

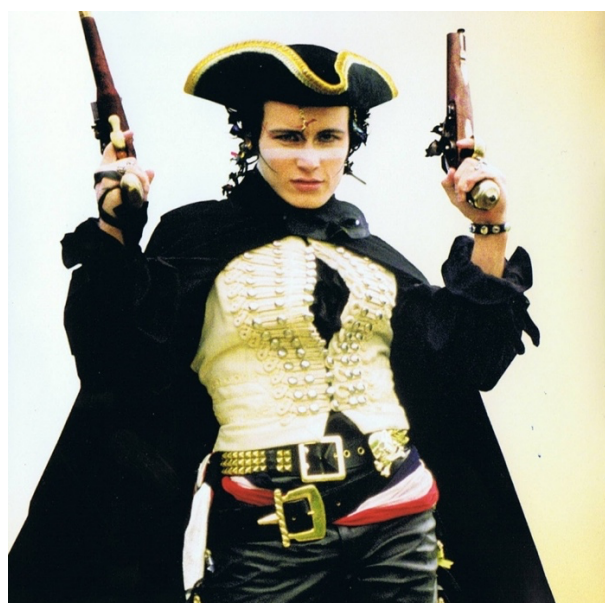
**Seventh Sunday of Easter**  
**Sunday, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2021**



Dear Friends in Christ,

***‘As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.’*** (John 17: 18)

Back in 1981, when I was an impressionable teenager, my father interviewed the cutting-edge New Wave Punk band, *‘Adam and the Ants’* for the BBC, as their iconic single, *‘Stand and Deliver’* had just hit Number 1 in the pop music charts. I remember feeling utterly mortified to learn that my dad, on being introduced to the lead singer of the group, had proffered his hand in a very formal greeting, with the salutation, *‘Good afternoon, Mr Ant!’* At the time, it would have been a teen-dream come true to have met the drop-dead gorgeous Adam, and so I was absolutely beside myself to have been lumbered with such an ‘uncool’ parent. Mr Ant indeed ....!



***‘Adam and the Ants’* – source: frolicflics.com**

Our seemingly unconnected scripture reading for the Seventh Sunday of Easter gives us the words of Jesus' passionate prayer to God on the eve of His crucifixion. How on earth could this text have triggered such an embarrassing memory from the annals of my teenager's mind? Well, the answer to this conundrum lies perhaps in the way we might receive the theological distillation of what Jesus was saying to us as He prayed: *Stand and Deliver!*

This passage is the end section of Jesus' impassioned prayer to God: calling the disciples to be united in harmony and love just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are united. Jesus extends the scope and reach of His prayer request to His Father, beyond the 'inner sanctum' of disciples who have been following him closely throughout His 3-year ministry, to also include those who have yet to believe, through the preaching of the apostles.



***'Awake My Soul' by Mike Moyers***

Here we glimpse what is on Jesus' mind in those final precious hours before His arrest and crucifixion. Here is Christ's intimate prayer for the church today: that we may continue in His love – and that we will stand strong in the power of His love and deliver His love to those who thirst to hear the Good News of His resurrection. Incidentally, this is the reading I chose for my Service of Institution & Induction as Rector to The Downs Benefice. My calling, then as now, was to lead you forward in Jesus' love, and to protect you all from the evil one in His holy name.

In the Upper Room on that final evening of His passion, with all His beloved apostles gathered around him for their final agape meal of love, Jesus prayed, not just for His apostles, but for all disciples in every age: for you and for me, right here, right now. He prayed for us that we might continue to follow His glorious example by the way we also live: That we might stand and deliver His Good News and live in unity with our fellow Christian believers: that we follow Him through His word; and that we live our lives in and through Him.

These themes each speak of the same reality; each in itself *is* that reality. Theologically speaking, union with the divine and inclusion in the divine are, not unsurprisingly, rather difficult ideas to comprehend. But love, in the sense of a divine merciful compassion, is an idea which is much easier for us to imagine. As He prays, Jesus is thinking way beyond the immediate concerns for His own life as he prepares for His death. He was thinking of us, and for all believers who would come to faith through His love. Jesus prays that we continue to bask in God's radiant love for us, and that through the agency of Christian fellowship in Him, we share Christ's love with others. As we begin a period of global prayer through '*Thy Kingdom Come*,' and as we journey to the excitement and upheaval of Pentecost, now is an important time for each of us to ask whether we are prepared to respond to Jesus' love for us. Christ, in His own prayer, has asked God to protect us and equip us as He sends us into the world to prosper His gospel message. Are we ready to stand and deliver?



***'Prayer' by Mike Moyers***

From Sparsholt Primary School this week, we are blessed with a fabulous example of Jesus' prayer for us in action. Our Benefice is privileged to partner with the Winchester based charity, Karis Kids, which many of you will know works to support poor and destitute families who themselves foster orphaned children, in the slums of Kampala, Uganda. Deputy Headteacher at Sparsholt, Jane Gwilliam, has been running an inspired fundraising challenge, '*Journey to Kampala*,' over the past weeks – encouraging children to think about the many miles children of their own ages walk in Uganda to go to school, to fetch food and water for their families, and to seek medical help, whilst also raising much needed funds to support the work of Karis Kids.

In a week when Mental Health awareness is prevalent, this cunning fundraiser also encourages children to increase their exercise and to engage with others in a meaningful way, as they share the difficulties and experiences of each other's lives.

The '*Journey to Kampala*' challenge encouraged children to make the 'virtual' walk from Sparsholt, UK to Okuvu, Uganda - a grand total of 9,174 km. The challenge has raised a breath-taking £1,000 in sponsorship for the distance the children walked. There has been quite an industry in recording individual mileage, and using every spare second of time in the school day to get children out of the classroom and walking to increase those miles walked!

Every pound raised will now be used by Karis Kids to make a difference to the life of a child living in Okuvu by providing them with new school shoes and a new school uniform. In the Karis Kids programme, there are 29 children going to Primary School and 14 attending Secondary School this year.



*Image courtesy of Karis Kids*

What a wonderful example of putting Jesus' command for us to stand and deliver into action – benefitting both the physical and mental health of our own children as much as that of their counterparts in Uganda. My heartfelt thanks go out to all pupils and parents involved, and especially to Jane Gwilliam, whose inspirational Christian leadership shines like a star in the night sky, (Philippians 2: 15) both to the children of Sparsholt Primary School and to each of us, as we too contemplate what it means to stand and deliver.

Through the little children of our community, we see the enormity of Jesus' great prayer for us. Jesus prays for those who believe in his Word and who, by believing, are caught up in the love of God. This love, this divine compassion which brings with it forgiveness and eternal acceptance in the sight of God, in turn prompts forgiveness and acceptance amongst those who believe. He prays, not that we just continue in this divine love, but that it *becomes perfected* in us. More than this, Jesus tells us that He provides the wherewithal for its perfection in us. He has displayed before us His radiant glory, the revelation of God's mind, and this is done to progress our ultimate perfection. Such is Jesus' desire for us as expressed in His prayer: to be one; to behold His glory; and to be loved by His Father! How then shall we react to such a prayer in our own lives?





***'Radiant Light' by Elizabeth Wang***

Today, right here in this beautiful part of rural Hampshire, we are called to take Jesus' prayer seriously. As a faithful community, we must do all we can to stand and deliver: Walking in unity; Walking in faith; Walking in love.

This then is our Mission from God as a Benefice. Even in the midst of all the worry about our own future as a community of faith - Christ is calling us to look beyond our own needs: to face our future focussed on the physical and spiritual needs of others, doing all we can to draw them into that same love which draws us together today. May we stand and deliver in the love of Christ!

Jax

**Revd Jax Machin**, Rector, The Downs Benefice

### Service Schedule

*All services are at 10am.*

*Please contact the Benefice Office on 01962 880 845 or [office@downsbenefice.org.uk](mailto:office@downsbenefice.org.uk) to book a place at any of these services.*

*Please remember to wear masks.*

Date	Chilbolton	Crawley	Littleton	Sparsholt	Wherwell
16 May			Morning Prayer		Holy Communion
23 May	Morning Prayer		Holy Communion + APCM		
30 May				Morning Prayer	Morning Prayer
6 June	Morning Prayer	Morning Prayer			
13 June				Holy Communion	Morning Prayer
20 June	Holy Communion		Morning Prayer		
27 June		Holy Communion			

### **Collect Prayer for the Seventh Sunday of Easter**

O God the King of glory,  
you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ  
with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven:  
we beseech you, leave us not comfortless,  
but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us  
and exalt us to the place where our Saviour Christ is gone before,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.  
Amen.



### **John 17: 6-19 – Jesus prays for His disciples**

I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.