

I Corinthians
Continued from
Chapter 11

Bible Notes
January – March
2024

Be ye followers of me, even as I am of Christ.

From the time of Abraham onwards, Israelite baby boys were circumcised on the eighth day. From the Christmas story we learn that they also received their name on that day. *His name was called Jesus, which was so named by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.* You name signifies who you are. Circumcision was a sign that you belonged to the people of God. You were party to what we call the Old Testament and what for the Israelites was simply the Covenant God made with Moses on Mt Sinai. God would be your God. You would be His. God would care for you. You would be bound to keep His commandments. All other Israelites would be your brothers, forming a royal priesthood to God. You would be holy as God is holy.

When the Christian Gospel was preached in Gentile lands as well as to the Jews, it was soon realised that circumcision was not necessary under the terms of the New Testament or Covenant. When people come to faith and repent of their sins, they are baptized. When we are baptized or christened (same thing), we join the people of God. God is our God and we are His people. All other Christians are our brothers and sisters. God cares for us and we are bound to keep His commandments – summed up (as they are in the Old Testament) in the command to love. We are a royal priesthood to God. We are holy as God is holy.

Some Christians – a minority – believe that Baptism should not take place until a person is old enough to understand what it is all about. Most Christians belong to churches which baptise infants. Surely, children may belong to the people of God, be blessed by His care for them and learn as they are able to walk in His ways.

ALMIGHTY God, who madest thy blessed Son to be circumcised, and obedient to the law for man; Grant us the true Circumcision of the Spirit; that, our hearts, and all our members, being mortified from all worldly and carnal lusts, we may in all things obey thy blessed will; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

January 2nd

I Corinthians 11 v2

Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.

Today is the 37th anniversary of my Institution and Induction as Rector of Cuxton and Halling. Paul praises his congregation in Corinth for remembering him and keeping the ordinances he had delivered to them. How did the Corinthians remember Paul? I expect that they remembered him in their prayers. They would have remembered his preaching and teaching and his pastoral care. No doubt, they had worshipped under his leadership. They would have remembered him as a friend, as a human being who had lived among them, with all his strengths and weaknesses. One aspect of a minister's work is to proclaim the ordinances – God's commandments. The Corinthians had respected Paul as, on occasion, God's spokesman. And so any Christian bishop, priest, deacon, minister, rector, vicar, curate seeks to lead people to the Throne of Grace in worship, to preach & teach the Word of God, to care for people in their needs, to be a friend and neighbour, to speak authoritatively as God's messenger as required. The minister's work depends on the fellowship, friendship and prayers of the people of God, especially those in his own congregation.

January 3rd

I Corinthians 11 vv 3-12

Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God.

I approach commenting on these verses with some trepidation. For centuries, we had a patriarchal society. Men were in charge. Women were subservient. (Of course I generalise.) Then came feminism. There were no fundamental differences between male & female. Therefore girls and women should have the same opportunities, status and rights as boys and men. It doesn't quite work out like that, however. Men are generally speaking tougher (and perhaps more aggressive) than women. Most people become parents and pregnancy, childbirth and nursing baby naturally place demands on women which men do not have to face. In order to achieve equality of outcome, to protect women's careers, to give them a chance to win in sports like football, to keep women safe from predatory men, therefore, there have

to be laws, conventions and other safeguards to level the playing field, so to speak.

The picture becomes a bit more confused with the recognition of homosexuality and same sex relationships and even more so with the trans debate. If someone with a male body identifies as a woman, should that person have the special protections which society affords to women? Raising the question at all acknowledges that men and women are different and that they therefore have different needs if they are to play their full part in society.

It isn't easy to discuss these issues rationally because they are so emotionally charged. Hence my trepidation in trying to deal with them.

My reading of Paul's words and the general teaching of the Bible is that men and women are equal but not the same. Men and women are equally made in God's image and are equally redeemed by Christ's Death on the Cross for us. We are not, however, the same and men and women naturally, therefore, have different roles in the household, in the Church and in the world at large. How those different roles would play out would depend on circumstances, the particular talents and opportunities of individuals, the kind of family or household we live in, the customs and attitudes of the particular culture in which we live. I'm brave enough to admit that I myself believe what I believe the Bible teaches. Other Christians may understand the Bible differently from the way I do, but what we cannot do is to discount the Bible as no longer relevant for us today. The Bible is the eternal Word of God.

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.*

January 4th

I Corinthians 11 vv 13-16

I still feel uncomfortable when I see a man wearing a hat in church. In the past, I have even wondered about the propriety of bishops' mitres and the skull caps and birettas which some clergy wear. But then, until recently, it was generally regarded as unacceptable for a man to wear a hat indoors and men uncovered their heads to show respect eg at a funeral or on meeting a woman. Women certainly generally wore hats in church for centuries. I believe that the Archbishop of Canterbury said this was unnecessary during the war, when clothes were rationed. I suppose it is a matter of what we mean by the way we dress. Are our clothes an assertion of status? Do we mean them to be alluring? Do we intend that other people should admire us? Do we mean to make them jealous? Commentators regard this differentiation of headgear as signifying what the earlier verses in the chapter have to say about the differences between men and women generally. So they have to be understood in that light.

January 5th

I Corinthians 11 v17

Now in this that i declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse.

Paul is talking about their meeting together for worship, for the fellowship meal, which is Holy Communion, the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper. In those days, it was conducted differently from the way it is today. It was a substantial meal, not just a piece of bread and a sip of wine. The same principles ought to have applied, however, to them then as to us today. When we worship as we ought, we worship in spirit and in truth; we give our best to God, give Him our full attention. Jesus is present with us. We owe it to Him that we obey His commandment to love one another as He loves us. We come with thankful hearts. Eucharist means thanks. Communion is fellowship (koinonia, κοινωνία in Greek) – fellowship with one another, fellowship with Jesus and in Him fellowship with the Father and the Holy Spirit. This is the agape meal – agape, ἀγάπη, meaning love. God is agape.

The Corinthians fell short of this ideal in their eucharistic celebrations as do we and maybe that is why our churches do not flourish and grow as they ought. See v30.

January 6th Epiphany)

I Corinthians 11 vv 18&19

The Corinthian Church was divided into factions. There were heresies. There was division. By these quarrels, their worship was impaired. Christ prayed that we should be one.

O GOD, who by the leading of a star didst manifest thy only-begotten Son to the Gentiles: Mercifully grant, that we, which know thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of thy glorious Godhead; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

If we have a vision of Jesus, the Son of God, then we ought to love one another and thereby be empowered to worship God in this life and at last to have the fruition of the glorious Godhead. Our authentic worship on earth is a participation in the worship of heaven, a foretaste and a preparation for what is to come.

O worship the Lord in the
beauty of holiness!

Bow down before him, his glory
proclaim;

with gold of obedience, and
incense of lowliness,

kneel and adore him: the Lord
is his Name!

January 7th (Epiphany 1 / Baptism of Christ) I Corinthians 11 vv 20-22

O LORD, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people which call upon thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

A powerful Christian I know prays this prayer very fervently: *grant that [we] may both perceive and know what things [we] ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same.* So should we all. It is the only way to live. The BCP Gospel for today is the 12 year old Jesus in the Temple, about His Father's business, astonishing the religious authorities with His understanding. CW celebrates His Baptism: God made known to us so that we should have fellowship with Him and with one another in an eternal union of love.

Very different from these Corinthians selfishly helping themselves to all the food and getting drunk on the wine. Selfishness is the opposite of love. Insofar as we are selfish we are unworthy to participate in Holy Communion, but *if we confess our sins, he is faithful & just to forgive us our sins.*

January 8th

I Corinthians 11 v23

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread.

Holy Communion is the Christian service. Whatever else we may do – Mattins, Evensong, Family Service, Fresh Expressions, Carol Service – what we must do is to celebrate Holy Communion. From the earliest days of the Church, the disciples broke bread together – daily if possible. They met together for the Eucharist at least on Sundays (or Saturday nights) even in the face of persecution. I have no doubt that we should do the same. We may well meet together for other worship services, but Holy Communion is the one we cannot do without if we obey our Lord's command on the night before He gave up His life for our salvation. There are reasons why churches have Mattins or family services or whatever INSTEAD of Holy Communion rather than AS WELL as Holy Communion, which is what they ought to do.

1. One reason churches stopped celebrating Holy Communion every week was that people felt unworthy to receive Christ in the Sacrament, that they might be eating and drinking their own damnation. So some Protestant churches held Communion services only a few times a year and in Roman Catholic churches, the mass was celebrated, but many people did not receive Holy Communion. We should approach the Sacrament with a genuine sense of our own unworthiness, but also in the knowledge that God forgives all who truly repent. We should always live in such way that we are ready to meet our Maker, whether in Holy Communion or because we are run over by a bus!
2. People may feel that they can attend Mattins or Evensong or more informal services without making a total commitment to Christ. But we are either for Christ or we are against Him. There is no half way house. If you are a Christian, you should be a regular communicant.
3. Services other than Holy Communion may be more attractive to people who have not yet made a commitment to Jesus. It may be appropriate to hold mission services as well as (not instead of) Holy Communion.
4. We'll think about tomorrow!

5. In these days when there are not enough clergy to go round, you can hold non-eucharistic services without an ordained minister. So you can, but we should not be complacent about this or allow it to become our usual practice. Rather we should pray for vocations.

January 9th

I Corinthians 11 vv 24&25

In the Middle Ages, it had become the custom for the priest to preside at the Mass, the Holy Communion service, to communicate himself and for only a few lay people to join with him and they only received the bread. Everybody else was expected to pray and worship in their hearts, but many would not have understood the words of the service spoken in Latin or really known what was going on.

Reformers like Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) wanted everybody to participate fully. The Bible & the Prayer Book would be in English. All those present would receive Holy Communion and they would receive both the bread and the wine. Provision is made for Holy Communion every Sunday and on other major celebrations. People were, however, reluctant to become weekly communicants (mainly for yesterday's reason 1). Clergy were not allowed to celebrate Holy Communion *except there be a convenient number to communicate with the Priest, according to his discretion*. So it came about that the service Jesus commanded us to celebrate was only held three or four times a year. These Sacrament Sundays meant a very great deal to the pious, but the Church was missing out on obeying her Lord's command 48 weeks of the year.

This situation began to be remedied in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with more frequent celebrations of Holy Communion and the Eucharist taking its proper place as the principal service of the week. (There has been some back-sliding in the twenty first century, mainly for yesterday's reasons 2,3&5.)

What has gone wrong, however, is that more frequent celebrations of Holy Communion (*chips with everything!* a critic remarked) may have resulted in our taking the Sacrament less seriously. We may have become too casual about it. Today's verses remind us just what it is

that we are doing in Holy Communion. We must receive the Sacrament in awe.

January 10th

I Corinthians 11 v26

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come. Holy Communion can be a missionary service. It proclaims the Cross of Christ. It warns of judgment to come. It promises salvation. It prepares us to meet our God. Attend in that spirit and bring your as yet non-Christian friends along and show them what we stand for.

January 11th

I Corinthians 11 v 27

What does it mean to discern the Lord's Body in Holy Communion? I believe that we need to recognise that *the bread which we break is the communion (koinonia) of the body of Christ* as the wine which we bless is the koinonia of His blood. If we do so, we must recognise that *we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.* We are a fellowship of love and must therefore love one another. It is the absence of love for God and for one another which is sin and it is sin which makes us unworthy to partake of the Lord's Supper.

January 12th

I Corinthians 11 v28

So how do we examine ourselves before we come to Holy Communion? We ought to know God's Commandments. They are set out for us in the Bible. We're taught them in Church. They are summed up in the command to love. Measure yourself against God's commandments. Measure yourself by the example and teaching of Jesus. Insofar as you fall short, pray for forgiveness and for grace to become a better person. As we hope to be forgiven, forgive everybody who has offended you.

Remember everything that God has done for you and be thankful. Offer your very self to God in worship as a sacrifice of praise. As a practical provision, read up the readings appointed for the service in advance. Maybe think about the things you would like to remember in prayer.

It's good to do these things in preparation to receive Holy Communion. It is better still if every day we seek to be ready to meet our God – even when we are not coming to Church or expecting to participate in Holy Communion.

January 13th

I Corinthians 11 v29

For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation unto himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

We rather gloss over the possibility of judgment and punishment. Knowing that God is love, it is easy to become complacent, to become casual, to think that nothing we are likely to do will ever really matter. But *our God is a consuming fire*. There cannot be love without justice. There is no place for that which is not holy in the Presence of the thrice holy God. Because God is love, as well as being just, He is merciful. But in order to obtain His mercy, we have to take seriously His justice. *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

January 14th (Epiphany 2)

I Corinthians 11 v30

For this cause many are weak and sickly among you and many sleep. Many people in the world today are mal-nourished. Millions of people just do not get enough to eat. Millions more eat too much of the wrong kinds of food either because they don't know any better, can't afford anything better or just prefer the taste and convenience of ready meals and takeaways to nourishing meals lovingly prepared from high quality ingredients. Too little food and you waste away and die. Too much of the wrong kind of food and you get sick and die. When families and friends eat together in harmony, our minds and spirits are nourished along with our bodies. For lonely people, eating alone is an ordeal and they may feel that they can't be bothered to prepare something nice and to make of it a good meal.

What about spiritual food? Holy Communion, the Word of God, Prayer, Christian Fellowship. Without these we are malnourished. We fail to flourish. Eventually we die.

1 My God, and is thy table spread,
and doth thy cup with love

o'erflow?
Thither be all thy children led,

and let them all thy sweetness
know.

2 Hail, sacred feast which Jesus
makes,
rich banquet of his flesh and
blood!
Thrice happy he who here partakes
that sacred stream, that heavenly
food.

3 Why are its bounties all in vain
before unwilling hearts displayed?
Was not for them the Victim slain?
Are they forbid the children's
bread?

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

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven
and earth; Mercifully hear the supplications of thy people, and grant
us thy peace all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

January 15th

I Corinthians 11 v31

For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

I have a confession to make. I am sorry to say that I feel superior to
some people. They don't, in my opinion, understand things as clearly
as I do – whether they be bishops, other clergy or lay people. There are
also people to whom I feel inferior. They seem to be able to achieve so
much more than I can. Neither is a particularly helpful attitude. It's not
good to feel superior to other people. It is by God's grace that I am
what I am – only by His grace. He is my Creator, Redeemer & the
source of whatever gifts, opportunities and talents I may have. It's not
good to feel less worthy than other people. I'm not called to be them.
I'm called to be me. So if I'm to judge myself before I come into the
Presence of the Lord in order that I might repent of my sins and thereby
escape being judged and found wanting by Him, by what standard do I
judge myself? By the standard of Jesus, of course. I am a member of
the Body of Christ. But what member am I? If I'm a hand, I shouldn't
feel guilty about being unable to see. If I'm a kidney, it's not a problem
that I can't hear. The question is not whether I am as good as those
clergy who attract hundreds to their services or those whose reputation
for pastoral wisdom is quietly admired in Christian circles everywhere.
The question is whether I am living the life God wills me to live,
whether I am doing the good works He has prepared for me to walk in.

January 16th

I Corinthians 11 v32

But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

If we are judged by God to be in error and He allows us to suffer some of the consequences of our sin, He does so in love, like a good parent chastising a child – not with the intention of hurting or even of destroying us, but rather in order to make us better people so that we do not destroy ourselves by living out our lives in opposition to God and His righteous commandments.

January 17th

I Corinthians 11 vv 33 & 34

Remember those greedy people eating up all the food and getting drunk on the wine? Well we can feast at home if we want to, but we must make sure that everyone is treated with respect in our meeting.

January 18th (Week of Prayer for Christian Unity) I Corinthians 12 vv 1-3

Appropriate that we should reach this chapter in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Every denomination of God's Church has been blessed by the Holy Spirit. Every congregation has. So has every individual Christian. As Christians we hold in common everything that is truly important – faith in Jesus Christ, through Him the knowledge of God, which is eternal life. We have this faith by the grace of God. Different denominations also have an array of different gifts, as do congregations, as do individual Christians. Some have a deep understanding of what it means to be the Church – Christ's Bride, His Body, the Temple of the Holy Spirit. Some have a great passion for the Word of God and for sharing the Good News with the whole world. Some focus on caring for the sick and the poor. Some long to transform society so that the love of God underpins our national life. Some experience Christ in the silence, of profound meditation. Some see Him in the world, *the daily round, the common task*. Some have wonderful spiritual gifts and experiences. We are imperfect, as we shall be until we get to Heaven, and we may fail to recognise the Christ in other Christians whose perceptions we do not share, with whom we may disagree on points which, while not insignificant, are nothing like as important as our unity. *No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost*. That is true whether you are Orthodox, Catholic or

Protestant, Charismatic or Baptist, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian or Congregationalist, Liberal or Conservative. If you acknowledge Jesus as Lord, you have the Holy Spirit. You are a Christian and all Christians are members one of another.

July 19th

I Corinthians 12 vv 4-6

We are all different. Just look round the church on a Sunday morning. We are very different. We have different roles to play in the Church. We have very different lives out in the world. That's how God intends it to be. By His grace, we have faith in Him. We are one with Him and one with one another. By His grace, we are the people that we are. Yet we are all different. That is how God has made us. That is His purpose for our lives. We each have a specific vocation, a contribution which we and only we make to the Church and to the world around us. We are all different, but we have one Lord and it is one Holy Spirit Who has made us the people we are.

January 20th

I Corinthians 12 v7

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. If we are living the lives God wants us to live, we are fulfilled human beings. We are playing the part He has assigned to us in His plan for the Church on the world. We should be thankful, therefore, for being the people He has made us and for the gifts, opportunities & talents which He has given us. We ought also to be grateful to God for the other people in our Church. They may be different from us. They may bring us joy. They may be quite difficult. But God has made them all and everyone of them has his or her part to play.

January 21st (Epiphany 3)

I Corinthians 12 vv 8&9

I don't think that we can be sure of exactly what Paul means by these gifts of the Spirit. As we shall see, the Corinthian Church was probably experiencing more in the way of the miraculous than most churches do today and also the gift of speaking in tongues. Some Christian congregations believe that this is how it ought to be today and indeed model their worship and their congregational life on what they believe to have been the way things were in New Testament times. Other Christians are very sceptical about miracles and phenomena such as speaking in tongues and, whatever may have happened in biblical times, deny that they still occur now. I think that most Christians today, at

least in this country, are probably like me, believing that miracles are possible and that they do occur, but rarely and certainly not on demand.

All our gifts and talents, all our resources, come from God – our natural aptitudes, the skills we learn and develop through practice, the time at our disposal, our money and property, the natural as well as the supernatural. Whoever we are, whatever our capabilities and opportunities, it is all of God and therefore to be received thanksgiving and respected in other people.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth thy right hand to help and defend us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

January 22nd

I Corinthians 12 vv 8-11

The overlap with yesterday's reading is deliberate. The Holy Spirit works in all Christians. If we didn't have the Spirit, we shouldn't have the grace to acknowledge that Jesus is our Lord. We are in a relationship of love with God and that relationship moulds our character as husbands and wives, parents and children mould one another. Wisdom and knowledge and faith are obviously things that we would all hope for, though some of us may be more richly endowed with these than others. Some people may have special, (almost?) supernatural gifts of wisdom, faith and knowledge. I don't like to assume a boundary between natural and supernatural. Everything is of God and it is all very wonderful. Gifts of healing would include healing by prayer, the laying on of hands, anointing with oil, but would not exclude scientific medicine and nursing care. It is all of God. Miracles do happen and some people are gifted as being the ones through whom God brings them about. Prophecy is not necessarily foretelling the future. To be a prophet is to be God's messenger, speaking His Word in a particular situation. Pray for preachers & teachers of the faith that they may speak God's Word authentically for us today. Pray God to raise up prophets to show us the way in these troubled times. Speaking with tongues is an experience of worship. Many Christians have this experience. Many more do not. It is not to be despised. Neither is it to be thought

that those Christians who have this gift are in any way superior to those of us who do not. Sometimes these tongues convey a message from God for the wider Church. Another gift is to be able to interpret this message. *But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.*

January 23rd

I Corinthians 12 vv 12&13

Church services in this country for centuries were conducted with the congregation in rows all looking towards the altar, pulpit & minister. 60+ years ago, it came to be thought that it was not a good thing to sit with our backs towards our fellow worshippers. More flexible seating plans were tried. People were encouraged to move around a bit more. We stood up, faced one another & passed the Peace, often using words similar to these verses. Ironically, passing the Peace in many places became a bone of contention. When we pass the Peace do we stop & think what it means or does it become just routine?

January 24th

I Corinthians 12 vv 14-21

I was thinking about a visual aid for a service. I'd lay out a nut, a nail, a piece of wood, a hammer, a screwdriver, nut crackers, a screw and a chisel. Obviously, you should use the nutcrackers to crack the nut, the hammer to drive in the nail, the screwdriver to screw in the screw and the chisel to shape the wood. But you could try cracking the nut with the hammer, knocking the nail in with the nutcrackers, using the screwdriver to trim up the piece of wood and the chisel (if it were a small one) to turn the screw. It might work, but you wouldn't do the job very well, you'd probably damage both the tools and what you were working on and quite likely injure yourself. (I'd better bring plasters if I try this out one Sunday.)

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified; Receive our supplications and prayers, which we offer before thee for all estates of men in thy holy Church, that every member of the same, in his vocation and ministry may truly and godly serve thee; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

January 25th (Conversion of St Paul)

I Corinthians 12 vv 22-25

Attending Spring Harvest years ago when thousands of Christians meet up at a holiday camp around Easter for worship, fellowship &

inspiration, I was occasionally troubled when the multitudes started to get excited because a famous preacher, musician or healer was rumoured to be expected – a Christian celebrity, if you like. St Paul could have been something of a celebrity in his own day: a great preacher and teacher, knowledgeable and intelligent, evidently filled with the Holy Spirit, someone who had endured hardship & persecution and finally suffered a martyr's death. Yet Paul tells us here that the unspectacular, the humble, the delicate parts of the Body of Christ are just as important as the celebrities. Those on the public stage are nothing without the backroom boys. We all matter. Everybody is to be respected. The most vulnerable are the ones of whom we should take special care.

GOD, who, through the preaching of the blessed Apostle Saint Paul, hast caused the light of the Gospel to shine throughout the world; Grant, we beseech thee, that we, having his wonderful conversion in remembrance, may shew forth our thankfulness unto thee for the same, by following the holy doctrine which he taught; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

January 26th

I Corinthians 12 v26

And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

We are members of one another. We share the sufferings of persecuted Christians the world over. We share the Church's triumphs. These thoughts inform both our prayers and our missionary and charitable giving.

January 27th

I Corinthians 12 vv 27-31

So we're not all the same. We all belong. We all matter. We are all part of the plan. Indeed pray for the opportunities, the gifts the resources to serve God in whatever capacity He calls you to serve Him. But don't be jealous of those who seem to be more important, more richly blessed than you are. Don't look down on those who appear to have a lower status in the Church. Above all things, pursue the more excellent way to which we shall be directed in the next chapter.

January 28th (Septuagesima)

I Corinthians 13 v1

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling symbol.

Recently, I was buying a birthday card for a family member. I rejected the one with what might have been the best picture because it had the word *love* in the message. It was a birthday card, not a Valentine! Some people use the word *love* easily, casually even. I'm more reserved. I do love this person but I would never say so. My feeling is that the people we love should know that we love them by the way we behave towards them. If we act in a loving way, there is no need to say *I love you*. If we don't behave lovingly towards them, it is pointless to say that we love them. The words *I love you* are too precious to say casually. Not everybody agrees with me! But what is love? Some people choose this reading for their wedding. It would be easy to assume that Paul is writing about married love. He isn't doing so particularly. He is talking about the love we ought all to have for one another. This is the love with which God loves us. God is love. We are to love one another in this sense as He loves us. There is the love between parents and children, brothers and sisters, close friends. There is the love we are to have for all our neighbours. The word *love* has a very wide range of meanings. This is partly why I like to retain the translation *charity* (from the Latin *caritas* – care) sometimes for the Greek word *agape*. We need to remember that the English word *love* is inadequate to describe the Love of God, the love with which we are called to love one another.

O LORD, we beseech thee favourably to hear the prayers of thy people; that we, who are justly punished for our offences, may be mercifully delivered by thy goodness, for the glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. *Amen*.

January 29th

I Corinthians 13 vv 2&3

You could appear to be the most wonderful of Christians – a wise leader, a great teacher, generous to a fault, a miracle worker and a martyr even, but none of this would signify anything if you were not possessed of the love of God. I read a strange story recently about a man who spent many years as a missionary in Africa. The twist was that he didn't like black people. I still don't quite know what to make of him, but I expect we can all think of examples nearer home of prominent people in the Church who seem to be missing the one thing necessary.

January 30th

I Corinthians 13 vv 4-7

Works without faith are dead. Works without love are dead. A genuine faith, however, true love, however, will be manifested in the way we behave. If it isn't, it isn't true. Try reading these verses substituting your own name for the word *love* or *charity*. Insofar as we fall short of perfect love, we are sinners and need to repent, but we do so in the knowledge that God forgives us when we do.

January 31st

I Corinthians 13 vv 8-10

There is one eternal – God. God is love. There are many things to be thankful for in our life here on earth – the wonder and beauty of the world, the way our every day needs are met, the enjoyment of food, sport and entertainment, other people, our own selves. There are many things to be thankful for in our lives as members of God's Church. Heaven and earth, however, will pass away. Only God is for ever. God is love and it is in His love that we have eternal life of which all these earthly blessings are a foretaste.

February 1st

I Corinthians 13 v11

When I was a child, I spake as a child. I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

I hope you had a happy childhood. Assuming that, like me, you did, you were looked after by your parents and other adults. They fed you, clothed you and gave you a home. They looked after you when you were ill. You had time to play and toys to play with and friends your own age. You grew in stature and (hopefully) in wisdom. You were offered an education and opportunities opened up before you as you got older. It's very wrong when children are neglected or abused.

We do, however, become adults. We have more power and more responsibilities. Our sense of satisfaction comes from different causes from when we were children. We no longer take for granted that we shall have a home or that there will be food on the table, but there is satisfaction in earning and providing for our families. We are the same people, but our lives have changed in so many ways. Some people's

adult lives are a struggle. For others, everything is much more straightforward.

There will be another transformation when we die. We shall still be the same people, but our circumstances will be infinitely changed for the better.

February 2nd (The Presentation of Christ in the Temple) I Corinthians 13 v12

For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

For now, we only have glimpses of the glory that shall be as Simeon held in his arms the infant Christ – *a light to lighten the gentiles and the glory of [God's] people Israel*. But there will come a time when we shall know God as He is and we shall not be consumed because we have been sanctified by the Blood of His Son and made like Him.

ALMIGHTY and everliving God, we humbly beseech thy Majesty, that, as thy only-begotten Son was this day presented in the temple in substance of our flesh, so we may be presented unto thee with pure and clean hearts, by the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

February 3rd

I Corinthians 13 v13

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three: but the greatest of these is charity.

2 Love is kind, and suffers long,
love is meek, and thinks no wrong,
love than death itself more strong;
therefore give us love.

3 Prophecy will fade away,
melting in the light of day;
love will ever with us stay;
therefore give us love.

4 Faith will vanish into sight;
hope be emptied in delight;
love in heaven will shine more bright;
therefore give us love.

5 Faith and hope and love we see
joining hand in hand agree;
but the greatest of the three,
and the best, is love.

February 4th (Sexagesima)

I Corinthians 14 v1

Follow after charity, and desire by spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.

So what is prophecy? It may be an ecstatic utterance which possibly needs interpretation. It may be a sober putting into ordinary words

what God is saying to us. But we certainly need to hear the Word of God. Psalm 74 complains that there were no prophets to show people the Way in the time the psalmist is writing. Amos warns of a coming famine of the Word of God when God will cease to speak to a people who haven't been listening. The Word of God was hard to come by when Samuel was a boy. Worship had become corrupt. We desperately need the Word of God to guide us in our current crises. If God isn't speaking to us, maybe we haven't been listening. As individuals, as the Church, our nation, the whole world needs to repent: to turn to God worshipping in spirit & in truth, to turn away from evil. We need to open our eyes, ears and hearts to the Word of God, the Way, the Truth & the Life.

O LORD God, who seest that we put not our trust in any thing that we do; Mercifully grant that by thy power we may be defended against all adversity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

February 5th

I Corinthians 14 vv 2-5

In some churches, speaking in tongues is highly regarded, a spiritual gift marking out a spiritual elite. God is no respecter of persons. There is no elite within the Church. We are what we are by the grace of God & He has given to each one of us the gifts we need to do the good works He has prepared for us to walk in. We are not better than other Christians – or worse. We are all forgiven sinners.

Many Christians discount the gift of tongues altogether, but I don't see how we can do that when it is clearly described as a gift of God in the Bible. It isn't one I seek for myself. It's not a gift given to most Christians. But it is a gift of God.

However, it is far from an elite gift. You may praise God in tongues. When you praise God, you are edified, you are built up as a person. However we praise God, we are edified, because we were made for the praise of God. However speaking in tongues does not edify anyone else. Prophecy is far better in the meeting because the Word of God edifies everyone.

February 6th

I Corinthians 14 vv 6-9

If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?

What we need from our worship leaders, preachers and teachers is the Word of God, proclaimed in a manner which we can understand. We Christians need to hear what God is saying to us expressed intelligibly. The Church is charged with proclaiming God's Word to the whole world. We need to know what we are talking about and to say it clearly, faithfully, honestly, fearlessly and lovingly. So please pray for all those councils of the Church which seek God's Word for the world today, for preachers & teachers of the faith, for prophets, for all Christians, *that we may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same.*

February 7th

I Corinthians 14 vv 10-12

Seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the Church.

What Paul says here about spiritual gifts has a much wider application. Some of the Corinthian Christians appear to have been on something of an ego trip. They believe that they are more gifted than others, more insightful. They've formed factions. They've disregarded apostolic authority. They've challenged established truths. They've thought themselves very fine Christians, but have damaged the Church. It's too easy for some of us to think and act like that and, if we do, we damage the Church.

February 8th

I Corinthians 14 vv 13-17

The point is that we should use the gifts – the talents and opportunities, the money, the hours – which God has given us to glorify Him, not ourselves, and to build His Church, not to make ourselves look important.

February 9th

I Corinthians 14 vv 18&19

Paul had this gift of tongues – more powerfully than anyone in the Church in Corinth. If it was something to boast about, Paul would have had first bragging rights. But God's gifts are not something for us to boast about, to make us feel that we are better than other people who don't have these gifts. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are for us to glorify God and to serve Him. It is in glorifying God in our lives and serving Him that we are built up in the likeness of His Son. Paul no doubt had a

wonderful sense of the glory of God when he praised God in tongues, but he was serving God's purposes much more effectively when he taught other people the truth about Jesus in a clear and lucid manner. Preachers can become too fond of the sounds of their own voices and forget that they are supposed to be building up the congregation with God's Word. Musicians can be too pleased with the music they make and forget that their purpose is to worship God and to inspire and support the congregation in their focus on Him. (Hence my discomfort with the growing trend to clap performances which form part of a service.) Cleaners can be so proud of the way they are keeping the church looking nice that they resent people messing it up.

February 10th

I Corinthians 14 v20

Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

Jesus told us that unless we receive the Kingdom of God as little children we shall not be able to enter. What did He mean by this? That we must be trusting in our heavenly Father, that we must be humble, that we must not imagine that we can rely on our own strength to save us? All these are possibly what He meant. Also, as Paul says, that we should be without malice. You may have other additional ideas as to how Jesus meant that we must be like children if we are to enter the Kingdom of God.

What He definitely did not mean is that we must lay aside our intelligence, our ability to reason or our education. These too are gifts of God which He has given to us in order that we should be able to serve Him better. I once attended a lecture in which the speaker told a hall full of mainly teenagers that, when she became a Christian, she stopped using her faculty for reason and her university education and allowed herself to be guided only by her emotions. She was so wrong that I got up & left the meeting.

February 11th (Quinquagesima)

I Corinthians 14 vv 21-26

O LORD, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth; Send thy Holy Ghost and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee; Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen.*

Paul's argument here is a bit hard to follow. He is quoting Isaiah where he says that God has warned the Israelites that, since they won't listen to Him when He speaks to them in their own language (Hebrew) through the Law and the Prophets, they will learn their lesson when, as a result of their rebellion against God, they will hear the language of the invading Assyrians. So, Paul concludes, the language people can't understand (tongues) are a warning to unbelievers. In order to bring people to the knowledge of God, you have to speak in a language they can understand. Speaking in tongues is an ecstatic utterance. Visitors to a church may think that the congregation have gone mad, are subject to some kind of mass hysteria, especially if lots of people are speaking in tongues together. Far better if people coming as seekers or even just as visitors hear the Word of God spoken intelligibly – prophecy. Prophecy too may be a supernatural gift and it seems that at Corinth more than one person might prophesy at the agape meal or meeting. The point is that whatever we do we remember that *all our doings without charity are nothing worth*.

There are questions too about the intelligibility of what we do in our own services – the use of Latin or archaic English, musical settings so complex that they seem to obscure rather than serve the meaning of the words. Some might argue that beautiful words and music enhance the message, others that they make it harder to understand.

February 12th

I Corinthians 14 v26

In our staid Church of England services, we don't often have people calling out during the service wanting a particular psalm, hymn or reading; praying extempore out loud or even in tongues; wanting there & then to share a revelation from God. In churches where these things do happen in services, Paul's guidance is clear. But we do need his wisdom in churches like ours too. We might not assert ourselves outright during services, but we do have different and sometimes competing ideas about how our services should be conducted – which hymnbook to use, which version of the Bible, which tunes we should sing, how much ceremony is appropriate, what we think of the preaching. Bringing together different people's insights ought to be an edificatory process, each bringing to the discussion what we believe

God wants in our worship. But it can be destructive if we assert our own rights to have our own way without considering the love we owe to our fellow Christians who may have their own ideas too. The point about worship is that it is offered in spirit & in truth to the glory of God.

February 13th

I Corinthians 14 vv 27-33

Back at the beginning of Genesis, we see how God creates the universe, bringing light out of darkness and order out of chaos. Human disobedience brings darkness and disorder. The coming of the Saviour brings us forgiveness of our sins and citizenship of the Kingdom of Heaven. Christ is the Light of the World and order is restored in Him, the Logos or Word. Our services, if we approach them as we ought, partake of and bear witness to God's recreation of all things in Christ – a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

February 14th (Ash Wednesday)

Matthew 6 vv 16-21

An Ash Wednesday tradition is to receive on your forehead the sign of the cross in ashes. We're reminded that *dust we are and to dust we shall return*. We signify our intention to repent (in dust & ashes if necessary) of our sins. We cling to the Cross on which Christ died that we might be forgiven and therefore that we may enjoy eternal life in Him. When we leave church our brows anointed with ashes, are we disobeying our Lord's command not to appear to fast. The answer depends on our motive and on how other people interpret our actions. If we go our ashed in the hope that people will admire us for our piety, that is sin, but if we believe that wearing a sign of repentance in this ungodly world is an act of witness, one which might even get us laughed at, then it would be a good thing to do. What matters is to be sincere in our love for God and for other people and to judge ourselves on that principle. Today is also St Valentine's Day and there will be many professions of love. They may be casual or careless. They may be a means to an end. But if they are sincere, only if they are sincere, they are a priceless gift.

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent; Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee,

the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

February 15th

I Corinthians 14 vv 34&35

I deliberately avoided dealing with these verses on Ash Wednesday, as it would have brought together too many themes. Some readers won't like them, but what are we to do about them? We can hardly disregard words which are contained in Holy Scripture. Can we suggest that things are much changed since Paul wrote to the Corinthians with respect to sex and gender roles and that, therefore what was right for Corinth 2,000 years ago, might not be right for us today? If we do, how much else of the Bible's teaching are we going to decide doesn't apply to us today? We aren't confronted with discussions in the Church about whether we can eat meat offered to idols, but we would still want to follow the principles which Paul makes use of when dealing with that issue – that only God is the true God, that we receive His gifts with thankfulness, that we respect other people & their consciences, even when we know better than they do. But what about women speaking in Church? Are there any general principles we can discern from how the Bible deals with this particular issue? Is Paul focusing on the importance of not having everyone talking at once, perhaps about matters that are not immediately relevant or helpful during the meeting for worship? Or does he mean that women should not be worship leaders, preachers or teachers of the faith? I think he means both. There should be no chattering during the service and women should not be in positions of leadership in worship. But many churches today – including some which give great weight to the Bible and its teaching – do have women ministers and believe that the whole Church is blessed by their ministry. The western world of non-believers finds it hard to understand why some denominations of the Church refuse to have female clergy. The equality of women with men in the workplace is generally regarded as a goal to be pursued and the Church is seen as out of line if it doesn't go along with this policy. I feel awkward in opposing the trend of thinking within the Church of England and wider English society and I certainly don't want to be at odds with the many good people who believe that the ordained ministry ought to be open to women or with women ministers. On the other hand, neither do I feel able to go against what the Bible apparently teaches, as it has been

interpreted for most of the last 2.000 years and as it is still understood by those churches to which the majority of Christians in today's world belong – Orthodox, Roman Catholic and a number of Protestant denominations.

February 16th

I Corinthians 14 v36

What came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?

When the Church of England was debating whether or not women ought to be ordained, there were some people who were outright opponents of women's ordination. Various, for biblical reasons, beliefs based in Christian tradition, their understanding of the physical & psychological differences between men & women, etc., they would never agree under any circumstances that it was right to ordain women. There were others, however, who did not believe that women's ordination was necessarily wrong as a matter of principle, but that the Church of England should not go ahead with it unless other churches – especially other episcopal churches (ie churches with bishops) – took the same step. We don't claim to be the one true Church. Other branches of the Church, denominations, are our fellow Christians. Together, all believers – Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Anglican - comprise the Body of Christ, His Bride, the *one, holy, catholic & apostolic Church*, founded by Jesus. We need to be very careful about going it alone, effectively asserting that we know better than they do, imperilling Christian unity. On the other hand...

February 17th

I Corinthians 14 v37

If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.

Paul tells the would be opinion formers at Corinth to respect his counsels because they are in fact the commandments of God. Paul had been a Pharisee who believed that the Christian faith was a very bad thing, undermining the Law and the Prophets which God had revealed to His people over the centuries. Then Christ appeared to Paul on the Road to Damascus and it was revealed to Paul that Jesus fulfils the Law and the Prophets, rather than abrogating them. Paul became a Christian, but he had to contend for his vision in the face of disagreement & opposition from fellow Christians who did not share his

insights. Sometimes, if you are sure that God is guiding you, you do have to make a stand, even against a majority.

Supporters of women priests believe that God is showing us that our traditional understanding of Scripture is mistaken and that we should go ahead and ordain women, even if many of our brothers & sisters disagree, even though we thereby further impair our unity. That is what has happened in the Church of England.

February 18th (Lent 1)

I Corinthians 14 vv 38-40

After His Baptism, Jesus went out into the wilderness for forty days & forty nights. He fasted. He was tempted by the devil. The wild beasts were there. Angels ministered to Him. He took time to be with God. His closeness to God inspired His praise and informed His teaching. He was filled with the Holy Spirit, enabled to perform God's work in the world, to enjoy fellowship with God's people, to face whatever trials and troubles came His way and finally to overcome death and all the powers of sin, the world & the devil. Whatever our gifts, whatever our place within the Church (which for most of us isn't ecstatic prophecy or speaking in tongues), we can only fulfil our Christian calling if, like Jesus, we abide in God.

O LORD, who for our sake didst fast forty days and forty nights; Give us grace to use such abstinence, that, our flesh being subdued to the Spirit, we may ever obey thy godly motions in righteousness, and true holiness, to thy honour and glory, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

February 19th

I Corinthians 15 v1

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and where in ye stand.

“The word *tradition* comes from Latin dare (give) and trans- (across, over, beyond).” Those of us who were teenagers in the sixties & seventies tend to think of tradition as something which is old or even dead wrapping its tentacles around us and preventing us from moving forward into the freedom which would otherwise be within our grasp. In its original and Christian sense, however, tradition is how God's gift to us of His Son is passed on. Those of us who have received the gift of the gospel from others pass it on to friends and neighbours and to the

wider world. We transmit the good news from generation to generation. It is the gift which just keeps on giving.

February 20th

I Corinthians 15 v2

By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

The gift of the Gospel of Christ saves us from the wrath to come. But what if, instead of cherishing the gift and sharing it, we become blasé about it? We might not think very often about what it means to know Jesus. We might not think much about how He teaches us that we ought to live. We might begin to disbelieve the Gospel truths. We might distort the true meaning of the Christian tradition (God's gift transmitted to us through the Bible & the Church) into something more like what everybody else in our world believes and practises. If our love grows cold, we have believed in vain.

February 21st

I Corinthians 15 vv 3&4

What Paul imparted to the Corinthians is what he had himself received. God gave Paul the gift of faith. He had his own personal knowledge of Jesus. (We all know Jesus if we are Christians, though few of us have had the miraculous experiences that Paul was granted.) Other Christians told Paul the story of how our Lord died & rose again. For those who have eyes to see, the story of Jesus is already to be received in the Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament. Many generations have received this gift and passed it on to us. We now receive it and pass it on to those who do not yet know the truth which is in Christ.

February 22nd

I Corinthians 15 vv 5-7

There are three principal pieces of evidence that Christ rose from the dead. His tomb was empty on the Sunday morning. He was seen by hundreds of people who were able to testify that He is alive. We have the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Risen Christ, dwelling in our hearts and in the whole Church of God.

February 23rd

I Corinthians 15 v8

And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.
It was 40 days after His Resurrection that Jesus ascended into Heaven, having commissioned His Church to preach the Gospel to the whole world. They began this task in earnest 10 days later when the Holy Spirit came upon them on the Feast of Pentecost. Thousands believed and were baptised. They met daily to break bread together. They pooled their resources. They worshipped together. They attended to the apostles' teaching. And many, including Saul of Tarsus, regarded this new movement as a threat. Jesus had been very critical of the Pharisees & Sadducees. He was much more popular than they were. He was a threat to their prestige and position. They might also have felt that, if the Romans regarded the nascent Church as potentially rabble-rousing, they would take away such authority as they allowed the Jewish authorities. They may also have seen Jesus' teaching as a corruption of what they understood to be the authentic faith God had revealed to Israel via Moses & the Prophets. They would probably have resented the mission to the Gentiles. For whatever reasons, they tried to prevent the apostles from preaching the Gospel, they martyred Stephen and persecuted the Church more widely. Saul of Tarsus was one of them. We don't know how long after the Ascension he journeyed to Damascus, but, we do know that when he did, the Risen Christ revealed Himself to Saul & Saul became Paul the apostle – a prime witness to the Resurrection.

We sing the glorious conquest
before Damascus gate,
when Saul, the church's spoiler,
came breathing threats and hate;
the ravening wolf rushed forward
full early to the prey;
but lo, the Shepherd met him,

O glory most excelling
that smote across his path!
O light that pierced and blinded
the zealot in his wrath,
O voice that spake within him
the calm reproving word,
O love that sought and held him
the bondman of his Lord!

February 24th (St Matthias)

I Corinthians 15 v9

For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.
Judas went and hanged himself when he saw what happened to Jesus. Surely, if he had returned to God and to Jesus, even he would have been forgiven and given a new start. But he didn't and the number of the apostles had to be brought back up to twelve. What are the

qualifications required to be an apostle? Peter said, *Of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.* The apostles were to be witnesses and Matthias was chosen to be one of them. Later on Paul & Barnabas are described as apostles. Neither of them *companied with the others from the baptism of John.* Paul was a witness to the Resurrection, but there is no evidence that Barnabas witnessed Christ's human body, though, like all Christians, he knew Jesus from the work of the Holy Spirit in his own heart. He could bear witness to the truth of the Gospel from his own experience.

The word *apostle* means *sent*. In that sense Jesus was the first apostle. *So God loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* God sent Jesus. Jesus sends His Church. The apostles in the New Testament are witnesses. They are leaders in the Church. But the whole Church is apostolic. We are all sent to bear witness, to do God's work in the world.

O ALMIGHTY God, who into the place of the traitor Judas didst choose thy faithful servant Matthias to be of the number of the twelve Apostles; Grant that thy Church, being alway preserved from false Apostles, may be ordered and guided by faithful and true pastors; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

February 25th (Lent 2)

I Corinthians 15 v10

But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I but the grace of God which was with me.

I take great comfort in those words, *But by the grace of God I am what I am.* I have many faults and many failings, but *by the grace of God I am what I am.* You too have many faults and many failings. You may find yourself judged by other people – sometimes harshly. You may judge yourself, but by the grace of God you are what you are. God made Paul

what he was and Paul didn't waste the opportunity. He laboured abundantly in the Lord's service. As he acknowledged, however, everything he achieved, he achieved by God's grace working with him. Likewise you and I. We are what we are by God's grace. Don't waste it. Use the opportunities God has given you. God is working with you when you are working for Him.

ALMIGHTY God, who seest that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves; Keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

February 26th

I Corinthians 15 vv 11-18

Some of the Corinthians apparently were denying the resurrection. Maybe they didn't believe that the tomb was empty and that hundreds of people saw Jesus after that first Easter. Maybe they didn't believe that we shall rise with Him. Perhaps they thought that the life in the Spirit which they experienced was all there was to being a Christian. Paul tells them to think this through & understand the implications. I find that people are often illogical, even Christians, and we claim to follow Jesus, the Logos (the Word). If there is no resurrection, what Paul & the other apostles are preaching is not true. Far from being good men whose teaching ought to be followed, they are telling lies about God. If the Corinthians' experience of God is based on lies, then it isn't genuine. Their faith is in vain. What's more, there is no hope for those who have died. Belief in the Resurrection of Jesus is essential to the Christian faith. It's not sufficient to believe that Jesus sets us a good example or that the world would be a better place if people obeyed His teaching or that the Church is beneficial for society. That is all true, but not enough.

February 27th

I Corinthians 15 v19

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. I don't quite understand Paul here. I enjoy my life here and I think that, even if I didn't believe in the life of the world to come, I'd still be happier for thanking God for what I have here and now & trying to live by His Law than I would be if I didn't believe in God and didn't believe that there is an essentially right way to live. I suppose that Paul would

say that my life would be based on a lie if I claimed to be a Christian but didn't believe in the Resurrection and I would therefore be worse off than a pagan who sincerely lived in accordance with his beliefs.

February 28th

I Corinthians 15 vv 20-22

Paul is could be quoting a hymn or text which was widely known in the Church at the time. (We use these verses as part of the Easter Anthems even today.) Fundamental to the Christian faith is the fact that Christ is risen. All human beings, like Adam, are sinners and, because we are sinners, we are mortal. We are all of the same stuff as Adam, of the same flesh, of the dust of the earth, rebels against God. But Jesus is the new Adam, the perfect man. In dying, He suffers the death which is the due of sinners and thereby sets sinners free to live eternally. Because Christ is risen from the dead, through faith in Him, we are taken up with Him into glory.

One Day When Heaven Was
Filled With His Praises,
One Day When Sin Was As
Black As Could Be,
Jesus Came Forth To Be Born
Of A Virgin
Dwelt Amongst Men, My
Example Is He!

One Day They Left Him Alone
In The Garden,
One Day He Rested, From
Suffering Free;
Angels Came Down O'er His
Tomb To Keep Vigil;
Hope Of The Hopeless, My
Saviour Is He!

*Living, He Loved Me; Dying, He
Saved Me;
Buried, He Carried My Sins Far
Away;
Rising, He Justified Freely, For
Ever:
One Day He's Coming O,
Glorious Day!*

One Day The Grave Could
Conceal Him No Longer,
One Day The Stone Rolled
Away From The Door;
Then He Arose, Over Death He
Had Conquered;
Now Is Ascended, My Lord
Evermore!

One Day They Led Him Up
Calvary's Mountain,
One Day They Nailed Him To
Die On The Tree;
Suffering Anguish, Despised
And Rejected:
Bearing Our Sins, My
Redeemer Is He!

One Day The Trumpet Will
Sound For His Coming,
One Day The Skies With His
Glories Will Shine;
Wonderful Day, My Beloved
Ones Bringing;
Glorious Saviour, This Jesus Is
Mine!

February 29th

I Corinthians 15 vv 23-28

I Corinthians 15 vv 20-58 is the reading set for a funeral in the Book of Common Prayer. It is a very powerful reading and there is much in it which helps us as mourners to make sense of what God is doing for us and our loved ones as we pass from death to immortality. Its very length gives it gravitas. However, it does contain some very difficult verses including these. Obviously, it makes perfect sense that Jesus overcomes all the powers of sin, the world and the devil, even death itself, and that He brings everything as an offering to God the Father. But how can *the Son be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all?* God the Son cannot be subject to God the Father because the three persons of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Ghost – are in all respects equal. I can only seek a clarification in these words from the Athanasian Creed, *Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead : and inferior to the Father, as touching his manhood.* It is the humanity of Jesus which is subject to the Godhead while, as the divine Son, He is eternally equal to the Father. He is the Son of Man, the perfect human being, the One Who represents us all to God, our leader, the One in Whom we are made one and presented to the Father, but, His human nature, while greater than every other human being, is nevertheless necessarily inferior to God.

March 1st

I Corinthians 15 v29

Else what shall they do which are baptised for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptised for the dead?

This verse is mysterious. What it seems to mean is this. Some Corinthian Christians thought it was possible to be baptized on behalf of dead people – presumably those who had died without being baptised themselves. Paul does not approve of this practice which doesn't make any sense anyway, but the very fact that it happens implies that they must believe in the afterlife.

March 2nd

I Corinthians 15 vv 30-32

If there were no resurrection from the dead, why would Paul and so many others, why would we be willing to face martyrdom rather than renounce our faith? It doesn't make sense to be a Christian and stand out against the world unless the Gospel is true.

March 3rd (Lent 3)

I Corinthians 15 v33

Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.

Live among the people of the world. Work and socialise among the people of the world. Most of us have no choice in the matter. If we didn't mix with non-Christians, how would we share our faith with? How would we show our care for them? How would be light, salt & yeast. But don't adopt the attitudes of the world around us, indifference to Jesus, the Way, the Truth & the Life.

WE beseech thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of thy humble servants, and stretch forth the right hand of thy Majesty, to be our defence against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

March 4th

I Corinthians 15 v34

Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.

Imagine standing up at the front of the church and reading this verse to the congregation, maybe the congregation at a funeral. What are its implications. One of the prayers at a funeral concludes with these words, *that we, with all those that are departed in the true faith of thy holy Name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in thy eternal and everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.* That's my job in essence, isn't it, to bring my parishioners – all of them if God so wills – to *our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in thy eternal and everlasting glory.* Only God can do that, but He uses His ministers as He works His purposes out. He uses all Christians. Ordained ministers need the support and prayers of lay people in doing their work. All baptised people need the prayers and support of other Christians as they play their part in bringing about God's Will, *that we, with all those that are departed in the true faith of thy holy Name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in thy eternal and everlasting glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

March 5th

I Corinthians 15 vv 35-38

It's a fair question - *how are the dead raised up?* It appears to us to be impossible. We can't see how it could happen. Yet there are many things in the world which we don't understand and yet we know that they happen. The universe is a very wonderful place. The more we discover of it, the more amazing it appears. The more we learn about it,

the more we realize we are a very long way from ever understanding. If you knew nothing about plants, you'd wonder why gardeners and farmers bury in the ground what appears to be dead? What are they hoping for? But, in the power of God, the seed grows. We understand more about the process of growth that people knew in Paul's time, but there is still a very great deal to learn, more than Paul could have ever imagined – DNA, cells & cell division, how cells use energy, how proteins are synthesised, the many chemical reactions which go on in living organisms. Think about the miracle of germination & growth. Can you still doubt that the God Who created this world can raise the dead?

March 6th

I Corinthians 15 v39

All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds.

God has made a wonderful and diverse world. In many respects, men, beasts, fish and birds are alike. We are all animals. In fact, we are all vertebrates. We are made of the same stuff – the dust of the earth, the chemicals of which the universe consists. Our growth and development are directed by our DNA, much of which is shared between species. Our energy comes from our food – proteins, carbohydrates, fat – whether we're people or birds. All living things have a great deal in common. And yet we are so different in so many respects. Is it really unreasonable to believe that there is also a natural body and a spiritual body – the same person, yet so different, one mortal, the other immortal.

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

March 7th

I Corinthians 15 vv 40&41

Paul could look up into the night sky and - there being so much less light & atmospheric pollution in his day – he would see myriads of stars and up to seven planets. Awe-inspiring. We now have telescopes and other instruments capable of discerning many more heavenly bodies than Paul could have imagined, at inconceivable distances from the earth. We know so much more about the gravitational and other forces which control their position and movement. Paul would have had no idea of the nuclear reactions which produce the stars' light and heat, as well as generating the chemicals which make life in the universe possible. The more we learn, the more we realise there is to learn. Awe-inspiring. Who could doubt that the God Who made all this could also raise the dead?

March 8th

I Corinthians 15 v 42-44

The sun and the moon and the stars have qualities which are less apparent on earth. From our point of view, there is a purity about them, a wonder, an order which is not so clear on our much less-ordered world, a world disfigured by human sin. The realm of space in practical terms is different from our life on earth. Stars and planets form tidy geometric shapes – at least when observed from earth. It is more obvious that they obey the laws of science simply because space is so vast and so much less complex than life on earth. Perhaps less different than most people in Paul's day would have understood, but the heavenly bodies are still different enough to provide an analogy between the natural body and the spiritual body. The latter is more ordered, purer, more glorious even. But the natural body and the spiritual body are aspects of redeemed humanity just as this terrestrial realm and the celestial realm are aspects of God's Creation – sharing much and differing greatly.

March 9th

I Corinthians 15 vv 45-49

In the Genesis story, God forms man of the dust of the ground. He breathes into Adam the breath of life and we become living souls. We forfeit that life by sinning against God. God sends Jesus into the world, *perfect God, and perfect Man*. He is tempted in all respects as we are, yet He does not sin. Jesus does not come under the sentence of death

which hangs over the rest of humanity. Nevertheless, Jesus dies and thereby overcomes death. In Adam – as ordinary human beings *of the earth, earthy* - we are doomed to die. The natural body is mortal. But in Christ (as we are through faith in Him, through repentance, in Baptism), we receive a spiritual body, we are inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Risen Christ. We can now look forward to a spiritual body, a body which is immortal.

March 10th (Lent 4 / Mothering Sunday) I Corinthians 15 vv 50 & 51
We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.

Supposedly, a bishop chose these words of St Paul when he was preaching at the opening of a new maternity hospital. It is a thought though. Babies in the womb can have no idea of life after birth. They couldn't survive outside their mothers' bodies until they were sufficiently developed, had been through the birth process and the chord had been cut. After birth, we are utterly different, but we are still the same people. In the womb, we don't even breathe for ourselves. There is a parallel between birth and dying. We cannot have much idea of heaven until we get there. We are utterly transformed from what we are on earth and yet we are the same people. We breathe in the Holy Spirit, rather than the air of the earthly atmosphere.

GRANT, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we, who for our evil deeds do worthily deserve to be punished, by the comfort of thy grace may mercifully be relieved; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

March 11th I Corinthians 15 v52

There is a certain amount of controversy in the Church about whether when we die we go straight to heaven or have to wait until the end of the world when Christ returns to judge the quick & the dead. Actually, it makes no difference to us. When we die, we leave the realm of time and space. Whenever we die, the next we shall know will be the Presence of God.

March 12th I Corinthians 15 vv 53-57

We shall be transformed into the likeness of Christ – the sinless One. We shall be inspired by His Holy Spirit. *The wages of sin is death.* Washed clean of all our sin, death cannot touch us and, by God's grace, we are immortal.

March 13th

I Corinthians 15 v 58

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

The last fourteen words of this chapter mean a great deal to me and are very appropriate for a funeral congregation. Life may sometimes seem purposeless. What are we here for? What do we achieve in life? What do our achievements matter? Aren't they all wiped out in death? In a generation or two we shall be forgotten. What does it all mean? Why do our lives matter? Does anything we do have any real significance? But we are assured here that we do matter. Our existence is not wiped out by death. On the contrary, we rise again to a much more glorious life. The things which we achieve in this life are worthwhile because they are part of God's eternal plan. We do matter. It goes with the line from Psalm 90, which is often used at funerals: *So teach us to number our days: that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

March 14th

I Corinthians 16 vv 1-4

It was Paul who began the Sunday collection. The Christians back in Jerusalem were facing hardship and Paul organised a collection for them among the Gentile churches. Although there were differences of opinion and emphasis between the Churches in Judaea and the Gentile Churches, they all comprised one Church, united in love. So, in the world today, we support Christians in other countries and they support us. Living in a relatively well to do part of the world, we can send money & goods. We can all pray for one another. Personnel from the UK may go to work abroad & Christians from other places may come to work here. What Christians in Africa achieve in terms of mission, church growth and care for their communities is astonishing to us members of the more complacent Church of England. It is a blessing that they can share their gifts with us.

March 15th

I Corinthians 16 vv 5&6

Paul is not sure of his itinerary. He doesn't know what difficulties he may encounter or what opportunities might open up before him. Transport might not be readily available or reliable. Travelling could be drastically affected by the weather or by storms at sea. I like this

admission of uncertainty. Some people have their lives mapped out in their minds: university, gap year, job, married at 30, a better job at 33, children at 35, etc.. I've heard people speaking quite resentfully because their lives are not going according to plan. But none of us can be sure about anything. We don't know that we'll pass our exams and get the jobs we want. We may never meet Mr or Miss Right. We may not be able to have children. Illness or accident may make it impossible to fulfil our ambitions. And on the other hand, we may have opportunities that we would never have thought of when we were eighteen and planning our lives. Miss Right might come along when we're 19 or when we're 60. We might be offered a job we never dreamt was possible. We might discover a vocation to an entirely different way of living. We may acquire interests or take up hobbies that we'd never thought of. I'm always mindful of what St James says (4¹³⁻¹⁵):
*¹³ Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:
¹⁴ Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. ¹⁵ For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.*

These days we come under pressure in the Church to draw up plans. Paul did have in mind what he hoped to do and presumably he made provision to travel to these different places, to meet the people he wanted to meet & to preach where he believed that he was called to preach. It is good to have in our minds an idea of what we hope to achieve in the next few days or years and to plan accordingly. But, when we do so, we also need to remember that our plans may not be God's plans. Doors may close in front of us when He wants us to take another path. Opportunities may open up before us which we had never considered. We may well find that we cannot depend on our own resources, but God may provide more than we can imagine.

March 16th

I Corinthians 16 vv 7-9

Paul wants to remain in Ephesus where he is enjoying a very successful ministry (Acts 19). His very success has, however, stirred up opposition. I have heard people surmise that the reason we Christians

in Britain are not persecuted is because we make too little impact to bother anyone. I don't know about that, but we should certainly be as bold as Paul and as committed in standing up for what we believe in.

March 17th (Lent 5 Passion Sunday) I Corinthians 16 vv 10&11
Paul and Timothy were very close and both engaged in the work of the ministry. It would appear that some people did not respect Timothy because he was still a young man. Jesus tells us that it is by their fruits that we know people – not by their age, their health, their appearance or whatever. What should have mattered to people regarding Timothy as a Christian minister was his character and his ability in which Paul had every confidence.

We are prone to judge our ministers, our clergy. We should always be very careful about judging people. *For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged.* We do owe our ministers, our elders, our priests, our bishops, respect. That is not to say that clergy are without fault. Far from it. We are fallible human beings like everybody else. There are times, therefore, when a bishop, a priest or an elder is justifiably criticised. But, if so, the criticism needs to be fair and with regard to things which really matter. Does the vicar faithfully preach the Gospel? Does he genuinely care about the people whose pastor he is? Does his own life match up to the faith he professes? Niggling complaints about his age or youth, his appearance, his mannerisms, etc., serve only to undermine him and to make it harder for people to profit from his God-given ministry. Paul writes to Timothy: *Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in manner of living, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*

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

March 18th I Corinthians 16 v12
I find it interesting that Apollos didn't do what Paul wanted him to do. Paul was a very powerful personality and I would have expected that mostly his companions would have fallen in with his wishes. Apollos

was fairly new to the faith. A good boss is not, however, a tyrant. Paul respected Apollos' priorities for his own ministry, but still commended him to the Church at Corinth. A recent study has shown that people are much happier at work and work better if they are not subject to over-bearing scrutiny and direction by their bosses. In order to work happily and efficiently, we need a reasonable degree of control over our lives including our work.

Sometimes, indeed, it is the workers who save the boss from himself. They can only do that if they know that he respects them. What happened at Ephesus was that a riot started because the silversmiths who made images which the pagans worshipped lost their trade when large numbers of people became Christians and gave up graven images of pagan deities. They assembled in the town theatre. The atmosphere was fraught and Paul thought he could help by entering and presumably addressing the crowd. His friends realised that his presence would only make things worse and held him back.

March 19th

I Corinthians 16 vv13

Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.

Most Christian congregations in this country are made up of more women than men. They may be older women who have perhaps been members of the Church all their lives or who have perhaps joined more recently, maybe following widowhood. They may be younger women with young children. But, very often, the men are lacking. Why should this be? I think the Church does tend to promote what some people would think of as feminine virtues – gentleness, meekness, compassion, etc. – and come down harder on what can be seen as masculine vices – bad temper, drink, selfishness, etc.. and downplay masculine virtues. But of course this is all wrong. While men and women are different, we all have the same Christian calling. We celebrate one another's virtues – watching, standing fast, strength, gentleness, meekness, compassion whether we are men or women. We all have our role in God's Church.

March 20th

I Corinthians 16 v14

Let all your things be done with charity.

We depend on the air we breathe. It is all around us. We breathe it into our lungs. Without air we die. Oxygen is dissolved in our blood. Our

blood conveys oxygen to every living part of our body. Without oxygen, our muscles wouldn't work, we couldn't keep warm, we couldn't metabolise our food, our organs wouldn't function. Without oxygen, the parts of our body die and become corrupted, like a gangrenous limb.

Now think of charity or love as the air we breathe. We are surrounded and sustained by the love of God. Without love, we cannot live. Without love we cannot function. Without love we die. As we dwell in the love of God, so we breathe in that love. God's love dwells in us. God's love fills us and makes it possible for us to live the Christian life.

1 Love divine, all loves
excelling,
joy of heav'n to earth come
down,
fix in us Thy humble dwelling;
all Thy faithful mercies crown!
Jesus, Thou art all
compassion,
pure, unbounded love Thou
art;
visit us with Thy salvation;
enter every trembling heart.

2 Breathe, O breathe Thy loving
Spirit
into every troubled breast!
Let us all in Thee inherit,
let us find the promised rest.
Take away our love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
end of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.

3 Come, Almighty to deliver;
let us all Thy grace receive;
suddenly return and never,
nevermore Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always
blessing,
serve Thee as Thy hosts above;
pray, and praise Thee without
ceasing,
glory in Thy perfect love.

4 Finish then, Thy new
creation;
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see Thy great salvation
perfectly restored in Thee.
Changed from glory into glory,
till in heav'n we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before
Thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

March 21st

I Corinthians 16 vv 15-18

This is how it should be, Paul and his co-workers, fellow ministers, working together. They should enjoy the fellowship and respect of the whole Church. All Christians are part of the Body, each with his or her part to play, harmoniously glorifying God, proclaiming the faith, caring for one another and the wider world.

Today is the anniversary of the martyrdom of Thomas Cranmer. Appointed Archbishop of Canterbury during the reign of Henry VIII, he was one of the leading figures in bringing reformation to the Church of England. He was a great thinker and teacher of the faith, identifying and correcting many of the errors which had come into the Church during the Middle Ages. He played a big part in making sure that the Bible was available to us in English. He gave us our English prayer book. He accomplished as much as he could under Henry and a great deal more under Henry's son Edward VI. But, inevitably there were many within the Church who disagreed with Cranmer's reforms and, when Edward's sister Mary became Queen, she and many others set about undoing them. Cranmer was burnt at the stake in Oxford on 21st March 1556. Monarchs, archbishops, bishops, theologians, liturgists are all human beings, as are all Christians, and therefore susceptible to error, from which it follows that there will be disagreements among church leaders and among church members more generally. Some of these disagreements will be regarding to important issues about which we may feel strongly. But what about respect & fellowship? What about our dwelling in the love of God? We can & should still love one another while we disagree & await together the fulfilment of Christ's promise that the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth.

Our 1662 Book of Common Prayer contains a prayer composed by Dr Gunning in 1661 – the year after Charles II was restored to the throne after a bloody civil war and years of tyranny in part brought about by the mishandling of religious differences. I use it every day & these words are an extract from it. *More especially, we pray for the good estate of the Catholick Church; that it may be so guided and governed by thy good Spirit, that all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life.*

March 22nd

I Corinthians 16 v19

The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

I'm a great one for the local Church and a strong supporter of the parish system. We are the Church in this place. We must not, however, lose sight of the fact that we are part of a greater whole. Just as the Church

in Corinth was in fellowship with local Churches in Asia Minor, so we are part of the Diocese of Rochester and the Church of England. We belong to the Anglican Communion and have links with Churches in Zimbabwe, Tanzania & Estonia. We are brothers and sisters with the other Churches in Cuxton & Halling and with the Bulgarian Orthodox who share St Michael's with us. We are members of the same Church with fellow Christians of other denominations in England & throughout the world.

Note also that the Church met in the private house of Aquila & Priscilla, not in a special dedicated or consecrated building, and that Priscilla (while presumably remaining within Paul's teaching about women's ministry) had a key role in the life & mission of the Church.

March 23rd

I Corinthians 16 vv 20-24

Paul signs off with words of love and fellowship, but there is this awkward verse 22. *F any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha. A curse on him who does not love the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord is coming. Or, Come, O Lord.* These words are hard to translate and certainly difficult to understand. The Lord is certainly coming. His advent is certainly something to hope for, to look forward to and to pay for. But a curse on those who don't love Him? Is this a warning to repent before that unpredictable date on which we shall all stand before our Judge? Are some people really incorrigible? Can there be people for whom there is no hope? Or is it that Paul is just so exasperated with some of the members of the Church at Corinth – divisive, opinionated, rebellious, stubborn – that he himself can do nothing with them and he can only leave the people's destiny to Jesus Himself to sort out?

March 24th (Palm Sunday)

Luke 19 vv 28-45

I thought we might spend these last eight days of the quarter thinking about the readings for Holy Week and Easter. Palm Sunday processions can be fun. We meet together as a Christian family. We process together. We sing joyful hymns like *All Glory, Laud & Honour*. It is really good if we can get a real live donkey. In some places, we

can process through the streets as an act of witness to the wider community.

Jesus was fulfilling prophecy as His whole life fulfils the Old Testament. The apostles & the crowds were jubilant, though of course Jesus knew what awaited Him in Jerusalem. He is hailed as the King, which He is – King of kings & Lord of lords. *King of the Jews* will also, however, be the superscription on the Cross. There were some who wanted to put a stop to this exaltation of the humble carpenter they had failed to recognise as the Messiah. But the praise was unstoppable. Truth will out. The stones would cry out if the people were silent. Jesus wept because the obduracy of the citizens of Jerusalem (in common with so many members of the human race) would bring destruction on themselves. He cleansed the Temple, but those who profited by its desecration sought to destroy Him. Religious people sometimes have the most closed minds of all.

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.

March 25th

John 14 vv 1-14

Today, we would celebrate Lady Day, the day the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to tell her that she would be the mother of the Son of God. Because this is Holy Week, we shall postpone Lady Day till 8th April.

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. There are many reasons these days why our hearts might be troubled, but they ought not to be. Mary's Son is the Son of God. To know Him is to know God and to know God is to have eternal life. Jesus has prepared a place for us at His side. We needn't feel lost. He is the Way. Pray regularly & frequently. Keep His commandments. We shan't be let down. We shan't be deceived if we put our trust in Jesus. He is the Truth. We shan't die eternally. He is the Life. In Christ, we

shall continue God's work on earth. In Him our prayers are answered as we trust that His Will is our welfare.

March 26th

John 15 vv 1-13

I quite often tell the story of when I was a curate looking after the vicar's tortoise while the vicar was on holiday. The reptile in question bit through the stalks of my runner beans, resulting in their withering & dying. Drawing up sap from the roots, the leaves open and photosynthesise, nourishing the whole plant. The scarlet flowers are attractive in themselves, beautifying the vegetable garden. They attract pollinating insects, enabling the beans to develop providing food for us and potentially propagating new bean plants for next year. But none of this happens if they are cut off from the roots. Severed from the roots, they die. Likewise, in order to live out our Christian lives, we need to be open to Jesus. His grace, His love, His Holy Spirit sustain our lives, enable us to play our part in supporting and feeding our fellow Christians, beautify God's Church, fulfil the function for which we are created, make new Christians.

March 27th

John 16 vv 1-16

We follow Jesus in the way of the cross. We should expect to be treated as He was treated. We're not necessarily promised an easy life as Christians. We may be resented and persecuted as He was by those who do not know God. Forewarned is forearmed. What are our arms? Faith & hope and love. We trust God to care for us. We have the sure & certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life. We are not overcome by evil; we overcome evil with good.

The Body of Jesus will be crucified, rise again and ascend into Heaven, but He will send us His Holy Spirit Who will be with us always, sustain us in our faith, pray with us and for us and enable us to perform the good works which God has prepared for us to walk in.

March 28th (Maundy Thursday)

John 17 vv 1-26

I think this is my favourite chapter in the Bible. Jesus is celebrating the Passover meal with His apostles, knowing that one of them has betrayed Him and that, after they have eaten, He will go out into the Garden of Gethsemane, be arrested & maltreated, deserted by His friends, mocked

and abused, be falsely convicted in a travesty of due process, and crucified the following day. He has washed the disciples' feet, instituted the Holy Communion, and given them so much wonderful teaching, culminating in this chapter. Jesus consecrates Himself. He is King of Kings & Lord of Lords. He is the great High Priest. He is the *full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.* He laid aside His glory when He was born into our world. God glorifies Him both because of Who He is and what He has accomplished. Jesus, the Father & the Spirit are one in a perfect unity of love which creates, redeems and sanctifies the human race which is described as the crown of creation.

He consecrates His apostles and the millions of us who have come to put our faith in Him through the apostolic witness. We are incorporated in the loving unity of the Trinity – kings and priests, who, having taken up our cross to follow Jesus, are in Him heirs of eternal life.

The Church is distinct from the world. Christians are different. But Jesus was sent because God so loved the world. So He sends us that the world might believe and those who do believe change sides and join God's Church, heirs of eternal life.

And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them.

March 29th (Good Friday)

Genesis 22 vv 1-19

The story of the Binding of Isaac is one of the most difficult in the Bible. What would it mean for a parent to be told to sacrifice a child? There have been many religions in human history that have practised human sacrifice, but human sacrifice is not mandated by either the faith of the Old Testament or that of the New. On the contrary, it is regarded as an abomination. Civilised Christian nations do, however, sometimes ask or even demand that families sacrifice their sons, for example in time of war. Isaac was the child of the promise, the son born to a couple who had long been unable to have children of their own. It was through Isaac that God's promise that Abraham's seed would inherit the land of Canaan was expected to be fulfilled. It says that God tempted

Abraham. Some people think of this story when they pray the Lord's Prayer – *Lead us not into temptation*. What God demanded of Abraham was terrible. And what about the boy himself? Was Isaac fearful as he began to understand what was about to happen? Did he trust his father up to the end or did he feel betrayed by a father who was putting obedience to God before his family.

We now know that the story has a happy ending. Abraham's faith is vindicated. Isaac is saved. God's promise to Abraham is confirmed: *that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.* As Christians, we understand this as being about Jesus Who is a blessing to all the nations of the earth. But not so fast! God the Father does accept the sacrifice of His Son. Jesus does die. What God spares Abraham & Isaac, He does not spare Himself.

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.*

March 30th (Holy Saturday)

Romans 6 vv 1-13

Easter is a wonderful time to hold baptism services. In the Easter Vigil service, we are invited to renew our baptismal vows. We are baptised into Christ's Death. We go under the waters of Baptism as He enters the tomb. Sin & death are put to death in us. We are born again. We are born into the *sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life*. As so often, Paul calls us to live up to our calling.

March 31st (Easter Day)

Revelation 5 vv 1-14

We think at Easter about the empty tomb and Christ showing Himself to Mary Magdalene and other women and the apostles and other disciples

on earth. But what about heaven? What about the glorification of the Son of Man?

John is granted this wonderful vision of the way things are in the heavenly realm and their relation to what happens on earth. I take it that the sealed book is the account of how God's purposes are worked out in the story of Creation from the beginning of the world to its end. Jesus reveals God's plan and it is He Who brings it to fruition. Thus He is the One Who is able to unseal the book. Jesus fulfils the Old Testament. He is the Lion of Judah and the Son of David. He is the Lamb of God, the Passover Lamb whose blood delivers us from the power of death, an offering for sin. The sacrificial Lamb has been slain, but now He stands. He is risen from the dead. All authority is given to Him in heaven and on earth. He sends the Paraclete, the Seven-fold Spirit of God to be our advocate and comforter. By His Blood, millions of us are redeemed from people of every race and language. In Him we are kings and priests. We join with myriads of angels and every creature of God to praise God and Jesus: *Blessing & honour & glory & power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.*