

Thy Word
is Truth

Bible Notes
October – December
2022

October 1st John 17 v17

Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

In the last quarter, we considered the question, “But where can wisdom be found?” This world desperately needs wisdom. You and I need wisdom. The power and wisdom of God is our Lord Jesus Christ. The world needs Jesus as you and I need Him. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the life. I thought that this quarter we should consider Truth in this world over which the Father of Lies claims to have dominion.

Today’s verse comes from the words of Jesus to His disciples at the Last Supper. He consecrates Himself as priest and sacrifice. He consecrates Himself as the Servant of God, the King anointed by the Holy Spirit, the Messiah, Who reigns both from the Cross and in the highest Heaven. He consecrates His apostles and, through them the apostolic Church (which is made up of all those who believe through their words proclaimed to the ends of earth and in every age, us in fact), to be a kingdom of priests, who, taking up their cross daily to follow Him, serve Him but proclaiming the praises of Him Who called us out of darkness into His own marvellous light. I often read this passage to my confirmation candidates shortly before the Confirmation service.

October 2nd (Trinity 16)

Psalm 119 v160

Thy word is true from everlasting; all the judgments of thy
righteousness endure for evermore.

With 176 verses, (eight for each of the twenty letters of the Hebrew alphabet, with eight verses beginning with A, eight with B etc.). I heard a probably untrue story of a vicar who, if there were too many empty seats on a Sunday, would tell those in church to sing Psalm 119 while he went to round up the rest of the congregation. It’s a celebration of the Law of God, His Word, His Truth. We can always rely on God. He is trustworthy and true. His Word is truth. His Law is just. His righteousness is eternal. We live by the Word of God. Prayer next page

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.*

October 3rd

Genesis 1 vv 1-3

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

The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword. The Word of God is the Wisdom of God and the Power of God. The Word of God is Jesus. God creates everything that there is by His Word. By (or through) Jesus all things were made. *For by him all things were created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible.* Praise Jesus.

October 4th

Psalms 33 vv 1-6

REJOICE in the Lord, O ye righteous : for it becometh well the just to be thankful. 2. Praise the Lord with harp : sing praises unto him with the lute, and instrument of ten strings. 3. Sing unto the Lord a new song : sing praises lustily unto him with a good courage. 4. For the word of the Lord is true : and all his works are faithful. 5. He loveth righteousness and judgement : the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord. 6. By the word of the Lord were the heavens made : and all the hosts of them by the breath of his mouth.

This is one of my favourite psalms. *The word of the Lord is true.* It is by the word of the LORD that the heavens are made – with all the hosts of cherubim and seraphim, angels and archangels. *He loveth righteousness and judgment.* God Himself is righteous and just. It follows that we, His people, must be righteous and just too. *Ye shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy.* We human beings are made in God's image. Our calling is to be like Him, the One Who is love. In our rebellion against Him, His image in us is marred. Jesus is the image of God both in His humanity and in His divinity. Through faith in Christ, His image is restored in us, so that we become like Him.

October 5th

Psalm 33 vv 8&9

8. Let all the earth fear the Lord : stand in awe of him, all ye that dwell in the world. 9. For he spake, and it was done : he commanded, and it stood fast.

It is indeed an awesome thought that everything we know about, everything we can think about, everything that exists in heaven and on earth is the work of God, the product of His Word. No praise we can utter is sufficient. All that we can offer to Him, even our very selves, is in the first place God's gift to us. *For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.*

The God people don't bother with is the God they have no idea about, no idea of how only God truly is and how everything else (including we ourselves) depends on Him for its existence, of how He holds in His Hand every passing hour, every fleeting shadow, of how we utterly depend on Him for everything we need for our lives on earth and how we are answerable to the One Who is righteous and just Who requires us to be righteous and just too in all our dealings. We can't expect to bring people to faith by watering down the awesomeness of God. Rather, like Mary, we must magnify the Lord if we are to be bearers of His Word.

October 6th

Psalm 33 vv 10 & 11

10. The Lord bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought : and maketh the devices of the people to be of none effect, and casteth out the counsels of princes. 11. The counsel of the Lord shall endure for ever : and the thoughts of his heart from generation to generation.

So where can we find wisdom? There are many people in the world around us telling us what we must believe and what we must not believe, what we can and cannot say, what we ought to do and what we should not do. Many of these voices are not Christian voices. They are politicians, school teachers and academics, influencers, the twitter mob, public opinion, our neighbours and sometimes our families. But where can we find wisdom? In prayerfully and humbly contemplating the Word of God.

October 7th

Psalm 119 vv 99&100

99. I have more understanding than my teachers : for thy testimonies are my study. 100. I am wiser than the aged : because I keep thy commandments.

That sounds very arrogant. Indeed it could be arrogant if we thought of ourselves as smarter than our teachers or our parents or those set in authority over us. On the other hand, no human authority is absolute. Only God has absolute authority. Only He is entitled to our unqualified obedience. If our conscience teaches us, after humble and prayerful consideration of the issues in the Light of the Word of God, that our elders and better are mistaken, it is our duty to go with what we believe God's Will to be for us. Acts 4: ¹⁸ *And they (the Sadducees and Pharisees) called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. ²⁰ For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*

October 8th

Psalm 33 vv 12-14

12. Blessed are the people, whose God is the Lord Jehovah : and blessed are the folk, that he hath chosen to him to be his inheritance. 13. The Lord looked down from heaven, and beheld all the children of men : from the habitation of his dwelling he considereth all them that dwell on the earth. 14. He fashioneth all the hearts of them : and understandeth all their works.

Jehovah, YHWH, the LORD, is our God. We are very blessed. We owe it God and to the world to share this Good News – to preach the Gospel throughout the world, starting from where we are now, teaching people to observe the things Jesus has taught us to observe and baptising all who believe in the Name of the Father & of the Son and of the Holy Ghost so that they too may share in the blessing of belonging to the people of God. He knows everything. He knows everyone. There is mercy and their is judgment – two sides of the same coin, which is love.

We have a gospel to proclaim, good news for men on all the earth;
The gospel of a Saviour's name: we sing his glory, tell his worth.

October 9th (Trinity 17)

Psalm 33 vv 15-18

15. There is no king that can be saved by the multitude of an host : neither is any mighty man delivered by much strength. 16. A horse is counted but a vain thing to save a man : neither shall he deliver any man by his great strength. 17.

Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him : and upon them that put their trust in his mercy; 18. To deliver their soul from death : and to feed them in the time of dearth.

Thinking back to life in ancient Israel, what might a king like David rely on to protect himself, the royal family and the nation? Obviously, he might think, regiments of foot soldiers, the cavalry. Yes, they might well have their place. But nothing like that is of any help at all without God. You and I might have all sorts of problems and we might look for the things which we think could help us: friends' support and advice, more money, better training, a larger or smaller house, going to the doctor. All these things might be the smart thing to do. They may well be gifts from God. But, ultimately it is only God Who can help us, whatever means He may use. So wherever we look for help, we do so in the context of prayer, seeking to align our will with God's Will so that we may make the best of our lives. Psalm 127: *EXCEPT the Lord build the house : their labour is but lost that build it. 2. Except the Lord keep the city : the watchman waketh but in vain.*

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.*

October 10th

Psalm 33 vv 19-21

19. Our soul hath patiently tarried for the Lord : for he is our help and our shield. 20. For our heart shall rejoice in him : because we have hoped in his holy Name. 21. Let thy merciful kindness, O Lord, be upon us : like as we do put our trust in thee.

It is vital to be thankful, to remember all that God has done for us, to thank Him for meeting all our needs to share with other people just how good God is so that they can share in our joy and be encouraged in their own faith.

October 11th

Psalm 19 vv 1-4

THE heavens declare the glory of God : and the firmament sheweth his handywork. 2. One day telleth another : and one night certieth another. 3. There is neither speech nor language : but their voices are heard among them. 4. Their sound is gone out into all lands : and their words into the ends of the world.

Heaven and earth are God's Creation, formed by the Word of His Mouth, Jesus. As human beings, we have the gift of speech and music, both to proclaim and to sing our praises, to bear witness of God. But even the plants and animals and the inanimate creation proclaim the glory of God just by their being. Really, people have no excuse if they can look at the world around them, the universe, all the wonders of science and the arts and still deny God. It takes a hard heart to behold the Creation and to deny that there is a Creator of it all. I've said before that I do sometimes wonder whether the prevalence of atheism and agnosticism in our society is at all connected to the way we have cut ourselves off from Nature. We leave our houses, get straight in the car and drive to an indoor car park connected directly with a shopping centre under cover or we go to work in an office, factory or even mine. People seem sometimes to be afraid to experience fresh air, the wind, the sun, the rain and snow. We concrete the countryside and we're warned not to venture out in the event of any inclemency of the weather. Children behold the world via a screen. The outside world is not safe. Cutting ourselves off from Creation, do we cut ourselves off from the Creator? My impression is that the countryside everywhere and in all ages tends to be more religious than the town. Even Abraham's family were told to leave metropolitan, sophisticated, but idolatrous, Ur, and re-establish themselves as faithful nomads in the Holy Land. But, if I'm not wrong about this, I ought to be. God is everywhere. There is such a thing as the Holy City. What human beings build they build using the materials and skills which God has given us. The city too speaks of the glory of God, even if I find its voice more muted than that of the countryside. Every human being you meet in the town, all those commuters, workers shoppers, theatre goers, everyone of them is made in the image of God. We ought to recognise God in the city as well as in the countryside.

October 11th continued

Psalm 19 verse 5&6

5. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun : which cometh forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a giant to run his course.
6. It goeth forth from the uttermost part of the heaven, and runneth about unto the end of it again : and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.

Primitive people looked up into the sky (which was much clearer before light and atmospheric pollution) and they wondered at the heavenly bodies: the sun, moon and stars. Often, they were tempted to worship them. But, taught by God Himself, through Moses and the Prophets, we came to know that there is only One God Who made everything that is. The sun, moon and stars worship God by their wondrous being and they themselves testify to the glory of God.

October 12th

Psalm 8 vv 1-6

O LORD our Governor, how excellent is thy Name in all the world : thou that hast set thy glory above the heavens! 2. Out of the mouth of very babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength, because of thine enemies : that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger. 3. For I will consider thy heavens, even the works of thy fingers : the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained. 4. What is man, that thou art mindful of him : and the son of man, that thou visitest him? 5. Thou madest him lower than the angels : to crown him with glory and worship. 6. Thou makest him to have dominion of the works of thy hands : and thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet;

Meditating then on the glory of God as manifest in His Creation, the psalmist is awed, as we all should be, at the thought that this God Who accomplished all this in the Creation of the universe cares so much about us mere human beings, that we have such a wonderful place in His Heart. We are made in His image. We have besmirched His image in us by our sin. Yet Jesus fulfils all that it is to be Man and all that it is to be God – *the express image of his person*. Jesus sums up in His Incarnation, Death, Resurrection and Ascension everything which it means to be human as seen in the psalmist's vision. Hebrews 2⁹: *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.*

October 13th

Psalm 19 v7

The law of the Lord is an undefiled law, converting the soul : the testimony of the Lord is sure, and giveth wisdom unto the simple.

Why did Science make so much progress in Jewish, Muslim and Christian lands? One theory is that it is because Jews, Muslims and Christians believe in one God. Other cultures have been and are very inventive. The Chinese, for example, invented things like gunpowder long before we did. But people who believe that one God of infinite wisdom created everything that there is instinctively look for His Hand in the affairs of this world. It all makes sense. There is an essential unity. Things are predictable. Everything is interrelated. Everything happens within the providence and purposes of God. Everything happens in accordance with God's Will. God is love. God is wisdom. God's commandments are summarised in the command to love. The laws discovered by scientists – gravity, relatively, etc. – are the laws of God. It is this belief which underpins the scientist's hope of explaining the universe. Of course, many scientists are unbelievers or followers of other religions, but they are building on this Jewish / Muslim / Christian heritage of faith that it all makes sense because it is all of God. Psalm 104 v24: *O Lord, how manifold are thy works : in wisdom hast thou made them all; the earth is full of thy riches.*

October 14th

Psalm 19 v8

The statutes of the Lord are right, and rejoice the heart : the commandment of the Lord is pure, and giveth light unto the eyes.

Inanimate objects have no choice as to whether or not they obey the Laws of God. That's why you can predict everything from how long it will take to boil an egg to when the next eclipse of the moon will take place. If you know enough, you can predict the way the natural world will behave. If you couldn't, life would be very difficult. (Quantum events like radioactive decay are much harder to comprehend, but there is a kind of predictability. Radioactive elements do have a measurable half life.) The natural world has no choice but to work in accordance with God's Law. We do have a choice and things go very wrong when we make the wrong choices.

October 15th

Psalm 19 v9

The fear of the Lord is clean, and endureth for ever : the judgements of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.

I was never great at woodwork, but one lesson I did learn is that you have to work with the grain. You can saw a piece of wood across the grain in order to get the length you want. When you are chiselling, using an adze or planing, however, you have to work with the grain. If you don't, you both spoil the article you are trying to fashion and risk cutting yourself and damaging your tools. It's the same with living in God's world. If you want to flourish yourself and achieve anything worthwhile, you have to work with the grain of the universe, God's perfect law of love.

October 16th (Trinity 18)

Psalm 19 vv 10 & 11

More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold : sweeter also than honey, and the honey-comb. Moreover, by them is thy servant taught : and in keeping of them there is great reward.

The psalmist talks about studying the Law of God – every day, seven times a day. We are very privileged to have the Bible freely available to us in so many different editions and translations. There is plenty of study material in print and online. There are study groups and bible schools. In church, the Bible is read to us and there is usually a sermon to explain its meaning and application in daily life. There is so much in the Bible. It makes such a difference to the way we live, what we do, how we feel. I wonder why it is that we are so reluctant to read the Bible. I think that it is the devil who tries to persuade us that the Bible is irrelevant or boring, that we don't need to know what it says, or that what we have already learnt is sufficient.

LORD, we beseech thee, grant thy people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow thee the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Who can tell how oft he offendeth : O cleanse thou me from my secret faults.

In days gone by, people would quickly have blamed anything bad that happened on sin. If there was war, a terrible storm, a drought, a plague or a famine, it must have been sent by God. Given that God is loving and wise, just and merciful, all-powerful and all-knowing, whatever the disaster, God must have sent it for a reason – quite often as punishment for sin. Traditional prayers for deliverance from wars and natural disasters include a large element of repentance - the implication being that we must have deserved whatever bad things are happening to us and that we must therefore repent of our sins and ask to be forgiven for them if we want God to end the plague. We're much less comfortable with thinking that way nowadays. God is just, but He is not vengeful. *He desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live*, as the Old Testament teaches. Jesus Himself (and much else in the OT & the NT) make clear that good people suffer grievously sometimes and bad people flourish like the green bay tree, even if these apparent injustices are eventually put right, if not in this world, in the age to come. *Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?* It may be very cruel to think that a person who is suffering must have done something proportionately bad to deserve it. Some Christians try to get around this by saying that God either cannot or chooses not to interfere in the day to day running of the world. He respects our freedom too much to micromanage. Others blame evil on Satan or humanity. Some even deny that evil really exists. They just call it the absence of good. Yet none of these evasions will do. God is in charge. That is quite clear from the Bible and we know it in our hearts. Evil is real, but neither the devil nor man can thwart God's purposes. God is in no way impotent. He doesn't just stand back and let us and the rest of the world go our own way. There would be no point in prayer and thanksgiving if He did.

From lightning and tempest; from plague, pestilence, and famine; from battle and murder, and from sudden death,
Good Lord, deliver us.

Keep thy servant also from presumptuous sins, lest they get the dominion over me : so shall I be undefiled, and innocent from the great offence.

Looking at Prayer Book prayers for use in time of drought, dearth or war, which have seemed very necessary this year, as has also been recently *the prayer for use in any time of common plague or sickness*, I have been struck by the thought that sin does have its hand in many disasters, War obviously. The dearth in so many parts of the world at this time is at least in part caused by the war in Ukraine. Poverty generally could be alleviated by a wiser use of the world's resources, less greed and more generosity. Has the drought and other extreme weather been caused by climate change, itself a result of excessive consumption, materialism and our reckless disregard for the consequences of our actions? Are we greedy, selfish and materialistic because we try to find fulfilment in things which can never satisfy instead of relying on Jesus in Whom all our needs and desires are met? We don't really know where COVID came from. Poor hygiene in Chinese markets? Carelessness which led to the escape of a laboratory specimen? An experiment in biological warfare which went wrong? Accidental transmission from some non-human species? I think the first and the last are now considered the most likely. Sin? Folly? *The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.*

The connection between human sin or folly and bad things happening in the world is far from simple but it is real. We ought always to be ready to examine ourselves, by God's grace to discover where we are falling short of being the people He wants us to be, and to repent.

ALMIGHTY God, who calledst Luke the Physician, whose praise is in the Gospel, to be an Evangelist, and Physician of the soul; May it please thee, that, by the wholesome medicines of the doctrine delivered by him, all the diseases of our souls may be healed; through the merits of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

October 19th

Psalm 19 vv 14&15

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart : be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord : my strength, and my redeemer.

This psalm which proclaims and celebrates the majesty of God's material Creation and the all-encompassing wisdom of His Holy Law is also very personal. Let my words and meditations be acceptable. He is my strength and redeemer. He is your strength and redeemer.

October 20th

Deuteronomy 4 vv 5&6

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

Moses is speaking to the people of Israel as they are about to enter the Promised Land after forty years wandering in the Wilderness. They are to remember all that God has done for them in setting them free from slavery in Egypt and leading them, guiding them, feeding them and protecting them in their long journey through the desert. They are to remember their sins and the consequences thereof. They are to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest God's holy Law. It is in keeping God's commandments that they will live.

This is even more wonderfully true for us Christians as we remember what God has done for us in setting us free from sin, the world and the devil, from slavery to the fear of death, in the Death of Jesus for us on the Cross. We are to be thankful to God for His daily care for us in our earthly lives. We joyfully anticipate dwelling with Him in all eternity. It is in keeping God's Law of love that we live. We don't earn our salvation by being good. Salvation is God's free gift to us. It is our response to His love which makes us good people.

October 21st

Deuteronomy 4 vv 7&8

For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? Justice is the gift of God to us. Mercy too is God's gift. Law comes from God.

A few days go we thought about scientists discovering the truth about the operation of the universe, the way the world works. Science is always provisional. Scientists come up with theories. They look at the evidence. They try experiments. Good scientists are always open to the possibility that the evidence will prove them wrong or that someone will come up with a better theory to explain things. Scientists can never be confident that they know the truth, but they hope that the advancement of Science will bring them closer to the truth. We hope that today's understanding is a closer approximation to the way things actually are than yesterday's understanding was but we hope that tomorrow's ideas will be even more refined and closer to reality, though never quite getting there.

So much for the laws of science, but what about the laws of man? Is law just what powerful people are able to enforce on the rest of us? Is law democratically determined? Are right and wrong just what most people think they are? Is justice just a fancy word for the arbitrary exercise of power? Louise XIV of France claimed L'Etat c' est moi. I am the state. Is that all there is to it? Human beings (powerful human beings) define for themselves law and justice? No. Law and Justice come from God. Law and Justice exist in the very nature of the Godhead, which is perfect love. Law and justice are God's gift to us. Just like the laws of science, human law is never perfect, but we must always be seeking to make it better, to strive to reform our human laws in order that they may progressively approximate ever more closely to God's Law, which is love.

That it may please thee to bless and keep the Magistrates, giving them grace to execute justice, and to maintain truth;

We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.

October 22nd

Psalm 120 vv 1-3

WHEN I was in trouble I called upon the Lord : and he heard me. Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips : and from a deceitful tongue. What reward shall be given or done unto thee, thou false tongue : even mighty and sharp arrows, with hot burning coals.

I wonder what lies someone had been telling against the psalmist? Was it giving false evidence in a legal case? Was it cheating in a business deal? Had someone started a malicious rumour against him? Was it just gossip? Obviously, it always hurts us if we are the victims of perjury or slander. Notice that the psalmist takes his trouble to God – always a good thing to do – *casting all your care on him, for he careth for you*. How do we respond to slander? Jude 9 is an odd verse in some ways. *Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee*. Moses died alone having viewed the Holy Land from the mountain top, but not permitted to enter it because of his own faithlessness and disobedience to God at the Waters of Strife. Deuteronomy 34 says *he buried him there* which is usually taken to mean that God Himself buried Moses. There is a story that Satan contended with the Archangel Michael for Moses' body. Jude observes that Michael did not himself rail against Satan. He trusted to God to deal with his adversary. Matthew Henry comments: *A memorandum to all disputants, never to bring railing accusations into their disputes. Truth needs no support from lies or scurrility. The Lord rebuke thee*. In other words, don't fight wrong-doing with the devil's weapons. Resist not evil with evil. Trust God. Rely on God to see justice prevail, justice, as always with God, tempered with mercy.

October 23rd (Trinity 19)

Psalm 100 vv 1 & 2

O BE joyful in the Lord, all ye lands : serve the Lord with gladness, and come before his presence with a song. Be ye sure that the Lord he is God : it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Psalm 100 is the Jubilate which is often sung at Mattins. All that we have and are are God's gift to us. Be joyful. Be glad. Sing His praises.

O GOD, forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee; Mercifully grant, that thy Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*.

October 24th

Psalm 100 vv 3&4

O go your way into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise : be thankful unto him, and speak good of his Name. For the Lord is gracious, his mercy is everlasting : and his truth endureth from generation to generation.

God's Truth endureth from generation to generation. God's truth is His faithfulness to us. We can absolutely rely on Him at all times and in all places whatever happens to us. His promises are sure. We can read the record of His dealings with His people in the Bible. We know from our own experience and that of our Christian friends. We can always trust God and we can take everything to Him in prayer.

October 25th

Psalm 96 vv 1&2

O SING unto the Lord a new song : sing unto the Lord, all the whole earth. Sing unto the Lord, and praise his Name : be telling of his salvation from day to day.

God's love is eternal. It is from time immemorial. We can look back on God's consistent love to the very beginning of time. He has made Himself known throughout history and in whatever went before history: in the glories of Nature, in His dealings with humanity and in His revelation of Himself in Scripture and in worship and in prayer. God is love in all eternity, before time began and *When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound and time shall be no more*, before time and space were and after they cease to exist. Yet, his mercy is for ever new. God's love is always fresh. There is always a new song to sing to the LORD.

Great is Thy faithfulness, Great
is Thy faithfulness,
Morning by morning new
mercies I see;

All I have needed Thy hand
hath provided,
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord
unto me.

October 26th

Psalm 96 vv 3&4

Declare his honour unto the heathen : and his wonders unto all people. For the Lord is great, and cannot worthily be praised : he is more to be feared than all gods.

The people of God share the Good News of what God has done for us with one another. We rejoice together. We also proclaim the Good News to the heathen, the non-believers, the world, to the glory of God and for their blessing. Only God is the true God. It is only in worship Him that human beings are fully human.

October 27th

Psalm 96 vv 5&6

As for all the gods of the heathen, they are but idols : but it is the Lord that made the heavens. Glory and worship are before him : power and honour are in his sanctuary.

All gods apart from the LORD are false gods. They are vanity. They are lies. What we worship is what we devote our lives to. We become what we worship. If we worship the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we become more like Him, people of love, people who have received the gift of eternal life, people who live in the abundance of the joy which Jesus came to bring. If we devote our lives to selfish goals, false gods, in effect we waste our lives. We become like what we worship – dead.

October 28th (St Simon and St Jude)

Psalm 96 vv 7&8

Ascribe unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people : ascribe unto the Lord worship and power. Ascribe unto the Lord the honour due unto his Name : bring presents, and come into his courts.

Psalm 96 is a wonderful psalm. Praising God is the very best thing that we can do on earth, as it will be the only thing we do in Heaven. Worship here on earth is a foretaste of Heaven. We really ought to encourage one another in worship, though sometimes I'm afraid we discourage one another with criticisms and unkindness. These things ought not to be so. If we worship God with our tongues, we ought never to use those same tongues to utter unkind, unfair or untrue words. Worship the LORD. Encourage one another. Tell other people who do not yet know the Truth of God so that they may join our fellowship of praise.

O ALMIGHTY God, who hast built thy Church upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the head corner-stone; Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made an holy temple acceptable unto thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness : let the whole earth stand in awe of him.

What does this verse mean to you? On the one hand, I feel moved to worship God by the beauty of the world which He has made. On the other hand, I think of worshipping the LORD in the beauty of His holiness, the holiness which is His Nature, the holiness which He imparts to us by cleansing us of our sins in the Blood of Jesus and by granting us the grace of His Holy Spirit to transform us into His likeness. We are God's holy people because He has forgiven us our sins and set us free. We have made a new beginning in Him, through the merits of Christ, not on our own merits, but on His alone. Set free from sin, we are free to serve Him Whose service is perfect freedom.

1 O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
with gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
kneel and adore him the Lord is his name.

2 Low at his feet lay thy burden of carefulness,
high on his heart he will bear it for thee,
comfort your sorrows and answer your prayerfulness,
guiding your steps in the way that is true.

3 Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness
of the poor wealth thou wouldst reckon as thine;

truth in its beauty and love in its tenderness
these are the offerings to bring to his throne.

4 These, though we bring them in trembling and fearfulness,
he will accept for the name that is dear;
mornings of joy give for evenings of tearfulness,
trust for our trembling and hope for our fear.

5 O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
with gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
kneel and adore him the Lord is his name.

October 30th (Trinity 20)

Psalm 96 v10

Tell it out among the heathen that the Lord is King : and that it is he who hath made the round world so fast that it cannot be moved; and how that he shall judge the people righteously

The word translated *heathen* here is also the word for *gentiles*. It means those who are not (yet) the people of God. They need to know that the LORD is King. He will protect His people. He will judge all the nations justly. If the heathen, the non-believers, repent and put their trust in God the King, they too will be saved. I take the words about the round world being so fast that it cannot be moved as meaning that it is bound by the laws of God. The psalmist didn't know about our orbit around the sun, the solar system, the galaxy of which we are a part, the myriad galaxies which comprise the universe, but He did know that they all are where they are and do what they do in accordance with God's Law – the laws of Science. It is also be God's Law that the people will be judged righteously. Gravity and the Ten Commandments are equally laws of God.

O ALMIGHTY and most merciful God, of thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech thee, from all things that may hurt us; that we, being ready both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that though wouldest have done; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

October 31st

Psalm 96 vv 11&12

Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad : let the sea make a noise, and all that therein is. Let the field be joyful, and all that is in it : then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord.

This is poetic language, but there is a sense in which the whole Creation rejoices in its Creator and our Creator rejoices in the things He has made. When the created order works in accordance with the Creator's Will, all things go well. When Creation goes awry and things start to fall apart, isn't human sin, our rebellion against God, very often the cause?

November 1st (All Saints)

Psalm 96 v13

For he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth : and with righteousness to judge the world, and the people with his truth.

The psalm is filled with praise for all the good things that God has done for us, for Who He is and for all His works. The culmination of our praises when we sing or say this psalm is that God is a God of justice. All wrongs will be righted. The innocent will be vindicated. We shall all get what we deserve. The wicked will be punished, unless we repent. Mercy is one of God's greatest attributes, but mercy presupposes justice. It is not just to turn a blind eye, to ignore, to pass over, to let off the perpetrators of wrong. God is just. And God is merciful. All our sins are forgiven through faith in Him Who died for us on the Cross. Mercy is far from of little value. Mercy is priceless. It is mercy which makes saints of all God's people.

O ALMIGHTY God, who hast knit together thine elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of thy Son Christ our Lord; Grant us grace so to follow thy blessed Saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys, which thou hast prepared for them that unfeignedly love thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

November 2nd (All Souls)

Psalm 95 vv 8-11

To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts : as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness. When your fathers tempted me : proved me, and saw my works. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said : It is a people that do err in their hearts, for they have not known my ways; Unto whom I swear in my wrath : that they should not enter into my rest.

Here's something of a curiosity. These are the last verses of the previous psalm to 96 which we have been studying. Psalm 95 is the *Venite* and is said 364 days a year at Prayer Book Mattins (365 days in a leap year). Christians I would accuse of wishy-washiness would often leave out these verses (also in the interests of brevity) because the

thought of God as Judge made them uncomfortable. Prayerbook revisers didn't want to leave out the theme of judgment from the Venite. So they substituted these verses with the last verse of Psalm 96 (or 98 which is nearly the same). They thereby kept it a bit shorter (for those in a hurry to get to their Sunday roast) and toned down the judgment theme, but didn't exclude it altogether. The trouble is that you can make Scripture say anything you like if you mangle it like this. It is too easy to use the Bible to back up what we think anyway rather than to let the Bible teach us how we should think about God and ourselves. These verses from Psalm 95 refer specifically to the time when the Israelites doubted God's ability to give them water in the desert and when Moses himself grew angry and struck the rock, from which the water then flowed. It was this incident which led to Moses dying before he could enter into the Promised Land. People should know this key story. We ought always be ready to hear, trust & obey the Word of God. The rock represents Christ and the water which flowed out of it stands for the Holy Spirit. The fact that that generation didn't enter the Promised Land is in itself a sign that there remains a rest for the people of God – our eternal home in heaven.

Incidentally, there is a spring in the land of Jordan which some of us saw on our visit to the Holy Land. Some people think that this spring is the one created when Moses struck the rock. The day in the year we don't say the Venite is Easter, when we say the Easter Anthems:

CHRIST our passover is sacrificed for us : therefore let us keep the feast; Not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness : but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 1 *Cor.* v. 7 Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more : death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once : but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin : but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Rom.* vi. 9 Christ is risen from the dead : and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death : by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die : even so in Christ shall all be made alive. 1 *Cor.* xv. 20. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end. *Amen.*

November 3rd

Proverbs 16 v11

A just weight and balance are the LORD'S: all the weights of the bag are his work.

The number 122 bus used to run from Gravesend to Brighton and I eventually managed to get my grandmother to take me. Well it took four hours on the bus and there was not much more time available than what was required to eat fish & chips. My grandmother's fish was off and she determined to take it to Weights and Measures (now Trading Standards) in Gravesend. Of course, after another four hours on a bus on a hot day, this proved an impractical proposition, but she had a good point, a biblical point. The honest trader supplies goods as advertised in good condition and in the quantities specified. Truth isn't just an abstract concept. It's a rule but which we are required to live.

November 4th

Nehemiah 9 v13

Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments:

Following their exile in Babylon, the Jews have returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the wall. In this chapter, the Law is read to them out loud, the story of God's faithfulness and our faithlessness. This is the God Who brought Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees to dwell in the Promised Land. He sent Joseph to deliver them from the famine. He set them free from slavery in Egypt and brought them to Mt Sinai to give them His Law. He led, guided, protected and provided for His people. He have them good laws. And yet they disobeyed time after time. The history of Israel is the history of the human race. It says of Jesus: *He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. 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:*

Why do you suppose that there are so few who believe? The choice is life or death. Why do so many make the wrong choice?

November 5th (The Gunpowder Plot)

Jude 3

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

Obviously, all Christians have to contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints. We have to be true to our Lord – to resist sin, the world and the devil, to fight (by the grace of God) every temptation to sin. But there are times when Christians don't agree about the details of the faith which was once delivered to the saints. The Church has split into different denominations who disagree about important aspects of doctrine and practice. Within denominations – including the Church of England – there are differences of opinion about important matters. There have been times in history (including England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) when disagreements within the Church have led to persecutions, violence and even civil war. The Gunpowder Plot and the savage punishment of the plotters are examples of this. Yet the foundation of the faith which was once delivered to the saints is love: God's love for us, our love for Him, His commandment that we should love one another as He loves us. Whatever our differences of opinion within churches or between churches, there ought nothing to be done or said which is not rooted and grounded in love, the consequence of Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith.

November 6th (Trinity 21)

Matthew 22 v16

Master we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men.

The authorities are trying to trap Jesus by asking Him whether it is lawful to give tribute to Caesar. What they are saying about Him is true. He speaks the truth no matter to whom He is speaking. But they are merely flattering in order to draw Him into their trap.

GRANT, we beseech thee, merciful Lord, to thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve thee with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

November 7th

Matthew 22 v21

Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

Our Lord's answer to yesterday's question is well known, but there have been two millennia of speculation on what He meant. Everything belongs to God, including everything which is Caesar's! Jesus isn't telling Christians to keep out of politics. God is very much concerned about the issues politicians deal with and the way they go about them: justice, peace, welfare, health, freedom from want, education, etc.. Those in authority derive their power ultimately from God and are answerable to Him for how they use it. They need our prayers and support – as well as our willingness to criticise and judge.

It says that Jesus recognised the hypocrisy of His questioners. Were they hypocrites because they didn't really want to know the answer? They were just trying to catch Jesus out? Or were they hypocrites because they were prepared to compromise their allegiance to God in order to obtain Caesar's favour? Or did they sometimes use their supposed religion as an excuse for not carrying out their civic duties?

November 8th

Luke 16 v11

If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?

We all live in the world. Many of us work for a living. We all have duties and responsibilities to our families, to the community, to our country, to the wider world. We may sometimes feel that these other duties are less important than our duty to God. After all, our service to God is about life eternal. Our service to our employer is about material things, things which don't ultimately matter, things which might seem not to matter much at all. We might not much like or respect our employer. We perhaps only go to work because we need the money. But actually, it is an aspect of our duty to God that we do our best to fulfil all our responsibilities, the mundane as well as the sublime.

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

November 9th

John 4 v23

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

This is how Jesus answers the woman at the well when she asks Him whether people should worship at Jerusalem or on Mt Gerizim as Samaritans like her did. What God wants is that we worship Him in spirit and in truth. That's something we should always remember when we are fretting and arguing about forms of service and types of music. What God wants is that we worship in spirit and in truth, which we can't do if we don't love one another as Christ loves us.

November 10th

John 4 v37

And herein that saying is true, One soweth and another reapeth.

Originally, this saying was used in the context of loss and disaster. You sowed your fields, worked on them. Then a robber or an enemy stole the crop. Jesus here (like Paul later) is using the saying in a more positive sense. Down through the generations, others have laboured in God's fields. Moses and the prophets had prepared the way for Jesus and the apostles reaped the harvest of their labours. So, it has been down through the generations. Others prepared the way for us. We reap the harvest for which they laboured. We prepare the way for those who will come after us. My predecessors as Rectors of Cuxton and Vicars of Halling laid the foundations on which I've tried to build. Anything God has done through me prepares the way for what will come hereafter. We pray that the harvest will not be lost through indifference, opposition or ill-advised reorganisation!

November 11th (Armistice Day)

I Timothy 1 v15

This is a true saying, and worthy of all men to be received, That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Thinking about war and its consequences, what a lot of human sin there is to be forgiven, what a lot of sinners there are to be saved. Jesus teaches us how we ought to love. He shows us how we ought to live. The record of His words and deeds is in the Bible. He gives us the Holy Spirit to enable us to live in accordance with His Will. He offers Himself on the Cross *a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.* When will we ever learn?

If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.

This seems an odd thing for Jesus to say. He means that we are sceptical of people who boast about themselves. What do other people say about them? Who are the witnesses who can tell us what this person is really like? How do we really know Who Jesus is? Actually, there are many impeccable witnesses to Who Jesus is. God the Father is His witness. So is the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist bears witness of Jesus. So do the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. His miracles are signs of Who He is. The apostles are witnesses of Jesus. So are all Christian people. If you don't yet know Him for yourself, *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.* Seek Him in prayer. Seek Him in the Church. Seek Him in the world. Seek Him in the quietness of your heart. Seek Him among your Christian friends.

November 13th (Trinity 22, Remembrance Sunday) Revelation 1 vv 4&5

John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; ⁵ And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,

In Revelation, Jesus is described as the faithful witness. The word for witness in the Greek is martyr. Jesus bears witness to the love of God by laying down His life for our salvation. *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* We sometimes apply these words to those who have given their lives for their country in war. None of them would have been perfect like Jesus. Some of them might not have been good people at all, but they have still made that sacrifice and we honour them for it. We look to Jesus to forgive all of us our sins and to bring us safely home to heaven when the time comes.

LORD, we beseech thee to keep thy household the Church in continual godliness; that through thy protection it may be free from all adversities, and devoutly given to serve thee in good works, to the glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

November 14th

John 10 v41

But all things that John spake of this man were true.

John the Baptist bore witness of Christ. Because John had spoken about Jesus, people knew something about Him. They were curious enough to seek Him out themselves. When they came to know Jesus, they knew that what John had said about Him was true. Some years ago now, but after I came here, I received a message from someone who had known me at school. He was then an atheist and we used to discuss religion and we couldn't agree. The message was that, all those years later, he had become a Christian. He had come to know Jesus for Himself. I don't know what if any part I played in his conversion, but you see the point. Tell people about Jesus, even if they don't want to know. It may bear fruit after many years.

November 15th

John 15 v1

I am the true vine.

I like to tell the story of the time when I was looking after the vicar's tortoise. It bit through the stems of my runner beans, just a little nip, not far from the ground, but then the whole plant withered, six foot of stem, leaves, flowers, beans. Separate from the root, the plants were neither use nor ornament, no fine scarlet flowers, no beans for my dinner. Ad this is how we are without Jesus – neither use nor ornament, unfruitful. Without Him we can do nothing. With Him we can do all things. So how do we keep in touch with Jesus?

November 16th

Acts 12 v9

And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.

Peter was in Herod's prison, awaiting execution, a fate that James had suffered shortly before. Everybody was praying for Peter, including, no doubt, Peter himself. And God sent his angel to rescue Peter. And it was too wonderful for Peter to believe. Similarly, shortly afterwards, when Peter went to the house where his friends were praying for him, they found it very hard to believe that God had answered their prayers in this wonderful way. Miracles are rare but they happen. God always answers prayer *as may be most expedient for us*.

November 17th

II Corinthians 1 vv 18-20

But as God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.

There is no equivocation about God. God is true. He is faithful. He is absolutely trustworthy. There is no reason whatever to doubt Him, to question His Word, be unsure about His Promises. We can absolutely trust God, no matter what might happen in our lives.

November 18th

James 5 v12

But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

You see. We should be like God. God is true. There is no dishonesty in Him. He is our God; we are His people. Because He is holy, we are holy too. There should be no reason for us to swear to the truth of what we are saying, because we should always be people of truth.

November 19th

Matthew 5 vv 33-37

Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

This is what Jesus has to say the same subject. There is no place for equivocation in the Christian life. God is faithful and true and our calling is to be faithful and true too. We don't need to swear by anything because our words should be the plain truth. That being the case, when people do try to make us believe what they are saying by elaborate oaths, we should perhaps be the more doubtful. If they were telling the truth, why swear. The only reason I can think of (outside of legal contexts) is that they may not expect us to believe them. Maybe they aren't used to being trusted. That might be because they have told lies in the past. It might be because they think that people like us won't be inclined to believe people like them – possibly unjustifiably.

November 20th (Last Sunday after Trinity)

II Corinthians 6 v7

By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left.

There have been challenges to Paul's authority at Corinth – divisions within the fellowship, disagreements about doctrine and conduct. So how does Paul demonstrate that he is a true minister of God. The words of v6 are key: *By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned.* Probably, all ministers suffer challenges to their authority. I certainly have. Can I commend myself to you as Paul did to the Corinthians? How do I measure up against the standards Paul sets? I'm aware that I don't succeed in every respect! But it's what a minister – any Christian ought to aspire to: pureness, knowledge of God & His Word, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit Who is the Spirit of the God Who is love. Our study this quarter is Truth. There is a temptation to compromise the Truth in order to be more popular or to avoid conflict. This no minister, no Christian ought to do. But it is a matter of speaking the Truth in love, humbly, trusting to God's power, not our own, relying on Him both to guide us and to protect us.

STIR up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may of thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

November 21st

II Corinthians 6 v8

By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers and yet true. Sometimes Christians receive respect, even from people who don't believe the Gospel. *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.* People may speak well of us. Years after the World Wars, I've heard people talk about the wonderful work of Salvation Army officers who went unarmed onto the battlefield to care for the wounded and dying. Sometimes, however, we are mocked. *Psalm-singing hypocrites* is another description I have heard of Christians. In the end it doesn't matter so much what other people think about us or even what we think about ourselves. It is God Who is our judge and He loves us as we are.

November 22nd

I Corinthians 4 v3&4

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet I am not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

So writes Paul, constantly criticised by his opponents in the Church and in the wider world. So writes Paul, only too aware of his own inadequacies. We hear a lot about accountability these days and it is right that we should be held accountable for how we perform our duties. But those who hold us accountable are not always fair. Sometimes they are just plain wrong about us. There is a great deal of criticism around. We are made to feel judged about the way we look, the way we speak, the opinions we hold, what we achieve and what we fail to achieve. We may have low opinions of ourselves. We always could do better. But what other people think of us is a small thing. We are mistaken if we ourselves feel worthless. The only Judge Who matters in the end is God and He loves us as we are.

November 23rd

Romans 5 v8

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

I digress, but this is important. I have some difficulties with the Churchyard Regulations, which tell us what kind of gravestones we can have. Some strike me as very sensible and necessary. Some appear to me to be arbitrary and I can't see the point of some of them. This piece of advice seems odd to me "An Incumbent should not readily exercise his discretion to consent to a cross, the supreme Christian symbol, for crosses have been too freely used in burial grounds in the past." The cross is indeed the supreme Christian symbol. It is the measure of God's love for us. It is our assurance of eternal life in Christ. Jesus didn't die for us because we are good. We don't deserve His love. We don't have to deserve His love. He loves us as we are. Don't beat yourself up about not being good enough. Don't believe anyone else who says you aren't worth much. God loves you so much that He died for you.

We sing the praise of him who
died,

of him who died upon the
cross;

the sinner's hope let men
deride,
for this we count the world but
loss.
2 Inscribed upon the cross we
see
in shining letters, 'God is love';
he bears our sins upon the
tree;
he brings us mercy from above.
3 The cross! It takes our guilt
away:
it holds the fainting spirit up;
it cheers with hope the gloomy
day,
and sweetens every bitter cup.

4 It makes the coward spirit
brave,
and nerves the feeble arm for
fight;
it takes its terror from the
grave,
and gilds the bed of death with
light:
5 The balm of life, the cure of
woe,
the measure and the pledge of
love,
the sinner's refuge here below,
the angels' theme in heaven
above.

November 24th

I John 3 vv 18-20

My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.
And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.
For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.
Love. Love God. Love one another. Don't doubt yourself. God loves you.

November 25th

I Corinthians 11 v31

For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.
Paul is writing here about when we come to Holy Communion. At
Corinth, the assembling together for the Breaking of Bread had become
something of a scandal. There was disunity. People did not love one
another as we ought. There were factions within the congregation.
Some people were selfish and greedy, taking more than their fair share
of what was then more of a meal than the way we celebrate Communion
today. The consequence was that the Corinthian Church failed to
flourish as it ought. Individual Christians too were feeble in their
Christian life and risked damnation hereafter. Paul isn't contradicting
himself when he tells us to judge ourselves before we come to
Communion. We should not judge ourselves (or other people) in the
sense of condemning us (or them). We should, however, examine
ourselves to check if we are indeed people of love in truth before we
come to Communion and in our prayers every day.

November 26th

Ephesians 4 vv 23&24

And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Don and *doff* are two slightly old fashioned words for putting on and taking off your clothes. Do on your garments. Do off your vesture. Taking off your old clothes and putting on new ones is sometimes part of the rite of Baptism – especially if Baptism is administered by total immersion. You can see why you wouldn't want to go home in wet clothes! But more important is the symbolism. We are a new Creation. Put off the *old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts*. Put on the *new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*.

November 27th (Advent Sunday)

Ephesians 4 v25

Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

Advent Sunday is New Year's Day, the coming of Christ, the Light of the World. In Him, we are renewed. We've doffed the old man and donned the new. We are members of Christ, limbs of His Body, we belong to His Church, united with Him and with one another as Father, Son & Holy Spirit are united in the eternal love of the Trinity. Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We live in Him. We walk in His Way. We are people of the Truth.

ALMIGHTY God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, now and for ever. *Amen*.

November 28th

Philippians 4 vv 4-7

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

This is a great Advent reading. It's a Scripture which is worth learning by heart. Christians are joyful people. We live modestly. God is never far away. He is always ready to hear our prayers. If we are thoughtful, we are thankful. Peace is God's gift to us.

November 29th

Philippians 4 v8

Finally brethren, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

I recently read an article by a clergyman who felt that he had been badly let down by the Church. We are sometimes very disappointed in people we love and have trusted. He was finding it very hard to pray. Bitter, resentful thoughts kept on intruding on his prayers. Perhaps, you have experienced the same. It is no use pretending with God. There's no point in making out that we are holier than we are. God knows our thoughts and He loves us just as we are. Don't try to pretend and don't break off praying if you are finding it hard to pray as you think you ought. Always be honest with God. Always trust in His love for you. The clergyman in question decided to pray for other people, many of them strangers, whom he met on his daily travels. He kept praying, saying prayers he honestly could pray. I hope though that there will come a time for him and for all of us who have felt like him when we can let go of these resentments and this bitterness and forgive.

November 30th (St Andrew)

Philippians 4 v9

Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

Why do we thank God for saints like Paul and Andrew? Because, "your glory is revealed in all the saints. In their lives you have given us an example of faithfulness to Christ. In their holiness, we find encouragement and hope. In our communion with them we share the unity of your kingdom." We are all called to be saints.

December 1st

I Timothy 3 v1

This is a true saying, If a man desireth the office of a bishop, he desireth in a good thing.

Paul's word translated here *bishop* could mean any church leader, not just what we mean by *bishop*. I do sometimes wonder why anyone wants to be a leader, whether in the Church or in the state or in any organisation. The responsibilities are heavy. The criticism is unceasing. Rivals may be trying to drag the leader down. It can be hard to identify one's achievements and people are only too ready to point to one's failures. Yet we need good leaders in Church and state. We need good people to come forward and offer themselves. We need leaders who regard leadership as their vocation and service. And leaders need our prayers and support. Our criticisms ought not to be unfair or unkind. We ought not to seek to undermine. Pray for good people to come forward, to be recognised and to succeed in all many ministries which are required in both the Church and the world.

December 2nd

Titus 3 v13

This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith.

Rebuking, correcting, disciplining are among the hardest thing that a leader has to do, but sometimes they are necessary. Some Christians in Crete were misleading the faithful and that cannot be allowed. So Titus was instructed by Paul to rebuke the deceivers. Discipline has to be exercised with love, with wisdom and humility on the part of the leader, justly, mercifully, honestly, acceptably and effectively. *Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*

December 3rd

Hebrews 8 vv 1&2

Now of the things which we have spoken *this* is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not man.

All our worship on earth – in our churches, in the Temple at Jerusalem, before the Ark of the Covenant in the wilderness, is but a shadow, a reflection, a taste and a foretaste of the worship of Heaven where the one true High Priest offers Himself as the perfect Sacrifice.

December 4th (Advent 2, Bible Sunday)

Hebrews 9 v 24

For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figure of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

God makes Himself known to us in so many ways. We see the wonders of Creation. We have His Word written in the Bible. He speaks to us through conscience, in prayer and in so many ways in our daily lives. He reveals Himself in Jesus and in the Holy Spirit. Taking part in the worship of God's Church on earth, we participate in the worship of Heaven – a taste and a foretaste of what is to come. As Thomas Aquinas says of Holy Communion: *Therefore we, before him bending, This great Sacrament revere; Types and shadows have their ending, For the newer rite is here.*

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

December 5th

Hebrews 10 vv 21&22

And having an high priest over the household of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of our faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

So we come into God's Presence in prayer or in church service. Christ is our High Priest Who has opened for us the way to the Throne of Grace. We may worship God with a true heart in full assurance of faith. We must be totally honest with God. We can trust Him with our secrets. His love for us does not depend on our goodness. It is all of Him. All our sins are cleansed as we have faith in the atoning Blood of Christ. They are washed away in the waters of Baptism.

December 6th (St Nicholas, Santa Claus)

Hebrews 10 vv 23&24

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works. So what is Christmas really all about? Love and good works. And what are these good works founded on? Our faith. Faith in God and repentance for sin sets us free to do good, rather, to be good. Our faith can be unwavering, not because we are so great, but because God is faithful.

December 7th

Philippians 4 v3

And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with others my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.

Frustratingly, we're not told the name of the true yokefellow whom Paul is commissioning to help these other fellowlabourers with Paul.

This verse is a snapshot, however, of the closeness of Paul's team.

There are those who travelled with him and there are those in particular positions of leadership and service in the churches which Paul founded and visited. There is a closeness, both men and women, working together in accordance with the gifts, talents and opportunities which God has given to them, for the well-being of the Church and her work in the world. They are united in their work and fellowship on earth and their names are written in the Book of Life. Their fellowship (communion) with God and with one another is eternal. And this is how it should be not only in C1 Philippi, Corinth, Rome, etc., but also in contemporary Cuxton, Halling, etc..

December 8th

I Peter 5 v12

By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.

So St Peter writes to the Christians presumably in Rome. There were many challenges facing the Roman Church. There was opposition and there were challenges to Christian belief. There was persecution. There were doctrinal disputes within the Church, doubts about what was the true faith. There were issues arising from the Gospel about how Christians should conduct themselves in the home, in their family lives, in their work, in their relationships with people who were not Christians, in their relationship to the Roman state. Peter deals with some of these issues and encourages Christians to find the resources to life's problems in their faith in Jesus Christ, *Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.* What the Bible says to Christians in Rome 2,000 years ago, it says to you and me today. We stand in the grace of God.

I am a new creation, no more in condemnation, no more in condemnation, here in the grace of God I stand.

For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is returned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

There is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. There is joy too in the Church when people come to faith and to the knowledge of Jesus. For them too, it is a great joy to come to know the Lord, to know that they have received the gift of eternal life. But what about backsliders? What is God's judgment on those who have come to know Him, have received all the benefits of Christ's Passion and have then fallen away? How ought we to feel about people who first received and shared but have now rejected the faith we hold so dear? The Bible talks about them as crucifying to themselves the Son of God afresh and putting Him to an open shame. What do reprobates deserve? The backsliders Peter is referring to still seem to be coming to the fellowship meal, but speaking out against the faith once delivered to the saints.

Perhaps the judgment which reprobates deserve depends on the reason for their behaviour. In the case Peter is writing about, it would appear to be arrogance. In other cases, they might have been misled by other people who are themselves questioning the authority of the apostolic ministry. Some people might leave the Church because they have been badly let down by Christians (including ministers) or by the Church as an institution. Or they might feel let down by God if something really bad happens to someone they love, despite their prayers. Or some people just lose interest in Church. There are plenty of other things to occupy their time and their minds. In some cases, of course, people renounce their faith because they are afraid of persecution. The degree of culpability must depend on circumstances. But it is no light matter to turn your back on the God Who redeemed you by the Blood of His Son and Whose Spirit taught you to call Him Father.

That it may please thee to bring into the way of truth all such as have erred, and are deceived; *We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.* That it may please thee to strengthen such as do stand; and to comfort and help the weak-hearted; and to raise up those who fall; and finally to beat down Satan under our feet; *We beseech thee to hear us, good Lord.*

December 10th

I John 2 vv 7&8

⁷Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. ⁸Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. As a student, I found these verses very hard to grasp. My over literal mind demanded to know whether in fact John was giving us a new commandment or an old commandment. Of the course, the commandment is actually love. Love is always new. It is always fresh.

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.	be set to hallow all we find, new treasures still, of countless price, God will provide for sacrifice.
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.	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.
3 If on our daily course our mind	5 Only, O Lord, in thy dear love fit us for perfect rest above; and help us, this and every day, to live more nearly as we pray.

But love is also an old commandment, the oldest and most profound of all. Jesus commanded us to love. He taught us that on love depend all the Law and the Prophets (the OT). God is love. Love is eternal. We dwell in eternal love and He dwells in us.

December 11th (Advent 3)

I John 5 vv 20&21

And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

Idols are false gods. Anything you devote your life to can be an idol. You become what you worship. The true God makes Himself known in Jesus Christ. If we believe in Him, we live in Him & have eternal life.

December 12th

Deuteronomy 14 v22

Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the year bringeth forth year by year.

All that we have comes from God. When we offer some of it back to Him (a suitably generous proportion if not necessarily a tenth) we are acknowledging that all that we have, all that we are, comes from God. We are offering Him our thanks and praise. We are signifying that we are giving back not only a tenth of what we own but our whole lives to Him. We are demonstrating that we trust Him not to let us go short. Our Christian giving is the first call on our finances, not a matter of offering God our spare change when we've met our own needs and fancies. When we give responsibly to missions, charities and the Church, what we are offering back to God brings relief to others in need and furthers God's purposes. I believe too (and have never been disappointed) what Jesus promises: Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and *shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.*

December 13th (St Lucy)

John 1 v9

[Jesus] was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

Lucy was martyred at Rome during the 4th century. She used to take food to other Christians in hiding wearing a crown of candles on her head in order to set both her hands free for carrying goods while finding her way in the dark catacombs. Eventually, she was martyred herself. She is commemorated on what was the darkest day of the year before calendar reform and in some places there are still St Lucy's Day processions in which girls wear white robes to signify baptismal purity, red sashes for the blood of martyrdom and a crown of candles for Jesus Light of the World. St Lucy's Day anticipates the Feast of Christmas when Jesus, the Light of the World, is born of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The ideas for prayer and action which arise from this story are many. We should pray for those facing martyrdom and help them if we can (eg by sending alms via missions & charities, writing letters, encouraging our government to take a stand, etc.) We should be generally charitable. We should be prepared to lay down our own lives if necessary for the Gospel. Jesus lights our way and we reflect His Light in the world.

December 14th

John 1 v8

He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness to that Light.

This, of course is St John the Baptist. He came to prepare the way of Jesus by proclaiming God's Kingdom & telling people to get ready by repentance and Baptism. With the Holy Spirit and God the Father, with the Holy Scriptures and the miracles, with the glories of creation & the faithfulness of all God's people, John is a witness to Jesus.

O LORD Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee; Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit ever, one God, world without end.

Amen.

December 15th

John 1 v7

The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

At the beginning of our Lord's ministry, John was a witness. He was born six months before Jesus. The unborn John leapt for joy in his mother's womb when the Blessed Virgin Mary came to visit her cousin. John prepared the way for the coming of Jesus by preaching the Gospel. It was John who baptized Jesus. When our Lord's bodily ministry on earth was drawing to a close, after He had risen from the dead and was about to ascend into heaven, Jesus commissioned all of us to be His witnesses to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth. This we do in words, bearing witness to our families, friends, colleagues and, if occasion arises, complete strangers. This we do by our actions. "Preach the Gospel at all times, and if necessary use words" is a saying attributed to St Francis of Assisi. We proclaim the Gospel simply by being Christians.

December 16th

Revelation 1 v5

Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first-begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.

God's complete witness is Jesus. His witness is one with that of the Holy Spirit. All the other witnesses (us included) reflect His glory.

December 17th

Revelation 1 vv 5&6

Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

We reflect His glory. He dwells in us and we in Him. We are washed clean of our sins in the water of Baptism by the Blood of the Lamb. We are nourished by the Bread of Life in Holy Communion. We are what we eat. We are becoming what He is. I think that we both overrate ourselves and underrate ourselves. We are not sufficiently conscious of how utterly dependent we are on God. We are insufficiently aware of just how much He has done for us and what we have become through His grace. We are the children of God. We are like Jesus, therefore, and we share Jesus' mission to demonstrate the Truth of God to the world. Without Him we are nothing. We depend on Him for everything. Everything is ours – the world, life, death, things present, things to come; all are ours; because we are Christ's and Christ is God's. (I Corinthians 3 vv 21-23).

December 18th (Advent 4)

Revelation 6 vv 9&10

And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

Suppose some members of one of our churches had been taken away by the authorities and tortured and killed for their faith. It's something that has happened in the past. It's something which is happening in the world today. Suppose that among those martyrs were some of your close friends and even members of your family. Suppose you thought you might be next to be called upon to perform the ultimate act of witness. Would you be quite so quick to dismiss these words in the Book of Revelation as we comfortable, western Christians so generally

are? Surely, we should go to our deaths rejoicing. Surely we should freely and completely forgive our torturers and executioners. So we should, but let's not make out that it would be easy. Don't underrate your ability to endure suffering and face death. Many ordinary people like you and have done so by the grace of God. But don't overrate how easy it would be to forgive in such circumstances.

December 19th

Revelation 3 vv 14&15

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

Amen is the Hebrew for Truth. Jesus is God's Truth, His steadfastness, His faithfulness. Jesus is Himself faithful and true. He is the ultimate witness, the Martyr in Whom alone all martyrdoms make sense. He is one with the Father & the Holy Spirit in the Creation of the Universe, its Redemption & its Sanctification. Jesus is all this. In contrast, the Laodicean Christians are described as luke warm. How could that possibly be? How could our response to the ineffable love of Jesus be merely lukewarm?

O LORD, raise up (we pray thee) thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honour and glory, world without end.

Amen.

December 20th

Revelation 19 vv 1-3

And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.

And again they said, Alleluia.

We've been going through some tough times lately. The word *apocalyptic* has been bandied about a bit. Apocalypse is Greek for Revelation. God makes Himself known through revelation. Jesus is God's complete self-revelation or apocalypse. The biblical Book of

Revelation contains sublime scenes of heavenly worship and wonderful promises for God's people. There are also horrifying, terrifying scenes of judgment and punishment. These are what a lot of people are thinking about when they use words like *apocalyptic*. The great whore is probably Rome, but she stands for all abuse of power. She has enforced her will by violence. Her trading practices have made some rich and many poor. She has practised slavery. Sexual immorality has been rife. She worships false gods and persecutes the Church. She can expect to get what she deserves. God is praised by His people because He is just. His judgments are true and righteous. He visits and redeems His people.

Of course, God doesn't desire the death of sinners. He didn't send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save it. If the great whore would only listen to God's Word and repent, things would be entirely different.

Do you think we should be asking ourselves whether our recent troubles – plague, war, acute shortages of food and other necessities – might be signs, signs that our world needs to repent of its sins and turn to God?

December 21st (St Thomas)

John 20 v29

Jesus said unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

So why do you believe in God? Because you've been taught by others about God? Because you read the Bible? Because you are sustained by the fellowship of the Church? Because you meet Him in Holy Communion? Because you experience Him in prayer and worship? Because you have heard once or more often than that His Voice speaking to you? God makes Himself known to us in different ways and uses different ways to reveal Himself to us in varying circumstances. Sometimes we may doubt, feel that God is far away or even imagine that He is absent. But He never forgets us or forsakes us.

ALMIGHTY and everliving God, who for the more confirmation of the faith didst suffer thy holy Apostle Thomas to be doubtful in thy Son's resurrection; Grant us so perfectly, and without all doubt, to believe in

thy Son Jesus Christ, that our faith in thy sight may never be reproved. Hear us, O Lord, through the same Jesus Christ, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for evermore. *Amen.*

Can a woman's tender care
cease towards the child she bare?
Yes, she may forgetful be,
yet will I remember thee.

'Mine is an unchanging love,
higher than the heights above,
deeper than the depths beneath,
free and faithful, strong as death.

December 22nd

II Chronicles 15 v3

Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true, God, and without a teaching priest, and without law.

The people of Israel had forsaken the worship of the one true God, as they so often did. Once you forget about the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man soon follows. If we don't love God, we don't love our neighbours. If we worship false gods, if our life goals are worthless, we fall into all kinds of sins of violence, dishonesty, immorality, etc.. Society fractures. Considering what God had done for the Israelites, it seems amazing that they so easily fell away from serving Him. But what about us? We thought of ourselves once as a Christian country. We've always been very far from perfect, but the Gospel has been for us a light shining in the darkness. Is that any longer the case? Are we still a Christian country? I should say not & I should say that the false god we worship – money, power, above all self – are rapidly leading us towards the dissolution of human society. **THY** word is a lantern unto my feet : and a light unto my paths.

December 23rd

Jeremiah 10 v10

But the LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation. In Jeremiah's time, the Jews were beset by enemy nations, notably the Babylonians. They were idolatrous pagans. The idols of their gods were hugely impressive and dwelt in fine temples. From time to time, they were carried through the city in procession. The Babylonians were wealthy and successful militarily, conquering many of the neighbouring countries. They themselves no doubt attributed their success to the power of their gods. People of other nations, worshippers of other

gods, may have concluded that the Babylonian gods trumped all the other gods. Even some Israelites may have wondered whether gods such as Adad, Marduk, Apsu, and Tiamat, were more powerful even than the LORD, the God of Israel? After all, they had apparently brought the Babylonians wealth and victory. We've already seen how, even before the Babylonian invasion, the Israelites' faithfulness to the LORD was apt to evaporate. Israel should have trusted in the LORD. He is the only true God. We need to confront the view that our security and prosperity depend on anything less than faithfulness to the one true God.

December 24th

John 17 v3

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

There are many reasons why we might be excited that it is Christmas Day tomorrow. Hopefully, there is friendship & fellowship. Probably, there will be an exchange of gifts. Decorations, good food, Christmas carols, happy memories of Christmases past, maybe tinged with sweet sadness for what is no longer, but always, I hope, trusting in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life. The joy of Christmas is Jesus. All those other joys derive their significance from Him. Writing the above, I am conscious that, for some people, Christmas is not a happy time. Maybe, they are too poor to enjoy the good things which make Christmas for so many of us. Perhaps they are all alone (and don't wish to be). Christmas may be a reminder of unresolved quarrels and conflicts, unforgiven sins. Jesus remains the key, however. He forgives and teaches us to forgive. He never leaves or forsakes us. We don't need a huge amount of expensive stuff in order to be happy. In Christ we have all things. But we do need enough. It is reasonable, therefore, for us who have more than we need to share with those who have less, Christ in us & we in Him.

What a friend we have in Jesus
 All our sins and griefs to bear!
 What a privilege to carry
 Everything to God in prayer!

All because we do not carry
 Everything to God in prayer!

Oh, what peace we often forfeit
 Oh, what needless pain we bear

Have we trials and temptations?
 Is there trouble anywhere?
 We should never be discouraged
 Take it to the Lord in prayer

Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness
Take it to the Lord in prayer
Are we weak and heavy-laden
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge
Take it to the Lord in prayer

Do thy friends despise, forsake
thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In His arms He'll take and shield

December 25th (Christmas Day)

Truth shall flourish out of the earth : and righteousness hath looked down from heaven. Yea, the Lord shall shew loving-kindness : and our land shall give her increase.

To Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love
All pray in their distress
And to those virtues of delight
Return their thankfulness.

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

Not a Christmas Carol, but surely a hymn of the Incarnation.

ALMIGHTY God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure Virgin; Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*

thee
Thou wilt find a solace there

Blessed Savior, Thou hast
promised
Thou wilt all our burdens bear
May we ever, Lord, be bringing
All to Thee in earnest prayer

Soon in glory bright, unclouded
There will be no need for prayer
Rapture, praise, and endless
worship
Will be our sweet portion there

Psalm 85 vv 10&11

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

Then ev'ry man, of ev'ry clime,
That prays in his distress,
Prays to the human form
divine:
Love, Mercy, Pity, Peace

December 26th (St Stephen)

John 17 vv 17&18

Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.

Jesus consecrates His people. He makes us saints. He makes us like Him, children of God, He in us, we in Him. Like Him, we are commissioned to proclaim the Word of God to the world. Like Him, our calling is to hold nothing back.

Grant, O Lord, that, in all our sufferings here upon earth for the testimony of thy truth, we may stedfastly look up to heaven, and by faith behold the glory that shall be revealed; and, being filled with the Holy Ghost, may learn to love and bless our persecutors by the example of thy first Martyr Saint Stephen, who prayed for his murderers to thee, O blessed Jesus, who standest at the right hand of God to succour all those that suffer for thee, our only Mediator and Advocate. *Amen.*

December 27th (St John)

I John 1 vv 3&4

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

John bears witness. He bears witness of Jesus so that those who hear and believe may come into the fellowship of the Church, the Body of people who believe in Jesus. The fellowship of the Church is fellowship with the Father & the Son & the Spirit. It is the fellowship of love. This is joy in all its fulness. This is ours, ours to share.

MERCIFUL Lord, we beseech thee to cast thy bright beams of light upon thy Church, that it being enlightened by the doctrine of thy blessed Apostle and Evangelist Saint John may so walk in the light of thy truth, that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

December 28th (Holy Innocents)

Revelation 14 vv 4&5

These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.

This is a very difficult commemoration, to remember the deaths of those infants whom Herod destroyed in his desperate attempt to kill Jesus before He could become a rival. The suffering and death of

children is always a tragedy. The murder of the innocent is an outrage against God and man. What do we make of this story? The NT reading encourages us to trust that these innocent victims are now eternally safe in the care of God. We might reflect on the reasons why children suffer in today's world: poverty, war, homelessness, sickness (mental as well as physical). We might think about the oppression of people of all ages in so many parts of the world. Is there anything we can do to relieve their sufferings? We can always pray.

ALMIGHTY God, who out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast ordained strength, and madest infants to glorify thee by their deaths; Mortify and kill all vices in us, and so strengthen us by thy grace, that by the innocency of our lives, and constancy of our faith even unto death, we may glorify thy holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

December 29th

James 1 v18

Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

The Holy Innocents were the first martyrs – *firstfruits unto God*. We are begotten of God, His children. He is our Father. We are begotten through Jesus, the Word & the Truth. We are firstfruits. Firstfruits imply the harvest to come. Through the witness of the Church, through our witness, there will come a time of harvest. Revelation 7: ⁹ *After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;* ¹⁰ *And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.*

December 30th

John 8 v32

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.

The truth. The way things really are. No lies. No idols. No false facts. No fake news. No your truth and my truth, just the truth. The facts. Integrity. Reliability. Dependability. Fidelity. Faithfulness. Trustworthiness. Jesus.

December 31st

Matthew 6 vv 33&34

³³ But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. ³⁴ Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

A new year starts tomorrow. What will it bring forth? We've been through a lot these last few years and we've heard plenty of gloomy prognostications about the future. Some of these may come true. Perhaps they will not. People do tend to assume the worst. Anyway, we ought not to be afraid. We know that God is in charge and that He will not let us down. Things do work out in accordance with His plans for us, both for us as individuals and also for the Church & for the world in general. We don't have to worry. We can trust God. I've quoted often before the saying, *We know not what the future holds, but we know Who holds the future.* Our part is to seek first the Kingdom of God & His righteousness & to trust God to look after us.