

September 30th

Revelation 5

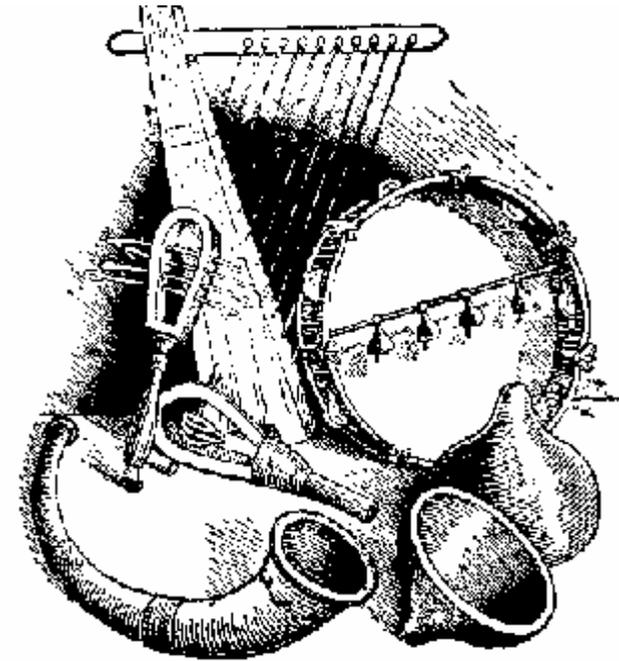
There is a hymn based on Revelation 4 & 5. For some reason *Songs of Fellowship* only has the first verse based on Rev 4. The fact that *Mission Praise* has both verses, based on chapters 4&5 sometimes makes me borrow the books from Halling to use at the Cuxton service. God is worthy of all the worship we can offer Him for His mighty works in Creation. God is also worthy of all the worship we can offer Him for His mighty works in Redemption. Chapter 4 describes John's vision of heaven gathered around the Throne of our Creator God. He is not permitted to see God, but he sees the works of God & the response of God's heavenly Creation to Who God is. In Revelation 5, John describes things which are a little bit easier for us to grasp. The book is God's plan for the creation & its redemption in Christ – a book of justice & mercy & therefore of love. The key to this plan is Jesus. He fulfils all the OT prophecies. He is the King, the Messiah, the One in Whom the promises to David are fulfilled. He is the Good Shepherd Who lays down His life for the sheep & yet He is also the slaughtered Lamb. The Lamb stands as it has been slain. Christ is risen. He is one with the sevenfold Spirit of God. All power is given to Him on earth & in heaven. The prayers of the saints (Christian people on earth) are heard in heaven. Our praises resound around the Throne of God. & why? Because Christ the King, our great High Priest, has by the sacrifice of Himself once offered on the Cross, made us kings & priests to sing God's praises in all eternity. The Truth sets us free. We are at one with the Resurrection & the Life. Our praises join with myriads of angels & with the whole creation to worship the Creator & the Lamb, to worship the Father, the Son & the Holy Ghost. & so we are fulfilled & we fulfil our vocation to be fully human, because this is what we were made for. The psalms put into words what it is to be human in relationship with God & with one another & with God's Creation today.

Revelation sets who & what we are in the context of eternal Love.

Thou art worthy, Thou art worthy,
 Thou art worthy, O Lord,
 To receive glory, glory and honour, and
 pow'r;
 For Thou has created, hast all things
 created,
 Thou hast created all things,
 And for Thy pleasure they are created:
 Thou art worthy, O Lord!

Thou art worthy, Thou art worthy,
 Thou art worthy, O Lamb,
 To receive glory and pow'r at the
 Father's right hand;
 For Thou hast redeemed us, hast
 ransomed and cleaned us,
 By Thy blood setting us free,
 In white robes arrayed us, Kings and
 priests made us:
 We are reigning in Thee!

The Book of Psalms



Psalms 90-150

July - September 2017

July 1st

Psalm 91

It was in the first quarter of 2007 that we looked at the first ninety psalms. If you want to refresh your memory or look at them for the first time, you can go to <http://cuxtonandhalling.org.uk/teaching.htm>. I have mixed feelings about studying psalms again. They can be quite a challenge, but spiritually they are extremely nourishing. Relatively recently, I've reverted to reading them as set in the Book of Common Prayer. This means reading an average of six psalms each day and thus reading the whole Psalter in a thirty day month. (You lose a day or two at the end of February and repeat the last seven in thirty one day months.) You also read them in order, which means that praise and worship, thanksgiving, intercession, confession, the whole gamut of human emotions are put before you, irrespective of how you yourself might be feeling that day. At the moment, I'm finding this spiritually more satisfying than the Common Worship lectionary which generally gives us fewer psalms and messes about with the order in an effort to make the daily psalms fit in with the seasons of the church's year. Some of the psalms are wonderful. Some are quite horrible. However, the Bible wouldn't be much use if it were only about nice people doing nice things. The Bible speaks to us in every situation because it has been there. The Bible is the Word of God. Jesus is the Word of God and He knows everything that there is to know about being human from His personal experience of it. The psalms give us the spiritual resources to make our whole lives a walk with the Lord.

Jesus Himself would have sung the psalms in the worship of temple and synagogue. Psalm 91 is a wonderful celebration of God's continued love for us. This is the God Who looks after us no matter what, the God Who knows our needs before we even ask Him. There is a bit of a sting in the tail, however. When Jesus is tempted in the Wilderness, the devil takes Him to the pinnacle of the temple and tells Him to jump down if He is the Son of God, relying on the promise of vv 11&12 of this psalm. Jesus replies that we must not test God. We must trust Him. We might well face trials and temptations. We're not promised an easy ride. In fact, the devil may tempt us all the more if he thinks we're too sure of our faith. What we have to do is to believe in the God Who is with us in the valley of the shadow of death as well as in the green pastures.

September 29th (Michaelmas)

Revelation 4 vv 1-11

When we say in our services, *Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying, Holy, holy, holy...* what goes through our minds? Angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim are beyond our imagination. When I lost loved ones, the archdeacon reminded me that I should have two more in heaven worshipping with me on earth. We can think of the souls of the faithful departed with the angels and archangels worshipping God in all eternity. It is what we were made for. It is our essential undefiled nature. It is our essential redeemed nature. Worship is perfect peace, perfect, joy, perfect love. *O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.* It is in that light of eternity that we live our lives on earth. We are citizens of heaven.

It is easy for preachers to lapse into going on and on about our duties and responsibilities. Preachers become nags and they make the Christian life sound like a series of chores. We might get to heaven if work hard enough at it in this vale of tears. We might be allowed to go to the pictures if we finish our homework on time.

But we are citizens of heaven now. We have eternal life if we know Jesus now. The joy He came to bring is ours today if we believe in Him. If we love God, it is natural to love one another. If we love, it is our nature to keep God's Commandments. They are not a burden. If we are good people, we naturally do good things and refrain from doing bad things. Worship encompasses everything It is the total offering of ourselves to God in love. We say, *It is our duty and our joy, at all times and in all places, to give you thanks and praise*, because it is. Duty and joy are not different. Filled with Christian joy, we naturally carry out our duty and fulfil our responsibilities.

O everlasting God, who hast ordained and constituted the services of Angels and men in a wonderful order: Mercifully grant that, as thy holy Angels alway do thee service in heaven, so by thy appointment they may succour and defend us on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

September 27th

Philippians 2 vv 5-11

In these last few days of the quarter, I thought we might look at some of the other possible sacred songs in Scripture. Many people think that S Paul is quoting a well known hymn here and it is set as such in some of our service books. What Paul is doing, if this is indeed a hymn the Philippians knew, is to ask them to think about what they are singing. If they really mean these words, what does it mean for their daily lives? We sing some wonderful hymns. I do wonder if we always think of what they really mean and what sort of people we should be if wonderful words such as these are on our lips.

September 28th

Jonah 2 vv 1-10

You couldn't get much more desperate than Jonah was at this point. He'd tried running away from God (rather than preach to the hated and feared Ninevites). He'd been in a terrible storm at sea and thrown overboard by the sailors. He'd then be swallowed by a whale. Things couldn't get much worse!

Preachers often make the point that Jonah was foolish to attempt to run away from God and to try to evade his duty as a prophet. There is nowhere that God is not. So you really cannot get away from God. Neither can you escape your responsibilities.

But here is a different perspective. Jonah was in a really terrible place and God was there with Him. In many ways, it was Jonah's fault that he was where he was. He had sinned by trying to go against what God wanted for his life. And yet he still prayed. The sinner prayed. And God heard him and delivered him from his predicament. He repented. He was converted and, once he was converted, he tried to do God's Will after all. Read the rest of the book and you will see that Jonah still got things wrong but God was able to use him to save that great and wicked city of Nineveh.

So, no matter how low you sink (pun intended), God is still with you. No matter if your predicament is all your own fault, God will still hear you. No matter what you have done, God can still use you. You have a place in His plan and you will only be fulfilled by filling that place.

July 2nd (Trinity 3)

Psalm 92

First savour the first four verses. Praise God because He is God. Then ask yourself, what do you have to be thankful for? There are the things which we all share – this beautiful world, our food and drink, the air we breathe. More important even than what He gives us in this life, He gives us everything that pertains to eternal life. *We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.* But what do you personally have to be thankful for? Everything we have is the gift of God. It is joyful to be thankful.

The psalm goes on to praise God because He is a God of justice. Unwise people may believe that there is no God or they may believe that God doesn't involve Himself with the affairs of this world, that He doesn't care about you and me, what happens to us or what we get up to. Unwise people might point to the injustice in the world and suggest that it proves that there is no just God in charge. But they believe these things precisely because they are unwise. God is with us every moment of every day. He is looking after us and we are answerable for everything we think, say or do. We are answerable to God for the people we are and there will come a time of reckoning. God is just and God is merciful. He is with us on our journey through this life and He is with us at the end of life.

July 3rd

Psalm 93

The world is an awe-inspiring phenomenon. I'm sure you love to see the waves crash on the shoreline when there's a storm at sea and you're down on the coast. The winds and waves might be a good deal more frightening if you're out in boat in such conditions. We are moved to awe by the majesty of the sun and the moon and the stars and by the sheer immensity of time and space. Every living thing is a miracle. Geology and geography amaze us when we stop to think about the world and its peoples. There is a deep reverence in Science for the things that are and the way they interact *But yet the Lord who dwelleth on high is mightier.* He is the Creator of heaven and earth. But the climax of the psalm is God's justice, His testimonies, and His holiness.

July 4th

Psalm 94

If we're nice people, we might be inclined to put the cart before the horse, mercy before justice. We are uncomfortable with people crying out for vengeance against their enemies and the punishment of their oppressors. We think of Jesus on the cross praying, *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*. Rightly, we seek grace to take Jesus as our example. But, not so fast, *They murder the widow, and the stranger: and put the fatherless to death*. Where would we be if God didn't uphold the right? People might imagine that they can get away with violence, dishonestly, infidelity, greed, selfishness, indifference to the needs of others, etc., but we can't. How could we, given that God is Who He is? God is almighty and God is justice. He is with us in our troubles and temptations. He can use them to make us better people. But we can't expect to get away with our sins. What we can expect is that God will forgive us our sins in response to Jesus' prayer. It was our sins which took Him to the cross. When He prays, *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*, He is praying for us. What is required of us is repentance and faith.

July 5th

Psalm 95

This is the psalm known as the Venite. Psalms are often referred to by their first few words in the Latin Psalter. In the BCP, the Venite is said every day at Mattins except for Easter Day. So we tend to know it very well. In fact, several of the psalms from 90 – 100 are used regularly in prayer book services. These eleven psalms were one of our set texts at college and I remember commenting that Church of England students had an unfair advantage over the rest. I've often preached on the Venite. What more is there to say about it? On days off, when I don't say Morning Prayer in church, I like to say this psalm on my garden seat, looking down my long and beautiful garden to the village and the rolling hills beyond. How marvellous it is to worship the Creator. How marvellous it is to come together with other Christians to worship. How marvellous it is that God has redeemed us and made us His own people. How vital it is to pay attention to His Will for our lives and to obey Him. How wonderful it is, *There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God*. This psalm puts into perspective where we stand with God, what we are to one another, and what we shall be when we see Him as He is.

September 26th

Te Deum Laudamus

We praise thee, O God : we acknowledge thee to be the Lord. All the earth doth worship thee : the Father everlasting. To thee all Angels cry aloud : the heavens, and all the powers therein. To thee Cherubin and Seraphin : continually do cry, Holy, Holy, Holy : Lord God of Sabaoth; Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty : of thy glory. The glorious company of the Apostles : praise thee. The goodly fellowship of the Prophets : praise thee. The noble army of Martyrs : praise thee. The holy Church throughout all the world : doth acknowledge thee; The Father : of an infinite Majesty; Thine honourable, true : and only Son; Also the Holy Ghost : the Comforter. Thou art the King of Glory : O Christ. Thou art the everlasting Son : of the Father. When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man : thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb. When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death : thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers. Thou sittest at the right hand of God : in the glory of the Father. We believe that thou shalt come : to be our Judge. We therefore pray thee, help thy servants : whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood. Make them to be numbered with thy Saints : in glory everlasting. O Lord, save thy people : and bless thine heritage. Govern them : and lift them up for ever. Day by day : we magnify thee; And we worship thy Name : ever world without end. Vouchsafe, O Lord : to keep us this day without sin. O Lord, have mercy upon us : have mercy upon us. O Lord, let thy mercy lighten upon us : as our trust is in thee. O Lord, in thee have I trusted : let me never be confounded.

This isn't Scripture either. It's a very ancient hymn which probably goes back to C4 and is supposed to have been composed by S Ambrose, Bishop of Milan. I love it. I'd sometimes like to say it instead of the Creed. It says the same things as the Creed but much more passionately. We ought to be passionate about God. *Never let my love grow cold*.

I shouldn't like today, however, to pass without any Scripture. So let's think about the very simple version of the Christian Creed which S Paul gives us in I Corinthians 15.

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

magnify him for ever. O ye Frost and Cold, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Ice and Snow, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Nights and Days, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Light and Darkness, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Lightnings and Clouds, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O let the Earth bless the Lord : yea, let it praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Mountains and Hills, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O all ye Green Things upon the Earth, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Wells, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Seas and Floods, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Whales, and all that move in the Waters, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O all ye Fowls of the Air, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O all ye Beasts and Cattle, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Children of Men, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O let Israel bless the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Priests of the Lord, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Servants of the Lord, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Spirits and Souls of the Righteous, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye holy and humble Men of heart, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever.

Strictly speaking, this wonderful hymn of praise isn't a psalm; it's a canticle. It's not from the Bible either as we Protestants have received it. It's from the Apocrypha, a collection of books which Roman Catholics include in the Bible, but which we Protestants regard as being well worth reading but not as having the same authority as Scripture. I particularly enjoy using this canticle on weekday mornings when I come into to church to say Morning Prayer, having taken Tommy for a lovely walk in the woods and seen some of the wonders of God's creation. Pagans might worship material things. We exhort the entire material universe to join us in worshipping God. Pagans might worship angels and spirits. We join the angels in worshipping the one true God. Ananias, Azarias, and Misael are the Hebrew names of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who were cast into a fiery furnace for refusing to worship a false god. There wouldn't be such a wickedness if the created acknowledged its Creator and worshipped Him.

July 6th

The Easter Anthems

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. 5. 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. 6. 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. 15. 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.

All right, so it isn't Easter, but I couldn't resist sharing what we say or sing on Easter Day instead of the Venite. Common Worship allows us to use the Easter Anthems more often, which is a definite plus. Ours is the Easter faith. We are the Easter people.

Jesus fulfils everything in the Old Testament, the Law and the Prophets. Just as God redeemed His people from slavery in Egypt and set them free to worship Him, keeping them safe from death by the blood of the Passover Lamb, so God sets us free from sin and death by the Blood of Jesus Christ. Just as the people of Israel, passed through the waters of the Red Sea, so we are baptised, washed clean, set free, saved from our enemies. As they were nourished with manna, Jesus is the Bread of Life. As they drank from the rock, He is our *stricken rock with streaming side*, the water of life, the Holy Spirit flowing out from the Cross of Christ to water and to heal the earth. Just as the Israelites were required to remove every vestige of leaven from the houses where the Passover was sacrificed, so we are required to be cleansed of every vestige of sin in order that we may keep the feast. In Him we are dead to sin and dead to death. In Him we have life eternal and shall rise with Him to an eternity of glory. All this is ours through faith because He has done everything that is necessary for us. Please see hymn on next page.

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

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

Though the lowliest form doth veil thee
as of old in Bethlehem,
here as there thine angels hail thee,

branch and flower of Jesse's stem.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
We in worship join with them.

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

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

July 7th

Psalm 96

This really is a splendid psalm. The song of praise is always new. *New every morning is the love.* God is praised in this psalm because He is the Creator of this magnificent universe. He is praised because He is just. He is praised because He cares for His people. This is good news for the people of God and for all the nations of the earth. We have a mission to share our faith, so to praise God that people who do not yet know Him may come to the knowledge of God and offer their lives to Him too. The gods of the heathen are not only graven images. What you worship is what you live your life for. Money, prestige, physical health, possessions, etc. can all be gods, but they are false gods and they will let you down in the end. What they offer is a lie, a delusion. *O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.* God is holy and we must be holy in order to worship Him. God is love and that is why we must love one another if we are to worship Him in spirit and in truth. You and I can only be holy in Jesus and it is in Him we seek forgiveness of our sins and forgive those who have sinned against us so that we can come into the presence of the thrice holy God and worship Him.

September 24th (Trinity 15)

Nunc Dimittis (Luke 2 vv 29-32)

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace : according to thy word. For mine eyes have seen : thy salvation; Which thou hast prepared : before the face of all people; To be a light to lighten the Gentiles : and to be the glory of thy people Israel.
The Bible starts with God's creation of everything that is. Humanity is very special right from the start. We were made to be specially loved by God, to love Him and to love one another. He made us with free wills but we were and are unwilling to be His people of love. The consequence is our alienation from the Source of everything that is good. In His goodness, He sets out to redeem us and you can read the stories in the OT of God's dealings with Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses and the rest. The children of Israel are the chosen people to whom God makes Himself particularly known as the key to His plan that all the world should come to know Him in Jesus Christ. Simeon sings this song in the Temple at Jerusalem when He holds in His arms the baby Jesus. It is in Christ that God makes Himself fully known to the world and it is in Christ that the children of Israel and people of every race and language and people and tongue will come to know Him and thereby to have eternal life as members of the people of God and heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Keep, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy Church with thy perpetual mercy; and, because the frailty of man without thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by thy help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

September 25th

Benedicite Omnia Opera

O all ye Works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Angels of the Lord, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Heavens, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Waters that be above the Firmament, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O all ye Powers of the Lord, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Sun and Moon, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Stars of Heaven, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Showers and Dew, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Winds of God, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Fire and Heat, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Winter and Summer, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and magnify him for ever. O ye Dews and Frosts, bless ye the Lord : praise him, and

September 21st (S Matthew)

Psalm 149

Matthew the tax-collector had lost his way. He had built his life on money. Perhaps, that was a deliberate choice. Perhaps he had drifted into it. It was a life which could never satisfy him. No human being is fulfilled by building a life on the things of this world. We are essentially living souls. Dust we are, but we are dust animated by the Breath of God. Material things which come from dust and to dust return cannot satisfy us. It is only the Breath of God in us which saves us from being nothing but dust ourselves. So Matthew had got it wrong and so has everyone who believes that it is only the things of this world that matter or who treats them with greater respect than he treats God. It was only when Matthew responded to Jesus' call *Follow me* that Matthew found himself. O Almighty God, who by thy blessed Son didst call Matthew from the receipt of custom to be an Apostle and Evangelist: Grant us grace to forsake all covetous desires and inordinate love of riches, and to follow the same thy Son Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

September 22nd

Psalm 150

So we come to the crowning glory of the Psalter: *Let every thing that hath breath: praise the Lord.* There's nothing to add.

September 23rd

Psalm 67

I mentioned that the BCP offers some psalms as alternatives to the more familiar canticles at Morning and Evening Prayer. Psalm 67 can be sung or said after the New Testament lesson at Evensong instead of the *Nunc Dimittis*. It's a psalm which reads to me like overlapping virtuous circles. God blesses us with all the good things He gives us. We bless Him by giving thanks for all that He does for us. Our thankful hearts set free His generosity so that we are even more blessed. Because we are blessed, we are a blessing to other people. We share the joy which we celebrate as the people of God. People who do not yet know God are drawn to Him by the love and joy of the worshipping community. They too bless God and are the beneficiaries of His blessing. To be honest the love and joy of the worshipping community are not always evident when we complain and argue and are less than generous to newcomers. If we are to fulfil our calling as ambassadors of Christ we need to bear that in mind!

July 8th

Psalm 97

Spend time over this psalm. Is v2 about Mount Sinai when God met Moses on the holy mountain? Is it about the storms we might encounter – thunder and lightning, black clouds and heavy rain? Is it the sun shining through the clouds and drying up the rain, the fresh smell of the newly rinsed garden? Whatever you can think of is a manifestation of the glory of God. In awe we praise Him – perhaps when we're caught out in a storm, maybe when we are holding a new born baby, perhaps when we are looking down a microscope at a living cell or a crystal. He alone is God. God is good. His Will is that we should be good too. *Be ye also holy for I am holy.*

O Lord, we beseech thee mercifully to hear us; and grant that we, to whom thou hast given an hearty desire to pray, may by thy mighty aid be defended and comforted in all dangers and adversities; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

July 9th (Trinity 4)

Psalm 98

Psalm 98 is offered to us an alternative to the Magnificat at Prayer book Evensong. In many ways, it speaks for itself. The Creator is marvellous, just and merciful. He is our Redeemer, our guide and companion in life, our end. When it was first composed, it probably referred to a victory of the armies of Israel over their human foes. In this wicked world, there are wars and some of them are just. Perhaps we have to fight. If we do come to the conclusion that it is right to fight, we must pray for victory. If we can't pray for victory, we're not justified in fighting. When I say this psalm, however, I think of God's ultimate victory, in which His salvation and righteousness are fulfilled – the Death of Jesus on the Cross, not shedding His enemies' blood, but shedding His own Blood for His enemies' salvation. The really alert of you will have noticed that v9 of this psalm in the Psalter says *He is come to judge the earth.* The version at Evensong has, *he cometh to judge the earth.* Both are correct – the now and the not yet. We are saved by the Cross. We shall be safe on the Last Day.

O God, the protector of all that trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy: Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal: Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake our Lord. Amen.

July 10th

The Magnificat

My soul doth magnify the Lord : and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded : the lowliness of his hand-maiden. For behold, from henceforth : all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath magnified me : and holy is his Name. And his mercy is on them that fear him : throughout all generations. He hath shewed strength with his arm : he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seat : and hath exalted the humble and meek. He hath filled the hungry with good things : and the rich he hath sent empty away. He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel : as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed, for ever.

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.**

This is the song that Mary sang when she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth after the angel told her that she would become the mother of the Son of God. These words are deservedly much loved. Some people think that it is appropriate for us to sing them between the first and second lessons because they are a sort of bridge between the Old and New Testaments. They pick up God's promises of justice and mercy which we have been celebrating as we have been reading the psalms. All these promises are fulfilled in Jesus and, nine months from the Annunciation, He will be born into the world which God so loved.

July 11th

Psalm 99

For all their difficulty, reading psalms nourishes us as Christians. When we read the rest of the bible, we read the Word of God. When we read the psalms, we pray the Word of God. It becomes part of us and we are subsumed into the Word. These are the prayers of God's people in every generation for thousands of years and throughout the world. The psalms are the prayers of Jesus. They are intensely personal. In praying them, we are caught up into Jesus. We are playing our part as members of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the Church of God. We share in the glory. The bad thoughts in the psalms are forgiven, cleansed and sanctified by Jesus. Our praises are His praises. Our prayers are His prayers. Our worship is His worship. And so we grow into Him when we pray the psalms.

September 17th (Trinity 14)

Psalm 145

The Lord is loving unto every man.

This is good news! The whole psalm is good news. It reflects the character of God and, what follows from God's nature, what He does in the world. The psalm is a celebration. When you celebrate, you tell everyone the good news. It is imperative that we tell the good news to our children and grandchildren and to our contemporaries.

September 18th

Psalm 146

In the end, only God is dependable. He uses people as His agents to care for us – rulers, doctors, clergy, teachers, parents, etc.. He uses material things to nourish us, heal us and provide for us – food, medicine, bricks and mortar, steel, oil, etc. But in the end they all come from God. Nothing is entirely to be relied upon except Him. Human beings are fallible. Material things break down and wear out. Only God is for ever. So surely it's obvious that God ought to be the focus of our lives and not the things of this world.

Almighty and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain that which thou dost promise, make us to love that which thou dost command; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

September 19th

Psalm 147

For some reason, the Common Worship lectionary nearly always splits this psalm into two. It's one of the frustrations with it which led me to go back to using the lectionary in the 1662 BCP. This is a magnificent psalm, uplifting as one reads the whole of it straight through. Scripture is given to us as it is and has to be received as a whole. Analysis (breaking it up) sometimes helps us to understand it but not at the price of losing the context, the integrity of God's Word written. Read it straight.

September 20th

Psalm 148

What a celebration of God's mighty works in creation – His heavenly creation and His earthly creation, the Creator of everything that is and He cares for us. *Our help is in the Name of the Lord: who hath made heaven and earth.* What more could you ask for?

September 14th

Psalm 142

This morning, I gave a class of primary school children a tour of the church. They asked me why it is mainly older people who go to church. I told them I didn't know. There is nothing more joyful than meeting up with other Christians to worship God. I cannot understand why so many people don't do it every Sunday & every other opportunity they get. Perhaps some people worship God when they are very grateful. I know that I am wonderfully privileged in the life I enjoy & I do praise God for it. Some people, however, forget about God when everything is going well. They may pray only when everything is going wrong for them as it is here for the psalmist. Again, we can think of Jesus undergoing what the psalmist underwent & of many millions of people in the world today, persecuted or chronically poor, or inhabiting war zones or countries with oppressive governments or failed states where anarchy & chaos fail to deliver the necessities of life & crime flourishes. Some people find it hard to pray in the darkest of times. We ought to pray for them & with them & we do when we pray psalms such as these. God is of course always there for us in the good times & in the bad. St Paul says, *Rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks.* (I Thessalonians 5¹⁶⁻¹⁸).

September 15th

Psalm 143

Today is Battle of Britain Day, the anniversary of the worst day of aerial combat in 1940, the turning point of the battle. These are the words of Jacob Astley, a royalist commander in the Civil War O Lord! *Thou knowest how busy I must be this day: if I forget thee, do not thou forget me.* Put them with the psalm & the fact that it is Battle of Britain Day.

September 16th

Psalm 144

I'm thankful that not many readers of these notes are likely to need to ask God for the skills to go to war. But we all have responsibilities. We all have tasks to perform. Sometimes, they seem beyond us & we don't feel we can cope. Whatever we have to face up to, take it to the Lord in prayer, but take everything to Him, not just what you think you can't manage on your own! Without Him, you can do nothing.

What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins & griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!

Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!

July 12th

Psalm 100

Just as Psalm 98 can be used instead of the Magnificat at Evensong, Psalm 100 (the Jubilate) can take the place of the Benedictus at Mattins. It has some similarities with the Venite. The emphasis is on what it means to be the people of God. He made us. He redeemed us. He cares for us in our daily lives. We are what we are because He is Who He is. He is just and merciful. He is utterly to be trusted because *his truth endureth from generation to generation*. The promises He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are just as true today as they were then. In fact they are fulfilled in Jesus and will be consummated on the Last Day. *We are his people and the sheep of his pasture.* We are safe in Him.

July 13th

The Benedictus

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel : for he hath visited and redeemed his people; And hath raised up a mighty salvation for us : in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy Prophets : which have been since the world began; That we should be saved from our enemies : and from the hand of all that hate us. To perform the mercy promised to our forefathers : and to remember his holy Covenant; To perform the oath which he sware to our forefather Abraham : that he would give us; That we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies : might serve him without fear; In holiness and righteousness before him : all the days of our life. And thou, Child, shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest : for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people : for the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God : whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us; To give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death : and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

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.**

This was the song his father Zacharias sang when John the Baptist received his name aged eight days. Like the Magnificat, it praises God because all His promises are fulfilled in Christ. There is justice and there is mercy. It is all the free gift of God to a world which desperately needs what God alone can provide. What is required of people is faith to receive it, but they can only come to faith if, like John the Baptist, we Christians act as His heralds and tell the world the Good News.

July 14th

Psalm 101

This psalm always bothers me slightly. We think of Jesus singing or saying these psalms. When psalms are about the blessings of the righteous, we understand that it is Jesus alone Who deserves these blessings. We know that we receive, of God's infinite goodness & grace, the blessings of the righteous just because He makes us righteous through our faith in His death on the Cross for our salvation. In Psalm 101, the psalmist vehemently rejects any intercourse with the wicked. We know how easy it is to be carried along with the crowd & may well advise especially young people to avoid bad company. We may do so ourselves. But Jesus says that He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. In the NT He makes a point of mixing with & being a friend of sinners. That's one of the things the Pharisees have against Him. We surely want to be like Jesus, not like the Pharisees. If Jesus didn't love sinners, we'd be in serious trouble ourselves. How can we be Christ's heralds to a fallen world if we never have intercourse with bad people? The answer must be to love them & to be ready to befriend them, but to model our own lives on Jesus on the people we mix with.

July 15th

Psalm 102

It was pointed out when we were at college that reading the psalms daily according to the date of the month, we may find ourselves singing laments on days when we are very happy & singing songs of joy just when we are at our lowest. These are, however, the prayers of the whole people of God, the prayers of Jesus. They are our prayers, common prayer, not just my prayer. It is right to try to enter into the spirit of these prayers whatever is going on in our own lives. As we pray, Psalm 102, we might think of people in countries today where there is a war on. We might think of people like Jesus let down by their friends. We might think of people overwhelmed by the burdens they have to face in old age. We express our solidarity with them & pray for them. We may become in part the answer to our prayers as we befriend someone who is lonely, offer help to someone who feels unable to cope or perhaps support a mission or charity working for peace & justice. In the end, the psalm assures, we can depend on God not only in time but in eternity. Even though heaven & earth pass away, the Word of God endures for ever.

September 12th

Psalm 140

Just because I'm paranoid, it doesn't mean that everybody doesn't hate me. So goes the old joke. But do you ever feel that the world is all against you? Do you feel that your enemies are plotting against you and your friends have let you down. We can think of Jesus feeling like this in Gethsemane and on Calvary. There are horrible attacks on people on social media – gossip, bullying, threats. But it's not new and it's not confined to the internet. People have always been hateful to one another. *We're not friends with her any more.* The bullies beat up the odd boy out. Grown ups are no better when they spread malicious gossip or ostracise people because they are unpopular or stab their colleagues in the back. Take it to the Lord in prayer. We always have one absolutely reliable friend. We don't have to be afraid or even to mind. And Jesus says, *pray for them which despitefully use you.* There is a wonderful victory in doing that over sin, the world and the devil.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge—
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In His arms He'll take and shield thee,
Thou wilt find a solace there.

September 13th

Psalm 141

In John 9, Jesus heals a blind man and the Pharisees refuse to accept that Jesus is acting with the power of God. They insist that Jesus is a sinner. The blind man responds (31): *Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth.* That takes some thinking about. At a superficial level, it is what many people believe, that God answers the prayers of good people, not sinners. It would make sense then to say that Jesus can't be a sinner because God answers His prayers. It is, of course, true that Jesus is not a sinner and that God answers His prayers. However, the rest of us are sinners. If God didn't answer the prayers of sinners, there would be no point in praying for anyone except Jesus. The deeper point is that we pray as found in Him. Our sins are washed away in His Blood. We pray in Him and He prays in us. So our prayers are heard and answered not as our reward for being good people but simply because God loves us and sent Jesus to set us free from sin. In Christ, and, by His grace, the work of His Holy Spirit, we seek to become more like Him, more like the sinless one, but it is in Christ that our prayers are heard and not because we deserve that God should give us what we want.

September 10th (Trinity 13)

Psalm 138

The Christian life is focused on God. We are citizens of heaven. Our lives are a living sacrifice. He is our purpose in life. He is our alpha and our omega, our beginning and our end. The second half of the first verse might mean that we worship the LORD even in the presence of the pagan gods. If it does, I should take it to mean that we worship the one true God even in the midst of an unbelieving world. That is true! However, this verse might simply that we worship before God (the LORD) which is also of course true. The rest of the psalm celebrates Who God is, what He does, and, amazingly that, infinitely great as He is, He cares for everyone of us, even the humblest of His creatures.

September 11th

Psalm 139

I do worry sometimes – more than I should. I’m capable of magnifying my problems and making too much of my troubles. Many people, including some of you reading these notes, have far worse troubles than anything I have to face. Now read this psalm. Maybe it’s the 29th day of the month. Maybe you’ve turned to it because you know what a wonderful comfort it is. Maybe you’ve been directed to it by a Christian friend. Maybe you’ve come across it by “chance”. Whatever is going on in your life, can you think of a more intimate description of your relationship with God?

How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds
in a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals
his wounds,
and drives away his fear.

Jesus! my Shepherd, Brother,
Friend,
my Prophet, Priest and King,
my Lord, my Life, my Way, my
End,
accept the praise I bring.

It makes the wounded spirit
whole,
and calms the troubled breast;
'tis manna to the hungry soul,
and to the weary, rest.

Weak is the effort of my heart,
and cold my warmest thought;
but when I see thee as thou art,
I'll praise thee as I ought.

Dear Name, the rock on which I
build,
my shield and hiding-place,
my never-failing treasury, filled
with boundless stores of grace!

Till then I would thy love
proclaim
with every fleeting breath;
and may the music of thy Name
refresh my soul in death!

July 16th (Trinity 5)

Psalm 103

John Stott was a great preacher in the latter half of C20. He played a big part in transforming the church of All Souls, Langham Place at the top of Regents Street into a centre of mission to students and young professionals in central London. He addressed meetings and preached extensively all over the world and wrote a number of books setting out the Christian faith in an easily understood way. He understood that we human beings without God are helpless sinners. He knew himself to be entirely dependent on God’s mercy. He told us that this was one of the greatest psalms praising God for His mercy, just as 104 speaks of God’s mighty works in creation. John Stott felt the truth of this psalm in his heart. Sometimes we use part of it at funerals. V16 makes you think. *The place thereof shall know it no more.* We are gone from this earth. But v17 states, *But the merciful goodness of the Lord endureth for ever and ever upon them that fear him.* Heaven and earth will pass away, but God’s mercy is for ever and we shall, by His grace, live for ever in Him. Because of the last three verses we also use it at Michaelmas. Our praises are joined with the angels’ praises because God’s mercy endures for ever.

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

July 17th

Psalm 104

This psalm is often used at Whitsun. Everything depends for its creation and continued existence on the breath of God – the Holy Spirit. He is the Lord and giver of life. He moved on the face of the waters at the Creation. He inspired the prophets. He gave God’s people the gifts they needed to serve God in OT times. He anointed both kings and priests. He anoints Jesus, the Son of God. He bears witness of Jesus. He streams from the stricken Rock, the water of life. He supplies God’s people in NT times with the gifts we need to do God’s work in the world today. He supports our prayers. He teaches us to call God, Father. He nourishes us and heals us. Through His grace, we bring forth the nine fold fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5^{22&23}). He will lead us home.

July 18th

Psalm 105

Is life just one thing after another or is there a plan? Do things just happen or is there a reason for everything? Could things have worked out differently? Is life just chance or is there any meaning in what we do and in what happens to us? Are our lives ultimately significant? Do we exist for a purpose? Are we in control of our own destinies or is nobody in control or is everything controlled by God?

The answer of faith, the Bible's answer, is that there is a plan. What happens is what is meant to happen. *God is working His purpose out.* God has made Himself known. He has made certain promises and given certain warnings and we can trust Him. Things have worked out in accordance with His plan in the past. They will work out in accordance with God's plan for the future. *He's got the whole world in His hands. He's got you and me, brother, He's got you and me, sister, in His hands.* That means we can trust Him both for what ever happens in our own lives and the lives of our loved ones, and also for what happens to the Church and to the world and to the whole Creation. Our prayers – yours and mine – have their place in His Almighty plan. Our lives contribute to His purposes, but our inadequacies and failures can never thwart His providence. We are part of a great whole, a universe being redeemed by God's love.

July 19th

Psalm 106

There is always a temptation to think that things were better in the past, especially in the Church. We are brought up on tales of great heroes of the faith in the Bible and astonishing stories of the saints in subsequent centuries. People tell us about the wonderful things our own local churches did in the past, but apparently can do no longer.. Older people remember Billy Graham's rallies. The implication is somehow that we are not as good as previous generations and things are only likely to get worse. But read the Bible. The story of the people of God has been one of repeated failure and faithlessness. All the great heroes turn out to be flawed. Only God is faithful. His people have always been prone to faithlessness and the result has been failure and often punishment. But God is faithful. His mercy endures for ever. His plans are not thwarted by our inadequacies. We need never give up hope. Keep the faith.

September 8th

Psalm 136

This is quite clearly a psalm which goes better with a congregation to handle the responses. It is fairly clear what it means. The Amorites lived in mountains east of the River Jordan & the Israelites had to overcome them in order to enter the Promised Land after the years spent wandering in the wilderness. I've been troubled by the words *for his mercy endureth for ever* in verses 19-22. He doesn't seem to be showing mercy to the Amorites! The Hebrew word is hesed (חֶסֶד). It means more than our word *mercy*. It includes goodness & kindness. But what about goodness & kindness to the Amorites? I'd like to be a pacifist, but I don't really think that is a realistic option. Sometimes you do have to fight for what is right. These wars against the Amorites must have been such a time.

September 9th

Psalm 137

Imagine that it is the Autumn of 1940, only we have lost the Battle of Britain. Operation Sealion has been successful. The eagle has landed. There have been massive casualties among military personnel & civilians. Towns & villages have been devastated. Women have been raped & children killed. London is a smoking wreck. St Paul's & Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament & Buckingham Palace are in ruins. The King is dead & Princess Elizabeth is a prisoner. As in 1918, mass movements of troops have spread a global pandemic. Farming & supply chains have been disrupted & people are hungry. The best & brightest of the British are to be resettled in Nazi Germany. Imagine all that & ask yourself honestly whether you can really condemn the sentiments the psalmist expresses in the last three verses, when this is what happened to his home in Judaea in 587 BC. Jesus could pray *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.* He is our example & inspiration. We'd very much need His grace to follow His example in such circumstances. We'd need His grace even to seek His grace. From which there are two lessons. One is that we shouldn't deceive ourselves that it is always easy to forgive. The other is that we should not be too quick to condemn others who can't or won't forgive. We have first to accept the reality of the wrong done to us. Then we have to acknowledge how badly it has hurt us & how hard it is to forgive. Only then, can we begin to accept our need for grace to do so.

September 6th

Psalm 134

I imagine that this psalm is an exhortation to the choir at the daily evening service in the Temple. Maybe, they sang it themselves nightly, just as Anglican choirs sing Psalm 95 daily. Or perhaps it is an exhortation to all the people of God to sing His praises every evening. When the “professionals” worship daily in temples and cathedrals and churches, they do so on their own behalf, but also on behalf of all the people of God who may not be able to come to services on weekdays. They welcome being joined by those who can come and those who worship in church buildings are at one with all those who are worshipping wherever they may be – at work, on the bus, in the kitchen, wherever. However we do it, it is a good thing to praise God daily.

NB: Despite a very half-hearted attempt at singing Psalm 119 the other night, we are wise enough to say the weekday services. So don't be put off if you don't sing.

September 7th

Psalm 135

Psalm 135 includes material in common with Psalms 134, 115 & 136. Again we think of the people praising God in the Temple – whether “professionals” or amateurs. Remember that amateur comes from amare. An amateur is someone who does what he does for love and if “professional” religious don't love God and serving Him, they'd do well to find another profession! In this particular psalm, the worshipping community is praising God for all that He has done – what academics call Salvation History, God's mighty acts of creation and redemption. We inherit everything described in the Old Testament and we add to the OT story and its promises everything that is now fulfilled in Jesus and in the life of His Body, the Church, the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

The psalm contrasts the greatness of God and His mighty acts with the gods of the heathen who don't really exist and can't do anything. So why do people worship false gods? Why do people devote their lives to things that can never satisfy – beauty, fitness, money, power, etc.? The answer is pride – our unwillingness to submit ourselves to God. We're like the man who would drive round in circles all day rather than admit that he was lost and ask directions.

July 20th

Psalm 107

I'm sometimes asked for this psalm at funerals. It's a favourite with some people, especially because of v23f *they that go down to the sea in ships: and occupy their business in great waters.* The sea is awe-inspiring, as is so much of the creation (all of it really) if only we have eyes to see. Awe is perhaps not far removed from fear. Awe in the Presence of God, however, overwhelms us with love. *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. Yet perfect love casteth out fear.* Ponder that apparent paradox.

The psalm is all about how God's foolish and faithless people keep wandering off the paths of righteousness and onto the broad highway which leads to destruction and our ever faithful God brings us back again time and again. That explains why, despite the failures of the people of God in every age, His Kingdom continues to grow.

July 21st

Psalm 108

Without God we can do nothing. We are helpless. With Him we can do anything. We know that we can trust Him because He is God. We know what He has done for us in the past. We know what He has done for our forefathers. We know that His promises are sure. We know that He will look after us personally. We know that His plan for the whole of creation will be fulfilled.

What can we do to work God's work,
to prosper and increase
the brotherhood of all mankind-
the reign of the Prince of Peace?
What can we do to hasten the time--
the time that shall surely be,
when the earth shall be filled
with the glory of God
as the waters cover the sea.

All we can do is nothing worth
unless God blessed the deed;
vainly we hope for the harvest-
tide
till God gives life to the seed;
yet nearer and nearer draws the
time,
the time that shall surely be,
when the earth shall be filled
with the glory of God
as the waters cover the sea.

July 22nd (S Mary Magdalene)

Psalm 109

The middle section of this psalm is very difficult for nice Christian people. In fact some people omit Ps 109 from their daily prayers or else use only the first and the last few verses. Again, we think of Jesus and the early Church using this psalm in their prayers. The first five verses are perfectly understandable – the justifiable anguish of a person who discovers that he has been betrayed by his friends. We can think of Jesus in Gethsemane and at His trial. We can think of Christians in the world today in countries where the Church is under pressure and they may be denounced by neighbours they had believed to be their friends or even family members. We ourselves might have been badly let down by people we trusted. Vv 29&30 also are perfectly understandable. Whatever happens to us, however badly people let us down, God is always faithful.

But vv 6-10 are so bitter. Surely we shouldn't feel like that and pray for horrible vengeance on our enemies. Surely Jesus wouldn't pray like this. He prayed, *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*. Actually, S Peter quotes v7 as a prophecy of what happens to Judas when, after the Ascension, they have to replace Judas as an apostle with Matthias (Acts 1²⁰). As I've said before, it's no use dissembling with God or with ourselves. It's no use pretending that we are all sweetness and light. If we are bitter, resentful, angry or hateful, the first step in dealing with it is to admit it. Jesus understands. He was tempted in every respect as we are tempted. Honestly share how you feel with Jesus. Then pray, *Thy will be done*. With Jesus, seek the grace to pray *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*, but don't pretend to yourself that you are a better person than you are and don't be too quick to condemn the victims of terrible evil because they cannot forgive. I'm writing this the day after the death of the Moors murderer. Many of the families of Ian Brady's victims can't forgive. It would be quite wrong for us to blame them because they can't. We can, however, pray for them. As a child, I was assured that Judas would have been forgiven if he had repented. I'm sure this is correct. Can we believe the same of Ian Brady? The bible would be useless if it ducked these terribly difficult aspects of what it means to be human and to be Christian and I don't omit such as Ps 109.

September 4th

Psalm 132

Saul was the first King of Israel, but it was David who brought the kingdom together and established Jerusalem as its capital. Before David's reign Jerusalem had been an independent city state with its own priest kings such as Melchizedek. Kings and priests were anointed by God, but, in Israel, they were never the same person. David built himself a palace at Jerusalem and made the city the seat of government and he desperately wanted to build a temple there. He brought the Ark of the Covenant (God's Presence with His people) into the city, but he was not allowed to build the House of God. God would establish David's household as kings for ever – the Lord's Anointed – and David's son Solomon would build the Temple. David established the site and amassed the materials, but it was Solomon who built the Temple. This psalm asks God to remember His promises to David concerning the Temple and the Holy City and the eternal reign of the Messiah. When we sing this psalm as Christians, we celebrate their fulfilment in Jesus, we pray for their fulfilment in our own generation and we anticipate the final establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven.

September 5th

Psalm 133

The first verse is fine, but personally I'm less keen on the next two verses. Being smothered in oil doesn't somehow appeal to me – though it's olive oil, not diesel, and its purposes are healing, cleansing and empowering. Being serious, I guess it talking about the oil with which the high priest was anointed. Moses' brother Aaron was the first high priest and all the others were supposed to be his descendants (until Jesus Who was of the much older priestly line of Melchizedec).

So, priesthood and unity. Christ is our High Priest and by the sacrifice of Himself once offered, He broke down the barrier between us and God. That barrier is sin and it is we human beings who erect it by our rebellion against God's perfect Law of love. By the outpouring of Himself in love on the Cross, Jesus breaks down that barrier and effects the atonement. We are at one with God. Given that we are children of God, we are brothers and sisters of all other children of God. The barriers between people and between peoples are broken down. We are at one with God and with one another – a perfect unity of love.

fightings and fears within,
without,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

4. Just as I am, poor, wretched,
blind;
sight, riches, healing of the
mind,
yea, all I need in thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

5. Just as I am, thou wilt
receive,

wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse,
relieve;
because thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

6. Just as I am, thy love
unknown
hath broken every barrier
down;
now, to be thine, yea thine
alone,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

September 3rd (Trinity 12)

Psalm 131

The 3rd September 1939 was also a Sunday and many people first heard that we were at war with Nazi Germany when they were in church. When you think of the Nazis, you can't help but think of the contrast between their attitude and the attitude of the psalmist in this psalm. The Nazis strutted around, throwing their weight about. They relied heavily on military might. They worshipped power. They were arrogant. They despised whole races of humanity. They subjugated the Church. They thought that they had a duty to exterminate those they regarded as *Untermenschen*, sub humans, a term that became infamous when the Nazis used it to describe non-Aryan "inferior people" often referred to as "the masses from the East", that is Jews, Roma, and Slavs - mainly ethnic Poles, Serbs, and later also the Russians, black and coloured people, the mentally and physically handicapped and homosexuals.

It's easy to condemn the Nazis, but what are the lessons to be learned from Nazism? What happened in Germany in the thirties and forties is what you get when put themselves in the place of God.

Almighty and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we are to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve: Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy; forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

July 23rd (Trinity 6)

Psalm 110

This is a much more joyful psalm. It is often quoted in the NT. V1 is used in the NT to demonstrate that the OT foreshadows Jesus as the Son of God. Think of David, King of Israel, singing this psalm. He says that the LORD (God) has exalted David's lord to God's right hand. Who is David's lord? The NT answer is Jesus. God has exalted Jesus to His right hand. Jesus is the lord. Jesus is the King of Kings. Jesus is the LORD. Jesus shall reign for ever. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. The power of Jesus manifest in Sion is His death and resurrection at Jerusalem and the consequent out-pouring of the Holy Spirit. V4 is also applied to Jesus in the NT. He is the priest after the order of Melchisedech – a priesthood which is far superior to the priesthood in the Jerusalem Temple, an eternal priesthood which offers once for all Himself to be a full, perfect and sufficient, sacrifice, satisfaction and oblation for the sins of the whole world. When you think of the sins of the world, that's some sacrifice! Jesus is the Judge Who divides the sheep from the goats and the Redeemer Who enables the goats to return to the fold.

July 24th

Psalm 111

Where do we praise God? V1 is a little bit ambiguous. Possibly wrongly, I tend to read it as giving thanks to God both in small groups of faithful people and in the wider congregation. The wider congregation would be (at least notionally) the whole people of Israel, some of whom were probably much less devoted to God than others. The same might be true in a notionally Christian country in which many people describe themselves as Christians, but don't show much sign of loving the Lord in their daily lives. The mandate would be to praise God both in the fellowship of definitely committed Christians and among those whose faith is more nominal. We'd praise God in our fellowship groups if we have them and in our regular church services. We'd also praise Him when people who don't usually come to church join us for remembrance or harvest or Christmas or a coronation. I should like to add that we praise God when we are on our own (Matthew 6⁶) and publicly before downright unbelievers, not to make ourselves look good, but letting our *light so shine before men that may see our good works and glorify our Father which is in heaven.*

July 25th (S James)

Psalm 112

Yesterday's psalm ended with the words *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*. The only way to live is to live in the light of eternity. So many people behave as though what really mattered were things like earning a living, a nice home, physical fitness, good clothes, etc. and as though religion were a sort of optional extra – or at least something you gave your attention to only when you had taken care of all these other things. They're putting the cart before the horse, however. Jesus said, *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you*. (Matthew 6³³). Grant, O merciful God, that as thine holy Apostle Saint James, leaving his father and all that he had, without delay was obedient unto the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him; so we, forsaking all worldly and carnal affections, may be evermore ready to follow thy holy commandments; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

July 26th

Psalm 113

You take verse 3 two ways and both would be correct. Sunrise to sunset might mean that we should praise God all day. East to west might mean that we should praise God across the whole landscape. And of course *It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks unto thee, O Lord, holy Father, almighty, everlasting God. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven...* And this glorious God cares for the poor as much as He does for princes.

July 27th

Psalm 114

As the people of God, we celebrate what God has done in the past – His mighty acts proclaimed in both the Old and New Testaments. We record and pass on to our neighbours and to generations yet to come what God has done for Israel and for all nations in the Creation and the stories following: in the call of Abraham and the history of Abraham's family, his seed in whom all the families of the earth are blessed; the Exodus and the wilderness years; the prophets' interpretation of the subsequent history of Israel; and, above all, all that Jesus said and did, especially His Crucifixion and Resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. These are the foundations on which we build our present and future. These are the acts of the God in Whom we trust.

September 2nd

Psalm 130

Is this still one of the better known psalms? In the prayer book, it is one of the psalms appointed for Ash Wednesday. I can't help but feel that we have neglected psalms and denied ourselves this tremendous spiritual resource. The psalm puts into words our feeling of utter dependence on God. If we do not feel that we are utterly dependent on God, we are living an illusion. We cannot depend on ourselves. We know that we are weak and unreliable. We cannot depend finally on other people. They are like us, unreliable. We can only depend finally upon God and He is utterly dependable. We can and must take everything to Him in prayer. We cannot but feel our own unworthiness, our sinfulness, our wretchedness as miserable sinners. Contrary to what "self help" counsellors would say, it is healthy to acknowledge our own helplessness. It is realistic to do so because we are helpless. So it is honest. We don't have to worry all the time in case we aren't good enough. We know we're not good enough. We know also that we don't have to worry because God forgives us our sins and because we depend only on Him and He is utterly dependable. The truth sets us free from being anxious about what we cannot achieve, our own personal fulfilment. It is only in God that people can be fulfilled as people. We are conscious that we are weak and sinful and we rejoice because Christ is all in all and in Him we are set free from sin and empowered to be the people God made us to be.

For there is mercy with thee: therefore shalt thou be feared. The commentator Artur Weiser puts it like this: In forgiving sin, God proves himself to be more powerful than sin itself, and, because he only has the power of overcoming sin by his forgiveness, he is to be feared, just because he is also the God who forgives.

1. Just as I am, without one
plea,
but that thy blood was shed for
me,
and that thou bidst me come to
thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

to rid my soul of one dark blot,
to thee whose blood can
cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

2. Just as I am, and waiting not

3. Just as I am, though tossed
about
with many a conflict, many a
doubt,

August 31st

Psalm 128

What God cares about is what I do in church and what I do for the Church. I'm in God's presence when I come into His house and worship with other people. I'm doing His work when I attend PCC or sweep the church path or visit the sick on behalf of the Church. This is my Christian life on earth. It's what God's interested in. When I die, I shall go to be with Him forever and then everything will be perfect and I shall know Him as He is.

I hope you're getting crosser and crosser about that last paragraph, a travesty of what it means to be a Christian. God cares about every aspect of our lives, on earth as well as in Heaven. We can expect Him to bless us because He loves us in our family and in our professional life and in our social life. It's not just about Church and heaven when you die. In the same way, as Christians, we are required to live as Christians in every aspect of our lives. *And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.* (Colossians 3¹⁷).

September 1st

Psalm 129

People sometimes ask how the Jews as a people have survived. They have had so many enemies. In Abraham's time, there was just a few of them in the land of Canaan. They were enslaved in Egypt. Other nations opposed them and fought against them during their forty years in the wilderness and when they attempted to settle in the Promised Land. Then, as now, there were wars in the Middle East. They were brought to their knees by the Assyrians, conquered by the Babylonians, oppressed by the Greeks and occupied by the Romans. To our shame as Christians, they have been persecuted by the Church for centuries. The Nazis attempted to annihilate them and the Communists treated them as a threat. How did they survive? Come to that, how has the Church grown from being a persecuted minority? How is it that she grows fastest and strongest where she is persecuted? The answer for both Jews and Christian is in this psalm. The Lord is on our side. But Jesus teaches us (Jesus the Jew that is) to pray for those who persecute us, to bless them and not to curse them. In doing so, we should be imitating Jesus. That is how we can help to bring in the Kingdom of God.

July 28th

Psalm 115

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us. It is God Who deserves the credit for us being the people we are and for everything we accomplish in His Name. It is not for us to seek thanks or praise for what we achieve. These things belong to God. From that it follows that we shouldn't despair at our inadequacies. When we admit that we are unable to achieve great things we are only telling the truth. But we don't despair. It doesn't depend on us. God's work, the Church, our own personal redemption depend on God and on Him alone. Without Him we can do nothing, but in fact Jesus promises that believers will do greater works even than He did (John 14¹²). Why? Because they are smart, clever, strong, virtuous, rich or powerful? No, we shall do greater things than Jesus because we are believers. It is God Who builds His Church. It is God Who brings in His Kingdom. What is required of us is faith, belief. People who don't know this may well mock us. They mocked Jesus on the Cross. Why didn't God deliver Him if there is a God and Jesus is His Son? Where is God, if there is a God, when churches close, congregations get smaller and older, and Christianity is increasingly marginalised? Well, actually, it is what non-believers rely on that is false. They rely on what human beings like themselves have invented and human beings are fallible. Therefore what human beings invent can offer no ultimate security. Only the God Who made heaven and earth is ultimately dependable. He is dependable and therefore we rejoice in Him and can trust Him for the outcome.

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

God is working his purpose out
as year succeeds to year:
God is working his purpose out,
and the time is drawing near;
nearer and nearer draws the time,
the time that shall surely be,
when the earth shall be filled
with the glory of God
as the waters cover the sea.

From utmost east to utmost west,
wherever foot hath trod,
by the mouth of many messengers
goes forth the voice of God;
give ear to me, ye continents,
ye isles, give ear to me,
that earth may be filled
with the glory of God
as the waters cover the sea.

July 29th

Psalm 116

The intercessions in church present me with some difficulties. Whom should we mention by name in our public prayers? Presumably those people who need praying for. But who doesn't need praying for? If we pray for people in public might we risk breaking confidences? Do we always know what we should pray for? For example, do we think that it might be better for a chronically sick person with a painful and embarrassing illness to die and go to be the Lord rather than to remain here on earth? Do we presume to tell God what He ought to do in a given situation? Quite often, we are asked to pray for people and then we hear no more about them to know how God has answered our prayers. We are seldom given the opportunity to give thanks for answered prayer. That's why I tend to keep public prayer fairly general and only mention a few specific cases, but this psalm does offer us a model of public thanksgiving for answered prayer. Maybe there should be more of it!

July 30th (Trinity 7)

Psalm 117

This psalm is the shortest of psalms. It exhorts all the peoples of the world to unite in praising God for His merciful kindness to His own people. If those outside the Church recognise God's love for us and join us in praising Him for it, they too become the people of God through faith.

Lord of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of thy name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

July 31st

Psalm 118

This psalm comes up a lot around Easter. It's one of the psalms they sang at Passover and Easter is the Christian Passover. The crowds were probably singing this psalm on the first Palm Sunday when they accompanied Jesus riding into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Jesus fulfils all the promises and prophecies of the OT.

Thou art the King of Israel, thou David's royal Son, who in the Lord's Name comest, the King and Blessed One.

August 28th

Psalm 125

Head religion or heart religion? Some of us may know quite a lot about God. We know that what we know is only a tiny fraction of the infinite Truth, but we know what we know of God, His promises to us and His Will for our lives. That's good. It's also good to feel in hearts that we know God, that He loves us and that we love Him. He knows me and loves me just as I am and I can talk to Him as my heavenly Father. So can you. We can feel that we that put our trust in the Lord may not be removed but stand fast forever.

O God, who declarest thy almighty power most chiefly in shewing mercy and pity: Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace, that we, running the way of thy commandments, may obtain thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

August 29th

Psalm 126

The psalm is about the rejoicing of the Jews who had been exiled in Babylon being allowed, decades later, to return to the Holy Land and to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the Temple. It was like the Exodus all over again. It was their redemption from captivity. How much greater is our redemption as Christians! We are set free from captivity to sin and death. S Paul says, *Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice.* Joy in all its fulness is what Jesus came to bring. Joy characterises our lives as Christians. God's big victories against sin, the world and the devil (the Exodus, the Return from Babylonian captivity, above all the Life, Death & Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ) assure us of the eventual triumph of good over evil whatever happens in our lives. *He that now goeth on his way weeping, and beareth forth good seed: shall doubtless come again with joy, and bring his sheaves with him.*

August 30th

Psalm 127

Another of my favourites. You can't sleep. You're stressed out. You worry, worry, worry. But you're wasting your time and energy. Only God can solve all your problems and He will. You need to trust Him and work with Him. *Cast your care on him for he careth for you.*

August 25th

Psalm 122

Why was the psalmist so glad to go to Jerusalem? It's quite exciting going to London – unless you're a computer. There are all those world famous buildings – seats of government, galleries, museums, department stores. The Queen lives there – at least some of the time. There are also the great churches. It can be exciting to be in crowds, especially if they are happy crowds with a common purpose, such as seeing the trooping of the colour, a football match or a concert.

The main thing the psalmist wants to see is the Temple. This is the place to which people turn to worship God. The buildings were magnificent, but God could not be contained within buildings. God is present with us in our daily lives. He is present with us wherever His people come together for prayer. It is as exciting for us to come to church as it was for the psalmist to go to Jerusalem.

August 26th

Psalm 123

We're trying to catch that sense of intimacy with God and at the same time to be conscious of His infinite majesty. We can talk to Him about all our troubles. Weak and inadequate as we feel, we can confide in Him. And He is greater than anything which we have to face. *What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?* Romans 8³¹.

August 27th (Trinity 11)

Psalm 124

We are rightly suspicious when people claim to have God on their side. When arrogant or foolish people think that they are acting on behalf of God, they are capable of doing some very wicked things – from suicide bombers to grand inquisitors to members of the Ku Klux Klan. God is not really on the side of people like that. God is on our side, however, if we humbly seek His Will, as He makes Himself known to us in the Bible, in prayer, in the teaching of the Church, in the wonders of the world, in the gift of human reason – in fact in Jesus Christ. We don't claim the glory for any good we might do in the world. The glory belongs to God alone. Working with God, there is nothing that we cannot achieve. Without Him, however, we can do nothing.

August 1st

Psalm 119 vv 1-8

Psalm 119 is by far the longest of the psalms. There is a story that one vicar, if he turned up to take the service and there were only a few in the congregation, he would set them to sing this psalm while he went round the parish and rounded up the rest of them. Psalm 119 is divided into 22 sections, each one named after the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet and in the Hebrew every verse of the so named sections starts with that letter. So every verse in this section starts with א the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The psalm celebrates the law of God. There is a lot to be said about the place of law, but today's thought is that obeying God's law is obeying the Maker's instructions. It is going with the grain of the universe. Life goes much more smoothly if we walk in the ways of God.

August 2nd

Psalm 119 vv 9-16

When we were looking at the Wisdom Literature (Proverbs, Job, Daniel, maybe, parts of Genesis) we considered that it took shape in schools for young men preparing for careers in public service. *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.* The wise man or woman delights in discovering God's truths, in meditating on them and in proclaiming them to the world. To study the things of God is to worship Him. To teach the things of God is to encourage other Christians in their faith and to evangelise – to spread the Good News.

August 3rd

Psalm 119 vv 17-24

Our knowledge of God depends on His making Himself known to us. So we read the Bible prayerfully. We listen to sermons and talks prayerfully. We read religious literature prayerfully. And we think about God prayerfully. We also pray for preachers and teachers that they may themselves discern God's truth and also faithfully proclaim and teach His Word – Jesus.

That it may please thee to illuminate all Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, with true knowledge and understanding of thy Word; and that both by their preaching and living they may set it forth and shew it accordingly, **We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.**

That it may please thee to give to all thy people increase of grace, to hear meekly thy Word, and to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, **We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.**

August 4th

Psalm 119 25-32

Our fulfilment as human beings depends on our relationship with God and His Word. We can never be contented unless we know God and that is why people continue to strive for things which can never satisfy and are, in the end, destructive. The devil is the father of lies. False gods are deception. Lives lived for the things of this world are doomed to disappointment. The things of this world cannot satisfy us because we are made to be the children of God. If we pursue the things of this world to the exclusion of God, we also lose what truly matters, eternal life in Jesus Christ.

August 5th

Psalm 119 vv 33-40

Law is for bad people. Good people don't need the law because being good is what comes naturally to them. God doesn't love us because we keep the law. He just loves us. When we repent of our sins and put our faith in Him, He makes us righteous. He makes us good. So we naturally keep God's law of love because our new nature is love. O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed: Give unto thy servants that peace which the world cannot give; that both our hearts may be set to obey thy commandments, and also that by thee we being defended from the fear of our enemies may pass our time in rest and quietness; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Amen.

August 6th (Trinity 8)

Psalm 119 vv 41-48

It is all of God. It is God Who gives us the longing to know Him. It is by God's mercy that we are set free from sin. It is the work of God's Holy Spirit that we know God's law in our hearts and it is only by the grace of God that we can keep His commandments. If we know these things, we cannot help but share our knowledge with those who do not yet have the knowledge of God and to sing God's praises in the congregation of the faithful.

O God, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth; We humbly beseech thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

August 22nd

Psalm 119 vv 169-176

Jesus talks about the Good Shepherd Who lays down His life for the sheep. He knows them by Name. They know His voice. He speaks of the shepherd who leaves the 99 sheep in the wilderness to recover the one that is lost. He talks about seeking the other sheep which are not (yet) of this fold and bringing them home so that there will be one Shepherd and one fold. The thoughts go back at least to Psalm 23 when King David, himself once a shepherd boy, sings, *The LORD is my shepherd*. These are very precious thoughts, thoughts on which we may end our study of Psalm 119 – sheep prone to err, but always sought after by our Good Shepherd.

August 23rd

Psalm 120

The psalmist isn't finding life easy. The people he lives among don't love the LORD. They put pressure on him to give up walking in the ways of the LORD and to live like them. They make trouble for him and trouble for other people and, did they but know it, trouble for themselves. There may be times when we feel isolated. The people we meet every day, perhaps even our own families, don't share our love for the Lord. They can't see why we want to go to Church and to pray. They might not be able to understand why we set ourselves higher standards of generosity, honesty and integrity than is usual in the world. The answer for us, as it is for the psalmist, is to cleave to the Lord.

August 24th (S Bartholomew)

Psalm 121

Psalm 121 is one of the most popular psalms, especially I find around here where we do lift up our eyes to the hills. It's quite popular at funerals. In the Lord we find help whatever happens to us. He is always with us.

O Almighty and everlasting God, who didst give to thine Apostle Bartholomew grace truly to believe and to preach thy Word: Grant, we beseech thee, unto thy Church, to love that Word which he believed, and both to preach and receive the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

August 20th (Trinity 10)

Psalm 119 vv 153-160

So we're praying to God whatever is on our mind. Maybe we're praying awake in bed when we can't sleep. Maybe it's our formal daily prayer time or we're praying in church before or after a service. Or perhaps we're seizing the chance to pray while we're stuck in a traffic jam or waiting for a bus. How would we get God to give us what we ask for? The point is that we should want what God wants to give us. He knows best! Let thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of thy humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions make them to ask such things as shall please thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

August 21st

Psalm 119 vv 161-168

Seven times a day do I praise thee.

This verse helped to inspire the monastic offices – the idea that the religious community would pause in its work several times a day and join together to praise God. This is a wonderful idea. There are, however, two problems with this. The religious community does not consist merely of the clergy and the people who may be called to be monks or nuns. The Christian community is the community of all the faithful people. It is all the baptised. Every baptised person has his own vocation and ministry. We are all equally loved by God. We are all equally called to respond to God's love by loving Him with all our hearts, minds, souls and strength. The other difficulty is the practical one that many people just can't keep stopping what they're doing to go to chapel or even to pray where they are. This is why Thomas Cranmer reduced the daily offices to two – Morning & Evening Prayer – and instructed the parish clergy to say them daily in church, ringing the bell to invite the whole parish to join with him. Some might come. Some might stop and pray where they are when they hear the bell. However that works out, it is important for us to pray constantly, to be aware that we live in the Presence of God and to maintain a perpetual communion with Him, offering up praise and prayers to Him all the day long. 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.

August 7th

Psalm 119 vv 49-56

the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

What S Paul says in II Corinthians 3⁶ might seem to be at variance with today's portion from the psalm. The contradiction is only superficial, however. What Paul means is that the misuse of the law kills. If you misunderstand and think that you have to earn God's favour by keeping the law you either despair because you know that you are a failure or you become proud and despise other people because you imagine that you are a success. Both despair and pride are fatal to our spiritual life. Once we understand that God loves us just as we are, we realise that there is no need to feel inadequate and that there are no grounds for arrogance. What we have rather is the freedom to live lives of love for God and for one another. To love unselfishly as a human being is to have integrity. We are whole only when we offer ourselves unconditionally to love.

August 8th

Psalm 119 vv 57-64

Thou art my portion O Lord.

Think on those words. What it is to have a personal relationship with God the Father, what it is to have Jesus as a personal friend, what it is to dwell in the Spirit and that the Holy Spirit dwells in you. We do indeed confess with sorrow our failure to love up to what it means for us to be members of the family of God. We know that God forgives and restores us, however. We know that He is with us even when we are in dire straights. We want to praise Him night and day. Think of Jesus on the Cross, let down by His friends, betrayed by one of them, denied by another, the victim of lies and injustice, mockery, cruel punishment and a terrible death, even to point of feeling forsaken by God and yet having the grace to finish what God had given Him to do, to forgive His enemies, to provide for His mother and to promise the Kingdom of God to the penitent thief.

Lord, Thy Word abideth,
And our footsteps guideth;
Who its truth believeth
Light and joy receiveth.

When our foes are near us,
Then Thy Word doth cheer us,
Word of consolation,
Message of salvation.

When the storms are o'er us,
And dark clouds before us,
Then its light directeth,
And our way protecteth.

Word of mercy, giving
Succour to the living;
Word of life, supplying
Comfort to the dying!

Who can tell the pleasure,
Who recount the treasure,
By Thy Word imparted
To the simple hearted?

O that we, discerning,
Its most holy learning,
Lord, may love and fear Thee,
Evermore be near Thee!

August 9th

Psalm 119 vv 65-72

Life isn't always smooth. We make mistakes. Sometimes we do deliberately what we know to be wrong. Stuff happens even to good people. Yet God can use our failings and our troubles to make us better people. We know His forgiveness when we confess our sins. We know His presence with us in our troubles.

Romans 5 ¹Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: ² By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ And not only [so], but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; ⁴ And patience, experience; and experience, hope: ⁵ And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

August 10th (S Laurence)

Psalm 119 vv 73-80

Saint Lawrence was one of seven deacons who were in charge of giving help to the poor and the needy. When a persecution broke out, Pope St. Sixtus was condemned to death. As he was led to execution, Lawrence followed him weeping, "Father, where are you going without your deacon?" he said. "I am not leaving you, my son," answered the Pope. "in three days you will follow me." Full of joy, Lawrence gave to the poor the rest of the money he had on hand and even sold expensive vessels to have more to give away. The Prefect of Rome, a greedy pagan, thought the Church had a great fortune hidden away. So he ordered Lawrence to bring the Church's treasure to him. The Saint said he would, in three days. Then he went through the city and gathered

August 17th

Think of Jesus as the fulfilment of the promises. He is God's Word made flesh. He is the Light of the World. He is the Saviour of us all.

Name him, brothers, name him,
with love as strong as death,
but with awe and wonder
and with bated breath;
he is God the Saviour,
he is Christ the Lord,
ever to be worshiped,
trusted, and adored.

In your hearts enthrone him;
there let him subdue
all that is not holy,
all that is not true;
crown him as your Captain
in temptation's hour;
let his will enfold you
in its light and power.

August 18th

Psalm 119 vv 137-144

Heaven and earth will pass away, but the Word of the Lord endures forever. Whatever may happen to us or to the world, God's love will prevail.

Brothers, this Lord Jesus
shall return again,
with his Father's glory
with his angel train;

for all wreaths of empire
meet upon his brow,
and our hearts confess him
King of glory now.

August 19th

Psalm 119 vv 145-152

There was a piece in the paper today about how long people sleep for. Apparently, it makes a difference what job you do. Physical work can make you sleep. Stress can keep you awake. It's supposed to be very bad for sleep if you take your mobile phone or tablet computer to bed with you. I'm no fan of the other sort of sleeping tablet either. Any medication has side effects. You get so you can't sleep without a tablet. You have to up the dose to achieve the same effect. So what can you do if you can't sleep? You can always pray. It might relieve any stress you are undergoing. At least you won't have wasted your time lying there awake fretting.

Forgive me, Lord, for thy dear
Son,
the ill that I this day have done,
that with the world, myself, and
thee,
I, ere I sleep, at peace may be.

O may my soul on thee repose,
and with sweet sleep mine
eyelids close,
sleep that may me more
vigorous make
to serve my God when I awake.

your preacher. How shall I call upon my God, my God and my Lord, when by the very act of calling upon him I would be calling him into myself? Is there any place within me into which my God might come? How should the God who made heaven and earth come into me? Is there any room in me for you, Lord, my God? Even heaven and earth, which you have made and in which you have made me – can even they contain you? Since nothing that exists would exist without you, does it follow that whatever exists does in some way contain you? But if this is so, how can I, who am one of these existing things, ask you to come into me, when I would not exist at all unless you were already in me? Not yet am I in hell, after all but even if I were, you would be there too; for if I descend into the underworld, you are there. No, my God, I would not exist, I would not be at all, if you were not in me. Or should I say, rather, that I should not exist if I were not in you, from whom are all things, through whom are all things, in whom are all things? Yes, Lord, that is the truth, that is indeed the truth. To what place can I invite you, then, since I am in you? Or where could you come from, in order to come into me? To what place outside heaven and earth could I travel, so that my God could come to me there, the God who said, I fill heaven and earth? Who will grant it to me to find peace in you? Who will grant me this grace, that you should come into my heart and inebriate it, enabling me to forget the evils that beset me and embrace you, my only good? What are you to me? Have mercy on me, so that I may tell. What indeed am I to you, that you should command me to love you, and grow angry with me if I do not, and threaten me with enormous woes? Is not the failure to love you woe enough in itself? Alas for me! Through your own merciful dealings with me, O Lord my God, tell me what you are to me. Say to my soul, I am your salvation. Say it so that I can hear it. My heart is listening, Lord; open the ears of my heart and say to my soul, I am your salvation. Let me run towards this voice and seize hold of you. Do not hide your face from me: let me die so that I may see it, for not to see it would be death to me indeed.

Jesu, the very thought of Thee
With sweetness fills the breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy presence rest.

Nor voice can sing, nor heart
can frame,
Nor can the memory find
A sweeter sound than Thy blest
Name,
O Saviour of mankind!

together all the poor and sick people supported by the Church. When he showed them to the Prefect, he said: "This is the Church's treasure!" In great anger, the Prefect condemned Lawrence to a slow, cruel death. The Saint was tied on top of an iron grill over a slow fire that roasted his flesh little by little, but Lawrence was burning with so much love of God that he almost did not feel the flames. In fact, God gave him so much strength and joy that he even joked. "Turn me over," he said to the judge. "I'm done on this side!" And just before he died, he said, "It's cooked enough now." Then he prayed that the city of Rome might be converted to Jesus and that the Catholic Faith might spread all over the world. After that, he went to receive the martyr's reward. (From the Catholic Encyclopaedia.)

August 11th

Psalm 119 vv 81-88

When we think of our Lord's arrest, trial and crucifixion, it is easy to think of Him praying in these words. They are appropriate for us to use when we feel that everything is against us. He sympathises with our weaknesses. He understands. He has been there. He is here with us. In the end we can depend only on God and God is utterly dependable.

I am writing this the day we heard the news of the Manchester club bombing when 22 people were killed, many of the injured being children and young people. We need to commit to God in Jesus Christ those who have died, those who have lost loved ones, those who are badly injured, those who care for the sick, those who minister to the bereaved and injured, those who are responsible for maintaining law and order – the police and security forces, the courts, those in government.

We also bring to the Lord the perpetrators of these atrocities.
Judgement and mercy.

A Manchester headmaster was asked how he talked to children about such events as these. He said that there is hatred and there is love. He said that the people who these kinds of things are hateful people, but we have to be people of love.

August 12th

Psalm 119 vv 89-96

I am also writing this as we prepare to take part in the Archbishops' global call to prayer from Ascension to Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*. God is love. God is the fount of justice and mercy. It is only when the peoples of the earth seek to live in accordance with His holy Will that there can be peace.

At the Name of Jesus
every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him
King of glory now;

'tis the Father's pleasure
we should call him Lord,
who from the beginning
was the mighty Word.

August 13th (Trinity 9)

Psalm 119 vv 97-104

It is quite an attractive thought for a young man that he might have more understanding and be wiser than the aged. So he is, however, if he believes the Word of God and they don't. He shouldn't be too complacent, though. The Word of God requires of us a proper humility. Are we really wiser than the people we disagree with? We'd have to consider the matter humbly and prayerfully in the light of Scripture and of what the Church believes. Grant to us, Lord, we beseech thee, the spirit to think and do always such things as be rightful; that we, who cannot do any thing that is good without thee, may by thee be enabled to live according to thy will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

August 14th

Psalm 119 vv 105-112

Back when I was a teenager, I taught Sunday, which as at Cuxton now took place at the same time as the 9.30 service. So, for my own spiritual nourishment and to concentrate on God rather than my pupils, I used to attend the 8.00 BCP Communion service. People still spoke of making my Communion and we used to sit scattered round the church nowhere near our neighbours. It was very personal and individual – the *I/Thou* relationship with God – very special and very precious. Such a spirituality, however, can be very selfish and lose sight of the fact that we are members of one another. We Christians belong together. We are the Body of Christ. I think we've got better at that over the last few decades. We worship as a congregation together. We are not individuals worshipping separately but in the same room! We mustn't however, let the pendulum swing too far the other way and lose the *I/Thou*. He is my God as well as our God.

August 15th (S Mary the Virgin).

Psalm 119 vv 113-120

The angel Gabriel was God's messenger to Mary. God's Word to Mary was that she should be the Mother of His Son. Mary's response to God was, *Be it unto me according to thy word*. Jesus, the Word of God, was implanted in Mary's womb. He is the Word by Whom God made heaven and earth. He is the personification of God's justice and mercy, God's love. He is love. He is our example and our teacher. It is through Him that God's Kingdom comes and through Him that God's will is done in earth as it is in Heaven. He is our example and our teacher and it is by His Spirit that we are enabled to learn from Him and empowered to do as He did. When Jesus hung on the Cross, He provided for Mary a home with S John the apostle. It is Jesus Who provides for us according to His Word.

August 16th

Psalm 119 vv 121-128

"Our Hearts are Restless Until They Rest in You"

From the *Confessions* Saint Augustine of Hippo

Great are you, O Lord, and exceedingly worthy of praise; your power is immense, and your wisdom beyond reckoning. And so we men, who are a due part of your creation, long to praise you – we also carry our mortality about with us, carry the evidence of our sin and with it the proof that you thwart the proud. You arouse us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you. Grant me to know and understand, Lord, which comes first. To call upon you or to praise you? To know you or to call upon you? Must we know you before we can call upon you? Anyone who invokes what is still unknown may be making a mistake. Or should you be invoked first, so that we may then come to know you? But how can people call upon someone in whom they do not yet believe? And how can they believe without a preacher? But scripture tells us that those who seek the Lord will praise him, for as they seek they find him, and on finding him they will praise him. Let me seek you then, Lord, even while I am calling upon you, and call upon you even as I believe in you; for to us you have indeed been preached. My faith calls upon you, Lord, this faith which is your gift to me, which you have breathed into me through the humanity of your Son and the ministry of