

The Epistle
to the
Ephesians
(continued)
Links

Daily Bible Reading Notes
April - June 2025

April 1st

Ephesians 5 vv3&4

Today is April Fool's Day, but what is a fool. Jesus warns us that if we call one another fools we are in danger of hellfire. The psalmist warns that it is the fool who says in his heart, There is no God. But St Paul refers to the foolishness of preaching. Christ crucified, he says, is a stumblingblock to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. God confounds the wise by the foolish things of the world. So what is wisdom and what is folly? Folly is to deny the reality of God. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. Christ (the One Who voluntarily died on the Cross) is the power of God and the wisdom God. God's grace is sufficient for us in all circumstances, however low we may sink, because God's power is made perfect in weakness. For this reason, Paul even says, *Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

So what are wisdom & folly? It's tempting to think that the wise man is ambitious for power & wealth, that he takes his pleasure where he can, that he looks after number one. What does the world think of the meek who don't put themselves forward, who put other people's interests before their own, who aren't caught up in the rat race to be richer, better looking, enjoying a more extravagant life style than other people, who aren't envious of other people and don't want other people to be jealous of them? What really matters?

April 2nd

Ephesians 5 vv 5&6

A big question I've had to confront since I was made to retire is *What is my life for?* I thought it was to preside at Holy Communion, to lead worship, to preach the Gospel, to teach the faith, to offer care to other people (especially parishioners) and to bear faithful witness of the Truth of Jesus Christ to the world. But now what? I occupy space on this planet. I breathe. I eat. But what for? The answer is that we all live to the glory of God – whatever our vocation might be. God has a plan for the life of every one of us and we can only live fulfilled lives if we *do the good works which he has prepared for us to walk in.* We have the gift of eternal life because we believe in Jesus Christ, because we know Him. Our knowledge of Him will be perfected in the hereafter. Obviously, however, vices such as the ones Paul lists here are incompatible with the vocation wherewith we are called.

April 3rd

Ephesians 5 vv 7&8

I don't know if you are familiar with the story of Naaman in II Kings 5? Naaman was a Syrian general, head of the army, rich & powerful.

Sadly, he suffered from leprosy and his wife's Israelite maid (although she was a captive) advised that the prophet of God in Samaria (Elisha) could cure Naaman. This Elisha did and Naaman was so grateful that he decided to worship the LORD. There is a caveat, however. *In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this thing.* Naaman is not so committed to the LORD that he is willing to give up his position as the right hand man of the King of Syria. When the king worships in the pagan temple, Naaman is expected to worship with him. Naaman is not prepared to take the consequences of failing to do so.

Paul was afraid that some of his converts might prove to be like Naaman. They'd been baptised. They believed that they had given their lives to the Lord. But maybe they didn't want to give up the enjoyment they had derived from the vices Paul refers to. Maybe they didn't want to be different - with all the consequences that follow from not fitting in with what most people think, the pleasures your non-Christian friends enjoy, the unpopularity which follows from criticizing the unethical business practices of your employer or denouncing corruption & incompetence in government. Maybe the converts themselves themselves failed to see the incompatibility between claiming to follow Christ and selfishness, debauchery and a worldly lifestyle.

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God, writes St James.

More especially, we pray for the good estate of the Catholick Church; that it may be so guided and governed by thy good Spirit, that all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life.

April 4th

Ephesians 5 v9

For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth. When I quoted James yesterday to the effect that friendship of the world is enmity with God, I realised that I could not let that pass without mentioning the apparent tension between those words and those of the most famous verse in the Bible. *So God loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* If God loves the world, if God loves the world so much that He gives His Son to die for the world, how can it be an offence against God to be a friend of the world? God sent His Son into the world to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. Jesus sends us – all Christian people, His Church – into the world to proclaim this same Good News.

The answer is that the word *world* is used differently in the two contexts. God does indeed love all the people in the world. Jesus died in order to redeem the world. As Christian people, we are bound to love the people God loves – all the people of the world – and to share His love with them. What God hates is the sin of the world – the sins of commission and omission of which all human beings (except Jesus) are guilty and which cause so much suffering to the people He loves. We are all perpetrators and victims of sin. Christ shared our victimhood and received the punishment which is our due as perpetrators. When we turn to Christ in faith, when we repent of our sins, when we are baptized in His Name, our sins are washed away. We are made clean. We are filled with the Holy Spirit. It is expected then that we bring forth the *fruit of the Spirit* [which] *is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.* We ought no longer to live by the world's values. Like God, we are to hate sin, but to love sinners, to reject the sinful ways of the world, and to work for that great day when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.

We have a gospel to proclaim,
good news for men in all the
earth;
the gospel of a Saviour's name:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.

Now we rejoice to name him
King:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth;
this gospel-message we
proclaim:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.

April 5th

Ephesians 5 v10

Proving what is acceptable to the Lord

What is acceptable to the Lord? It's what comes from love. How do we feel or think about other people? How do we talk about them or to them? How do we behave towards other people? Are we *rooted & grounded in love*? I have to ask myself whether I am rooted & grounded in love when I think or talk about people who, I feel, have wronged me. How does God feel about them? He loves them. So how ought I, as a child of God, to think about them? That doesn't mean that we have to condone their wrong doing or weakly accept the consequences. It does, however, mean two things. We have to ask ourselves if they are really in the wrong & what mitigating factors there might be if they are. Whether they are right or wrong, we have to love them because God does & our calling is to be the image of our heavenly Father.

April 6th (Passion Sunday)

Ephesians 5 vv 11&12

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.

So it was when Jesus was hanging on the Cross. Sin was as black as can be. We stumble in the dark. We get lost in the dark. We may be fearful of attack in the dark. If we are criminals, we may take advantage of the darkness to carry out our crimes with less chance of getting caught. Jesus is the Light of the world. His Word is a light to our paths and a lantern to our feet. It is in contemplating Jesus, walking in His Light, that we discern the way to walk in, that we are safe, that we shall come to the haven where we would be.

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

Amen.

April 7th

Ephesians 5 v13

But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest in the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.

The Church, like so many formerly respected institutions, has been disgraced by its failure to deal with abuse. Senior churchmen, including bishops, have been perpetrators of things *which it is a shame even to speak of* – *works of darkness*. Other senior people have covered for

these sinners, alleging that they have insufficient legal power either to punish the perpetrators or to protect potential victims, very often using “confidentiality” as an excuse for secrecy, an invisibility cloak for the diabolical. Victims have been and probably still are pressured to sign non-disclosure agreements. The policy we are told we should now adopt is summarised in the phrase *transparency and accountability*. Of course, confidentiality has its place. It is sometimes required to protect victims or even witnesses who might otherwise be intimidated or too ashamed to testify. All too often, however, confidentiality is brought in to protect the powerful individual or corporation which has perpetrated the abuse or allowed it to continue: the bishop or TV celebrity, the Church, the NHS Trust, the Social Services Department, the abusive or negligent social worker or police officer, Dr Shipman or Nurse Letby. Bishops and other powerful people are of course accountable to God & He knows all about them. They themselves apparently discount God in their calculations regarding what they think they can get away with. So, it is important that there is no secrecy masquerading as confidentiality and that bishops and other powerful people are held accountable to the Law and to the general public. Even the courts are not incorruptible and that is why justice has to be seen to be done – by you and me as well as lawyers, police officers, civil servants, politicians and other members of the elite.

April 8th

Ephesians 5 v14

Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

Baptism is the Church’s initiation rite. All the baptised belong to God’s Church. Sadly, however, too many people who have been christened or baptised (same thing) don’t seem to take it seriously. Maybe they actually don’t believe in God. They might have experimented with another religion or philosophy. Christian faith doesn’t appear to have made much difference to their lives. And then they experience what they might describe as a conversion experience. The penny drops. Faith makes all the difference to their lives. Do we have a rite capable of expressing this transformation? You can’t be baptised a second time. Maybe you could be confirmed, but perhaps you already have been & not taken that very seriously either. A speaker at a meeting I once

attended suggested that the “convert” should be invited to lie in a coffin and then to leap up out of it: dead to sin, buried with Christ, sharing in His resurrection. It would be dramatic & a powerful witness both to the “convert” and to the congregation, but I can’t really see it catching on.

April 9th

Ephesians 5 vv 15-17

Our calling then is wisdom, Christ the power & wisdom of God. The wise man builds his house on the Rock. That Rock is Christ. The storms of life cannot shake it. The foolish man builds his house on sand – the wisdom of this world essentially founded on the denial of God – and the fool’s house quickly collapses when confronted with reality.

April 10th

Ephesians 5 vv 18&19

I have a friend who used to rate villages on their pub / church ratio. In his reckoning, the best villages were those which had a high number of pubs in proportion to the number of churches. I enjoy visiting both. They have a lot in common. There is joy in both. They are good places to meet people and make friends. They are good for the community. Both churches & pubs support charities and village events. On the other hand, they can both be cliquey. They don’t always demonstrate much concern for the wider community or for charitable work. There can be toxic conflicts in both churches and pubs. They are not always very welcoming to strangers. Excessive ingestion of alcohol can lead to terribly bad behaviour and harm the health of the drinker. Religious fanaticism can have similar effects on the misguided believer. By & large, I’m in favour of communities having both churches & pubs, but if we could only have one or the other I know which I’d choose.

April 11th

Ephesians 5 v20

Giving thanks always for all things unto God & the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We hear a lot about mental health & well-being these days. One of the keys, we’re often told, to good mental health is to be grateful for our lives, for other people, for the things we have, for our opportunities. For non-believers, however, this immediately presents the problem of to whom they should be grateful. The life of the non-believer must be very empty. We know Whom we should thank and we need to share this knowledge.

April 12th

Ephesians 5 v21

Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Sometimes I think I'm under confident. I don't accept that I am capable of achieving certain goals, which are actually within my reach. I don't expect other people to respect me. Sometimes I think I'm over confident. I tackle tasks of which I'm really not capable, sometimes disregarding the warnings of those who know better. I expect other people to follow my lead and suspect that they have malign motives if they won't.

Both my under confidence and my over confidence are a result of my not having a sensible understanding of myself in relation to God. It is God Who has made me the man I am. He has given me everything that I have. The talents I have are His gift to me and so are the opportunities I have to make use of them. What He wants me to do with my life, I can do. So I don't have to be fearful of failure. I've no right to be arrogant. Other people's judgments of me, indeed my judgment of myself, don't matter. The only judgment which is truly important is God's Judgment of me. He loves me. Jesus died for me. He has given me His Holy Spirit. (If He hadn't, I couldn't address God as Father or Jesus as Lord.)

So we're not in competition with one another, judging other people and worrying about how they judge us. In the fear of God, we can submit ourselves to one another. We are all the people we are because we are what God has made us. Romans 12 is well worth reading in this context. Here is v3: *For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*

April 13th (Palm Sunday)

Ephesians 5 vv 22-33

This being Palm Sunday, I'm not going to get into the vexed question of *headship* today. We'll come back to that. Today, let's just think of this verse.

The church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ, her Lord
She is His new creation
By water and the Word
From heaven, He came and sought

her
To be His holy bride
With His own blood He bought her
And for her life He died.

April 14th

Ephesians 5 v22

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord.

Verse 21 told us all to submit to one another in the fear of God. So why does Paul pick out in particular the submission of wives to husbands? It's tempting simply to gloss over those words in the Bible with which we are uncomfortable, but we really shouldn't do that. God has given all holy scripture for our learning. I'll leave you to work out how these words are to be understood in the context of a modern marriage in which both parties may have been equally educated, both parties are likely to be in paid employment and both parties are increasingly expected to share in such tasks as child-rearing, housework & cookery.

April 15th

Ephesians 5 vv 23&24

In the traditional C of E marriage service the woman promised *from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey, till death us do part,*

Brides no longer usually say *obey* and many marriages are no longer lifelong. People are not expected necessarily to remain faithful *for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health.*

If not unconditional & lifelong, what is marriage? Now legally possible between people of the same sex has marriage evolved to become something different from what it was traditionally understood to be? If so, are these changes a good thing? If you don't think so, can you have a traditional marriage without the concept of male headship?

Traditionally, one of the main causes for which matrimony was ordained was the procreation of children. If there is no shame in illegitimacy, children may be conceived by, for example, AID and there are too many people in the world anyway, is this still the case? I would hesitate to formulate a doctrine of marriage which was not rooted in the biblical understanding of marriage as set out here.

April 16th

Ephesians 5 vv 25-29

In the traditional marriage service the man said, *with this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow.* The word *worship* in this service was always controversial.

Only God is worthy of worship. *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* Worship means total commitment.

Worship is devoting your life. It is the giving of yourself. If we understand worship in this way, while, of course, one's love for one's wife, one's devotion to her, could never be the same thing as one's love for & duty to God, I think we can justify the notion of worshipping our wives with our bodies as well as endowing them with our goods if we understand that the ideal husband devotes his life to his wife just as Christ devotes His life to the Church.

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

April 17th (Maundy Thursday)

Ephesians 5 vv 30-33

Think about Holy Communion as the Marriage Feast of the Lamb and the Church as His Bride.

Elect from every nation	'Mid toil and tribulation	Yet she on earth had union
Yet one o'er all the earth	And tumult of her war	With God, the Three-in-One
Her charter of salvation	She waits the consummation	And mystic, sweet
One Lord, one faith, one birth	Of peace forevermore	communion With those
One holy name she blesses	'Til with the vision glorious	whose rest is won
Partakes one holy food	Her longing eyes are blest	O happy ones and holy
And to one hope she presses	And the great church	Lord, give us grace that we
With every grace endued	victorious Shall be the church at rest	Like them, the meek and lowly On high may dwell with Thee

April 18th (Good Friday)

Ephesians 6 vv 1-4

*Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered
(Hebrews 5⁸).*

Jesus was tempted in all respects as we are, yet without sin. Christ's humanity is genuine. On earth, He experienced what we experience. He shares our joy and our pain. He is fully human. We are commanded to honour our parents. They bring us up. We obey them. They care for us. We care for them. Sometimes it may be hard for us to obey them. Sometimes we might have to care for them in ways which we find difficult – especially perhaps as they got older. Of course, Jesus honoured God the Father. He obeyed God even to the point of death on the Cross. But He learned obedience just as we learn obedience. He is fully human, like us save in that He never yielded to the temptation to sin. So He fully understands us from His own experience to be human. That is a great comfort when we pray. He sets us an example of obedience to God. By His sacrifice on the Cross, He makes us God's children, His brothers and sisters. He not only teaches us how to live as God's children. He inspires us.

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

April 19th (Holy Saturday)

Ephesians 6 vv 5-9

Just as Jesus is the perfect Son of God, He is the perfect Servant of God. *He being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. (Philippians 2⁶⁻⁸).* He sets us an example of what it means for us to be servants of God. The fact that Christ became a servant teaches us how we should serve others (professionally or otherwise) and how we should treat those who serve us.

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

April 20th (Easter Day)

Ephesians 6 vv 10-18

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

2 Where the paschal blood is
poured,
death's dark angel sheathes his
sword;
Israel's hosts triumphant go
through the wave that drowns
the foe.
Praise we Christ, whose blood
was shed,
Paschal Victim, Paschal Bread;
with sincerity and love
eat we manna from above.

3 Mighty Victim from the sky,
pow'rs of hell beneath Thee lie;
death is conquered in the fight,
Thou hast brought us life and
light;
Now no more can death appal,
Now no more the grave enthrall;
Thou hast opened Paradise,
And in Thee Thy saints shall
rise.

Easter triumph, Easter joy,
Sin alone can this destroy;
From sin's power do Thou set
free
Souls new born, O Lord, in
Thee.
Hymns of glory and of praise,
risen Lord, to Thee we raise;
Holy Father, praise to Thee,
with the Spirit, ever be.

The Victory is Christ's. He has conquered sin, the world & the devil. He has overcome death and the fear of death. Baptised in His Name, members of His Body, partakers of that holy food, we are one with Him. *Ours the cross, the grave, the skies*, He has overcome through love, by obedience to God, by self-sacrifice. It is only by these means that victory is secured. As we partake of His Resurrection, our calling is, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to overcome the evil which is in us and which is in the world bearing the whole armour of God

Stand then in His great might,
With all His strength endued,
And take, to arm you for the
fight,
The panoply of God;

That, having all things done,
And all your conflicts passed,
Ye may o'ercome through Christ
alone,
And stand entire at last.

These hymns are great, aren't they?

April 21st

Ephesians 6 vv 19-24

Paul asks the prayers of the Ephesian Church. We ought to pray for church leaders, for bishops and other clergy, for all ministers, missionaries & evangelists. We pray for one another. All the baptised have their Christian calling – *one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth*, Paul kept in touch through messengers such as Tychicus. We have so many more ways of keeping in touch with the people we know. We can also find out about, pray for & contribute to Christian work throughout the world through news media, missionary organisations and personal contacts. With Paul we can pray for peace, love & faith for ourselves and for one another & for the various Christian congregations with which we might have some affinity – the churches to which we belong, the churches to which we used to belong, the churches to which our friends belong, the churches we feel particularly drawn to care about.

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

April 22nd

Genesis 3 vv 1-13

Having reached the end of the Epistle to the Ephesians, I thought it would be good to look at the way in which passages in the Bible link up. Today we have the well known story of the Fall. God made us in His own image. He made us to be His children. He set us in Paradise & gave us one another. He also gave us freedom of choice – to love and obey Him or not. Freedom is a great gift. How we exercise it, however, has profound consequences.

April 23rd (St George)

Romans 5 vv 8-21

The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life.

Adam made the wrong choice. He rejected God and the consequence is death. Adam stands for humanity. We're all sinners and the consequence is that we are all doomed to death. The human race is essentially sinful. If you don't believe that, just read a newspaper. We

are in solidarity with Adam in our rebellion against God and its consequences. One human being, however, is not a sinner. In love, He is perfectly obedient to God. He alone of the whole human race does not deserve to die, but He chooses to die on behalf of the rest of us. Thus our sins are forgiven in Him. In Baptism we are in solidarity with Christ and we share in His Resurrection to eternal life.

2 O loving wisdom of our God!
When all was sin and shame,
a second Adam to the fight
and to the rescue came.

3 O wisest love! that flesh and
blood,
which did in Adam fail,
should strive afresh against the
foe,
should strive and should
prevail;

4 And that a higher gift than
grace
should flesh and blood refine,
God's presence and his very
self,
and essence all-divine.

5 O generous love! that he, who
smote
in Man for man the foe,
the double agony in Man
for man should undergo;

April 24th

I Corinthians 15 vv 20-26

I Corinthians 15 vv 20-26 is the reading appointed for funeral in the Book of Common Prayer. Because it is long and some of it is hard to understand and because there are many readings in the Bible suitable for funerals, it is often omitted or abbreviated. It is worth considering, however. Yesterday was St George's Day. The legend is that George fought and overcame the dragon (or serpent) which terrorised the village. Jesus fought and overcame death itself and its power to terrorise us by His Death on the Cross. Through faith in Him, we share in His victory and do not have to fear the consequences of our & Adam's sin.

April 25th (St Mark)

I Corinthians 15 vv 27 & 28

This is one of the difficult things to understand in this chapter. Christ's victory on the cross defeats all the powers of sin, the world and the devil. Having been *found in fashion as a man, [and] humbled himself, and become obedient unto death... God hath highly exalted him... that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow*. Jesus is Lord of Lords & King of Kings. He is these things both by right (being the Son of God,

God the Son) and because He has earned these titles by what He has accomplished. So why *shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him?* Mark's Gospel emphasises that Jesus is the Son of God. It also portrays the very human Jesus. My attempt to understand these two verses from I Corinthians depends on the doctrine that Jesus, as the second person of the Trinity, is God, equal with the Father & the Holy Spirit in every respect, but He is also fully human, the greatest human being ever, above every other human being, but nevertheless inferior to God. As the Athanasian Creed puts it:

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation : that [we] also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess : that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds : and Man of the substance of his Mother, born in the world; Perfect God and perfect Man : of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead : and inferior to the Father, as touching his manhood; Who, although he be God and Man : yet he is not two, but one Christ;

O ALMIGHTY God, who hast instructed thy holy Church with the heavenly doctrine of thy Evangelist Saint Mark; Give us grace, that, being not like children carried away with every blast of vain doctrine, we may be established in the truth of thy holy Gospel; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

April 26th

I Corinthians 15 vv 29-32

I don't know what Paul means by being baptized for the dead & I have never come across a convincing explanation. Today's verses do, however, have one point. Belief in the Resurrection of Jesus & our own eternal life in Him is fundamental to Christianity. If there were no eternal life why *renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the carnal desires of the flesh, so that thou wilt not follow, nor be led by them?* If tomorrow we die and that's the end of everything we might as well eat, drink & be merry – not that there would be much pleasure even in these things if we didn't know Whom to thank for them. But, if we do know God, Whom to know is eternal life, then we must behave accordingly in this world as well as the next.

April 27th (Easter 1)

I Corinthians 15 vv 35-38

The idea of life after the death of our physical bodies might seem incredible, but there are plenty of wonderful and mysterious things in the world – not least the fact that an apparently lifeless seed grows into a plant. We understand the process much better than people did in Paul's day, but it's no less wonderful for all that. And there's a great deal we still don't understand about how living things grow and develop. They are natural processes, susceptible to scientific investigation, and we may come to understand them a great deal better than we do now, but they are marvellous and essential to our own existence. Given that God created all living things which grow and develop as they do, is it unreasonable to think that He can also give life to the dead?

ALMIGHTY Father, who has given thine only Son to die for our sins, and to rise again for our justification; Grant us so to put away the leaven of malice and wickedness, that we may alway serve thee in pureness of living and truth; through the merits of the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

April 28th

I Corinthians 15 vv 39-41

Back in I Kings 4, when Solomon's wisdom is being celebrated, one example of his understanding is that he spoke of trees and plants, beasts & fowl, creeping things and fishes. Adam named the animals. The first step in *getting a handle on nature* is to observe, to describe & to list what there is in the universe. Having observed what there is and how it behaves, we begin to recognise patterns. For example, apples fall from trees at a particular rate. Magnets attract iron. Heat melts solids and boils liquids. These patterns are predictable. Water always boils at 100C at atmospheric pressure. We deduce scientific laws from these patterns. We also classify what we have observed, described and listed: animal, vegetable or mineral; coniferous or deciduous; mammal, reptile, bird or insect; igneous, metamorphic or sedimentary rock; gas giant or earth like planet, dwarf stars & giant stars. All this being so, it is not unreasonable to suppose that there are many myriads of things we don't yet know about, that they may fall into categories entirely different from anything we have experienced so far & that they follow their own God-given laws. There is a spiritual realm as well as a material one.

April 29th

I Corinthians 15 vv 42-49

We currently inhabit the physical realm, the corruptible, weak, inglorious earthy realm. We shall die & our bodies will see corruption. Like Adam, we are made of the dust of the earth. We are living souls because God breathes into us the breath of life. We shall surely die because we have rebelled against God, the source of all life. The second Adam, Jesus, gives life. He gives eternal life to those who believe in Him. This enlivening power, this quickening spirit is the gift of God which we receive through faith in His Name.

April 30th

I Corinthians 15 vv 42-55

Corruptible, weak, inglorious & earthy, we have no place in the spiritual realm, the Kingdom of God. What is needed is a transformation, a metamorphosis. We must cease to be tadpoles or caterpillars and become the frogs or butterflies we were always meant to be. It is Christ crucified, Christ risen from the dead, Who effects our transformation. There are two aspects to our metamorphosis – one taking place on earth, the other happening when we depart from the earth. In Romans 12², Paul says, *be no longer conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind*. Living Christian lives on earth, we grow to be more like Him. Young tadpoles look like fish. Then they grow back legs, then front legs, their bodies become frog shaped, their tails shrink and at last they can leave the water for a new life on land. There is also the total & final transformation when we see Him as He is and become like Him. Those of us who are still around at the Second Coming will meet Him as He returns to earth. Those of us who have already died on that day will awaken and arise. A caterpillar goes into a chrysalis sometimes for a considerable time & then the butterfly emerges.

May 1st (St Philip & St James)

I Corinthians 15 vv 56-58

ALMIGHTY God, whom truly to know is everlasting life; Grant us perfectly to know thy Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life; that, following the steps of thy holy Apostles, Saint Philip and Saint James, we may stedfastly walk in the way that leadeth to eternal life; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

May 2nd (St Athanasius)

Genesis 3 vv 1-6

This year is the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. The council was called to discuss an issue which had arisen concerning Who Jesus really is. Athanasius attended the conference which insisted on the belief that Jesus is of one being or substance (Greek ‘ομοουσιος) with God the Father. He is not merely the greatest of all created beings, He is *God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God*. An enthusiastic and effective preacher called Arius had taught that Jesus is not truly God, merely the greatest of all created beings. Arius’ teaching is attractive. It is easier to understand than what the creed states. But it is wrong and actually incompatible with Christian belief. Jesus is indeed fully human as we are. He knows our every weakness from His own experience as well as His divine omniscience. But He is also truly and fully God. Otherwise He would not be a complete communication of God’s Truth to us. God would not in Him experience what we are. God’s love for the human race would not be absolute if it lacked that total giving of self to the beloved. Our humanity would not be saved were it not fully assumed by divinity. Jesus is God become like us so that we should become like Him, one with us so that we may be one with Him. The divine became human so that we humans should become divine.

What has all that to do with the snake in the garden (the devil)? To say that Jesus is merely the greatest created being and not truly God is a plausible and (for many people) attractive falsehood. The devil is the father of lies. *The wages of sin is death* whatever plausible lies are offered to us.

May 3rd

Genesis 3 vv 14&15

On the mundane level, we may think of the general antipathy between human beings and snakes. A lot of people don’t like them. Some people are terrified even by the thought of snakes. There are many people who would take any opportunity to kill a snake. Poisonous snakes do bite and inject venom which is, in many cases, fatal. They may lurk in dark corners and strike unexpectedly. Nevertheless, snakes are beautiful and wonderful creatures. They have their place in the created order and I, for one, would not want a snake to be killed unless

there were a genuine (as opposed to an exaggerated) threat to human life.

More to our point is to read this story in the context of salvation history. The serpent symbolising Satan, the Father of lies, the tempter, the accuser is finally put down by Jesus, the child of Mary, by the children of Eve (humanity) redeemed in Him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

May 4th (Easter 2)

Revelation 12 vv 1-6

At Cuxton, we're very familiar with this chapter because it is read at our Patronal Festival. We might think of Eve, mother of the human race, which the devil sets out to destroy from the very beginning. Or Mary & her Son Jesus Whom the devil tempts, against Whom the devil stirs up opposition, Whom the devil thinks He has beaten at the Crucifixion, but Who turns out to be the Victor after all. Or Mother Church whose children are persecuted in this world but who share the Victory of the Son of God.

ALMIGHTY God, who has given thine only Son to be unto us both a sacrifice for sin, and also an ensample of godly life; Give us grace that we may always most thankfully receive that his inestimable benefit, and also daily endeavour ourselves to follow the blessed steps of his most holy life; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

May 5th

Revelation 12 vv 7-9

There is a great battle between good and evil in all creation, between those who walk in the way of life, the way of God & those many who choose the broad way that leads to destruction, the way of death, the devil's path. Inevitably, good ultimately conquers because God is good, but the price of this conquest is Christ's obedience to death on the cross, the only answer to humanity's abuse of God's gift of free will, our disobedience to the command to love Him & to love one another.

May 6th

Revelation 12 vv 10&11

We share in His Victory by following in His footsteps, the way of the Cross, which is the only route to eternal life. We are baptised into His death, buried with Him, in order that, by the power of His Holy Spirit working in us, we may share in His Resurrection.

Take up thy cross, the Saviour
said,
if thou wouldst my disciple be;
deny thyself, the world forsake,
and humbly follow after me.

strength,
and calmly sin's wild deluge
brave,
'twill guide thee to a better
home,
it points to glory o'er the grave.

Take up thy cross, let not its
weight
fill thy weak spirit with alarm;
his strength shall bear thy
spirit up,
and brace thy heart and nerve
thine arm.

Take up thy cross and follow
Christ,
nor think till death to lay it
down;
for only those who bear the
cross
may hope to wear the glorious
crown.

Take up thy cross, nor heed the
shame,
nor let thy foolish pride rebel;
thy Lord for thee the cross
endured,
to save thy soul from death and
hell.

To thee, great Lord, the One in
Three,
all praise forevermore ascend:
O grant us in our home to see
the heavenly life that knows no
end

Take up thy cross then in his

May 7th

Revelation 12 vv 12-17

When did the Second World War end? You could argue that defeat for the Axis powers was inevitable once America, with her economic and

military might, joined the allies. Perhaps it was effectively over for the Germans when the Normandy landings were successful, but there was still a lot of bloody fighting to come before their surrender. Even after VE Day, the war in the East continued till VJ Day and, for decades after that, lonely Japanese soldiers isolated on Pacific islands believed the war to be continuing and were still ready to fight. The victory of Good over Evil was decisively won at Calvary, when Jesus said, *It is finished*, but there are still many battles to be fought before the final consummation. So we continue to pray & work for peace & justice.

May 8th

Numbers 21 vv 4-6

The story of the forty years wandering in the wilderness between the Israelites' deliverance from slavery in Egypt until their entrance into the Promised Land is defiled by repeated examples of their ingratitude, faithlessness & disobedience to God. That's not to have a dig at ancient Israel & it most certainly isn't a justification for anti-Semitism, which is always unjustifiable, just like prejudice against any race or religion. It's a warning to us all (cf I Corinthians 10¹⁻¹³). We're insufficiently thankful for all that God does for us. We don't trust Him sufficiently. We disobey His commandments. Now I'm no longer an official spokesman of the Church England, perhaps you'll forgive me for enlarging on this theme in a contemporary Church context. We're told not to *forsake the assembling of ourselves together*. We are told, *Do this in remembrance of me*. Just as God fed His people with the manna in the wilderness, He feeds us with Jesus the Bread of Life on our life's journey from Baptism to the Kingdom of Heaven. And yet church attendance is not always a very high priority for those who think of themselves as Christians. For a variety of reasons, even when we do assemble ourselves together, we don't celebrate Holy Communion together every week. I believe that this neglect both of coming to Church regularly & frequently and also, when we do meet together for worship, our failure to participate in the Sacrament at least every Sunday weakens us as individual Christians & weakens the Church, which is after all made up of people like us.

My God, and is thy table spread,
and doth thy cup with love
o'erflow?

and let them all thy sweetness
know.

Thither be all thy children led,

2 Hail, sacred feast which Jesus
makes,

rich banquet of his flesh and
blood!
Thrice happy he who here partakes
that sacred stream, that heavenly
food.

3 Why are its bounties all in vain
before unwilling hearts displayed?
Was not for them the Victim slain?

Are they forbid the children's
bread?

4 O let thy table honoured be,
and furnished well with joyful
guests;
and may each soul salvation see,
that here its sacred pledges tastes

May 9th

Numbers 21 vv 7-10

The snake on the pole signifies Christ. He is the great Healer – healing our bodies, minds and spirits, healing our fractured relationships with God & with one another. There is a sculpture of a snake on a pole on the mountain where Moses died, with the inscription, *As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.* The pagan Greeks also used the symbol of a snake on a pole (the Rod of Asclepius) as a symbol of healing. There must surely be a connection, but I don't know what it could be. Maybe there is an association deep in human consciousness between this symbol and healing, but we have to be careful not to descend into idolatry & paganism.

May 10th

II Kings 18 1-8

Hundreds of years after Moses, the reforming King Hezekiah reigned in Jerusalem. The sad story had continued as it does today. God's people, Christians as well as Jews, Gentiles, all of humanity, disregard God's commandments and abuse the good gifts He has given us for our good for our own evil evil purposes. God had told Moses to make the bronze serpent as an instrument of forgiveness and healing, of atonement and peace. The people had abused this gift. They had treated it as an idol and worshipped it instead of worshipping the living God. So the reforming King Hezekiah had to destroy it.

I'm reminded of Christians burning one another at the stake because of their different understandings of Holy Communion and religious wars fought over different understandings of the Bible and even today Churches riven by disagreements regarding doctrine and order.

May 11th (Easter 3)

John 3 vv 1-17

Human history is very much a tale of woe, not least the history of our religions. Religion has been used to “justify” atrocities quite as bad as anything non-believers have got up to. This all follows from sin, from humanity’s rejection of God. But God does not leave it at that. We have this wonderful chapter culminating in the words, *For God sent not his Son into the world; but that the world through him might be saved.*

ALMIGHTY God, who shewest to them that be in error the light of thy truth, to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness; Grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ’s Religion, that they may eschew those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

May 12th

Genesis 4 vv 1-10

Once humanity rejects the love of God, evil comes into the world. Cain was jealous of his brother Abel. His offering was not as acceptable as Abel’s. Probably it was less valuable. We ought not to dare to offer God less than our best. Jealousy turned to violence and violence to murder. *Am I my brother’s keeper.* It has been said that where Communism went wrong was in believing that it was possible to have the brotherhood of man without the fatherhood of God. Behaving towards our fellow human beings as we ought depends on our having the right relationship with God – to understand fully what it means to be human, to know His commandments and to be endued with His grace so that we might fulfil them.

May 13th

Genesis 4 vv 11-15

Cain was justly punished. God is just. Human society must be just. Justice is fundamental to the workings of the universe because justice flows from the reality of God. Abel’s murder could not be glossed over and forgotten as something of no account. On the other hand, God does not give up on Cain. There is mercy. Cain is not to be punished more severely than he deserves. He is protected from the vengeful. Potentially he might be reformed. Human justice too must be merciful – fair, not vengeful, never giving up hope that the sinner will be restored to righteousness.

Abel’s blood for vengeance
pleaded to the skies,

but the blood of Jesus
for our pardon cries.

May 14th

Genesis 4 vv 16-26

Obviously Adam's family were not the only human beings on earth at this time because Cain was able to find and marry a wife. This part of the story perplexes many Christians. One way of looking at it is that these stories are not strict historical accounts of what happened. They are what some people would call *myths* intended by God to teach us about how important things are – what it is to be human, how we are called to relate to God, to our fellow human beings and to the world in general, not the sort of detailed and accurate account of events which a modern historian would endeavour to produce. Another more literal way of looking at it is to think that perhaps God did create many human beings (cf Genesis 1⁶⁻²⁸), many human families, of which Adam's family in the Garden of Eden is a special case, the only ones who (in the male line through Seth) survived the Flood.

May 15th

I John 3 vv 7-15

Given that we are justified by faith rather than works, that God forgives our sins, it might be tempting to think that it does not matter how we behave. God loves us as we are. He is ready to forgive. But that is not so. If we truly love God, then Christ dwells in our hearts; we have the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are in the process of being transformed into His likeness. God is love and as we become more like Him, as we mature as His children & grow into our family inheritance, so our behaviour inevitably stems from love. Insofar as *We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done*, we have been untrue to our redeemed status. *There is no health in us*. So we ought not to be complacent about our sins, but confess them & pray for God's grace to model ourselves more completely on Jesus.

May 16th

I John 4 vv 19-21

Am I my brother's keeper?

Yes I am. It would be sheer hypocrisy to claim to love God if I didn't love His other children. I know I fail time & time again to love my neighbour as myself, to love my neighbour as God loves him, but it's not something I ought to be complacent about. I pray for grace to do better.

May 17th

Genesis 5 vv 18-24

Genesis 5 is one of those chapters you hope you won't be asked to read out loud in Church. It is also one of those chapters at which people attempting to read the whole of the Bible straight through are apt to give up. But it is part of Holy Scripture which God has caused to be written for our learning. Enoch is an interesting character. We are told twice that he walked with God. He walked with God during his life on earth, which I take to mean that he was a good man, obedient to God's commandments. At the end of his life on earth, he walked with God into eternity. To walk with God all our lives and to spend eternity with Him is what we all aspire to in Jesus Christ, though most of us will have to pass, as Jesus did.

Jesus lives! thy terrors now
can no longer, death, appal us;
Jesus lives! by this we know
thou, O grave, canst not
enthrall us.
Alleluia!

Alleluia!

Jesus lives! our hearts know
well
nought from us his love shall
sever;
life, nor death, nor powers of
hell
tear us from his keeping ever.
Alleluia!

Jesus lives! henceforth is death
but the gate of life immortal;
this shall calm our trembling
breath
when we pass its gloomy portal.
Alleluia!

Jesus lives! to him the throne
over all the world is given:
may we go where he has gone,
rest and reign with him in
heaven.
Alleluia!

Jesus lives! for us he died;
then, alone to Jesus living,
pure in heart may we abide,
glory to our Saviour giving.

May 18th (Easter 4)

Hebrews 11 vv 5&6

So how would we walk with God? How would we please Him?

Through faith, obviously.

ALMIGHTY God, who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men; Grant unto thy people, that they may love the thing which thou commandest, and desire that which thou dost promise; that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

May 19th

Jude vv 14&15

There is an ancient writing called the Book of Enoch which presents itself as though it were written by him. These verses may or may not be a quotation from that book. It's probably best to leave it that the origin of these words is lost in mystery. Their purport however is always relevant. There will be a Judgment, both of the Church and of the world. That is why it is vital that we *earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints* (Jude v3).

May 20th

Genesis 7 vv 1-16

We've failed. We've failed badly. Children in Britain today don't know stories like Noah's Ark & the Tower of Babel. They don't know about Abraham, Isaac & Jacob or the Exodus. They know very little about the New Testament, even the stories about Jesus. Ask them if you don't believe me. Why are there so few children and young people in most of our churches? Where have we gone wrong? The children of people of other faiths in modern Britain are taught their religion and attend synagogue, temple or mosque. My generation were taught the basics of the Christian faith at school even if we didn't go to Church or Sunday School. Where have we gone wrong & what are we going to do about it? These stories are much more than mere entertainment. They are the stories which have formed our civilisation.

May 21st

Matthew 24 vv 35-44

And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.

The Scout motto is *Be Prepared*. That makes sense. No point in making a cache of tinned provisions and forgetting the tin opener! But how do we prepare for life? How do we prepare for eternal life? The Words of Jesus outlast heaven & earth. We prepare for eternal life by seeking not to live by bread alone but by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God. We seek to walk in His ways. His word is a lantern to our feet and a light to our paths.

There is judgment and there is mercy, The created order as we know it will come to an end. The end will be sudden. We need to be ready.

And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead: Whose kingdom shall have no end.

May 22nd

II Peter 2 vv 1-9

There is a great deal of evil in the world. The Church herself is not free from corruption – false doctrine, abuse scandals, the persecution of those we disagree with, siding with despots, pursuing worldly wealth & power rather than spiritual values, negligence in mission, falling short of total commitment to Christ & His cause, etc.. Complacency is a snare. But God is just as merciful. There will be justice as there has been in the past. The unrepentant sinner should expect to be punished. Thus we should repent of our own sins, warn other sinners of what will happen and assure those who are ready to turn to Christ that *He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel.*

May 23rd

Genesis 8 vv 15-22

At the Creation, God had brought light out of darkness and order out of chaos. The dry land was separated from the water and both land and sea were populated with the appropriate plants and animals. Humanity, made in the image of God, given the choice between good and evil, was to be the key to the flourishing of this world. Man's rebellion against God, our defiance of His Word by which He created heaven and earth, disrupted everything. There was violence on the face of the earth, disfiguring her beauty. Chaos returned. The waters covered the earth. The inhabitants of the world, human and animal, perished. But after the Flood order is restored. The earth will be repopulated. God promises that the laws of nature, His laws, the laws of science, will prevail. The material creation, the Universe, will reliably perform in an orderly manner such that we can trust our senses & make plans, so that we can study the world in which we live & predict the consequences of our actions.

Great is Thy faithfulness, O
God my Father;
There is no shadow of turning
with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy
compassions, they fail not;
As Thou hast been Thou
forever wilt be.

Great is Thy faithfulness!
Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new
mercies I see:
All I have needed Thy hand
hath provided—
Great is Thy faithfulness,
Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter and
springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their
courses above
Join with all nature in
manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness,
mercy, and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace
that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to
cheer and to guide,
Strength for today and bright
hope for tomorrow—
Blessings all mine, with ten
thousand beside!

May 24th

Genesis 9 vv 1-17

So we're back in charge. It's an awesome responsibility. We cultivate the land to supply us with food & other necessities. We farm or hunt animals for food or skins. We use them as draught animals. We make pets of them. We take wood and stone from the earth and make bricks for our houses, hospitals, schools and temples. We mine the earth for coal and oil. He have great power & therefore great responsibility: to cherish creation to the glory of God, to take good care of it, to meet its needs and our needs as human beings, to ensure that everyone has enough, to prevent cruelty to animals as well as to people, to make ploughshares and pruning hooks rather than swords or spears. God has made a covenant with humanity. By the Word of the LORD were heaven and earth made. By His Word they are sustained. It is only by our living in accordance with His Word that we can play our part in sustaining the created order.

Psalm 19. **THE** heavens declare the glory of God : and the firmament sheweth his handywork. One day telleth another : and one night certifieth another. There is neither speech nor language : but their voices are heard among them. Their sound is gone out into all lands : and their words into the ends of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun : which cometh forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a giant to run his course. It goeth forth from the uttermost part of the heaven, and runneth about unto the end of it again : and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof. The law of the Lord is an undefiled law, converting the soul : the testimony of the Lord is sure, and giveth wisdom unto the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, and rejoice the heart : the commandment of the Lord is pure, and giveth light unto the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, and endureth for ever : the judgements of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold : sweeter also than honey, and the honey-comb. Moreover, by them is thy servant taught : and in keeping of them there is great

reward. Who can tell how oft he offendeth : O cleanse thou me from my secret faults. Keep thy servant also from presumptuous sins, lest they get the dominion over me : so shall I be undefiled, and innocent from the great offence. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart : be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord : my strength, and my redeemer.

May 25th (Easter 5)

I Peter 3 vv 18-22

We know that those who have heard the Word of God, repented of their sins, put their faith in Jesus and been baptised in His Name are saved. But what about the rest of humanity? What about those who have never heard the Gospel? What about those who might have heard the Gospel but who have been put off Jesus by the terrible things Christians do, claiming to be acting in His Name? Victims of abuse by clergy? What about those who heard the message & scoffed? There is reason to believe that those who have not heard will be judged on how they responded to the promptings of conscience or whether they were prepared to open their eyes to the glory of God in the wonders of the world or to look into their hearts and realise that it is in Him that we live & move & have our being. If those who refused to take the warning when Noah was building the Ark had another chance when Jesus *descended into hell*, could it be that there is another opportunity for sinners to repent even after death? It's not a question you or I can answer. What we do know is that we must live up to our status as baptized Christians.

O LORD, from whom all good things do come; Grant to us thy humble servants, that by thy holy inspiration we may think those things that be good, and by thy merciful guiding may perform the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

May 26th

Hebrews 11 vv 6&7

How are we to please God? By being like Noah having faith & acting on it.

May 27th

II Peter 3 vv 1-18

There are many people, Christians even, despite what we say in the Creed, who do not believe in the End of the World, the Second Coming or the Last Judgment. They are in for a surprise!

If the earth will be destroyed by fire rather than water next time, what could this mean? Could it be nuclear war or the effects of climate change? We don't know but it makes sense for us to do everything we can to avert both these possibilities. Could it be an astronomical event such as a meteor strike or the eventual death of the sun? Scientists are investigating ways to prevent the former. The latter is not expected for billions of years. So it's not something for us to worry about.

I'm inclined to think that Peter is not writing about any natural event. What he is warning us of is the end of nature. Just as our universe of time and space was created out of nothing, so it will, one day, in God's good time, just cease to exist. Christ will be present as He was at the original Creation. He will judge the quick & the dead. Then there will be new heavens & a new earth in which righteousness dwells. In this new creation there will be no room for sin or for unrepentant sinners.

May 28th

Genesis 11 vv 1-9

Human beings are capable of great marvels when we work together. Just look at what we have achieved in terms of invention, exploration agriculture, industry, commerce, science, art & architecture, music & literature. But we know that we are also capable of great evil. God, thank God, puts limits on our powers. He teaches us His Law. He rewards faithful service. He punishes wickedness. He has given us dominion over the earth. We have been fruitful & multiplied & we have subdued the earth. There is much we can be proud of but too much of what we should surely be ashamed: conflict, injustice, deliberate cruelty to others, indifference to the plight of the poor, greed & selfishness, the ill treatment of the animals, the degradation of the environment. The perfection of the new heavens and the new earth depends on the redeeming Presence of the Son of God. So we read at Christmas in anticipation of His first & second Advent Isaiah 11: And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: ² And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; ³ And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: ⁴ But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the

earth: with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. ⁵ And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. ⁶ The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. ⁷ And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸ And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. ⁹ They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. ¹⁰ And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.

May 29th (Ascension Day)

Hebrews 7 vv 24&25

Jesus ascends into Heaven. He is the High Priest and the Atoning Sacrifice. He is King of Kings & Lord of Lords, reigning and worshipped at God's Right Hand. He opens the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers. Our prayers ascend to the Throne of Grace through Him. He intercedes on our behalf. He endues us with the gift of the Holy Spirit so that we may follow in His footsteps, continue His work on earth, and, at a time of His appointing, come to that place where He is in all eternity.

GRANT, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe thy only-begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ to have ascended into the heavens; so we may also in heart and mind thither ascend, and with him continually dwell, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

May 30th

Acts 2 vv 1-13

Pentecost undoes the curse of Babel. In Baptism, we are one with Christ & one with one another. We all speak the same language, the language of love. This being so, we can be trusted to unite. We can work together for the coming of God's Kingdom. God can trust us to use the materials and skills He has given us for good purposes: to glorify His Name, to meet everybody's needs, to cherish His Creation. So what has gone so wrong with the Church down through the ages? We often behave no better than the people who built the Tower of Babel, thinking they could exalt themselves to heaven. Pray for a spirit of repentance in the Church & in our hearts.

May 31st

John 17 vv 15-26

This is an excerpt from Christ's high priestly prayer, His intercession for His Church, our consecration as His Body. His prayer ought to be our prayer. We should seek to subject our spirits to His Spirit, we in Him, He in us in the perfect unity of love. So we accomplish His purposes on earth. So we shall dwell forever in glory with Him.

June 1st (Sunday after Ascension)

I Peter 4 vv 7-11

We've thought about living in readiness for the Coming of the Son of Man, the Last Judgment & our home in the new heavens and the new earth. We've thought about what it means to dwell here on earth in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one with the Father, one with the Son, one with one another. The unity of the Holy Spirit is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. *I believe* and *We believe*. The Greek word for fellowship, *κοινωνία*, is sometimes translated *communion*. It doesn't specifically mean the sacrament of Holy Communion in the blessing *the fellowship of the Holy Spirit*, but the Sacrament is an aspect of this same oneness. I Corinthians 10: ¹⁶ *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?*¹⁷ *For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.* And what is the characteristic, the law & custom, of this fellowship? It is love. All our possessions, all our talents, all our opportunities are gifts of God. We use these rightly when we employ them in love – *that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

O GOD the King of glory, who hast exalted thine only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph unto thy kingdom in heaven; We beseech thee, leave us not comfortless; but send to us thine Holy Ghost to comfort us, and exalt us unto the same place whither our Saviour Christ is gone before, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

June 2nd

Genesis 11 vv 27-32

We often overlook the fact that it was Abraham's father who removed his family from prosperous, civilised but idolatrous Ur of the Chaldees seeking in a new purer life in Haran. The issue is what is truly important in life? What this world has to offer in terms of culture and material security or the values of the Kingdom of God,

June 3rd

Genesis 12 vv 1-5

After the death of his father Terah, God told Abraham to move on from Haran. He was to make a new life in the land of Canaan. God promised that Abraham would be richly blessed and also that in Abraham all the families of the earth would be blessed. And so we are. Jesus, the Saviour of the world is the seed of Abraham.

And his mercy is on them that fear him : throughout all generations.

He hath showed strength with his arm : he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seat : and hath exalted the humble and meek.

He hath filled the hungry with good things : and the rich he hath sent empty away.

He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel : as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed, for ever.

June 4th

Hebrews 11 vv 8-10

Not knowing whither he went.

Abraham knew that he had to move on. It was God's Will for his life. He was promised a blessing but he did not entirely understand what this meant. He did know this much, however. *He looked for a city which had foundations, whose builder and maker is God.* We know this too. Whatever happens to us in life, whatever God calls us to, we know that we are *en route*, by His grace to that eternal city. And how do we know this? It is by the same faith as that of Abraham who set out from his home in obedience to God's commandment.

June 5th

Genesis 15 vv 1-7

I am thy shield and exceeding great reward.

We can certainly trust God for our lives. He is our shield and exceeding great reward. Abram (as he then was) knew this. He had faith in God. He had acted on that faith and left the security of Haran at a great age to make a new life in the land of Canaan. But he still wasn't clear about his vocation, the blessing he was to expect. God promised him an heir, despite his advanced years, his wife's age & the fact that they had never been blessed with children even when they were younger. *And he believed in the LORD and it was counted to him for righteousness.*

June 6th

Hebrews 11 vv 11-16

Abraham trusted God for his life. He walked in God's ways. He received many blessings, but he did not live to see the outworking of God's promise when his seed, Jesus, would come to be a light to lighten the gentiles & the glory of God's people Israel. We're all on a journey. We can't yet see the final destination. We might be perplexed by the route we are called to take & the challenges we face, but, like Abraham, we know to trust & obey and that God will fulfil His purposes in us and bring us home at last to the Holy City.

1. Lead, kindly Light, amid
th' encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on;
The night is dark, and I
am far from home,
Lead Thou me on;
Keep Thou my feet; I do
not ask to see
The distant scene; one
step enough for me.
2. I was not ever thus, nor
prayed that Thou
Shouldst lead me on;
I loved to choose and
see my path, but now
Lead Thou me on;

- I loved the garish day,
and spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will;
remember not past
years.
3. So long Thy pow'r has
blest me, sure it still
Wilt lead me on,
O'er moor and fen, o'er
crag and torrent, till
The night is gone,
And with the morn
those angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long
since, and lost awhile.

June 7th

John 8 vv 32-59

Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Jesus is the Truth and we know Him by faith. People are not saved by being Abraham's literal descendants (sharing his DNA) or by keeping the rules. We are saved by grace through faith. Our Lord's interlocutors here claim to be following Abraham but they have got Abraham all wrong. If they followed Abraham in believing God, they would believe in Jesus. The promise to Abraham was partly fulfilled in that he and his descendants after the flesh inherited the land of Canaan, but the complete fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham is that people of every race & culture receive the gift of eternal life in Jesus – through faith. Abraham was mortal. Christ is immortal. We are mortal. In Christ, through faith in Him, we put on immortality. *Before Abraham was, says Jesus, I am.* Think about that.

June 8th (Pentecost / Whitsunday)

Galatians 3 vv 1-9

We can only know God through the teaching of our hearts by His Holy Spirit. Our experience of God depends on Him. The life of the Church is inspired by Him. Without the Holy Spirit we can neither know Him nor be effective in His service. It is not because we have earned God's favour by being such good people. It is by God's grace that we are called His children and, as in the case of Abraham, it is through faith that we know Him.

GOD, who as at this time didst teach the hearts of thy faithful people, by the sending to them the light of thy Holy Spirit; Grant us by the same Spirit to have a right judgement in all things, and evermore to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the same Spirit, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

June 9th

Galatians 3 vv 10-14

Psalm 15: LORD, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle : or who shall rest upon thy holy hill? Even he that leadeth an uncorrupt life : and doeth the thing which is right, and speaketh the truth from his heart. He that hath used no deceit in his tongue, nor done evil to his neighbour : and hath not slandered his neighbour. He that setteth not by himself, but is lowly in his own eyes : and maketh much of them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth unto his neighbour, and disappointeth him not : though it were to his own hindrance. He that hath not given his money upon usury : nor taken reward against the innocent. Whoso doeth these things : shall never fall.

Who would have the right to stand in the Presence of God? *Be ye holy even as I am holy.* Who, of all the sons of Adam, has the right to enter into the dwelling place of God. There can only be one answer. There is only one human being Who is without sin. He only is fit to stand before God. We are not saved by keeping the Law of God because only Jesus has kept that Law perfectly. The Law of God is to love Him with all our heart and our neighbours as ourselves. Now we can probably think of other people who are much worse than we are. We may well think that we're reasonably decent people & I that expect people who read these notes are decent people, but we're not good enough. Only Jesus is good enough. He took our sins on Himself and suffered the punishment which is our dessert. So, like Abraham, we are saved through faith in Him whether we are Jew or Gentile.

June 10th

Galatians 3 vv 15-18

God made a covenant with Abraham. God promised Abraham that in him all nations would be blessed, not just the Jews, Abraham's descendants after the flesh, but also the Gentiles – everybody who shares Abraham's faith. *In thy seed*, said God to Abraham, *shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice*. Abraham had faith in God and he acted on that faith. This was just after he had shown his readiness to sacrifice his son Isaac if that was what God wanted (Genesis 22). Thankfully, it wasn't. God provided Himself a lamb. Initially the promise was partially effected through Abraham's son Isaac. But many generations later it was totally fulfilled by Abraham's seed Jesus, the Son of God, the Lamb of God. The formal Law was given by God to Moses on Mt Sinai 430 years after the time of Abraham. It didn't annul God's Promise. God's promises cannot be annulled.

June 11th (St Barnabas)

Galatians 3 vv 19-24

So, if the Law isn't a sort of exam we have to pass in order to be accepted into the household of God, what is it for? It teaches us right from wrong. It spurs our consciences. It warns us of the consequences of sin. It invites us to walk in the paths of righteousness and to receive the blessings which follow when we do. It leads us to Christ.

O LORD God Almighty, who didst endue thy holy Apostle Barnabas with singular gifts of the Holy Ghost; Leave us not, we beseech thee, destitute of thy manifold gifts, nor yet of grace to use them alway to thy honour and glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

June 12th

Galatians 3 vv 25-29

Having come to Christ and put our faith in Him, our lives are transformed. We no longer rely on what people tell us or what we read in books in order to know right from wrong. We no longer refrain from doing bad things because we are afraid of being punished. We don't do good things in the hope of a reward. We know how we ought to live because we have God's Holy Spirit. Our sins are forgiven. We have been made righteous. It is therefore our nature to refrain from doing evil & to do good. We're no longer pupils needing to be guided & disciplined by a schoolmaster. We are adults responsible for our own actions. Anyway, we shall be when our transformation is complete!

June 13th

Galatians 4 vv 1-7

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He told them to begin *Our Father*. The Lord's Prayer is so familiar that it is only too easy to forget what an astonishing thing it is that we – *frail children of dust & feeble as frail* – are not only permitted but instructed to address God as *Father*. We can only do so because God Himself sent His Son into the world. He took upon Himself our human nature so that we might be partakers of the divine nature. We were created to be the children of God. We took what our Father had provided for us, walked away & took up residence in a far country where we wasted our substance and became destitute. We forfeited our birthright and were hardly fit to be our Father's servants, let alone His children. In His love, He welcomed us back into the family. He sought us. The lost was found. We were adopted and received back into what God had always attended should be our home (cf Luke 15).

June 14th

Genesis 22 vv 1-14

This is a hard passage to read . Yet it is seminal. It is crucial to our understanding of God. It is one of the readings provided for the service of Nine Lessons & Carols at Christmas & often it is abbreviated or an alternative is used. When you think about, this is a horrifying story. When I was growing up, I remember people putting the emphasis on the fact that Isaac was not sacrificed. We could read the story as teaching us that God does not require human sacrifice. Human sacrifice is an abomination practised by the pagans. People who truly know God don't sacrifice human beings to Him! Nowadays, with all the concern about safeguarding, preachers are inclined to read this as a kind of child abuse. Isaac must have been terrified. Did he ever trust his father again. Such preachers come close to judging the Bible rather than looking to the Bible to judge us – a move which makes it easier to deal with passages we find difficult but which is finally fatal to true religion. We finish up making up our own religion rather than seeking God in His revelation of Himself. We can comfort ourselves that God knew all along that He would save Isaac. But Abraham & Isaac didn't know that. Nevertheless, the actual point of the story in the Bible is that Abraham's faith was so great that he would do anything God asked of him. We praise God that Isaac was spared. But God *spared not his own Son*.

June 15th (Trinity Sunday)

Isaiah 6 vv 1-8

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? (Romans 8³²)

When I was a child, my grandmother had a sort of cubby hole in which the coal was kept. There were also several shelves and on these, covered in coal dust, was a variety of fascinating bits & pieces which had been acquired at some time, were no longer useful if they ever had been, but were not yet ready to be thrown away. Among these was a gold coloured powder which was supposed to be made up to make gold paint. This was irresistible and, from a child's point of view, just the thing to create a picture of God in His Heaven. I must have been unaware of the implications of the Second Commandment! Anyway, if one were to imagine God, supposing images of God were not forbidden, something with a lot of gold and light in it might come to mind – something along the lines of Isaiah's vision - God, high & lifted up in infinite majesty, thrice holy, eternally worshipped by angelic beings, awesome, terrifying even, overwhelming any mortal who dared to come into His Presence.

This is a true picture – as true as we human beings can understand. But it is only one picture, one way of seeing God. We also see Him *Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature*, hanging on the Cross and dying there.

It is also our experience of God that *if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you (Romans 8¹¹)*.

And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. (Galatians 4⁶)

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who hast given unto us thy servants grace, by the confession of a true faith to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity; We beseech thee, that thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith, and evermore defend us from all adversities, who livest and reignest, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

June 16th

Genesis 25 vv 19-23

The child of the promise, Isaac, grew up to be the father of twins. They were the ancestors of the Edomites & the Israelites. The Edomites lived in the mountains of southern Jordan where much later on the rose red city of Petra would be built. Even before the boys were born, there was strife between them, as there would be between the nations they begat. The LORD informed Isaac even before the boys were born that there would be war between the two nations & that Israel would come out on top. This story then raises the question how is it possible to foretell the future. Given that it is, the course of this world must be determined. By Whom could the course of this world be ultimately determined? There can only be one answer to that question, but it is not an easy answer because it raises another question which is essentially unanswerable.

June 17th

Malachi 1 vv 1-4

Many centuries after the time of Isaac and Rebekah, there was war in the Middle East, as there so often is. It is horrifying that, in the very places where God made Himself known in the Law and the Prophets, the very soil on which Jesus walked, even there, humanity's heart has been so hardened that there is no peace. *There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked.* Malachi is explicit that God was on Israel's side, as would be expected in the light of the Genesis story we are reading. Malachi's point is that the Israelites, having been so blessed by God, are behaving with unnatural ingratitude in the half-heartedness of their worship and faithfulness to God. But why did, as Malachi says, God hate the Edomites? There might be some justification for Israel rejoicing in the fall of Edom because the Edomites rejoiced when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians. Understandable perhaps, but it is not how Jesus behaved. He prayed for the people who crucified Him, *Father, forgiven them for they know not what they do.* Jesus is the perfect revelation of God and it is He Who sets us an example – the example Stephen followed when he was stoned, praying, *Lord lay not this sin to their charge.* Like the Israelites Malachi is prophesying to, we have been richly blessed by God. Our devotion to Him ought to be in no way half-hearted. *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

June 18th

Romans 9 vv 9-16

St Paul takes the doctrine of Justification by Faith to its logical conclusion. If we can do nothing to deserve God's love; if we are all helpless sinners, redeemable only by an outside Agency, Jesus Christ; if it is all of God that we are saved; then everything is eternally determined. If that is the case where is justice? *Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?* demanded Abraham. God knew Esau and Jacob before they were born, just as He has known you and me in all eternity. In human terms, there would appear to be nothing that Jacob did (or that you & I have done) that would account for God's favour towards us – nor to explain why Esau was born to be rejected. I can't explain it. Paul doesn't explain it. Read the whole of Romans 9. He marvels at what God has done. He celebrates the absolute sovereignty, the absolute justice of God, but it is that very perfection of Providence which puts His ways beyond our extremely imperfect understanding. We just have to trust Him that He knows what He is doing. Human beings certainly make choices for which we are responsible, but God is working His purposes out in our lives whatever choices we may make and whatever other people do to us.

The Church of England tried to make sense of this in 17th Article of Religion. It helps me. Does it help you?

XVII. Of Predestination and Election.

PREDESTINATION to life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby, before the foundations of the world were laid, He hath constantly decreed by His counsel secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom He hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation as vessels made to honour. Wherefore they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God be called according to God's purpose by His Spirit working in due season; they through grace obey the calling; they be justified freely; they be made sons of God by adoption; they be made like the image of His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ; they walk religiously in good works; and at length by God's mercy

they attain to everlasting felicity.

As the godly consideration of Predestination and our Election in Christ is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons and such as feeling in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh and their earthly members and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God: so for curious and carnal persons, lacking the Spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God's Predestination is a most dangerous downfall, whereby the devil doth thrust them either into desperation or into wretchlessness of most unclean living no less perilous than desperation.

Furthermore, we must receive God's promises in such wise as they be generally set forth in Holy Scripture; and in our doings that will of God is to be followed which we have expressly declared unto us in the word of God.

June 19th

Genesis 25 vv 24-28

If Isaac and Rebekah lived next door to me & I knew the family and saw the twins growing up, I should have liked Esau better than Jacob. Esau was, I think, a straightforward kind of guy, irresponsible perhaps, impetuous, but open and frank, active. Jacob hung about his mother's apron strings. He was sly. He didn't mind taking unfair advantage. When he was offered the chance to take what should have been Esau's it was fear rather than fraternal love which made him hesitate. But God's choice was Jacob. I would have got that wrong. *The LORD seeth not as man seeth. Judge not that ye be not judged. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? Who are you & I to judge God's servants. Every one of us shall give account of himself to God.*

We don't know the answers to the questions raised by yesterday's reading. In the end, we have to accept that God's wisdom is infinitely greater than ours, but He makes Himself known to us in Jesus Christ.

June 20th

Genesis 25 vv 29-34

So Esau comes in from the field tired & hungry & he sees his brother cooking a casserole. You'd think that Jacob would gladly share. But no, he demands that Esau give up his birthright before he shares his food with him. The birthright was very precious. Given Jacob's intransigence, Esau should have been prepared to put up with being hungry for a bit longer rather than yielding his birthright. Maybe he didn't think Jacob would hold him to it, that it was all a joke. But Jacob did hold him to it. Esau carelessly renounced his inheritance rather than endure his hunger any longer.

June 21st

Hebrews 12 vv 12-19

These Hebrew Christians were facing persecution. We don't know what form the persecution would take. We do know that nevertheless everything was in God's Hands. God was refining His Church. Whatever the threat was, it must have been very tempting for these Hebrew Christians to renounce their faith. They had *not yet resisted unto blood*, but maybe that would come. How easy it would have been to deny Christ and avoid social ostracism, mockery, unemployment, torture, imprisonment, even execution, whatever form the persecution would take. But what would they be giving up if they did renounce Christ? *Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,* ²³ *To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,* ²⁴ *And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.* God's revelation of Himself to us in Jesus Christ is infinitely more wonderful than His revelation of Himself on Mt Sinai to the Israelites of the Exodus. The promise of eternity in heaven is infinitely more marvellous than the promise that the descendants of Jacob would live out their mortal lives in the Land of Canaan. Proportionately, the potential punishment for renouncing all that is infinitely greater than the penalties suffered by the Israelites for their faithlessness after their deliverance from Egyptian slavery. Walking away from our salvation in Christ for fear of persecution would be like Esau giving up his birthright for a mess of pottage – and there was no way back for him.

June 22nd (Trinity 1)

Genesis 28 vv 10-22

To cut a long story short, the sibling rivalry reached a point at which Esau let it be known that he would kill Jacob if he got the chance. Their mother contrived to send Jacob away to safety in Haran where her relations lived. On the way, despite his unworthiness, God made tremendous promises to Jacob. He richly blessed Jacob. God commissioned him as the one through whom God's covenant with Abraham would be fulfilled. This is Jacob's place in God's plan. Jacob responded by promising to be faithful to God.

On 22nd June 1980, I was ordained deacon. Nobody is worthy to be a minister of religion. God calls us, despite our unworthiness, in accordance with his plans for our own personal lives and for His Church and for her mission to the world. Not everyone who believes that he might be called actually is called and the Church has prayerfully & humbly to foster vocations, to encourage those whom God is calling to offer for the ministry and to seek to recognise what God has in store for those who may be mistaken in believing that they are called to ordained ministry. All Christians are called to serve God & everyone has a vocation to serve Him. The Church is a human as well as a divine organisation and may not always get it right. If the Church ordains wrong 'uns, the Sacrament is not thereby invalidated.

XXVI. Of the unworthiness of the Ministers, which hinders not the effect of the Sacraments.

ALTHOUGH in the visible Church the evil be ever mingled with the good, and sometime the evil have chief authority in the ministration of the word and sacraments; yet forasmuch as they do not the same in their own name, but in Christ's, and do minister by His commission and authority, we may use their ministry both in hearing the word of God and in the receiving of the sacraments. Neither is the effect of Christ's ordinance taken away by their wickedness, nor the grace of God's gifts diminished from such as by faith and rightly do receive the sacraments ministered unto them, which be effectual because of Christ's institution and promise, although they be ministered by evil men.

Nevertheless it appertaineth to the discipline of the Church that inquiry be made of evil ministers, and that they be accused by those that have knowledge of their offences; and finally, being found guilty by just judgement, be deposed.

If the Church fails to recognise the vocation of those whom God is calling, that is a loss for all of us. Proceeding on the basis that the right people have been selected, appropriate training and spiritual preparation are provided. The Church recognises God's call in the service of ordination – the laying on of hands with prayer, a practice which goes back to biblical times. God honours our ordination and supplies those who are ordained with the spiritual gifts which are required for us to function as ministers. Ordination quickly came to be understood as indelible. Once a priest, always a priest. It's a life long commitment on both sides – what God has done for us, our promises to Him. It is like Baptism. Once you are baptised you can never become unbaptised. God has given you His grace and made you a member of His Church. If you are so bad that you are excommunicated or if you turn your back on God, that is tragic, but you are not unbaptised. Our hope and prayer is that you will return to the fold. Similarly, marriage is a lifelong commitment made by the couple and blessed by God Who makes them one. *Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder.* Divorce is a tragedy. A baptised person is a Christian. A married person is a husband or wife. An ordained person is a minister of religion – a bishop, priest or deacon. Being a Christian, a spouse or a priest is not so much what we do as what we are. We act as Christians, husbands or wives, or clergy because that is what we are indelibly. The Church does not make us Christians, spouses or ministers. That is what God does. In the rites of Baptism, Matrimony & Ordination, the Church is a conduit for God's grace, not the source. The prescribed rites are instrumental in effecting His Will, but it is God Who makes the decisions and supplies the blessings, not we ourselves. All this being so, another retired priest raised this question. Given that it is God Who called us to be ordained & that it is He Who gives us the grace of holy orders, what right has the Church to take away our licence to officiate on the the grounds of an irrelevant consideration such as age?

O GOD, the strength of all them that put their trust in thee, mercifully accept our prayers; and because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without thee, grant us the help of thy grace, that in keeping of thy commandments we may please thee, both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

June 23rd

John 1 vv 35-51

Hereafter ye shall see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.

John the Baptist came to bear witness of Jesus. He preached to the crowds. He bore witness to the religious authorities. He spoke to individuals, some of whom had become his disciples. A disciple is one who learns. John proclaims Jesus as the One Who should come, the Judge, the One Who would baptize with the Holy Spirit, the Lamb of God, the Son of God. John's disciples follow Jesus & find out for themselves Who He is and then bear witness to their friends and relations. Nathanael is initially sceptical. Jesus knows all about Nathanael as He knows all about every one of us. When Nathanael realises this, he gets excited and honours Jesus as the Son of God and the King of Israel. Jesus refers to Himself, then, as the Son of Man in the role of Jacob's ladder. It is Jesus Who truly joins heaven and earth. God's blessings and promises come to us through Jesus. Our prayers and worship ascend to God through Him.

June 24th (The Nativity of St John the Baptist)

Malachi 3 vv 1-6

It was said that the late Queen Elizabeth II probably thought that everywhere smelt of new paint. When a visit from her was expected, everything would be cleaned and tidied and, if necessary, painted. The way is prepared for the coming of God. We need to be informed that He is coming. We need to be ready for Him. Readiness to receive God requires repentance from sin. Judgment is real. There is justice. The world was prepared for the coming of Jesus by all the ways in which God makes Himself known to us, by the Law & the Prophets & ultimately by the preaching of John. *Repent & be baptized.* Similarly, we must be ready to meet Him when He comes again in glory to judge the living & the dead. *Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.* Likewise we must be ready to meet Him everyday in our fellow human beings, in nature, in prayer & in the Bible and when we receive Holy Communion.

ALMIGHTY God, by whose providence thy servant John Baptist was wonderfully born, and sent to prepare the way of thy Son our Saviour, by preaching of repentance; Make us so to follow his doctrine and holy life, that we may truly repent according to his preaching; and after his example constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the truth's sake; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

June 25th

Exodus 3 vv 1-15

The Israelites were suffering terribly as slaves in Egypt. They cried out to God for deliverance and He heard their cries. God commissioned Moses to set His people free. But Who is God? What is His Name? Who shall Moses say sent him. What are God's credentials. God answers Moses *I am that I am*. How are we to understand these words?

Moses is presumptuous to ask the Name of God? To name something or someone is to acquire some control or power over that object or person, which clearly is impossible with God.

God is God? All the other entities which men call gods are idols.

God is infinitely beyond our understanding? We have nothing with which to compare God. He simply is. Any attempt to describe God or to say that He is like anything else would be idolatry. We'd be devising a false god & dishonouring the one true God.

God is not a being. God is being. God alone exists in Himself. Every being, everything else which exists depends on God for its existence.
We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life.

June 26th

John 18 vv 4-8

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus has been praying that the cup might pass from Him and sweat blood. Nevertheless, knowing the horror of what awaits Him, He has consecrated Himself to obey His Father's Will. One of His friends is in the process of betraying Him. The others have let Him down. An angel has ministered to Him. Now the guards arrive to take Him into custody. Twice He affirms, *I am he*, eliciting two very different responses. The second is what one would expect. The suspect confirms His identity and they arrest Him. But the first time He says, *I am he*, they fall to the ground. They are awestruck, possibly briefly terrified. Jesus is the One Who is. He is what He is. By Him & for Him all things were made. He is the image of the invisible God. In Him all things consist. He is also a voluntarily helpless prisoner about to be condemned to death despite His innocence of every offence.

June 27th

Luke 3 vv 23-38

Jesus, it was supposed, the son of Joseph. We know that His mother was a virgin and that Jesus is the Son of God. Nevertheless, Jesus shares Joseph's patrimony. He is of the house and lineage of David. Luke traces the ancestral tree right back to Adam, whom he describes as *the son of God*. Adam is the archetypal human being. He was created to represent all humanity. We are all meant to be the children of God. Like the prodigal son in the parable, we have taken a journey away from our Father into a far country where we have wasted our inheritance – all that God has given us. Jesus is the second Adam, Son of God & Son of Man. In Him we are restored to our proper place as members of God's household.

June 28th

Psalm 89 vv 1-50

He shall call me, Thou art my Father : my God, and my strong salvation. And I will make him my first-born : higher than the kings of the earth.

A long passage today, but my main focus in this study is on these two verses. David and his descendants as Kings of Israel were regarded at least metaphorically as the sons of God. The idea was that they reigned on God's behalf. God would care for them as a father cares for his children. They themselves were required to be obedient to God's Law and to enforce God's Law in Israel. They were to be shepherds of the people over whom they reigned – to take care of them, to promote peace and justice, to attend to their well-being. A good king, a god-fearing king would reign over a prosperous country at peace with itself (cf Psalm 72 passim). Psalm 72 speaks of kings bringing him presents, including the gold of Arabia. Looking forward to the coming Kingdom of God and His Messiah, Isaiah prophesies, Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Lift up thine eyes round about, and see: all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side. Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee. The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense; and they shall shew forth the praises of the Lord. We're anticipating the Birth of Jesus here.

June 29th (St Peter)

Matthew 16 vv 13-19

The Son of Man, it is revealed by God to Peter, is also the Son of the living God, the Messiah or Christ Who fulfils all the prophecies of the Old Testament. All God's promises are fulfilled in Jesus. On Peter's confession of the Truth, God founds His Church and commissions her to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God to the whole creation. He promises that nothing can destroy that Church. He bestows on His Church the power, the authority, to effect His purposes.

O ALMIGHTY God, who by thy Son Jesus Christ didst give to thy Apostle Saint Peter many excellent gifts, and commandest him earnestly to feed thy flock; Make, we beseech thee, all Bishops and Pastors diligently to preach thy holy Word, and the people obediently to follow the same, that they may receive the crown of everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

June 30th

Acts 8 vv 25-40

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

The Ethiopian Eunuch was an important man in his home country. Maybe he was of the Jewish faith himself. Maybe he simply wanted to know more. Either way, he had come to Jerusalem to worship in the Temple. On the journey home, he was reading the Bible. (Presumably, someone else was driving!) It is good to read the Bible. It is good to give people the opportunity to read the Bible – like putting bibles in hotel rooms or prison cells, like making sure the Bible is available in languages people can understand and at a price they can afford or even free, like getting round repressive laws which restrict access to the Bible. It is good to read the Bible, the Old Testament as well as the New, the former preparing the way for the latter, the latter fulfilling the former. But the eunuch needed an interpreter which could be where you or I might come in. Are we *always ready to give an answer to every man that asketh [us] for the hope that is in [us] in meekness and fear?*

O LORD, who never failest to help and govern them who thou dost bring up in thy steadfast fear and love; Keep us, we beseech thee, under the protection of thy good providence, and make us to have a perpetual fear and love of thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*