

St Luke's  
Gospel  
from Chapter 17  
Onwards.

Bible Notes April-  
June 2022

April 1<sup>st</sup>

Luke 17 vv 1&2

When I was growing up, I was taught that when Jesus says things like this He is warning adults that it is a terrible thing to undermine the faith of a child. Jesus loved children. He blessed them. He pointed out that *Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein* (Mark 10<sup>15</sup>). What did He mean? What is about children that makes them fit for the Kingdom of God when adults may not be? Their trust and faith? Their readiness to love? Their innocence? Their vulnerability? Their openness to learn new things? Whatever it is about children, it is evidently dreadful to act in such a way towards them as to damage their confidence in God and His care for them and the world. We might do this by belittling their understanding, making fun of them or by letting them down when they have trusted us, as well as by careless neglect or by deliberate cruelty. In recent years, however, I have wondered whether Jesus also meant the terrible abuse of children which has gone on even in the Church. Perhaps it has only recently become common knowledge that these things go on, but presumably they always have, human nature being what is, corrupted by our original rebellion against God.

April 2<sup>nd</sup>

Luke 17 vv 3&4

Forgiveness is at the very core of Christianity. Even on the Cross, Jesus prayed for the forgiveness of His tormenters. So did Stephen, the first martyr, when he was stoned. *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us*, Jesus taught us to pray and warned us that God won't forgive us if we don't forgive one another. It's unequivocal. We can't hide behind prevarications such as *I forgive you, but I'll never forget what you've done*. Jesus takes wrong-doing seriously. He doesn't say that we should treat it as though it didn't matter when someone does us wrong. We are to rebuke him. How else is he to know that he has done wrong? When we've been harmed, we have the right to feel hurt and it is dishonest to pretend that we don't. We might only be honest with ourselves and with God if that is the only way to avoid making a quarrel worse, but we need to be honest with Him & with ourselves. Taking wrong seriously, the sinner repents and we forgive how ever often he repeats the offence. If there is no remorse, we might find it hard to forgive. Nevertheless we shouldn't seek revenge.

April 3<sup>rd</sup> (Lent 5 Passion Sunday)

Luke 17 vv 5&6

*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.*

My last parish was near the sea. They wanted to build a room for meetings in the Vicarage garden. Unfortunately, there was a sycamore tree in the way and, when they heard about the Church's plans, the council put a preservation order on it. I drew the vicar's attention to this text. I was only joking. We don't really expect God to rearrange the world in accordance with our wishes. It's not that, if only we had enough faith, we could make God do our will. Faith is trusting in God. Faith is seeking God's Will. If we trust God and obey His Will, there is nothing we cannot accomplish.

April 4<sup>th</sup>

Luke 17 vv 7-10

At that time, I was also chaplain to the local branch of the Royal Airforce Association. At their annual dinner, various people who had worked very hard throughout the year for the charity were publicly thanked and honoured in various ways. It is only natural that we want to express our appreciation for what people do. It feels good to be appreciated. If we properly honour the people who fulfil various roles in our organisation, we encourage them to continue, and maybe we inspire other people too to step forward and help out. All this seems right and good, but I wasn't quite comfortable with it, because I am aware of the teaching of Jesus. Should we expect to be thanked for doing our duty? Ought God to be grateful because we give back to Him a proportion of the time, talents and money which He has given us? It's nice when our efforts are appreciated by our family, our friends, the Church or the wider community, but surely we don't do them because we expect to be thanked and, if we're good people, we don't stop doing what we do for others just because those others are ungrateful!

On a related matter, I'm made a bit uncomfortable by the growing practice of applauding people in church. We are a congregation, not an audience. The people who play, sing, recite, read, etc. are doing these things to glorify God, not to earn our approval. Being christened or married is to receive God's grace, not to achieve something by our own merit or effort. Give God the glory.

April 5<sup>th</sup>

Luke 17 vv 11-19

We often tell this story to children, making the perfectly correct point that we should say thank you and be thankful when people do something for us. It is only polite. Insofar as courtesy means consideration for other people, it is not far from the Golden Rule – *therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them* (Matthew 7<sup>12</sup>). Jesus says that *this is the law and the prophets*. In other words, the whole of the Word of God is epitomised by love.

But who is said to benefit from the Samaritan leper offering thanks in this story? God doesn't benefit by our offering Him thanks and praise. He is perfect and you can't add to perfection. Jesus doesn't benefit by the leper thanking Him, though He appears to be disappointed in the nine Jewish lepers who don't come back to say thank you. The Samaritan is more spiritually aware perhaps because he knows his need for God. Maybe the Jewish lepers were more complacent that they were by their birthright the people of God and felt that all they needed to do was to obey the Law which told them to show themselves to the priests in order to be certified clean and to make the appropriate sacrifice.

No, the person in the story who we are told benefits by returning to give thanks is the Samaritan. *Thy faith hath made thee whole*. The other nine were only cured of their leprosy. The one who gave thanks was made whole.

April 6<sup>th</sup>

Luke 17 vv 20&21

There are two ways of thinking about the Kingdom of God – both of them correct. One day, this universe, this created order, will cease to exist. There will be no more time or space, matter or energy, at least not as we understand them. God will judge the world. Every human being will be called to account. All wrongs will be put right. Justice and mercy will be unfettered.

Revelation 21: <sup>3</sup> *And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be*

*their God. <sup>4</sup> And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*

*<sup>8</sup> But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*

The other sense in which we use the phrase *Kingdom of God* is when we speak of God's Will being done in earth as it is in heaven, when justice and mercy (justice + mercy = love) prevail in this present age. Jesus brings in the Kingdom of God in both senses – the celestial Kingdom which is to come and the Kingdom which now is and is growing like a crop planted in a field. God gives the increase. We do not and cannot know the date on which He will come in glory to establish the Kingdom which has no end. We are already citizens of God's Kingdom here on earth if we are Christian people. Our Lord's words in v22 are traditionally translated *the kingdom of God is within you*. Modern translations have *the kingdom of God is among you*. When you come to think about it, both are true.

April 7<sup>th</sup>

Peace on the earth, good will to  
men  
From heaven's all gracious King  
The world in solemn stillness  
lay  
To hear the angels sing

Still through the cloven skies  
they come  
With peaceful wings unfurled  
And still their heavenly music  
floats  
O'er all the weary world

Luke 17 v22

Above its sad and lowly plains  
They bend on hovering wing  
And ever o'er its Babel sounds  
The blessed angels sing

All ye beneath life's crushing  
load  
Whose forms are bending low  
Who toil along the climbing way  
With painful steps and slow  
Look now for glad and golden  
hours come swiftly on the wing  
O rest beside the weary road  
And hear the angels sing  
And hear the angels sing

We long for the coming of God's Kingdom when we think about all the troubles & sorrows on earth – in the world, in the Church, maybe in our own lives. But we have to be patient.

April 8<sup>th</sup>

Luke 17 vv 23-37

For lo!, the days are hastening  
on,  
By prophet bards foretold,  
When with the ever-circling  
years  
Comes round the age of gold

When peace shall over all the  
earth  
Its ancient splendours fling,  
And the whole world give back  
the song  
Which now the angels sing.

We do not and we cannot know the date of the end of the world. Don't believe people who tell you that they do. Our part is to be ready, to live every day as if it might be the last.

April 9<sup>th</sup>

Luke 18 vv 1-8

Pester power is a powerful marketing technique. Put the sweets near the check out. Advertise the latest toys as must have Christmas presents. In other words, get the children who haven't yet developed a realisation of what things cost or where money comes from, to put pressure on parents to purchase whatever it is you are trying to sell them. Most parents eventually give in even though they can't really afford the items and they have their doubts about whether they are value for money and good for their children. Is this what Jesus is advocating here, that if we keep pestering God, He'll eventually give in and give us what we want? No. In the end, we wouldn't thank Him for giving us what isn't good for us. The way I read this is that Jesus is telling us to keep on praying. There are times when we don't feel the Presence of God, times when He doesn't seem to be listening. Our prayers don't seem to be helping. Whatever it is that troubles us just doesn't go away even though we keep on praying. I believe that Jesus here is telling us to trust God. Keep that channel of communication open. Don't block your prayerway. God is faithful. God is in charge. It will work out right. Only believe. God is neither an unjust judge nor a weak parent. He is God. If even unjust judges and pestered parents eventually give us what we want, how much more will God give us what we need?

April 10<sup>th</sup> (Palm Sunday)

Luke 18 v8

*When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on earth?*

I wonder. He didn't find much faith in Jerusalem when He entered the Holy City on a donkey. The crowds cheered. The apostles pledged undying loyalty. But He died virtually alone on the Cross. His enemies had the upper hand. The crowds turned against Him. His friends failed to understand Him and, in fear, deserted Him when He most needed them. What if He were to return today? Would the Son of man find faith on earth?

**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 11<sup>th</sup> (Monday in Holy Week)

Luke 18 vv 9-14

The Pharisee could never justify himself before God. Nobody could. God is holy and we are human. God's love is infinite. Ours is circumscribed. In order to be justified before God, we should have to be perfect love. If we were perfect love, we would keep all God's commandments, because they are all *briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. So none of us can justify himself before God. Only Jesus has fulfilled the Law. The publican recognised that he could not justify himself and asked for God's mercy and God justified him. Until any of us can recognise that we cannot justify ourselves before God, and that we utterly depend on His mercy, we remain unjustified. The moment, however, that we ask for God's mercy. We are forgiven. We are justified. And that's a great freedom. We don't have to worry about being good enough. We don't have to worry because we know that we are not good enough. It is God Who justifies us, not we ourselves. All we have to is to trust Him.

**ALMIGHTY** and most merciful Father; We have erred, and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. 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; And there is no health in us. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us,

miserable offenders. Spare thou them, O God, who confess their faults. Restore thou them that are penitent; According to thy promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesu our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake; That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life, To the glory of thy holy Name. Amen.

April 12<sup>th</sup> (Tuesday in Holy Week)

Luke 18 vv 15-17

What puts people off coming to God, coming to Church even? We have an attractive offer. If you believe in God, you can pray to the Almighty Creator of the Universe and He will hear you. In the Bible and the teaching of the Church, you have the words of eternal life. You have a moral code, a guide to life, far better than anything which the world offers. You belong to a fellowship here on earth bound together with cords of love that cannot be broken. You know that you have no need to fear. So why don't people offer their lives to God? Why aren't our churches packed? One answer is original sin. Human beings are inherent rebels against God. They don't believe His promises. They don't want to accept His laws. They want to live their own lives the way they see it. Another reason, however, why people don't come to the Lord or find Him in our churches is that, like the apostles turning away the children, we put them off. We don't behave like Jesus Who said: **COME** unto me all that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you. St. Matth. xi. 28.

April 13<sup>th</sup> (Wednesday in Holy Week)

Luke 18 vv 18-30

In this of all weeks we are thinking of Jesus giving His all for us. We are possibly thinking too that we cannot do less than to offer our all to Him. Like the rich, young ruler in the story, we might find that impossibly difficult. (But *The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.*) Like Peter, we might sometimes question whether we are making the right choice if we give up the things of this world for the things of God. But we do know really, don't we, what is the only sensible choice?

When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the death of Christ my God!

All the vain things that charm me  
most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,



Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

His dying crimson, like a robe,  
Spreads o'er His body on the tree;  
Then I am dead to all the globe,  
And all the globe is dead to me.

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were an offering far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

### April 14<sup>th</sup> (Maundy Thursday)

Luke 18 vv 31-34

*They understood none of these things.* But this is what He came for – to offer Himself as *a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.* Jesus is the High Priest. Jesus is the Sacrifice. On this day, He *did institute, and in his holy Gospel command us to continue, a perpetual memory of that his precious death, until his coming again;* This we do and pray, *Hear us, O merciful Father, we most humbly beseech thee; and grant that we receiving these thy creatures of bread and wine, according to thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of his death and passion, may be partakers of his most blessed Body and Blood.* It is impossible to overstate the importance of Holy Communion and I do exhort everybody who is a Christian to participate in this Sacrament at least every Sunday. If any of reader of these notes wants to know more, perhaps to be confirmed, please get in touch.

### April 15<sup>th</sup> (Good Friday)

Luke 18 vv 35-43

The blind man knew his need of God. He called out to Jesus, *Thou son of David, have mercy on me.* The people all around, though presumably they each had a working set of eyes, were less perceptive. They told him not to bother Jesus. But Jesus is always ready to hear the prayers of those who come to Him. So He commanded the blind man to be brought to Him and He gave him his sight. To perceive, to recognise, to understand the meaning of the Cross.

**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.*

**ALMIGHTY** and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified; Receive our supplications and prayers, which we offer before thee for all estates of men in thy holy Church, that every member of the same, in his vocation and ministry

may truly and godly serve thee; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

There is a third Good Friday collect for the restoration of heretics to the fold and for the conversion of non-Christians into the way of Christ. Problematic? The traditional language probably is, but, if we don't share the sentiment, what do we believe about Jesus?

### April 16<sup>th</sup> (Holy Saturday)

Luke 19 vv 1-10

Most people call this day Easter Saturday. It used to be a popular date for weddings because there was also Bank Holiday Monday to extend the holiday. Easter egg hunts and other family entertainments are also often held on this day. For people who aren't Christians and for Christians who aren't too bothered about the Church's year, Easter Saturday is just a holiday. For those of us who do care, however, about the rhythm of the liturgy and find it a meaningful way to experience something of what the Gospel story means, today is a solemn day. We discourage weddings on Holy Saturday. We regard parties as inappropriate and Easter egg hunts as premature. It is the day in which the mangled corpse of our best friend lay dead in the tomb. It is a solemn day for contemplation.

If we're strict about Holy Saturday, do we come over as killjoys spoiling other people's fun and possibly putting them off the Church altogether? Or, by insisting on the solemnity of the day, are we preserving something which the world is in danger of losing? With hot cross buns on sale as soon as Christmas is over and the Easter bunny being given ever greater prominence alongside or even displacing Jesus, is there a risk that the deep meaning of what happened on Good Friday, Holy Saturday and the first Easter is swallowed up in shallow merrymaking promoted by those who see Easter more as a commercial opportunity than a Christian celebration? To be honest, I'm not sure.

Zacchaeus sought out Jesus. Jesus accepted Zacchaeus' hospitality. He thereby accepted Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus responded by wholeheartedly and self-sacrificially following Jesus. There was no watering down of what God requires of us in order to make it easy for the uncommitted to appear to be disciples.

**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 17<sup>th</sup> (Easter Day)

Luke 19 vv 11-27

Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia!  
our triumphant holy day, Alleluia!  
who did once upon the cross, Alleluia!  
suffer to redeem our loss. Alleluia!

I once heard of a school teacher who liked this hymn so much that they sang it every day in assembly from Easter to Whitsun. It is an ineffable joy to celebrate Christ's Resurrection. *Ineffable* means that our joy is so great that it is beyond words to express.

Jesus is our King. He receives His crown from God the Father. It is His by right, but He voluntarily surrenders His heavenly glory in order to die a humiliating death on the Cross for our salvation. The superscription reads in three languages *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*. Taken down from the Cross, His dead body is laid in the tomb. He Himself descends into Hell. There is nowhere beyond the love of Christ. Having on the Cross won the victory over sin, the world and the devil, He ascends into Heaven. *The head that once was crowned with thorns is crowned with glory now.* He receives gifts – the gifts of the Holy Spirit – which He bestows on His followers as He commissions them to complete His work by proclaiming the Good News to the whole of creation. Each of us has the gifts needed to perform the part He has assigned to every one of us in His plan for the world. Some reject His kingship. For them, there are consequences. The gifts He gives to His followers are to be used. Whatever talents we have, whatever resources, whatever opportunities, it is down to us to make the best use of them and a terrible mistake not even to try.

**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 18<sup>th</sup>

Luke 19 vv 28-38

As it's worked out, our daily readings are about a week behind the Church's year. Never mind. It is all one, as this hymn demonstrates.

Ride on! ride on in majesty!  
Hark! all the tribes hosanna  
cry;  
O Saviour meek, pursue thy  
road  
with palms and scattered  
garments strowed.

Ride on! ride on in majesty!  
In lowly pomp ride on to die;  
O Christ, thy triumphs now  
begin  
o'er captive death and  
conquered sin.

Ride on! ride on in majesty!  
The angel-squadrons of the sky  
look down with sad and

wondering eyes  
to see the approaching  
sacrifice.

Ride on! ride on in majesty!  
Thy last and fiercest strife is  
nigh;  
the Father on his sapphire  
throne  
expects his own anointed Son.

Ride on! ride on in majesty!  
In lowly pomp ride on to die;  
bow thy meek head to mortal  
pain,  
then take, O God, thy power,  
and reign

April 19<sup>th</sup>

Luke 19 vv 39 & 40

In Matthew's account of this, it is the children who cry Hosanna in the Temple and provoke the chief priests' rebuke. The whole multitude – apostles, disciples and no doubt hangers on, adults and children proclaimed the Messiah in the words of the Passover Psalm – Psalm 118, but when Jesus makes that remark about the stones crying out the Good News if the children and disciples did not, He quotes Psalm 8. This Psalm we also think of when Herod murders the boy babies in Jerusalem. It is about the glory of God and His goodness to humanity. He has literally given us the earth. *Son of man* means humanity. *Son of man* also means Jesus, the Son of God Who represents humanity at the Throne of grace.

**O LORD** our Governor, how excellent is thy Name in all the world :  
thou that hast set thy glory above the heavens! 2. Out of the mouth of  
very babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength, because of

thine enemies : that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger. 3. For I will consider thy heavens, even the works of thy fingers : the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained. 4. What is man, that thou art mindful of him : and the son of man, that thou visitest him? 5. Thou madest him lower than the angels : to crown him with glory and worship. 6. Thou makest him to have dominion of the works of thy hands : and thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet; 7. All sheep and oxen : yea, and the beasts of the field; 8. The fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea : and whatsoever walketh through the paths of the seas. 9. O Lord our Governor : how excellent is thy Name in all the world!

April 20<sup>th</sup>

Luke 19 vv 41&42

I think Jesus would still weep, not only over Jerusalem, but over all this sinful world. When we think of the pain and the suffering which there is in the world and how much of it is caused by our human failure to obey God's perfect law of love! The Word is unheard. The Word is misunderstood. The Word is rejected. Even when God sends Jesus to get humanity back on track, we don't listen, we fail to see the signs of the times, we fail to repent of the sins which divide us from God and from one another. *John 1<sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. <sup>11</sup> He came unto his own, and his own received him not. <sup>12</sup> But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.* We who are in that latter category, those who have received Jesus and thereby become children of God, now share His mission to make the Word known to the world.

April 21<sup>st</sup>

Luke 19 vv 43 & 44

Less than forty years later, the Jews would rebel against the Romans and, after a bloody war, the Romans would conquer and destroy the city of Jerusalem and its temple amidst terrible suffering. We are told that the Christians remembered our Lord's prophecy and got out of the city in time, but those who did not heed His Word perished.

The prophecies about the destruction of Jerusalem are mingled in the Gospel with prophecies about the end of time and the Last Judgment. They have an application in every generation. Always be ready. Watch. Pray. Have faith in God. Trust Him. Seek to live your life so

as to be worthy of Him. Share the Good News of coming judgment. Repent of the sins which deserve to be punished. Believe the promises.

April 22<sup>nd</sup>

Luke 19 vv 45-48

People sometimes quote this story with reference to cathedral shops or church buildings being used for purposes such as concerts, stalls or youth clubs. Are they justified in their complaint? On the one hand, human beings find it helpful to have sacred space, special places to go for prayer and meditation where we feel that God is near. People love visiting old churches and soaking up the atmosphere which is perhaps attributable to centuries of prayer or maybe (also?) to the design of the building, the architecture and the artwork of which are calculated to turn our hearts to thoughts of heaven. It may be harder to pray if there are other activities going on in the building – crowds of noisy tourists, the chink of coins. Or we may not be able to get in to pray if the church is being used for a concert or a lecture. The clear lines of the architecture and the beauty of the artwork may be obscured by partitions separating off areas for secular purposes. Laying out the floor as a basketball court with nets at either end may seem incongruous in a building with gothic arches and stained glass windows depicting scenes from the Bible.

On the other hand, we know that God does not dwell in temples made by human hands. God is everywhere and we can worship Him anywhere. Using church buildings for purposes other than public worship and private prayer may offer a valuable service to the community. People who come in as tourists or to use the shop or cafe or to play basketball as members of the youth club may pick up some of the sense of the Gospel from the building and all it stands for. It might be an opportunity for them to meet Christian people and see us committed to serving the wider community. If our prayers are disrupted by a crowd of noisy tourists, we might pray quietly for them. So, as so often, there are two sides to this.

Speaking for myself, I'd be uncomfortable about using the church building for something like "Olde Tyme Musical" or a 15+ rated film, but I can't really give a logical reason why something I might enjoy in a

hall or cinema or at home I'd be uncomfortable with in church. God is everywhere & if He disapproves of these things, we ought not to do them anywhere. But if they are fine with God, why not do them in church?

April 23<sup>rd</sup>

Luke 20 vv 1&2

*By what authority* is a question I often ask. Some people say that I am a bit of a rebel. *By what authority* does the council tell me whether I can cut down my own trees or where I may exercise my dog? *By what authority* does the Church tell you that you can't have a marble headstone? *By what authority* do the police record as a hate crime what, only in the last ten or so years, has come to be regarded as offensive language? But *by what authority* do we lock up burglars and murderers? *By what authority* do we take away the licences of drunk drivers? *By what authority* do we fine people who don't wear seat belts? Blackstone the jurist draws an important distinction between *mala prohibita* and *mala in re* – things which are wrong because they are against the law and things which are wrong in themselves. An example of the first might be carrying out repairs on your listed home without the say-so of the council. An example of the latter is not paying your taxes. Other examples are harder to decide. Is not wearing a motor cycle helmet wrong in itself or wrong because the law says you must wear a helmet when riding a motor cycle? In the end authority comes from God. He has revealed to us the sort of things which are wrong in themselves – *mala in re* – in the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount. Some of these things are against our man made laws; some are not. God also gives some human beings the authority to make and enforce laws – including to make laws regarding things which are not wrong in themselves but only prohibited as a matter of regulation *mala prohibita*. Bearing in mind that all authority comes from God, those who make and administer the law are answerable to Him & should remember that. We are all obliged, as a matter of our duty to God, to obey the Law unless we are certain that the Law is ungodly – such as to reveal the hiding places of Jewish children to the Gestapo.

April 24<sup>th</sup> (Easter 1 {I'm sticking with the traditional calendar in these notes}) Luke 20 vv 3-7

**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 always serve thee in pureness of living and truth; through the merits of the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

I've long thought that the Jerusalem authorities gave Jesus a politician's answer – no answer at all. Is that putting away *malice & wickedness*?

April 25<sup>th</sup> (S Mark)

Luke 20 v8

**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.*

Jesus responds to the politicians' evasion by avoiding being drawn into a pointless discussion with people who are not sincerely seeking the Truth. Jesus Himself is the Truth. If we seek the Truth, by the grace of God, in the Gospel, we shall find it.

April 26<sup>th</sup>

Luke 20 vv 9-16

The Vineyard of the LORD of Hosts is Israel. The Old Testament details how God loved Israel – not for any merit of their own, but simply of His own choosing – nurtured them, cared for them, gave them the Law and the Prophets and settled them in a land flowing with milk and honey. The fruit He ought to have been able to expect was that they should love Him, remain faithful to Him and to keep His commandments. Time after time, however, they rebelled against God, provoking His wrath and bringing on themselves well-deserved punishment. God sent them His prophets to warn them of the consequences of their disobedience and they responded by disregarding and ill-treating God's spokesmen. At last, God sent His own Son, God's Word made flesh, and Him they crucified. So the Vineyard of the LORD of Hosts will be given to others – to us Gentiles.

But, not so fast, if we're feeling superior to the Jews. The history of Israel is one special example of the history of humanity. God has revealed His love to people of every race, kindred, culture and language down through the ages. He has blessed us with all the good gifts which we have received from Him. He has given us the gifts of conscience and reason. There is no excuse for humanity's rebellion against God



and defiance of His Law. We listen to false teachers and false prophets and disregard the Word of God. If we are grafted into the people of God because Israel rebelled, we can just as easily be cut out again if we rebel against Him. If we abide in the Vine – Christ – we shall bring forth the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Without Him we can do nothing. If we reject His grace, we are nothing.

April 27<sup>th</sup>

Luke 20 vv 17&18

This line about the stone which the builders rejected comes from the Passover Psalm 118, which no doubt people were singing all this week. It also contains the verse *Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord*. It is the Palm Sunday psalm. Originally, it was probably sung for the earthly Kings of Israel, but we can understand it now as referring to Jesus – the Son of David Who fulfils all the Law & the Prophets. Jesus is the stone which the builders reject. The leaders of Israel fail to recognise that He is the One upon Whom the whole building (the People of God, the Temple of the Holy Spirit) depends. He is, however, the cornerstone. Those Who trust in Him are safe and secure in the Rock of All Ages, but those who resist His love are crushed under it.

**Psalm 118. O GIVE** thanks unto the Lord, for he is gracious : because his mercy endureth for ever. Let Israel now confess that he is gracious : and that his mercy endureth for ever. Let the house of Aaron now confess : that his mercy endureth for ever. Yea, let them now that fear the Lord confess : that his mercy endureth for ever. I called upon the Lord in trouble : and the Lord heard me at large. The Lord is on my side : I will not fear what man doeth unto me. The Lord taketh my part with them that help me : therefore shall I see my desire upon mine enemies. It is better to trust in the Lord : than to put any confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord : than to put any confidence in princes. All nations compassed me round about : but in the Name of the Lord will I destroy them. They kept me in on every side, they kept me in, I say, on every side : but in the Name of the Lord will I destroy them. They came about me like bees, and are extinct even as the fire among the thorns : for in the Name of the Lord I will destroy them. Thou hast thrust sore at me, that I might fall : but the Lord was my help. The Lord is my strength, and my song : and is become my salvation. The voice of joy and health is in the dwellings of the righteous : the right hand of the Lord bringeth mighty things to pass. The right hand of the Lord hath the pre-eminence : the right hand of the Lord bringeth mighty things to pass. I shall not die, but

live : and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord hath chastened and corrected me : but he hath not given me over unto death. Open me the gates of righteousness : that I may go into them, and give thanks unto the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord : the righteous shall enter into it. I will thank thee, for thou hast heard me : and art become my salvation. The same stone which the builders refused : is become the head-stone in the corner. This is the Lord's doing : and it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made : we will rejoice and be glad in it. Help me now, O Lord : O Lord, send us now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the Name of the Lord : we have wished you good luck , ye that are of the house of the Lord. God is the Lord who hath shewed us light : bind the sacrifice with cords, yea, even unto the horns of the altar. Thou art my God, and I will thank thee : thou art my God, and I will praise thee. O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is gracious : and his mercy endureth for ever.

April 28<sup>th</sup>

Luke 20 vv 19-26

*Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's.*

These words of Jesus have been puzzled over for centuries. Some take them to mean that Christians ought not to get involved in politics or that the Church as a body shouldn't take a stance on political issues. Others point out that all things belong to God. Caesar only thinks he is in charge. Christians have a duty to work for the day when the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of God & of His Christ – and to get involved in politics, if that is what it takes. In context – the chief priests and scribes are trying to catch Jesus out – I would say that the prime meaning of His words here is that we should not use a pretended religious scruples as an excuse to avoid our civic duty to the world.

April 29<sup>th</sup>

Luke 20 vv 27-38

God is not a God of the dead. So, given that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, even though they had died hundreds of years before this discussion between Jesus and the Sadducees, those three patriarchs still live. Death is not the end. There is resurrection from the dead. In Christ we die to sin and rise again to eternal life. There is a Judgment. Christ takes home those who are willing to receive His love. For those who reject Him, what is to come is bleak.

But what will it be like? It doesn't say that we become angels, but it does say that we shall be like angels. Life in heaven will be very different from what we have experienced on earth, infinitely wonderful and characterised by perfect love.

April 30<sup>th</sup>

Luke 20 vv 39-44

Note that Jesus quotes the Old Testament. It is the Word of God. It testifies of Him. In the Scriptures – Old and New Testament – we find the words of eternal life. The King James (and some other translations) makes this a bit clearer. *The LORD said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand. The LORD is God. My Lord is the King.* Originally in the OT, the thought would be of a composer or singer singing about God establishing the King of Israel (David or one of his descendants) at God's right hand. But think of David as the composer and singer of the psalms and Jesus as the true King of Israel. This is the NT way to think about the OT psalm. David is now referring to the King as *my Lord*. You don't call your sons "lord". American boys might call their fathers "sir", but you don't call your son "lord". It follows that Jesus, the Messiah, the true King, Who fulfils all the prophecies, is not merely David's Son. He is David's Lord. In fact the one David addresses as "My Lord" is in fact the Son of the LORD. I hope that is clear!

May 1<sup>st</sup>

Luke 20 vv 45-47

**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*

In view of the possible closure of churches and withdrawal of clergy from parishes allegedly because of lack of funds, there has been a great deal of discussion about the cost of bishops. Why do we need so many of them – more than four times as many as we had in 1851 when far more people went to church? Why do they need so many expensive staff? Why are they paid more than rectors? (They can't eat more than rectors!) Why do they live in posh houses and receive so much in the way of expenses? Why should bishops expect to be honoured and respected above the ordinary ranks of humanity? And, if all this display of importance and piety is at the expense of doing more for the poor or even paid for out of the offerings of the poor, what would Jesus say

about it. But I'm paid well over the average for this country. I live in a very nice house. People know that I pray a lot. Sometimes, I wear long robes in the street. I enjoy being greeted when I'm out & about. What is the appropriate level of remuneration for clergy? How much honour is their due?

May 2<sup>nd</sup> (S Philip & S James transferred from yesterday) Luke 21 vv 1-4

**O 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.*

The words of Jesus, the Law and the Prophets are very often at odds with the ways of the world, as are those of S Paul & other biblical writers. It is not just that they lived in a world very different from our own – different climate, different culture, different times. Their words jar not just with our ideas about how the world really works; they conflict also with the world view of their contemporaries. The widow's mite is worth more than thousands of pounds donated by the rich. Don't map out your life for years to come. Don't worry about tomorrow even. Trust God. His Kingdom matters more even than food and clothing. Take up your cross and follow Him. God before family. Lend to people who probably can't or won't repay you. Turn the other cheek. If you're looking for religious leaders, choose fishermen, unbearded youths, old men, people who don't want the job, even persecutors of the Church. Which is more "realistic" for us as individuals, for the Church, or for the world itself indeed, to live in accordance with the teaching of Jesus and of the Bible or to live by the values of the world we live in? One is like building a house on a rock. The other is building on sand.

May 3<sup>rd</sup>

Luke 21 vv 5&6

There was a time during lockdown when the bishops ordered clergy not to enter our churches to pray even on our own but advised that we should go into them every few weeks to make sure that the buildings were safe and in good condition. Cynics like me thought that this instruction revealed the true priorities of the Church of England – to look after money and property, to be good managers of our physical

assets, to adopt sound business principles, and indeed to behave as if we were a hierarchy with the bishops on top, beneath them the other clergy, below them the laity. I confess that I have become increasingly cynical, partly I think from so seldom meeting Christians (whether bishops, archdeacons, other clergy or Christian laity) apart from parishioners for the last two years. I haven't been blessed by sharing their fellowship. However we must beware of the danger of adopting the world's values.

May 4<sup>th</sup>

Luke 21 vv 7&8

This is an example of what I said earlier. Jesus is prophesying about the Jewish Revolt against the Romans which would result in the sacking of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in AD70. The words are also applicable to a further revolt in AD 132 after which the Emperor Hadrian banned the Jews from entering Jerusalem at all except on one day of the year and put up pagan images on the Temple Mount. His Words are applicable to all kinds of wars and commotions down through the centuries. There would be many who would claim to be Messiahs or Christs (including Bar Kokhba who led that second revolt). Others such as Stalin and Hitler have behaved as if they were Messiahs, claiming to be leading their people into a new age of prosperity and peace and demanding and receiving their people's adulation. Finally, there will be the End of Time & the Coming of the Kingdom of God when all these prophecies will be fulfilled.

May 5<sup>th</sup>

Luke 21 v9

*But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified.*

I think those are wonderful words. They are relevant to us as individuals when we feel overwhelmed by life's challenges or we are fearful for the future. They are highly applicable when there is some kind of public panic in the air: COVID, possible wars, inflation, political instability, moral panics around the internet and the implications of technology. *Be not terrified.* God is in control. As it happens, people often turn out to be amazingly resilient when there is something really serious to worry about. Our grandparents came through two world wars, a flu pandemic, the grinding poverty and general strike of the interwar years, and they were people just like us.

May 6<sup>th</sup>

Luke 21 vv 10&11

These things have happened throughout human history, but there is reason to believe that they will get worse just before the final end of the world. Nuclear Armageddon? Pollution? Climate Change? Tyrannies? Natural Disasters? Plagues? Famines? Any or all of them have the power to terrify in the present and could be signs of the end. But, *Be not terrified*. God is in charge. *Your redemption draweth nigh*.

May 7<sup>th</sup>

Luke 21 vv 12&13

There is a story that in viscerally anti-religious communist East Germany, two soldiers waving their automatic rifles burst into a religious service and ordered all those who were not Christians to depart. Some fearfully did so. Knowing now that they were safe, the soldiers joined in the service. The opinion is sometimes expressed that it is a pity that you & I are not persecuted for being Christians. Our freedom lets us get away with a half-hearted love of God. We can't be sure who truly believes and who is just along for the ride. Perhaps the fact that we are not persecuted is an indication that we are not sufficiently challenging to the rotten values of the world around us. I wouldn't go that far, but it's a point.

May 8<sup>th</sup> (Easter 3)

Luke 21 vv 14&15

**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*.

Some clergy take these words of Jesus as an excuse for not preparing their sermons – sometimes with disastrous results. We do preach with the authority God gives us when we are ordained. We are commissioned to preach the Word of God (not our own personal views & opinions). We prepare prayerfully. The Holy Spirit does inspire us – both in the preparation and in the pulpit. We ought not to neglect to prepare properly, thinking it through, checking references, etc.. We don't always get it right, but we do try. When we are listening to a sermon, we should be straining to hear the Word of God. Don't come expecting to find fault. Pay attention. But by all means question.

Check the preacher's words prayerfully against the Bible and your own experience of living as a Christian in this world.

What Jesus is talking about here is not formal sermons but being dragged before a hostile tribunal. *Be not terrified.* God is with you and will show you what to do. The same could apply if you find yourself challenged by a family member or a friend as to why you believe.

May 9<sup>th</sup>

Luke 21 v16

*And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you they shall cause to be put to death.*

There was a great deal of opposition to Jesus in the period when He was on earth in bodily form. There has been a great deal of opposition subsequently at diverse times and in diverse places. The consistent teaching of Jesus is that we must cleave to Him in the face of all opposition, even from our own friends and families. I've known that since I was a boy and I am very thankful that I have never either been at serious risk of persecution or had to choose between my faith & my family & friends. My family brought me up in the faith & have always supported me. But, theoretically, I have always known that a Christian must remain faithful to Christ even if his family are so much against the Christian faith that they would betray him to the authorities, even to death. I've always known that much theoretically, but what about practically? At one time, I knew quite well someone who had been a missionary in a country where converts might well be betrayed by their families and friends and killed. He said that the mission he was part of supported the faith of those who already believed but did not attempt to make converts because those converts' lives would be at risk. I'm not sure what I think about this? What do you think?

May 10<sup>th</sup>

Luke 21 vv 17&18

Why would Christians expect to be hated of all men for Christ's sake?

Why did so many people hate Him that they crucified Him?

Why, what hath my Lord done?

Sweet injuries!

What makes this rage and spite?

Yet they at these themselves displease, and 'gainst him rise.

He made the lame to run,  
he gave the blind their sight.

Jesus presents a challenge to the world's values, to the values of unredeemed humanity. His teaching tells us how we ought to live – lives of perfectly love. His example is a reproach to us for our failure to do so. We can turn to Him, repent of our sins and renounce evil. If we do so, we receive the gift of eternal life. But conversely, we can resist and reject His love, in which case we face eternal perdition. It might be that a majority to choose that latter option, but God will keep safe those who put their trust in Him. The Cross opens the Way to Heaven.

May 11<sup>th</sup>

Luke 21 v19

*In your patience possess ye your souls.*

*By your endurance you will secure your lives.*

Two very different looking translations of the same verse. I like the first one better, but the experts go for the second one. The Greek word can be translated *soul* or *life*. It can also mean *mind*. These three words are very close in meaning. The word is the same for *patience* or *endurance*. It can also mean *steadfastness*. The word translated *secure* in the second translation can mean *possess*, but much more rarely. It can mean *acquire* or *get*.

I think we can have it both ways. If we patiently endure opposition & persecution, we shall have inner peace in this life and a heavenly home in the life which is to come.

May 12<sup>th</sup>

Luke 21 vv 20-24

Jesus is foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem around forty years later. The sack of a city is a terrible thing. Those wise enough to heed the prophecy would get out of the city while they could, but refugee status too would be hard. This destruction is the culmination of millennia of human rebellion against God, an instance of the consequences of human rejection of God's perfect law of love, and a foretaste of subsequent disasters right up to the end of time when the peoples of the world will be judged and dealt with appropriately by God.



May 13<sup>th</sup>

Luke 21 vv 25-28

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

In one form or another we say these words weekly in the creed, even daily, if like me you use the services of the Church in your daily prayers. Today's verses from Luke are what we mean by these words. We are warned to be ready for the Judgment. We are warned to be prepared for what is coming on this sinful world. But we are also to be joyful & hopeful because of what Christ promises to all those who believe in Him. *And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.*

May 14<sup>th</sup>

Luke 21 vv 29-32

I'm writing these notes in February, rejoicing in the first signs of Spring. The days are getting longer. Spring flowers are appearing. Catkins bedeck the hazel. My Forsythia appears to be on the point of bursting into flower. Jesus reminds us that we see these signs of Spring as an earnest of the Summer. Summer is promised. Summer will come. But, it's the bad things happening in the world which Jesus tells us to recognise as signs that the Kingdom of God is at hand. In every generation they are opportunities for us to experience and exhibit faith and hope and love. In the last generation, they are signs that the final consummation is imminent.

May 15<sup>th</sup> (Easter 4)

Luke 21 v33

*Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away.* God will renew everything, not only the earth, the physical universe, but also heaven itself. There will be new heavens and a new earth. What this means is too wonderful for us to understand. But the existing creation – material and spiritual, terrestrial and celestial – is, wonderful as it is, time limited. It will be replaced in God's good time with a more perfect creation – in which we shall share through faith in His Name. There is the time bound, the temporal, and the infinitely more marvellous eternal. Atoms and insects, oceans and mountains, cities and villages, stars and planets are time bound, you. But the words of Jesus are eternal!

**O 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 16<sup>th</sup>

Luke 21 vv 34-38

One of the best known verses in the Bible is John 3<sup>16</sup>: *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.* God loved the world. He sent Jesus because He loved the world. Jesus sends us because God loves the world. It follows that we too should love the world. But St James says in his epistle: 4:4 *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.* Christians cannot therefore love the world. To love the world is to be unfaithful to God, to commit adultery against Him. So, how come one part of the Bible appears to contradict another? The answer is that the word “world” is being used in two slightly different senses. God loves the world. He looks down on the peoples of the world. It grieves God to see the multitude of humanity living sinful lives, hurting themselves, hurting one another. They are like sheep without a shepherd and God loves us so much that He sends us Jesus the Good Shepherd Who lays down His life for the sheep. Those who receive Him become the children of God. We are redeemed from the world and its values. We are no longer slaves to sin. We are set free in Christ. That being so, we love the world as God loves the world and are part of His mission to bring other people home to the Good Shepherd. We long, as God does, to bring the people of the world home to Him. The world we must not love is the values of the world – self-centredness, materialism, greed, etc. To love the values of the world is to be at enmity with God and to risk not being ready when the Son of Man calls us.

May 17<sup>th</sup>

Luke 22 vv 1-6

This is another one of those great mysteries. Human beings freely choose what they do with their lives. They are responsible for the decisions they make and can expect to be rewarded or punished in accordance with their choices. On the other hand, God is in control and things always work out in accordance with His plan both for the world and for each individual in it. I can't explain it, but it is so. It would be disastrous either to believe that God's plans could be thwarted by our choices or that we are not responsible for our actions.

May 18<sup>th</sup>

Luke 22 vv 7-16

Passover is very special for Jewish people. It is a time for family, a time for friends, an act of solidarity with the entire people of Israel. It is a memorial of what God did all those millennia ago in setting the people free from Egyptian slavery. To take part in the Passover is to affirm one's identity with the nation which God redeemed and set free; led through the Red Sea to the holy mountain, where He gave them His Law; guided, nourished and protected for forty years in the wilderness; suffered and forgave their repeated rebellion; and, at last, after 40 years of wandering, brought them to the Promised Land. The Bible says that every Israelite should keep the Passover.

In many ways what the Passover is for Jews, Holy Communion is for Christians. It is an expression of God's love for us and the love that we have for one another. To participate in Holy Communion is to affirm our identity as the people of God, our solidarity, our essential unity with our Lord Jesus Christ and with all Christian people on earth and in heaven. It is a memorial of what Christ did for us on the Cross. It is an assurance of His Presence with us on earth in every generation. It is an earnest of what is to come in Heaven. We are sustained, guided, nourished and protected by Christ present with us in the Sacrament. He suffers and forgives our sins. We ought to celebrate Holy Communion.

May 19<sup>th</sup>

Luke 22 vv 17-20

There are four occasions on which the people gathered for Passover bless and drink from a cup of wine. Luke mentions two of them. Matthew and Mark only one and John does not describe the Passover meal at all. It is surely an indication of the wickedness of human beings

that there have been such terrible quarrels, anathematising & persecution within the Church about what exactly happens at Holy Communion, the Sacrament of brotherly love, about what exactly Jesus meant by the words He said over the bread and wine. Queen Elizabeth I was wise in accepting that God feeds us on Himself in this Passover meal without trying too hard to understand it.

*'Twas Christ the Word that spake  
it,  
The same took bread and break it,*

*And as the Word did make it,  
So I believe and take it.*

May 20<sup>th</sup>

Luke 22 vv 21-23

Here of course the betrayer is Judas. Later on, but still quite soon after this meal, Peter will deny Jesus three times. The other disciples will run away. If we come away from receiving Holy Communion and behave in a less than Christian manner, aren't we betraying Him, denying Him, running away from our responsibilities towards the One Who laid down His life on the Cross for us? It is so easy to come out of Church gossiping, complaining, arguing, even on the journey home, and then behaving at home and at school and work or in the shops or the pub, as though we were no different from people who did not know Christ in His Word and in the Blessed Sacrament.

*Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.*

May 21<sup>st</sup>

Luke 22 vv 24-27

A recent book suggests that we shouldn't be surprised if the quality of people in power is very poor. Three reasons are given for this.

- People who want power are very often the last people who should be trusted with power.
- Even if you want power for the right reasons – ie to serve other people – you may not be able to attain power without behaving unethically. In some countries that might be actual physical violence, perhaps a coup against a corrupt regime. In any set up, personal advancement may require the use of sharp elbows and a certain ruthlessness in order to beat one's rivals. In a democracy (a cynic like me would suspect), no candidate who told the electorate the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth would be elected. Moreover, in order to have any chance of elected office, you have to join a party, to compromise. At

what point does compromising become impossible to those who would be true to their principles?

- Even if you want power for the right reasons and acquire power without behaving unethically, Lord Acton was right. Power corrupts.

Evidently, a lot of thought and prayer needs to go into the selection of leaders in Church and state and those selected really need our prayers!

May 22<sup>nd</sup> (Easter 5)

Luke 22 vv 28-30

Twelve ordinary men these apostles. Yet they (presumably with Matthias replacing Judas) are to eat and drink in God's Kingdom, sit on thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel. Kings and priests indeed. Their lives are transformed by their meeting Jesus. They share in His work. They will continue His work after His Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension. They will be empowered to do so by the Holy Spirit. When we say *We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church*, we include ourselves in that communion and fellowship. By God's grace we are one, holy, catholic and apostolic. We have met Jesus and He is with us every day. We work with Him and He with us. We are commissioned every one of us to play our part in His work here on earth. We are empowered to do so by His Holy Spirit.

**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 23<sup>rd</sup> (Rogation Day)

Luke 22 vv 31-34

The three days before Ascension Day are the Rogation Days, when traditionally we especially pray for God's blessing on the growing crops. They are traditionally a time also for beating the bounds, marking the parish boundaries – the part of the world for which we are responsible, the community we belong to, and the land and people to which we look for support, in this case tithes, rents, glebe land, etc.. Jesus says that Satan wants to sift Peter as wheat. He is thinking of the harvest when the wheat is separated from the tares, the good grain from the chaff. Harvest symbolises judgment, sorting out the good from the bad, and also the final consummation. The wheat is stored in the barns.

There is an abundance of good things. Peter thinks he can save himself by his own strength. But he can't. We can't save ourselves. The prayers of Jesus save Peter and then Peter will be able to strengthen the others with the strength which Jesus gives him.

Come, ye thankful                    shall in that day  
people, come,                    All offenses purge  
Raise the song of                    away;  
harvest home;                    Give His angels  
All is safely                    charge at last  
gathered in,                    In the fire the  
Ere the winter                    tares to cast;  
storms begin;                    But the fruitful  
God our Maker                    ears to store  
doth provide                    In His garner  
For our wants to                    evermore.  
be supplied;

Come to God's  
own temple, come,  
Raise the song of  
harvest home.

All the world is  
God's own field,  
Fruit unto His  
praise to yield;  
Wheat and tares  
together sown,  
Unto joy or sorrow  
grown;  
First the blade,  
and then the ear,  
Then the full corn  
shall appear:  
Lord of harvest,  
grant that we  
Wholesome grain  
and pure may be.

Even so, Lord,  
quickly come,  
Bring Thy final  
harvest home;  
Gather Thou Thy  
people in,  
Free from sorrow,  
free from sin,  
There, forever  
purified,  
In Thy garner to  
abide;  
Come, with all  
Thine angels  
come,  
Raise the glorious  
harvest home.

For the Lord our  
God shall come,  
And shall take His  
harvest home;  
From His field

May 24<sup>th</sup> (Rogation Day)

Luke 22 vv 35-38

I touched yesterday on the delicate subject of boundaries. The traditional English parish had a rector or vicar and a church. It was an interdependent community in which people worked on the farms or as local tradesmen, paid their rents to their landlords, their dues to the Church. We were all in it together and in theory at least we all looked after one another, doing our duty in that state of life, into which it pleased God to call us. But it very often didn't work out like that. The rich and powerful might well exploit and oppress the poor. In a small community, people might dislike or even hate their neighbours rather than love them. Even when the parish works well, a close community may well be unwelcoming to strangers, suspicious of rival neighbouring parishes, inward looking and "parochial" in the bad sense of the word. We all like to belong. Most of us value the thought that we can rely on other people and that they can rely on us. Boundaries are important. Whom can we trust? Who will trust us? But, we don't like to be excluded. We don't want to be beyond the boundary, outside the circle of trust. And what we would that others should do to us we are commanded to do to them. The apostles constituted a close community. They supported one another but ultimately they depended on Jesus & would eventually open their close fellowship to the whole world.

May 25<sup>th</sup> (Rogation Day)

Luke 22 v 39-46

*And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the crown.*

One young woman told me years ago that it was this verse which played a very big part in her conversion to Christianity. It made her realise just how much Jesus loved her.

May 26<sup>th</sup> (Ascension Day)

Luke 22 vv 47-49

*Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?*

Those of you who know me know that I am not a very tactile person. When it became the custom to pass the Peace in church, I wasn't very comfortable with it. From that point of you, I didn't mind the COVID rules. I used to say that the guy who really loved his neighbour was the one who would lend him ten pounds if he was hard up irrespective of whether or not he shook hands with him, hugged him or even kissed

him, whether in church or anywhere else. You don't need, I would maintain, to say *I love you* if your actions show that you do and if you don't act lovingly towards another person it is sheer hypocrisy to say those three magic words. COVID has shown me however that physical contact does matter to a lot of people. Even I have missed shaking hands whether at the Peace or more generally. These gestures do matter. For some people, it is important to hear the words *I love you*. I accept that, albeit somewhat grudgingly. On the other hand, the point still stands. The words and gestures are worse than meaningless if they don't represent the true state of the heart.

**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 27<sup>th</sup>

Luke 22 vv 50&51

One important feature of the teaching of Jesus is that we should not retaliate. Another is that we should not resist evil. Another is that we must forgive. Another that we submit to God's Will for our lives. We can trust God. We shall not keep ourselves safe by compromising our Christian principles and accepting the ways of the sinful world.

May 28<sup>th</sup>

Luke 22 vv 52&53

In John's Gospel, Jesus several times speaks of His own hour. For example, when they run out of wine at the wedding feast at Cana, Jesus tells Mary that His hour is not yet come. Jesus' hour comes when He is crucified. This is when we see the extent of His submission to God's Will for His life and the extent of His love for fallen humanity. On the Cross, Jesus triumphs over sin, the world and the devil. His death destroys death. His last words are *It is finished*. It is accomplished. I have done what I came to do. His glorious Resurrection affirms and proclaims His victory.

It is thought-provoking that in our reading today, Jesus refers to this being the hour of these evil sinners and of the power of darkness. The hour of sin and absolute rebellion against God is also the hour of



ultimate forgiveness and the atonement of redeemed humanity with our Creator & Father. Golgotha is the battle ground on which all the forces of evil engage the forces of good and are defeated by the power of self-sacrificial love.

1. The strife is o'er,  
the battle done;  
Now is the Victor's  
triumph won;  
O let the song of  
praise be sung.  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
Alleluia!

2. Death's  
mightiest powers  
have done their  
worst,  
And Jesus hath

His foes dispersed;  
Let shouts of  
praise and joy  
outburst.  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
Alleluia!

3. On the third  
morn He rose  
again  
Glorious in  
majesty to reign;  
Oh, let us swell  
the joyful strain!

Alleluia! Alleluia!  
Alleluia!

4. Lord, by the  
stripes which  
wounded Thee.  
From death's  
dread sting Thy  
servants free  
That we may live  
and sing to Thee.  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
Alleluia!

May 29<sup>th</sup> (Sunday after Ascension.

Luke 22 vv 54-62

*And Peter went out, and wept bitterly.*

I remember once hearing this read in church and being struck by the poignancy of these words of Peter. Like some of you, I read the Bible every day and some of it is extremely familiar to me. Now, I try to avoid watching repeats on TV and very few books are worth reading a second time. But the Bible is different. It really is the living Word of the God with the potential to speak to us every time we read it. (It helps if we are listening.) Maybe this fact is the reason that Satan tries to tell us that the Bible is boring, that we know it well enough already or that it is out of date. When what Peter felt on realising that he had denied Jesus really strikes home, we're bound to ask ourselves whether our words or deeds effectively deny Christ. They do whenever we are unloving. **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.*

May 30<sup>th</sup>

Luke 22 vv 63-65

Suppose the prisoner were not Jesus. Suppose these police and soldiers were handling a notoriously wicked criminal plausibly wanted for some terrible crime. Would they be justified in treating him like this? Obviously not. Even a notorious criminal deserves a fair trial. If then found guilty, it is legitimate that he should receive a proportionate punishment in accordance with the sentence of the court. Such a punishment will balance the scales of justice, deter others from committing similar crimes and will seek to restore the criminal. There is no excuse for brutality in the treatment of criminals, still less in the way suspects are dealt with.

May 31<sup>st</sup>

Luke 22 vv 66-71

It would appear that there was an informal hearing before the high priests and members of the Jewish Council (the Sanhedrin) soon after Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane (Mark 14<sup>53-65</sup>). It was at this time that Peter denied Christ. The Sanhedrin wasn't allowed to meet at night. So they convened a formal meeting first thing in the morning, which went over the same ground again. Despite suborning false witnesses, they could find no evidence that Jesus had done anything wrong. They convicted Him of blasphemy because He claimed to be God's Son and the prophesied Son of Man. But He was. He is Son of God & Son of Man. It occurs to me that so are we. What do people think of our claim?

June 1<sup>st</sup>

Luke 23 vv 1&2

There is a lot of debate about whether the Jews under Roman rule had the power to impose the death penalty. The probable answer is that formally they didn't. However, they did stone Stephen and they were ready to stone the woman taken in adultery (John 8<sup>1-11</sup>), though that might have been a trap for Jesus, like the debate about paying tribute to Caesar. If He had condemned the woman to die under Moses' Law, they would have denounced Him to Rome because the Jews didn't have the legal power to inflict the death penalty. If Jesus had acknowledged that the woman ought to die under Jewish Law but that the sentence couldn't be carried out in deference to Rome, they would have made out to Jewish patriots that He had sold out to Caesar. They obviously did

not know Jesus. “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” *The wages of sin is death.* Sinners deserve to die. But who isn’t a sinner and therefore is entitled to carry out the sentence? Only Jesus. But, *the gift of God is eternal life.* Anyway, the chief priests don’t want to get into trouble with Rome or to be held responsible by Jesus’ many supporters for His death, but they do want Him out of their way. So they hand Jesus over to the Roman governor, falsely claiming that Jesus is a rebel against Rome. In fact, His Kingdom is not of this world.

June 2<sup>nd</sup>

Luke 23 vv 3&4

Messiah or Christ means the Anointed One. In the Old Testament, kings and priests were anointed. Anointing signifies God’s choice, the setting apart of the individual for the task, and the bestowal of the appropriate spiritual gifts. David was the anointed King of Israel as were his descendants who succeeded him. The King of Israel was thought of as the Son of God – God’s viceroy, ruling by God’s authority, answerable to God for the welfare of God’s people. When there were no more kings in Jerusalem following conquest by a series of powerful empires including Rome, there were prophecies that God would send a new Messiah, more wonderful than David or his sons. Christians understand that these prophecies refer to Jesus. But in the years before Christ came (and subsequently) many came claiming to be the Messiah and their mission was understood in different ways, usually militarily. The priests want Pilate to believe that Jesus is one of these.

June 3<sup>rd</sup>

Luke 23 vv 5-12

Pilate can’t quite work out Who Jesus is. He knows, however, that He is special. He’s not a guerrilla leader claiming to be the Messiah. Pilate can’t see that He’s done anything worthy of death. Neither can he afford to antagonise the Sadducees too much. Keeping the peace depends on keeping the authorities in the provinces on the side of Rome. So Pilate is caught on the horns of a dilemma. But, he’s a politician and thinks he’s found a way out. Jesus is a Galilean. Let Herod deal with Him. Herod was tetrarch of Galilee. He was also the one who executed John the Baptist and wondered whether Jesus was John somehow come back to life. No wonder he wanted to see Jesus

for himself. Herod's soldiers, like those of the Sadducees and Pilate, cruelly mock Jesus. Herod makes no progress in judging Jesus – good or bad – and sends Him back to Pilate. Some people read v12 as meaning that Pilate and Herod were united in hurting Jesus. I prefer the alternative view that, even suffering as He was, the influence of Jesus was such as to reconcile two enemies.

June 4<sup>th</sup>

Luke 23 vv 13-22

*I have found no cause of death in him.*

So the King James Bible. I once taught Luke's Gospel to a small group of fifth form girls who were studying for O level or GCSE. They were given the New English Bible to read which has Pilate say *I have not found him guilty of any capital offence*. They didn't know what the modern version meant. Was a capital offence a crime committed in Jerusalem? But they did understand the traditional version. It's rash to assume that people would understand better and appreciate more the biblical message in newer translations of the Scriptures. Sometimes they may, but it's not clear cut one way or the other. The classical English translations are often more direct and in more straightforward language than some of the new versions. The classical translations are still deeply engrained in our culture. Being more rhythmic, they are easier to remember. Their special religious language sets the Bible and Prayerbook apart from the commonplace – sometimes a good thing, sometimes not so much. All of life should be holy, but if we don't make a point of keeping certain special things holy, the whole of life is apt to become common.

June 5<sup>th</sup> (Whitsun)

Luke 23 vv 23-26

Simon carried the cross. From time to time, I've been involved in arranging open air processions of Christians led by a man carrying a large wooden cross. Such a cross is heavy and it seems fair to share out the burden and allow different people to take turns to carry it. But I find that the men chosen to carry the cross are often reluctant to relinquish it. I've been in that position myself. We say softly, *That's OK. I'll carry on with it.*

**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 6<sup>th</sup>

Luke 23 vv 27-31

The women might well have lamented the fate of anyone being taken to be crucified. If these women knew Jesus personally or even if they only knew enough about Him to know that He was the hope of Israel, their tears would be even more understandable. Although He has been betrayed, denied, mocked, the victim of a terrible miscarriage of justice and brutally flogged, Jesus attends to the women, their concern for Him and their own needs. He warns of the coming troubles – the fall of Jerusalem, all the hideous atrocities perpetrated by humankind up to the Apocalypse. If we can do this to Jesus, the sinless Son of God, what horrors are human beings capable of in the ordinary way.

June 7<sup>th</sup>

Luke 23 vv 32&33

*And He was numbered with the transgressors.*

Jesus died the death of a criminal, of a thief, a murderer, a rebel. He wasn't any of those things but He died with those who were. This means more that, however. It refers back to the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53. Verse 12 includes the words, *He hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors.; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.* King and High Priest, indeed, the Messiah is also the atoning sacrifice – not merely for the sins of the penitent thief, but also for the sins of all us sinners who repent and believe in Him.

June 8<sup>th</sup>

Luke 23 v34

*Father forgive them; for they know not what they do.*

Could you say that if you were being crucified? I'm not sure that I could. To be honest, I find it hard enough to forgive the slights and petty insults which are usually the worst wrongs ever done to me. On the other hand, I sometimes think we do cope better with really big problems than with minor or imaginary troubles. I find that I can, by God's grace, usually cope with big problems and forgive quite serious transgressions against me, but I do have trouble dealing with the small things. So I don't know. I hope I would find grace to forgive my murderers if it ever comes to it. The fact that Jesus did have that grace

demonstrates His love for us sinners. He died for all of us, not just those who knocked the nails into His hands and feet. *They know not what they do*. Would any of us sin if we really understood what sin is: an insult to the thrice holy God; and infliction of pain on His Creation; a step on the broad way which leads to perdition.

June 9<sup>th</sup>

Luke 23 vv 35-38

Do people ever challenge you? What difference does it make being a Christian? Are you a better person than we are? Does God answer your prayers? If God is in charge, why do bad things happen? If God loves you, why do bad things happen to you and your family? We don't know all the answers to questions like that. There are some answers which can be put forward and discussed, if only our questioners would stay for an answer. But often we don't know and we might feel in the dark ourselves. Jesus doesn't get into a debate with them. The Cross was hardly the place for debating. He does, however, show them even when hanging from the Cross what faith & hope & love truly mean.

June 10<sup>th</sup>

Luke 23 vv 39-43

It is never too late to repent. I don't suggest that people should put off turning to Christ and renouncing evil. They might get caught unexpectedly. Besides our lives here on earth are much happier and more fulfilled if we know Christ. We know that He is looking after us. We talk to Him in prayer. His Word teaches us how to live and His Holy Spirit enables us to grow more like Him. If you are thinking about becoming a Christian faith don't delay. It's not too late.

June 11<sup>th</sup> (St Barnabas)

Luke 23 vv 44&45

Barnabas, *son of consolation*. What we know of Barnabas is not darkness but light. He was generous with the abundant wealth God had given him. He was a good judge of character. He travelled with St Paul on his early missionary work. He participated whole-heartedly in the joyful fellowship of the Jerusalem Church, with its regular meetings for prayer and the breaking of bread, its attention to the Word of God and the apostles' preaching. But when Jesus died on the Cross *there was darkness over all the earth* for three hours. However, the veil of the Temple was rent in twain. All human beings have access to the Presence of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Moses' face shone when

he entered the Presence and communed with the divine. So Christian faces shine metaphorically with the Light of Christ. The rending of the veil also opens the way for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit Whose manifold gifts enable us to fulfil our calling as Barnabas fulfilled his. **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 12<sup>th</sup> (Trinity Sunday)

Luke 23 v46

'Tis mystery all! Th'Immortal dies!  
Who can explore His strange design?  
In vain the firstborn seraph tries  
To sound the depths of love divine!  
'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,  
Let angel minds inquire no more.

The Trinity is a mystery. We cannot avoid mystery. God is infinite. We are extremely limited. We fail utterly to fathom the mystery, but the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation point us towards some understanding of Who God is and how utterly we depend on Him for everything and how He never lets us down.

**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 thy 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 13<sup>th</sup>

Luke 23 vv 47-49

None of the people in these verses is named. They are ordinary people who stand in relation to Jesus. What is their connection to Him? How do they relate to Him as individuals? What does He mean to them personally? What does He mean to you and me? You might say that for me it is my job, but actually it is something that all Christians are called to do. We have to share our faith with other people. I know quite a lot about Jesus. (I've got a Theology degree!) And I can tell people about Him: what the Bible says, what the Church teaches, what I believe in my head and in my heart. But I strongly suspect that what would be

most effective in bringing other people to faith would be if I could share with them what Jesus means to me. I don't expect everyone to have the same experience of God, but we can all have our own personal experience of God. I'd like to think that my experience of God would help other people to open up themselves to God and to get to know Him personally.

And can it be that I should gain  
An int'rest in the Saviour's blood?  
Died He for me, who caused His pain?  
For me, who Him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! how can it be  
That Thou, my God, should die for me?

June 14<sup>th</sup>

Luke 23 vv 50-56

And here is a man whose name we probably wouldn't know if he were not involved at such a crucial point in the story of Jesus. Joseph was quite well off. He was a member of the Sanhedrin (Jewish council). He was a respected member of society. He was a good man and a just. Like Simeon and Hannah, he looked forward to the coming of the Kingdom. He was a disciple of Jesus, *but secretly for fear of the Jews*.

Not all the rich and powerful were against Jesus, then. What do we make of Joseph's timorous discipleship? He certainly performed a useful service for Jesus. He must have overcome his fears when he went into Pilate and asked for the Body. Maybe, seeing Jesus die on the Cross inspired greater faith, hope and love in Joseph – greater courage. Again, I ask myself, would I go to the Roman governor and admit to be the admirer of a crucified criminal? Some time after this, when Peter & John are up before the chief priests for preaching the Gospel, it says (Acts 4) <sup>13</sup>*Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, **that they had been with Jesus.***

June 15<sup>th</sup>

Luke 24 vv 1-12

Easter is the great Christian celebration. It is the consequence of everything which Jesus accomplished on the Cross. Jesus is vindicated. Jesus is victorious. The powers of sin, the world and the devil are vanquished. Death is destroyed. Human beings have no need any longer to be in bondage to the fear of death. Love casts out fear. At first, the apostles don't believe. Peter goes to see for himself. Angels bear witness to the Resurrection. The women bear witness to the



Resurrection. The Risen Christ manifests Himself. Psalm 34<sup>8</sup>: *O taste and see, how gracious the Lord is: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.*

June 16<sup>th</sup> (Corpus Christi)

Luke 24 vv 13-35

The Risen Christ manifests Himself. How does He go about it? In many ways, but here are three basic ways in which He makes Himself known to Cleopas and his companion, the Church & the world which are generally available.

- He is present with them when two or three are gathered together in His Name. We have family prayers, prayer groups and fellowship groups, the services of the Church.
- He is present with them and He is made manifest to them in the reading of the Scriptures. We have the Bible which we revere as the Word of God. When we read it and act upon it, we are walking with Jesus.
- He is present with them in the breaking of bread. Christ is present with us at every meal. Our food is the gift of God to us. Friendship and fellowship with our fellow diners is a great blessing to us. And then there is Holy Communion, the institution of which we especially celebrate today. In Holy Communion, we remember what Christ has done for us. We are nourished and healed by His Presence with us. Our fellowship with Him and with one another is both affirmed and strengthened. We are given a foretaste of the joy which is to come.

**ALMIGHTY** and everliving God, we most heartily thank thee, for that thou dost vouchsafe to feed us, who have duly received these holy mysteries, with the spiritual food of the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ; and dost assure us thereby of thy favour and goodness towards us; and that we are very members incorporate in the mystical body of thy Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people; and are also heirs through hope of thy everlasting kingdom, by the merits of the most precious death and passion of thy dear Son. And we most humbly beseech thee, O heavenly Father, so to assist us with thy grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as thou hast prepared for us to walk in; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom,

with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

June 17<sup>th</sup>

Luke 24 vv 36-43

Slightly irreverently, reading this I was reminded of the evening I ate two dinners. I was at college, sitting on my own, eating the meal I had prepared for myself, when a group of friends invited me to join them in going to a restaurant just down the road. Teenage boys have a good appetite. So I went with them and had another dinner. I thought of this when reading about Jesus having supper with two friends at Emmaus and then joining the apostles for what I take to be a meal in Jerusalem. Table fellowship is important, sometimes as important as or more important than the nutritional value of the food. The Church Army captain who spoke to us mentioned how some of the homeless who come to their shelters value a bit of company and a chat as much as they do food, warm clothes and a place to sleep. Many of us eat alone a lot of the time and it doesn't worry us. But some people are lonely, especially if they seldom see anyone or only receive perfunctory visits from carers. They'd like someone to share their meal with sometimes, rather than just deliver a consignment of prepared meals to be heated up in the microwave and consumed in front of the TV.

June 18<sup>th</sup>

Luke 24 vv 44-48

They've enjoyed table fellowship with the Risen Christ. He has deigned to prove to them that He is really risen by eating and drinking with them. He has explained to them what the Bible means and how He fulfils the Law & the Prophets (what we call the OT). He will always be with us, always love us and care for us. We can talk to Him every day. We live in anticipation of what He has promised us. But we've got to share the Good News. *Ye are witnesses of these things.*

June 19<sup>th</sup> (Trinity 1)

Luke 24 v49

*Endued with power from on high.*

How can we bear witness to Jesus? Are we brave enough? Are we clever enough? Do we live such good lives that other people would naturally want we've got? Do we even get the opportunity to talk about Jesus to people outside the Church? I don't know about you, but I know that I have very many limitations. I also know, however, that we Christians, however humble, are endued with power from on high.

There is no reason why you or I should be unable to walk in all such good works as God has prepared for us to walk in.

**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 20<sup>th</sup>

Luke 24 vv 50-53

For forty days, Jesus appeared to His disciples, over 500 people, teaching them about God's revelation of Himself, God's plan for Creation, as revealed in the Bible and in the life, death & resurrection of Jesus. He commissioned us to continue His work and He endued us with all the resources that we need. Don't listen to people who say that the Church is on the way out or that it is impossible for us to survive and continue to do God's Work. So long as we are doing God's Will, He will provide all the resources we need. So, if it looks like we are failing, it's for one of two reasons. Either we're not doing His Will or we are not using the resources He has given us in accordance with His plans for us. Think & pray about it. And what do God's people do while they await God's good time? They worship. They are full of joy. They come together continually to praise & bless God.

June 21<sup>st</sup>

Proverbs 1 vv 1-7

I thought we'd use the remainder of the quarter to look at a book which is not very well known. We all need wisdom. The world desperately needs wisdom. When you think of all the problems perplexing us in the world today, we all need wisdom – individuals, families, businesses, schools, medical services, the military, governments, international organisations, churches. We all need wisdom. The fear of the LORD...

June 22<sup>nd</sup>

Proverbs 1 vv 8&9

One of the things which perplexes me is the speed of change. I don't mean the invention & development of things like computers and the internet. What perplexes me is the speed at which there has been a change in values in society. What used to be thought disgraceful is now fine. What used to be regarded as innocent is now considered harmful or has even been made criminal. One change I personally find very hard

is the change in attitude to freedom of speech. We used to go with what Voltaire was supposed to have said, "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it," but now we're not allowed to say things which other people might find offensive. This worries me. I don't see how we can learn from one another if we can't debate freely. Moreover, looking back at others who have tried to suppress the circulation of ideas which they believed to be harmful, people like Stalin, Hitler, the members of the Inquisition, etc., I don't trust the censors always to get right what they are censoring or to treat those they disagree with justly. The overriding principle is love and all our ethical and moral beliefs must be considered in the light of love. We were wrong about some things in the past. We are wrong about some things in the present. We've discarded values we ought to have hung on to. We've realised that some of the things we used to think were wrong. Love is the standard by which we must judge all our values. But, our parents are good guides. We should always have regard to what they taught us as we try to make sense of the ever changing thicket of public debate.

June 23<sup>rd</sup>

Proverbs 1 vv 10-19

Human beings are pack animals. Our instinct is to belong. We want to be part of the in crowd. Some of us are natural leaders. Most of us are natural followers. A minority are neither leaders nor followers. Most of us don't like to feel left out. We may show that we belong by the way we speak, the way we dress, our cultural instincts. If we are blessed with coming from a good family, having nice friends, belonging to a Church, peer pressure tends to make us better people. But if we come from an unhappy or criminal family, if we get in with a bad lot, if we feel it's exciting to run with the bad boys or girls, we may find ourselves in a lot of trouble. Our best friend would always be Jesus.

June 24<sup>th</sup> (Nativity of St John the Baptist)

Proverbs 1 vv 20-33

**ALMIGHTY** God, by whose providence thy servant John Baptist was wonderfully born, and sent to prepare the way of they 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.*

John obviously wasn't a follower. He received his message from God and He faithfully and fearlessly preached to the people the way in which they should go. I don't see John compromising with the ways of the world for fear of being left out. I'm not sure that he was a leader either. He did have disciples, but there is no evidence that John's disciples were his followers. They were people whom John was preparing to follow Jesus. Much of John's message was unpopular. It went against the grain of the world. Ultimately he was martyred for his uncompromising allegiance to the Truth. But, of course, John was right. There is a coming judgment and we shall be judged by the standard set by Jesus. To disregard the Voice of Wisdom is to choose the broad way which leads to destruction.

June 25<sup>th</sup>

Proverbs 2 vv 1-9

Philosophy comes from the Greek *for love of wisdom*. In Plato's day, some men claimed to be wise – the sophists. Plato thought that they were arrogant. Wisdom is very deep. Wisdom must be approached with humility and an open mind. Wisdom is not something we ought to claim to have mastered. Wisdom is something we should humbly seek with a profound love of our subject. That is all true – even though Plato was a pagan – but Philosophy in our universities and colleges is an extremely intellectually demanding discipline which few people are capable of undertaking. There is a case to be made too that philosophers haven't got much further than Plato did 2 ½ thousand years ago – asking the questions and recognising the challenges in answering them. But there is wisdom available to everybody, very deep and to be approached in humility and with an open mind. *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. Christ is the Wisdom & Power of God.* The pursuit of true wisdom requires faith as well as intellect.

June 26<sup>th</sup> (Trinity 2)

Proverbs 2 vv 10-22

**O LORD**, who never failest to help and govern them who thou dost bring up in thy stedfast 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.*

We talk about vicious circles, but there are virtuous circles too. The more we study the things of God, the more time we spend with Him, the better our defences against the temptations of sin, the world & the devil.

June 27<sup>th</sup>

Proverbs 3 vv 1-6

*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.* If memory serves me correctly, I copied out the first of these two verses onto a piece of paper and stuck it on the wall of my college room when I was studying for the ministry. These are words which would be good to learn by heart. I cannot imagine that there could be any better way to live than to live by faith in God, acknowledging Him in all that we do and say and think. This is not only true for rectors and trainee rectors. It is true for everyone. I was going to say that there is no better way to live than to live trusting in the LORD. That doesn't go anything like far enough. There is no other way to live than through faith in God. Life without God is a pale reflection of the abundant life which Jesus came to give to us.

June 28<sup>th</sup>

Proverbs 3 vv 9&10

I'm supposed to be going to a meeting on the evening of the day I am writing these notes. It will be dark and cold and possibly wet and I don't much like going to meetings! So I haven't yet definitely decided to get the car out and go. It is farther than I want to cycle on a winter's evening. The talk is *Encouraging Generosity* and it occurred to me that I ought to be generous with my time and energy and make the effort to go. Today's verses encourage generosity. If we trust in the LORD with all our hearts and acknowledge Him in all our ways, we know that everything we have is the gift God. It is God Who meets all our needs. He is an infinitely generous God and gives as far more than we need. It follows that, as His children, made in His image, we ought to be equally generous, reciprocally generous. God has freely given to us. It makes sense that we freely offer back to Him what He has freely made available to us. That we offer Him the firstfruits thankfully and faithfully, trusting Him that He will continue to bless us. That we offer

Him the firstfruits, the greatest and best that we have, not that we grudgingly hand over what's left of the time, talents and money He has so generously provided when we've looked after ourselves and done everything we want to do with what we think of as belonging to us. The Scripture says that it is in giving that we receive. We shan't go short if we trust God to the extent of being as generous to others as God is to us.

Luke 6<sup>38</sup>: *Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.*

**ALMIGHTY** God, Father of all mercies, we thine unworthy servants do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us, and to all men; [\*particularly to those who desire now to offer up their praises and thanksgivings for thy late mercies vouchsafed unto them.] We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all, for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we beseech thee, give us that due sense of all thy mercies, that our hearts may be unfeignedly thankful, and that we shew forth thy praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives; by giving up ourselves to thy service, and by walking before thee in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

June 29<sup>th</sup> (St Peter)

Proverbs 3 vv 11&12

*Despise not the chastening of the LORD.*

Peter was chastened when, immediately after recognising Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God and being told that he is the rock on which Jesus will build His Church and being promised the keys of the kingdom, he understandably refuses to accept that Jesus will be crucified. "Get thee behind me, Satan," says Jesus. "thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." Peter is rebuked. He weeps bitterly when he realises what he has done in denying Jesus. After the resurrection, Peter is made to feel very uncomfortable when Jesus asks him whether he loves Him three times. Having said that he does, Peter is made pastor of God's flock, only to get told off again

straight afterwards for questioning Jesus' plans for John. Peter often gets things wrong and gets himself into hot water one way or another. Later on, he will suffer beatings and imprisonment and finally a martyr's death, but Peter's life is in God's Hands. He keeps the faith. Luke 22: <sup>31</sup> *And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.* <sup>32</sup> *But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.* Jesus is looking after Peter as He looks after us and the chastening which Peter endures makes him a better person.

**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 30<sup>th</sup>

Proverbs 3 vv 13-20

God made everything that there is in His wisdom. It is only by living in that same wisdom that we can live our lives on earth to their full potential. Wisdom is more precious than gold or silver or jewels. Wisdom is the most valuable thing we can have. Christ is the wisdom and power of God. It is through faith in Him that we know the wisdom of God Whom to know is eternal life.

I did miss yesterday's meeting, but I can share in the words of Isaac Watts' hymn the basis of Christian giving.

When I survey the wondrous  
cross  
On which the Prince of glory  
died,  
My richest gain I count but  
loss,  
And pour contempt on all my  
pride.  
  
Forbid it, Lord, that I should  
boast,  
Save in the death of Christ my  
God!

All the vain things that charm  
me most,  
I sacrifice them to His blood.  
  
See from His head, His hands,  
His feet,  
Sorrow and love flow mingled  
down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow  
meet,  
Or thorns compose so rich a  
crown?



His dying crimson, like a robe,  
Spreads o'er His body on the  
tree;  
Then I am dead to all the globe,  
And all the globe is dead to me.

Were the whole realm of nature

mine,  
That were a present far too  
small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my  
all.