

# Samuel

## Continued

### Bible Notes

October - December 2019

**Psalm 2.** *Quare fremuerunt gentes?*

**WHY** do the heathen so furiously rage together : and why do the people imagine a vain thing?

2. The kings of the earth stand up, and the rulers take counsel together : against the Lord, and against his Anointed.

3. Let us break their bonds asunder : and cast away their cords from us.

4. He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh them to scorn : the Lord shall have them in derision.

5. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath : and vex them in his sore displeasure.

6. Yet have I set my King : upon my holy hill of Sion.

7. I will preach the law, whereof the Lord hath said unto me : Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

8. Desire of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance: and the utmost parts of the earth for thy possession.

9. Thou shalt bruise them with a rod of iron : and break them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

10. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings : be learned, ye that are judges of the earth.

11. Serve the Lord in fear : and rejoice unto him with reverence.

12. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and so ye perish from the right way : if his wrath be kindled, (yea, but a little,) blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

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

October 1<sup>st</sup>

II Samuel 5 vv 1-5

God had sent Samuel to anoint David King of Israel when he was still just a boy. The anointing is a sign of the giving of God's Spirit, In these verses, finally, David fulfils the prophecy. He becomes what God had ordained him to be – the King of Israel.

We sometimes say that a sacrament is a sign which effects what it signifies. What that means is that God acts through the sacraments. Baptism is not merely something which we do to mark that we have decided to become Christians. It is more than a badge signifying our membership of the Church, an initiation rite. God acts in Baptism to make us Christians. When we are unfaithful to our Baptism, we are bad Christians, not non-Christians. There is always the way back to God through repentance and faith. Holy Communion is not merely a meal in which we commemorate Jesus. It isn't a wake! Or even just a celebration of His Life. God acts in Holy Communion and comes to us in the Body and Blood of Christ. That is why we eat and drink our own damnation, not merely bread and wine, if we receive Communion unworthily – ie not in love and charity with our neighbours.

Similarly in marriage, it is God who makes us one flesh. It is God Who gives His Holy Spirit in Confirmation. It is God Who makes us bishops, priests and deacons if we are so ordained. It is God Who forgives sin when we come to Him penitent and it is He Who heals us when we receive unction – the oil of healing – whether curing us of our bodily ills or the final healing of death. Hence we approach all these things with reverence and respect what God does for people through them.

October 2<sup>nd</sup>

II Samuel 5 vv 6-10

These verses are much less congenial than the last, but they are still holy Scripture. David needed a capital which was neither in Judah (his own tribal lands) nor in the territory of the other tribes. The Jebusites were still in possession of the already ancient city of Jerusalem and David took it off them. It was to be the place where God would establish His Temple. War is, however, always horrible. Pray for peace.

October 3<sup>rd</sup>

II Samuel 5 vv 11-16

So David is established in the kingdom. He is recognised by neighbouring kings, including King Hiram of Tyre, as well as by the people of Israel. Tyre is in Lebanon and Hiram sends (free gift? tribute? purchase?) some of the famous cedars with which, among other things, they build David a house or palace. This will become significant later on. Why does the King of Israel dwell in a house but the God of Israel in a tent?

I can't think of anywhere in the Bible where it specifically says that it is forbidden to have more than one wife and polygamy is common in the Old Testament. It seldom leads to domestic bliss, however, and surely the ideal is what Adam said when Eve was created, words which Jesus Himself repeated, confirmed and blessed: *Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall become one flesh.* Having a large harem was one way in which a potentate like David demonstrated his power and achieved the respect of others. But how did the women feel? Also, royal marriages, as they have been down through the ages, signified and effected alliances with other countries and were politically, economically and sometimes militarily important. But again what about the individuals concerned? What about love? How much choice did they have in deciding whom to marry? It is an ancient tradition that a valid marriage requires the consent of both parties (cf Genesis 24<sup>8&58</sup>), but how often was this principle disregarded? For very many years in England, we have assumed that two people first meet and fall in love and then choose of their own free will to marry. It is not quite as simple as that. Parents can still forbid the marriage of under 18s if they think it advisable to do so. In reality, we have a limited choice of people we are likely to fall in love with, even if we date online. We are also very likely to be influenced by our family and friends in the choice we make. Friends and family may well introduce us to people they think we'd get on with. Immigrant communities practise arranged marriage, where families bring two young people together with a view to marriage. This isn't necessarily a problem if the young people concerned freely give their informed consent. Forced marriage, or marriage based on deception, would however always be wrong.

October 4<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 5 vv 17-25

*Priest.* Give peace in our time, O Lord.

*Answer.* Because there is none other that fighteth for us, but only thou, O God.

Some people are very uncomfortable with that answer. If we think that God is on our side, might not that make us more warlike? Anyway, why should God be on our side, rather than the enemy's side. Yet today's passage assumes that God is on Israel's side against the Philistines. My way of looking at it is this. If we don't believe that God is on our side, we shouldn't fight. So the question is, Are we justified in fighting? Is this a just war? Some Christians believe that war can never be justified. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Most Christians believe that it is sometimes our duty to fight for the right. Only if we are prayerfully confident that we are fighting for the right can we expect God to be on our side. If we are confident that we are fighting in a just war, it is right that we pray for victory. If we don't feel able to pray for victory, we shouldn't be fighting. But, better than praying for victory, pray: *Give peace in our time, O Lord.* I often think that the next prayer is the key to peaceful relationships whether between nations or between communities, or within communities and even churches, within or between families, and the key to peace in our own hearts, peace within ourselves,

*Priest.* O God, make clean our hearts within us.

*Answer.* And take not thy Holy Spirit from us.

October 5<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 6 vv 1-5

They carried the Ark of the Covenant in which was the Throne of God on a new cart. On Palm Sunday, Jesus (in Whom dwells the Fulness of the Godhead bodily) rode into Jerusalem on a *colt, whereon never man set*. These are holy occasions and require something undefiled by common use, something new, fresh, unused for anything else. I think we can overdo the distinction between the holy and the common (cf Acts 10 where God tells Peter not to regard gentiles like us as unclean!), but a sense of reverence is important. We abolish the distinction between sacred and mundane, the eternal and the everyday, by treating all things as holy, not by treating holy things as common.

October 6<sup>th</sup> (Trinity 16 Harvest Festival)

II Samuel 6 vv 6-11

Uzzah didn't show sufficient respect to the Ark. When we were teenagers, we used to meet in church after evening service. I remember a woman getting very upset that some youngsters were playing around the altar, not that they were doing anything bad, but that they weren't showing proper respect. Did those children deserve the fate of Uzzah? I expect most readers of this would fall (as I do) between those extremes. We're not comfortable if people treat holy things as if they were not special, but we wouldn't like to think of God striking them dead for doing so. I remember reading an old book about counselling penitents. Stealing, it said, was worse if you stole from a church because that was sacrilege as well as theft. Fornication was worse if committed with a person who had taken a vow of celibacy. Again it was sacrilege as well as immorality. Yet, sin is sin. Might it not be worse to steal from a poor person than from a rich church? I'm not quite sure where I stand on this. If we have no sense of reverence for sacred things, maybe we are in danger of losing our respect for the wonderful truths which they signify. On the other hand, excessive reverence for buildings and books and icons may lead us into idolatry and produce in us a judgmental frame of mind which looks down on people who don't see things the way we see them. If you found a group of young men in church wearing their baseball caps and larking about would you do:

- a. T  
hrow them out.
- b. L  
et them be.
- c. T  
ry to get them to experience something of what you feel when you come into a place of prayer?

1. Fair waved the golden corn in Canaan's pleasant land, when full of joy, some shining morn, went forth the reaper-band.
2. To God so good and great their cheerful thanks they pour; then carry to his temple-gate the choicest of their store.
3. Like Israel, Lord, we give our earliest fruits to thee, and pray that, long as we shall live; we may thy children be.
4. Thine is our youthful prime, and life and all its powers; be with us in

our morning time, and bless our evening hours.

5. In wisdom let us grow, as years and strength are given, that we may serve thy Church below, and join thy Saints in heaven. Amen.

October 7<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 6 vv 12-19

There is a hymn based on this story. I think it reflects some of the joy of this joyous occasion. God dwells in the midst of His people. He is our strength. Celebrate God with us. God with us, Emanuel in Hebrew, the Name the angel gave Joseph for Jesus.

When David danced before the Lord,  
The ark was coming up the road;  
His wife despised him in her heart;  
The ark was coming up the road.  
*It's coming, hallelujah!*  
*The ark is coming up the road;*  
*It's coming, hallelujah!*  
*The ark is coming up the road.*

*The ark is coming up the road;*  
*It's coming, hallelujah!*  
*The ark is coming up the road.*

Sing on, pray on, we're gaining  
ground;  
The ark is coming up the road;  
The pow'r of God is coming down;  
The ark is coming up the road.  
*It's coming, hallelujah!*  
*The ark is coming up the road;*  
*It's coming, hallelujah!*  
*The ark is coming up the road.*

I do believe without a doubt—  
The ark is coming up the road—  
God's children have a right to shout—  
The ark is coming up the road.  
*It's coming, hallelujah!*

October 8<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 6 vv 20-23

What is appropriate behaviour for kings, for priests, for people who have a position to maintain in society? What does dignity mean? Michal evidently felt that David's dress and behaviour were undignified, inappropriate for a man in his position. But what does dignity really mean? It comes from the Latin dignitas which basically means worth, worthiness, merit. Sure the ancient Romans were fond of their "dignities" – their offices of state, their stately bearing, their patrician manners, their senatorial robes – but the basic meaning is worth and what is worth? What is worthy? What is worthy is fundamentally to worship, to worship God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. He and He alone is is worthy of our worship, our worthship. Stacey Gleddiesmith: *The most commonly cited definition of the word "worship" is based on the etymology of the English word: "Worship" is derived from the Old English word "woerthship." So, when we*

worship God, we are proclaiming (or giving him back) his worth. So David was right. Whatever we think about decorum and dress and such things, what really matters is hearts filled with praise.

October 9<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 7 vv 1-3

David was a king after God's own heart. Nathan was a prophet. They both thought the same thing, that it would be good to build a house for God in Jerusalem. The Ark lived in a tent or tabernacle. The king lived in a palace. Surely a temple would be more appropriate for God. The same Hebrew word **היכל** means both palace and temple. But this was not God's Will. There are times both in our personal lives and in the life of our churches when some plan we have formulated looks obviously right, but it isn't. We need to pause and listen to God. What He really wants rather than what we think He would want.

October 10<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 7 vv 4-11

There are several reasons why David doesn't get to build a house for God. Elsewhere, we are told that David wasn't the right man to build the temple because he had been in too many wars. There was too much blood on his hands. Even though they may have been just and holy wars, they still defiled those who waged them. If we accept that there are times when we have to fight, soldiering must be regarded as an honourable profession. Paradoxically perhaps, we need the most ethical men to go to war, who will achieve their aims with the minimum of suffering to the other side, not thugs, who will win at any moral price. It is also imperative that we honour our soldiers and take care of them and their families. Yet war, like punishment, though sometimes necessary, is always a failure on our part to effect peace and justice by holier means. It is also the case that God cannot be contained in any house that we might make for Him. *The heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee*, Solomon will say at the temple's consecration, *how much less this house that I have builded?* I think there is also the issue that David might be over-centralising, aggregating all the symbols of power around his capital. A delicate balance that in any society, central control imposes universal standards, but quashes regional self-expression, whereas devolution allows for local control of local areas and people but may descend into

inefficiency and corruption. Finally, there is the sense that David really has nothing to offer to God. God has given David everything that David has. He himself will say later in the story, *All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.*

October 11<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 7 vv 12-17

In their OT context, these words and this promise obviously mean Solomon and his descendants. For us Christians, however, it is even more obvious that God's promises are fulfilled in Jesus.

I have been thinking a lot lately about I Chronicles 29<sup>14</sup>: *All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.* Parish churches used to pay a quota or parish share to the diocese towards the cost of diocesan and national church expenditure and to subsidise parishes which cannot pay their own way. This quota or parish share was based on income and the numbers of people on the electoral roll and the numbers who attend services. Although it was a voluntary contribution, a lot of people regarded it as a kind of tax and resented paying it. So we tried replacing quota with a parish pledge. Parishes were invited to consider how much they thought they ought to pay and to pay that amount. Sadly, parishes have not been pledging enough to cover diocesan expenditure and there is now a financial crisis. The response has been to introduce indicative offers, asking parishes to pledge a sum which reflects their income and numbers. It sounds very much like quota to me!

But let's look at in a biblical way. In I Chronicles 29, David had asked for contributions towards the cost of building the temple. These were so generous that there was more than enough. It had been the same centuries previously when Moses made the Ark and the Tabernacle. In the spirit that everything we have is God's gift to us, *All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee*, the people offered more than was needed for the work. If we believe that what the diocese spends its money is what God wants it to spend its money on, then we should respond with the same generosity as the Israelites responded to Moses and David when they asked for contributions for the Tabernacle and the Temple. I'm sceptical of the need for elaborate schemes, closely

detailed budgets and reserves. There is no shortage of resources for God's work, *All things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee*. If we haven't enough, either the work isn't God's or we are failing to respond to God's generosity with equal generosity on our part. God's promises are fulfilled in Jesus Who gave us nothing less than His very self. How can we offer Him less than our very selves?

October 12<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 7 vv 18-24

The Israelites were very privileged in all that God had done for them. If human beings were rational, their response would have been to offer themselves wholly and unconditionally back to God. This is the key to human fulfilment, to give ourselves back freely to the One in Whose image we are made. S Paul points out that we are now infinitely more greatly blessed than OT Israel. We see Jesus. In Him we have eternal life. *For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.* (II Corinthians 5<sup>14&15</sup>).

October 13<sup>th</sup> (Trinity 17)

II Samuel 7 vv 25-29

The fulfilment of the promises depends on God, not on David, not on us, but on God. To offer ourselves and everything that we have to Him is faith. Faith believes God and it is counted as righteousness. I do believe that responsible stewardship of the Church's resources may include budgeting and reserves, but this stewardship must be in the light of biblical principles. Of the manna, S Paul reminds us: *He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack.* He also says: *But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:* (II Corinthians 9<sup>6&7</sup>). And all this has to be read in the light of our Lord's words in Matthew 6<sup>24-34</sup>:

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do

they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

### October 14<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 8 vv 1-18

So David secures his boundaries at the cost of more blood on his hands. The last three verses tell us who was who at court. The Cherethites and Pelethites were mercenaries who fought for David. Abiathar (a good man) and Joab (not such a good man) represent the old comrades who were with David in the outlaw days. Benaiah and Zadok belong to the new elite. Eventually, the court will fracture along those lines with civilized Jerusalem prevailing over the older more primitive life of the past.

### October 15<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 9 vv 1-13

David had promised Saul's son Jonathan that he would look after his descendants when David became king. David now fulfils that promise by looking after Mephibosheth, Jonathan's crippled son.

### October 16<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 10 vv 1-19

This is a mysterious incident. We don't know how Nahash had shown kindness to David. The bible doesn't say. Tradition has it that Nahash saved one of David's brothers when the Moabites exterminated the rest of his family. Maybe Nahash supported David simply because David challenged Saul who had defeated Nahash in battle at the beginning of his reign. Anyway, David's gesture of kindness was misunderstood and war broke out – the Ammonites and the Syrians in league against David's forces. David's men prevailed and there was peace again, Israel retaining the upper hand.

### October 17<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 11 vv 1-5

Powerful men taking advantage of women. What did Bath-sheba think about it? Was she flattered to be chosen by the king or was she afraid to turn him down? Did she think to advance her own position in society or

possibly even her husband's position? The king would owe them. Powerful men seem often to think that they need not play by the rules which apply to ordinary people. But the king is under the authority of God just as much as the lowliest peasant. The king is no more entitled to commit adultery than anyone else. And that goes for celebrities and wealthy businessmen and politicians in the world today. The truth comes out not in the *Sun*, but because Bath-sheba is pregnant.

October 18<sup>th</sup> (S Luke)

II Samuel 11 vv 6-13

David hopes that Uriah will sleep with his wife and think that the baby is his. So deceit is added to adultery on David's list of sins. I find that, when I pray for people, the kind of things I am asking for are peace for them, wisdom (which means love because Christ is the power and wisdom of God and God is love), and healing of body, mind and spirit, of relationships with other people and with God, forgiveness of sins. These are the gifts of Jesus, Who is the Word of God made flesh. The Scriptures (God's written Word) bear witness to Him. Through the Sacraments, He works His healing power in our hearts. In the fellowship of the Church and in personal prayer, we grow to know Him better, Whom to know is eternal life.

**ALMIGHTY** God, who calledst Luke the Physician, whose praise is in the Gospel, to be an Evangelist, and Physician of the soul; May it please thee, that, by the wholesome medicines of the doctrine delivered by him, all the diseases of our souls may be healed; through the merits of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

October 19<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 11 vv 14-17

I am preparing these notes just after the death in custody (apparently suicide) of Jeffrey Epstein, who was on remand awaiting trial for serious sexual offences. His parties were attended by many wealthy and powerful people and it was thought that, at his trial, there might come out many embarrassing facts about some of them, even evidence of crimes they too might have committed. Epstein had previously attempted to kill himself and had been on suicide watch, but this had been discontinued. Given that his death could be convenient for rich and famous people, questions have been asked. Was the suicide watch discontinued in the expectation that he would end his own life? Is it possible that he was killed by someone else and his death made to look

like suicide? The prison authorities insist that the suicide watch was dropped in accordance with normal practice and nothing sinister happened. But it isn't hard to believe that in every age the rich and powerful have been tempted to do what David did and remove from this earth people who could do them harm. We all know of official cover ups of abuse and other wrongdoing by public bodies and famous individuals. We know about the lies told by official spokesmen. David adds murder to his list of crimes. Power certainly brings temptations.

October 20<sup>th</sup> (Trinity 18)

II Samuel 11 vv 18-25

We've met Joab in earlier stories about David. He was a ruthless and cruel man, a consummate politician. In earlier stories, David had deplored Joab's ruthlessness and distanced himself from it, even while taking advantage of the political benefits that it brought (such as the convenient death of Abner, which led to the fall of Ishbosheth and opened the path to the throne of all Israel to David). Here, however, David openly exploits Joab's lack of integrity. Integrity is perhaps the most important virtue to be sought in those entrusted with power, yet it is hard to see how people of integrity can attain power or position and retain them. Am I being too cynical here or is it really impossible for a decent, honest person to rise to the top and maintain his or her position? **LORD**, we beseech thee, grant thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow thee the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

October 21<sup>st</sup>

II Samuel 11 vv 26&27

And yet we shall stand before the Judgment seat of God, rich and poor, high and low, all alike.

**Matthew 19:16-26:** And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle,

than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

The rich have to obey the same commandments as the rest of us. Jesus says that they find it harder. The disciples are amazed that the rich aren't at the front of the queue for heaven as they seem to be for everything else. In the end, only God can save, rich and poor alike, but it can be harder for the rich to know their need of God.

October 22<sup>nd</sup>

II Samuel 12 vv 1-6

It is often only too easy for the rich and powerful to take what they want. The people who need more money least find it easiest to obtain. A rich man finds it easier to get a loan than a poor man and is likely to be charged lower rates of interest. A rich man has spare money to invest and make more money. A rich man can buy better quality things which last longer. A well-dressed, well-spoken person is better treated by everyone from shopkeepers to policemen. [We once, as a family, had been out somewhere where rough clothes were the order of the day and called into a showroom on the way home to enquire about buying a car. The dismissive treatment we received ensured that we bought the car somewhere else!] [I remember a policeman saying that, one of the first things bobbies learn in training is telling the difference between the people you call *sir* and the people you call *mate*.] Yet it is the poor who are very often the most vulnerable, the poor who most need help, who most need at least to be treated with respect. David was angry with the rich man in Nathan's story, but then comes the punch line: *Thou art the man*. Do we recognise ourselves in the stories of Jesus?

October 23<sup>rd</sup>

II Samuel 12 vv 7-14

Actions have consequences. God's law is universal. It doesn't just apply to other people. If we break God's rules, we damage the fabric of society. Whether we are rich or poor, a celebrity or just ordinary, powerful or at the bottom of the heap, if we don't live in accordance with the order sustained by God's law, we invite primaevial chaos to return. Maybe the sins of kings do more harm to the social order than those of us peasants. They certainly don't have a free pass to break the rules, but we all do damage to the social order when we fail to live by

God's Law. Yet, we are not under law, but under grace. Our relationship with God transforms our nature so that we grow into His likeness and He is love. As we grow closer to God, it becomes our very nature to keep the Law, because the Law is summarised in the Commandments to love. God is love and we are love if we love Him with all our hearts. Because we are love, we no longer sin. The Law is like a schoolmaster who teaches us right from wrong and punishes us when necessary until we attain that maturity whereby we behave ourselves simply because we have become adults.

October 24<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 12 vv 15-17

The death of a child is one of the cruellest things that can happen. Parents may well wonder if they have done something to deserve such a thing. Did mum eat or drink the wrong things during pregnancy? Did Dad or someone else knock her about? Were the parents careless in allowing the child to get into a dangerous situation? Did the family doctor miss the symptoms of a fatal illness? Did we sin and this is our punishment? We ask all these questions. In John 9, the disciples ask Jesus, *Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?* Often there is no reason that we can see. No-one is to blame. If that is the case, we have to be reasonable and not blame ourselves or someone else (the doctor or social worker, the NHS or the council) for what is nobody's fault. Jesus is the Logos (Λογος), reason, wisdom, prudence, the truth, the word, and, in Him, Christians are logical (λογικοι), reasonable, wise, prudent, honest, sensible people. Emotion is a very powerful and important aspect of our personality, but we must not allow it to displace reason as our guiding principle. Emotion and prudence, faith and reason are partners in giving our lives direction and purpose. Emotion and reason are like the two horses pulling a two horse wagon. We'd go off track if one predominated.

But what about when there clearly is someone to blame? What if parents or carers or doctors or nurses have been negligent or even have deliberately harmed the child? What if we rightly think that we have done something so terrible as to deserve such a tragedy? For one thing, lessons have to be learnt – about supervision, good practice, etc..

Where there is deliberate wrong-doing or criminal negligence, there must be justice and that might imply punishment of the offender.

And then there is forgiveness. Can we forgive ourselves if we have been in any way responsible for the death of our own child? Can we forgive other people whose negligence or deliberate action might have been responsible for our child's death? Not having experienced such an appalling event, I haven't the moral right to tell you that you must forgive yourself or any other person. I can't tell you how to forgive such an awful thing. But I do think that forgiveness is the only way you will find peace and I can only humbly suggest prayer to help you find it.

October 25<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 12 vv 18-23

You do have to get on with life, even after a bereavement or a terrible tragedy. If our loved ones die before we do, they will understand that we mourn for them, but they will also want us to have the best possible lives in the time that remains to us on earth. If we go through some terrible trauma, it will change us, but it must not be allowed to destroy us. We all have a part to play in the world and we must not allow any setback, whatever its enormity, to prevent us from caring for other people in the world around us.

October 26<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 12 vv 24 & 25

Some people want to clone their dear departed pets. It can only be a matter of time before they want to do the same thing for their children or their lovers. The whole idea seems gruesome to me. Even if the new dog looks like the old one, it won't be your old dog back again. He's had his life – short or long. Both his appearance and personality are features of his environment and experience as well as his DNA. He won't be the same animal and you won't be treating him right if you behave towards him as if he were. How much more would that be true of human beings. You might be able to clone a human being but he wouldn't be the same person as the one you had lost. Yet some people do behave as if another child could replace one they have lost. It isn't fair to the child and the parents aren't being fair to themselves. We need to be valued for the people we are, not as replacements for

something others have lost. We are of infinite value in our own right, not merely as instruments for the well-being of others.

October 27<sup>th</sup> (Trinity 19)

II Samuel 12 vv 26-31

Another horrible battle with even more terrible consequences for the vanquished than the victors. Do you think that David's shame for his own conduct made him crueller than he might otherwise have been to the Ammonites? It had been a long war. Maybe, there was much pent up resentment at previous atrocities. Maybe, they wanted to destroy Ammon once and for all. In Amos 1<sup>13-15</sup>, long after these events, the Ammonites themselves are guilty of terrible war crimes.

**O GOD**, forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee; Mercifully grant, that thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

October 28<sup>th</sup> (S Simon & S Jude)

II Samuel 13 vv 1-14

Another revolting story of human sin and its consequences. We don't often read it in church, but it is a common theme for artists. Today's collect prays for a Church united in love for God and for one another, the dwelling place of God. Such a Church models God's Kingdom for the world. This, we ought to be able to say of the Church, is how the world could be if only people would live in accordance with God's commandments.

**O ALMIGHTY** God, who hast built thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the head corner-stone; Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made an holy temple acceptable unto thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

October 29<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 13 vv 15-22

You could make a Netflix series out of the story of David's family. It would contain all the sex and violence, jealousy and revenge that would appeal to subscribers. Millions of people stream Netflix. Yet we censor the Bible and don't read these appalling stories. But sex and violence, jealousy and revenge, and the like are very much part of the world as it is or as it could be if we were not restrained by the conventions and disciplines of Christian culture. People are interested in these things. They are very much part of the human experience whether at first or

second hand or in our imaginations. We tell stories in order to make sense of the world and to pass on that wisdom from one generation to another. If the Church doesn't face up to the nasty side of human life as well as the nice, it runs the risk of being seen as irrelevant by those who most need Christian experience and nurture. A Church which only reached the already nice wouldn't be of much use in the world. *I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.* People, especially young people, will seek out these stories of sex and violence, jealousy and revenge, and the like. What we can offer is to tell these stories within the context of the Christian Gospel – in which there are right and wrong, justice and mercy, forgiveness, hope and ultimately love, because God is love and He is our Maker, our Redeemer and the One Who sanctifies our lives.

October 30<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 13 vv 23-29

There would be a party, a celebration at the shearing of the sheep, a sort of pastoral harvest festival. Having bided his time for two years, Absalom works out a cunning plan to take Amnon's life. You might think that Amnon deserved the death penalty, given that it existed in that culture, or at least that he deserved to be severely punished. But there has to be a distinction between justice and revenge. Justice is administered dispassionately by properly constituted authority. Justice is about preserving the fabric of society. The punishment balances the crime. Hopefully, it deters others from committing crime. Ideally, it also leads the offender to be reformed and rehabilitated. As Christians, we can never want a criminal, however vile, to be destroyed by his punishment, however deserved. *ALMIGHTY God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness, and live.* What God desires is what we desire if we are the people of God, *not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds*, by the grace of God given to us in Word and Sacrament, prayer and Christian fellowship. Revenge, on the other hand, may balance the crime, but it does not have the rehabilitation of the offender at heart. Neither is it likely to deter others. Revenge may result in retaliation on the part of the other or of his friends and might degenerate into a feud which could

last for generations. Revenge does not restore the social order. It is subjective, not objective and, if we feel better for inflicting pain on our enemies, we are not nice people. We are not whole or healthy.

Matthew 5: 38 Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

October 31<sup>st</sup>

II Samuel 13 vv 30-39

What a terrible state of affairs. How must David have felt? One son has raped his half sister. Another son has murdered the rapist. At one point it looked as if Absalom had done away with all the king's sons, possibly a foretaste of the rebellion which is yet to come. And much of this disorder in David's family goes back to his adultery with Bath-sheba and what hid did to her husband, Uriah the Hittite. There are families like this in today's world. There are plenty of families where there is abuse within the home, brutality, feuds, revenge, violence, even rape and murder. The saying about the sins of the fathers being visited to the third and fourth generation is often only too true as abuse begets abuse, violence begets violence and hatreds are passed on to children and grandchildren. Today is Hallowe'en. As the days grow shorter, thoughts turn to darkness and its powers. Traditionally bonfires are lit, though in England this custom got replaced by bonfires on Guy Fawkes night, to commemorate the foiling of the gunpowder plot to blow up king & parliament and there is the horrible thought of burning people at the stake, though Fawkes and his co-conspirators were hanged, drawn and quartered – the punishment for treason. Anyway, the original message of fire at this time of year is light and warmth when the world is turning cold and dark. Going back to the horrors in David's family and the darkness of much of the world, Christians think of our Lord's

words to us in Matthew 5: **14** Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

November 1<sup>st</sup> (All Saints)

II Samuel 14 vv 1-3

Joab wants to effect a reconciliation between David and Absalom, but probably more for political than saintly reasons. It is not always a good thing to examine other people's motives. Who are we to judge? It is a good thing to examine our own motives, however. Do we really mean well or are we hypocrites when we appear to be solicitous of others' welfare?

**O ALMIGHTY** God, who hast knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord; Grant us grace so to follow thy blessed Saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys, which thou hast prepared for them that unfeignedly love thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

November 2<sup>nd</sup>

II Samuel 14 vv 4-11

They can't approach the king directly about Absalom. His hurt is too great and it doesn't do to risk provoking the wrath of kings. So Joab enlists the help of this wise woman to get the king's attention and to set him thinking. Remember that there was no police force in those days. Families executed justice and perhaps there was sometimes not sufficient distinction made between justice and revenge. The tale Joab concocts is quite plausible in the context of Israelite society. The death penalty was normal for murder. The family would be expected to avenge the murdered victim by carrying it out. In this case, however, the widow would be left with no sons to support her. Her dead husband would be deprived of heirs and the rest of the family would inherit his property. This could have been their motive in wanting to see the second son dead as well. So the woman might reasonably be expected to turn to the king for a judgment, which she does, and David decides that the right choice is to let the murderer live on this occasion, because to execute him would make the situation even worse than it is already. So now the wise woman has David's attention and she has got him thinking about showing mercy to a son who kills his brother.

November 3<sup>rd</sup> (Trinity 20)

II Samuel 14vv 12&13

All this about letting off a killer for the benefit of the family or even, as the wise woman here intimates, for the benefit of the whole nation, made me think about whether we do anything similar today. Recently, an entertainer was let off a long driving ban for speeding because he said he needed his car to do his job and many other people's jobs depended on him keeping his. Speeding isn't exactly murder, though it is true that speed kills. Then I was reminded of something I reported on in the parish magazine a couple of years ago. It was about not punishing terrorist murderers for what they had done during the Troubles in Northern Ireland in the interest of establishing lasting peace there now. There was a man from Northern Ireland whose mother had been murdered thirty years previously by paramilitaries in the troubles. Should her murderers be sought out, put on trial and punished, even if to do so would set back the peace process? In other words, should justice for her and her family be pursued at all costs, even if it meant that the fighting would continue longer? Her son, very generously, said, No. He would forego justice in order to advance the peace process. When questioned, he said that he would expect ordinary murderers (what they ironically call in Northern Ireland "ordinary decent criminals") to be pursued and brought to justice in all circumstances. It was only terrorists he was prepared to see let off. He admitted that this was illogical, but anything would be worth it if it put an end to the troubles and avoided further killing. Interestingly, that man is a Christian and from that he drew the strength to forgive his enemies but he also looked to God to ensure that justice prevails and to deal with sinners accordingly. We can't escape God's justice. Neither is God a pragmatist, turning a blind eye to what He would rather not have to deal with. Moreover, we overlook crimes committed by tyrannical foreign governments against their own people or powerful perpetrators of war crimes, partly because we often cannot do much about them anyway, but also because it may be in our economic interest to turn a blind eye if we need, say, their oil or their support in other conflicts eg oil rich Saudi Arabia which is also an ally against Iran.

November 4<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 14 v14

God does not respect persons. I've been exercised about this lately having been complained about for not dressing in accordance with my

“station in life”. In several places in the bible it says that God does not respect persons. It also says that God does not judge by appearances. Surely, therefore, we His people ought neither to respect persons nor to judge by appearances. I found this on the internet. *One of the very first areas that you will really need to get a grip on in this area is to learn that God the Father is no respecter of persons. What this means is that every single man and woman He has ever created is on an equal footing with Him. What this means is that He has an equal and unconditional love for each person He has ever created and He is not going to be playing favourites with anyone.*

God devises means that His banished should not be expelled from Him. I take this to mean God’s reaching out to the sinner, the Good Shepherd seeking out the lost sheep. I have to confess that the translation and interpretation of this whole verse is not clear, but both the two lessons I have drawn from it are more than supported by better known Scripture.

November 5<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 14 vv 15-20

**O ALMIGHTY** and most merciful God, of thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech thee, from all things that may hurt us; that we, being ready both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that though wouldest have done; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Amen.* So this week’s collect. The wise woman eventually gets round to telling David what she wants him to do. He recognises Joab’s work when he sees it. This isn’t going to work out well for David or Israel. Our collect assumes God’s providence in our lives, protecting and guiding us, and presupposes that ought to be ready in body and soul cheerfully to accomplish the things He would have done. Joab and the wise woman and David have not thought and prayed sufficiently about what God would have them do. We need to pray every day for grace to recognise and to accomplish what God would have us do, quietly confident that He is keeping us from all things hurtful.

November 6<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 14 vv 21-27

So Absalom returns to Jerusalem. He is a remarkable young man and attracts many admirers and followers. I like the note about his hair! They say that we sort ourselves out as teenagers into natural leaders and natural followers. A minority become neither. They are on the edge of

the group or outside it altogether – the boffins, the jesters, etc. (the clergy?), but most people fit in with other people and naturally lead or naturally follow. This gives natural leaders great power and responsibility. Are they gang leaders who organise others to deal in drugs or fight with rival gangs? Or do they organise sports teams? Or do they persuade others to join in acts of community service? When they grow up, are they Hitlers or Ghandis? If you are a natural leader, make sure you use your gift responsibly. If you are a natural follower, at least think about where you are being led to and don't follow if know it is wrong. Think for yourself.

### November 7<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 14 vv 28-33

Absalom stops at nothing to gain what he wants. Was he sincere in returning to David as a loyal son or was it always possible that he would revolt? Maybe he revolted because he felt ill used but maybe he was never going to accept not being number one. A good leader leads only in order to serve.

### November 8<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 15 vv 1-6

Maybe David was too busy to see all the people who came to him for judgments. Perhaps he should have delegated more, but to whom? To Absalom who had killed his half brother? Absalom takes advantage of the situation to undermine people's loyalty to David. Yet stability is important. The default position is to respect the leadership. If we continually despise and undermine those in authority over us, we are heading for anarchy or even civil war. Rulers are never above criticism, but they always deserve respect. In a democracy, we can change our rulers without bloodshed. It is intrinsic to the system. Revolution or rebellion, however, are the very last resorts if they are ever justified, which I'm not sure about – setting brother against brother and generally resulting in a worse tyranny than the one it is designed to overthrow. The Reign of Terror & Napoleon's wars followed the French Revolution. Stalin seized control of post-revolutionary Russia. We disliked Cromwell so much that we invited the king back!

From all sedition, privy conspiracy, and rebellion; from all false doctrine, heresy, and schism; from hardness of heart, and contempt of thy Word and Commandment,  
*Good Lord, deliver us.*

November 9<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 15 vv 7-9

Absalom is a liar, a hypocrite and possibly a blasphemer. He claims the religious reason for going to Hebron that he is going there to worship God in fulfilment of a vow, something David would find very hard to deny him. In reality, once out from under his father's eye, Absalom intends to foment a rebellion. Church and state were closely linked in David's Israel as they were in Tudor England when the prayer which ends yesterday's reading was written. *False doctrine, heresy and schism* (breaking up the Church) are seen as natural parallels to *sedition, privy conspiracy and rebellion*. Certainly our place within society as citizens of Britain (or wherever Christians happen to live in the world) is determined by our relationship with God – the fact that we are Christians, members of Christ, members of one another, members of Christ's Body, the Church. Because we are Christians, we are good citizens of the country we happen to live in and our relationship with the state is determined by our relationship with God. Normally, we obey the law because *the powers that be are ordained of God*. Occasionally we decline to obey an unjust regime and pay the price if necessary.

November 10<sup>th</sup> (Trinity21, Remembrance Sunday) II Samuel 15 vv 10-12

At school we learnt how quickly the First World War started. The Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated. Countries declared war on one another. Their allies joined in to support them. The troop trains were set in motion. A conflagration had been ignited which it took four terrible years to douse, only for the embers to burst once more into flame in 1939, to be followed by six years of even more deadly conflict. Once Absalom's rebellion began it acquired its own momentum. There was no going back once the established order was broken. We have to cherish peace and good order the way we do politics, the way we live generally, the way we speak to other people and in our attention to prayer and biblical principles of right and wrong. Our own political system is going through great trauma and our politicians have lost the respect of many. The whole political system has lost the respect of many. We must be careful not to destroy it in our frustration. The destruction of stability and order would be far worse than being on the losing side of any of the issues which divide us.

**GRANT**, we beseech thee, merciful Lord, to thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve thee with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

November 11<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 15 vv 13-23

What follows is a roll call of the loyal. Loyalty is very important to be. You remember that the Cherethites and the Pelethites were mercenaries. Their captain was Ittai the Gittite. That means he came from the Philistine city of Gath. Yet he and his men were loyal to King David, whereas David's own son was not. Never mind wars for a moment, where do our loyalties lie when they are quarrels (schisms even) within the Church? Our first loyalty must be to God, then to His Church, but what about to His ministers? What loyalty do we owe them?

November 12<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 15 vv 24-29

The two priests, Zadok, high priest in Jerusalem, and Abiathar, who had accompanied David since his outlaw days, were loyal to David and brought the Ark of the Covenant, symbolising the Presence of God, Emanuel. David realises, however, that they will be more use to him in Jerusalem. God is with him wherever he is and he will return as King if God so wills.

November 13<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 15 v30

Words of Jesus in Matthew 23: <sup>37</sup> O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Thinking of David ascending the Mount of Olives, weeping as he leaves the City of Jerusalem, Christians are surely reminded of great David's greater Son, hundreds of years later, entering the city as the King coming in peace seated on an ass and the foal of an ass, the adulation and rejoicing of the crowds, and what so soon would follow.

Refrain:  
All glory, laud, and  
honour,  
to thee, Redeemer,  
King,  
to whom the lips of  
children  
made sweet  
hosannas ring.

1. Thou art the King  
of Israel,  
thou David's royal  
Son,  
who in the Lord's  
name comest,  
the King and  
Blessed One.  
(Refrain)

2. The company of  
angels  
are praising thee on  
high,  
and we with all  
creation  
in chorus make  
reply.  
(Refrain)

3. The people of the  
Hebrews  
with psalms before  
thee went;  
our prayer and  
praise and anthems  
before thee we  
present.  
(Refrain)

4. To thee, before  
thy passion,  
they sang their  
hymns of praise;  
to thee, now high  
exalted,  
our melody we raise.  
(Refrain)

5. Thou didst accept  
their praises;  
accept the prayers  
we bring,  
who in all good  
delightest,  
thou good and  
gracious King.  
(Refrain)

### November 14th

### II Samuel 15 vv 32-37

Ahithophel was considered to be a very wise counsellor. He had gone over to Absalom's side and would have been a great asset to the rebel prince. The much older Hushai, however, was also a counsellor but loyal to David. David realises the potential of having a wise man he can trust in Absalom's court. Thus, in the providence of God, Ahithophel's counsel will be rendered useless and, in God's plan for His people, David will prevail over his errant son.

### November 15<sup>th</sup>

### II Samuel 16 vv 1-4

Remember Mephibosheth? He is Jonathan's son and David has taken care of him in fulfilment of his promise to his father. Now Ziba is casting in his lot with David and claiming that Mephibosheth thinks that he might become king. He is, after all, Saul's grandson. It really isn't clear whether Mephibosheth really was that stupid and disloyal or whether Ziba was making it all up in order to gain David's favour. Even David can't ultimately decide, as we shall see. Loyalty again. Whom can we trust? To whom are we ourselves loyal? Where our loyalties lie must be determined by our relationship to God. His is our first loyalty and all our other loyalties derive from our trust in God. Disloyalty is nasty. We might not be able to support the people we

claim to love in everything they do. We might even have to try to oppose them if they are going wrong. But love has no place for disloyalty. Ultimately, we want for them the best whatever they might have done wrong, even if they have wronged us.

November 16<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 16 vv 5-14

Obviously, there were some who still thought the house of Saul should reign, including Shimei. Abishai was Joab's brother. The third brother, Asahel, had been killed in chapter 2 by Abner, Saul's commander in chief. These three sons of Zeruiah were violent and ruthless men. David depended on their loyalty to him, but he found it very hard to control them. Abishai wanted Shimei dead. David was more circumspect. But it's true that leaders are not omnipotent. They cannot always control their staff because they depend on their staff for their authority. The prime minister has to take account of the views of the cabinet and parliament. Even a military commander is heading for trouble if he ignores his officers and men. Discipline only holds so far. Generally speaking, it is good that the top men cannot have things all their own way. *Absolute power corrupts absolutely.* However, there are times when, like David with the sons of Zeruiah, one could wish that the top man could impose his will on his deputies.

Conquering kings their titles take  
From the foes they captive make;  
Jesus, by a nobler deed,  
From the thousands he hath freed.

November 17<sup>th</sup> (Trinity 22)

II Samuel 16 vv 15-23

So Absalom has two counsellors, one secretly working for David, pretending loyalty to Absalom. Ahithophel's counsel is extremely highly regarded, but it will be confounded because Hushai is on the side of right. Ahithophel's counsel regarding David's concubines is horrible. The motive is to show that Absalom has supplanted his father, which is wrong in itself, and it takes no account of the feelings of the women. What we pray for in today's collect is a complete contrast, but we have to work for it, to work with God to answer our prayers that the Church will be a model of what the world should be, a community of loving people, living by the commandments of God. Too often the

Church seems to adopt the world's ethos, rather than demonstrating God's Way (Jesus) to the world.

**LORD**, we beseech thee to keep thy household the Church in continual godliness; that through thy protection it may be free from all adversities, and devoutly given to serve thee in good works, to the glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

November 18<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 17 vv 1-14

Ahithophel is right. Absalom's best plan is to hunt down David quickly before he can secure his position. Hushai deliberately gives the wrong advice and Absalom accepts it because God is protecting David and the Kingdom of Israel. It is characteristic of human history to be defiled by war and bloodshed, but so different from the values of the Kingdom of God, to which we, as the Church, bear witness – in word and hopefully in deed.

Yea, none other Name is  
given  
Unto mortals under heaven,  
Which can make the dead  
arise,  
And exalt them to the skies.

Jesus, who dost condescend  
To be called the sinner's  
friend,  
Hear us, as to thee we pray,  
Glorying in thy Name to-day.

Rather gladly for that Name  
Bear the Cross, endure the  
shame;  
Joyfully for him to die  
Is not death but victory.

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

November 19<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 17 vv 15-22

In all the horror of civil war and the conflict even within the royal family, I'm quite enamoured of the story of these two young men. It is an adventure for them. War provides an opportunity in which people – often quite ordinary people – can demonstrate virtues such as loyalty, fortitude, endurance & courage. War can bring out the best in people as well as the worst. The resources devoted to war stimulate invention and development. In C20, treatment of wounds, radio and radar, aviation, etc., were brought on by leaps and bounds. If only we could put as much effort into living peacefully together as we do in fighting one another.

November 20<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 17 v23

Suicide is rarely mentioned in the Bible. Christians have generally thought that it is covered by the commandment *Thou shalt do no murder*, regarding suicide as self murder. Suicide is the ultimate in giving up hope. It can be quite selfish as it hurts the people who love you and it is terribly unfair to strangers who may be driving the train under which you throw yourself or members of the emergency services who have to deal with your remains. It has been thought of as the unforgivable sin because you may have no opportunity to repent before you find yourself standing before the Judgment Seat of God. Suicides were denied burial in consecrated ground. Society seeks to protect itself and its members from the risk of suicide. On the other hand, those who decide to commit suicide in our culture are generally either desperate or mentally ill. They ought to be able to expect compassion rather than condemnation from Christians. Then there are those very sick people who feel unable to face the future who may want to kill themselves and may need others to assist them to do so. Currently, it is illegal to assist someone to commit suicide, though many people would like to see the law changed as it has been in some other parts of the world. Is life always sacred so that it should never be taken? If not, under what circumstances can life be taken? Is there a risk of a slippery slope so that suicide comes to be the normal way to deal with unsatisfactory lives and serious physical or mental illness? Some seriously disabled people are concerned that a more lax attitude to the taking of life might lead people to think that the life of a disabled person isn't worth saving.

November 21<sup>st</sup>

II Samuel 17 vv 24-29

So Absalom and David consolidate their positions. Absalom no longer has Joab on his side. Joab was a formidable operator and it is a great loss to Absalom's campaign that Joab fights for David. Meanwhile, David receives more support and provisions from Machir and Barzillai. It is interesting that he is also helped by Shobi the son of Nahash and brother of Hanun, with whose men David's men had been fighting in chapter 10.

November 22<sup>nd</sup>

II Samuel 18 vv 1-5

George II was the last English king to lead his troops into battle in 1743. Our own Prince Harry was forced to give up a military career because his presence complicated the politics and endangered troops fighting alongside him. Kings and princes are totemic figureheads and for that very reason cannot be allowed to be killed, wounded or captured. Generals nowadays are usually well back from any fighting. If they were killed, strategic leadership would be severely damaged. Their capture could create all sorts of problems. David's very person, his survival, were vital for morale. Yet there also seems something wrong about people fighting for someone who does not fight himself or officers ordering troops to risk their lives from the safety of GHQ. Soldiers like Prince Harry feel bad about not sharing the dangers their men have to face. Again, complex questions of mutual loyalty.

November 23<sup>rd</sup>

II Samuel 18 vv 6-18

There was a terrible battle fought in a wood which apparently led to far greater casualties than might have been the case in an open field. Absalom, rather ridiculously, gets stuck in a tree. Despite his rebellion and everything else Absalom has done, David still loves his son and has ordered all three of his commanders (including Joab) to save his life. Ruthless Joab, however, thinks otherwise. Joab believes that the only way to stop the war and secure David on his throne is to kill Absalom, which he does. Again, the sons of Zeruah do not submit to what David wants. It is in their interest to see that David remains king and that is what they do.

November 24<sup>th</sup> (Last Sunday after Trinity)

II Samuel 18 vv 19-33

Ahimaaz is keen. He has good news. Probably he thinks that David will be impressed with the bearer of good tidings. Joab, however, understands that David will not be rejoicing when he finds out that Absalom is dead. So he sends a man who is probably a professional runner, Cush. When David hears that his son is dead, the king is devastated. Despite everything that Absalom has done, David still loves him and his death cuts David to the quick. What do we do when those whom we love let us down very badly? Can we forgive? What happens if the person we don't forgive dies before there is a

reconciliation? Would we report a family member or a friend we suspected of committing a crime? For me, it would depend on how serious the crime was. What about those on different sides from their cousins in civil wars? What about if our relatives are our rivals in business or politics or sport? What if we give a brother a chance and he abuses it? In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the father forgives the son everything he has done – taking his share of the family fortune and wasting it on riotous living. Jesus says that God is like the father in the story, which means that we too, as the people of God, should be forgiving. But the son in the story repented. What about those who have wronged us but don't repent? I'm sure we're still called by God to love them. When Jesus on the Cross prayed *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do*, there was nothing to suggest that any of them had yet repented.

**STIR** up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

November 25<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 19 vv 1-10

Civic duty versus family feeling. What happens when our deeply experienced emotions clash with our duties? A mother, for example, may not be able to give full expression to the grief she feels at the death of her husband for the sake of the children. People in public life, like David, may discover a conflict between their personal relationships and their responsibilities. How about a general who has to order a unit including his own sons into battle? What about a doctor or a priest who has a family member needing urgent attention, but also has a professional responsibility to patients or parishioners? People caught in these dilemmas need our prayers and our understanding.

November 26<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 19 vv 11-15

Absalom's revolt and David's reaction to his death was in danger of creating a power vacuum – anarchy and continuing civil war. Despite his own personal emotional trauma, David had to take hold of the levers of power for the sake of Israel, to restore peace and legitimate government. The northern tribes (which had been most loyal to Saul) were the first to recognise that David was the only credible candidate for kingship. David's own tribe of Judah was slower to come back into

the fold of the erstwhile shepherd and forerunner of the Good Shepherd. Absalom had appointed Amasa as his chief of staff. David promises Amasa the same job under his rule in place of Joab. Two possible motives. David had had enough of the ruthless Joab who had killed Absalom (having been instrumental in bringing him back to court and possibly therefore in making the rebellion possible) and also it might have been good politics to reunite the country by making Absalom's chosen chief of staff, David's number two.

November 27<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 19 vv 16-23

Shimei's conduct hardly seems admirable. He had cursed David when he thought that David's reign was over. Now, presumably for purely pragmatic reasons, he tries to get back into David's favour. Wouldn't you, though? Loyalty is extremely important. One of the terrible things about civil war is that it divides loyalties. Shimei probably quite legitimately resented David for taking the kingdom from the family of Saul to whom Shimei was loyal and was really pleased to see David fall. But now David is back in power, what would be the point of dying in a lost cause? To be honest, I don't really know how to answer that. I value loyalty tremendously. I strongly believe that we should live our lives in accordance with our principles. On the other hand, there could never be peace if people were not prepared to compromise and perhaps even to sacrifice their principles. I suppose that we have to ask ourselves which of our own principles actually are given to us by God. Given that God is love, love must surely be the principle which overrides all our other convictions and loyalties.

Joab's brother wants Shimei dead. David shows grace by sparing him, but, if we read on, we shall see that he changes his mind later.

November 28<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 19 vv 24-30

David had promised Jonathan that he would look after Jonathan's family when he became king. Jonathan had always supported David's claim to the throne. Ziba had alleged that Mephibosheth had imagined that he might become king as a result of the civil war between David and Absalom. I think the implication of these verses is that Ziba was lying in order to gain David's favour and Mephibosheth's land. It

would appear that David wasn't sure and split the difference. It reminds me of an occasion when great David's greater Son was asked to adjudicate in a dispute about property. He directed us to concentrate on what really matters – which is not material possessions!

Luke 12: <sup>13</sup> And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. <sup>14</sup> And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? <sup>15</sup> And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

November 29<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 19 vv 31-40

*I am this day fourscore years old: and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king?* How does this verse make you feel? The increasing limitations of age. Barzillai is realistic about his prospects. He steps aside for Chimham and promotes him, as we all must for those who will come after us. In fact, we should rejoice to do so. As Christians we look forward to what St Paul promises us in I Corinthians 13: **12** For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. **13** And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. It is also a reminder to all of us to respect those who, like Barzillai, are slowing down. *The days of our age are three score years and ten; and though men be so strong that they come to fourscore years: yet is their strength then but labour and sorrow; so soon passeth it away, and we are gone... So teach us to number our days: that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.* Psalm 90.

November 30<sup>th</sup> S Andrew)

II Samuel 19 v41 – 20 v3

After the death of Solomon, the Kingdom of Israel would split into two – Judah and the ten northern tribes, somewhat confusingly also known as Israel (or Ephraim) – but there had already long been tension between Judah and the rest, jealousies and suspicion. Whom would you follow? People of your own tribe or group of tribes? The man who was claimed to be the LORD's anointed? Or, pragmatically, the man most likely to come out on top? Where would your loyalties lie? How would

you go about making up your mind if you were an ordinary guy going about your everyday life far from the court and relatively uninformed about politics and national affairs? I guess most of us would think what our neighbours thought (or at least make out we did) and our loyalties would be to the people and the way of life we knew. Yet Jesus called His disciples to a radically different way of life. He is the Way. His disciples forsook their families, their business interests, everything which was familiar, and followed Him in the Way which is both the way of the Cross and the route to eternal life.

**ALMIGHTY** God, who didst give such grace unto thy holy Apostle Saint Andrew, that he readily obeyed the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him without delay; Grant unto us all, that we, being called by thy holy Word, may forthwith give up ourselves obediently to fulfil the holy commandments; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### December 1<sup>st</sup> (Advent Sunday)

II Samuel 20 vv 4-26

Civil war once again. Joab takes the opportunity to get rid of Amasa to whom David has given his old job. Terrible devastation throughout the land until a woman saves her own city from ruin by betraying Sheba who was making his last stand there. *Works of darkness* which still disfigure the world today. Christians are the sons of light, called so to shine in this dark world that men may glorify God by forsaking the ways of darkness and, by faith & repentance, coming to Jesus, the Light of the World.

**ALMIGHTY** God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

### December 2<sup>nd</sup>

II Samuel 21 vv 1-14

Does genocide deserve to be punished? The Israelites were ordered to wipe out the existing inhabitants of Canaan when they entered the Promised Land after their deliverance from Egypt and forty years in the wilderness. The justification was that the Canaanite tribes were exceedingly wicked people and, if the Israelites assimilated with them, they too would be corrupted. The Gibeonites, however, by trickery made a treaty with the Israelites not to harm them in return for which

they would become servants – drawers of water and hewers of wood. Saul evidently had disregarded this treaty and decided to wipe them out as well and Israel was punished for this by a famine. The Gibeonites said that they would accept the death of seven of Saul’s sons as an atonement. This raises all sorts of questions which I for one can’t answer. We live in a messy world where justice and mercy are sometimes extremely difficult to establish. Had Saul still been alive, it would obviously have been right to put him on trial for genocide and, on conviction, to punish him. It cannot be right, however, surely, to punish his sons for what their father did. The Bible says as much: Deuteronomy 24: <sup>16</sup>*The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.* Anyway, David decided that something had to be done to give the Gibeonites what they would regard as justice. (Wouldn’t financial compensation have been better? But the Gibeonites didn’t want that. They wanted Saul’s family to suffer. It still goes on, despite the Deuteronomy verse. Gangsters take revenge on the families or gangs of their neighbours. Unbalanced members of the public take out on all Muslims the actions of a fanatical few. Without the violence, there can still be a feeling that we don’t want to be friends with someone from another family, village, community, religion or culture we have something against, however unreasonable.) So David spares Jonathan’s son as he had promised. Another Mephibosheth was more unfortunate, one of two sons of Saul’s concubine Rizpah. This poor woman had already been taken by Abner in II Samuel 3<sup>7</sup>, a sign of the impotence of Saul’s initial successor Ishbosheth. Michal, of course was David’s wife to whom he refused to give children because she disapproved of what she considered his unbecoming conduct in dancing before the LORD improperly dressed. It appears that she had brought up the children of her older sister Merab, who should have been given to David in marriage, but was instead given to Adriel. These lads, Michal’s nephews, Saul’s grandsons die too. It is Rizpah who tries to show the bodies respect. Despite what he has done, David now decides to honour the remains of these condemned men and buries them with Saul and Jonathan, who also at last get a proper burial. Just consider the feelings of all these people and how powerless they all were – even David who felt unable to refuse the

Gibeonites their revenge on the House of Saul. *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

### December 3<sup>rd</sup>

II Samuel 21 vv 15-22

*At the going down of the sun and in the morning We will remember them.* We say these words every year as we commemorate the fallen in two world wars. Will there ever come a day when we say, “Enough is enough. It’s all too long ago”? When would that day come? Who would decide? We remember for four reasons. One is in the desperate hope that we learn the lessons of conflict and stop fighting. The second is that we remember our duty to look after the survivors of war and the dependents of the fallen. The third is the feeling that those who have performed mighty acts of valour and perhaps made the supreme sacrifice should never be forgotten. They deserve to be honoured in perpetuity. Fourthly, their example is an inspiration to us, not to fight physical battles, but to be no less dedicated in the cause of God’s Kingdom of justice, mercy and peace. These men are commemorated here in the Bible. Whether or not our deeds are recorded in human history, if we are Christians, our names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life, which is what really counts.

### December 4<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 22 vv 1-50

This is David’s testimony to the way God has been with him throughout his life. It is the same as Psalm 18 & it is, therefore, part of the worship of the Christian Church. It is our common experience, our shared experience with David. The LORD is with us. It is He Who looks after us. It is He Who enables us to do the good works He has prepared for us to do. So the psalms and the biblical canticles not only reflect the insights and experience of their original authors, but also our common experience as human beings living out our lives in God’s world.

### December 5<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 23 vv 1-7

*He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.* That is the nub of these verses and it applies to the exercise of any kind of authority – as a parent or teacher, a police constable or a compliance officer, a councillor or member of parliament, a president, chancellor or

king, a general or a senior NCO, an employer or a head of department. All power comes from God and we are answerable to Him for how we use it.

December 6<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 23 vv 8-17

Heroes long dead, battles long forgotten except insofar as they are recorded in Scripture. The little story about David in vv 14-17 is quite an insight, however, into David's character, to the loyalty he inspired in his followers and to how men can behave as a band of brothers.

December 7<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 23 vv 18-39

I have never been good with names and I fear I'm getting worse at remembering them as I get older. It's embarrassing because people can feel you don't care about them if you forget their names. I hope that isn't the case! Names do matter. They are a sign of belonging, our Christian name given in our Baptism, our family name. *A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches.* (Proverbs 22<sup>1</sup>). Jesus, the Good Shepherd, *knoweth his sheep by name.* Putting your name to something is a sign of integrity. I understand why people who claim to be the victims of certain serious crimes might well need their identities to be kept confidential, but I am worried about the increasing use of confidentiality in legal, regulatory and disciplinary matters. Anonymity provides a cloak for the malicious as well as a safeguard for the vulnerable victim. Justice has to be seen to be done for the sake of society, for the vindication of the victim, to ensure the honesty of witnesses and to protect the innocent accused.

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

2 Jesus is the name we  
treasure,  
name beyond what words can  
tell;  
name of gladness, name of

pleasure,  
ear and heart delighting well;  
name of sweetness passing  
measure,  
saving us from sin and hell.

3 'Tis the name that whoso  
preacheth  
speaks like music to the ear;  
who in prayer this name  
beseecheth

sweetest comfort findeth near;  
who its perfect wisdom  
reacheth  
heavenly joy possesseth here.

4 Jesus is the name exalted  
over every other name;  
in this name, whene'er  
assaulted,  
we can put our foes to shame:  
strength to them who else had

halted,  
eyes to blind, and feet to lame.

5 Therefore we in love adoring  
this most blessed name revere,  
holy Jesu, thee imploring  
so to write it in us here,  
that hereafter heavenward  
soaring  
we may sing with angels there.

### December 8<sup>th</sup> (Advent 2)

II Samuel 24 vv 1-4

This is puzzling. Why was God angry with Israel and why was it an offence for David to conduct a census? The possible answer to the second question is that the people are God's people, not David's people. David might want to know how many young men there are who could be conscripted to fight his battles or how many young women there might be to serve him and how much property the Israelites owned in order to tax them. (See I Samuel 8.) Knowledge is power. Power corrupts. David might well have wanted to know all about the people of Israel in order to make the best use of them for his purposes. But they are not David's people; they are God's people. They are free under God. The first UK census in 1801 was also to find out how many men there were available to fight the French. Since then, there has been a national census mostly every ten years. They still want to know about how many potential soldiers and workers there are and what we earn and own. They also want to identify our needs – how many schools and hospitals to build, how many homes, whether people can find gainful employment, whether there is discrimination against particular groups. Government can be benign and it needs the power that knowledge gives it in order to perform its duties to the best effect. I still think we need to be vigilant, however. No human authority is entirely to be trusted and modern governments are quite capable of using what they know about us to control us or exploit us.

### December 9<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 24 vv 5-9

Traditionally, yesterday (Advent 2) is kept as Bible Sunday. In Common Worship, Bible Sunday is kept in October. It is so important

that we might keep it twice this year! The Bible is, after all, the Word of God. But parts of it like this are very hard to understand. What I wrote for yesterday may be part of the reason for including this story – that we belong to God, not to the government, and are therefore free – but the principal focus, as we shall see, is that what happened with regard to the census led to the discovery of the site where the Temple was to be built.

**BLESSED** Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.  
*Amen.*

December 10<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 24 vv 10-17

When God told Abraham that he was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham challenged God as to whether He would destroy any righteous people in those cities along with the sinners. God said that He wouldn't destroy them if there were any righteous people in them. The implication is that there were no righteous people in Sodom or Gomorrah (except Lot who left with his family) and therefore the cities were destroyed. But David here says that his innocent subjects are being punished for his sin. It is true of course that the wrong or foolish actions of our rulers have consequences for us all, but this does seem to be an extreme example of this. David seems to refuse to choose between war, famine and pestilence, but leaves the punishment up to God.

From lightning and tempest; from earthquake, fire, and flood; from plague, pestilence, and famine; from battle and murder, and from sudden death,

*Good Lord, deliver us.*

December 11<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 24 v18

Threshing floors have often been regarded as sacred places. They are where we separate the wheat from the chaff. They are key to the production of bread from corn. *Give us this day, our daily bread*, we pray. So we thank God for the harvest. We ask His blessing on our food. As Christians, we think of Jesus, the Bread of Life (in whom dwells the fulness of the Godhead bodily). We think of the manna in the wilderness and the bread of Holy Communion, which proclaims Christ's death till He comes again, nourishes us, unites us in His Body

the Church (one with Him, one with one another), and is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet in which, by His grace, we shall feast with Him for ever. The threshing floor is also symbol of judgment – the separation of wheat and chaff, good and evil. This prayer so beautifully declares what it is for us to be Christians united around His table that, even though it is from 1662, I quite often use it in our Common Worship services. I remember quoting it in an essay I had to write when the Church was considering whether I should be a candidate for ordination more than forty years ago. I hope you can see why I insist that Holy Communion is not an optional extra in the Christian life, but intrinsic to our relationship with Jesus, our membership of His Church. **ALMIGHTY** and everliving God, we most heartily thank thee, for that thou dost vouchsafe to feed us, who have duly received these holy mysteries, with the spiritual food of the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ; and dost assure us thereby of thy favour and goodness towards us; and that we are very members incorporate in the mystical body of thy Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people; and are also heirs through hope of thy everlasting kingdom, by the merits of the most precious death and passion of thy dear Son. And we most humbly beseech thee , O heavenly Father, so to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

### December 12<sup>th</sup>

II Samuel 24 vv 19-25

Araunah's threshing floor is the site where the temple is to be built in Jerusalem. David insists on paying for what he offers God. It has to be his own freewill offering. The temple models heaven. The authentic high priest is Jesus. The offering is Himself. Can we offer less than ourselves, our souls and bodies?

Where high the heavenly temple  
stands,  
the house of God not made with hands,  
a great High Priest our nature wears,  
Jesus, the Son of God, appears.

He who for us our surety stood,  
and poured on earth his precious  
blood,  
pursues in heaven his mighty plan,  
eternal God and Son of Man.

### December 13<sup>th</sup>

I Chronicles 28 vv 1-8

David is not allowed to build the temple because he is a man of blood. David's son, Solomon, will build the temple, but David makes all the

preparations in these wonderful last chapters of the first Book of Chronicles. The promise to the House of David is fully fulfilled in Jesus. Amidst the magnificence and the glory, consider Who Jesus is and what His true natures (God and man) in one Christ mean for us.

Though now ascended up on high,  
he bends on earth a brother's eye;  
partaker of the human name,  
he knows the frailty of our frame.

In every pang that rends the heart  
the Man of Sorrows has a part;  
he sympathizes with our grief,  
and to the sufferer sends relief.

Our fellow-sufferer yet retains  
a fellow-feeling of our pains;  
and still remembers in the skies  
his tears, his agonies and cries.

With boldness, therefore, at the throne,  
let us make all our sorrows known;  
and ask the aid of heavenly power  
to help us in the evil hour.

#### December 14<sup>th</sup>

I Chronicles 28 vv 9&10

Someone once remarked to me that the Church of England prays for the Queen at every service. That isn't quite true, but we do pray for the Queen at Mattins and Evensong and when we celebrate Holy Communion. We pray for her personal well-being. We pray for what she stands for as our head of state. We also very often pray for the royal family (a prayer only introduced into our prayer books in the reign of King James I because Queen Elizabeth I did not have a family). When we pray for the Queen, we pray for our country, for its people and for ourselves. The Queen represents the country, us. Many of the things we pray for for her personally are the sort of things we would pray for anyone. So what David commissions Solomon to do, he commissions all God's people to do – the ancient Israelites and us today. Know God. Serve Him with a perfect heart and willing mind. Seek Him. Do the job God has given you to do. We're not called to be build a stone temple, but we are called to build God's Church (the people, not the buildings).

Jude 20-21 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

#### December 15<sup>th</sup> (Advent 3)

I Chronicles 28 vv 11-21

*God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*

The worship of the Church, especially the Eucharist, is one with the worship of heaven. *Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious Name, evermore praising thee, and saying, Holy, holy, holy!* It is a privilege to join in the worship of the Church. We worship in the beauty of holiness, which necessitates a willingness to repent of all our sins and to forgive all those who have sinned against us. Worship is total commitment to God and willingness to serve Him in any way which He pleases. We can do this, as Solomon could do what he had to, solely because the LORD our God is with us, and so He is as He has promised – *And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*

**O LORD** and heavenly Father, we thy humble servants entirely desire thy fatherly goodness mercifully to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; most humbly beseeching thee to grant, that by the merits and death of thy Son Jesus Christ, and through faith in his blood, we and all thy whole Church may obtain remission of our sins, and all other benefits of his passion. And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee; humbly beseeching thee, that all we, who are partakers of this holy Communion, may be fulfilled with thy grace and heavenly benediction. And although we be unworthy, through our manifold sins, to offer unto thee any sacrifice, yet we beseech thee to accept this our bounden duty and service; not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offences, through Jesus Christ our Lord; by whom, and with whom, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, all honour and glory be unto thee, O Father Almighty, world without end. *Amen.*

December 16<sup>th</sup>

I Chronicles 29 vv 1-9

I'm afraid that I misled the congregation at the Jubilee Hall on 11<sup>th</sup> August. I told them that David was embarrassed because, in their enthusiasm to worship God, the people brought more than was required for the temple. They did offer in astonishing abundance, but it doesn't say that they brought too much. That was Moses' problem (Exodus 36<sup>5-7</sup>) when they built the sanctuary in the wilderness centuries earlier. This too was modelled on the heavenly sanctuary and it was the pattern for the temple. Both stories are, however, the solution to all the Church's problems with regard to money and other resources. What God gives is limitless. God is infinitely generous. When the people of

God are at their best, they exhibit the faith and hope and love to be unstinting in their giving of themselves, their time, their talents, their resources and even their money. Jesus says in Luke 6<sup>38</sup>: *Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.* That's the true answer to the problem of quota / parish share / pledge / indicative offer. It's the answer to the problem of paying the clergy, funding missionary work and providing for the poor and the sick. It's even the solution to the problem of maintaining our buildings, though I do think that it is a sign of centuries of failure to get the message across that, when most people speak of the Church in Cuxton and Halling, they mean a couple of old buildings rather than a group of people united in love for God and for one another by faith in Christ.

December 17<sup>th</sup>

I Chronicles 29 vv 10-19

David is preparing for the building of the temple. He acknowledges that everything we have comes from God and that we can only offer Him what He has given to us. He prays God to prepare the hearts of His people (v18). John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way for Christ. God's ministers are called to prepare the way for Christ to come again in glory by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just that we may be found a people acceptable to God. This duty of the ministers is of course shared by all the people of God, all the baptised, to be prepared, to be firmly established, to prepare the world for the coming of the Saviour.

**LORD** Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit ever, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

December 18<sup>th</sup>

I Chronicles 29 vv 20-30

I often say at funerals that we don't only look back on the life of the deceased. We do look back with respect and thanksgiving to God. We dwell, however, in the eternal present. God is love. Those who live in love live in God. We love those whom we love but see no longer. They love us where they are now. The Church militant here in earth is one with the Church triumphant in heaven, one in the love of God. For now our calling is to live out the rest of our lives on earth in accordance with God's Will for us, which is our true fulfilment. We also look forward to our eternal home when we shall see face to face and know as we are known and love abides eternally. Similarly, we look back on the achievements of David and Solomon with respect and thanksgiving. We have our lives to live here and now in the company of great David's greater Son. We await that glorious final consummation in awe and wonder at what is to come.

The Church's one foundation  
is Jesus Christ, her Lord;  
she is his new creation  
by water and the Word:  
from heav'n he came and  
sought her  
to be his holy bride;  
with his own blood he bought  
her,  
and for her life he died.

Elect from ev'ry nation,  
yet one o'er all the earth,  
her charter of salvation  
one Lord, one faith, one birth;  
one holy name she blesses,  
partakes one holy food,  
and to one hope she presses,  
with ev'ry grace endued.

Though with a scornful wonder  
men see her sore oppressed,  
by schisms rent asunder,  
by heresies distressed,

yet saints their watch are  
keeping,  
their cry goes up, "How long?"  
And soon the night of weeping  
shall be the morn of song.

Mid toil and tribulation,  
and tumult of her war,  
she waits the consummation  
of peace forevermore;  
till with the vision glorious  
her longing eyes are blest,  
and the great church victorious  
shall be the church at rest.

Yet she on earth hath union  
with the God the Three in One,  
and mystic sweet communion  
with those whose rest is won:  
O happy ones and holy!  
Lord, give us grace that we,  
like them, the meek and lowly,  
on high may dwell with thee.

December 19<sup>th</sup>

Matthew 27 vv 26-54

All this about the temple that we have been reading is to point us in the direction of heaven. We mere mortals cannot grasp Who God must be and what heaven is like or fully understand how we might come into His Presence and dwell with Him in all eternity. But we can be pointed in the right direction. It is Jesus Who opens to us the way into God's Presence and, through His Blood, makes it possible to dwell there forever.

There is a green hill far away,  
without a city wall,  
where the dear Lord was  
crucified,  
who died to save us all.

We may not know, we cannot  
tell,  
what pains he had to bear;  
but we believe it was for us  
he hung and suffered there.

He died that we might be  
forgiv'n,  
he died to make us good,

that we might go at last to  
heav'n,  
saved by his precious blood.

There was no other good  
enough  
to pay the price of sin;  
he only could unlock the gate  
of heav'n, and let us in.

O dearly, dearly has he loved,  
and we must love him too,  
and trust in his redeeming  
blood,  
and try his works to do.

December 20<sup>th</sup>

Revelation 4 vv 1-11

Another vision of heaven. Our worship on earth, feeble though it is, is one with the worship of heaven. In all eternity, if we have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be worshipping the heavenly worship.

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

Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore  
thee,  
casting down their golden crowns  
around the glassy sea;  
cherubim and seraphim falling down  
before thee,  
who wert, and art, and evermore shalt  
be.

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

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
All thy works shall praise thy name in  
earth and sky and sea.  
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!  
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

December 21<sup>st</sup> (S Thomas)

John 14 vv 1-7

Although S Thomas is now often kept on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, it has been observed that it is good to commemorate a saint so closely connected with thoughts of the Resurrection just before Christmas. It is all one story, the story of the Redemption of the world through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We participate in the glory which we read about yesterday, we come to the Father, by him, Who is the Way the Truth & the Life.

**ALMIGHTY** and everliving God, who for the more confirmation of the faith didst suffer thy holy Apostle Thomas to be doubtful in thy Son's resurrection; Grant us so perfectly, and without all doubt, to believe in thy Son Jesus Christ, that our faith in thy sight may never be reprov'd. Hear us, O Lord, through the same Jesus Christ, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for evermore. *Amen.*

December 22<sup>nd</sup> (Advent 4)

Isaiah 55 vv 1-13

Many people's lives are futile, or at least the way they speak about themselves makes it seem as if they are. They worry about how they compare with other people in terms of looks, attainment in life, friendships and social success. They want to be rich, famous, celebrities, powerful. In fact they set themselves up for failure. Very few people achieve stunning beauty, perfect relationships, top jobs, sporting prowess, fame, wealth or power. Those few who do discover that none of these things brings fulfilment. Centuries before Christ, Isaiah told us what makes for a good life. We Christians know this. It is our mission to share this knowledge.

**O LORD**, raise up (we pray thee) thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honour and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

December 23<sup>rd</sup>

Revelation 12 vv 1-17

This is a very familiar reading in a parish where one of the churches is dedicated to S Michael & All Angels. It is about the decisive battle between good and evil, the victory which Christ won on the Cross. The dragon is the devil. We could think of the woman as Eve and the child as the human race. We could think of the woman as Mary and the child as Jesus. We could think of the woman as the Church and the child as Christian people. The devil seeks to destroy the human race, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Church of God. Jesus is the second Adam Who represents humanity at the Throne of Grace and redeems the children of Eve. The redeemed of the Lord constitute the Church. There is still much evil on earth. Satan is very active still. But the war is won and we are on the winning side. God keeps us safe in Jesus. We do not seek to overcome evil with evil. Rather the brothers and sisters of Jesus (us) *overcame him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto death.*

December 24<sup>th</sup> (Christmas Eve)

Revelation 14 vv 1-7

Salvation is imminent. Christ comes at Christmas. On this last day of Advent, we proclaim His coming again to judge the living and the dead. There is justice and here is mercy. This is the eternal Gospel which must be proclaimed throughout the world. The whole of creation must repent and *worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.*

December 25<sup>th</sup> (Christmas Day)

Isaiah 9 vv 1-7

Isaiah prophesies the Kingdom of God. Today, the King is born. The prophesies are fulfilled in Jesus, the Son of God. As sons and daughters of God, we are citizens of God's Kingdom and share the blessings. We are coheirs with Christ. As His brothers and sisters, we share His commission to proclaim God's Kingdom to the world.

**ALMIGHTY** God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure Virgin; Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth

and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

December 26<sup>th</sup> (S Stephen)

Genesis 4 vv 1-10

S Stephen's Day reminds us of why we need Christmas. God is love. We are made in His image in order that we might be people of love. But we reject God and His perfect law of love. I John 3<sup>15</sup>: *Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.* That's worth pondering. Christ's offering of Himself in love on the Cross purges our lovelessness so that we are remade in the image of God Who is love. Our calling is to spread the love. What happened to Stephen is a warning of what can happen to those who preach love in this wicked world. The collect opens up to us the resources we need to follow Stephen in following Jesus.

**Grant**, O Lord, that, in all our sufferings here upon earth for the testimony of thy truth, we may stedfastly look up to heaven, and by faith behold the glory that shall be revealed; and, being filled with the Holy Ghost, may learn to love and bless our persecutors by the example of thy first Martyr Saint Stephen, who prayed for his murderers to thee, O blessed Jesus, who standest at the right hand of God to succour all those that suffer for thee, our only Mediator and Advocate. *Amen*

December 27<sup>th</sup> (S John the Evangelist)

Isaiah 6 vv 1-13

You and I have something of the heavenly vision. It is this that makes us what we are. *Changed from glory into glory till in heaven we take our place.* It is God Who purifies us both so that we may be in His Presence and so that we may serve Him. Like Isaiah, our correct response to God is, *Here am I send me.* The work may be discouraging in this wicked world, but it is God's work and it will achieve His purposes.

**MERCIFUL** Lord, we beseech thee to cast thy bright beams of light upon thy Church, that it being enlightened by the doctrine of thy blessed Apostle and Evangelist Saint John may so walk in the light of thy truth, that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

December 28<sup>th</sup> (Holy Innocents)

Jeremiah 31 vv 1-17

Jeremiah 31 is about the time when the Babylonians overran the Kingdom of Judah. They laid waste the surrounding countryside, people dying not only by the sword, but of the hunger and pestilence

which come with the turmoil of war. Eventually they took and destroyed the city of Jerusalem including the temple, taking captive to Babylon many of the population, concentrating on the most able. In this passage Jeremiah is promising restoration. The exiles will return. Jerusalem will be rebuilt. Humanity will be restored in Christ. There will be new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwell. Jeremiah thinks of the despair of Rachel (Jacob's second wife, mother of Joseph and Benjamin, buried at Bethlehem) at the loss of her children and promises they will return. *Women received their dead raised to life again.* (See Hebrews 11<sup>35</sup>.) In Matthew's Gospel the babes of Bethlehem killed by Herod are remembered in the light of Jeremiah's prophecy. We might think today of all the children, all the innocents caught up in battle and in all the wickedness of humanity and pray for the coming of God's Kingdom of Peace.

**O ALMIGHTY** God, who out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast ordained strength, and madest infants to glorify thee by their deaths; Mortify and kill all vices in us, and so strengthen us by thy grace, that by the innocency of our lives, and constancy of our faith even unto death, we may glorify thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

December 29<sup>th</sup> (Christmas 1)

Revelation 19 vv 1-11

*Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Blessed are those who are called to his supper.* Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed.

We often use these words in our invitation to participate in the Holy Communion. Now you know where the second sentence comes from, if you didn't know already. Jesus is the Lamb of God. He takes away the sins of the world – our dis ease with God and with one another. He alone can heal us, heal our relationship with God, heal our relationships with one another. *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.* It was the Roman centurion in the Gospel who said that he was not worthy for Jesus to come under his roof. Matthew 8<sup>8</sup>: *The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.* None of us is worthy to receive Jesus as a guest. None of us is worthy to come into His house, but He speaks the word and we are healed – made fit to receive Holy Communion, made fit to go to

Heaven. We have a place at the marriage feast of the Lamb. As the Church, we are the bride of Christ.

December 30<sup>th</sup>

Revelation 21 vv 1-14

So this is what we have to look forward to.

Jerusalem the golden,  
with milk and honey blest,  
beneath your contemplation  
sink heart and voice oppressed.  
I know not, O I know not,  
what joys await us there;  
what radiancy of glory,  
what bliss beyond compare.

There is the throne of David;  
and there, from care released,  
the song of them that triumph,  
the shout of them that feast;  
and they who with their Leader  
have conquered in the fight,  
forever and forever  
are clad in robes of white.

They stand, those halls of Zion,  
all jubilant with song,  
and bright with many an angel,  
and all the martyr throng.  
The Prince is ever in them,  
the daylight is serene;  
the pastures of the blessed  
are decked in glorious sheen.

O sweet and blessed country,  
the home of God's elect!  
O sweet and blessed country  
that eager hearts expect!  
Jesus, in mercy bring us  
to that dear land of rest;  
who are, with God the Father  
and Spirit, ever blest.

December 31<sup>st</sup>

Revelation 22 vv 6-21

On the last day of the year we read from the last chapter of the Bible about the end of this world of time and space. Jesus will return. There will be new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. There will be justice. There will be mercy. There will be infinite, eternal bliss for all God's people. Participating in the beatific vision, we shall be made like Him as we see Him face to face and know as we are known. A thought provoking end to this study – an intriguing prayer from the funeral service. Can we say it for our loved ones & ourselves?

**ALMIGHTY** God, with whom do live the spirits of them that depart hence in the Lord, and with whom the souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, are in joy and felicity: We give thee hearty thanks, for that it hath pleased thee to deliver this our *brother* out of the miseries of this sinful world; beseeching thee, that it may please thee, of thy gracious goodness, shortly to accomplish the number of thine elect, and to hasten thy kingdom; that we, with all those that are departed in the true faith of thy holy Name, may have

our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in thy eternal and everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*