

Our
Origins

Studies in the
Book of Genesis

Bible Notes April-June 2023

April 1st

Genesis 1 v1

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

When, on the 2nd January this year, I started again to read the Bible through the year as appointed for Morning & Evening Prayer in the BCP, from Genesis chapter 1, Matthew chapter 1 and Acts chapter 1 through to Isaiah (via the rest of the OT) and Revelation, it gave me a warm feeling of belonging. (1st January is the Circumcision of Christ and has its own set readings.) I remembered as a child sitting in my grandmother's armchair and picking up the heavy black bound bible on the shelf next to it and attempting to read it through from cover to cover, starting with Genesis. Like many such attempts, I never made it straight through to the end and cover to cover is not necessarily the best way to read the Bible. In the decades since sitting in my grandmother's armchair, I have spent a good deal of time reading the Bible. For most of my life, I have read it every day. God speaks to me in the words of the Bible. Some parts of the Bible have become very familiar to me and I know them almost by heart in the King James Version. The Bible is a big part of what I am. Perhaps that shouldn't be surprising. The Bible is the Word of God. Jesus is the Word of God. He dwells in us and we in Him. As Christian ministers we are called, in the words of the prayer, *that we may both by our life and doctrine set forth thy true and lively Word, and rightly and duly administer thy holy Sacraments.* When we come to Holy Communion, we pray, *that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us.* By Word and Sacrament Christ dwells in us and we in Him.

I don't very often read a book or watch a film more than once except by mistake. But I read the Bible every day. It is always fresh. God speaks to us in new ways as we prayerfully contemplate His Word.

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

God created the heaven and the earth.

A lot of Christians worry about some of these stories in Genesis and the rest of the Bible. Are they true scientifically and historically? Some Christians vehemently insist that the whole of the Bible is true in the scientific and historical sense and even that those who believe otherwise are damned. It can't be right that people are damned for what they believe about the Bible. We are saved by faith in Christ and by nothing else. Faith is God's gift to us and it is not for other human beings to judge us and to denigrate our relationship with God. Some other Christians, I'm sorry to say, write off the stories in the Bible which they find hard to believe as myths, devised by ignorant peoples for their own ends, and try to explain away teaching about doctrine or ethics, which they don't agree with, as reflective of the values and beliefs of primitive cultures. Some unbelievers ridicule what the Bible says about Creation, the Flood, the Tower of Babel and much else, judging these stories by the standards of modern science and historical investigation, and abusing them in a vain attempt to discredit our religion. I suspect that there are many Christians more like me, however. We have had a modern, western, academic education. We understand the world in terms of Science and History, Mathematics, Geography, etc.. We celebrate the fruitfulness of these ways of explaining the world in terms of our growing understanding of how the world works and the advances brought about in industry, agriculture and medicine, etc. by the application of modern scientific measures. And yet we know that the Bible is the Word of God. Not only do we love what the Bible says, we love the Bible. We know that it speaks to us the truth of God. It works for us. It works for the Church. It works for the world.

Psalm 119: 89 **O LORD**, thy word : endureth for ever in heaven. 90. Thy truth also remaineth from one generation to another : thou hast laid the foundation of the earth, and it abideth. 91. They continue this day according to thine ordinance : for all things serve thee. 92. If my delight had not been in thy law : I should have perished in my trouble. 93. I will never forget thy commandments : for with them thou hast quickened me. 94. I am thine, O save me : for I have sought thy commandments. 95. The ungodly laid wait for me to destroy me : but I will consider thy testimonies. 96. I see that all things come to an end : but thy commandment is exceeding broad.

In the beginning God

For many years, I've resolved this tension between the Bible and evolution, the Flood and recorded history, the Tower of Babel and modern theories about the development of language, by pointing out that the Bible isn't a history book or a scientific treatise. There is a great deal of history in the Bible and a certain amount of science, as well as information about other subjects which are quite properly studied in schools and universities. But the Bible isn't really about such things. The Bible is God talking to us about the things that really matter: Who God is, what we are, what God requires of us, what God promises us, how He cares for us, what is our ultimate end. We don't read the Bible for information about how the physical universe came into being or the early history of the human race or about ancient middle-eastern politics. We read the Bible in order to get to know God, Whom to know is eternal life – in the end much more important than anything in the world of time and space in which we live out our three score years and ten. The Bible is true. The Bible is the Word of God. Jesus is the Word of God. He is the Way, the Truth & the Life. But the Truth to Whom the Bible bears witness is infinitely more profound than the mundane truths we investigate in our laboratories and debate in our lecture theatres.

This has been my understanding for some time, but I believe that I have found a deeper insight into these difficult questions by reading a book by a friend of a friend. This guy was an anthropologist and spent some time living with and trying to understand a culture very different from our own in Peru. The Arakmbut have their stories to explain who they are and how the world works. They are not interested in whether these stories are true historically and scientifically or not. Worrying about issues like those is missing the point. Their stories are the stories of the Arakmbut people. They inhabit the stories. The Arakmbut dwell in their myths. Those who are not Arakmbut, who do not belong to the Arakmbut people, can never truly appreciate these “myths”.

The Arakmbut are not Christians, but what they are saying about their culture provides us with an insight into our own Christian culture. We

are the people of God and only we can truly appreciate the Bible. We inhabit the Word of God in the Scriptures. He dwells in us and we in Him. Scientific and historical questions miss the point of the Truth contained in the Scriptures. People who are not Christians cannot ever fully understand the Truth contained in the Bible. What we have is not merely information about, but a relationship with the Truth. *Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* In order to receive the Truth to which the Bible bears witness, we must be members of the community of faith, the people of God and approach His Word prayerfully. The good news is that, whereas you have to be quite intelligent and to have a good education if you want to be a scientist or a historian, anyone can become a member of the people of God and discern the Truth which is in the Bible simply by believing in Jesus.

April 4th

Genesis 1 v1

In the beginning God

I hope my comments for the last few days have been helpful, if long-winded! We shall get on now. *In the beginning God.* I was going to say that God is the fact on which all other facts depend. That is true but it would be better simply to say that everything depends on God. Without God, there is nothing.

Our lives depend on God. Without God, we should be nothing. I was going to say that God is the most important thing in our lives. So He is, but it would be better to say that everything in our lives depends on Him: the way we think, our conversation, what we do, what we don't do, who we are. It all depends on Him. The life of prayer is a life of aligning ourselves with God's Will for our lives.

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 5th

Genesis 1v2

And the earth was without form and void.

How do you describe what there was before anything we can comprehend actually existed. How can we talk about what happened before time began? We know what we mean, but, when you come to think about it, it is logically challenging when we sing:

When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound,
And time shall be no more,
And the morning breaks eternal, bright, and fair;
And the saved of earth shall gather over on the other shore,
And the roll is called up yonder,
I'll be there.

That's what matters, not that I can understand all this, but that I'll be there – through God's grace, not through any merit on my part. I have stressed that Genesis is not principally about Science, but I was interested to compare today's verse with what Stephen Hawking proposed with regard to the Big Bang with which everything supposedly began: *Events before the Big Bang are simply not defined, because there's no way one could measure what happened at them. Since events before the Big Bang have no observational consequences, one may as well cut them out of the theory, and say that time began at the Big Bang.*

April 6th Maundy Thursday

Genesis 1 vv2&3

And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

Before the Creation, chaos and darkness. Traditionally on Maundy Thursday, we celebrate Holy Communion as Jesus and His disciples celebrated the Passover, His Last Supper, on this night. After we have received Communion, we sing Psalm 22 (*My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me*, strip all the ornaments out of the Church, turn out the lights and depart quietly. When Judas had received the sop, *he went immediately out and it was night*. Peter was warned that he would deny Christ three times. They sang (probably Psalm 118) and went out into the darkness of Gethsemane, where Jesus fervently prayed that this cup might pass from Him and God sent an angel to strengthen Him.

April 7th Good Friday

Genesis 1v3

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

God spoke. Creation is effected by the Word of God. The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. The Father spoke the Word. The Christmas Gospel is John chapter 1¹⁻¹⁴, beginning, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.* The Word is the Son of God, God the Son, the Second Person of the eternal Trinity. The last verse of the Christmas Gospel is, *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father).* Today, the Word made flesh suffered and died hanging on a cross.

AND can it be that	'Tis mystery all!	He left His
I should gain	The Immortal dies:	Father's throne
An interest in the	Who can explore	above so free,
Saviour's blood?	His strange	So infinite His
Died He for me,	design?	grace,
who caused His	In vain the first-	Emptied Himself
pain?	born seraph tries	of all but love,
For me, who Him	To sound the	And bled for
to death pursued?	depths of love	Adam's helpless
Amazing love! how	divine.	race.
can it be	'Tis mercy all! let	'Tis mercy all,
That Thou, my	earth adore,	immense and free;
God, shouldst die	Let angel minds	For, O my God, it
for me?	inquire no more.	found out me

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

April 8th Holy Saturday

Genesis 1 vv 4&5

And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

God brings order out of chaos, light out of darkness. The story of our redemption parallels the story of creation – Jesus the Light of the World

transcending the dark wickedness of humanity's rebellion against God, which culminates in the Crucifixion and asserting the order of God's Law, His perfect Law of Love, in the face of the chaos in the world which follows from our disobedience to His Word. As followers of Christ, it is our vocation to bring light in the darkness and to bring the order of God's commandments to a world disordered by sin and rebellion.

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 9th Easter Day

Genesis 1 vv 6-8

Psalm 115 v16: *All the whole heavens are the Lord's: the earth hath he given to the children of men.*

God created heaven and earth. Sometimes, in the Bible, *heaven* means the sky – where there are clouds and the sun and the moon and the stars. Sometimes by *heaven* the Bible means the realm where God dwells, where is the Throne of Grace, where the angels for ever sing His praises, the home of the *spirits of just men* (and women) *made perfect*. Either way, God created heaven and earth. He created everything that exists whether in the material or the spiritual realm. There is, however, a distinction between heaven and earth. Jesus Whose home is in Heaven comes to earth and becomes one of us. The impassible (which means someone who can't suffer) suffers; the immortal dies. He has a human body just like we have except that He is without sin. If we keep the Easter Vigil service, the church is in darkness at the beginning. We wait inside in anticipation each holding his or her own unlit candle. From, a bonfire outside, we light the Paschal Candle which signifies Jesus the Light of the world risen from the dead. The Light is brought into the church and from it we each light our own individual candles, sharing the Light of Christ one with another. We listen to the Old Testament prophecies of the coming of Christ. We hear the epistle and Easter Gospel. We renew our Baptismal vows and share in the Holy Communion, the service He Himself gave us so that we should remember what He has done for us, so that He should dwell in us and

we in Him, so that we should be assured of the things He has laid up for those who love Him. He inhabits us in our world so that we may dwell with Him and in Him eternally.

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 10th

Genesis 1 vv 9-13

Out of the primaeval chaos, order, a series of distinctions – light & darkness, heaven and earth, dry land and ocean, male & female. In I Corinthians 14⁴⁰, St Paul writes, *Let all things be done decently and in order.* In the context, he is speaking about the confusion and disorder which can arise in a charismatic or pentecostal congregation when people put themselves forward, airing their spiritual gifts without due consideration for the well-being of everybody else and so dishonouring God Who is the giver of all good gifts. This principal is generally true. Whatever it is that we are doing – *decency and in order* – church meetings, discussions before and after the services, church politics. It is also true of the way we Christians ought to behave in the world – *decently and in order* – exercising our brains so that we act & speak rationally, exercising our hearts so that we always treat other people with love and respect – even those other people whom we believe to be wrong.

April 11th

Genesis 1 vv 14-19

If this were meant to be a scientific treatise, surely the text would explain how it is that day and night existed before the sun and the moon and the stars. We don't have to worry about that. We're not meant to. Light and darkness are great gifts of God. People don't always appreciate the darkness, but there is darkness for a reason: Psalm 104 *He appointed the moon for certain seasons : and the sun knoweth his going down. Thou makest darkness that it may be night : wherein all the beasts of the forest do move. The lions roaring after their prey : do seek their meat from God.* II Chronicles 6¹: *The LORD hath said that*

he would dwell in thick darkness. Darkness has a profound value and it is a mistake that we create so much artificial light that we can't see the stars and we destroy the rhythms of the natural world. The moon and the stars are awesome. We also celebrate the sun and the day. Psalm 104 again: *The sun ariseth, and they get them away together : and lay them down in their dens. Man goeth forth to his work, and to his labour : until the evening. O Lord, how manifold are thy works : in wisdom hast thou made them all; the earth is full of thy riches.*

April 12th

Genesis 1 vv 20-23

There used to be a TV game show *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral* in which experts had to decide which artefacts they were presented with came into each of these three categories. There are many wonders – animal, vegetable and mineral – and God created them all, something for which we should never cease to be thankful.

April 13th

Genesis 1 vv 24-28

So God created all the animals and He created us. In many respects, we are animals. Our bodies are not so very different from those of other creatures. We need air and water. We eat and drink. We get sick. We get well. We die. Our bodies are ultimately formed of the dust of the earth – minerals. We eat vegetables and most of us eat animals. We are part of God's material creation. It also says, however, that we are made in God's image. What does this mean? Some people suggest that, like God, we are creative. My take on it is that, as God is love, we are love – or rather that we ought to be love. The image of God is marred in us by our disobedience to His perfect law of love. We have the choice. Love wouldn't be genuine if it were truly involuntary. So in order to be free to love we have to be free not to love. Collectively, the human race has chosen not to love. Sure, we love some people, especially those who love us, but we don't have that universal love, that disinterested love, which loves God wholeheartedly and which loves our neighbours unconditionally as we love ourselves however undeserving they are of our love. But there is one human being, just one, Who does love as God loves and He is what we were created to be – *the image of the invisible God* (Colossians 1¹⁵).

April 14th

Genesis 1 vv 29-31

So God put us in charge. What account shall we give of our stewardship? Did we share out God's gifts so that nobody went without the necessities of life? Did we take good care of God's creation? Do we even remember to thank Him for all His goodness to us?

April 15th

Genesis 2 vv 1-3

The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.

So said Jesus. Observing the sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments. Yet it is one which we wriggle to get out of. We point out that the original sabbath is Saturday, not Sunday, though most Christians have kept the sabbath on the day on which Jesus rose from the dead for centuries. We get bored if we can't work or shop or go to places of entertainment because they are closed on Sundays or because public transport is restricted. Some Christians have seemed to want to outlaw all pleasures on Sunday – giving the sabbath a bad name and putting others off respecting Sunday as the Lord's Day in any way at all. Sunday has come to be the day on which some shops and other businesses do most of their trade, presumably because other people are off work and school and free to patronise them. Yet we need to get things into perspective. What really matters in our lives? Don't we need time to relax as well as to work? Shouldn't we have time for our families and friends? Certainly, we ought to have time for God. I'm sure the decline in Sunday observance has contributed to the decline in church attendance and the fact that a growing proportion of our population (especially the young) are ignorant of the Christian faith. In Heaven, there is eternal rest, eternal worship. Properly observed, the sabbath is a foretaste of heaven.

April 16th Easter 1

Genesis 2 vv 4-7

These verses tell the story of creation differently from chapter 1. Neither chapter is principally about science or history. The Bible is concerned with much more fundamental truth. God created and sustains everything that there is. He made us both of the dust of the ground and of His Spirit. We are His stewards of Creation, responsible for looking after it.

April 17th

Genesis 2 vv 8-17

Humanity is abundantly blessed. All our needs are met and more. But we have a responsible choice. Are we with God or are we against Him? **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.*

April 18th

Genesis 2 v18

And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make an help meet for him.

We are a gregarious species. We need one another. In prison, solitary confinement is a punishment. We need love; we need to be loved and to love one another. It is our nature to love. We are made in the image of Him Who is love. We need the support of other people. If we are to feel that our lives are worthwhile, we need to contribute to the well-being of other people. Relationships are important and it is vital that all our relationships are conducted in accordance with God's Will for us.

April 19th

Genesis 2 vv 19 & 20

There are wild animals, farm animals and pets. God has created this tremendous array and He has entrusted us with their care. We derive huge benefits from our stewardship of the natural creation and that blessing brings with it responsibility for the welfare of everything which God has made. When we fish or farm or hunt, we have to have regard for the need to avoid cruelty and to sustain the earth. We have a responsibility to look after our pets.

April 20th

Genesis 2 vv 21-24

But the animals are not enough. We need other human beings. We need colleagues and co-workers and friends and companions. More importantly still, we need families. Marriage is the foundation of family life. Husband and wife belong to one another. The two are one. Their love is unconditional. Marriage is the context in which children come into being and are nurtured in love. The ties of kin create a network of mutual love and care across the generations. We often don't live up to the ideal, but we should be very cautious about abandoning it.

April 21st

Genesis 2 v25

And they were both naked, the man and the woman, and were not ashamed. In what the Prayer Book calls *the time of man's innocency*, they didn't worry about clothes. It wasn't that it was wrong to come together as man and wife. All of creation was commanded to *be fruitful and multiply*. The man and the woman were to be one flesh. It is the misuse of this attraction which is sinful – not an issue before sin came into the world. After that, of course, temptation was to be avoided (in every area of life, not just sex). Marriage itself is a great blessing, of a sacramental nature, *an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church; which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence, and first miracle that he wrought, in Cana of Galilee; and is commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men.*

April 22nd

Genesis 3 vv 1-7

You see how the devil tempts. “Surely, you are free to do what you want.” “The forbidden fruit is extremely desirable.” “You don't really think there is any harm in taking a bite, do you?” “Did God really warn you that there would be consequences? Would He really punish you? Can He really punish you? Do you believe His Word?” So we persuade ourselves or we are persuaded by other people or by the devil himself that it is not unreasonable for us to do what we want to do, that what we're proposing won't really do any harm, that there won't be any unfortunate consequences, that maybe what we've always been taught is sinful isn't really bad after all, that God won't punish us even if it is.

April 23rd Easter 2 St George

Genesis 3 v8

They hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.

In the myth of St George, the saint rides out to slay the dragon – emblem of evil power, Satan – to protect the villagers from his depredations and to save the maiden's virtue & life. Think of Michael defeating the serpent & Christ on the cross conquering sin. The reverse of Adam & Eve who fall into temptation & then hide from God. Which do we think we should emulate?

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*

April 24th

Genesis 3 v9

Where art thou?

There have been times when my dog Tommy has run off in the woods and wouldn't come back, when I've thought, *Get los then, if that's what you want. Why should I worry about you?* But, of course, I do worry about him. All sorts of bad things could happen to him if he didn't come home. I should miss him terribly. God doesn't give up on Adam & Eve. The human race goes astray, runs away from God and hides from Him. But God doesn't give up on us. He seeks us out and, when He finds us, He brings us home rejoicing.

April 25th (St Mark)

Genesis 3 v10

I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

As well as loving concern, there was a tone of reproach in the LORD's words *Where art thou?* And indeed a warning of judgment and punishment. Adam quite rightly feels guilty and embarrassed. He might be embarrassed because he was naked. What ought to have concerned him far more than that was the fact that he had disobeyed God. It is too easy sometimes to make a big thing of the small thing and to ignore what really matters. Eg: *I'm really sorry, Lord, that I swore when I hit my thumb with a hammer when I was mending the church roof* when the real sin was that you didn't want to help out with repairing the church at all.

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

April 26th

Genesis 3 v11

Who told thee that wast naked?

God knows everything about us. He knows what is in our hearts. He gets Adam to acknowledge his responsibility for what he has done in eating the forbidden fruit. God knows what is inside us. It is no use our cloaking or dissembling. What we need to do is to admit our failures to God and to ourselves so that we can be forgiven and make a fresh start.

ALMIGHTY God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

April 27th

Genesis 3 v12

Adam blames Eve. Don't we all look for scapegoats? It's not my fault I'm not a rock star; my teachers never encouraged me. It's not my fault I'm a bully; my parents bullied me when I was a child. Sure I hit him; he hit me first. I know I shouldn't have taken your money, but you shouldn't have left it on the table. My company makes huge profits by overcharging naive customers, but there's no law against it. We have varying culpability for our failures to live up to our Christian calling, but, insofar as our failures are our own fault, the most profitable thing to do is to accept that we are wrong, repent of our sins, and do the best we can with the opportunities that we have – not bury ourselves in regret for past disappointments whosever fault they are.

April 28th

Genesis 3 v13

Eve blames the snake. *The dog ate my homework.* Adam and Eve both knew perfectly well that they were not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It may have looked nice and tasted good. They couldn't, they thought, see any harm in it. Satan persuaded them that it would be good for them. He managed to make the human race doubt God's Word to them and the consequences of disobeying Him. I think of this when we're now told that certain practices which have always been regarded as sinful are, after all, in fact harmless, actually beneficial, that they're not really forbidden, and even if they were, there won't be any consequences if we go ahead and do them anyway. I'm particularly thinking about the current controversies surrounding sex and gender, family life and Christian ministry. A lot of prayer is needed as we all seek the Truth in these matters and also seek to remain in love & charity with those with whom we disagree.

April 29th

Genesis 3 v14

Remember, the Bible isn't primarily a source of scientific information. Those squabbles between evolutionary scientists and fundamentalist Christians about how snakes come to be legless (some more legless than others, vipers having no legs at all, pythons having tiny leg bones buried in the muscles towards their tails) miss the point. The Bible is about God, His Justice & Mercy, His Judgment against sin and His plan for the redemption of Creation.

April 30th (Easter 3)

Genesis 3 v15

There are two ways of looking at this. On the one hand, there is the simple fact that many snakes are dangerous, that many people fear snakes, and, fearing them, are merciless in killing them. As responsible stewards of God's creation, I should say that we ought not to kill God's creatures willy-nilly, certainly not to hurt any creature if we can avoid it. Be cautious. Treat snakes with respect. Study them. Be awed by their amazing anatomy, physiology and life-styles. Keep them as pets, so long as you take care to look after them properly. But don't destroy them unless you really have to to protect people & domestic animals.

On the other hand, this verse is a prophecy of the victory of the woman's seed, Mary's child, over Satan personified as a great serpent.

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

For Judah's Lion
burst his chains,
and crushed the
serpent's head;
and brought with
him, from death's
domains,
the long-
imprisoned dead.

From hell's
devouring jaws the
prey
alone our leader
bore;
his ransomed
hosts pursue their
way
where he hath
gone before.

Triumphant in his
glory now
his sceptre ruleth
all:
earth, heav'n and
hell before him
bow
and at his

footstool fall.

While joyful thus
his praise we sing,
his mercy we
implore,
into his palace
bright to bring,
and keep us
evermore.

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

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

May 1st (St Philip & St James)

Genesis 3 v16

As I remarked earlier, there is considerable controversy both in the Church and in the world today about sex, gender, gender roles and marriage. I'd better tread carefully here. But, as I understand it, the early feminists demanded that women should have the same rights as men – to vote, to do any job they chose, to manage their own money and property, etc., - because there are really no essential differences between men and women. At the same time, in the nineteenth century, campaigners were trying to save women from having to work in the mines, mills and factories, both because they were the *weaker vessels* and should not be expected to do hard manual work in rough conditions and because they should not be at work but be caring for their children and making nice homes for their families. This tension persists in the world today. On the one hand, we insist that men and women have equal opportunities. On the other hand, we regard women as a protected group who need special considerations – maternity leave, time off for caring responsibilities, safe spaces, single sex facilities, protection from men and their toxic masculinity, special treatment at that time of the month & during the menopause. Complicating the picture is the whole trans phenomenon – the belief that someone with a male body may in fact be a woman and vice versa. Marriage traditionally derived most of its significance from the fact that it provided a safe space for the procreation of children. But most children are now born outside wedlock. Some married couples choose not to have children. Most limit the number of children they have. Casual sex is regarded by many as a normal part of growing up. And, if sex and reproduction don't necessarily go together, many people see no problem about same sex relationships and marriages. So where do we stand? Does Genesis 3¹⁶ express a fundamental truth about the relation of the sexes? Have we found a better way in the twenty first century? Or is there still a lot to think about? From the male point of view, a man who worked in warehouse expressed the paradox thus. “Our boss is proud of his equality policy but, when anything heavy needs lifting, he expects that it will be the men who do it.

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

May 2nd

Genesis 3 v16

Thy desire shall be unto thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

It makes me sad sometimes to encounter women who seem to be so desperate to have a man to love them that they will fall for and go with the most unsuitable men and even stay with them when they are treated very badly – infidelity, cruelty, coercive control. Sometimes, it is very difficult for a woman to break up with such a man because she has nowhere else to go, no other support for her children or because she is frightened that he will track here down. I am disgusted that there are men who take advantage of vulnerable women and exploit them for their own pleasure. Love is not the same thing as lust. Love is being more concerned about the person you love than you are about yourself. Love is neither self-centred nor selfish. If you don't respect your wife or husband, you can't really say that you love them. Some of you may think that S Paul is out of date on this issue, but I'm mailing my colours to the mast here. The marriage relationship mirrors (or ought to mirror) Christ's relationship with the Church. Ephesians 5

²⁰ Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; ²¹ Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. ²² Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. ²⁴ Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; ²⁶ That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. ²⁹ For no man ever yet hated his own

flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:
³⁰ For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. ³¹ For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. ³² This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. ³³ Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

May 3rd

Genesis 3 vv 17-19

God worked to create heaven and earth and then He rested on the Sabbath day. We are made in God's image. We are fulfilled in doing creative work – so long as we keep things in proportion by keeping the Sabbath rest. There is also toil – work we have to do in order to survive, work which sometimes we may find oppressive rather than fulfilling. Some people's lives are very toilsome, having to do work which doesn't really interest them except as a source of wages, heavy work, labour which may damage their health. In human history, millions of people have been slaves & some are today. This kind of work is a consequence of sin. The world ought to be so ordered that we all contribute to one another's welfare in jobs that are satisfying because they make the best use of our God-given talents and are not too onerous.

May 4th

Genesis 3 vv 20 & 21

There is a view that we were happier in the Stone Age than we are now. Food was acquired by hunting and gathering, much more gathering than hunting. Anyone can be a gatherer – male or female. So Stone Age society, it is suggested, was much more egalitarian. The diet was healthy. They got plenty of exercise and fresh air. They were mostly, therefore, healthy. Such a culture only supported a relatively small population. When we invented farming, we could feed far more people. The population grew. Farming was hard work and unrelenting in order to maintain the growing numbers of people. Men & women took different roles and were no longer equal. Sickness spread. I don't know how true this is, but it has been suggested that the story of our being cast out of Eden and having to fend for ourselves parallels this development in human history. True or not, either way, we see here

that God did not abandon us to our own devices even when we turned our backs on Him.

May 5th

Genesis 3 vv 22-24

There was to be no going back. The Fall was irrevocable – irrevocable for us human beings anyway. But God’s plan for our redemption is eternal. Jesus, the undefiled human image of God, the second Adam, would redeem us from our fall.

1 Praise to the Holiest
in the height,
and in the depth be
praise:
in all his words most
wonderful,
most sure in all his
ways.

which did in Adam
fail,
should strive afresh
against the foe,
should strive and
should prevail;

Man
for man should
undergo;

6 And in the garden
secretly,
and on the cross on
high,
should teach his
brethren, and inspire
to suffer and to die.

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

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

7 Praise to the Holiest
in the height,
and in the depth be
praise:
in all his words most
wonderful,
most sure in all his
ways.

3 O wisest love! that
flesh and blood,

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

May 6th

Genesis 4 vv 1-8

Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, and visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and shew mercy unto thousands in them that love me, and keep my commandments.

I enjoy taking the 1662 Communion service, including the Ten Commandments, which I think we are in danger of forgetting both in the Church and the world, But I’m uncomfortable with the warning that the sins of the fathers are visited on the children. But they are. Adam & Eve were bad parents. They rejected God’s Law for their lives. The consequence was that Cain murdered Abel. How many people turn out

bad because they are not properly brought up. Proverbs 22⁶: *Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*

May 7th (Easter4)

Genesis 4 vv 1-8

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.*

We take another look at this reading. Another theory about early human history is that this story reflects something of the division between pastoral farmers (who kept flocks and herds) and arable farmers who grew crops. Arable farmers enclose the land and bar access to roaming shepherds and cowboys seeking pasture and water for their animals. Sheep and cattle eat the growing crops and use up the water. There is something of a feeling that pastoralists, nomads who range widely over the countryside were somehow more noble than people who stayed in their village tilling the same soil from year to year. Certainly, the offering of a lamb or a kid would be worth more than the offering of grain, fruit or vegetables. Abel was more generous to God than Cain. But what really matters is the spirit in which it is given. Luke 21: *And he (Jesus) looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury.² And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites.³ And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all:⁴ For all these have of their abundance cast in unto the offerings of God: but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had.*

May 8th

Genesis 4 v9

Am I my brother's keeper?

Isn't the answer to this question always "yes". Aren't we all responsible for the welfare of our brothers, our neighbours? Aren't we all responsible for one another?

When I needed a neighbour
Were you there, were you
there?

When I needed a neighbour,
were you there?
And the creed and the colour
And the name won't matter

Were you there?

there

And the creed and the colour

Wherever you travel

And the name won't matter

I'll be there, I'll be there

I'll be there

Wherever you travel, I'll be

May 9th

Genesis 4 v10

The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.

Justice is something we understand. We demand justice – and so we should. We should be very careful always to behave justly. Victims of horrible crimes rightly demand justice and get very frustrated if the perpetrator cannot be identified or receives what looks like an excessively lenient punishment. Justice is the prerogative of those who have been wronged. God is just. And yet...

Abel's blood for vengeance
pleaded to the skies,
but the blood of Jesus
for our pardon cries.

May 10th

Genesis 4 vv 10-15

The first murderer is not sentenced to death. Later on in the Bible, capital punishment is prescribed for murder and for a number of other crimes or sins. But it was not so from the beginning. There may be no alternative to capital punishment for serious crimes in nomadic & other societies in which lengthy imprisonment in reasonably humane conditions is impossible. Murdering a fellow human being, made in the image of God, for whom Christ died, is a uniquely wicked crime. I do not believe, however, in capital punishment in civilised societies. It denies the sinner the opportunity to repent & reform. There is always the danger of making a mistake and executing the wrong man. In a sense, we are murderers ourselves when we kill a murderer. Pray for those who investigate crime, those who have to administer the law and prison officers, probation officers, etc. who have the care of convicted criminals and have responsibility where possible for their rehabilitation.

May 11th

Genesis 4 vv 16-26

So, if Adam's family were the only human beings in existence, where did Cain find a wife? As I've said, asking that question is missing the point. This is not a history lesson. It's about God's dealings with us and ours with Him & with one another. Having said that Professor Sam

Berry, who was both a scientist and a Christian, speculated that (as the fossil record indicates) there were other human families, perhaps not made in the image of God, not caught up in Adam's sin, who died out, perhaps in the Flood, before the history of our human family really took off.

May 12th

Genesis 5 vv 1-32

This is where many a new Christian's resolution to read the Bible right through from the beginning comes to grief, all those hard names, lives which seem impossibly long. In the last chapter, we saw how Cain's descendants founded various crafts: caring for animals, music, metal work. They all began at some time and no doubt the requisite skills were passed down in families and in guilds. It's worth remembering people in their daily work, honouring them, respecting them, keeping them in our prayers. It isn't only ministers of religion, doctors, nurses & teachers who serve God in their daily lives and sustain the life of our communities. It is missing the point to worry about the length of these people's lives. The number of years is a measure of their significance in human history rather than a calculation based on the calendar. *Enoch walked with God*. He did so in two ways. He lived his life in accordance with God's commandments. His life was so remarkable that God took him home without his dying in the normal way – like Elijah in the Bible and, as many Christians believe though it isn't in the Bible, Mary. Jesus, of course, did die in the normal way, but rose from the dead and His resurrection body ascended directly into heaven.

May 13th

Genesis 6 vv 1-4

These are mysterious verses. *Sons of God* probably means angelic beings, fallen angels, though some people think that they were aliens from outer space. What happened was unnatural and wrong, whatever it was, and, although the progeny were remarkable, they perished in the Flood.

May 14th (Easter 5)

Genesis 6 vv 5-8

Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

Creation is so messed up by human rebellion that God contemplates order returning to chaos, *without form and void, darkness covering the*

face of the deep. Our world is pretty chaotic & dark. But Noah found grace & became God's instrument of salvation. We seek God's grace both so that we ourselves may be saved and so that we may our part in His plan for the salvation of the world.

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 15th

Genesis 6 vv 9-13

That they might keep his statutes: and observe his laws (Psalm 105⁴⁴)
Psalm 105 is about the liberation of the Children of Israel from slavery in Egypt, God's faithfulness to them in the Wilderness despite their faithlessness, and His bringing them into the Promised Land. The principle is the same as when God saved the material world by means of Noah, who found grace, and when He saved the entire Creation through Christ. We are saved by grace through faith. Our sins are forgiven in Him. We are saved in order that we should do good works. We believe and we are baptised because God loves us. God loves us, sinners that we are, and our sins are forgiven as we repent. God does not love us because we are good. He just loves us as we are and sets us free from sin and death in order that we may be good people, that we may fulfil our vocation as His children, made in His image. *God's service is perfect freedom.*

May 16th

Genesis 6 vv 14-16

The part of a traditional church in which the people sit is called the nave. The word comes from the same root as *navy & naval*. Often the roof of the nave is designed to look like an upturned boat or ship. The church building is designed to reflect the truth that the Church, God's people, is our Ark of Salvation in which we are kept safe from sin and its consequences. Hence this prayer from the Baptism service, which is worth reflecting on with regard to what was done for us when we were baptised & what we hope & pray for when we bring others (adults or children) to Baptism.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who of thy great mercy didst save Noah and his family in the ark from perishing by water; and also didst safely lead the children of Israel thy people through the Red Sea, figuring thereby thy holy Baptism; and by the Baptism of thy well-beloved Son Jesus Christ, in the river Jordan, didst sanctify Water to

the mystical washing away of sin: We beseech thee, for thine infinite mercies, that thou wilt mercifully look upon *this Child*; wash him and sanctify *him* with the Holy Ghost; that *he*, being delivered from thy wrath, may be received into the ark of Christ's Church; and being steadfast in faith, joyful through hope, and rooted in charity, may so pass the waves of this troublesome world, that finally *he* may come to the land of everlasting life, there to reign with thee world without end; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

May 17th

Genesis 6 vv 17-22

Again, people worry about the practicalities. How could there be a boat big enough to take samples of every species of creature? Wouldn't they fight & kill & eat one another? River fish can't live in the sea and sea fish can't live in rivers. So wouldn't all the fish die if the river water & the sea water got all mixed up. My Biology teacher raised that question when I was at school. He was an atheist – though a very nice man. But, again, these questions are missing the point. God can do anything. So these stories could be literally true in every respect. But God doesn't generally interfere with the Laws of Science. They are, after all, God's Laws. So it might not have happened just like this. Anyway, these stories are not primarily about science or history. They are about justice & mercy. So it doesn't matter if historical events do not conform exactly to the biblical account. Many cultures do have legends of a tremendous flood, which may reflect a tremendous deluge such as is described in the Bible.

May 18th (Ascension Day)

Genesis 7 vv 1-6

Everybody knows that the animals went in two by two, but actually there were seven of each of the clean beasts – the ones that (after the Flood) are available to eat, also seven of each kind of bird. Forty days & forty nights. The future of the world is protected in the Ark. For forty days after His Resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples and commissioned us to share the Good News of the Gospel with the whole of the world. Before the Flood it was only Noah who found grace in the eyes of the LORD, only he and his family of the whole human race who were saved, together with the animal kingdom and the earth itself, I think we can say, of which we are stewards. Now, in Christ, salvation is offered to all. He is a light to lighten the gentiles and the glory of God's people Israel. The story of salvation focuses on one man, one

Man, but the consequence of that man's (Noah's) life, one Man's (Jesus') is salvation for all who find grace – Noah for life on earth, Christ for eternal life.

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 19th

Genesis 7 vv 7-10

Imagine waiting in the Ark as the rain falls and the waters rise. We have floods – though on nothing like this scale. Imagine families moving their goods upstairs, sandbagging their doors and waiting to discover whether the waters will reach their homes. Or those townships in Australia or America towards which forest fires are approaching. In several of the US States, people are ordered indoors when tornadoes are expected. Imagine waiting inside not knowing whether your home will be in the path of the storm. Older readers may remember sheltering during air raids, not knowing whether they or their loved ones would survive. You'd pray. You'd comfort one another. You'd get on and do what you could do. If the wait is a long one, you'd try to entertain yourselves & one another with songs or games. Earthquake victims in Syria and Turkey had no warning. Their homes collapsed around them while they slept and thousands were buried under the rubble. Living where we do, we're mostly spared these natural disasters and the immediate effects of war, but we can still feel for those who do suffer – pray for them and do our bit if it is only giving to relevant charities.

May 20th

Genesis 7 vv 11-16

We read this story in the light of other stories about the sea and water in the Bible. The Flood is a return to the *primaeval* chaos when *darkness was upon the face of the deep and the Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters*. It also signifies Baptism. Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan and the Holy Spirit came on Him in the form of a dove. God led the children Of Israel through the waters of the Red Sea, but their pursuing oppressors were drowned. God gave His people water out of the rock in the desert. Jesus stilled the storm when His disciples feared that the boat (or ark or church) they were in with Him would founder.

He walked on the waters. He commanded us to be baptized in His Name. In Baptism, we are dead to sin, we receive the Holy Spirit, we are made partakers of His risen life, *buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should also walk in newness of life.*

God moves in a mysterious way,

His wonders to perform;

He plants his footsteps in the sea,

And rides upon the storm.

May 21st (Sunday after Ascension)

Genesis 7 vv 17-24

There's something slightly weird about this date in the Church's calendar. The Roman Catholic Church (and some high Anglicans) regard the Ascension as so important that it is a sin not to celebrate it by celebrating Holy Communion in Church, but, recognising the difficulty of getting people into church on a Thursday, they have moved the commemoration of the Ascension to the Sunday following. In the Church of England's Common Worship, however, Ascension Day is kept on the right day (whether or not anybody comes) and this Sunday is simply one of the Sundays of Easter. The Book of Common Prayer, on the other hand, celebrates Ascension Day on the right day and treats today as well as part of the Ascension celebration. This might all seem arcane and only likely to be of interest to clergymen and religious obsessives, but I do have a reason for mentioning it. Why should it be hard to get people to come to church on a Thursday (or on any other day, come to that)? What could be more important? In today's reading, those who were not in the ark, those who had not found grace, were wiped out. God is the source of all life. Without Him we are dead. *In him we live, and move, and have our being.* What could be more important than worshipping God and how could we do so better than by meeting together, if only two or three, in His Name and performing the service He enjoined us to carry out until He comes again? At the beginning of the C20, the Vicar of Halling put on Ascension Day services at 5.30 am and even 4.30 am so that Christians could celebrate the Ascension together before they went to work. I wonder how many joined him? And how much more fulfilled their lives would have been if they had! We shall celebrate Ascension Day at Halling at 9.30 am on the Thursday. There are currently no plans for a service at Cuxton,

though I will provide if asked. We'll also celebrate the Ascension today.

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 22nd

Genesis 8 vv 1-5

God is in control. Whatever happens, God is in control. He remembers Noah and his family in the ark. He never forgets any of us, wherever we may be, whatever we may be doing. We can always trust Him. we ought always to pray.

Psalm 139: **LORD**, thou hast searched me out and known me : thou knowest my down-sitting and mine up-rising, thou understandest my thoughts long before. Thou art about my path, and about my bed : and spiest out all my ways. For lo, there is not a word in my tongue : but thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether. Thou hast fashioned me behind and before : and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me : I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go then from thy Spirit : or whither shall I go then from thy presence? If I climb up into heaven, thou art there : if I go down to hell, thou art there also. 8. If I take the wings of the morning : and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there also shall thy hand lead me : and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Peradventure the darkness shall cover me : then shall my night be turned to day. Yea, the darkness is no darkness with thee, but the night is as clear as the day : the darkness and light to thee are both alike. For my reins are thine : thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks unto thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made : marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well. My bones are not hid from thee : though I be made secretly, and fashioned beneath in the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect : and in thy book were all my members written; 16. Which day by day were fashioned : when as yet there was

none of them. 17. How dear are thy counsels unto me, O God : O how great is the sum of them! If I tell them, they are more in number than the sand : when I wake up I am present with thee. Wilt thou not slay the wicked, O God : depart from me, ye blood-thirsty men. For they speak unrighteously against thee : and thine enemies take thy Name in vain. Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee : and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? Yea, I hate them right sore : even as though they were mine enemies. Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart : prove me, and examine my thoughts. Look well if there be any way of wickedness in me : and lead me in the way everlasting.

May 23rd

Genesis 8 vv 6-12

I remember our junior school teacher explaining that the raven was a strong bird which could soar above the waters until they sufficiently abated for it to rest, but the dove was a gentler creature which had to return to the ark. The dove is a symbol of peace, as is the olive branch. The dove signifies the Holy Spirit. Isaiah prophesies of Jesus: *And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord;* At Confirmation services we pray for that gift of the same Spirit on all the candidates. We are called to be like Him. Baptized in His Name, we receive His Spirit, the Spirit signified by the descent of the dove.

May 24th

Genesis 8 vv 13-22

Sometimes, in the depths of Winter, it's hard to believe that Spring will ever come. Conversely, on hot days in the Summer, when it's light from 5.00 am – 10.00 pm, the long cold nights of December & January seem unimaginable. But the Seasons come round. God keeps His promises. The Laws of Science, which are God's Laws, continue to operate reliably and we are confident that they will always do so throughout time and space, all over the material universe. If they did not, we couldn't do Science. If laws such as gravity, motion, pressure, aerodynamics, etc., were unreliable, it would be very difficult for us to do anything at all. What if apples didn't sometimes fall from the tree? What if the forces keeping aeroplanes in the sky occasionally faltered?

What if water no longer dependably boiled at what we've come to know as boiling point, even at normal atmospheric pressures?

1 Great is thy faithfulness, O
God my Father;
there is no shadow of turning
with thee;
thou changest not, thy
compassions, they fail not;
as thou hast been thou forever
wilt be.

2 Summer and winter and
springtime and harvest,
sun, moon, and stars in their
courses above
join with all nature in manifold
witness
to thy great faithfulness,
mercy, and love. [Refrain]

Refrain:

Great is thy faithfulness!
Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new
mercies I see:
all I have needed thy hand hath
provided--
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord,
unto me!

3 Pardon for sin and a peace
that endureth,
thine own dear presence to
cheer and to guide,
strength for today and bright
hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten
thousand beside! [Refrain]

May 25th

Genesis 9 vv 1-7

A few weeks ago, we had an illustration of the fact that reading bible passages over and again, even familiar ones such as this, we may sometimes receive new insights as God speaks to us through His Word. Having heard this passage read in church, one person present noticed for the first time the implication that we only became meat eaters after the Flood. Before that we were vegetarians. God has given us meat to eat. It takes a good deal of care to eat healthily on a purely vegetarian or vegan diet because some essential nutrients are sparse in plant foods (though most of us probably eat more meat than is good for us, for the animals or for the earth). However, Nature wouldn't, in an ideal world, the Kingdom of God, be *red in tooth and claw*.

Isaiah 9⁶ The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. ⁷ And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸ And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. ⁹ They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

May 26th

Genesis 9 vv 8-13

The rainbow is incredibly beautiful. Artists have striven to depict its beauty. Scientifically, the rainbow may be described simply as the way the human eye receives and the human brain processes the different wavelengths into which white light is split by passing through the interface between air and water. Two different descriptions – the artist’s and the scientist’s. Both are true. Neither tells the whole story of the rainbow. Romantics would ignore the Science, which is just foolish. So many of the blessings of modern life are given to us through the medium of Science. But the person who insists that the rainbow is nothing but what Science can describe in numbers is also missing an important point. The rainbow is a thing of beauty. The poet John Keats put it like this.

Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold
philosophy?
There was an awful rainbow
once in heaven:
We know her woof, her texture;
she is given
In the dull catalogue of
common things.
Philosophy will clip an Angel's

wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule
and line,
Empty the haunted air, and
gnomed mine—
Unweave a rainbow, as it
erewhile made
The tender-person'd Lamia melt
into a shade

(As far as I can make out, Lamia was a beautiful woman in Greek mythology whose charms were ruined by a jealous goddess. In the same way, Keats says, Scientism deprives the rainbow of its beauty.)

May 27th

Genesis 9 vv 14-17

The Laws of Science guarantee the seasons, but those laws are ineluctable. By the same laws, we may make nuclear weapons capable of destroying our world. If we continue to generate greenhouse gases in huge quantities, climate change, by these same scientific laws, will disrupt the normal progression of the seasons. Had we failed to cease damaging the ozone layer with chemicals such as hydroflouorocarbons, the sun’s rays, unfiltered by ozone in the upper atmosphere, would have caused cancer and mutation and we’re not quite out of that wood yet. There is a belief that the world we end, not in another Flood because God has promised it won’t, but in fire: II Peter 3¹⁰: *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and*

the works that are therein shall be burned up. Does this mean nuclear war, climate change or some other fiery disaster brought about by human sin & folly? Or will it be a unique divine intervention to end this world of time & space in preparation for the promised *new heavens and a new earth wherein righteousness dwells*? We should be prudent, but not scared. God is looking after us. Luke 21²⁸: *And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.* God is in charge. There is judgment and there is mercy. *I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that thou and thy seed may live* (Deuteronomy 30¹⁹).

May 28th (Whit Sunday)

Genesis 9 vv 18-21

On the Day of Pentecost, when the apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit, began preaching in the streets of Jerusalem, scoffers thought that they were drunk. Noah did get disgracefully drunk. The two stories coming together reminded me of what St Paul says in Ephesians 5¹⁸: *And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.* There is nothing wrong with alcohol in moderation. It is the gift of God. Psalm 104¹³⁻¹⁵: *He watereth the hills from above: the earth is filled with the fruit of his works. He bringeth forth grass for the cattle: and green herb for the service of men; That he may bring food out of the earth, and wine that maketh glad the heart of man: and oil to make him a cheerful countenance, and bread to strengthen men's hearts.* Psalm 104 is one of the psalms appointed for Whit Sunday – God's blessings poured out on the earth. The problem is that our hearts are restless until they find their rest in God. People try to fill the void in their lives with wine and other good things, which can never satisfy and, in excess, do us harm. What they need, what we all need, is to be the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. He alone can satisfy.

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.*

May 29th

Genesis 9 vv 22-29

This passage has been shamefully misused by white supremacists. They argue that African people are descended from Ham and that therefore the curse on Ham resulting from his disrespect for his father justifies the rest of us – descendants of Shem & Japheth – in enslaving Africans. The passage says nothing of the sort. Canaanites are not Africans. The next chapter tells us that Ham was also the father of the Egyptians, & possibly the Libyans & Ethiopians but, even so, what their ancestor did would not entitle other people to enslave them. The Kingdom of Heaven includes people *of all nations, and kindreds, and people and tongues* (Revelation 7⁹). It should be unthinkable to enslave our fellow human beings.

May 30th

Genesis 10 vv 1-32

You may or may not feel you can read this chapter. It tells us about how certain families / tribes / nations settled in particular territories and, in the case of Nimrod, what they were famous for. Around the time of the EU referendum, it was observed that there are *somewhere people* and *anywhere people*. *Somewhere people* are fiercely loyal to the places where they live, their families and their communities. They are unlikely to move far from home and they may be suspicious of strangers and resent having change forced on them. *Anywhere people* are happy to live anywhere in the world in pursuit of employment, exploration, adventure, even pleasure. They may be more open to change and more willing to form friendships with people who are unlike them in respect of culture or ethnicity. On the other hand, *anywhere people* may seem to be rootless and lacking in loyalty. Of course, there are not two distinct groups. It's a spectrum. Some of us are more *somewhere people* and some of us are more *anywhere people*, but there are few at either extreme. Most of us come somewhere on the spectrum between the two. And all kinds of people are needed. The world needs the stability which *somewhere people* provide and the movement and innovation which *anywhere people* have to offer. Jesus carried out His ministry just in the Holy Land. Paul carried out the same ministry travelling all around the Mediterranean. What we must not do is despise the other lot – the people who don't see the world the way we do. The tragedy of the EU referendum was that too many

people on both sides were unable even to respect the “others” who disagreed with them.

May 31st

Genesis 11 vv 1-9

We were made in the image of God. Human beings have great power. We have accomplished marvels: agriculture, industry, great construction projects, irrigation, sanitation, ships, navigation, tunnels, bridges, roads and railways, engines, medical advances, terrible weapons, travel in outer space, postal services, the internet, etc.. We have all this power, but what do we do with it?

Job 28: But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding?

And unto man he said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.

June 1st

Genesis 11 (10 or 27) – 30

You may or may not read the names of the descendants of Shem down as far as Terah. It's because they are descended from Shem that Jews are known as Semites. On that basis, Arabs too are Semites, though this is not always appreciated and Muslim Arabs are sometimes accused of anti-Semitism. This should not be so. Jews and Arabs both claim descent from Terah's son Abraham, respectively through Abraham's sons Isaac and Ishmael. I remember sitting talking to an Arab in the Kingdom of Jordan looking across the Dead Sea to the lights in the Land of Israel and he saying, “Those are our brothers over there.” And so they are and it is tragic when they are at war with one another. St Paul says of God (Acts 17²⁶) :*And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth.* We are all the family of God, brothers and sisters made in His image. It is tragic that we do not love one another as brothers.

June 2nd

Genesis 11 vv 31&32

There were very few cities anywhere in the world at that time. Terah decided to leave civilisation and live in the presumably rougher conditions of Haran. God called the family to get out of the city because it was given over to idolatry. Are cities a good thing? People living together in cities achieve much more in technological advance

and in the arts than people do living in small communities or on their own. There is a differentiation of labour such that not everybody has to provide his own food and housing with the result that a proportion of the population may be builders or artists or doctors or professional soldiers. Cities tend to be more prosperous than villages (unless villages are populated by rich people retiring from jobs in the city or commuters). On the other hand, cities don't have the community spirit of small towns and villages. There are higher crime rates. There is a sense that there is a greater purity of religion in the countryside where you live in a close community and witness the works of God in nature at first hand. Cities tend to be dirty places with high volumes of litter. Where fresh food and water are unavailable and drainage is inefficient, cities harbour disease. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, London relied on incomers from the countryside to maintain its population because the death rate from disease exceeded the birth rate.

June 3rd

Genesis 12 v1

God tells Abram to move again, to move on from Haran to the Land of Canaan. Continuing from yesterday's thoughts about cities, in which I perhaps came down on the side of the countryside, there is another side to the story. There were pagan shrines in the countryside of ancient Israel (as in many other places). Centuries after Abraham, it would be the Temple in Jerusalem to which people ought to come to worship – the priests there charged with maintaining the purity of the worship. *God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.* The Temple would become unnecessary when the one true High Priests offered Himself as the one perfect Sacrifice *without the city wall* and the Holy Spirit was poured out into the heart of believers. Hebrews talks about Abraham's pilgrimage as looking *for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God* – the Holy City, New Jerusalem, our heavenly home.

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

June 4th (Trinity Sunday)

Genesis 12 vv 2&3

In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

After the flesh, Jesus is of the seed of Abraham. He is the light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of God's people Israel. Abraham believed God. He was obedient to God. He played his part in God's plan for the redemption of His Creation, just as did the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Magnificat, Mary's song, ends with the words: *He remembering his mercy hath holpen (helped) his servant Israel: as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever.* (I get cross with modern translations of the Magnificat which make that a plural.) Jesus is the seed of Abraham, singular, in Whom the rest of us are Abraham's descendants or seeds. In Jesus we see Who God is. In Christ we are made like Him.

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 5th

Genesis 12 vv 4&5

I was at a meeting once at which the Christian speaker suggested that God's literal promise to Abraham about his descendants after the flesh possessing the Promised Land for ever still stands. I commented that this might be bad news for the Palestinians. Christians have more generally re-interpreted this promise to mean that everybody who shares Abraham's faith, Jew or Gentile, has an inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven. *Abraham looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God* (Hebrews 11¹⁰). However, many Christians have also regarded the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel from the end of the nineteenth century to the present day and the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 as a fulfilment of these promises in Genesis. Some have even seen the return of the Jews to Jerusalem as a sign that the end of all things is at hand and that we should prepare for the Day of Judgment. I don't know. I do know, however, two things. One is that we should always live as ready for the Day of Judgment. The other is that there must be a path to peace so that Jews and Arabs can both enjoy the blessings of justice, freedom from want and security.

June 6th

Genesis 12 vv 6-9

Bethel means House of God. Later, Jerusalem would be the only legitimate place for worship. In Christ, as we have seen, we don't need a building to worship in. We Christians are living stones and constitute together the Temple of the Holy Spirit, Jesus Himself being the chief cornerstone.

June 7th

Genesis 12 vv 10-20

Something like this happens twice to Abram and once to his son Isaac. Maybe, in those times, it was a risk you ran that if you took refuge with powerful people, they might kill you & take your wife. One commentator I consulted said that Abraham lacked faith in leaving the Promised Land to go into Egypt. Another said that going to Egypt was the sensible thing to do but that he ought not to have lied to Pharaoh, but to have put his trust in God to keep him & his family safe. Matthew Henry says, *The scripture is impartial in relating the misdeeds of the most celebrated saints, which are recorded not for our imitation, but our admonition, that he who thinks he stands, may take heed lest he fall.*

June 8th

Genesis 13 vv 1-13

The Holy Land is very dry relative to countries like ours. Flocks and herds would very soon drink wells dry and eat up all the pasture. So nomadic farmers would always be moving on to look for fresh pasture. Lot's household and Abram's household were too much. Their servants squabbled over the available food & water. So Abram proposed that they split up & allowed Lot first choice of destination. Lot chose the land around Sodom & Gomorrah, despite their dreadful reputation, with consequences which will appear in chapter 18. Can you think of examples of cases where you or someone else might be tempted by the promise of prosperity to dwell too close to sin and temptation?

June 9th

Genesis 13 vv 14-18

Abram made the right choice. Better to live a virtuous life, if less prosperous and even insecure, than to achieve security and wealth by compromising with wrong-doing. Psalm 84: 10. *For one day in thy courts : is better than a thousand.* 11. *I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God : than to dwell in the tents of ungodliness.* 12. *For the Lord God is a light and defence : the Lord will give grace and worship, and no good thing shall he withhold from them*

that live a godly life. 13. O Lord God of hosts : blessed is the man that putteth his trust in thee. God, therefore, repeats his promise to Abram.

June 10th

Genesis 14 vv 1-16

There were wars between the confederations of city states. Sodom & Gomorrah were on the losing side and Lot was captured. When Abram got to hear about this, he intervened and rescued Lot and retrieved the booty taken from them. So, having recklessly made the wrong choice in his life, Lot depended on Abram, who had made the right choice, to rescue him. We all make wrong choices sometimes. Sometimes we're even arrogant enough to believe that the people who advise against doing these are stupid as well as wrong. This can happen in families. "I wouldn't buy that decrepit old motorbike, son." "I wouldn't invest in those Argentine railway shares, Mum." "Do you really think you should marry a man who treats you with contempt?" We might make all these mistakes, dismiss our father's, daughter's, brother's concerns and then look to them to sort out the mess. They may or may not be able to help us, but we can always turn to our heavenly Father for help, even when our troubles are our own fault, even if we have disregarded His Word.

June 11th Trinity 1 (St Barnabas)

Genesis 14 vv 17-24

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.*

Today's collect follows on rather well from yesterday's meditation.

The King of Sodom wants to reward Abram, but Abram will take nothing from him except expenses. Abram has been richly blessed by God and he is content with what God has given him. He does not want to be beholden to anyone else, least of all the king of a notoriously sinful city.

Melchizedek is very interesting. He is King and High Priest of Jerusalem, which would not be an Israelite city until the time of David, many centuries in the future. When Jerusalem was an Israelite city with the Temple of the LORD at its heart, the king and the high priest could never be the same man. The king was a descendant of David of the

tribe of Judah. The high priest was a descendant of Moses' brother Aaron of the tribe of Levi. In the New Testament, the Epistle to the Hebrews has a lot to say about Melchizedek as a *type* of Christ. His name means King of Righteousness. He is King of Jerusalem, which means King of Peace. We know nothing about Melchizedek's ancestry, birth or death. In fact, his was probably a hereditary role with Melchizedeks reigning in Jerusalem as kings and priests for many generations. In Matthew 10⁴² Jesus asked the Pharisees, *Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David.* ⁴³ *He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying,* ⁴⁴ *The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?* ⁴⁵ *If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? In John 6⁴², the Jews ask, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven? In Luke 4²², it says, And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son? People don't recognise Who Jesus is or where He truly comes from. Neither do they understand that He lives for ever. Abram gives tithes to Melchizedek, indicating that his priesthood (Christ's priesthood) takes precedence over that of Aaron and his Levite descendants because Levi was Abram's yet unborn great grandson. To me, it is significant that the high priest who prefigures Christ gives Abram bread and wine as Jesus gives us His Body & Blood.*

June 12th

Genesis 15 vv 1-6

Abram is told that the number of his descendants (all those who will share his faith and thereby be inheritors of the Kingdom of God) will be comparable both to the number of grains on the sea shore and the number of stars in the sky. I'm sure I read somewhere that there are more stars in the universe than there are grains of sand in our world, but I don't know who counted either of them!

1 Hark! the sound of holy voices,
chanting at the crystal sea:
Alleluia, alleluia,
alleluia, Lord, to thee:
multitude, which none can number,
like the stars in glory stands,
clothed in white apparel,

holding
palms of vict'ry in their hands.

2 Patriarch and holy prophet,
who prepared the way of Christ,
king, apostle, saint, confessor,
martyr and evangelist,
saintly maiden, godly matron,
widows who have watched in

prayer,
joined in holy concert, singing
to the Lord of all, are there.

3 They have come from
tribulation,
and have washed their robes in
blood,
washed them in the blood of
Jesus;
tried they were, and firm they
stood;
gladly, Lord, with thee they
suffered;
gladly, Lord, with thee they
died,
and by death to life immortal
they were born and glorified.

4 Now they reign in heav'nly
glory,
now they walk in golden light,
now they drink, as from a river,
holy bliss and infinite;
love and peace they taste for
ever,
and all truth and knowledge
see
in the beatific vision
of the blessed Trinity.

5 God of God, the one-begotten,
Light of Light, Emmanuel,
in whose body joined together
all the saints for ever dwell;
pour upon us of thy fullness,
that we may for evermore
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
truly worship and adore.

Isn't it great to think of ourselves and our loved ones in that happy
throng. One of them is Barnabas whose day was yesterday.

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 13th

Genesis 15 vv 7-21

I'm not quite sure why, but this passage appeals to my imagination.
How often do prayers begin, *Almighty God, our heavenly Father?* God
is God – infinitely greater than anything we can conceive and also our
Father – *Abba*. He is awesome, awful, fearful. He is our terrible Judge.
His holiness is unapproachable. *Our God is a consuming fire. It is a
fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* Yet, He is our
Father, our Shepherd, our Teacher, our Friends, Who stretches out His
arms to embrace us. We seek to worship Him in the beauty of holiness
– sometimes speaking to Him in our hearts as we would speak with our
lips to a friend, sometimes in awesome wonder as we worship at the
Throne of Grace. And so it is in the Bible. Sometimes God speaks to
people as He did to Abram yesterday as a man speaks to his friend.
Sometimes, as He does in today's reading, as the awe-inspiring Creator.

Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
in you do we trust, nor find you to fail.
Your mercies, how tender, how firm to the end,
our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend!

I mentioned in a sermon lately that it might seem strange that confession comes first *when we assemble and meet together to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands, to set forth his most worthy praise, to hear his most holy Word, and to ask those things which are requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul.* Christian sometimes seem to be obsessed with sin. We could switch the order and start from any of the other four, but we'd get the same result – the need to repent of our sins and turn to God in penitence in faith. When we *render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands,* we have to acknowledge how too often we have misused them. When we *set forth his most worthy praise,* we are only too aware that we are unworthy to come into His Presence. If we *hear his most holy Word,* we're reminded time and again of God's faithfulness and our faithlessness and how the only remedy is to return to Him. It is right that we *ask those things which are requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul.* Asking is probably not the best way to open our conversation with God, though it very often is. But when we think of what we need, we ought to be aware of how much our lives depend on living by God's Holy Laws & ask forgiveness for our failure to do so.

June 14th

Genesis 16 vv 1-3

It was hard on Abram and Sarai that they had had no children. Most people want children and it can be bitterly disappointing for couples if no children come along. There are marvels of modern medicine which can often help, but not always. Sometimes the procedures involved are unpleasant and very expensive. It can be a considerable strain on people if they go through these procedures without any satisfactory outcome. It is a matter for sensitivity and prayer that some couples may be unable to have much wanted children or if pregnancy ends in miscarriage.

June 15th

Genesis 16 vv 4-6

One remedy for childlessness in the modern world is surrogacy in which a woman voluntarily (or sometimes for money in other jurisdictions than ours or even under duress) carries another woman's child after her womb has been implanted with a fertilised ovum. Sometimes this works well. There may, however, be problems if the surrogate mother finds it difficult to give up the child or if, as occasionally happens, the couple who sought the help of a surrogate decide they don't want the resulting child – if perhaps it is disabled. These issues are very delicate and strong emotions are involved. In a way, Abram, Sarai & Hagar were in a kind of surrogacy arrangement. Hagar easily became a mother to Abram's child, though Sarai had so far been unable to do so. Was Hagar given a choice about this? Was she honoured to be chosen to be the mother of her master's child or was she constrained against her will? Or would it just not have occurred to her to question her destiny?

June 16th

Genesis 16 vv 7-16

The outcome doesn't appear to have been a happy one for Hagar, Sarai or Abram. Hagar runs away and the angel tells her to go back to Abram's household. How else would she provide for herself and the child? The boy won't enjoy the status which will be Isaac's, but he will be an important man. Abram and Sarai seem to have lost their confidence that God would honour His promise to them and therefore they acted rashly – with awkward consequences for all concerned. We really do have to trust in God and abide His time.

June 17th

Genesis 17 vv 1-8

An English university recently warned its staff and students against using the phrase *Christian name*. Supposedly, the phrase is divisive and potentially discriminatory against non-Christians. I've been fighting a rear guard action for decades, insisting that Roger & Ivan are my Christian names and refusing to refer to them as my forenames.

From the Catechism:

Question: What is your Name?

Answer. N. or M.

Question. Who gave you this Name?

Answer. My Godfathers and Godmothers in my Baptism; wherein I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.

Question. What did your Godfathers and Godmothers then for you?

Answer. They did promise and vow three things in my name. First, that I should renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanity of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh. Secondly, that I should believe all the Articles of the Christian Faith. And thirdly, that I should keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of my life.

Question. Dost thou not think that thou art bound to believe, and to do, as they have promised for thee?

Answer. Yes verily: and by God's help so I will. And I heartily thank our heavenly Father, that he hath called me to this state of salvation, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. And I pray unto God to give me his grace, that I may continue in the same unto my life's end.

It matters to me very much that I have Christian names. Names do matter. They signify who we are. When people convert to Christianity, they may well take a new name at their Baptism. Expunging the phrase *Christian name* from official forms was a recognition that we are no longer a Christian country. It is more than that, however, it is a means of promoting secularisation. Religion is increasingly excluded from the public sphere and “modern British values” (values which we ourselves have made up) replace God’s Laws which He has revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Hence the campaign against the candidacy of the Christian Kate Forbes for the position of leaders of the Scottish National Party. In today’s reading Abram is given a new name as his vocation to be the father of many nations enters a new phase. Names matter. They are a sign of our identity. I am not ashamed to be a Christian. My faith means more to me than my country or than anything else really.

June 18th (Trinity 2)

Genesis 17 vv 9-14

Having accepted that we are no longer a Christian country, we ceased to keep Sunday special and Religious Education in our schools stopped being about teaching children what we believe (and what they should believe) and became a matter of teaching students about faith from the outside, what other people believe. So two or three generations have grown up with very little experience of Church, small knowledge of

bible stories, hymns and prayers, and very little understanding of what it is to be a Christian. Is it any wonder that a majority of young people told the Census that they have no religious belief? This ignorance of the God Whom to know is to have eternal life explains a great deal about our society. Abraham, on the other hand, was told to include his children in the covenant from the very beginning. They were to undergo initiation at eight days. Later on in the Bible, we shall see how each generation is to teach its children about the great things that God has done and about His commandments which we must obey if the world is to function correctly. How have we lost the knack of including our children in the people of God? Is there a way back? There must be. There is always hope.

O LORD, who never failest to help and govern them whom 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.*

June 19th

Genesis 17 vv 15-27

Sarai too gets a new name. She is about to fulfil her vocation as the mother of the child of the Promise. All the men in the household underwent the rite of initiation into the People of God. The covenant was with everybody – including the slaves. It's uncomfortable that Abraham had slaves, but the institution of slavery has been very common in the course of human history. Slaves might be prisoners of war, the children of slaves, debtors whose only recourse was to sell themselves into slavery. Domestic slaves were part of the household. It would always have been recognised that slaves ought to be treated decently and fairly. It wasn't, however, appreciated until the fourth century AD in the teaching of St Gregory of Nyssa that slavery was wrong in principle, however well you treated your slaves. Actually, Gregory reminds us, Christ has given an idea of the value of human souls: "He who knew the nature of mankind rightly said that the whole world was not worth giving in exchange for a human soul,"

June 20th

Genesis 18 vv 1-8

When travel was hard and dangerous, hospitality to strangers was a recognised virtue. These strangers turn out to be angels. This is the basis on which the Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts Christians *Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained*

angels unawares. I often think of the enforced leisurely pace of this encounter. The travellers are invited to dinner, but they have to wait for a calf to be selected, slaughtered, dressed and cooked. Sarah didn't take something out of the freezer and put it in the microwave! But they took the time. Abraham paused in whatever he was doing. He took time to spend with his unexpected guests. I very often rush from one thing to another, following a self-imposed schedule, and sometimes, I'm ashamed to admit, I get hot under the collar if my timetable is disrupted by unexpected human encounters. And then I have to ask myself what really matters? Engaging with another human being or completing these notes or finishing the mowing or taking Tommy out or watching that film I'm looking forward to or getting to that meeting or service on time? What should be our priorities in our stewardship of time. Other people must be close to the top of the list when we are allocating the ways in which we spend our time.

June 21st

Genesis 18 vv 9-15

The name Isaac means *laughter*, and there are different kinds of laughter. I enjoy a joke – as many people do. Sometimes I laugh for sheer joy. Quite often I laugh for a good reason – such as something working out well or someone being particularly kind to me or doing something I particularly enjoy. Jesus came to bring us joy in abundance. Joy is very closely connected with ideas such as love and peace. This is eternal life – experienced in part here on earth and in all its fulness in heaven in due course. Laughter can, of course, be cruel, mocking, scornful or disbelieving as it is here. So human beings pervert God's good gifts. Sarah disbelieves and then she makes out that she didn't laugh at God's promise.

Philippians 4. 4: **REJOICE** in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

June 22nd

Genesis 18 vv 16-22

So, whom did Abraham entertain in the plains of Mamre? The reference is to men and angels. The text can be read as to imply that God Himself visited Abraham and spoke to him. Angels are messengers of God's

Word. Men – prophets – may be God’s messengers. Many Christian thinkers have considered that the fact that there were three persons is indicative of the doctrine that God is three persons in one God.

1 Three in One, and One in Three,
Ruler of the earth and sea,
Hear us while we lift to Thee
Holy chant and psalm.

3 Light of lights! when falls the even,
Let it close on sin forgiven;
Fold us in the peace of heaven;
Shed a holy calm.

2 Light of lights! with morning-shine,
Lift on us Thy light divine;
And let charity benign
Breathe on us her balm.

4 Three in One, and One in Three,
Dimly here we worship Thee;
With the saints hereafter we
Hope to bear the palm.

Encountering God. He loves us and, by His grace, we respond in love for Him. We seek His Truth, His Word: in the Bible, in our Christian fellowship one with another, in the teaching of the Church, in our personal prayers, and in the wider world – in other people, in the wonders of Creation in all the subjects we study, in our personal experience of life. God is everywhere and speaks to us always in one way or one another – we in Him and He in us. It is a matter of our being open to His continual love.

June 23rd

Genesis 18 vv23-33

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah must have been horrendous. What had they done to deserve such a terrible fate? The Bible isn’t explicit on the point and it would be a mistake to assume that their sin was wholly what it is commonly believed to be. Romans 1 does, however, imply that that kind of sin would be characteristic of a civilisation which had rejected God. *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?* Of course He will. The ensuing verses indicate that there were no righteous people in Sodom & Gomorrah. They also indicate that we can debate with God. We can and should honestly tell Him what we think and we can humbly and sincerely question Him.

June 24th (Nativity of St John the Baptist)

Genesis 19 vv 1-11

ALMIGHTY God, by whose providence thy servant John Baptist was wonderfully born, and sent to prepare the way of thy Son our Saviour, by preaching of repentance; Make us so to follow his doctrine

and holy life, that we may truly repent according to his preaching; and after his example constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the truth's sake; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

In today's reading, there are plenty of reasons for preaching repentance, for speaking the truth & for rebuking vice. What about patiently suffering for the truth's sake? Lot's effort to protect his guests was pretty disgraceful in itself. The people of Sodom obviously don't trust strangers. They demand that Lot's visitors should be brought out to them and they intend to abuse them. (Whatever we may think about consensual same sex relationships or same sex marriage, what is going on here is entirely different; it is attempted rape. So these verses on their own are not sufficient for us to make up our minds concerning certain issues currently perplexing the Church and society at large. We need to consider all the relevant texts, opinions and experiences and read them in the Light of Christ.) Neither do they have much respect for Lot, the stranger living among them – a category of person to be treated with respect according to the Law & the Prophets.

June 25th (Trinity 3)

Genesis 19 vv 12-16

The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? The Sadducees had demanded of Jesus By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority. Jesus said He would tell them if they could answer Him one question: The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? If they acknowledged that John was commissioned by God they would lay themselves open to the question why didn't they believe him & act on his message? Then they thought, But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. So, being politicians they decline to commit themselves to either answer and evade the question.

So let me ask you one question. Why is that human beings consistently refuse to hear and obey the messengers of God, whether it's Lot and his family hanging back from leaving Sodom while there was still time, the religious authorities refusing to accept that John the Baptist and even

Jesus were sent from God, or humanity in general going its own way – the way which leads to perdition – when the Word of God is so freely available – on sale in bookshops, preached from pulpits, on TV & radio, online, taught in good schools. Why is the Word ignored, rejected, even persecuted? It's back to original sin, that twist in human nature which goes back to Adam. Only God can save us from our own folly & wickedness.

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

June 26th

Genesis 19 vv 17-29

Sodom and Gomorrah were two of five Cities of the Plain, all of which presumably were similar in their way of life. Lot had been more comfortable in urban Sodom than living as a nomad in the open countryside. He didn't want to give up city life even though the cities he lived in were notoriously wicked. When we turn to Christ, do we totally turn to Him? Are we truly buried with Him in Baptism? Or is there a lingering desire to enjoy the pleasures, the comforts and security of the world even though to do so means compromising our Christian principals and continuing to some extent in sin? Lot's words are quite funny really, *Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live.* Either we're Christians or we aren't. There's no place for a half-hearted discipleship, ready to compromise with sin, the world and the devil. Lot's wife was even more reluctant to let go of her past life of sin & we see what happened to her. What happens to Lot in the next story is hardly edifying either.

1 Christian, dost thou see them
On the holy ground,
How the troops of Midian prowl
& prowl around?
Christian, up and smite them,
Counting gain but loss,
Smite them by the merit~
By the holy cross.

How they work within,
Striving, tempting, luring,
Goading into sin?
Christian, never tremble;
Never be downcast;
Smite them by the virtue~
Of the Lenten fast.

2 Christian, dost thou feel
them,

3 Christian, dost thou hear
them,
How they speak thee fair?,

"Always fast and vigil?
Always watch and prayer?"
Christian, answer boldly,
"While I breathe I pray."
Peace shall follow battle,
Night shall end in day.

4 "Well I know thy trouble,
O my servant true:
Thou art very weary;
I was weary too.
But that toil shall make thee
Some day all mine own,
And the end of sorrow
Shall be near my throne."

June 27th

Genesis 19 vv 30-38

This is a story you don't hear in Sunday School or very often in Church. It is, however, Holy Scripture & therefore written for our learning, horrifying as it is. Despite begging to be allowed to take refuge there, Lot was afraid to stay in Zoar and went to live in a cave. We don't know how God destroyed Sodom & Gomorrah. It might have been a supernatural event. It might have been an earthquake or a volcanic eruption. It has been suggested that it was a meteorite. However it happened, I'm reminded of people, as recently in Syria & Turkey, afraid to return to their homes after some kind of disaster. Those whose houses have been destroyed by earthquakes, fires, floods or tsunamis and those displaced by war may find themselves living in temporary accommodation, tents or refugee camps, sometimes for many years. It's important not to forget them once the natural disaster or conflict which forced them out of their homes disappears from the headlines. They still need our prayers and practical help – if only through donations to charities & missions. The way they felt they had to degrade themselves reveals a society in which women in the position of Lot's daughters would have been unable to expect much respect or support. Some criminals of course have no excuse. They come from good homes and are comfortably off. Others, however, have not had good upbringings, have had few opportunities in life, have limited ways of earning a living honestly and move in a world in which crime is the norm. It's easy to condemn. But there but for the grace of God go I. The Christian response to human degradation is to seek to find a way back.

June 28th

Genesis 22 vv 1-8

I've missed out two chapters, partly because they cover similar ground to those we've already studied and also because this particular chapter is so important. After all the difficulties, the child of the Promise is born and growing up to be a young man and God tells Abraham to offer the child as a sacrifice. *Lead us not into temptation.* The horror of what God is asking of Abraham is unimaginable. You can say that God is showing Abraham in a very dramatic way that human sacrifice is NOT required. It has after all been practised in many human cultures, including some of those of ancient Canaan and humanity needs to know that it is not what God wants. We know that God knew that Abraham would not fail the test. God knows everything. But we can't get away from the fact that Abraham was tempted to the uttermost and it would appear that the boy Isaac was pretty much aware of what was going on. We cannot comprehend the enormity of this event.

June 29th (St Peter's Day)

Genesis 22 vv 9-14

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.*

The Gospel reading for St Peter's Day is about the time when Jesus asked His apostles who people thought He was. He then asked them who they thought He was. It was Peter who answered, *Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.* Jesus responds, *Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.* Peter was indeed blessed and, on that basis was given huge responsibilities. But the story goes on with Jesus telling the apostles about how He would suffer and die in Jerusalem. It's too much for Peter. *Be it far from thee, Lord,* he says: *this shall not be unto thee.*

And Jesus responds, *Get thee behind me Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.* Once Abraham had demonstrated that he was prepared to sacrifice his son to God, God told him not to do so and provided a substitute. But God *spared not his own Son.* Now, that takes some thinking about.

June 30th

Genesis 22 vv 15-19

I'm glad to have St Paul on my side when I insist that the last verse of the Magnificat is singular – *Abraham and his seed for ever.* Paul writes to the Galatians (3¹⁶): *Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.* Abraham's faith is one of the foundations on which God builds His plan for the salvation of His Creation. (Peter's faith is another, inadequate as he was, as Abraham was, as we all are. Many labour in the vineyard, but it is God Who gives the increase.) It is Jesus in Whom the Law & the Prophets are fulfilled. It is Jesus Who is the Way, the Truth & the Life. It is through Christ's supreme sacrifice that we are redeemed. Pure love is tried to the uttermost and prevails – as it must because God is love. This is all beyond human comprehension. Many wise people have struggled to understand it all and have come up with solutions which are part of the truth, but never the whole truth. The whole Truth is way beyond our ability to comprehend. I'll finish this quarter's readings with the passage from Romans 8 in which St Paul glories in the consequences of what God has done for us in Christ. (I have to admit also that my insistence on the singular *seed* in the Magnificat is derived from St Paul wrote to the Galatians. I'm not really pretending to be an expert on ancient languages!)

31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? **32** He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? **33** Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. **34** Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God,

who also maketh intercession for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. ³⁷ Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. ³⁸ For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, ³⁹ Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.