<div align="center">Whatever Happened to Trust?</div>

When I was a small boy, people used to go out and leave their doors unlocked. Churches were generally open all the time. When my grandmother stopped leaving her front door actually open when she went to the village shop, it was not because she was afraid of thieves. She got fed up with finding her neighbour's cat asleep on her bed. There wasn't a lot of point in locking up anyway. A curious child, I discovered by experiment that there were only two kinds of lock in a row of ten houses. So you could open four of your neighbours' doors with your own key. Anyway, most window catches could be slipped from outside using a knife blade, useful if you did lock yourself out as my other grandmother did once when she took three year old me out in the snow to be photographed. Nearly twenty years later, when I opened a bank account, all they needed was my word and a specimen signature. There was no proof of ID required in those days. Mind you, back in the 'seventies, you could trust your bank not to attempt to pull fast ones like payment protection insurance and big companies didn't exploit their loyal and naive customers by charging them more than they charge the more savvy for the same product or service.

Now, trust seems to have flown out of the window. Treasurers of tiny village charities handling a couple of hundred pounds have to produce detailed accounts and follow strict rules as if everyone who offered to help out on a voluntary basis were a potential fraudster. The UK has the highest number of cctv cameras per head of population in the whole world. Are we British the least trustworthy people on earth or the most paranoid? Why don't we trust one another any more? One possible reason is that we no longer live in close knit communities. It is psychologically harder to rob someone you know than a stranger. If you did, in a small village everybody would know. There would be shame as well as punishment for some ne'er do well who pinched an old lady's pension. We also had regular beat police officers, who often lived in the communities they served. Their very presence was a deterrent and they knew people well enough to know whom to keep an eye on. Some people think that the decline in religion has something to do with it. We were taught that, even if you didn't get caught, God would know if you did (or said or thought) something bad. Another view is that people in the past had less that was worth stealing and perhaps didn't mind so much if a needy neighbour helped herself to a few vegetables or a cup of sugar when they weren't looking. If we look at reports of gang violence among urban youngsters, both drugs and the decline of the stable family play a big part.

Maybe we worry more. We used not to hear much about crime outside our own communities. Now we're bombarded by reports of robberies and murders. There is a thought too that fiction like Midsomer Murders and Morse's Oxford lead people to feel that the murder rate is a great deal higher than it actually is. In the past, most ordinary people did not have contents insurance. Now that we have, we have to report crime where we might not once have bothered because what has been stolen was of low value or because we didn't think there was much chance that we'd get it back or that the criminals would get caught. Some thieves even say that it is OK to steal someone's TV or computer because the insurance will by them another one.

Crime rates certainly have gone up in my life time. Not only is there more street crime, but also people whom we would once have trusted implicitly, people in professional roles, even clergy, have been found to be guilty of the most horrible wrong-doing. But, personally, I do believe that we exaggerate the risk of being a victim of crime and I also think it is better occasionally to be let down than to treat everybody you know and everybody you do business with as a potential villain. In a slightly different context, St Paul says, *Suffer yourselves rather to be defrauded.*

Ironically, when I was growing up, most people were at least notionally Christians and Christianity teaches the doctrine of original sin – that all human beings are inherently sinful. Nowadays, most people seem to believe that everybody is born good. Yet fifty years ago we trusted one another and now we don't. Why is that? Surveillance, regulation, law, punishment, they can only do so much to prevent wrong-doing. People will always break the rules and some of them will get away with it. The law is for bad people. Good people don't need to be threatened with penal sanctions if they misbehave. It is their nature to be good. What our aim must be is not frighten people into abstaining from evil but convert them into being good. That is the transformation we experience through faith in Jesus Christ Who died to sin on the Cross in order to set us free to live eternally in love for God and for other people.

<u>Easter at St John's Halling:</u> Maundy Thursday (18th April) Holy Communion 9.30 am; Good Friday Three Hour Devotion 12.00 noon; Easter Day Holy Communion Jubilee Hall 8.00 am, St John's 11.00 am.
<u>Easter at St Michael's Cuxton:</u> Maundy Thursday Passover 7. 00 pm; Good Friday Family Service 10.00 am; Easter Day Holy Communion 9.30 am.