

Services at St John the Baptist Halling and the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling		
Sunday 7 th October Harvest Festival	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall (Trinity 18)	2 Timothy 1 vv 1-14 p1195 Luke 17 vv 5-10 p1051
	11.00 Holy Communion & Holy Baptism	Deuteronomy 26 vv 1-11 p203 Revelation 14 vv 14-18 p1243 John 6 vv 25-35 p1070
	6.30 Evening Prayer Followed by Harvest Supper	Joel 2 vv 21-27 p913 Matthew 6 vv 25-33 p971
Sunday 14 th October Trinity 19	11.00 Holy Communion	2 Kings 5 vv 1-15 p373 2 Timothy 2 vv 8-15 p1196 Luke 17 vv 11-19 p1051
	5.30 Evening Prayer Jubilee Hall	Nehemiah 6 vv 1-16 p489 John 15 vv 12-27 p1083
Sunday 21 st October Trinity 20	11.00 Holy Communion & Stop! Look! Listen!	Jeremiah 31 vv 27-34 p793 2 Timothy 3 v10 – 4 v5 p1196 Luke 18 vv 1-8 p1052
Sunday 28 th October S Simon & S Jude	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 28 vv 14-16 p711 Ephesians 2 vv 19-22 p1174 John 15 vv 17-27 p1083
Thursday 1 st November All Saints	9.30 Holy Communion	Ephesians 1 vv 11-23 p1173 Luke 6 vv 20-31 p1034
Friday 2 nd November All Souls (Commemoration of the Faithful Departed)	9.30 Holy Communion	Lamentations 3 vv 17-33 p826 John 6 vv 37-40 p1070
Sunday 4 th November Fourth Sunday before Advent	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Lamentations 3 vv 22-33 p826 John 11 vv 32-44 p1078
	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 1 vv 10-18 p685 2 Thessalonians 1 vv 1-12 p1189 Luke 19 vv 1-10 p1053
Services at St Michael and All Cuxton		
Sunday 7 th October Harvest Festival	9.30 Family Communion	Philippians 4 vv 4-9 p1181 John 6 vv 25-35 p1070
Sunday 14 th October Trinity 19	9.30 Holy Communion	2 Kings 5 vv 1-27 p373 2 Timothy 2 vv 8-15 p1196 Luke 17 vv 11-19 p1051
Sunday 21 st October Trinity 20	8.00 Holy Communion	Nehemiah 8 vv 9-18 p493 John 16 vv 1-11 p1084
	9.30 Holy Communion	Jeremiah 31 vv 27-34 p793 2 Timothy 3 v10 – 4 v5 p1196 Luke 18 vv 1-8 p1052
Sunday 28 th October S Simon & S Jude	9.30 Holy Communion	Isaiah 28 vv 14-16 p711 Ephesians 2 vv 19-22 p1174 John 15 vv 17-27 p1083
Friday 2 nd November All Souls (Commemoration of the Faithful Departed)	7.30 am Holy Communion	Romans 5 vv 5-11 p1132 John 6 vv 37-40 p1070
	7.30 pm Holy Communion	1 Peter 1 vv 3-9 p1217 John 5 vv 19-25 p1069
Sunday 4 th November All Saints Sunday	9.30 Family Communion	Daniel 7 vv 1-18 p892 Luke 6 vv 20-31 p1034

Copy Date November Magazine 12th October 8.30 am Rectory.

On Thursday afternoons we have a **Mother & Toddler** service at Halling at 2.00 and at Cuxton every Wednesday also at 2.00 **Sunday School** is at Cuxton Church Hall at 9.30 (not first Sundays or school holidays). **After School Club**, Thursdays @ St John's.

Please note new addresses for e mail and parish webpage.

roger@cuxtonandhalling.org.uk

<http://www.cuxtonandhalling.org.uk>



Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness

I have been letting rip in this year's letters in the parish magazine. There is so much to be said about so many things: the way the world is, the way the Church is, what kind of people we should be. But there is a danger here of missing the point. What comes first is worship. It is because we love God that we love our neighbours and try to live accordingly. It is because we love God that we are concerned for the world and all its people. It is because we love God that we so much desire a holy Church. So I thought it would be good and right to produce a magazine letter on worship.

That is a very difficult thing to do. My words, anybody's words, are in no way adequate to describe God. Indeed, anything anyone says is bound to fall so far short of the glory of God as to be actually misleading. Maybe a good place to start would be with the verse in the psalm where the LORD says *Be still, then, and know that I am God*. Can you do that much?

Can you be still and open your heart to God before and during a religious service in church? Are there times in your everyday life when you can be still and know that He is God? Maybe you have a quiet time each day, a period of meditation, time to look at the Bible, time to pray. You can do these things anywhere, but you will generally find the church at Cuxton open if you want to use a building set aside and consecrated for the purpose, and, of course, there are our daily services in addition to our Sunday services. Jesus promises to be present where even two or three meet together in His Name. Music – singing yourself to God or listening to a choir or an instrumental piece, live or recorded – can help you to be open to a sense of the presence of God. The visual arts too – a picture in a Bible, a painting of a sacred scene, sculpture, architecture – may point us towards God and help us to open our hearts to Him. Any of these things may become an idol if we are stupid enough and sinful enough to think that any of them could be an image of God. If we worship the church building or the statue or the picture or the music or even the form of service we like, we are erecting a barrier between ourselves and God and may be hindering others from coming to God as we fight to defend the words or music or art

that have become more precious to us than our heavenly Father Himself.

I could share with you some of the things that have helped me to have a sense of Who God is, what He means to me, His presence in my heart and all around me. The wonder and beauty of the Universe inspire me as they do so many other people. If God created all this, how great He must be. The love of other people, the miracle of human life, these are things that point to the divine love which fills and sustains everything.

The Bible, of course, points us to God. The Bible is God's written Word and it bears witness to Jesus, the Word made flesh, the Son of God become a human being. The Bible helps us to make sense of the world because it puts our human existence and history in the context of the Intelligence which underlies and fills the Universe.

The words we use in our services – the prayers we say, the hymns we sing, the creeds we repeat – not only express what we already know and believe; they teach us things which we did not know before and they sometimes help us to realise again the implications of what we know perfectly well already. I suppose I am very much a "words person" and I feel very uncomfortable if the things we are invited to say or sing in our services are not completely in agreement with the Gospel as proclaimed in the Bible and passed down from generation to generation in what we call the Church's tradition. The sermon also has to be the Word of God, not the preacher's own opinions. We ought not to judge sermons as to whether or not we like them, but as to whether or not we believe them to be truly the Word of God for this congregation today. The way we do this is to meditate prayerfully and intelligently on what the Bible teaches and how Christians have interpreted and reinterpreted those sacred words down through the generations.

And then there are the Sacraments – especially Holy Communion, the sacrament in which we should participate at least weekly and in which we may be privileged to participate much more often so long as we approach it with a genuine love for the Lord. St Paul tells us that in Holy Communion we are proclaiming the Lord's Death. What a thing it is that the Lord Who made Heaven and earth became a human being and allowed us

human beings to humiliate Him and to put Him to a horrible death and that He did this in order to save us human beings from the consequences of our sins and to bring us the gift of eternal life and that He did all this simply because He loves us so much. Our worship books anticipate that our receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in the consecrated Bread and Wine will so cleanse our sinful bodies and souls that we may dwell in Him and He in us forever. St Paul tells us that all we communicants are in fellowship in the Body of Christ: the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church; the communion of saints; in a blessed

communion of love with Christ Himself, with those who have gone before us and now worship in Heaven, and with all other Christians throughout the world. It is therefore a foretaste of our eternal life in eternal love.

There are so many things which point us to the glory of God. After all, it was He Who made the world and everything in it, He Who inspired the Bible, He Who sent Jesus His Son, He Who pours out His Holy Spirit on the world and the Church. Can you be still, then, and know that He is God?

Roger.



Halling WI

Our August meeting was quite a quiet one. Nothing much happens in August. Evelyn was in the chair and we all sang Jerusalem with gusto. The many birthday roses were given out, nearly as many as May now. Our gallant treasure, Mrs Betty Head, doubled up as secretary as Mrs Ann Hayward was sunning herself somewhere (on her holiday). Minutes were read and signed and the little bit of correspondence was dealt with. The nomination form for the County Executive committee was read. Nobody from our W.I. was forthcoming to put their name on the list. It is quite a daunting task, but someone has to do it. Ann Seagar and Trish Smallwood will go to represent Halling W.I. at West Malling's 90th anniversary dinner in November. It was disappointing that the Public Affairs and International evening had to be cancelled, but in the District we couldn't sell enough tickets to make it viable. We have made 27 hats for the Mission to Seaman's merchants sailors, these will be sent in September. Evelyn then presented Betty with a big basket of golden flowers in recognition of her recent Golden Wedding.

Our speaker for the month was Alan Stockwell, a puppeteer. He didn't look like a puppeteer and we were all a bit disappointed that he didn't bring any puppets to show us, but his stories were interesting. He told us about his puppeteering adventures from Brunei to Brazil. He was quick to tell us he had been sent to these wonderful places by the British Government at the expense of the tax payer. He and his wife Brenda (She sounded a bit of a character) went into schools in these far-away places and did puppet shows for

the children. The shows were English folk stories, spoken in English. It probably made the kids laugh as I don't suppose they understood a word of it. After our usual refreshments, Alan judged the competitions, I won the flower of the month with a dark red dahlia, the only decent flower in my garden at the moment. The doll competition was won by Margaret Sullivan with her very elegant Edwardian doll. Our meeting finished early, it was just as well as the next day was our much looked forward too, SUMMER lunch in Mrs Vi Head's garden.

Wednesday 22nd August 2007.

Oh dear! The day dawned very gloomy and grey, Will we have our garden meeting? Of course we will; after all we are English. It crept up to midday and the weather didn't improve. In fact, the wind got up almost to hurricane force. With two flapping gazebos, chairs and tables that wouldn't stand up, we gathered, wrapped in travel rugs and wearing our hooded raingear, we looked like a crowd of refugees with nowhere to go. We had a lovely lunch, ably prepared by Betty Head and served by her little helpers. At least the weather kept the wasps away. Our Bring and Buy was laid out in Vi's garage, a cross between Petticoat Lane and Stanley Market, Honk Kong. We bought our figs, tomatoes, peppers, carrots, books and jam, and at this point, Vi said we could all retire to her cosy warm living room for our tea and cake. We had our raffle. Did we enjoy ourselves?, Of course we did, as the song goes, Mad dogs and Halling W.I. ladies go out in the midday rain and wind. Perhaps it will be better weather next year, but thanks once again Vi for the loan of your garden (and house).

Phyllis.

Joke: A woman enters a Scottish cake shop and finds that all the cakes are a £1, except one which is £2. She asks why? The proprietor replies, "That's Madeira Cake!"

From the Registers

Baptisms:

12th August
25th August
2nd September
2nd September
9th September
9th September

Bailey Kyran Cole
Owen Morgan Davies
Paige Quita Ann Marrs
Matthew James Fletcher
Sam Tomas Moyle
Emily Elizabeth Moyle

The Caravan Site
Wainscott
Strood
Chillington Close
High Street
High Street

Funerals:

21st August
30th August
14th September

Ronald Arthur Lusted (70)
Arthur Birch (78)
Michael Richard (Vince) Stapleton (68)

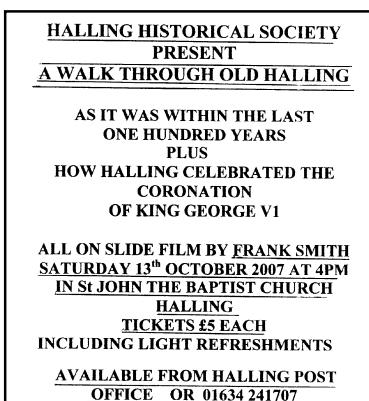
Bush Road
St Paul's Cray
James Road

Thanks

Jenny and Chris Beaney would like to thank everyone who came to their lunchtime BBQ and donated so generously to church funds. Also a big thank you to our local butcher, Gerry, for the meat he donated.

Don't Miss in October!

Harvest Supper: Sunday 7th following Harvest Hymns of Praise at St John's at 6.30. Harvest gifts (tins and packets please) will be received at 9.30 service at Cuxton and 11.00 & 6.30 at Halling) for distribution to those in need. *Poverty and Hope* envelopes will be available from Harvest Festival and may be returned any time before 31st December for Christian work mainly in the Third World. Leaflets give details.



Frank Smith A History of Halling: Saturday 13th at St John's at 4.00

Quiz Evening: Saturday 27th, Church Hall, Cuxton at 7.30. Teams 6-8, supper (but not drinks) included.

Blythswood Shoe Box Appeal

We shall be collecting shoeboxes with gifts for overseas until the middle of November. Leaflets are available in church, listing suitable items you might like to put in your boxes.

St John's Draw: £25 each to Mrs Ashford (99) 7 Mrs Burr (11) & £10 to Mr Mattingly (66) – drawn by Mrs Hesketh.

Church Hall Draw: £5 to Gill Bogg, drawn by Ray Maisey.

Dickens' Country Protection Society

Protecting the Countryside?



The Society was a little surprised by the “goings on” in Brewers Road, Shorne, where suddenly traffic lights and other paraphernalia were introduced into a quiet country lane. The Society understands that this is for an equestrian crossing. Whilst the Society is pleased to see provision being made for horses, it questions whether it could have been constructed more sympathetically with its rural surroundings.

Kay Roots.

Halling Bell Ringers: Julia Holdstock has become our new tower captain from August 15th, our first woman captain. She replaces David, who may be leaving the area.

Use Your Post Office

Local post offices are currently being surveyed by Post Office Counter with the intention of closing them. Use them (especially between now and end of October) or lose them!

CUXTON COMMUNITY INFANT SCHOOL NEWS

It is difficult to believe the summer holiday is now over, and we are back at school. The end of last term flew by. We celebrated sports day one fine day at the beginning of June, and that same day Dads came to Father's day lunch, and cook provided an excellent roast lunch followed by chocolate sponge pudding which went down a treat!

My thanks as usual to the FCS (Friends of Cuxton Schools), who organised a fantastic Summer fete. The rain did not stop too many folk from coming out, and they raised a great deal of money for both schools. The Year R children visited Hadlow farm and saw many animals, and the Year 1 and 2 trip to Kingsnorth Nature Reserve was extremely successful, with children able to see many creatures, including a seal.

The Year R children enjoyed the company of Beehive and Mayday playgroups, and undertook a variety of activities during Grounds Morning, from bubbles to spray painting, art and collage, water and sand play, and spaghetti worms. I think we had about 96 children taking part and much excitement was had!

Just Trombones came into school at the beginning of July, and entertained the children with their musical instruments, hosepipes and funnels! The children looked on in awe and joined in with conducting and singing.

Year R had a very successful Pirates day. Many of the costumes were fantastic! The children made jellies and pizzas and enjoyed various activities, including stick the parrot on the pirate, find the treasure, walk the plank, and testing the boats they had made.

We enjoyed seeing the Junior school play, Hoodwinked. I know if you saw it you will agree with me that the acting and singing were great, as were the scenery and costumes. I find it hard to believe that I taught many of the children when I first came to the school, and now they have left Juniors for secondary school. We wish them good luck and happiness.

We were all extremely proud of our children at our end of term singing celebration. So many parents commented on the achievements of the children, and how they enjoyed seeing the progression of singing and musical skills throughout the school. This is due to the Voices Project we have been involved with.

The Year 2 leaver's assembly was a great success. To see our Year 2s performing at the end of the year, still so young yet so grown up in many ways. I hope these children continue to thrive, learn to their full potential, and most of all are happy at the Junior school. I am sure they will be.

Now following the holiday, we started back on Monday with two staff training days, although staff were in for several days during the previous week, rearranging furniture in classes, backing boards in bright colours and preparing resources, labels etc. Office staff, myself and my deputy returned to 5 weeks of post and emails, and we have welcomed 35 children into school, and Mr Pettit our new caretaker. We wish Mr Hall a happy and restful retirement, but Mr Hall, we expect you to pop in especially for cook's roast dinners!

We hope the 5 0 Club will continue coming into school on a weekly basis for lunch, and today I met our new community policy officer who is to have more of a presence on the streets of Cuxton and Halling. Some of you may have seen the planning notice at the end of the school drive. We are hoping to slightly extend part of the front of the school. Please be assured the beech trees and their roots will not be affected in any way, nor the library or driveway, and we are endeavouring to keep the front of the school in keeping with the age of the school.

The term ahead promises to be a busy one and next time I will update you on future events. In the meantime, best wishes from us all at Cuxton Infants - take care and keep safe.

Sincerely
S Jones, Head teacher

Halling Historical Society

The speaker for our August meeting was Mr P Rose who gave a illustrated talk on *The World's Best Buildings (UK Not Included)*, starting in Europe with the cathedrals and churches of Sweden and, in France, La Grande Chartreuse, the magnificent architecture of the buildings and the highly decorated interiors. Istanbul, the Byzantine Hagia Sophia took 5 years to build 1500 years ago. Into Germany to Munich, the Olympic Building, built for the 1972 Games is of an unusual design and was very difficult to build. To date, the style has not been repeated. Then to India and the Taj Mahal, the white marble mausoleum built by Shah Jahan in memory of his favourite wife. Australia has the Sydney Opera House, a unique design by Joern Ulzon, in which our speaker played a small part. In the USA, New York has the Goldenheim Museum, an unusual spiral design standing out in contrast to the surrounding square buildings. Finally to Japan and the Phoenix Hall, a 1,000 year old shrine devoted to Buddha – a wonderful building based on the Japanese concept of Building, Hard Landscape and Water. A very interesting subject as seen through the eyes of an engineer.



Cuxton Women's Institute

Our September meeting was well-attended and everyone was busy staging their entries for the Produce Show. Our Home Economics rep, Pam Hart, had done a sterling job providing a points sheet and 1st, 2nd & 3rd cards for the winners, and each category was clearly marked. We had a good number of entries, various vegetables, best rose and decorated cakes, also entries for poetry, craft, water-colour painting and photography. Margaret Clift from Frindsbury WI judged the produce, while the business was got through – not much because of holidays etc. After tea break, Margaret gave us some very useful criticism and several hints on how to improve our entries, followed by prize-giving - small cash prizes, presented by Dorothy. The WI Vases for Best Rose and Flower of the Month Points 2006/2007 were awarded and also the Silver Trinket Box and Thimble for the best Craft item. The prize for the Overall Winner was won by Maureen Lauder. We then held an

auction for items of produce not wanted back, and this money plus what was made on the Trading Stall went to swell our funds.

Next month our speaker is Peter Shearan on *The Life and Works of Rudyard Kipling*, Thursday 4th October at 7.30 pm.

The Walking Group went for a coffee at Tesco's and a stroll round the Leybourne Lakes. Our original walk to the Cobham Mausoleum was changed as it was felt it would be too muddy after a lot of heavy rain. We ended the walk with a superb lunch provided by Sheila (our leader) at her house, and donations towards the lunch amounting to £50 were sent to the Woodland Trust. For our next walk we are heading over to Bredhurst, and being guided by a local WI member, who normally travels over to us.

Ann Harris.

Nature Notes August 2007

At last we enjoyed a beautiful summer's day. Autumn tints, however, were to be seen on the sycamores and elms on the embankment and horse chestnut trees along Pilgrims Road were also beginning to show signs of Autumn. Blackberries and elderberries had ripened and ivy was in bud waiting to break into flower. The first two weeks of the month were sunny and warm, wild flowers bloomed along the river path and the roadside verges, the river glistened in the sunlight and butterflies and dragonflies hovered in the garden. By the second week, the westerly wind was replaced by a northerly flow but it remained warm. Billowing white clouds drifted across the sky and they produced castles in the air. During the month, I walked with Murphy along Pilgrims Road to Upper Halling where I sat for a while drinking in the silence and the beautiful trees up on the hill before returning home.

August 1994

I drew meadow cranes bill and common mallow. August, the month when fields are almost ready for harvest. Crops lie golden in hazy sunshine but quite suddenly there is a change in the weather; heavy rain and thunderstorms sweep across the countryside and crops and hay fields are crushed. The sun reappears bringing constant chirping of grasshoppers in the fields. Woodland undergrowth is beginning to die and there is a strong odour of decaying vegetation. Mallow and meadow cranes bill continue to regale roadside verges, southerly winds caress the countryside and a peace subdues the clamour of man and machine.

August 1996

The month of August began warm and sunny. While walking in Dean Valley, I observed butterflies settling on wild flowers of scabious, knapweed and marjoram, while during the evenings, glow-worms were to be found in the garden under the hedge and by the pond. The corn, wheat and barley were harvested, leaving golden stubble where crickets chirped and where a heat haze hovered. During the second week, much needed rain fell bringing life to parched grassland on the hills and down on the marshes where the cows were grazing on brambles and hedgerows. By the end of that week, skies were overcast with strong winds blowing, but eventually the hot weather returned when I enjoyed the beauties of the river with hovering gulls, Canada geese, and sea asters blooming on the banks. By the end of the month, however, Autumn was manifesting itself in bright red hawthorn berries, changing colours in the leaves and a chill in the air.

August 1997

The first morning of August is grey but this is soon replaced by hot sunshine, which is to be with us throughout the month accompanied by humidity, which brings its heaviness and a feeling of lethargy. I find common fleabane and scarlet pimpernel in the lower fields while rosebay willow herb is overcoming man's endeavour to kill it. The sun scorches the fields and paths, large cracks appear again on the marsh paths, which are pounded by the hooves of grazing cattle which fill the air with their special aroma. At the end of the week heavy rain falls, flooding the roads, but such rain is unable to rescue the sycamore trees from being scorched by the sun. The heat and humidity continue unabated, and then a fierce storm keeps us awake throughout the night. Thunder roars and lightning flashes and whips across the sky, while rain pounds on the roofs, paths and roads. The following day, which is beautiful, sees us walking in peace and tranquillity on the marsh. Butterflies hover over the rape stubble in the valley and the only sounds are of cooing wood pigeons and buzzing bees. The hips are turning red, an early sign of approaching Autumn. The hot weather continues almost until the end of the month, then temperatures fall to give periods of cool winds, sunshine and showers. Is the summer over?

August 2007

The second half of the month was cool and at times, blustery but with periods of warm sunshine. Billowing clouds marched across the sky and small waves were whipped up on the river. I recorded twenty-one species of wild flowers still in bloom along the grassy banks by the side of the river path while privet and spindle berries ripened near the towering pillars of The Medway Bridge. Murphy and I walked to Upper Halling again when I saw hazel nuts and beech masts. Wild clematis straddled the hedgerows and red rowanberries were to be seen. The 23rd was very gloomy when we walked the river path and as I took Murphy up and down the parking bays, I counted fourteen snails on a pile of discarded asphalt. I had an enjoyable walk to Dean Valley where, beside wild flowers I saw definite signs of an early Autumn. The month ended on a cool note.

Elizabeth Summers.

Drifting From God - A Sermon

(Isaiah 58 vv 9-14, Hebrews 12 vv 18-29, Luke 13 vv 10-17)

Richard Madeley recently wrote in the *Daily Express* that he believed that many of the problems we face in our country today are the result of our abandoning the Christian religion. He also said that he had never thought that he would say such a thing. I think that is significant. There have been many decent people in England in the last fifty or so years who have not acknowledged that decency is inextricably bound up with the question of what you believe about ultimate reality.

For what it is worth, I think Richard is right. Many of the problems we face as a society are indeed the result of our abandoning our Christian faith. But how did it happen? When did we decide that we didn't want to be Christians anymore?

I don't think that we ever did decide. We just drifted away from God. In the 1950s England was a complacently Christian country. Most people described themselves as C of E, unless they were quite definitely members of another Christian denomination. We have an established Church and our Head of State also enjoys titles such as Supreme Governor of the Church of England and Defender of the Faith.

According to our coinage, the Queen holds her position Deo Gratia, by the Grace of God. Religious Education in state schools was teaching children the Christian faith. More than half of children went to Sunday School and most adults went to church at least sometimes. People joked about vehicular Christians who came just three times in their lives – in a pram, a wedding car and a hearse – but there was nothing unusual in coming to church every Sunday and quite a few people were “twicers” coming to both morning and evening services. We never made a collective decision, as a nation, that the Christian faith was a load of rubbish. We just drifted away from it. Harold Macmillan, Prime Minister from 1957-1963, said that we had never had it so good and he was right. We had won two World Wars and we were now at peace. There was no longer the grinding poverty of the interwar years or the Victorian Era. Not only had medicine made real progress in conquering diseases which had been killers for centuries; it was all free on the recently founded NHS! Perhaps people no longer felt that prayer was imperative. Increasing prosperity brought more leisure opportunities. In 1950 on a Sunday in Cuxton or Halling, the church and the pubs were the only things open, and they not at the same time, and there was nowhere else to go unless you were prepared to walk or throw yourself on the mercy of Sunday public transport services. I am not saying that in 1950 people came to church insincerely, but they lived in a world in which there were few other possibilities and it was normal to go to church. So they just came. By 1970, however, you might well have had a car and be able to go to the seaside or into town. More leisure opportunities were opening up even on Sundays. The Church had more rivals for your time than had formerly been the case. Unless you consciously believed that Church was more important than going to the beach, there was nothing to stop you from spending Sunday beside the sea.

In the Gospel, Jesus had to contend with pharisaic Jews who had turned their Sabbath into a burden rather than an opportunity, weighing people down with rules and restrictions, instead of opening up possibilities for worship and recreation. Too many Christians in England in the C19 & C20 did the same thing to the Christian Sunday, making it a miserable day when you couldn't have any fun. We have to face the fact that, for many people, being allowed to treat Sunday as an ordinary day has been a liberation!

Mid C20 English Christianity was a nice religion. We respected the right of other people to hold other views. We avoided religious controversy. We were quite happy to accept that you could be a Christian without coming to church, even that you could live a perfectly good Christian life without believing in Christian doctrine. Jesus was a great teacher and you could try to frame your life around the precepts He exemplified without believing that He was the Son of God. As the number of non-believing teachers and pupils grew in the 1960s, and as immigrants of other faiths became part of British society from the 1970s onwards, we played down the specifically Christian in school assemblies and religious education, believing it to be more important to build a united and harmonious community, than to pass on the dogmas and doctrines of Christianity to our own children and grandchildren.

The second half of C20 saw a good deal of change in the Church. We introduced new forms of service and we found ourselves forced to reconsider our own ethical beliefs in the face of rapid changes in the world at large: the effect of freely available contraception on sexual mores; the legalisation of abortion and homosexual behaviour; pressure to legalise euthanasia and so on and so forth. The Church herself became much less self-confident. Sometimes we were criticised for failing to make a stand for traditional values. Sometimes we were criticised for our inflexibility and our inability to change fast enough. Some people will tell you that the reason we suffered such a catastrophic decline in numbers in the second half of C20 was because we abandoned the traditional services which meant so much to so many people. Other people will tell you that we have failed to attract new people precisely because we are still far too traditional. I think there is something to be said on both sides of that argument! One point, which is sometimes overlooked, however, is the effect of all those debates in parishes in the 1960s and 70s about which services to put on. In one way these debates were a good thing. They involved ordinary churchgoers in the decision-making process and encouraged us all to think carefully about the words we use in our public worship and why we use them. On the other hand, however, these discussions about the services we hold in our churches undermined the givenness of the liturgy. We used to come to Church in order to worship God, generally speaking accepting the form of service our particular denomination offered and perhaps had offered since time immemorial, whenever that was! Having been through months of argument, however, in which we eventually agreed to compromise and have 1662 at 8.00 for the traditionalists, the occasional youth service

for the young people, a Series 1,2 or 3 Parish Communion for the main body of the Church and monthly Mattins for the people who still liked that sort of thing, it was easy to start picking and choosing the services we attended, coming to church to please ourselves, rather than to please God, staying away from public worship if there was something which did not quite suit us. We might accept our Lord's words that He had chosen us, not we chosen Him, but we thought that it was a matter of our choice whether we took part in public worship and, if so, how and when.

So we were living such easy lives that we did not feel the need to pray, there were plenty of things to do on Sundays other than go to Church and we did not want to impose our religious beliefs on other people. England was drifting away from the churches and church going was increasingly seen as a matter of personal choice rather than a sacred duty. Once that process got under way, it acquired a momentum of its own. Human beings are herd animals. We feel most comfortable doing what other people do. We don't like to stand out from the crowd. So, when it is no longer normal to go to church, even those who still do go to church every week start to question whether church-going is really necessary. When new people do decide to come to church, they feel lost as they are invited to join in what have now become unfamiliar words and rituals. The faithful few are discouraged by the very fact that they are so few and a small church does not have the resources to serve the community in the way that we would wish. Sunday is a day when children from broken homes go to their dads, a time when families who live in different parts of the country get together, a time to catch up on shopping and the chores we don't have time to do in the busy lives that we lead. A country in which fewer than 10% regularly attend church cannot hold the line against shops and other businesses opening for the other 90%, but once the shops are open, people who might otherwise be in Church get jobs in them or find it convenient to do their shopping. A vicar told me that he ran three children's services every Sunday, reaching more than 100 young people, till Sunday shopping was legalised, the mothers all got jobs in Tesco's and his family worship services collapsed.

People who arrange activities for boys and girls and for men and women on Sunday mornings are mostly not determinedly anti-Christian, trying to kill the Church in this country. They are ordinary decent people working to improve their community through such things as sports or youth movements or tidying up the environment. 95% of the people involved wouldn't have gone to church anyway. Does it matter if the 5% who might have gone to church do something else worthwhile instead? Does it matter enough to avoid Sunday mornings when planning the timetable of worthwhile social institutions? If Church is just one leisure activity – pleasant, mildly beneficial, but gradually fading away – why give it a specially privileged status and expect the voluntary organisations to arrange their activities so as not to clash with our worship services and Sunday Schools?

I think the answer is to be found in our OT lesson. In it God brings together such things as caring for the oppressed and abstaining from malice with observing the Sabbath if the Jews want to live in a just society and enjoy God's blessings. Sabbath is about taking time for God. Everything good about us derives from God. He gives us life. He gives us conscience. He comforts and sustains us. He teaches us the right way to live. He judges our failure to do so and provides the means of forgiveness. We are entirely dependent on God and we cannot survive as human beings unless we maintain our relationship with Him. Without God, we are very clever animals, providing marvellously for the satisfaction of both our needs and our desires, but we are not fully formed human beings. Without God we lack the divine spark which makes us different from animals. We are doomed to die and such life as we have is incomplete, unsatisfactory and unfulfilling. You can't actually have the blessings of a Christian way of life unless you have faith in Jesus Christ, the God-Man, Who died on the Cross so that we may know God as our Saviour, our Friend and our Father, our God and our King, our Lord, our everything, so that knowing God we might have eternal life. Jesus said, *I am the Vine; you are the branches*. If branches are cut off from the vine, they wither and die and that is what happens to human beings when they are cut off from God. So Richard Madeley is right. Many of the problems we face in our society are the result of our abandoning our Christian belief. We thought we could be Christians without belonging to the Church, but we couldn't and we can't. If we haven't got time for God we forfeit our eternity.

But how can we recover? How can we swim against what appears to be the tide of history, the decline of the Church in western Europe? The answer lies in our New Testament reading from Hebrews. What we have as

Christians is more wonderful than anything that any other religion can offer. It is more wonderful than all the things that secular culture offers – consumer goods, fantastic holidays, designer clothes, more than enough to eat. What we have as Christians is the ineffable privilege of entering into the presence of God. Hebrews speaks of Heaven, the angels, the spirits of fellow Christians already in the fullness of His presence. He speaks of the reality of God our Judge and Jesus our Saviour. We come into that astonishing Presence. Two things follow. The first is that this is a Kingdom which cannot be shaken. The Church's guarantor is God Himself. That's why we sing

*Gates of Hell shall never 'gainst that Church prevail,
We have Christ's own promise and that cannot fail.*

The Church's continued existence, its growth and its mission, do not depend on us. They depend on God. This is the promise.

There is, however, also a warning in this wonderful passage and that is its second point. To be a Christian is an amazing privilege. When you think about it, it is astonishing that God invites us mortal, sinful creatures into His Presence, that He speaks to us through the Bible, that He nourishes us with the Body and Blood of His Son, that He hears and answers our prayers, that He has prepared for us a place in Heaven, with joys which are beyond our understanding. This is so amazing, but it contains a warning. You can't mess about with God. *Our God is a consuming fire.* Our membership of God's Church is much more than pleasant and mildly beneficial. It is how we relate to a consuming fire. You can't mess about with God. Church is not just one thing among many, a pleasant way to pass the time on Sunday, a nice place to meet nice people and maybe to do a bit of good in the community. What is required of us is such a love for God, for the Church and for the world, that we are utterly different from the people we might have been had we not been Christians. Faith is not a hobby which may be allowed to lapse when we grow bored or get too busy for it or it becomes unfashionable. Our love is to be God's love, an all consuming love which passionately sacrifices self for the salvation of humanity. Such Christians may be confident that in this world they are working with God and therefore must prevail and that God Himself is their eternal inheritance.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.



If You're Happy And You Know It, Wag Your Tail

I couldn't believe it when Master told me that the Government is going to introduce happiness classes in school. I reckon that life is sheer bliss. What have children these days got to be unhappy about? Master blames the Government. He says they have wrung all the joy out of life with their constant monitoring, testing and intervening in people's lives. Life in C21 Britain, he says, is soulless, devoid of meaning and over-regulated. He asked me what makes me happy. I said, "Being with the people I love and running free." "There you have it," he said. "Children don't see enough of the people they love because of family breakdown and the long hours parents work. They don't get to run free because we insist on a risk free environment, in which adventure is banned as too dangerous. They can't even have 15 minutes in the sun without protective sun screen and clothing!"

"Ah but," I said, "Look at the wonderful classrooms they have and all the equipment they get to use, much more than when you, Master, were at school." "Yes," he said, "but the bureaucrats and politicians run the schools nowadays and tell the teachers what to teach and how to teach it. The core subjects in the National Curriculum have elbowed out science, drama, music, languages, art, history, geography, religion – subjects that feed the soul and develop the personalities of children who may find literacy and numeracy dreary and difficult. Even sport is more about achieving fitness standards than having fun. Still," he said, "It's probably good preparation for the adult world, also dominated by bureaucrats. When they go to work, they'll find that there is no longer any room for personal creativity or risk-taking or respect for professional skill. Much of their working lives will be spent form filling to satisfy the bureaucrats that they are obeying all the petty rules and limiting their activities to achieving goals set by politicians. What have they got to be happy about?"

"Well," I replied, "I enjoy my dinners. At least modern children are well fed". Master wasn't having that either. He said that, because they aren't allowed to run free, everyone is now scared that they will all get fat. So they are forced to eat healthily rather than enjoyably.

"All right," I said, "but at least they're not afraid of their teachers anymore. There's no more physical punishment." "Maybe not," said Master, "and that must be a good thing, but what discipline is there? Aren't schools like the outside world – ordinary decent kids watched and checked up on and immediately pulled up for the most minor of transgressions, while the authorities themselves seem to be scared of the thugs. So the well-behaved boy or girl is not only constricted and restricted in their own lives, but also lives in fear of the bullies who disrupt classes and lie in wait in the playgrounds and on the street."

I, personally, think that Master is too grumpy. That's how men get when they're middle aged. If only he looked at the wonderful world around him, he would see that there is plenty to be happy about – and so would the children.