

But Where Shall
Wisdom Be
Found

The Book of Proverbs
Bible Notes
July – September 2022

July 1st

Proverbs 3 vv 21-26

For the LORD shall be thy confidence.

I had been thinking of having a change this quarter and looking at St Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. On reflection, however, I think it will be good to carry on with Proverbs. There are connections between Proverbs and I Corinthians – as you would expect. It is all the Word of God.

For the LORD shall be thy confidence. The world has certainly faced some challenges over these last few years 'Twas ever thus. Sadly, there are always wars going on somewhere in the world, the poor are always with us somewhere at home or abroad, the fight continues against ignorance and unbelief, disease is ever present in the world, but, in these last two or three years, we ourselves have been more caught up in these challenges the world always faces than we had become accustomed to being. In our personal lives too, we may feel overwhelmed. We feel, perhaps, that we can't cope. We don't know what to do. We feel got at. It is nevertheless true that whatever the world throws at us, the LORD is our confidence. We can always trust Him for ourselves, for the people we love, for the Church and for the world.

July 2nd

Proverbs 3 vv 27 & 28

Procrastination, they say, is the thief of time. We know what we ought to do. There is no reason why we shouldn't do it now. Yet we put it off till tomorrow. Maybe we're tired. Maybe we're busy. Maybe we just don't want to do whatever it is. But if we have a bill to pay (especially if it is to a small trader) we are duty bound to pay it promptly. If we really intend to give a donation to a mission or charity, the sooner we do so, the better. If we're going to offer a helping hand to a friend or a neighbour, the sooner we do so, the sooner we set their mind at rest. We might be shy in offering help. We might doubt our ability to make much difference. But it's only by getting on with things that we can achieve anything and doing so takes away from us the stress of worrying about what we've got to do.

July 3rd (Trinity 3)

Proverbs 3 vv 29&30

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

Amen.

Why would you devise evil with against your neighbour or start a fight with someone who has done you no harm? But somebody must be doing these things. Every fight has to be started by someone. There is that spirit of mischief in us. We enjoy a gossip and might, without thinking about it even, do harm to someone by talking about them. Young men in pubs pick fights to demonstrate their strength. It is possible to use wit or superior intelligence to make other people feel bad and sometimes we do it almost without thinking. We can take unreasonable dislikes to other people. Maybe we bear grudges out of all proportion to any original wrong. St Paul says, *Whatever is not of faith is sin*. He might also have said, *Whatever is not of love is sin*.

July 4th

Proverbs 3 vv 31&32

It can often seem that the ruthless do better in this world than good people. Some are plainly criminals who commit fraud or rob people or who use violence to get what they want. Others might stay within the law (just about) but nevertheless achieve their own personal goals at the expense of mistreating their workforce, exploiting the planet, short-changing their customers or behaving dishonourably towards their colleagues. You can probably think of selfish people who ride roughshod over other people – including their friends, families and neighbours – and appear to do very well out of it. You may then wonder whether trying to be a good person is really worth it. Three thoughts.

- 1) Am I really without sin & in a position to cast the first stone?
- 2) Virtue really is its own reward. We do live better, more contented lives if we live in accordance with God's Law.
- 3) There is Judgment to come & the wicked will pay the price for their wickedness unless they repent.

July 5th

Proverbs 3 vv 33-35

The sinner is a fool. The fool is a sinner. That's the biblical way of looking at people. Quite possibly, we find that approach distasteful and unacceptable. That's because what we tend to mean by the word *fool* is a person of low IQ. But IQ is a measure of cleverness. Really it is just a measure of how good you are at IQ tests. A person with a high IQ can be a fool in the biblical sense and a person of very low IQ can be a wise man or woman. In the biblical sense, the fool is the man who has said in his heart, *There is no God*. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the LORD. The wise man hears the words of Jesus and acts on what Jesus says. So he is like a man who builds his house on a rock. The fool disregards the words of Jesus. His life is built on sand. Christ is the power and wisdom of God. Wisdom is not far removed from love. If we love, we keep God's commandments. If we are wise, we obey Jesus. God is love. You can be very clever, powerful and rich and still be a fool if you don't love God and keep His commandments. Whereas you may not be very good at exams or particularly outstanding at all in the opinion of the world, but if you love God and live in accordance with His Will, you have a treasure beyond price. You are a treasure beyond price.

July 6th

Proverbs 4 vv 1-4

Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

In some ways, at least for us growing up in a reasonably prosperous and peaceful country, each generation has had more opportunities than its predecessor - secondary education, universities and colleges. We've all benefitted by advances in human knowledge, from personal computers to improved medical treatments, more comfortable homes and greater opportunities to travel. It's easy, especially when you're young, to feel superior to your dad and mum who haven't got your qualifications, aren't really comfortable with technology and still express opinions which the great & the good regard as unacceptable. The old themselves might start to regard themselves as useless and redundant. But the fundamental principles – faith, hope, love, wisdom, etc. – don't change. They are learnt, experienced and passed down the generations.

July 7th

Proverbs 4 vv 5-14

Get wisdom. Get understanding.

How would you go about doing that? Yes, study. It's always good to learn. Most of us experience formal education. That is an opportunity to make the most of. We can study the world for ourselves, by observation, by trying things, by reading books, looking things up online, etc.. We can learn from other people who know more than we do. We can tease out deeper understanding by discussing things with other people. One of the best ways of learning is to try to teach others. You really have to get a grip on your subject to do that. Yet, as we have seen, the acquisition of true wisdom is a religious exercise. We can and should read the Bible. We can and should pray. We can and should meet Christ – the power and wisdom of God – in Christian fellowship, in the Sacraments and by means of all the means of grace. I believe that any knowledge – of scientific subjects, of any of the arts, of practical skills, of human relationships – can contribute to our store of wisdom, but, most of all, in order to be wise, we need the grace of God, to which we have access through prayer.

James 1: ⁵ *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.* ⁶ *But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.*

July 8th

Proverbs 4 vv 14-19

It's not always easy to avoid the path of the wicked. As human beings, we do like to belong. Much of what we call the Wisdom Literature in the Bible is addressed to young men going out into the world. You go to college, start a new job, join one of the armed services. You are alone, away from home perhaps for the first time. You may feel lonely and somewhat daunted. So, what do you do when you're invited to join the group and go out and paint the town red? Most readers of these notes will like me be past that stage in life if we ever went through it, but we still meet these challenges, less so in the Church I hope than in the wider world – one reason for belonging to a Church perhaps – but there are times when in order to belong we might be tempted to join in with what we really know is wrong.

July 9th

Proverbs 4 vv 20-27

There have been some disgraceful scenes at foreign holiday results in which groups of English young adults, under the influence of far too much alcohol, have offended the locals, got into fights, behaved extremely imprudently with members of the opposite sex, and committed acts of vandalism. Reading a journalist's account of such an episode, I was moved by the writer's reference to a young man's torn and bloodied tee shirt which had probably been lovingly washed and ironed and packed by his mother. On his own, not urged on by his mates, if he hadn't drunk so much, he would probably never have done what he did. He would have been ashamed of himself and ashamed of the way he had let his mother down. He would have been much wiser if, with a cool head, he had first sat down before going out and remembered what his parents had taught him when he was a child. Isaiah 51¹: *Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.* The reference is to our heavenly Father, but it would also apply to our earthly parents if we were properly brought up.

July 10th (Trinity 4)

Proverbs 5 vv 1&2

O **GOD**, the protector of all that trust in thee, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy; Increase and multiply upon us thy mercy; that, thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal: Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake our Lord. *Amen.*

Writing the notes for yesterday, I was very conscious of those young people who haven't had a good upbringing, who might know no better. It's a reminder of how important it is that children grow up in good homes, that they are well educated, that they know right from wrong, that they know Jesus. Hence the imperative to support parents and teachers and to what what we can to help them and to help children to grow up with a reliable moral compass, the needle aligned with God's Will for our lives – ie perfect love for Him & for one another.

July 11th

Proverbs 5 vv 3-14

What matters most in your life? We need air, water, food, clothing, shelter. We need other people. We need love. We need purpose in life. We need grounds for hope and faith. We might say that these things are human rights.

But, in satisfying some needs (or desires or lusts), we may be tempted away from the paths of wisdom. We might lie or steal or use violence to obtain the things that are essential to life. We might deceive another person in the attempt to make them love us. Our purpose in life might not be a good one. We might have an all-consuming desire for wealth, power or position.

Seeking love or lust, we might give ourselves to the wrong person or we might exploit another person's weakness or vulnerability. There are reports of single men of dubious reputation offering homes to Ukrainian female refugees.

What we really need is to be right with God and our attitude to everything else we might need or desire is determined by our relationship with Him.

July 12th

Proverbs 5 vv 15-21

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

People will tell you that the commandment against adultery only applied to women. They claim that the Bible was written in and for a patriarchal society and that chastity was only required of women whereas husbands were free to behave as they chose. This is not so, as this and many other passages demonstrate. Jesus taught (Mark 10): *But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.*⁷ *For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife;*⁸ *And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh.*⁹ *What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.* This is the way things are meant to be and this is best for husbands, wives & any children they have.

July 13th

Proverbs 5 vv 22&23

Before the murder of Abel, when Cain expressed jealousy that his brother's offering was acceptable and his was not, God told him, *If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.* (Genesis 4⁷). Cain then killed Abel. Sin is a vicious circle. One sin leads to another. The sinner seeks deeper into the mire. Sin becomes a habit. Further sins may be committed in an attempt to conceal what the sinner has already done wrong. How do you break the circle? How do you escape the quagmire of evil before it completely overwhelms and destroys you? You turn to Christ. You repent of your sins. You are baptised in His Name. Then you seek the grace of the Holy Spirit to live as a Christian in the fellowship of the Church and receiving the means of grace – including Word & Sacraments, prayer, thanksgiving & praise.

One of my tutors at theological college, who was not a great fan of the 1662 prayerbook, used to say that Cranmer's introduction to Morning and Evening Prayer got what worship is pretty well right. *Scripture moveth us, in sundry places, to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness; and that we should not dissemble nor cloak them before the face of Almighty God our heavenly Father; but confess them with an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart; to the end that we may obtain forgiveness of the same, by his infinite goodness and mercy. And although we ought, at all times, humbly to acknowledge our sins before God; yet ought we chiefly so to do, when we assemble and meet together to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands, to set forth his most worthy praise, to hear his most holy Word, and to ask those things which are requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul.* Worship is the offering of our lives to God. It is only when we offer ourselves back to Him Who gave Himself for us that we are truly alive.

O Love, that wilt not let me
go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I

owe,
That in Thine ocean depths
its flow
May richer, fuller be.

July 14th

Proverbs 6 vv 1-5

This is so topical. Young adults struggling, for example, to purchase a home. They can't get together a big enough deposit. They turn to somebody else – usually parents – to stand surety for them. If the young people can't pay the mortgage, the surety will have to come up with the money. But what happens when your son or your daughter or your good friend cannot pay their debts? What if it is a large sum which you can't really pay either? Do you mortgage your own home? Do you declare yourself bankrupt? These arrangements have to be thought through very carefully and the fact that you love someone dearly mustn't be allowed to cloud your judgment to the point where both they and you are running dangerous risks with your future financial security. Sadly, even love doesn't always survive a default on a loan.

July 15th

Proverbs 6 vv 6-11

Remember the original intended readership of these words was young men. It can be difficult getting teenagers and young adults out of bed in the morning – partly because they very often go to bed too late the night before. Some studies have suggested that teenage brains actually work that way and that schools and colleges should begin their later. Be that as it may, you do have to get up and get on with things at some stage and most of us have to be up and at work at the same time as other people!

How doth the little busy bee
Improve each shining hour,
And gather honey all the day
From every opening flower!

How skilfully she builds her
cell!
How neat she spreads the wax!
And labours hard to store it well
With the sweet food she makes.

In works of labour or of skill,
I would be busy too;
For Satan finds some mischief
still
For idle hands to do.

In books, or work, or healthful
play,
Let my first years be passed,
That I may give for every day
Some good account at last.

Isaac Watts.

July 16th

Proverbs 6 vv 12-15

It's not fair is one of the first things the growing child learns to say.

We grow up having from the very beginning of our lives a strong sense of fairness – even if it is biased in our favour until we learn better. We instinctively believe that everybody should get his or her deserts. And it troubles us when the wicked appear to flourish or when good people suffer unjustly. I believe that we feel this way because we are made in the image of God Who is just, because we are born with consciences and because we are taught about right and wrong, reward and punishment from a very early age. The Bible strongly affirms that God is just and that justice will prevail while also acknowledging that the appearance is often quite different. I think it's one of those subjects where we just have to hang on in their. God is just. Maybe, the sufferings of the saints makes them stronger. Maybe the wicked are being given time to repent. Maybe we just have to accept that there are some things which we just cannot understand, but that we can nevertheless always trust God.

Psalm 131: **LORD**, *I am not high-minded : I have no proud looks. 2. I do not exercise myself in great matters : which are too high for me. 3. But I refrain my soul, and keep it low, like as a child that is weaned from his mother : yea, my soul is even as a weaned child. 4. O Israel, trust in the Lord : from this time forth for evermore.*

July 17th (Trinity 5)

Proverbs 6 vv 16-19

O GOD, who hast prepared for them that love thee such good things as pass man's understanding; Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Six things, yea seven. It is thought that when a list is put together in this form the seventh is the most important item on the list. That being so, sowing discord among brothers is a very serious sin. And yet how tempting it can be to make mischief within a family or in a Church, to stir up trouble, to gossip. We may be hypocrites, deceiving ourselves even, when we claim to be speaking the truth in love when love is in fact very far from our true motive.

July 18th

Proverbs 6 vv 20-22

There's a great deal of debate going on about sex and gender. Even young people have seen in their lifetimes enormous changes and challenges to traditional ideas about women in the work place, the role of fathers in child care, celibacy, chastity, grounds for divorce, contraception, abortion, same sex relationships, the possibilities and implications of transition from one gender to another. Understandably, people feel very strongly about these issues. The Church of England consultation *Living in Faith and Love* has been examining some of them. As noted above, some people regard the Bible as rooted in a patriarchal society which is inevitably repressive of women, harsh towards people who are different and hopelessly out of date. Other people rightly insist that the Bible is the eternal Word of God which speaks to us in every generation and is always relevant, but they don't read it carefully enough. It's too easy to assume that the Bible supports our prejudices and to read into it what we expect to find.

I look at it this way. The Bible is the eternal Word of God, relevant in every generation. The foundation of the Law is love. It follows that, whatever our differences of opinion, however firmly held, we must treat one another with respect. God is the Judge. It is not our place to condemn people whom we regard as sinners. We are all sinners in one way or another and it is only God Who has the right to judge. The Bible is not misogynistic. The young man is to attend both to his father and his mother. Men and women are equally made in the image of God and are equally redeemed in Christ. Men and women are, however, different. God could have made us all the same – hermaphrodites like earthworms – but He didn't; He created us male and female. It is not unreasonable therefore to think that women are better suited to some roles and men to others.

It is certainly wrong to oppress or to persecute people who are different, but I do believe that the traditional family – father & mother in lifelong union, children, other relations – is the basic building brick of human society and that we should be very cautious about undermining it or replacing it with alternatives.

July 19th

Proverbs 6 vv 23-29

Years ago, I remember a vicar telling me about a parishioner who tried to justify her adultery on the grounds that she loved the person with whom she was committing adultery. But you have to think through what love really means in any situation. Love is not just a feeling. It is a feeling, but it is much more than that. However you feel, if you love you won't harm other people – break up somebody else's home, break up your own home, let down your husband and children, encourage somebody else's husband to desert her for you. If you have any self respect, you won't allow your passions to make you behave in a way that you know you should be ashamed of. When the commandments forbid something, they are not just trying to spoil your fun; they are saving you from harming other people and yourself.

I Corinthians 13: ⁴*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.* ⁵*It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.* ⁶*Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.* ⁷*It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

July 20th

Proverbs 6 vv30&31

We thought a few days ago about the possibility of stealing to get food if you are hungry. To do so would be understandable. We would rightly sympathise with the thief. But we couldn't condone theft. Society could hardly function if people who thought they had good enough reason to do so simply broke the law. So the thief must receive justice, but certainly in these circumstances, tempered with mercy. Can we so order society that nobody needs to steal in order to eat? That those who can work have the chance of getting a reasonable job. That those who can't work (perhaps because of age or illness) can nevertheless have somewhere to turn for help?

July 21st

Proverbs 6 vv 32-35

Theft is punishable by law in this country. Adultery is not a crime. But adultery is a much worse offence than stealing food if you are starving. Human laws don't always coincide with God's Justice. Not every sin ought to be a crime. The prisons would be very full if they were. But is it right that some things which are not wrong in themselves are nevertheless against the law? Things like double glazing a listed cottage?

July 22nd

Proverbs 7 vv 1-27

Is the young man tempted into adultery by a woman who is bored & lonely because her husband is away? Or is this woman a professional prostitute? Or might it be that a married woman is temporarily prostituting herself in her husband's absence? Or could it be that the whole chapter is an allegory. The woman is not a real human being at all but an allegory of folly?

Folly can be attractive: gambling, risk-taking, drugs, fast driving, reckless investments, ill advised relationships, friendships or encounters. Easy to judge if you're not tempted by any of the above. But we need to examine ourselves to understand how you or I might be playing the fool. Bearing in mind that God is love, Christ is God and Christ is wisdom, any unloving thoughts, words or deeds are unwise. It's also better to pray for than to judge other people who yield to temptations to sins which we don't find at all attractive.

Adultery is obviously wrong. It is breaking a solemn vow. It is letting down people to whom you owe a duty of love. It destroys families. It may not be against the law, but jealous husbands or wives are a force to be reckoned with.

Today, S Mary Magdalene is commemorated. It is often thought that she was a prostitute, though the Bible doesn't say so. It does say, however, that Jesus cast seven devils out of her in Mark 16⁹ (which admittedly some people think was not originally part of the Gospel). Mary was certainly one of His most devoted friends and followers and she was the first witness of His Resurrection. Some people think that Jesus was talking about Mary in Luke 7⁴⁷: *Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.* The woman in the story may or may not have been Mary. The point is that she knew that she was a sinner and that she needed Jesus and loved Him because He loved her despite her admitted sinfulness. The contrast is not with the righteous. Only Jesus is truly righteous. The contrast is with those who do not recognise that they are sinners who need Jesus.

July 23rd

Proverbs 8 vv 1-9

Whether or not the woman in Proverbs 7 is an allegory for folly, this woman certainly speaks for wisdom. Wisdom – the fear of the LORD, the knowledge of God, obedience to His commandments, Love – is certainly the most important thing, to be acquired before anything else – wealth, fame, power, even a wife and family. There is a deep resonance in us with the rhythm of Wisdom. We are made in the image of God. But sin, selfishness, folly, etc. conspire to dampen our harmony with our Creator and His creation. The solution is to turn to Christ, to repent of our sins, to renounce evil. The wiser we become, the greater our potential for becoming wiser still. It's not cleverness, remember, that I'm talking about; it's openness to God.

July 24th (Trinity 6)

Proverbs 8 vv 10-14

O GOD, who hast prepared for them that love thee such good things as pass man's understanding; Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Do you agree with me that what we are asking for in the collect is what today's Bible reading advocates that we should desire?

1 TO Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love,
All pray in their distress,
And to these virtues of delight
Return their thankfulness.

2 For Mercy, Pity, Peace,
and Love,
Is God our Father dear;
And Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love,
Is Man, his child and care.

3 For Mercy has a human heart,
Pity, a human face;
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.

4 Then every man, of every clime,
That prays in his distress,
Prays to the human form divine:
Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace.

July 25th (S James)

Proverbs 8 vv 15&16

At least in the western world, there seems to be a growing disillusionment with government & politicians. In the UK, the US, France and no doubt other places as well, many voters have felt that they are being asked to vote for the lesser of two evils – more to keep the worse candidate out than to express positive support for someone in whom one truly believes. This is worrying. Democracy is probably the least bad form of government. The alternatives don't have very much to say for themselves. We certainly wouldn't want to live under a tyranny or an autocracy or to suffer the breakdown in law and order and collapse of public services typical of anarchy. So where are we going wrong? What happened to integrity, truth, honesty? What happened to competence? Why is there no vision? Various answers can be suggested but I would suggest that the biggest problem stems from lack of wisdom and we lack wisdom because, as a society, we no longer fear the LORD.

July 26th

Proverbs 8 vv 17-21

If you act wisely, you are honest and dependable. In the ordinary course of events this will lead people to trust you and it might be expected that this will lead to success and reasonable prosperity in both your business and your home life. Of course, growing wealth and power, worldly success, etc. might lead you into the folly of believing that you have achieved it all yourself, that you don't have to follow the rules and that you don't have to care about people or God. If so, you won't enjoy your wealth or your power & you'll lose the people you love. It is also true that the wise person, the good person may not prosper in worldly terms, but such a person will always know what really matters – a loving relationship with God.

Psalms 128: **BLESSED** are all they that fear the Lord : and walk in his ways. For thou shalt eat the labours of thine hands : O well is thee, and happy shalt thou be. Thy wife shall be as the fruitful vine : upon the walls of thine house. Thy children like the olive-branches : round about thy table. Lo, thus shall the man be blessed : that feareth the Lord. The Lord from out of Sion shall so bless thee : that thou shalt see Jerusalem in prosperity all thy life long. Yea, that thou shalt see thy children's children : and peace upon Israel.

July 27th

Proverbs 8 vv 22-29

How did God create Heaven and earth? God created everything that there is by His Wisdom. The Wisdom of God is eternal. It is through His Wisdom that God achieves everything which He achieves. The Wisdom of God is Jesus.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.

July 28th

Proverbs 8 vv 30&31

The inner life of the Trinity is infinitely beyond our comprehension. V30 speaks of delight and rejoicing. God is love and the unity of the Trinity is the union of love. Love encompasses joy, beauty, holiness, every virtue, all goodness. *My delights were with the sons of men.*

.For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

July 29th

Proverbs 8 vv 32-36

The Wisdom of God – manifest in Jesus, the Holy Spirit filling the whole creation, enabling us to share in the life and love and wisdom and joy and beauty and holiness of the Blessed Trinity.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

July 30th

Proverbs 9 vv 1-6

The acquisition of Wisdom is represented as participating in a rich banquet. The reference to Bread & Wine makes the Christian think of the richest banquet of all. We can't all be clever. We can't all be rich, powerful, famous or even popular. But we can all be nourished by Jesus the Bread of Life.

1 At the Lamb's high feast
we sing
praise to our victorious
King,
who has washed us in the
tide
flowing from his pierced
side,
Alleluia!

2 Praise we him whose love
divine
gives his sacred blood for
wine,
gives his body for the feast—
Christ the victim, Christ the
priest.
Alleluia!

July 31st (Trinity 7)

Proverbs 9 vv 7-9

LORD of all power and might, who art the author and giver of all good things; Graft in our hearts the love of thy Name, increase in us true religion, nourish us with all goodness, and of thy great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

I used to take assembly quite often when I was a pupil at Gillingham Grammar. I once shocked a number of people by telling any atheists present that they could go to sleep because I was not prepared to cast my pearls before swine. I've not always been modest or tactful. Jesus does, however, warn us against trying to share with people whose hearts are hardened against the message and who will only turn on us. *The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.* Today's verses warn us that it is useless to try to impart wisdom to scorners but that the wise will profit by further instruction and debate. Is the scorner committing the sin against the Holy Spirit, hardening himself against the Word of God? I don't think that God gives up on anyone. Neither should we, but we have to be sensible about what might be helpful. Nagging, fierce argument, probably won't work. But we can always pray for people. It is only God Who can soften human hearts. And we pray for ourselves as in this collect.

August 1st (Lammas)

Proverbs 9 vv 10-12

It's never too late in life to turn to God. Even at the eleventh hour, repentance is accepted. One of the thieves dying on the cross with Jesus was promised that he would be with Him in Paradise. Our lives are, however, happier, more blessed, more fulfilled if we know Jesus earlier on. It is the right thing to do to baptise infants and bring them up in the faith. Some people find Christ at school or college. Some come to God when they are married and become parents. There are many ways in which Jesus works to make Himself known to us and to bring us home to Him. But the sooner the better! Eventually, despite the infinite patience of God, it may be too late. Lammas is the feast of firstfruits.

1 Fair waved the golden corn
in Canaan's pleasant land,
when, full of joy, some shining
morn,
went forth the reaper-band.

2 To God so good and great
their cheerful thanks they
pour;
then carry to his temple-gate
the choicest of their store.

3 Like Israel, Lord, we give
our earliest fruits to thee,

and pray that, long as we shall
live,
we may thy children be.

4 Thine is our youthful prime,
and life and all its pow'rs;
be with us in our morning time,
and bless our evening hours.

5 In wisdom let us grow,
as years and strength are giv'n,
that we may serve thy Church
below,
and join thy saints in heav'n.

August 2nd

Proverbs 9 vv 13-18

You might be thinking that a lot of the blame so far has been loaded on the women for leading the men astray – whether adulteresses, prostitutes or just women of easy virtue. But of course the men are to blame too. You may think that I am old fashioned, but I remain convinced that the only those fully committed to one another in marriage should have this sort of relationship.

But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. ⁷ For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; ⁸ And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are

no more twain, but one flesh. ⁹ *What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*

August 3rd

Proverbs 10¹

Parents take a lot of pride in their children and surely most parents do everything they can not merely to protect and care for them as infants but to bring them up in such a way that they will be able to look after themselves and take an honourable and worthwhile place in the adult world. There may be many causes for anxiety as parents have to stand back progressively, giving their children room to grow up, to make their own decisions, to take risks, to become their own men or women, but without going off the rails or getting themselves into serious danger. The Bible is the best guide. Prayer is the most valuable resource.

August 4th

Proverbs 10 vv 2-6

Laziness is coupled with wickedness in these verses as a reason for poverty and failure. It is actually our duty to support ourselves as best we can and to be useful members of society. *Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath-day. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all that thou hast to do.* The fourth commandment not only tells us to rest on the seventh day. It tells us to get on and carry out our responsibilities on the other seven. Now, not every body can do a paid job. Not everybody can do physical or mental work. Some of us need help even to perform personal tasks. What matters is that we do the best we can with what we have – and that includes how we treat the people around us and our relationship of prayer with God. We can be nice to our carers. We can still pray for people even if we can't help them in what some people would call practical ways.

August 5th

Proverbs 10⁷

We've heard a lot lately about taking down the statues of sinners. We do want to honour good people and to remember them. We ought not to exalt or admire villains. There is a bit of a problem here in that most people are a mixture of good and bad. How good to you have to be to have your statue put up? How bad do you have to be to have it taken down? Who decides? In any case, statues tend to be put up to the rich

and famous who may well have done less good and more harm than much less well known people who have got on with caring for their family and doing their bit for their immediate neighbours.

August 6th

Proverbs 10⁸

This is the anniversary of the day on which the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Was that a wise thing to do? One school of thought is that such a drastic act was the only way to persuade the Japanese to surrender and so to end the Second World War. If so, such a terrible act of destruction perhaps saved many more lives which would have been lost had the war continued. This view is disputed by many who say that Japan was close to surrender anyway. We can't prove it either way. It is also suggested that, after the fall of Germany, the Russians would have carried on marching westward, assuming control of much more of Europe than was eventually the case. The bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were a warning of what the US could do if Stalin overstepped the mark. This all seems very relevant as I write with the war being waged in Ukraine. Was it wise to use nuclear weapons on human populations? The two bombings killed between 129,000 and 226,000 people, most of whom were civilians. It was a terrible way to die. In the years following, exposure to radiation at the time and afterwards led to cancers and some birth defects. What followed was a nuclear arms race and the Cold War. A significant number of nations – some with unstable or tyrannical governments - now possess nuclear weapons. The human race has the potential to wipe itself out. So was it wise to develop and deploy nuclear weapons in the first place? Had we not done so, would some other power have produced weapons like these, maybe using them on us. The Nazis tried hard to make an atom bomb. The wise man obeys God's commandments. God's commandments are summarised in the command to love.

August 7th (Trinity 8)

Proverbs 10 verses 9-12

O GOD, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth; We humbly beseech thee to put away from us all hurtful things, and to give us those things which be profitable for us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

Now there's a collect to say when we think about the issues we looked at yesterday. Wisdom is to be found in the heart of God.

Jesus, who gave himself for you
upon the cross to die,
opens to you his sacred heart;
oh, to that heart draw nigh.
Jesus, thou joy of saints on

high,
thou hope of sinners here,
attracted by those loving words
to thee I lift my prayer.

August 8th

Proverbs 10 v13

Wise people think, talk and pray about their problems and issues which confront them. It ought to be possible to get a bad person to see why he should stop being bad. It cannot be good to hurt other people. A bad person faces judgment both in this world and the next. Reform makes sense. The verse speaks about punishing the person who is too stupid to see the wisdom of living a virtuous life. Corporal punishment was common in those days. Hopefully, we can think of better ways to punish offenders. The victims of crime and society at large need to believe that justice is done. Others need to be deterred from wrongdoing. Hopefully, the offender can be reformed. Brutal punishments will not achieve the first or last of those objectives. So we pray for wisdom for judges & juries, magistrates, prison officers & governors, probation officers, the police and the government ministers and civil servants who administer the criminal justice system. We pray both for victims of crime and offenders.

August 9th

Proverbs 10 vv 14-17

Wisdom begets wisdom. If you are wise, you grow wiser. You fear God & keep His commandments. You experience His Presence with you on life's journey. Folly, a heart hardened against God, a heart with no love in it results in an unfulfilled life. Wealth is good in that it protects us from hardship and provides us with an opportunity to do

good. But if we trust in riches, if we become arrogant in the face of God and our fellow human beings, we are on the road to destruction. Poverty makes it hard to live a good life or any kind of life at all. It is God's Will that we so order society that nobody is in abject poverty. The poor are always with us, but only because we do not keep God's commandments.

August 10th (S Laurence)

Proverbs 10 v18

The first half of this verse is very hard to translate into English. It could mean, as in KJV, "he who hides hatred with lying lips is a fool" or it could mean, "he who reveals hatred with lying lips is a fool". Both make sense. Lying is wrong either way. I suppose the first meaning is of the hypocrite, flatterer or deceiver; the second is the person who insults his neighbour or gossips about him.

August 11th

Proverbs 10 v19

Do you talk too much? We can talk too much from nerves or because we want to impress or because we are uncomfortable with silence or because we think that what we have to say is more interesting and important than what other people have to say. "It is better to keep one's mouth shut and be thought a fool than to open it and remove all doubt." If we talk too much, we may be talking rubbish. We might start exaggerating or even lying. We might betray confidences. We might impart more information about ourselves than is wise in some company. We might be angry. We might gossip. We might boast. If we talk about things when we don't really know what we're talking about, we might mislead others. Silence is often wiser than speech. And that goes for writing too. I have written and sent letters and emails which it would have been wiser not to have sent, or at least to have phrased differently.

August 12th

Proverbs 10 vv 20&21

When you do have something worth saying and people are prepared to listen, then you should take the opportunity. You might be giving a sermon, a lecture or a lesson, but, more often, you will just be taking part in ordinary conversations. If your heart is in tune with God, then

your words will convey grace. They may be quite ordinary, even mundane, words, but if you show a sincere concern for and interest in the person with whom you are having a conversation, you'll be doing them good and they'll be doing you good.

August 13th

Proverbs 10 v22

This is another verse which is hard to translate. The sense is probably that we receive from God as His gift what we need in order to lead fulfilled lives. Our striving in our own strength to better ourselves achieves nothing. We only live the lives we were meant to live when we live them in faith. Psalm 127: **EXCEPT** the Lord build the house : their labour is but lost that build it. Except the Lord keep the city : the watchman waketh but in vain. It is but lost labour that ye haste to rise up early, and so late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness : for so he giveth his beloved sleep.

August 14th (Trinity 9)

Proverbs 10 v23

GRANT to us, Lord, we beseech thee, the spirit to think and do always such things as be rightful; that we, who cannot do any thing that is good without thee, may by thee be enabled to live according to thy will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

I once heard a speaker say that preachers who tell you that there is no pleasure in sin have obviously not been trying the right sins. You see his point. If people got nothing out of sinning they wouldn't do it. So why not live a life of sin? Why not simply live your life doing what brings you pleasure? Is it that God is some kind of killjoy Who will make you pay hereafter for any enjoyment you get in this life? No, the answer is that sin is destructive. It destroys other people's lives. It destroys our own lives. Sin is the opposite of love. All the commandments are comprehended in the command to love. God is love. God is the source of all life. Without love, without God, we are dead. *The wages of sin is death.* Insofar as we are without love, we are dead men walking, casting the shadow of death over the lives of the people we encounter. *The gift of God is eternal life.* The wise man or woman puts his or her trust in Him.

August 15th

Proverbs 10 vv 24&25

I've been thinking about the question of who gets to be remembered again. This question of the removal of statues & monuments keeps it at the forefronts of our minds. Statues and magnificent monuments do tend to be put up to the rich and powerful. They may deserve to be so honoured. They may, on the other hand, be serious sinners. Maybe I'm prejudiced, but I suspect that it is more likely that the rich man in his castle is a bad man than is the poor man at his gate. After we die, we're all remembered for a generation or two, by the people who knew us. We're all remembered eternally by God. In decades to come, people may know our names, eg if they do genealogical research, although they may not know much more about us. It's only famous people whose character and reputation are recorded for centuries. Yet, if we'd lived in days gone by, we might be surprised by who does get remembered. We've only heard of Pontius Pilate for his part in the story of Jesus. There are many once powerful men in the OT whose names we only know because of their opposition to humble servants of God.

August 16th

Proverbs 10 v26

I admit that I am an impatient person. If it's long wait for the train or bus, I start walking. I used to get very hot under the collar when guests turned up five minutes late, people failed to make appointments or meetings or services failed to start on time. I'm much more mellow now and, I'm ashamed to say, sometimes late myself. That too is a result of my impatience. I can't bear inactivity. So, if I've got ten minutes to spare, I'll do something to use the time – which might then take longer than ten minutes! People like me are not relaxing to be with and we should be more generous with our time and more gentle with other people, rather than always being in a hurry and getting frustrated if other people keep us waiting. On the other hand, time is precious. If a meeting of twelve people starts five minutes late, that's 12x5 minutes = 1 hour wasted. If we keep other people waiting, we have to consider that they might have more important things to do than to wait for us. If there is a job to be done, we need to get on and do it!

(See next page for hymn.)

Teach me, my God and King,
in all things thee to see,
and what I do in anything
to do it as for thee.

A man that looks on glass,
on it may stay his eye;
or if he pleaseth, through it
pass,
and then the heaven espy.

All may of thee partake;
nothing can be so mean,
which with this tincture, "for

thy sake,"
will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause
makes drudgery divine:
who sweeps a room, as for thy
laws,
makes that and the action fine.

This is the famous stone
that turneth all to gold;
for that which God doth touch
and own
cannot for less be told.

August 17th

Proverbs 10 vv 27-30

These verses reinforce the point that the way to live well is to live godly.

O make but trial of his love:
Experience will decide~
How blest are they and only they,
Who in his truth confide.

Fear him, ye saints, and you will
then~
Have nothing else to fear;
Make you his service your delight,
Your wants shall be his care.

August 18th

Proverbs 10 vv 31&32

I confessed a couple of days ago to being impatient with time. I'm afraid I can sometimes be impatient with people. I might think things about people which are uncharitable. That is wrong in itself. Worse still, if I put those thoughts into words – spoken, written or electronic. Saying nasty things to or about people is essentially incompatible with using the same mouth to sing God's praises or to say prayers. James 3¹⁰: *Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.*

August 19th

Proverbs 11 v1

Basic honesty in business. These days we have trading standards officers to check that scales and other measures are accurate. The fact that the Book of Proverbs needs to comment on it shows that there have been dishonest business people for thousands of years. We have nowadays the resources to make and enforce laws. But what about

practices which are dishonourable but not illegal such as letting people pay too much for their gas or insurance or making it hard for people to cancel subscriptions they no longer need or failing to point out to a customer that what she is buying is not what she really needs for the purpose she has in mind? Such practices might not be against man's law, but they fail to meet the requirements of God's Law – which is love.

August 20th

Proverbs 11 vv 2&3

From all blindness of heart; from pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy; from envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness, *Good Lord, deliver us.* In Dickens' *Bleak House* one of the characters (the son of a housekeeper) wonders what the self-satisfied proprietor of the big house makes of this prayer when he hears it in Church. Human pride does indeed come before a fall. It impairs our relationships with God and with other people. If we put our trust in ourselves, we are bound to fail. *Blessed are the meek.*

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

Forbid it, Lord, that I should
boast,
Save in the death of Christ my
God!
All the vain things that charm
me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

August 21st (Trinity 10)

Proverbs 11 vv 3-8

LET thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of thy humble servants; and that they may obtain their petitions make them to ask such things as shall please thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

You can't take it with you, they say and yet the acquisition, saving and spending of money takes up a large part of our lives. It would be hard to survive if we didn't have enough money. Most people have to work in order to earn a living. How much is enough money? We've heard a lot lately about people who can't afford both to heat their homes and to eat. They definitely haven't got enough money. You also need clothes,

soap and cleaning products. You almost certainly need a ‘phone to live in today’s world. It’s quite hard to manage without a computer with government agencies (including benefits) and big companies demanding that you deal with them online. Children really need computers for their schoolwork and to be online if they are not to be excluded from friendship groups at school. We all also need some treats. I think we also need to have enough to be generous and to give gifts to other people. Some very poor people are also very generous. So we all need money and yet *the love of money is the root of all evil*. that they may obtain their petitions make them to ask such things as shall please thee.

August 22nd

Proverbs 11 vv 9-13

James 3⁵: *the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!* ⁶ *And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.*

⁷ *For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind.* ⁸ *But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.* ⁹ *Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.* Our words can have a tremendous effect – sometimes far more effect than we supposed. It is nice to hear sometimes that what we have said has really helped someone. But a thoughtless putdown, an unkind word, a lie, s confidence broken, a false boast, etc. can do great harm.

August 23rd

Proverbs 11 v14

Take counsel. None of us knows everything. It is therefore wise to seek advice, especially from someone who might be expected to know more about the subject than you do. If the issue is complex, it might be wise to consult a number of counsellors. But what if they don’t all agree with one another? Even after taking advice, you still have to make the decision. In some cases, it is wiser to take advice from just one person. *Should I ask her out? Should I apply for that job in another town?* In the end, it’s your decision and you are responsible for it. Different friends might give different advice. You might not like the

advice you get from one friend and ask another, hoping he'll say something different. That might be a way of evading responsibility.

And then there is more formal council – local authority, board, parochial church council, cabinet. It would be very dangerous if the mayor or chief executive, the vicar or prime minister were able to exercise power untrammelled by the need to seek and consider counsel. On the other hand, a multitude of dissenting voices can make it difficult or impossible to progress. What does the mayor, CEO, vicar or PM do then. He or she may have enough power to be regarded as responsible for the decisions taken but not powerful enough to ensure that they are decisions he can believe in.

August 24th (S Bartholomew)

Proverbs 11 vv 15-23

O ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who didst give to thine Apostle Bartholomew grace truly to believe and to preach thy Word; Grant, we beseech thee, unto thy Church, to love that Word which he believed, and both to preach and receive the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

It was 362 years ago today that the Book of Common Prayer again became mandatory in Church of England churches. The Reformation recovered that sense of the importance of the Word of God which is vital both to the life of the Church and to that of the individual Christian. The Book of Common Prayer and Common Worship are full of Scripture. They aspire to regulate our services in accordance with Scripture & thus to fit us to serve God in the whole of our lives.

August 26th

Proverbs 11 vv 24-26

You can be generous and grow richer, not only in monetary terms, but also in your own personal happiness and in the respect you receive from the community. You can be miserly and selfish, unhappy, disliked and still poor. Money and goods can only bring joy if they are put to good use.

When food or other essentials are in short supply, a farmer or a merchant or an industrialist might be tempted to hang on to what he's

got waiting for the price to go up before selling. It's the poor who will suffer. Hence hoarding is unloving and therefore unwise and tends only to ultimate failure.

August 27th

1. Daisies are our silver,
Buttercups our gold:
This is all the treasure
We can have or hold.

2. Raindrops are our diamonds
And the morning dew;
While for shining sapphires
We've the speedwell blue.

3. These shall be our emeralds
Leaves so new and green;
Roses make the reddest
Rubies ever seen.

We were speaking recently about this hymn which we used to sing in infant school. I think it must have made an impression on me! What really matters in life? It is possibly romantic to think that natural beauty is worth more than hard cash. But natural beauty has worth in itself. Cash only has worth as a means of exchange – what you can buy with it. As we've said, we can't really do without money in modern society because we need what money can buy. A lot of good things are free, however, the best perhaps in the material world and the good things of the more important spiritual world are all free!

August 28th (Trinity11)

O GOD, who declarest thy almighty power most chiefly in shewing mercy and pity; Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace, that we, running the way of thy commandments, may obtain thy gracious promises, and be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Proverbs 11 vv 27-31

4. God, who gave these
treasures
To your children small,
Teach us how to love them
And grow like them all.

5. Make us bright as silver:
Make us good as gold;
Warm as summer roses
Let our hearts unfold.

6. Gay as leaves in April,
Clear as drops of dew
God, who made the speedwell,
Keep us true to you.

The way to live a happy, fulfilled life is to live a good life. To live a good life is to live a godly life. We can only do that by the grace of God for which we must pray as we do in this collect.

I confess that there are times when I feel frustrated, angry, selfish, etc.. By God's grace, I am sometimes then reminded of those words ***THE** grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore. Amen* – perhaps as I walk down the church path from Evensong – and then I'm whole again.

August 29th

Proverbs 12 v4

All that I am I give to you.

Those are my favourite words in the marriage service. Husband and wife belong to one another. Children belong to their parents. Their parents are THEIR parents. God is our Father. We belong to Him. We are members one of another. We belong to one another as Christians, as members of the Christian family. What unites us is love. Speaking first of Christian ministers and then of the cosmos and then of the Church, St Paul says (I Corinthians 3): ²¹ *Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours;* ²² *Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours;*

²³ *And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.*

Just as in the Proverbs verse the wife may bring her husband and her household honour or shame because they are one, one family, so may we. The way we live our lives may bring honour or shame to our families, our communities, our country, our Church or our God.

August 30th

Proverbs 12 vv 5-9

Generally, the message of biblical wisdom is repeated here. To be good is to be wise is to obey the commandments of God. If you are good and wise and persevere in God's commandments, you become better and wiser. The world works for you. You are working with the grain. You are working with the Creator.

Verse 9 is a bit puzzling. Possibly the word translated *servant* or *slave* ought to be rendered *employment*. What it means is that it is better to be of a lowly disposition not regarded by your neighbours as anything special but to have a job (or maybe a servant) than it is to give yourself airs and graces when really you have nothing.

August 31st

Proverbs 12¹⁰

A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast.

There is no justification for cruelty to animals as there is no justification for cruelty to people. I think this also extends to there being no justification for the wanton destruction of nature or of anything which is beautiful. If you have a pet or if you use a horse or a donkey to ride or to be a beast of burden, if you employ oxen to plough or to tread out the corn, if you keep farm animals for wool or food, if you hunt, if you run a zoo or a research laboratory, if you do any of those things, they are God's creatures capable of feeling pain and distress and it is your Christian duty to look after them properly.

September 1st

Proverbs 12 vv 11-14

What goes around comes around. What you put in is reflected in what you get out. That's how the world is supposed to work and, generally speaking, it does. We can't get around the fact, however, that people don't always get what they deserve. The lazy or the wicked apparently flourish. The decent, hard-working person suffers. There are, however, inner resources. There is the knowledge of God. There is eternal life. A person of a right disposition may lead a more fulfilled and contented life than the person who is not right with God, himself and other people who appears to be much better off in worldly terms. There are good reasons not to covet.

September 3rd

Proverbs 12 v15

I don't deny that I'm impulsive. I want to get on with things. I come to decisions quickly. I can be arrogant and not listen to what other people have to say. I do sometimes therefore act rashly and in ways which

don't result in a happy ending. If you're like me, this verse could have been written with us in mind.

But it is possible to make the opposite mistake, to lack the confidence to make a decision, to delay, to procrastinate, to keep asking advice but never take it and get on with things.

There is a happy mean between over-confidence and too much self doubt. Romans 12³: *“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”*

September 4th (Trinity 12)

Proverbs 12 v16

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we are to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire, or deserve; Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy; forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord. *Amen.*

James 1²⁰: *For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.*

This is another text I find pertinent to myself. It takes some thinking about. There is a righteous indignation which gets things done, an anger against injustice and wrong. Anger can be effective in getting other people to do what you want them to do. We all quail a bit before strong emotions. On the other hand, wrath can get out of control. We may say or do what is extremely ill-advised when we are angry. Frightening or threatening people into doing what we want them to is disrespectful even when we have good reason. Better to use reason or persuasion. Better still, set a good example – which getting angry never is. Being ready to pray, as we ask in the collect, is much better than being ready to get angry!

September 5th

Proverbs 12 vv 17-22

Speak the truth and shame the devil.

The devil is the fathers of lies. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. *Thou shalt not bear false witness* is one of the Ten Commandments. But it seems to me that honesty and truthfulness have vanished from the face of the earth. Much of what politicians says turns out to be untrue. NHS trusts, major corporations, government departments, local authorities, the Church even, put out statements which fall far short of being the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Whistleblowers are sacked. Honest witnesses are threatened with prosecution. Client confidentiality is used as an excuse for cover ups. Victims are bullied and bribed into signing Non Disclosure Agreements so that the full truth about corporate negligence, incompetence or downright deliberate wrong-doing never comes out. Advertising makes things look better than they really are. Professional public relations put enough gloss on reality that nobody can discern what reality really is. This isn't pleasing to God. In the short run, it might seem that economy with the truth is expedient. In the long run, it is disastrous.

September 6th

Proverbs 12 v23

The strong, silent type is respected. A chatterbox very often is not respected. It is possible to talk too much. It is not always wise to give away too much about ourselves. Some people would exploit any weaknesses we admit to. Talking about ourselves too much can be boring to other people. They're not always interested in our opinions or the details of our lives. Boasting is always unattractive. If we talk about other people, we may betray their confidences, speak unfairly about them or even gossip and say things which are not exactly true. It is sometimes wiser not to admit to knowing as much as in fact we do. A royal marine who served for some time in a hostile country once told me that it was useful sometimes if the natives didn't realise how much you understood their language. On the other hand, it is perfectly legitimate to engage in conversation with people, talking about what is interesting to them, listening to their concerns and offering kind words and helpful advice if the person wants it.

September 7th

Proverbs 12 vv 24-28

So far, so obvious. If you're indolent, you don't get anything done and, in the end, you go without. Given that Jesus is the Way, the Truth & the Life, it follows (verse 28) that walking in the Way of righteousness, we are also walking in the Way which leads to life eternal.

It was v25 which stood out to me. What a difference our mental state makes to our physical state. When we are happy, we feel well. We walk more uprightly. We appreciate more the world around us. But when we are sad or depressed, anxious or afraid, we feel bad. We don't see the goodness of the world around us. We stoop and trudge along the road. And sometimes it doesn't take much to turn our mood around – just a smile or a kind word. That being so, offering a kind word or a smile to other people might transform their day too. Then we'd all be happier.

September 8th

Proverbs 13 vv 1-3

This is the day on which many Christians celebrate the birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary. I wonder what her home life was like when she was a girl? One can imagine that she would have been brought up with faith in God, to say her prayers, to know the Bible stories, to keep God's commandments. Sometimes, at Evensong, when I say the Magnificat (Mary's song) after the OT lesson, I'm reminded that Mary would have sung these psalms which we've just sung, known these wonderful stories and observed the feasts and other obligations that were enjoined on the Israelites as part of the Old Covenant. Thus she was ready, when God sent the angel Gabriel to tell her that she was to be the mother of His Son, to respond, *Be it unto me according to thy word.*

It's good if our homes are like Mary's home, especially if there are children. It's good if faith, prayer, bible reading, obedience to God's commandments characterise our lives. Then we too may be ready always to say to God, *Be it unto me according to thy word.*

September 9th

Proverbs 13 vv 4-6

I misread v4. The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing. It means that the sluggard wants something but is too lazy to make the effort to earn it. I first read it as if there were no comma. The soul of the sluggard desireth nothing and hath nothing. The way I read it, the sluggard doesn't even want to change his situation and that is the reason why he cannot do so.

That set me thinking about the way on the estate where I used to live houses where the occupants were unemployed were quite often dirty and untidy with gardens full of old car parts while the homes of people who were long hours were immaculate. You might think it would be the other way round. The people with time on their hands would have nothing to do all day but clean and polish their houses and tend their gardens, whereas the hard workers would come in exhausted at the end of a long day and just slump in an armchair. The sluggards had no desire to make things better and didn't even try. But before I get too judgmental, how came it that some people were so demoralised that they had stopped even trying? Some of them might have been bone idle all their lives. But some might have lost their jobs through no fault of their own in what was an area of high unemployment. Some might have suffered from physical or mental illness. Some of them may have sustained personal blows from which they were unable to recover.

Jesus warned us (Matthew 7):

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

² For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

³ And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

⁴ Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

⁵ Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

September 10th

Proverbs 13 vv 5-11

One of the first things governments did in response to the Ukraine war was to confiscate some of the vast wealth of Russian oligarchs. There has also been more recently a bit of a shareholders' rebellion regarding the fantastic salaries and bonuses which are paid to the chief executives of wealthy corporations. How can it be right, I heard someone ask, to pay these individuals sums of money which they can't possibly spend when workers at the bottom end of the scale are earning barely enough to live on? Quite. St Paul said that he was happy if he had food and clothing. Jesus didn't even have anywhere to lay His Head. What do we actually need? How can we justify taking more than we need if there are very many other people in the world who just don't have enough? What do we actually need? I don't know, to be honest. I've got a lot more now than our family had when I was a child: phone, computer, central heating, car, classy bike, fridge, washing machine, huge garden, three spare rooms, no need to worry about meeting the weekly and monthly bills. I wouldn't like to give them all up, though I could survive without them. If I'd been a banker or something and was now used to having a swimming pool, a yacht and a private jet, would I be willing to give them up now? How do we decide what is excess and therefore ought to give up for the benefit of others?

Thinking about singing *Daisies are our silver* at school made me think of another hymn we used to sing with a similar theme, that all we need can be found in the simple pleasures which God affords in Nature.

1 Glad that I live am I;
That the sky is blue;
Glad for the country lanes
And the fall of dew.

This is the way of life,
Till the work be done.

2. After the sun the rain,
After the rain the sun;

3. All that we need to do,
Be we low or high,
Is to see that we grow,
Nearer the sky.

It's a good start, but it would be naive to suppose we don't need anything more than the beauty of the natural world. What about food and shelter? I'm not too sure either what the last line means. I hope that sky there means heaven.

September 11th (Trinity 13)

Proverbs 13 v12

ALMIGHTY and merciful God, of whose only gift it cometh that thy faithful people do unto thee true and laudable service; Grant, we beseech thee, that we may so faithfully serve thee in this life, that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly promises; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

People often speak about *hope deferred*. They may not realise that the phrase comes from the Bible. It is obviously true that *hope deferred maketh the heart sick*. But perhaps we're back to what really matters. What do we really need in life. Surely *that we fail not finally to attain thy heavenly promises*. In that we cannot fail if we rely solely on *the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord*.

September 12th

Proverbs 13 vv 13-18

By the word of the Lord were the heavens made : and all the hosts of them by the breath of his mouth.

That's from Psalm 33. On the Rogation Days (the days leading up to Ascension Day) it is customary to ask God's blessing on the growing crops. At least one year, we went outside to do this, reciting this psalm. *By the word of the Lord were the heavens made*. God's Word is that powerful. God created heaven and earth by what the psalmist calls the breath of His mouth. God's Word is Jesus. God's Breath is the Holy Spirit, three persons, one God, an indivisible unity of love. God speaks to us through His creation. He speaks to us in the Bible and in the teaching of the Church. He speaks to us through our fellow Christians and He speaks to us as we go about our daily lives. There is no limit to the number of ways in which God may speak to us. It is when we live in accordance with the Word of God, inspired by His Holy Spirit, that we live the lives that God has planned for us in the service which is perfect freedom.

September 13th

Proverbs 13 vv 19&20

It feels good to achieve something worthwhile, to complete a task. So much so that it can be tempting to cut corners in order to finish on time

and therefore to spoil the work, but it is true that, if a job's worth doing, it's worth doing well.

September 14th (Holy Cross Day)

Proverbs 13 v21

At a lunch celebrating St Constantine, the first Christian Roman Emperor, and his mother, St Helen, we got to discussing name saint days. One of the women present was called Constantina. So it was her name saint day. Mine is St Andrew's Day because I was born on 30th November. There was a Greek named Stavros there who asked if I knew when his name holy day came. I hadn't a clue until he told me that Stavros in modern Greek means Cross. (It is Stauros in New Testament Greek.) I was then able to get the month but I needed a bit of help with the day. Today, 14th September, is Holy Cross Day – supposedly the day on which St Helena discovered the original Cross of Jesus on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 326. Whatever the truth of that particular story, the Cross is the keystone of our faith. As today's verse indicates, God is just. The righteous are rewarded and sinners are punished. But we are all sinners. We should all expect to be punished except that Jesus died on the Cross for our salvation. So, through faith in Him & repentance, righteousness is imputed to us and we share the blessings of the just rather than enduring the sinner's punishment which we deserve.

September 15th

Proverbs 13 vv 22&23

Today is Battle of Britain Day. After the Fall of France in 1940 and the withdrawal of British forces from Dunkirk, Hitler's next trick was to have been the invasion of Britain. This required his attaining air superiority over the English Channel which he attempted to achieve by a series of raids throughout that Summer. The RAF bravely resisted and at last won a sufficient victory to render invasion virtually impossible. Hitler made the mistake of opening a second front against Russia, thereby ensuring his eventual defeat. Churchill famously said, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few." Given the horrors of Nazism, many felt it not unreasonable to believe that God was on our side in the successful evacuation from Dunkirk, our victory in the Battle of Britain and the subsequent defeat

of the Third Reich. Yet war is never a good thing. Many good men died on all sides without leaving anything to their children or even having the chance to become fathers.

September 16th

Proverbs 13 vv 24&25

Many Christians have read v24 as justifying the corporal punishment of children or even enjoining it. I don't think that we need to read it that way. There are other ways of punishing children which don't so readily degenerate into brutality. It is, however, sometimes necessary to take a stand, to set boundaries, to enforce discipline, and that does include a duty to punish if only as a last resort. Children (and adults) need to be taught right from wrong – preferably by example and sound teaching. They need our prayers and encouragement. But they also need to understand that there are consequences if we don't behave towards other people as we ought. Justice is a real thing.

September 17th

Proverbs 14 v1

Studying Proverbs for these notes, I am discovering that the translation of the text from Hebrew into English has presented some problems for translators. My King James Bible renders this verse: *Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.* See tomorrow's notes for what this would mean. More modern versions have something like this. *Wisdom builds herself a house; with her own hands, Folly tears it down.* There are several instances in the Book of Proverbs where Wisdom is portrayed as a good woman and Folly as a harlot. If a man cleaves to Wisdom, he will prosper. If he turns to a harlot, he is on the road to perdition. For what it's worth, the classic Greek & Latin translations agree with the King James. The Hebrew is unusual and modern translators believe that it was misunderstood and then glossed to give us the Greek/Latin/KJV version.

September 18th (Trinity 14)

Proverbs 31 vv 10-31

I've jumped to chapter 31 because it describes how a wise woman might have built her house and cared for her household in biblical times. When I was at Ramsgate, the women's groups of three churches combined every year for a special woman's service and they nearly

always chose this reading. Obviously life in contemporary Ramsgate (or Cuxton or Halling) is very different from life in Palestine hundreds of years before Jesus was born, but maybe the principles are the same. What do you think. (See next page for collect.)

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, give unto us the increase of faith, hope, and charity; and, that we may obtain that which thou dost promise, make us to love that which thou dost command; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

September 19th

Proverbs 14 vv 2-4

Two days ago, I mentioned the difficulty of translating some of these verses. (I don't know enough Hebrew to translate them myself, but I do compare translations on occasion and know a little bit of Hebrew which helps me to understand the problems.) What I do notice, however, is that read in the context of the rest of the Bible, the different possible translations all have a message which is helpful to Christians. For example in verse 4, why is the crib clean? Because the farmer can't be bothered to put out cattle food with the result that the oxen are malnourished and unable to do their work – which of course is to grow more food? Or is the crib clean, because the property owner thinks it's too much trouble to keep oxen? Either way, he'll go hungry. Either way, we've been made to pause and think about it!

September 20th

Proverbs 14 v5

When He was before the high priest, false witnesses were called to give evidence against Jesus. The devil is the Father of lies. There are, however, many true witnesses for Jesus mentioned in the Bible. He bore witness of Himself. God the Father bears witness of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is a witness of Christ. The signs and miracles which He did bear witness of Who Jesus is. John the Baptist was a witness. John the Evangelist and Apostle bore witness of Jesus. The whole Bible bears witness to Jesus. There are very good grounds for believing in Jesus, but perhaps most especially the knowledge that we have of Him in our hearts.

I serve a risen Saviour
He's in the world today.

I know that He is living,
Whatever men may say.

I see His hand of mercy;
I hear His voice of cheer;
And just the time I need Him
He's always near.

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus
lives today!
He walks with me and talks
with me along life's narrow
way.
He lives, He lives, salvation to
impart!
You ask me how I know He
lives?
He lives within my heart.

In all the world around me
I see His loving care,

And though my heart grows
weary,
I never will despair;
I know that He is leading,
Through all the stormy blast;
The day of His appearing
Will come at last.

Rejoice, rejoice, O Christian,
Lift up your voice and sing
Eternal hallelujahs
To Jesus Christ the King!
The Hope of all who seek Him,
The Help of all who find,
None other is so loving,
So good and kind.

September 21st (St Matthew)

Proverbs 14 v31

*He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that
honoureth him hath mercy on the poor.*

Tax collectors like Matthew were disliked both because they worked for the Roman government and also because they often made money for themselves by taking more than what was due. As St Paul says, *The love of money is the root of all evil*. Matthew may or may not have been rich, but it is safe to assume that he was not at peace with himself. Then Jesus came along and said, *Follow me* and Matthew's life was transformed. What really matters in life? What makes life worth living? There are plenty of people who try to grow rich at the expense of the poor – paying poor wages, overcharging for goods, trapping people into agreements which are not to their best advantage, over-charging the naive and downright criminality. In oppressing the poor they dishonour the One Who made rich and poor alike. And none of that brings them happiness. Eternal life, the joy which Jesus came to bring, is through the knowledge of God. And those who truly know God don't oppress the poor. (Please see next page for collect.)

ALMIGHTY God, who by thy blessed Son didst call Matthew from the receipt of custom to be an Apostle and Evangelist; Grant us grace to forsake all covetous desires, and inordinate love of riches, and to follow the same thy Son Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

September 22nd

Proverbs 14 v6

A scorner seeketh wisdom and findeth it not: but knowledge is easy unto him that understandeth.

How did you like school? Did you find classes easy and sail through exams? Or was it always a struggle? Were there some subjects you dreaded? Or did you go on to university and spend years studying a subject you really loved, perhaps becoming a professor yourself? Different readers will answer differently! But, for most of us, learning anything requires a lot of effort – from playing the piano to proving Pythagorus’ theorem, from making a dress to making a space rocket. So it should. We should be prepared to use all the talents God has given us to their fullest extent. Some of us will be good at one thing, some another, but the pint is that we make the best use of the gifts God has given us and the opportunities with which He has provided us.

1 New every morning is the love
our wakening and uprising
prove;
through sleep and darkness
safely brought,
restored to life and power and
thought.

2 New mercies, each returning
day,
hover around us while we pray;
new perils past, new sins
forgiven,
new thoughts of God, new
hopes of heaven.

3 If on our daily course our
mind

be set to hallow all we find,
new treasures still, of countless
price,
God will provide for sacrifice.

4 The trivial round, the
common task,
will furnish all we need to ask,
room to deny ourselves, a road
to bring us daily nearer God.

5 Only, O Lord, in thy dear love
fit us for perfect rest above;
and help us, this and every
day,
to live more nearly as we pray.

But don't forget what true wisdom is. True wisdom is available to everybody – rich and poor, smart and not so smart, old and young, ugly & beautiful. *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.* If we have that, everything else follows.

September 23rd

Proverbs 14 vv 20-22

I'm skipping some of the verses which seem to repeat what we've already learnt. The rich may indeed seem to have many friends. Maybe some of these friends are genuine. If you go out with a rich person, he can give you a good time, though it might be embarrassing to allow him to pay for everything and equally embarrassing if you can't afford to match his generosity with similar generosity of your own. A friend in a position of influence might get you into a good job. If you are in need, a rich friend can help you out – if he wants to. A poor person may become an embarrassment. They might never be able to stand their round in the pub. They might always be asking you for a sub. Homeless people may not even be very clean. Yet: *He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.* Do we make friends with people who can help us get on in life or do we make friends with people simply because we like them?

September 24th

Proverbs 14 v34

Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people. So far, we've been mainly thinking about individuals, whether our lives are wise or foolish, good or bad. I'm writing these notes on the day that the report on the scandal of parties in Downing Street during lockdown is published. Official guidance was certainly disregarded. Laws were broken. They were broken by the people who had made them. False and misleading statements were made as part of the cover up. I'm not proud. In a prayer composed by a former Rector of Cuxton, we pray ***MOST** gracious God, we humbly beseech thee, as for this Kingdom in general, so especially for the High Court of Parliament, under our most religious and gracious Queen at this time assembled: That thou wouldest be pleased to direct and prosper all their consultations, to the advancement of thy glory, the good of thy Church, the safety, honour, and welfare of our Sovereign and her Dominions; We pray not only for our safety and welfare, but also for our honour – that of our*

gracious Queen and her dominions. I'm disgusted, but far from surprised. Even in my own experience and from what I have read, I have become only too used to the idea that rich & powerful corporations and individuals in this country regularly get away with dishonest & dishonourable conduct far more serious than a few parties. These things ought not to be so!

September 25th (Trinity 15)

Deuteronomy 17 vv 14-20

KEEP, we beseech thee, O Lord, thy Church with thy perpetual mercy: and, because the frailty of man without thee cannot but fall, keep us ever by thy help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

I switched to Deuteronomy today in order to follow on from yesterday's thoughts. What kind of rulers should we have? People who fear the LORD and seek to obey His commandments. People who are humble. People who are not seduced by power, wealth or sex. People who honestly seek to serve God by caring for the people with whom He has entrusted them.

MOST gracious God, we humbly beseech thee, as for this Kingdom in general, so especially for the High Court of Parliament, under our most religious and gracious Queen at this time assembled: That thou wouldest be pleased to direct and prosper all their consultations, to the advancement of thy glory, the good of thy Church, the safety, honour, and welfare of our Sovereign and her Dominions; that all things may be so ordered and settled by their endeavours, upon the best and surest foundations, that peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety, may be established among us for all generations. These and all other necessities, for them, for us, and thy whole Church, we humbly beg in the Name and Mediation of Jesus Christ, our most blessed Lord and Saviour. *Amen*

September 26th

Proverbs 15 vv 1-4

A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.
I was once advised that, when you get a letter which angers you, you should sit down at once and write a reply telling the sender just what you think of him. Then you put it aside for a week, tear it up and write the conciliatory letter which ought to be your reply as a Christian. I'm

afraid I'm much too hasty answering letters, especially emails, making it only too clear what I think. In conversation, I'm apt to respond harshly or sarcastically without even noticing that I have. I don't always realise what other people might find offensive. This is not the behaviour of a wise man. James 1²⁶: *If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.*

September 27th

Proverbs 15 vv 16&17

Better is little with the fear of the LORD than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.

Again, what really matters in life? Surely, it is relationships. First of all comes our relationship with God. To know God is to have eternal life. Then all our other relationships in the context of our love for God. Family love is of huge importance to us. Love of our neighbours. Friendships. Love of our fellow Christians. These relationships matter more than anything to us. Wisdom, the fear of the LORD, is worth infinitely more than rubies. Better salad for Sunday dinner in a loving home than roast beef where they all hate one another. The first three commandments are all about our relationship with God. The last six are about our relationship with other people which follows from our relationship with God.

GOD spake these words, and said; I am the Lord thy God: Thou shalt have none other gods but me. Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down to them, nor worship them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, and visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and

fourth generation of them that hate me, and shew mercy unto thousands in them that love me, and keep my commandments. Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his Name in vain. Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath-day. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all that thou hast to do; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of

the Lord thy God. In it thou shalt do no manner of work, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, thy man-servant, and thy maid-servant, thy cattle, and the stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and ail that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it. Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be

long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. Thou shalt do no murder. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his servant, nor his maid, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is his.

But which is the fourth, bridging the gap between the first three and our relationship with God and the last six and our relationships with one another? It is the command to honour the Sabbath – to take time away from work and the acquisition of material possessions in order to rest and to spend time with God, with our families and friends, our neighbours and coreligionists. Maybe our carelessness about the Sabbath accounts for much of what is wrong in modern Britain.

September 28th

Proverbs 15 v22

Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.

The obvious thought is that it is wise to take the advice of wise counsellors before proceeding with any idea because that way you are more likely to get it right. There is another consideration, however. People like to be consulted. If you ask people's advice, you get them on board. This may particularly be the case with meetings. If you can get people engaged in the discussion, they are perhaps more likely to be committed to making whatever is decided work properly. In theory by consulting with other members of the committee or whatever you get better decisions which the whole committee will then try to make work.

But, maybe not. Sometimes, in a meeting, people will nail their colours to the mast, oppose what the chairman or the majority want, fail to cooperate with what is decided or even try to undermine it. Maybe, you can go ahead without their support, but it is an unhappy situation.

We need to pray for chairmen and for meetings (especially church meetings) to go well.

September 29th (St Michael & All Angels)

Proverbs 15 v23

The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility.

There is no mention of angels in the Book of Proverbs. There is plenty, however, about the fear of the LORD being the beginning of wisdom. A preacher I heard at Margate observed that, when angels appear to people in the Bible, they nearly always begin by saying *Fear not*, except for Gabriel who, when he appeared to Mary, began *Hail thou that art highly favoured*. I've just done a bit of research and angels don't always start *Fear not*, but the people who see them do tend to be awed and afraid. Even Mary has to be told *Fear not* after the initial greeting. Well, how would you feel if an angel appeared to you? I'm not sure how I should feel. I think fear might well come into it, also awe, and I hope love and wonder.

There is a place for awe, for fear, for wonder, for a tremendous depth of love in our relationship with God. We are highly privileged to be able to enter into His awesome Presence. His Word is holy. The Sacraments are holy. It is awesome that He is present where two or three are gathered together in His Name. He is the thrice holy God and we are sinners. We should be consumed by His holiness, destroyed by His perfection, condemned in His judgment if it were not for Jesus Who is *a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world*. Without Him, we should perish in the Presence of God, dust and ashes in His sight, unable to stand before Him. No man may see God and live – except through Jesus.

Is it possible that we have become to casual about our religion? And might that be why our churches sometimes seem to have a form of godliness but deny the power thereof (II Timothy 3⁵)?

O EVERLASTING God, who hast ordained and constituted the services of Angels and men in a wonderful order; Mercifully grant, that as thy holy Angels always do thee service in heaven, so by thy appointment they may succour and defend us on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

September 30th

Job 28 vv 1-28

I thought it would be good to finish these thoughts about wisdom with this beautiful chapter from Job. The psalmist talks about the beauty of holiness. Mathematicians and physicists speak of the beauty of the equations and mathematical proofs which express the fundamental truths which make the world go round. Beauty is one of the attributes of God. There is an essential harmony in the way the world works, a rhythm in resonance with the essential nature of its Creator. It is when we are out of tune with God, clashing out a different beat, that things go wrong. Indifference to the needs of others, actual hatred, careless stewardship of creation, selfishness, all defile the pure loveliness of the world God has made. It is only God Who can restore order and harmony. This He does by living and dying among us the human life which ought to be lived by us all. It is in living in harmony with God, by His grace, that our lives are truly fulfilled and we are enabled to play our part in His plans for His creation.

By the mystery of thy holy Incarnation; by thy holy Nativity and Circumcision; by thy Baptism, Fasting, and Temptation,
Good Lord, deliver us.

By thine Agony and Bloody Sweat; by thy Cross and Passion; by thy precious Death and Burial; by thy glorious Resurrection and Ascension, and by the Coming of the Holy Ghost,
Good Lord, deliver us.

In all time of our tribulation; in all time of our wealth; in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment,
Good Lord, deliver us.