

The Gospel
according to
St
Matthew

Bible Notes
July - September 2024

July 1st

Matthew 11 vv 1-6

O taste, and see, how gracious the Lord is : blessed is the man that trusteth in him.

That verse is Psalm 34⁸. It is also the text of a motet composed by Vaughan William's for the late Queen's coronation & also sung at her funeral. John the Baptist had been imprisoned by the tyrannical King Herod and it appears that he had come to have his doubts about whether Jesus truly was the Messiah. He sent two of his own disciples to find out more & Jesus told them to return to John and to bear witness of what Jesus was teaching and doing – the signs of the Kingdom of God.

When we're feeling low, when we're questioning our own faith, it is good to reflect on what God has already done for us in our lives and also to reflect on the Bible story and God's dealings with His people down through the ages, above all never to give up on the prayer. Keep the channels of communication open.

July 2nd

Matthew 11 vv 8-15

You see how Jesus praises John. John is himself the fulfilment of prophecy. He takes the role of the prophet Elijah, believed to be the one who will open the way for the coming of the LORD. John is the forerunner. He prepares the way for Jesus. This makes John a great man, the greatest. But, at this stage, with John in Herod's prison and Christ not yet crucified, John is not yet a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. That is still to come.

July 3rd

Matthew 11 vv 16-19

Only this morning, I was in a discussion about what we could do to make people want to join a worshipping community. Should we make our service of Holy Communion shorter and simpler? Were we more successful when the morning service was generally Mattins? Would more people come if we were more *happy clappy*? Should we offer a *fresh expression of Church*, a different way of worshipping, perhaps not in a consecrated building? If we attempt to cater to people's tastes in worship, we have to consider that not everybody's taste is the same. The people who currently worship with us might not like it if we made changes to attract newcomers. Changes might not attract newcomers. If the people who currently support our churches ceased to do so, there

might be no Church for the newcomers to come to (or to stay away from). We mentioned the way the Church of England is cutting back on parish ministry in order to divert resources of money and manpower to new initiatives intended to reach new, younger and more diverse people, but, by and large, it is the parishes which support the Church of England. Without us there would be less money and probably fewer people offering for the ministry and the new initiatives would be bound to founder for lack of support.

Church is not entertainment. We don't come to Church to please ourselves. We come to Church to please God. He actually told us *Do this in remembrance of me*. I do not think that there can be any question of replacing Holy Communion as the principal service of the Church in which all Christians are duty bound to participate.

You can find examples of successful churches which are *happy clappy*, and successful traditionalist parishes, Anglo-Catholic and Evangelical, Charismatic & Liberal. There is no model which we only have to copy in order to succeed. John was one kind of preacher, Jesus very different, but they both proclaimed the same Gospel, and hard-hearted humanity rejected them both. What matters is that we worship in spirit and in truth. If we do that (whatever our style of worship), we shall find that God will add to our number those whom He is calling.

July 4th

Matthew 11 vv 20-24

The people of Jesus' own day thought of themselves as better than the notorious sinners of the past. In some ways, no doubt they were. We can congratulate ourselves on what progress (often inspired by the Christian message) has wrought in our own country over the centuries. We are much less violent than we used to be. There is less abject poverty. We abolished slavery. And yet we are not called to compare ourselves with other people; we're called to compare ourselves with Jesus and to measure our lives by the commandments of God. In what respects do we and our civilisation fall short of what the LORD requires of us, that we should do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God? We too shall be judged, just as Sodom was, and Tyre and even Capernaum where Jesus spent so much time.

July 5th

Matthew 11 vv 25-27

It is all of God. Arrogant people who believe that they are the masters of their own destiny, who think that they have got everything worked out, are heading for a fall. All wisdom, all virtue comes from God. It is only what we receive humbly from Him, by His grace, which makes it possible for us to fulfil our human potential, to know Him Whom to know is eternal life.

July 6th

Matthew 11 vv 28-30

I chose these verses as the Gospel reading for my Institution & Induction as Rector of Cuxton & Halling all those years ago. They are Christ's invitation to us and, as His Body the Church, it is our calling to extend His invitation to the world – especially to those who labour & are heavy laden.

July 7th (Trinity 6)

Matthew 12 vv 1-9

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 wee, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

I find it difficult to be consistent on this issue of the Sabbath. *Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day* is one of the Ten Commandments which stand at the head of God's Law. Jesus came to fulfil the Law & the Prophets, not to abolish them. Jesus certainly interpreted the Sabbath commandment much more liberally than did the Pharisees. They put strict observance before mercy, which both the Law & the Prophets teach is the wrong way round. Mark's account of this incident records our Lord's words as: *The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath.* The Sabbath rest is a gift from God to humanity. The words *Son of man* sometimes just mean *human being*. Sometimes they mean the human being who represents the entire race, revealed in the Gospel to be Jesus. The Sabbath is for our benefit. What the Sabbath means, what it is permitted to do on the Sabbath, what we ought to do on the Sabbath is interpreted by Jesus Who stands for the whole of humanity before the Throne of God, revealing to us God's true nature (which is love) and pleading to Him for us poor sinners.

July 8th

Matthew 12 vv 10-13

The Pharisaic Sabbath is a burden. You can't get on with what you want to do. You can't enjoy yourself. You are expected to go to Church and read the Bible, often with the implication that you won't enjoy either of these two religious duties. Moreover, modern life depends on a considerable number of people working on the Sabbath. We shouldn't like to have to manage one day a week without electricity, gas or running water. We expect A&E to be open if we have an accident. Some of us rely on trains or buses to get to Church. Dickens pointed out that, if working people only get one day off a week, it is hardly fair if all the places of entertainment are closed on that day. A majority of us have got used to the convenience of Sunday shopping and most people can't see any harm in Sunday sport. Sunday is no longer special and a lot of people would say *A good thing too*. We might justify this disappearance of specialness for Sunday on the grounds of Jesus' liberal attitude to the Sabbath and the hypocrisy and misery of the Victorian Sunday which may well have put people off the Christian religion. St Paul himself says, *Let therefore no man judge you in meat or drink, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of the things to come.* (Colossians 2¹⁶). The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us: *There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.* Sunday is a foretaste of heaven, an eternal rest in which we worship eternally God the Holy Trinity perfectly and perpetually in the beauty of holiness. So the Sabbath is a wonderful gift of God, but we are not to be judged on how we keep it. If we were saved by giving up enjoying ourselves on Sundays, that would not be salvation by grace through faith, but of works and pretty silly works at that. But keeping the Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments and our failure to keep the Sabbath is a major factor in the decline in religion in this country. Too busy with other things to enjoy Christian fellowship or to go to Church or to pray and read the Bible, neglecting the Sacrament, millions of people have isolated themselves from the knowledge of God, Whom to know is eternal life. The Church is made weaker by their absence. The Sabbath really ought not to be disregarded but we need to pray for wisdom to know how best to observe it.

July 9th

Matthew 12 v14

Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

There is a thing called in Latin *odium theologicum*, in English *theological hatred*. Theology is seeking to know what we can know of the nature of God, Whom to know is to have eternal life. God is love. Our calling as human beings, made in His image, made to be His children, is to worship God in the beauty of holiness. There is no other way in which we can be at peace – with ourselves, with other people, with God. We are made for the glory of God.

And yet, religious hatred, the *odium theologicum*, runs like a foul stream through the religions of the world. We feel very strongly about matters of faith. What we believe about God matters more than anything. And the devil very easily seizes on our passion for God and so perverts our desire to please Him that we come to hate and sometimes to fear those with whom we disagree. And yet God is love and, if we truly knew Him, we would love our neighbours as we do ourselves, even those we believe to be sinners. God loves sinners. If He didn't, there would be no hope for any of us.

July 10th

Matthew 12 vv 15-21

A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench.

Jesus is gentle with us. We may not feel strong. We may have little confidence in ourselves, our courage, our wisdom or our virtue. Our faith may be weak, our hope just a glimmer. Our lives might have been hard. Possibly, we've gone off the rails and done some bad things. We don't love ourselves. We don't see why anyone else would love us, least of all God. We're like a sheep gone astray in the wilderness, a lost coin smothered in the dust, a young man who has taken and squandered his inheritance, down on his uppers and almost too ashamed to go home.

But Jesus is gentle with us. He loves us as we are. He's always there ready for us and takes us as we are. We are always welcome, no matter how tremulously we approach Him.

Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.

July 11th

Matthew 12 vv 22

We look at the world around us and we observe the terrible consequences of human folly and wickedness and we may think, “Why doesn’t God perform some extraordinarily powerful miracle which would compel to believe in Him and, if necessary, terrify them into repenting of their sins?”

But, it doesn’t work like that. Jesus demonstrably overcomes the power of evil, but only those who are open to the possibility of faith in Him respond positively to what He has done. Those who are determined to reject Him and His message would rather (however ridiculously) attribute this healing miracle to the devil than acknowledge Jesus as Lord.

So long as we have free will, God’s free gift to us human beings made in His image, tainted by original sin as we are, men and women will find reasons to evade the truth about God & themselves unless they are redeemed through grace. Miracles are signs, but signs are of no benefit to those who are not open to what they signify. [In fact, those who receive Holy Communion, for example, while blinding themselves to what the bread & wine signify, the Body of Christ in the Church, eat & drink their own damnation, cf I Corinthians 11²⁰⁻³⁴).

Come Lord, come wisdom, love, and power,
open our ears to hear;
let us not miss the accepted hour;
save, Lord, by love or fear.

July 12th

Matthew 12 vv 25-28

You’re on God’s side or you’re not. If the devil fought the devil, his kingdom would come to nothing. Through Christ’s Death on the Cross, the devil’s kingdom comes to nothing. Nothing can overcome the power of God’s love. Jesus knows what His adversaries are thinking. He knows what all of us are thinking. For those who have eyes to see, the miracles of Jesus are evidence that God’s Spirit is at work in the world. For the wilfully blind, they confirm their condemnation, making nonsense of their own essentially hypocritical claims to be doing God’s work.

July 13th

- 1 Christ the Lord is risen again;
Christ has broken death's
strong chain.
Hark, the angels shout for joy,
singing evermore on high:
Hallelujah!
- 2 He who gave for us his life,
who for us endured the strife,
is our Paschal Lamb today.
We too sing for joy and say:
Hallelujah!
- 3 He who bore all pain and loss
comfortless upon the cross
lives in glory now on high,
pleads for us, and hears our
cry:
Hallelujah!
- 4 He whose path no records tell
has descended into hell;

Matthew 12 vv 29-30

- he the strong man armed has
bound
and in highest heav'n is
crowned.
Hallelujah!
- 5 He who slumbered in the
grave
is exalted now to save;
now through Christendom it
rings
that the Lamb is King of kings.
Hallelujah!
- 6 Now he bids us tell abroad
how the lost may be restored,
how the penitent forgiv'n,
how we too may enter heav'n,
Hallelujah!

July 14th (Trinity 7)

Matthew 12 vv31&32

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.*

When we think of blasphemy, we tend to think of taking the LORD's Name in vain and we take that as when people use one of God's titles or the Name of Jesus as a swear word. To act in that way is wrong, but there is a lot more to the misuse of God's Name – eg to claim His authority for our prejudices or to claim to be acting in His Name when we are really only furthering our own agenda. Do we abuse His Name when we claim to be CHRISTians and then behave as though we were not? Blasphemy is to disrespect God, to reject God, His Love, His Law & His forgiveness. Sadly, we all do these things at times and God is always ready to forgive us when we return to Him. Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost would be so firmly to reject God that we refused all His overtures of grace and declined every route back into His Love. It follows that, if you are worried that you might be blaspheming against the Holy Ghost, you aren't, because you wouldn't care if you had wilfully strayed that far from God.

July 15th

Matthew 12 vv 33-37

Save, Lord, by love or fear.

We may set out to be good or at least try to avoid being caught doing evil because we are afraid of the consequences. Being good because we are afraid not to be good is better than being bad, but it is not the best. It is not what God wants us to be. If we are not good people by nature, it will be hard to sustain good behaviour no matter what challenges or temptations we may face. If we behave well only in the hope of a reward or of avoiding punishment, we may lapse from our professed virtue when we think we can get away with it. How do we become good people? *The fear of the LORD is indeed the beginning of wisdom.* We progress from that point to a love which is so deep that we become one with Him even more wonderfully than a man is one with his wife. Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labour and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do your will. Amen.

July 16th

Matthew 12 vv 38-42

I once asked a friend who was a regular commuter why the London termini no longer displayed a huge board indicating which trains at which times departed from which platforms. She said that they still do. I'd become that short-sighted. Some years later, when I had lost my glasses while out walking, I knew that the sign was there (I'd been told) but I couldn't read it. I had to ask directions. If you can't see Who Jesus is, if you can't recognise or can't read the signs, then you are inly blind. You need to draw closer to Him. You may need to ask directions of fellow travellers. Stretching the analogy a bit, just as I need my glasses to see any distance, we need things like the Bible & the Sacraments through which to perceive the Fulness of God until such time as we are close up to Him in what may now seem to be the distant Heaven. Unlike the mechanical or electronic indicator board at mainline stations, however, God is not indifferent to us and our journey. He draws us to Himself. He blesses us with Christian fellowship & friendship. He supplies us with Word & Sacrament and all the graces we need.

July 17th

Matthew 12 vv 43-45

Having always found these verses difficult, I looked them up to see what a respected commentator might have to say about them. Applied to individuals, he says, "By religious education or impressions, the devil has been cast out of a man; but how often do the religious lives of men spend themselves in the sweeping and garnering, in formality and hypocrisy, till utter emptiness of real faith and spirituality has prepared them for that second invasion of the Evil One, which is indeed worse than the first!" We may have the outward appearance of being Christians, we might even have been sincere once, but we've become what my father called *psalm-singing hypocrites*. We put on an appearance, but we're not really people who love God & our neighbour and, pretending to do so, we may be worse than honest sinners. We delude ourselves as to our own spiritual condition. We put non-believers off the faith we profess for ourselves.

The commentator, Henry Alford, also applies this teaching of Jesus to the whole people of God communally. Time and again, ancient Israel or the Christian Church have been purged of their rebellion against God, only to lapse back into sin, quite often worse than the wickedness for which they had previously been restored & forgiven.

Alford writes of the ways in which the Church and allegedly Christian nations such as ours have gone wrong since the Reformation. "The first evil spirit has been cast out. but by the growth of hypocrisy, secularity, and rationalism, the house has become empty, swept, and garnished: swept and garnished by the decencies of civilization and discoveries of secular knowledge, but empty of living and earnest faith. And he must read prophecy but ill, who does not see under all these seeming improvements the preparation for the final development of the man of sin, the great re-possession, when idolatry and the seven more evil spirits shall bring the outward frame of so-called Christendom to a fearful end." Those words were printed in 1874. I can't help thinking, the more I think about them, that they are coming true in the world as we know it.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

July 18th

Matthew 12 vv 46-50

Sometimes a light surprises a Christian when he sings.

I remember what an impression they made on me when I first understood something of what Jesus is saying in these words. We are the family of God. Jesus is as close to us as He is to His own Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the family in which He grew up.

July 19th

Matthew 13 vv 1-15

Most people apparently believe that Jesus taught in parables because putting things in story form makes the message easier to understand. But here Jesus explicitly says that the point of parables is that their meaning is obscure to those whose hearts are not open to God's Word. Even the disciples don't always understand parables, as is the case here. People have argued for centuries as to what Jesus meant by His parables. Perhaps it would better to regard parables as a way of getting people to think. Their meaning may not always be clear to us. We may not quickly see how they apply to us. Parables might carry different messages for different people. Read the parables or listen to them, as we should all Scripture, prayerfully and in the light of the whole Bible & the teaching of the Church. Study God's Word written as a member of God's Church, as someone in whom dwells Jesus, God's Word made flesh., nourished by the Bread of Life we receive in the Sacrament.

WE do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table. But thou art the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy: Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. *Amen.*

July 20th

Matthew 13 vv 16&17

I believe that much of the weakness of the Church in England today derives from the fact that we don't realise what a privilege it is to know God in Jesus Christ. For that reason, we may be casual about our duty to God, casual in our devotions. Like some married couples, we lose sight of what is special about our life together, our loved grows cold and our relationship is in danger of rupture.

July 21st (Trinity 8)

Matthew 13 vv 18&19

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.*

So who *heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not?* Could be people who see a “wayside pulpit”, a religious poster, and don’t give it a second thought. Could be people who, as children, have had to attend RE lessons, but not paid much attention. Could be people who come to Church but who are too busy criticising or too concerned about things that don’t matter to think deeply about the message contained in our hymns and prayers, the wonderful words of the Bible readings, the sermon, the Presence of Christ in the Sacrament, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit manifest in the congregation of the faithful. Could be people who engage in religious debate but don’t do so seriously. All these people miss out. I feel very sorry for those who find it hard to find Jesus because they have been treated so very badly by people who call themselves Christians. But I also suspect some people of using the faults of Christians as an excuse for not themselves committing to Christ. We’re all sinners. If you ever find a perfect Church, don’t spoil it by joining it.

July 22nd (S Mary Magdalene)

Matthew 13 vv 20&21

Mary was one of the women who was close to Jesus. He had delivered her from terrible evil. Sometimes she accompanied Him and, with others, she supported Him in His ministry. She loved Him dearly. Mary was present when Jesus died on the cross. She saw Him buried. It is hard to imagine what it must feel like to see someone you love suffer such a terrible death. Moreover, so much had been hoped of Jesus. It must have appeared that all those hopes had come to nothing. Mary had known the joy of receiving the Word. Unlike the grain which had fallen in stony ground, however, her roots in Him were deep enough that she did not totally despair. She returned to the tomb (possibly at some risk from the authorities who would probably have been keeping a watch on His disciples) with a view at least to making the grave nice. Her reward was to meet the Risen Christ, to be addressed by Him by Name & to be commissioned to be among the first to bear witness of the Resurrection.

Many people do give up, though faced with far less discouragement than what Mary had the grace to overcome.

1 Magdalene, thy grief and gladness voice and heart in concert sing, telling how the risen Saviour called thee from thy sorrowing, tidings of his resurrection to his chosen flock to bring.

2 She beheld him, yet she knew not in the gardener's seeming guise Christ, who in her heart was sowing seed of heavenly mysteries, till his voice, her name pronouncing, bade he see and recognize.

3 Weep not, Mary, weep no longer! Now thy seeking heart ma rest; Christ the heavenly gardener soweth light and joy within thy breast: in the glowing cry 'Rabboni!' be thy gratitude confest.

July 23rd

Matthew 13 v22

When I was commenting on the Sabbath, I observed that our failure to keep Sunday special has resulted in a weakened Church and a large and growing proportion of the population being unaware of the Gospel. People are too busy to think about religion. They have too many things on their plate. Top priority has to be to get on in this world. They should read Psalm 49.

HEAR ye this, all ye people : ponder it with your ears, all ye that dwell in the world; 2. High and low, rich and poor : one with another. 3. My mouth shall speak of wisdom : and my heart shall muse of understanding. 4. I will incline mine ear to the parable : and shew my dark speech upon the harp. 5. Wherefore should I fear in the days of wickedness : and when the wickedness of my heels compasseth me round about? 6. There be some that put their trust in their goods : and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches. 7. But no man may deliver his brother : nor make agreement unto God for him; 8. For it cost more to redeem their souls : so that he must let that alone for ever; 9. Yea, though he live long : and see not the grave. 10. For he seeth that wise men also die, and perish together : as well as the ignorant and foolish, and leave their riches for other. 11. And yet they think that their houses shall continue for ever : and that their dwelling-places shall endure from one generation to another; and call the lands after their own names. 12. Nevertheless, man will not abide in honour : seeing he may be compared unto the beasts that perish; this is the way of them. 13. This is their foolishness : and their posterity praise their saying. 14. They lie in the hell like sheep, death

gnaweth upon them, and the righteous shall have domination over them in the morning : their beauty shall consume in the sepulchre out of their dwelling. 15. But God hath delivered my soul from the place of hell : for he shall receive me. 16. Be not thou afraid, though one be made rich : or if the glory of his house be increased; 17. For he shall carry nothing away with him when he dieth : neither shall his pomp follow him. 18. For while he lived, he counted himself an happy man : and so long as thou doest well unto thyself, men will speak good of thee. 19. He shall follow the generation of his fathers : and shall never see light. 20. Man being in honour hath no understanding : but is compared unto the beasts that perish.

July 24th

Matthew 13 v23

Who is he *that heareth the word and understandeth it?* The Word of God is beyond our comprehension. *By the Word of the LORD were the heavens made.* God spake and it was so. The Word of God is *very God of very God.* *We see through a glass darkly. So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.* We can only grasp an infinitesimally small fraction of What and Who the Word of God is, but what we can know of Him, through His grace, is authentic and it is the Word of Life.

July 25th (St James)

Matthew 13 vv 24-30

GRANT, O merciful God, that as thine holy Apostle Saint James, leaving his father and all that he had, without delay was obedient unto the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him; so we, forsaking all worldly and carnal affections, may be evermore ready to follow thy holy commandments; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* James and his brother John were given the nickname Boanerges by Jesus – sons of thunder. They could be impulsive and too eager to condemn those who did not follow Jesus as they did. James was a faithful servant of Christ. He left his father and all that he had without delay, obediently obeying the call of Jesus and following Him. He died a martyr's death. However, when some Samaritans refused to let Jesus pass through their village on the way to Jerusalem, James & John wanted to call down fire from heaven to consume them. Jesus rebuked them. *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.* The most zealous of Christians can be the most intolerant & it does not become us!

July 26th

Matthew 13 vv 31-33

When I was at Ramsgate, the well-known evangelist Eric Delve led a mission in a large tent in Hartsdown Park, Margate. I can't remember for how many days, but it went on for a long time. Many of the churches on the Isle of Thanet, including ours, took part and there was a long period of planning and preparation. An aircraftsman at Manston asked me what an evangelist does. I replied that he preaches the same things as I do, only people believe him. That was meant as a joke, but what we were all planning for was a large number of people who did not yet know Jesus going to the meetings and being converted. That did happen to some extent, but, as it turned out, the main effect of the mission was to deepen the commitment of those who were already Christians. One would expect that this deepening of their experience of God would make ordinary Christians more effective in doing His work in their daily lives: praying, performing their tasks (however humdrum) as for Him, caring for one another & sharing their faith. Such things cannot be measured. The growth of the Kingdom of God is something beyond our understanding, just like the way a seed grows or yeast leavens flour. We know more about these processes now than people did in the time of Jesus, but they remain very wonderful. We need to work with nature, to work with the grain, to work with God in order to provide for our needs and the needs of the world in general. We need to work with God in order to be part of the process by which His Kingdom grows. We have to be careful that we are not arrogant in our planning, too sure that we know what will work. We have to approach God's work in a spirit of humility and prayer and, even then, as in the Eric Delve mission, God may use our efforts to produce results which we had not anticipated.

July 27th

Matthew 13 vv 34 & 35

The Christian Gospel is implicit in the Old Testament. Jesus does not come to destroy or contradict the Law & the Prophets; He fulfils them. Yet the full truth of the Christian Gospel – that God's love extends to all nations and that eternal life is His free gift to all who believe in Him – does not become apparent until the Scriptures are read in the Light of Jesus, the Light of the world and the Spirit of the Lord sets our minds free.

July 28th (Trinity 9)

Matthew 13 vv 36-43

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.*

There are many reasons why we should not judge other people. For one thing, God is our Judge & we are usurping His prerogative when we judge other people (or even ourselves). Secondly, as in the parable, we may get it wrong when we judge others. Thirdly, it is too easy to find faults in others when our faults may be equally bad or worse. (As I was writing these words, I found myself judging someone I know for the fact that he is too ready to judge other people!) Fourthly, if we are critical of other people, we are likely to worry that they might be judging us. If I judge you, say, because your hair is a mess, I shall wonder whether you are judging me because my trainers are unfashionable.

July 29th

Matthew 13 vv 44-46

To know God is of infinite worth. To know God is to have eternal life. It follows that there is no sacrifice too great for the privilege of knowing Him.

July 30th

Matthew 13 vv 47-50

The meaning of this parable seems to be very similar to that of the Parable of the Tares. The good and the bad are, for now, mixed up and it is not possible for us to separate them, even, sometimes, to distinguish between them. We shall, however, all be sorted out in the end and get what is coming to us. It is possible that the Parable of the Tares refers to the world in general and the Parable of the Net to the Church. The Church draws in all and sundry – as we should. Some people who call themselves Christians are not, but you & I should hesitate to judge. Matthew 20¹⁶: *So the last shall be first, and first last: for many be called, but few chosen.* We don't judge, but we do pray: *for the good estate of the Catholick Church; that it may be so guided and governed by thy good Spirit, that all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life.*

July 31st

Matthew 13 vv 51&52

I think Jesus is teasing His disciples here. *Have ye understood all these things?* They reply, *Yea, Lord*, but their subsequent behaviour clearly indicates that they have not fully understood Him. We cannot fully understand this side of eternity, when it says that we shall know as we are known. We can understand something of the Gospel, however, something authentic which leads us into an ever deeper knowledge of God. Jesus speaks of the value of things old and new. There is the Old Testament & there is the New Testament. They both bear witness to Christ. In the Light of the Gospel, the Holy Spirit opens our understanding to recognise Jesus in the Scriptures, to know Him and to be transformed by Him into His likeness. II Corinthians 3¹⁸: *But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

August 1st

Matthew 13 vv 53-58

There is a book by Neville Shute in which an aircraft manufacturing company employs two engineers. One has a prestigious reputation and a commanding manner. He is an expert in his field and is deservedly respected. Everybody pays attention to what he says. The other engineer is equally competent, but somehow he does not command respect. There is just something about him which fails to impress. In the story, there have been several crashes which the more meek engineer strongly suspects have been caused by a design fault, but the engineer everyone respects doesn't believe this and the board accept his judgment and go along with him. Spoiler alert! It is eventually proved that the meek engineer was right on this occasion and modifications are made to the aircraft design which make it safer.

I've often noticed this that people – individuals, meetings – are swayed by their perception of the status or mien of a speaker rather than by his or her understanding of the subject under discussion. Sometimes a committee will disregard the input of someone who is much more highly qualified in the relevant field than the more impressive person with whose counsel they decide to follow. In today's story, they discounted Jesus because they thought they didn't need to respect Him.

August 2nd

Matthew 14 vv 1&2

As we have seen, John & Jesus were very different, though they preached the same Gospel: *Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*. The one spent years in the desert, dressed in rough clothing, ate coarse food and drank no alcohol. The other enjoyed human company, socialised, wore a valuable seamless robe and turned 120 gallons of water into wine. But, by and large, people believed neither of them. So we get people who won't go to church because their parish church is too high or too low, because they don't like the vicar, because the music is either too happy clappy or else too staid and old fashioned, because they hate incense or guitars or both, because the service is at the wrong time or because someone was rude to them last time they went twenty years ago.

In John 6 Jesus says something which upsets some of His audience.

The result: From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. What are we missing if we drop out of Christian fellowship because our focus is on the outward (eg whether because the preacher is a desert dwelling ascete or because he is someone who enjoys his food & drink) rather than on what really matters – law, judgment, mercy & faith?

August 3rd

Matthew 14 vv 3&4

Herod fell in love with Herodias, the wife of his half brother Philip, put away his own wife and married his sister in law, which was not allowed at that time because of the consanguinity laws. So Herod's marital arrangements were scandalous and John did not hesitate to say so, despite the fact that Herod was a very powerful man, or perhaps because he was nominally a king and ought to be setting an example. I have two questions for the Church today – especially the Established Church. Are we still confident in traditional Christian morality with regard to issues of gender, sexuality and marriage? If so, are we bound to maintain these standards in opposition to what are often called *Modern British Values*? Even if it meant disestablishment and possibly facing penalties for so-called *hate speech*?

August 4th (Trinity 10)

Matthew 14 v5

*And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude,
because they counted him as a prophet.*

Amnesty International sets out to keep the plight of prisoners of conscience in the public eye. There are information campaigns, letters to governments, both hostile & friendly, letters to prisoners themselves. No doubt other organisations and individuals do similar things including praying for prisoners. It seems to work. Prisoners are encouraged by receiving messages of support, being prayed for and knowing that they are not forgotten. Sometimes oppressive governments are embarrassed to continue to persecute individuals whose circumstances are known to a wide public or fear for the effect their disregard of human rights will have on their own status as trading partners or significant political players on the world stage. We know that there is a very long way to go before people are free to express their beliefs without let or hindrance, but that doesn't stop us doing what we can. **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.*

August 5th

Matthew 14 vv 6-12

Have you ever done something as a result of a dare? Have you ever backed out of doing something even though backing out will mean losing face? I've recently tried to hurry a snail's pace legal process by laying down an ultimatum. I hope it will achieve the result I want. The trouble is that, if the other parties still won't resolve the issue, I shall be damaging myself as well as them if I stick to what I said. If I don't do what I said, however, I shall feel that I have been dishonest, I shall lose face, and the other side will not take seriously anything I say in the future. What should you do if you find that you have made a promise you really do not want to keep or a threat which you really don't want to carry out? Maybe circumstances have changed and you can no longer afford to pay your son's deposit on a house as you had promised in better times. Perhaps when you said that you would resign from the planning committee if they approved a sewage works in a beauty spot, you really thought that your threat would be enough to stop them, but it wasn't and they went ahead anyway?

August 6th (The Transfiguration)

Matthew 14 vv 13-21

When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, three chosen disciples were privileged to see something more of His glory than was normally apparent. His face shone. His robes appeared whiter than white. He spoke with Moses and Elijah. God Himself, present in the cloud, proclaimed Jesus as His Son and instructed us to hear Him.

He revealed His glory, too, in the miracle of the loaves and fishes. He healed the crowds. He taught them. He fed them in the wilderness, as Moses did, when God had delivered the people from slavery in Egypt and revealed Himself to them on Mt Sinai. Jesus reveals His glory, His power. His compassion – all inextricably entangled. On Mt Sinai, God shows Moses His glory. Exodus 34^{5&6}: *And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by him, and proclaimed, The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth.*

He works with the disciples to feed the multitude. While we may not always expect a miracle, we can be sure that when we are working with God to achieve His purposes, we shall not run out of resources.

1 'Tis good, Lord, to be here!
Your glory fills the night;
Your face and garments, like
the sun,
Shine with unborrowed
light.

2 'Tis good, Lord, to be here,
Your beauty to behold,
Where Moses and Elijah
stand,
Your messengers of old.

3 Fulfiller of the past!
Promise of things to be!

We hail your body glorified,
And our redemption see.

4 Before we taste of death,
We see your kingdom come;
We long to hold the vision
bright,
And make this hill our
home.

5 'Tis good, Lord, to be here!
Yet we may not remain;
But since you bid us leave
the mount,
Come with us to the plain.

August 7th

Matthew 14 vv 22&23

After the miracle of the loaves and fishes, the crowds wanted to make Jesus King, but what did they mean by that? Would He defeat the Romans by force and reign in Jerusalem as David & Solomon did? That isn't the kind of king that Jesus is. *Art thou a king, then?* Pontius Pilate asked Jesus. Jesus had already told Pilate, *My kingdom is not of this world.* He responded to the question about His kingship by replying, *For this cause I came into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.* Pilate replied, *What is truth?* Jesus is the truth; He is the Way, the Truth & the Life. Pilate couldn't apprehend the truth, but Jesus promised, *Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice.* Pilate, nevertheless had the words *King of the Jews* placed on the cross, in not one, but three languages. The King reigns on a cross. He is also the King of Glory Who sits upon His throne and judges both the quick & the dead.

After the Feeding of the 5,000, an end of a long day, Jesus dismissed the disciples and the crowds who wanted to make Him King. He then went away on His own to pray. When we feel overwhelmed by life, take time to be alone in peace and pray to God.

1 Conquering kings their titles
take
from the lands they captive
make;
Jesus, from a nobler deed,
from the thousands he hath
freed.

2 Yes: none other name is given
unto mortals under heaven,
which can make the dead arise
and exalt them to the skies.

3 That which Christ so hardly
wrought,
that which he so dearly bought,

that salvation, brethren say,
shall we madly cast away?

4 Rather gladly for that name
bear the cross, endure the
shame;
joyfully for him to die
is not death but victory.

5 Jesu, who dost condescend
to be called the sinner's friend,
hear us, as to thee we pray,

6 Glory to the Father be,
glory, Holy Son, to thee,
glory to the Holy Ghost,
from the saints and angel-host.

August 8th

Matthew 14 vv 24-33

*God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm.*

It is the nature of God that His power infinitely exceeds that of the natural phenomena of which He is the Creator. The sea represents chaotic, destructive power. God brings order, healing and peace. Like Father, like Son. This miracle demonstrates the saying, *Of a truth thou art the Son of God.* And Peter, could he have walked with Christ on the sea amidst the storm? Jesus said, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.* I doubt if you or I will ever be required to walk on water, but, Christ in us and we in Him, we can, in the power of the Holy Spirit, walk with Him to accomplish His purposes. Have faith. In the various storms of life I have been through – all much more minor than what many people have to go through - I ask myself, *O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?*

August 9th

Matthew 14 vv 34-36

Another manifestation of the Lord's power. He meets our needs for nourishment – material and spiritual. He brings order out of chaos and peace out of tumult. He bears us up in our weaknesses. He heals our diseases of body, mind and spirit.

*The healing of his seamless dress is by our beds of pain;
We touch him in life's throng and press, and we are whole again.*

August 10th (St Laurence)

Matthew 15 vv 1&2

Under the influence of Francis Bacon & John Wesley, we were taught that *cleanliness is next to godliness.* 'Twas not always believed. The Roman public baths had a reputation for vice. The Church became rather suspicious of excessive attention to personal hygiene. The washing the elders are talking about here is primarily ritual, but it would have had some hygienic benefit. The common people who accompanied Jesus weren't so particular as the professional classes. Sometimes I've felt bound to eat or drink something served in not very clean looking crockery because it would have given offence to refuse. There are more important things even than infection control. Laurence regarded the poor as the treasure of the Church.

August 11th (Trinity 11)

Matthew 15 vv 3-9

Some years ago, a traffic camera on a motorway caught thousands of motorists speeding past some roadworks and they were duly fined. Then a rich man was caught who could afford a fancy lawyer. The lawyer discovered a loophole and the rich man avoided both a fine and points on his licence. There were a few heady newspaper headlines about all the thousands of others caught having to be refunded, but the government refused on the grounds that those who had paid up had effectively admitted their guilt. So where does justice lie in all this? They had all been breaking the law by speeding, including the one who could afford a fancy lawyer. So should they all have been fined, including the one with the lawyer? On the other hand, the law requires speed cameras to be operated in accordance with certain criteria and the court accepted that the fancy lawyer's loophole was valid. The authorities had failed in their duty to set up the speed trap in accordance with the law. So should everyone have been let off?*

You can sometimes use the letter of the law to defeat the purpose of the law – especially if you can afford a fancy lawyer. Without breaking the rules you can get around the moral principles on which the rules are supposed to be based, you can get away with leaving undone those things which you ought to have done; and doing those things which you ought not to have done. But should we take advantage of these loopholes to get away with sin? Jesus says not. Good people behave well not because they are constrained by man made laws, but because the Law of God is written in their hearts – God is Love.

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.*

*It is another question whether these speed limits around roadworks are reasonable and whether the authorities are not themselves treating the public with disrespect when the limits appear to have been imposed without adequate justification and remain in place when no-one is apparently doing any roadworks? We can question (and we should hold corporations & government to account), but it remains our duty to obey the law.

August 12th

Matthew 15 vv 10-20

Coming back to the Bible story, what matters much more than observing the rituals, following social conventions and even, in some cases, observing proper protocols with regard to hygiene, is to be a good person. Being a good person normally entails taking care not to get sick nor to spread disease. Generally speaking, we should follow social conventions insofar as they do not conflict with our faith. There is no sense in standing out from the crowd for the wrong reasons! We may well observe rituals both because they help to sustain and deepen our own faith & because we may offend others if we don't – so long as we don't put our faith in ritual nor denigrate people who do not observe the same customs as we do. You're a blind leader of the blind if you let ritual, convention or anything else stand in the way of universal love.

August 13th

Matthew 15 vv 21-31

This story of the gentile woman with the demon possessed daughter is a difficult one. Why does Jesus seem to be so reluctant to help her? The obvious answer is that Jesus came to proclaim the Gospel to the Jews. Only after His Crucifixion, Resurrection & Ascension & the Coming of the Holy Spirit, would the Good News be conveyed to us gentiles by chosen men such as Paul & by the whole Church generally. Another answer is that Jesus did not heal the woman's daughter straight away because it was of benefit to her that He gave the woman space to think of the wise answers she gave to His questions.

August 14th

Matthew 15 vv 32-39

Jesus fed more than one multitude. After the Feeding of the Five Thousand, there were twelve baskets full of leftovers. On this occasion, there were seven. Some people think that the twelve baskets represent the twelve tribes of Israel & the seven stand for the seven gentile nations. I'm not convinced myself that this is the symbolic significance of the numbers of the baskets. It is certainly true, however, that Jesus came to be both a light to lighten the gentiles & to be the glory of God's people Israel. There should be no anti-Semitism, no racism, no prejudice. (See next page where Paul speaks to the Athenian philosophers..) **Acts 17:** ²⁴ God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with

hands; ²⁵ Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; ²⁶ And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; ²⁷ That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

August 15th (The Blessed Virgin Mary)

Matthew 16 vv 1-4

When the angel visited Mary and she freely accepted her vocation to be the mother of the Son of God, the time had come. God was intervening in human history in a new and decisive manner which would free us from our sins and their consequences. This is the time longed for by holy men and women in times past. This is the time in which God is redeeming His Creation. Now is the time to repent of our sins, to put our faith in Him.

August 16th

Matthew 16 vv 5-12

Was the lesson of the two feeding miracles that we don't have to worry about earning our bread because the Lord will provide? The lesson of these two miracles is that Jesus does what God does. He is in fact the human face of God. He can do anything. He gives us the Bread from Heaven. He is the Bread of Heaven. What matters is that we put our trust in the Truth (which the doctrine of the Pharisees was not). We don't have to worry about our daily bread. That's not to say that we don't have to bother about working for it. Normally that's how we feed ourselves, but always we put God first.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God & his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

August 17th

Matthew 16 v13

Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

What do you think? What do you think your neighbours think? What does your family think about Jesus? What does the world think about Jesus? What do people in your Church think about Him? How do you think of Jesus?

August 18th (Trinity 12)

Matthew 16 v14

Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some Elias; others Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

Our Lord's contemporaries interpreted Him in the light of their own expectations and culture. People in the world today, those who do not know Jesus personally, might think of Him as a great teacher or a miracle worker, a holy man or a prophet. Some might believe that He was a charlatan, a fraud, or even that He didn't really exist.

So how would people in the world discover the truth about Jesus? Pray for enlightenment? Read the Bible? Come to Church? Why would they feel moved to do any of those things? Guile, perplexity, seeking the meaning of life, fear, hope, looking for help, seeking a purpose, needing a friend? Any of those reasons and many more, but perhaps the most potent draw towards seeking Jesus lies in the answer to the question He asks in tomorrow's reading?

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.*

August 19th

Matthew 16 v15

But whom say ye that I am?

What do you and I believe about Jesus? What does the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church believe about Jesus? If we believe what the Bible says about Him, if believe the Church's teaching and participate in Christian worship, if we not only know about Jesus, but know Him, then we have the gift of eternal life. We take up our cross and follow Him. We grow into His likeness. As we become more & more like Jesus we can expect people to react towards us as they did towards Him. He said (John 15) ¹⁷ These things I command you, that ye love one another. ¹⁸ If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. ²¹ But all these things will they do

unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me. The world will treat Jesus' disciples in the same way as it treated Him. John 1: ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. ¹¹ He came unto his own, and his own received him not. ¹² But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Those who will not forsake the world reject Jesus, but those who accept Him become the children of God. We are the Church & we have the gift of eternal life. If we are faithful followers of Jesus, we will attract those who are honestly seeking Him. It is infinitely more important that a Christian congregation is authentic than that it is massive.

August 20th

Matthew 16 vv 16&17

Thou art the Son of the living God.

This is the truth about Jesus. Peter has apprehended this truth in the only way it is possible for anyone to come to know Jesus. God has revealed Christ to Him as Jesus reveals God to us, the Holy Spirit bearing witness with our spirit. If you want to bring someone to know Jesus, by all means tell them what you know of Him. Try, by the way you live, to show what it means to be a Christian. But, above all, pray for them.

August 21st

Matthew 16 vv 18&19

The Church is constituted of people of faith. All those of us who share the faith of Peter in Jesus, the Son of the living God, constitute the Church. The Church is the Body of Christ. Jesus works through us to accomplish the purposes of God. He endues us with the gifts of the Holy Spirit Who empowers us to act on Christ's behalf. We are custodians of the keys to the Kingdom. Under Christ's authority, the Church acts with Christ's authority in order to further the salvation of the world. Peter (for all his weaknesses) evidently had a vital leadership role in the early years of the Church. God calls leaders in the Church today, who as members of the universal Church, as members of the Body of Christ, are entrusted with aspects of the authority which Christ bestows upon the whole Church in order that she may fulfil His purposes.

August 22nd

Matthew 16 v20

Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

One of the surprising things when reading the Gospels is the number of times Jesus tells people not to tell other people about Him. People might misunderstand Who He is and what He came to do. Multitudes clamouring for miracles might make it difficult for Him to teach or to move on when it was time to another town or village. Excited crowds might attract the wrong sort of attention from the authorities.

After His Ascension, however, it is clear that the imperative is to teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

August 23rd

Matthew 16 vv 21-23

In v16, Peter had sincerely professed his faith in Jesus as the Son of God. Nevertheless, he was still a very long way from understanding what this faith means, what it is to be the Son of God, and what, therefore, it is to follow Him. Our faith may be as tiny as a grain of mustard seed. Our understanding of Jesus is inevitably very limited; He is God, infinitely beyond our comprehension. But, tiny as it is, our faith can be authentic and God the Holy Spirit will lead us into all Truth, despite the many mistakes we will make in following the Way which leads to eternal Life.

August 24th (St Bartholomew)

Matthew 16 vv 24-28

Jesus reveals here both the cost of discipleship – the sacrifice of our worldly selves – and the reward – the recovery of what it truly means to be us.

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.*

August 25th (Trinity 13)

Matthew 17 v1

Jesus took Peter, James & John up the mountain. Why not Andrew, Peter's brother? Why not all the apostles? These three seem to have been privileged to be with Him at the most significant times. Peter, James & John accompany Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when the others are left a a greater distance. The same three only were allowed to be present at the raising of Jairus' daughter. But why is Andrew left out? Having been born on S Andrew's Day, I am curious about this. A book I had on saints suggested that Andrew did not take things seriously enough! He was a great man. He has been called the first missionary because it was Andrew who brought his brother Simon (whom Jesus named Peter) to Christ. He was the one to whom Philip turned for support when some Greeks wanted to see Jesus. Just guessing here, but perhaps Andrew found it hard to accept the commandment *Be still and know that I am God*. I know that I find it difficult to be still and contemplate, to luxuriate in being in God's Presence. I find it hard to be still at all. The ability to be still in the Presence of God is something which perhaps we all to cultivate, a gift which some of you may already have.

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.*

August 26th

Matthew 17 v2

It is likely that St Michael's Church Cuxton (like many churches dedicated to St Michael was built on a hill because people felt closer to heaven as they contemplated the sky above and looked down on the river and the surrounding woods and fields and marshes. Nature can speak to us of God. Both Moses and Elijah met God on Mt Sinai or Horeb; it's the same mountain. On a bike ride through the Holy Land, I was once stationed alone on a mountain side to warn other cyclists who were descending too fast of a serious risk which they might not see before it was too late. It was so very peaceful there while I waited alone on the mountainside. See next page for hymn.

O Lord my God,
When I in
awesome wonder,
Consider all the
worlds Thy Hands
have made;
I see the stars, I
hear the rolling
thunder,
Thy power
throughout the
universe
displayed.

Then sings my
soul, My Saviour
God, to Thee,
How great Thou
art, How great
Thou art.
Then sings my
soul, My Saviour
God, to Thee,
How great Thou
art, How great
Thou art!

When through the
woods, and forest
glades I wander,
And hear the birds
sing sweetly in the
trees.
When I look down,
from lofty
mountain
grandeur

And see the brook,
and feel the gentle
breeze.

Then sings my
soul, My Saviour
God, to Thee,
How great Thou
art, How great
Thou art.
Then sings my
soul, My Saviour
God, to Thee,
How great Thou
art, How great
Thou art!

And when I think,
that God, His Son
not sparing;
Sent Him to die, I
scarce can take it
in;
That on the Cross,
my burden gladly
bearing,
He bled and died
to take away my
sin.

Then sings my
soul, My Saviour
God, to Thee,
How great Thou
art, How great

Thou art.
Then sings my
soul, My Saviour
God, to Thee,
How great Thou
art, How great
Thou art!

When Christ shall
come, with shout
of acclamation,
And take me
home, what joy
shall fill my heart.
Then I shall bow,
in humble
adoration,
And then
proclaim: "My
God, how great
Thou art!"

Then sings my
soul, My Saviour
God, to Thee,
How great Thou
art, How great
Thou art.
Then sings my
soul, My Saviour
God, to Thee,
How great Thou
art, How great
Thou art!

August 27th

Matthew 17 v3

Moses and Elijah stand for the Law and the Prophets – the Old Testament, which Jesus came not to destroy but to fulfil. Both testaments bear witness of the Way, the Truth & the Life.

August 28th

Matthew 17 v4

It was certainly good to be there, but why did Peter suggest making tabernacles for Moses, Elijah and Jesus? Some people think that he wanted them to stay so that all of them could continue to live in that glorious radiance. Perhaps, he was just being hospitable. The Feast of Tabernacles follows Harvest Festival & the Day of Atonement and originally commemorated the fact that, during the Exodus, the children of Israel lived in tabernacles (or tents) for 40 years in the wilderness, but it also came to be associated with the coming of the Messiah and the inception of God's Kingdom. It is closely associated with the reading of the Law which God gave to His people through the agency of Moses and Elijah is closely associated with preparing the way for the coming of the Messiah. But Mark tells us that Peter *wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid*.

August 29th

Matthew 17v5

God affirmed Jesus. *Hear ye him*. To hear is to obey. Once we know Who Jesus is and therefore by what authority He speaks, we have no choice but to obey His Words. It is by the Word of the LORD that everything was made that was made and the world only works as it is meant to work if we live by the Maker's instructions.

August 30th

Matthew 17 vv 6&7

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and I fear that it is something of which we have become too careless. We have forgotten that *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*. Matters of faith are treated casually or even contemptuously. There is no fear of the consequences of sin. We lack that sense of awe which naturally follows from a contemplation of Who God is and what He must be to have wrought what He has wrought. Jesus touches the disciples and tells them not to be afraid. *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear*. It is the fear and the awe, however, which shape our hearts so that we can comprehend what love really means. We don't have to be afraid of God because God doesn't matter; the reason we don't have to be afraid is that He matters to an infinite degree & God is love.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;

August 31st

Matthew 17 vv 8-13

This incident is certainly too wonderful to recount until after the Resurrection, but it is a foretaste of the glory which shall be revealed, the triumph of Christ on the Cross which it foretells. The disciples are not sure that the Kingdom is coming because Elijah has not yet appeared. But John the Baptist has come in the spirit & power of Elijah. The angel Gabriel told John's father Zacharias, before the child was even conceived, *And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit & power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.* John fulfils the prophecies. Jesus is the Messiah. The Kingdom of God is at hand.

September 1st (Trinity 14)

Matthew 17 vv 14-16

When I was teaching this story to Sunday School children very many years ago, a bright girl pointed out that the boy's symptoms appear to be those of epilepsy. In the story, he is described as moon struck or lunatic, demon possessed. Epilepsy is not a mental illness. It is a physical condition affecting the way nerve cells in the brain fire and stimulate muscles in the body. It is nothing to do with the moon. Our use of the word *lunatic* tends to be a bit casual, reflecting earlier ages' exaggeration of the moon's effect on our mental & physical well-being. Treating epileptics as demon possessed very wrongly suggests that they are responsible for their condition (perhaps that they have been particularly wicked) and sometimes leads to attempts at exorcism which are both cruel and dangerous. As Christians, our guiding principle ought always to be love, not judging or blaming the patient, not indulging in cruel practices, even if we tell ourselves that we mean well. If someone has epilepsy, by all means pray for them, be kind to them, look out for them and support them in seeking medical help. There are some very effective drugs in many cases of epilepsy & they are the best treatment available.

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 2nd

Matthew 17 vv 17&18

Did this particular boy in this particular story have epilepsy? Or was he suffering from something different – demon possession? Or should we think that all kinds of dis-ease, mental & physical, owe something to the devil? There is nothing good about being ill. There would be no sickness in a perfect world. There will be no pain in heaven. When Jesus died on the cross, the Archangel Michael drove Satan out of heaven. Could we think that, whenever anyone is healed of any malaise - whether a spontaneous recovery, the result of medical intervention, by prayer, by miracle, by any combination of these – a demon is cast, good has won a victory over evil? I don't know. I can't discount the truth of the Bible story. The Bible is the Word of God. But neither can I go along with the folly which all too quickly attributes many physical and mental illnesses to demonic possession, blames the patient for letting the evil into their lives & for not having enough faith to get better & sometimes indulges in grotesque rituals which only make the situation worse. We all can & should pray for people suffering from any kind of sickness. We can always ask for God's blessing in any situation. We do not have to be afraid of demons or ghosts; the Holy Spirit is more powerful than any other kind of spirit. On those very rare occasions, however, when an exorcism is called for, we should consult a reputable specialist who is appointed by a sober Church which we know we can trust.

September 3rd

Matthew 17 vv 19-21

Neither do I know what was wrong with the apostles' exorcism technique. I'm not a specialist and wouldn't presume to be. I've blessed allegedly haunted buildings and prayed for people who have believed themselves to be troubled by spirits, though sometimes the problem has been some kind of mental illness, which, like physical illness, is appropriately dealt with by prayer and medical treatment. I've seen people deeply troubled because they have foolishly dabbled in the world of spirits, mediums, Ouija boards and the like. Don't take the risk. What I do know is what the apostles needed to cast out the demon was what we all need to overcome all & every manifestation of evil – faith. Ephesians 6¹⁶: *Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked.*

September 4th

Matthew 18 vv 1-6

I sometimes wonder if, among other things, Jesus was referring to what we have come to call child abuse when he spoke of what will happen to *whoso(m) shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me*. It defies belief that people in positions of trust, including clergy, could perpetrate such wickedness on vulnerable children. On the contrary, we should be like children, innocent, humble, without malice. In understanding, says St Paul, be men, but without malice like children. To care for a child is to love Jesus.

Yesterday was the anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War & I quoted from Ephesians 6. The passage about putting on the whole armour of God begins with the reminder: *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities; against powers; against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places*. I take these words to include powerful evil men & Satan & his demonic legions.

September 5th

Matthew 18 vv 7-9

We're not to take these words literally, though some misguided people have done so. What they remind us of is how total our commitment to Christ must be, how uncompromising our rejection of evil in all its forms.

1 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.
2 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 through his
blood.

3 See, from his head, his
hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled
down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow
meet,
or thorns compose so rich a
crown?
4 Were the whole realm of
nature mine,
that were a present far too
small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my
all.

September 6th

Matthew 18 vv 10&11

There's not much about guardian angels in the Bible, but there is the strong implication that there are angels designated to take care of such corporations as nations and churches and also of individuals. Jesus says that the angels of children are close to the Throne of Grace. He hears their prayers. He protects them. His wrath is powerful against those who abuse them. Jesus speaks of coming to save the lost. Those who don't know that they are lost, don't seek Him, or hear His voice when the Good Shepherd Himself seeks them.

September 7th

Matthew 18 vv 12-14

If you flick through the diocesan directory (whatever the online equivalent of flicking is) or use the diocesan daily intercessions, you quickly notice that it seems to be the large churches with big well-educated congregations and plenty of money which have the most ministers, lay & ordained. There maybe good reasons for this. Such parishes are good training posts for the newly ordained. They are good at identifying people called to lay ministry. They finance their own ministry teams and subsidise the rest of the diocese. But I do wonder whether all these pastors are disproportionately looking after the ninety-nine sheep that have not gone astray while far fewer shepherds are allocated to those churches which have little money, small congregations and a parish in which there is much poverty and people have few opportunities to hear the Good News – those whom Jesus says are like sheep without a shepherd. Pray for bishops and others allocating pastors where they can do most good.

September 8th (Accession of HM King Charles 3rd / Trinity 15) Matt 18¹⁵⁻¹⁷

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*. Sinful humanity being what it is, we need order in Church and state, order which has to be imposed by authority when our consciences are insufficient to make us behave as we ought to, order, which, if it is not to be disorder, must be imposed on the principles laid down by Him Who brought order out of primaeval chaos and light out of darkness. Ideally, we act as we should act because we are good people. Insofar as

we are not good people, we need law and all law which makes sense derives from God's Law – the Ten Commandments etc., summarised in the command to love. The UK constitution makes King Charles our head of state and supreme governor of the Church of England. He too is a sinful man and like us he needs the support of *prayer 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.*

September 9th

Matthew 18 vv 18-20

The Church has Christ's authority, but how is His authority made manifest in the Church? Is it through the bishops in succession to the apostles, to Peter who was entrusted with the keys of the Kingdom? Is it where *two or three are gathered together* as in worship or a prayer group, a PCC or a synod? Or an ecumenical (worldwide or church wide) council as in Acts 15? Many council, synod & PCC meetings don't appear to reflect the love of Jesus to any significant degree. Yet God can use us, despite our human frailty. Does God manifest His authority in inspired individuals like Moses & Elijah? Do we seek God's authority in the Scriptures? Does He sometimes teach His Church through the world? Human laws are sometimes more humane than Church Law. No human being is perfect and none has ultimate authority. God bestows His authority on the Church in all the ways I've mentioned and no doubt in other ways too.

It so happened that the *Save the Parish* annual conference report was published while I was working on these notes. There is a trend in the Church of England to amalgamate parishes, close churches and withdraw the clergy to the centre instead of being dispersed among the people they are called to serve. Many senior people in the Church believe that this is the best way to serve God in the modern world with the limited resources we have. *Save the Parish* believe that it is in having an ordained priest & a parish Church at the heart of every community that we can best offer pastoral care and spread the Good News (and therefore to recruit more people to do God's work in the parishes). As you can imagine, discussions sometimes get very heated and each side may be tempted to impugn the motives of the other. It is good that the STP report included the reminder to discuss our differences in the light of Matthew 18 – *endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.* Ephesians 4 v3)

September 10th

Matthew 18 vv 21-35

Forgiveness is very important in the teaching of Jesus. In the Lord's Prayer we pray, *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.* And what if we don't forgive? We shan't be forgiven. As our starting point, we need to acknowledge how much we owe to God. Our calling is to act as His children, to behave as people made in God's image, to be holy as He is holy, to be perfect as He is perfect, to be Christ-like in all our thoughts, words and deeds. Mere conventional goodness is very far from sufficient for us to spend eternity in the presence of the thrice holy God. We fall very far short of the standard Jesus sets. Our sins are forgiven through faith in Him, but the expectation is not that we shall be complacent and continue in sin, but, that, set free from sin, we shall grow into His likeness. It is often hard to forgive other people from our hearts, but it is what we must seek grace to do, if we are to be like Jesus, Who prayed for the men who nailed Him to the Cross, *Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*

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.

September 11th

Matthew 19 vv 1-12

What is marriage? Is it an agreement which two people make to live together and to look after one another? If you happened to be marooned on a desert island with your fiancé and no-one else, could you get married? * Is it a legal contract recognised by the state, which is in certain circumstances dissoluble? How does marriage differ from a civil partnership, especially now that both marriage & civil partnership is legally available to homosexual as well as heterosexual couples †? Is marriage a Sacrament? Is it *an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church* ? I'd go for the last. Marriage is a gift of God to the human race. Husband and wife are God's gift to each other. Their love for one another ought to be as God's love is for us all – unconditional and permanent. Marriage is the only context in which it is right for *the twain to become one flesh*. A principal purpose of marriage is to continue the Creator's work of replenishing the planet. That being so, divorce is something which ought not to happen. But what of our hardness of heart? What about the fact that some people do not, perhaps cannot, live up to the ideal? If you see marriage as an agreement between two people or a legal contract, it is not too difficult to envisage circumstances in which the agreement may be broken or the contract legally terminated. But if you believe that marriage is a Sacrament or (preferring to reserve the word *Sacrament* for the two Gospel Sacraments of Holy Baptism & Holy Communion, you simply say that marriage is *an honourable estate, instituted of God*), it is hard to see that divorce can ever be legitimate. *What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder*. Should therefore couples stay together however badly either one or both of them behave? Is it legitimate *in extremis* to separate, to divorce even, but not to get married again? Or, if your marriage fails, wherever the fault lies and nobody is totally innocent, is it permissible to divorce and to marry again, someone with whom you believe you can be happy? To refuse divorce and a fresh start to people whose marriage has failed badly is harsh, but to allow divorce and subsequent marriage undermines its sacramental character.

* In Church teaching, you could. The couple, not the priest, are the ministers of the Sacrament.

† In civil ceremonies and some churches but not the Church of England

September 12th

Matthew 19 vv 13-15

Children in Church. They can be a distraction. They make a noise & we can't hear. They get bored & move around and we find it hard to focus on our devotions. Staid old adults in Church. They can be a barrier to children and their families coming to faith. They give disapproving looks. They make comments. The children and the staid old adults may be happier if the former are in a separate Sunday School while the latter participate in a more formal service in Church. But then, what about the fact that we are a family, the family of God? We've got to be all together at least some of the time. I don't know the answers to these conundrums, but I do know that we must find our way round them in love.

September 13th

Matthew 19 vv 16-26

Being conventionally good (*All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?*) If we really want to be Jesus' disciples we can hold nothing back.

September 14th (Holy Cross Day)

Matthew 19 vv 27-30

At one of our shared events with the Orthodox, I was told that a guy called Stavros celebrated his Christian name day on 14th September. I hadn't realised that the modern Greek name Stavros is the same as the New Testament Greek word Stauros, which means cross. Jesus died for us on the Cross. Our calling is take up our cross and follow Him. The blessings which follow forsaking all to follow Him infinitely outweigh such sacrifices as we are required to make.

1 There is a green hill far away,
Without a city wall,
Where the dear Lord was
crucified,
Who died to save us all.

2 We may not know, we cannot
tell
What pains He had to bear,
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.

3 He died that we might be
forgiv'n,
He died to make us good,
That we might go at last to

heav'n,
Saved by His precious blood.

4 There was no other good
enough

To pay the price of sin,
He only could unlock the gate
Of heav'n and let us in.

5 Oh, dearly, dearly has He
loved!

And we must love Him too
And trust in His redeeming
blood

And try His works to do.

September 15th (Trinity 16)

Matthew 20 vv 1-16

I don't much like having nothing to do. One of the reasons I'm sometimes hard to contact is that I am nearly always doing something. But imagine that if you had nothing to do, you had no work, you had no income either. You'd not only be bored; you'd be very worried for yourself and for your family. What would you do for dinner tonight? That would have been very much on the minds of those casual labourers hanging about in the market place for as long as it took to get a job. The men who were hired early were the lucky ones. They had a day doing something useful with a promise of a day's pay at the end of it and they received the reward they were given to expect. Those of us who have been privileged to labour in the Lord's vineyard for many years should be thankful for the lives we have had rather than resentful that some sinners might make it to heaven by repenting at the 11th hour. They've not had fulfilled lives and they've not known what to expect hereafter.

O LORD, we beseech thee, let thy continual pity cleanse and defend thy Church; and, because it cannot continue in safety without thy succour, preserve it evermore by thy help and goodness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

September 16th

Matthew 20 vv 17-19

Jesus knew what awaited Him. He had come into the world in order to offer Himself as a sacrifice, dying on the Cross for the sins of the world. He knew that God would raise Him from the dead and that by these means God would pour out His Holy Spirit on the world that through faith in Him, humanity would be redeemed. This was very hard for the apostles and His contemporaries in general to grasp. It is far from easy to understand even given what we know now. The best way in which we can explain these things to the world is to live Christian lives.

September 17th

Matthew 20 vv 20-29

Is it right for the clergy to be ambitious? Is it right for anyone to be ambitious? If you have talents – gifts from God – surely you should make the best use of them. Why be a road sweeper if you could be a brain surgeon? That isn't to say that road sweepers aren't important. Cuxton residents may remember when we were without a village road sweeper for a considerable time. But most people could probably be

road sweepers and only a few are clever enough to become brain surgeons. If you are one of those few, isn't it your duty to develop and use your talents? If you have a better paid job, you can provide a better life style for yourself and your family; you'll have more resources to do good in the community. If you attain power, potentially you can use it do a lot of good. If you are respected in the community, you are in a position to set a good example to other people. But a high position brings with it responsibilities and its own temptations: temptations to attribute your success to your own qualities and effort while forgetting that the opportunities you have had have all come from God; the temptation to look down on other people (The guy who keeps the drains clean and hygienic may well save more lives than the guy who operates on very rare brain disorders.); the temptation to use one's position, power and resources selfishly rather than for the common good; the temptation to enjoy being looked up to by "lesser mortals". I do believe that we ought to use our talents to the uttermost, to accept a high position if we are truly suited to occupy one, but we have to be cautious and humble when we plot out our careers.

The rich man in his castle, the poor man at his gate,
God made them, high or lowly, and ordered their estate.

We all owe our position to God. We should neither despise nor envy our neighbour, but the rich man who treats the poor man with indifference or contempt will get his comeuppance and the poor man may look to God for justice both in this world & the next. (cf Luke 16¹⁹⁻³¹).

September 18th

Matthew 20 vv 30-34

Immediately their eyes received sight and they followed him.

Earlier in the Gospel story, those who have benefitted by our Lord's miracles have been told to go home, even often to say nothing about the blessings they have received. There are various theories about why this might have been so. It's been called the Messianic Secret. Until after the confession of Peter that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and the Transfiguration, the hour has not yet come to disclose Who Jesus is generally to the world. More prosaically, it might just be that He didn't want to be so overwhelmed by people begging for miracles that He was unable to teach. Anyway, these men did what it is logical to do when we see Jesus (literally or metaphorically). They followed Him.

September 19th

Matthew 21 vv 1-11

When I was younger, I don't think it ever occurred to me that this was not a miracle. Jesus knew that there would be an ass tied up and that He would ride it into Jerusalem and fulfil the prophecy just because He knows everything. On further consideration, however, maybe this was a normal human transaction. Jesus had arranged with the owner of the ass to make it available when He sent His disciples to collect it. I think some Christians relate more to Christ's divinity and some to His humanity. He is of course both fully human and fully divine and it is a mistake to neglect either aspect of His personhood.

September 20th

Matthew 21 vv 12-16

It was Passover time. Literally millions of people were travelling up to Jerusalem. They were singing the Passover Psalms, including Ps 118 which is quoted in this story. People who had not brought their animals for sacrifice with them would be buying them in what had become a market place in the Temple. They would be changing their money into shekels in order to pay the Temple tax. All would have been confusion in what ought to have been a place of prayer. Maybe what Jesus says about a den of thieves tells us that these at least some of these transactions in the market were not honest. All this was going on in the outer court where Gentiles were allowed, though they weren't allowed nearer the sanctuary. So this market was depriving the less privileged of their place of prayer. It is interesting that Jesus quotes Psalm 8 to explain what the children were doing. This psalm is often quoted in the New Testament. It expresses our awe that this wonderful Creator of everything cares so much for and has entrusted so much to us human beings and focuses on Jesus as the epitome and representative of humanity.

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

September 21st (St Matthew)

Matthew 21 vv 17-22

Why did Jesus curse the fig tree. It wasn't even the season for figs. So why was Jesus so frustrated not to find any figs on the tree and why did He react as He did? Can I suggest that the meaning is that we ought always to be ready to serve Christ? Historically, men offering for the ministry had generally done so while relatively young, perhaps just out of college or having served in the armed forces, The experience of battle turned the hearts of many men to thoughts of God and how they could serve Him in the cause of peace & justice.) Towards the end of the twentieth century, however, larger numbers of candidates were coming forward having already had careers in other professions. Now of course God can call people of any age to serve Him in any capacity, but the then Archbishop of Canterbury became worried that some men were treating the ministry as a sort of retirement hobby. They'd made their money, their children were grown up. Now they had the leisure to become vicars. Some such men may genuinely have been called in their sixties, but might some have been called while much younger, called to sacrifice a high salary, the opportunity to own their own house and to subsidise their children through college? Are there occasions in all our lives – not just prospective vicars – when God is calling us to do something now and it is not acceptable to tell Him to wait till it's a more convenient time for us?

O 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 (Trinity 17)

Matthew 21 vv 23-27

By what authority?

The chief priests wanted to cast doubt on our Lord's authority. His teaching was turning the world upside down. It turns the world upside down today. Just read the first twelve verses of Matthew 5 again. So His authority is deprecated in order that His teaching can be disregarded. Houses are built on sand rather than on the rock. (Matt 7²⁴⁻²⁹)

LORD, we pray thee that thy grace may always prevent and follow us, and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

September 23rd

Matthew 21 vv 28-32

There are different ways of interpreting this parable. You could say that those who promised to obey God & didn't actually do so were the Sadducees and Pharisees, and the people who initially rejected God but then turned back to Him and tried to live in accordance with His Will were the publicans and sinners. You could say that the Jews were the people who promised to live by God's Law & failed to do so and that it was the Gentiles who at first did not know God but later repented and were baptised with faithful Jews into the people of God. Even more profitably we could ask ourselves if we fit into either of these categories. Did we promise to serve God and then walk away? Did we initially disregard God's calling and then, after all, return into His ways? Ideally of course we'd both promise & act on our promise.

September 24th

Matthew 21 vv 33-46

The same considerations apply to this parable as to the last one. The nation is God's vineyard. He has planted it and provided it with everything it needs to be fruitful. God entrusts His vineyard to His people. He sends Moses and the prophets to harvest the fruits of righteousness. The husbandmen refuse to hand over the fruit and persecute those who are sent to demand it. The culmination of their wickedness is to kill the Son of the owner. Maybe the husbandmen are the Sadducees and Pharisees and the "nation" the vineyard is given to are the despised "people of the land", the poor & uneducated, the publicans and sinners. Or maybe the husbandmen are the Israelites in general & the nation to whom the vineyard is given is the Gentiles or the Church (which of course includes both faithful Jews & faithful Gentiles). But again, more pertinently perhaps, the question we should be asking ourselves is whether we ourselves are bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit, in love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness & temperance? Do we even sometimes disregard or even abuse the messengers God sends to us to remind us of our duties?

September 25th

Matthew 22 vv 1-14

The originally invited guests didn't rate the king's invitation very highly. Attending the banquet wasn't a high priority for them. It was inconvenient. They had too many other things to attend to. They (like the vineyard husbandmen) ill treated & even killed the king's messengers. The guy without a wedding garment wasn't particularly bothered either. Grace is free, but our salvation is priceless, not without value.

September 26th

Matthew 22 vv 15-22

What Jesus says here has provoked 2,000 years of controversy. *Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.* Some people take these words to mean that religion and politics don't mix. Some think that they mean that we can separate our faith from our business life, striving to live by Christian principles at home & in Church, confining prayer to the ecclesiastical & domestic spheres, but behaving no differently from people who are not Christians in the world of work and commerce. Such an approach to what Jesus said must be wrong. God is involved in everything which happens on earth. His laws, His principles are universally applicable. The way we live, how we behave if we are Christians, whatever we are doing has to reflect the love of God. Our politics, the way we do our work or run our businesses, the hobbies & interests we pursue all come under the judgment of God and our Christian calling is to act on our faith in all circumstances.

I believe that what Jesus is doing here is condemning the hypocrisy which some people employ by pretending that they cannot do their duty to the state by making out that it conflicts with their faith – eg the coward who suddenly acquires the principles of a conscientious objector only when his call-up papers arrive. Jesus is also, of course, condemning those who would use a conundrum to catch Him out.

September 27th

Matthew 22 vv 23-33

Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be?

I remember wondering about questions like this when I was a child, probably before I had read this passage. What will it be like in heaven? How shall we relate to other people? If we've been married more than once, won't that be awkward? Jesus said, *If I have told you of earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?* St Paul writes, *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.* It is hard enough to grasp the truth of things on earth. Heaven is beyond our understanding. We do know, however, that *God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.* We know that we shall see Him face to face and know Him even as He knows us. We are changed into the same image (Jesus) from glory to glory. We shall be made like Him. We shall meet our loved ones who have died in the Lord and, with them, we shall be for ever with Him. Eternal love, eternal joy, eternal life. Two very different hymns expressing the same hope.

So long Thy power hath blest
me, sure it still
Will lead me on.
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag
and torrent, till
The night is gone,
And with the morn those angel
faces smile,
Which I have loved long since,
and lost awhile!

One day the trumpet will sound
for His coming,
One day the skies with His
glory will shine;
Wonderful day, my beloved
ones bringing;
Glorious Saviour, this Jesus is
mine!

September 28th

Matthew 22 vv 34-40

Near the beginning of the 1662 Communion service, the priest reads the Ten Commandments and, after each one, we ask for God's mercy and His grace that we may obey them. Newer versions of the service omit the commandments altogether or substitute for them this Summary of the Law. I'm concerned that people seem no longer to know the Ten Commandments & we ought to know them. If we love truly God wholeheartedly & our neighbour as ourselves, we'll keep God's commandments because it is in our nature to do so.

Psalm 110: **THE** Lord said unto my Lord : Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of thy power out of Sion : be thou ruler, even in the midst among thine enemies. In the day of thy power shall the people offer thee free-will offerings with an holy worship : the dew of thy birth is of the womb of the morning. The Lord sware, and will not repent : Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedech. The Lord upon thy right hand : shall wound even kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen; he shall fill the places with the dead bodies : and smite in sunder the heads over divers countries. He shall drink of the brook in the way : therefore shall he lift up his head.

In the Old Testament, this psalm (a psalm of David) is about the King of Israel and the High Priest. In Abraham's time (and for some considerable time afterwards) one and the same man occupied both offices. Melchizedek is the best known. At least from David's time onwards, king & priest were separate offices and the one must not trespass on the other's prerogatives. In the New Testament, we see how Jesus fulfils both roles. He is our King & our High Priest. (In Him, therefore, all we Christians are kings and priests.) In the first verse of the psalm, God – the LORD – addresses the King / High Priest, Whom David refers to as *my lord*. If David calls Him Lord, He is an infinitely greater being than any merely human son (descendant) of David. So we need to look higher than David's descendants after the flesh to discern Who the true Messiah is.

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

Matthew 23 vv 1-12

The Pharisees knew their Bibles. They studied the Law. They knew what they were talking about & it was worth taking notice of what they said. But, at least the Pharisees Jesus so often encountered, didn't take the Law they knew so well to heart. They taught others. Their erudition was very impressive. They were much respected and enjoyed the honours they received from an admiring populace. But they were too fond of their own reputations as respected members of society. They looked down on ordinary people. Sometimes they cheated them. Their teaching burdened their students rather than setting them free. They imposed on others (and often themselves followed) the rules in all their minutiae, but lost sight of the bigger picture. *Do as I say, not what I do* is an expression desperate parents and teachers may fall back on on occasion, but it's not a principle to live by. Parents, teachers & priests are duty bound to try to live by the principles with which they are attempting to inculcate their charges. St Paul says, *But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway* (I Corinthians 9 v27).

But mature Christians don't need a rabbi, teacher or priest to stand between us and God. Jesus is our teacher and our high priest. Both God & Man Himself, it is through Him & Him alone that we may approach the Throne of Grace. The Prayer Book describes Him as *our only mediator and advocate* and so He is and we need no other.