought Christians to keep? Parents may well worry about their children keeping bad company. We are easily influenced by other people. The Church ought to be a community which makes us better people. It ought to be a loving fellowship whose members are seeking together the grace to be good people. Yet, you can't go out into the world without meeting all kinds of people – good and bad alike. You couldn't live any kind of normal life if you restricted all your relationships to good people. Moreover, we wouldn't achieve much for Christ in the world if we didn't mix with all sorts of people. Jesus was notorious for mixing with publicans and sinners. God so loved the world that he sent Jesus. Jesus commissions the Church to complete the work God sent Him to do. How can we redeem the world if we don't mix with the world? So how can we go out into the world without becoming worldly people or lapsing back into worldliness? How can we avoid becoming birds of the same feather as the birds we flock with? The answer (as it was for Jesus) is our

relationship with God. It is our love for God which protects us from the world's influence, His grace working within us. It is because we love God that we love everyone. It is because we love God that we seek to be like Him rather than the people we meet in the world. So we need the means of grace: prayer, the Bible, Holy Communion and the fellowship of the Church. The church community therefore has to be a place where sinners are loved but sin is not acceptable.

February 23rd

I Corinthians 6 vv 1-8

The Church is God's creation. She is a divine institution. Nevertheless, she is made up of human beings with all their weaknesses and foibles. She is an institution along with many other institutions in society – charities, public bodies, commercial institutions, etc.. She is subject to the law of the land and many of the rules which apply to secular institutions also apply to the Church. In NT times, there was a clear distinction between the Church and the world. The Church was a minority grouping in a pagan empire. In countries like ours, where the Church is established and a large proportion of the population claim to be Christian, the lines are more blurred. In some circumstances, Acts of Synod, like Acts of Parliament, change the law of the land. There are also church courts and canon law has the same status as statute law. The Church of England can be very legalistic, despite the fact that we claim to be not under law, but under grace. Paul is warning the Corinthian Christians here about the dangers of relying on secular law, on the state, to enforce their own rights. It's not good for the Church's reputation if Christians resort to the pagan or secular state to assert their rights. Christians ought to treat one another graciously rather than legalistically. It's better to be defrauded than to insist on your legal rights against a Christian brother. It's like this business of enforcing discipline in a loving community of free people. It ought not to be necessary to resort to law to get people to do the right thing. Sometimes it's better to put up with being wronged than to enforce your rights in a way which is unbecoming a Christian.

February 24th (S Matthias 1662)

I Corinthians 6 vv 9&10

This is another one of those days when you get into trouble if, like me, you use both the 1662 and Common Worship lectionaries. One year, helping out in different churches, I kept S Matthias twice. In CW his

day falls 14th May. Judas betrayed Christ and went off and killed himself. I feel sure that even he would have been welcomed back if he had returned to Jesus, but he didn't. Matthias was chosen in his place. We need good leaders and teachers in the Church. Paul lists a number of sins which, if unrepented of, would disqualify us from the Kingdom of God. Faith sets us free from sin. It doesn't set us free to sin. We are called to be Christ-like people. For many centuries, the sins Paul refers to here would have been regarded as very serious wrong-doing. Nowadays, some of them are regarded as not all that serious. Others are regarded by some as not sins at all, even something to celebrate. Was Paul wrong? Was he right for his own day, but things are different in the world in which we now live? Was Paul right for all time and in every culture so that what would have been a serious sin in C1 Corinth is still a serious sin today? As these issues are debated in the C of E and the Church more widely, as we look to our bishops and other clergy and our synods for guidance, we need good and wise leadership. For this we pray.

O 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 always preserved from false Apostles, may be ordered and guided by faithful and true pastors; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

February 25th (Lent 2)

I Corinthians 6 v11

We might think that there is no place in our fellowship for people who have been really bad. We know we're all sinners, but we tend to think that our own sins aren't so serious as some other people's. We're probably not murderers, thieves or adulterers. Any lies we tell are little white ones. But, whatever, people's past, God welcomes us back. It's the lost sheep the Good Shepherd goes looking for, not the 99 in the fold. People might have been all the things Paul lists, but they are welcome to be members of the Church on exactly the same terms as everyone else – faith and repentance. It is God Who makes us holy, whether our sins were spectacular ones or boring sins like yours and mine. We all depend utterly on God.

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 26th

I Corinthians 6 vv 12&13

All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient.

This follows from our being not under the law, but under grace. We are free. We have been set free from sin and the power of death. We have no reason to be afraid. We are not slaves to the devil. Neither are slaves to the law. You don't make people good by weighing them down with feelings of guilt or threatening them with punishment. You might stop them behaving badly or force them to behave well, but you don't make them good people. What makes us good is the love of God, forgiving our sins, imputing righteousness. Being set free from sin and the fear of death, we are free to be good people. Good people live well. So it's not expedient for us to do all those sinful things we now know to be both enslaving and destructive. Neither is it expedient for us to fail to seize the opportunities our freedom presents us with to do good.

1. There is a green hill
far away
Without a city wall,
Where the dear Lord
was crucified,
Who died to save us
all.

He hung and suffered
there.

To pay the price of
sin.

2. We may not know,
we cannot tell,
What pains He had to
bear;
But we believe it was
for us

3. He died that we
might be forgiv'n,
He died to make us
good,
That we might go at
last to heav'n
Saved by His precious
blood.

He only could unlock
the gate
Of heav'n, and let us
in.

4. There was no other
good enough

5. O, dearly, dearly
has He loved,
And we must love
Him too,
And trust in His
redeeming blood,
And try His works to
do.

February 27th

I Corinthians 6 vv 14-20

I've often thought that the Church seems to be harsher on sexual sin than on other kinds of sin. Is it fair to be more judgmental of an adulterer than a thief? We seem to be much more strict about divorce than we are about dishonesty. I suppose Paul is saying here that sexual sin is so much more fundamental to our nature. There is an intimacy about it – a becoming one flesh. Perhaps it reflects more on the people we are or might become than other kinds of sin. I'm not sure, but it is certainly true that we are both one with Christ & temples of the Holy Spirit and that our calling is to act accordingly.

February 28th

I Corinthians 7 vv 1-11

All this is quite tricky. Here is what I think Paul is saying. It is good to be single and celibate. Our relationship with God is more than sufficient for us. If we have special responsibilities in the Church, it might be better not to marry because we might not be able to be fair to a family if we're required to work long hours, travel far from home and perhaps get into danger. It might be unwise to marry if persecution is likely. Some people might not marry because they believe that the end will soon come and earthly relationships will be swallowed up in the heavenly.

However, human love, sexual love, is very important. Not all are called to be single and celibate. There is no sin in marrying. Marry the person you love if that is what you want to. Don't be guilty of fornication. Don't commit adultery. Cleave to your wife. Support your daughter in marrying a good husband if that is what she wants. Live a normal married life. Christians aren't expected to remain celibate within marriage, but respect one another's needs and desires. If you marry, marry a Christian. If you become a Christian after you marry and your husband and wife doesn't become a Christian, don't leave them. Try to be faithful to Christ and to your husband or wife. If you can't help but leave them, don't marry somebody else and be reconciled if you can.

March 1st

I Corinthians 7 vv 12-16

If you're already married when you become a Christian, stick with your family. You may consecrate your spouse and children. If they leave you, you're free. Paul doesn't say you're free to live a single life or free to remarry. Jesus only gives adultery as a ground for divorce. The

implication in His teaching seems to be that you ought not to re-marry. Certainly, the ideal is that husband and wife become one flesh. God joins them together. No man should put them asunder. They make lifelong vows of unconditional love. The relationship between husband and wife is like that between Christ and the church – undying, unconditional, self-sacrificial love. That is how it is meant to be. How we sort out the consequences when we sinners fail to live up to the standard is another matter and we haven't yet found a way of maintaining the standard while being compassionate to those who fail.

March 2nd

I Corinthians 7 v4

I'm going back to this because I've been thinking a lot lately about I Peter 3 v7, which refers to the wife as the *weaker vessel*. There have been all these complaints about men making unwanted advances to women, actual sexual assaults and even rape. Now I suppose I was brought up to think of the woman as the *weaker vessel*. Women needed special care and protection. You didn't hit girls. You carried their bags, walked on the outside of the pavement and offered them your seat on the bus. You respected women and treated them the way that you would hope other men would treat your sister or your mother. I'm not saying I always lived up to this, but this is the way I was brought up. Then came the sexual revolution. Women were the same as men – proud, independent. They were in control of their bodies and their lives. It was an insult to treat with women with special respect because they were the *weaker vessel*. And yet now, all these complaints about men who don't respect women and use their greater physical strength or the power they enjoy because of their wealth or status within an organisation to make unwelcome demands. Can you be both proud and independent and demand special respect because you are the *weaker vessel*? Peter and Paul regard women as different and complementary in a way which grates with much modern thinking. (Peter reminds us that Sarah called Abraham, "Lord".) What do you think?

March 3rd

I Corinthians 8 vv 1-13

This is much more straightforward than it looks. The underlying principle is always love. What builds your brother up or drags him down? If you're smarter or more mature than other people, do you take advantage of your gifts to make them feel small? Do you think that you

are better than they are? Do you assert your rights at the cost of causing other people distress? Do you make yourself look better by making other people look worse. The context is that most of the meat on general sale would have been offered in sacrifice to false gods. Some Christians took the attitude that these false gods were nothing and so it didn't matter to eat what was offered to them. Others thought that it would compromise their loyalty to Christ if they ate idols' food. What matters, Paul says, is not what you have for dinner, but the effect of what you do on your brother's faith, your brother for whom Christ died.

March 4th (Lent 3)

I Corinthians 9 vv 1-9

“Where did I go wrong? Parents are sometimes forced to ask that question. So are teachers and politicians. Probably we all are sometimes. “Where did I go wrong?” Ministers of religion may well ask that question? Why isn't my church full? Why do even the congregation pay so little attention to what I say? Why is it that some people don't seem to like me? Paul is disappointed in the disloyalty of some of the Christians at Corinth. He doesn't think he has gone wrong. He might seem to be less prestigious than a Peter or a James who had actually known Jesus in the flesh. Ironically, some people despised him because he didn't charge for his services. They only respected those who were paid for their ministry. (Paul points out that ministers are entitled to be paid, but he had chosen not to, and that shouldn't be held against him.) So “Where did I go wrong?” Sometimes, like Paul, you didn't go wrong. There might well not have been a church at Corinth without Paul. You did your duty as minister, parent, teacher or politician and your obtuse congregation, children, pupils or public refused to co-operate through stupidity or obstinacy. Sometimes, however, we did go wrong. It's important to decide honestly whether you really are doing the right thing. If you are, stick to it no matter that other people don't respond as they should. If you're doing it wrong, be humble enough to admit it. Sometimes the obstinate parishioners, children, pupils or general public are right!

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 5th

I Corinthians 9 vv 9-14

Normally, ministers are to be supported by their congregations. That does raise the question, at what level should they be supported? It seems unreasonable if a minister is kept in relative luxury out of the offerings of the poor. But is it honouring to God if a rich congregation expect their minister to live in poverty? If there is much difference in what different churches pay, some ministers might be attracted to the better paying parishes for worldly reasons and some might be genuinely unable to minister in poor churches because they have families to feed.

March 6th

I Corinthians 9 vv 15-18

Whatever we decide about remuneration, the point is to preach the Gospel. If we are called to do that, we just can't not do it. Paul supported himself as a tentmaker. We have self supporting ministers in the Church today, people who do another job they are paid for and minister in their (I nearly wrote *spare*) free time. Sometimes self-supporting ministry is the right way, but ministry isn't a spare time occupation. It is a full time occupation which demands our all. It is likely that the poorest areas need the most from their ministers. So it would be a mistake to think that self-supporting ministers would do for poor churches and pay "full time" clergy only for the places which could afford them. So we all pay into the diocese which then tries to deploy ministers according to need rather than ability to pay. Worth remembering when we are making our own offerings and praying for wisdom for bishops and others in senior positions who have to make these decisions.

March 7th

I Corinthians 9 vv 19-23

O GOD, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom; Defend us thy humble servants in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in thy defence, may not fear the power of any adversaries, through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

I say this collect every day. It contains the paradox that God's service is perfect freedom. In our reading today, Paul describes serving all me as a natural consequence of being free. It's the same paradox. To serve God is the same thing as serving people and this service is perfect

freedom. You can be a slave to sin and death. You can be a slave to the devil. You can be a slave to material things, such as wealth, power and status, the opinion of other people. Faith in Christ sets us free from all such slavery. Freedom doesn't, however, mean leading an aimless life with nothing much to do but pursue leisure activities, passing the time until we die. Perfect freedom is the freedom to accomplish what we were made for, the service of God and world which He has made.

To that end, Paul makes every effort to meet people where they are and to share the Good News with them. What is your vocation & ministry?

March 8th

I Corinthians 9 vv 24-27

Running is fun. Exercise does make you feel good so long as you don't overdo it. It's one of those odd things about human beings that we often feel too lazy to exercise and, as a result, miss out on the good feeling it gives us and become progressively fatter and less fit. Why do people drive short distances when they could walk? There is also pleasure in competition, though not if you become obsessed with winning and think the less of people who, having tried their utmost, are still *also rans*. Paul, however, points out that there is something a great deal more important than bodily exercise and athletic competition. It demands much greater dedication than taking part in the Olympics and there won't be only one gold medallist. We can all win. Christ has set us free. Christ has assigned us our calling and supplied us with the wherewithal (the gifts of the Holy Spirit) in order to fulfil it. We surely wouldn't put less effort into following Jesus than we'd put into running the 100m or getting an A in A level physics!

Fight the good fight with all thy
might;

Christ is thy Strength, and
Christ thy Right;

Lay hold on life, and it shall be
Thy joy and crown eternally.

Run the straight race through
God's good grace,
Lift up thine eyes, and seek His
face;
Life with its way before us lies,
Christ is the Path, and Christ
the Prize.

Cast care aside, upon thy
Guide,

Lean, and His mercy will
provide;

Lean, and the trusting soul
shall prove

Christ is its Life, and Christ its
Love.

Faint not nor fear, His arms are
near,

He changeth not, and thou art
dear.

Only believe, and thou shalt

see

That Christ is all in all to thee.

March 9th

I Corinthians 10 vv 1-10

Too many Christians think that you can understand the NT without knowing the OT or even that the NT is contrary to the OT. Christ came to fulfil the Law, not to abolish it. Paul here is warning us against complacency. We are like the people in the Old Testament. If we aren't faithful to God, we are on the road which leads to destruction. They passed through the waters of the Red Sea, just as we pass through the waters of Baptism. They were protected and led by the pillar of fire and smoke just as we are protected and led by the Holy Spirit. God gave them bread and fresh, life-giving water in the desert, as He feeds us on the Body and Blood of Christ. Yet for all the blessings God poured out upon them, some of them worshipped false gods, some of them were guilty of gross immorality, they doubted God and rebelled against the ministers He sent them. And, as result, of the generation which left Egypt, only two of them – Joshua and Caleb – actually made it to the Promised Land. Paul is saying that the same thing could happen to us if we disparage our Baptism, Holy Communion, the gifts of the Spirit and the Word of God and therefore live just as if we were unredeemed.

March 10th

I Corinthians 10 vv 11-14

Of course there are two wrong ways of looking at this. One is the complacent. God is like Father Christmas. He doesn't really mean it when He says that bad people might not get the good things they're counting on. No, God is just. We shall all be judged and we should all get what we deserved if God were not also merciful. But mercy doesn't mean discounting or forgetting injustice. It means recognising and dealing with it. God doesn't sweep our failings under the carpet. He brings them out into the light and overcomes sin through Christ's perfect love in dying on the Cross. We are saved because God takes what we are like very seriously and truly loves us, not because He doesn't care how badly we let Him down and other people down and ourselves down. He doesn't discount our unworthiness to enter His Presence. He graciously opens His Heart to us and deals with it and lets us in.

The other mistake is to think it is all too difficult. Far from being complacent about reaching the Promised Land, however little effort we make, we can think it is impossible. It is beyond us. We are just too weak and sinful. But here, in this chapter, is one of the most precious promises in the Bible. God will not tempt us beyond what we can bear. We are never tested beyond reason. The wilderness may be barren, but we have God's Presence with us, His Word, the Sacraments, the Holy Spirit. We are never alone and we shall never be overcome so long as we trust in Him. He is with us now and He will lead us home.

March 11th (Lent 4, Mothering Sunday)

I Corinthians 10 vv 15-17

Those of you who've been going to Church as long as I have may remember when the Church of England revived the custom of passing the peace. If I remember rightly, it was in the 1960s when we first had the Series 2 Communion service. These words of St Paul were used to introduce the Peace. It was controversial then (and still is to some extent) to have people at this point moving round the church, shaking hands or hugging or showing their love in some other ritualistic way. Some of us don't much like being touched. Some of us feel that our love is better expressed in practical actions (like carrying an old person's shopping) than in ritual gestures. Some of us just think it distracts from a properly reverent atmosphere just as we are coming to the most important part of the service.

But leave all that aside. The thinking behind it was to recover the sense that we are all one in the Lord, one body, the Body of Christ. It is possible to think of oneself as "making my communion". We may well sit apart in a large church (I'm an offender in this) and come up to the altar rail for what we see as our personal, individual interaction with God. We do relate to God as individuals, but we're not on our own. If God is our Father, all Christians are our brothers and sisters. If we are members of Christ, we are members of one another. Our communion is not only with God; it is with all Christian people. Indeed, the God we interact with is both one and three. God is three persons in one, one in eternal love. We are the family of God. We cannot be at one with God if we are not at one with all His people. "Love one another as I have loved you."

The human family reflects this eternal reality. We are children of the same heavenly Father. The Church is the Bride of Christ. What binds us all together is love.

GRANT, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

March 12th

I Corinthians 10 vv 18-22

The Last Supper was a fellowship meal. Jesus ate with His disciples. It is special to eat together. That is why it is significant that Jesus ate with publicans and sinners – the sort of people that respectable people didn't eat with. It is why it is significant that Paul the Jew, and former Pharisee, ate with gentiles. We eat with our families and our friends. We enjoy romantic dinners with our lovers. The people of Israel are the people who eat the Passover meal together. We eat with the people we belong with. In a sense, eating the meat of a sacrifice is eating with God in the Old Testament or, in the case of pagan sacrifices, with the pagan gods. Those who eat the sacrifice are enjoying table fellowship with their God or gods. We enjoy table fellowship with Jesus in Holy Communion, in which He is the sacrifice and the priest. What Paul is saying here, is that we can't have fellowship with pagan gods and with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. If we worship (offer our lives in the service of) pagan gods or demons, we cannot also worship Jesus. This is as true if what we live for is money or power or material goods or any selfish desire as it is true if we worship actual idols. It is still true if we effectively worship the devil by behaving towards other people in an unloving way. That is why we have to be in love and charity with our neighbour when we come to the Lord's Supper.

Alleluia! bread of heaven,
here on earth our food and
stay!

Alleluia! here the sinful
flee to thee from day to day.
Intercessor, Friend of sinners,
earth's Redeemer, plead for me.
Where the songs of all the
sinless sweep across the crystal

Alleluia! King eternal,
thee the Lord of lords we own;
Alleluia! born of Mary,
earth thy footstool, heaven thy
throne.

Thou within the veil hast
entered, robed in flesh, our
great High Priest.
Thou on earth both Priest and
Victim in the Eucharistic Feast.

March 13th

I Corinthians 10 vv 23-33

So, basically, what Paul is saying is don't worry that your meat might have been offered to idols. They're nothing. So it doesn't matter. Just enjoy it and thank the one true God for it. If, on the other hand, you're specifically invited to partake of an idolatrous meal, refuse. But, above all, avoid giving offence to other Christians who might misunderstand your freedom and think that you are condoning idolatry.

March 14th

I Corinthians 11 v1

We are disciples needing a teacher. Our Teacher, our Master is Christ. He is the one Whom we follow. He may send us others to guide us – Christian parents or teachers, ministers of religion, faithful members of our churches whom we look up to – but we follow them just so far as they follow Christ.

March 15th

I Corinthians 11 vv 2-16

This is where it gets controversial. Paul's teaching is that God made men and women different. Men and women are both created in the same way in the image of God. Men and women are redeemed in the same way by the Blood of Christ. Men and women need one another, but, in Paul's teaching, they are different. Men and women have different roles both in the Church and in the world and, generally speaking, leadership is expected to be exercised by men. Notwithstanding this, there are very powerful women in the bible, including some who worked with Paul and took a prominent role in the mission of the Churches Paul was concerned with. So, do we conclude from this that this is how things should be for all time: that the husband is head of the house; that men should normally take the lead in the Church; that society as a whole should be structured around men predominantly taking some roles and women predominantly taking others? Or have we now ironed out the differences by giving girls and boys the same education, inventing technology which makes it possible for Dad to feed baby on infant formula while Mum kills her country's

enemies with remote controlled drones, and safe effective contraception releases women from repeated pregnancies? In the modern world, are men and women equally suited to every role in the Church and the world? And do they really want to be?

March 16th

I Corinthians 11 vv 17-31

The Sunday Eucharist is fundamental to what it means to be a Christian community. It is our fellowship meal with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, with one another in the same building and with the whole holy, catholic and apostolic Church on earth and in heaven. It is a love feast, an agape meal. The only way to take part is in love charity with our neighbours. Anything less insults our Host and dooms us. In Paul's day it was a full meal. For us, it is just a little bread and wine, but it's the same principle.

March 17th (S Patrick)

I Corinthians 12 vv 1-3

I've just been reading an interesting book by a guy called Ken Wilson. He is a pastor in one of the Vineyard churches and he writes about how they came to be founded about 40 years ago. On the one hand, you had the Pentecostals and Charismatics who seemed to be obsessed with speaking in tongues and other ecstatic experiences of God, who expected miracles as a routine aspect of church life and who looked all the time for signs and wonders to accompany the preaching of the Word. On the other hand, you had the mainstream institutional churches which seemed to have given up on spiritual experiences. Worship was boringly sober. Miracles weren't expected at all. Sermons had degenerated into lectures or cosy chats. The founders of Vineyard thought there must be a third way which expected God to act in exciting and surprising ways, that we could really feel His Presence with us, but without losing our grip on logic and common sense reality. The Corinthians appear to have been obsessed with ecstatic experiences and to have become irrational, failing to see how what we believe fundamentally alters the way we behave. Love is a surer mark of a relationship with God than the ability to speak in tongues. But there is much more to loving than merely always doing the right thing. Love is both rational and emotional, both steadfast and exciting. If you read the legends of S Patrick, his motivation is love and his ministry includes both miracles and sound, logical teaching.

March 18th (Lent 5, Passion Sunday)

I Corinthians 12 vv 3-7

When you look around in church, what do you see? Who are all these people? What about the Christians we meet when we attend other services or meetings? What about the ones we see on TV – bishops and other leaders, self-appointed spokesmen, meetings of synod, etc.? Who are all these people. They're a funny lot, aren't they? And they probably think that we're a funny lot too. But if they know Jesus as their Lord, they have the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is giving them the gifts they need to do the work God has for every one of us to do. The Holy Spirit is making them the people they are.

WE beseech thee, Almighty God, mercifully to look upon thy people; that by thy great goodness they may be governed and preserved evermore, both in body and soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

March 19th (S Joseph transferred)

I Corinthians 12 vv 8-11

It is relatively new in the Church of England to have a special day for S Joseph, the husband of Mary. Usually, it is 18th March, but Lent 5 is too important to miss out as part of our preparation for Easter and so Joseph is transferred to Monday this year. We think of Joseph as a husband, caring for Mary and her Baby and the rest of the family. As we think of Joseph, we think of men and the responsibilities they have for their households in the world today. Like Joseph and Mary, some of them are in danger from tyrants and some have to flee their countries in order to keep their families safe. We think of the challenges Joseph faced as it was revealed to him that Mary's baby would be the Son of God and we remember the responsibilities which any man whose wife is having a baby takes up. We think of Joseph the carpenter and remember all those who work for a living. Husbands, fathers and workers are all called by God. God supplies them with the gifts that they need. We pray that husbands, fathers and workers may know Jesus so that they know to Whom to turn in all their responsibilities.

March 20th

I Corinthians 12 vv 12-31

It sticks in my mind that, as a server probably in my teens, I read this epistle at S Matthew's Wigmore at an 8.00 Communion service. It must have been the 10th Sunday after Trinity. This came back to me when I read the same Epistle taking Communion to a resident of the Abbeyfield which is just behind S Matthew's. I think it sticks in my

mind because it is so very important. We all belong. We are all equally valuable. We're not to look down on other people nor to look up at them as better than we are. There are no first and second class Christians. All the baptised are called to follow Christ wholeheartedly. There are ordained ministers like me, but every baptised person is a minister. The word means servant. We are all servants of Christ, servants of one another, servants of God's world. Jesus is the quintessential Servant. We have different callings in Christ, but it is the same Spirit, Who enables us to fulfil our callings, whatever they may be. We are one with each other in that same Spirit. We share one another's joys and we share one another's sorrows. We are here for one another. God has made us all different because we have different functions to fulfil, but never believe that you are any less vital than any other member of the Church.

March 21st (The First Day of Spring, Thomas Cranmer) I Corinthians 13 vv 1-3
For many people, this is their favourite chapter in the Bible. We're asked for it at weddings and funerals and, like the Lord's Prayer, it is always appropriate. I liked that we have go there on the first day of Spring. Spring brings light and warmth and growth. And that's what love does.

March 22nd I Corinthians 13 vv 4-7
In yesterday's verses, Paul said that he could do all kinds of wonderful things, but they would be without value if he had no love. In today's verses, he tells us what kind of behaviour you can expect from a loving person. Works follow from faith. Fruit grows out of love. A robot could do good things if it were so programmed, but that wouldn't make it a Christian. The character of a Christian is love and that is why, by the grace of God, we live in the manner described in these verses. Our resources to do so come only from God.

March 23rd I Corinthians 13 vv 8-10
On earth, we need faith and hope, but we shan't need them when we see God in heaven. On earth, we have a limited knowledge of God and of everything else. On earth, we need preachers and teachers, prophets even, but, like us, they only have part of the story. In heaven we shall know God as He is and all these partial things will be swallowed up in

completeness. Love, however, is for ever. God is love. Love is eternal. The love which we have now is an authentic foretaste of the love that shall be ours eternally.

1 Gracious Spirit, Holy Ghost,
taught by thee, we covet most
of thy gifts at Pentecost,
holy, heavenly love.

2 Love is kind, and suffers
long,
love is meek, and thinks no
wrong,
love than death itself more
strong;
therefore give us love.

3 Prophecy will fade away,
melting in the light of day;
love will ever with us stay;
therefore give us love.

March 24th

4 Faith will vanish into sight;
hope be emptied in delight;
love in heaven will shine more
bright;

therefore give us love.
5 Faith and hope and love we
see
joining hand in hand agree;
but the greatest of the three,
and the best, is love.

6 From the overshadowing
of thy gold and silver wing
shed on us, who to thee sing,
holy, heavenly love.

I Corinthians 13 vv 11-13

I had a bit of a shock at a wedding recently. The lady reading this passage said, *When I became a woman*, where Paul wrote, *When I became a man*. I'm always shocked when people change Scripture. The Bible says what it says whether we like it or not and it is the Word of the Lord even if we have trouble understanding what He is saying to us through it today. Paul's analogy here is that, just as we understand a great deal more now we are grown up than we did when we were children, so we shall understand immeasurably more when we get to heaven than we do now. I suppose it works just as well for women and girls as it does for men and boys, but still! Perhaps we'd better focus on the other analogy Paul offers for the same truth. It will be like seeing the real thing rather than an image in a mirror (which you can see, but can't smell, hear or touch and is, in any case, the wrong way round). Or perhaps, if we want to bring Paul up to date. Heaven as compared to earth will be like actually being on a sunny beach rather than your avatar being in a virtual reality sunny beach on your computer.

March 25th (Palm Sunday)

I Corinthians 14 vv 1&2

Paul's concern is that people should understand the Word of God. We'll come back to that later in the chapter. It is better that people should speak intelligibly than that they should speak ecstatically –

talking in tongues of which the meaning is only made known if there is an interpreter. But for today, let's just think what it would mean to know the Word of God. The Word of God is made flesh. The Word of God dies on the Cross. The best way to understand the Word of God is to know Jesus and what he has done for us.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who, of thy tender love towards mankind, hast sent thy Son, our Saviour 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 26th (Monday in Holy Week)

I Corinthians 14 vv 4-19

If, like me, you've had anything to do with Charismatic or Pentecostal Christians, you probably know this chapter very well. It's the only chapter in the Bible which says very much about speaking in tongues, which is a gift that Pentecostals and Charismatics rate very highly. It's a phenomenon which occurs at several places in the Bible – Old and New Testaments and at times in church history. People have this experience of speaking to God – praise or sometimes lamentation – in a language which other people mostly cannot understand. This gift was obviously very highly valued in Corinth and people spoke or sung in tongues in their public worship. Now Paul says the point is to build the Church – to make Christians better Christians and to add to their number whom the Lord is calling. As was made clear in the last chapter, the Church must be built in love. It's not loving to show off with a gift which other people don't have. It's not loving to talk in a way that people can't understand. It's not loving if you behave in such a way that people thinking about becoming Christians think you're all mad. So Paul counsels how this genuine gift of the Spirit may be used in love to build the Church. The same would, of course, be true for any gifts which God has given us. They are not to be used selfishly, divisively, dismissively or destructively. Our gifts are given to us to build the Church in love – whether preaching, leading the music, singing in the

choir, keeping the building tidy and in good order, arranging the flowers or making the tea.

March 27th (Tuesday in Holy Week)

I Corinthians 14 vv 20-40

Prophecy would be delivering the word of God. This would be in a language that people could understand. So long as it was the authentic word, it would edify the Church in love. Unknown tongues might be a witness to those outside that they don't belong. So, Paul says everything should be done decently and in order to build the congregation in love and to welcome those who come seeking the Truth. Even in Churches which are not charismatic like the Church at Corinth, it is desirable that things should be done decently and in order, which means allowing the leader to lead. It doesn't help the atmosphere of worship if people who think they know better try steer the service in a different way from those appointed to lead: pace, silence, reverence, music, etc..

March 28th (Wednesday in Holy Week)

I Corinthians 15 vv 1-11

It seems like we're anticipating Easter here, but note that Paul comes to the Resurrection via the Death and Burial of Jesus. The Resurrection isn't the happy ending which makes it as though the Death hadn't taken place. It's a mistake to miss out on the services of Holy Week, especially of Good Friday, and go straight to Easter Sunday. Jesus is with us in the valley of the shadow of death. His Death atones for our sins. We are buried with Christ in Baptism. We take up our cross and follow Him. Bad things happen in the world, even to good people. God deals with evil by the self-sacrificial Crucifixion of Jesus. We all die. God overcomes death through the Death of His Son. We are all tempted by the devil. The devil is defeated by the Cross. The Crucifixion is very real. It alters the whole course of the history of the universe. It changes the destiny of Creation, reconciling this sinful world to its infinitely holy Creator. The Resurrection proclaims what the Cross has achieved. We come to the empty tomb via Calvary. We experience the joy of eternal life in Him because Jesus has destroyed Death on the Cross. The one follows naturally from the other.

March 29th (Maundy Thursday)

I Corinthians 15 vv 12-19

At His Last Supper, Jesus prayed that His Church should be one. He gave us His new commandment, that we should love one another as He has loved us. He instituted the Holy Communion so that, as often as we eat and drink these holy mysteries, we proclaim His Death in the Presence of the Risen Christ and in anticipation of eternal life in Him. Yet some of the Corinthians apparently doubted the resurrection and this had become a source of division among them. How quickly we give up the insights which God has given to us! Paul reminds them of the testimony of Scripture. He reminds them of the evidence of eye witnesses to the Resurrection. He draws their attention back to the experience that the contemporary Church has of the risen Christ in our midst. He reminds them of our sure and certain hope for the resurrection of those who sleep in Him. He points to the absurdity of claiming to be a Christian if we don't believe these things. We might have got very little out of the materialism and sin which ruled us before we became Christians, but, if Christ isn't risen, there isn't anything else but materialism and sin and we were fools to give them up!

March 30th (Good Friday)

I Corinthians 15 vv 20-26

These verses also form part of the Easter Anthems. Christ's death has conquered death. He is risen from the dead. All those who come to Him in repentance and faith are dead to sin and are living in the Holy Spirit, living the eternal life of Christ, "changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place." This is the truth we mark today and are proclaiming to the world.

ALMIGHTY God, we beseech thee graciously to behold this thy family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was contented to be betrayed, and given up into the hands of wicked men, and to suffer death upon the cross, who now liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

March 31st

I Corinthians 15 vv 27-58

I Corinthians 15 vv 20-58 is the reading provided for the Burial Service in the 1662 BCP. It's a long and complicated reading and it doesn't always seem to me to be the best one to use at a funeral. It is a splendid reading, however.

We've already seen how Jesus has conquered death on the Cross and opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers through His Resurrection, Ascension and by sending the Holy Spirit. This is His final victory over the last enemy, which is death. He will come again in glory and we shall see Him as He is. We shall know as we are known and, by his grace, we shall be made like Him.

Nobody really knows what Paul meant by being baptised for the dead. Whatever it means, there is hope even in the grave. That hope is in Jesus Christ. We are buried with Him in Baptism so that we might rise with Him in glory.

It is this perspective that in Christ we have conquered death which enables us to live the Christian life, putting sin to death, mortifying the flesh with its lusts and following Jesus, even, if necessary, to wear a martyr's crown.

The resurrection is hard to understand, but so are many other things which God has created. The seeds we plant look dead, but, in the power of God, they grow and bear fruit. There are different kinds of plants and different kinds of animal. In the same way, our resurrection body is different from our natural body. To say that human beings cannot live eternally because our bodies die makes no more sense than to say that animals can't live in water because the ones we know of would drown. We'd only say that if we knew as little about fish and whales, etc. as we do about the resurrection body. Just as the moon, the sun and the other stars are different from the earth, our spiritual bodies will be different from our natural bodies and much more glorious.

We're all like Adam – of the earth, earthy, mortal, sinful. But God recreates us in Christ by grace through faith. We are made like Jesus, heavenly, immortal, free from sin.

You could start reading at v50. What follows is not for me to comment on. It's for all of us to exalt in.

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.*