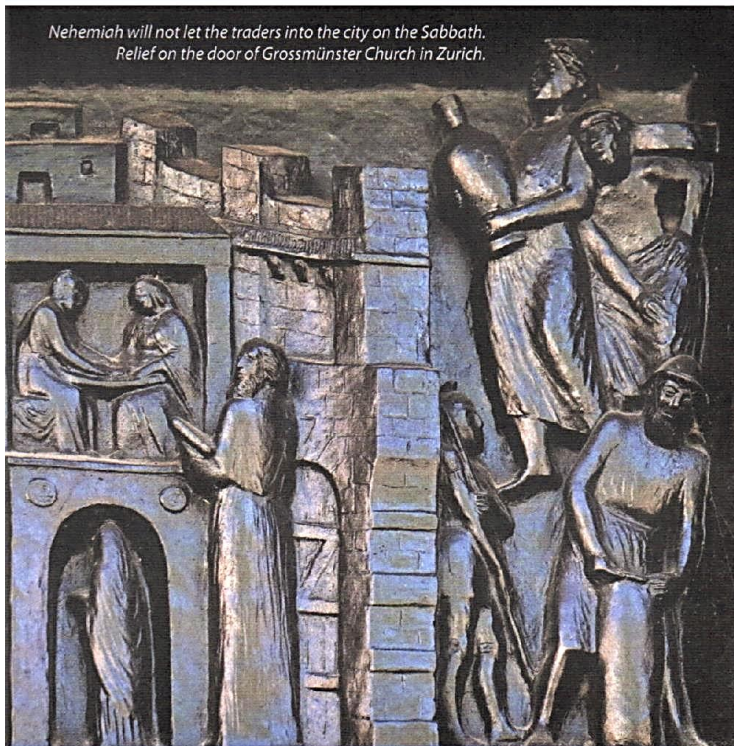


# God's promises hold good



Nehemiah will not let the traders into the city on the Sabbath.  
Relief on the door of Grossmünster Church in Zurich.

Gillian Cooper *reflects on* Nehemiah 8:1-4a [5-6] 8-12

**A**ll the people wept when they heard the words of the law." So the book of Nehemiah tells us. The people are the returned exiles, back in Jerusalem, beginning to rebuild their life as the people of God in new and difficult circumstances. The city and Temple are in ruins and there are enemies all around. They need something to bring them together and give them new courage and purpose. So they gather, and their religious leader Ezra reads to them from the book of the Law of Moses, probably what we know as the books of Genesis to Deuteronomy.

At first they weep. We may guess that they realise how far they and their ancestors have departed from God's Law, and how their disobedience has led to their current predicament. But then they rejoice; God's promises still hold good, and therefore there is a future for God's people.

On this Bible Sunday, we are reminded that the scriptures both challenge and encourage us. They remind us how far we have failed to live up to our calling as God's people. But they also give us a hope which lies not in our own efforts but in God's eternal promises. ☺

We give you thanks, O Lord, for the scriptures which challenge and inspire us. Help us to read and listen with openness and humility, that we may understand afresh the task you have given us as your people, and of your promises that guarantee its fulfilment. Amen.

## Alfred the Great

by Julian Smith

Alfred (c. 847-899) was King of Wessex then King of the Anglo-Saxons when England was attacked by waves of Viking invaders. A scholar rather than a warrior, Alfred's reign was shaped by his study and his deep faith. Alfred reformed the Navy, built fortified towns to protect his people, and from hiding on the Somerset Levels began a campaign that brought lasting peace to southern England.

Alfred had a particular vision for his people, for he saw that peace and freedom from invasion were not enough. Alfred instituted legal reforms and insisted that primary education should be in the vernacular, not Latin. Alfred had a wider vision, that the old Anglo-Saxon kingdoms be united as one kingdom – England. A new kingdom that would be guided, governed and united by the Christian faith.

Legends suggest Alfred could never win *Bake Off*, although he is rightly celebrated as the father of the English nation. ☺

## Walking with Poppy

All God's children

by Gillian Cooper

Poppy's favourite kind of outing involves a visit to one of London's many dog-friendly coffee shops. The attraction is probably the treat she gets while I drink my coffee, but I mostly enjoy the people. I watch them through the window, or as they order their drinks, alone or in groups, in all their astonishing variety.

Some are obviously tourists; some civil servants with their ID badges round their necks; some police and security officers. But many are simply Londoners. Watching their faces, admiring their clothes, listening to their voices, I am aware of the complexity and beauty of the humanity God has created. What I see in one London coffee shop is just a small example of the miracle of our human existence, an existence crafted in God's image. And I wonder whether God still looks at us, across all time and space, and sees that creation is "very good". ☺

**“Open wide the door of our hearts, that we may receive and entertain Thee with all our powers of adoration and love.”**

Christina Rossetti (1830-1894), poet