

**Eighth Sunday after Trinity**  
**Sunday, 25<sup>th</sup> July 2021**



Dear Friends in Christ,

**‘For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.’ (Matthew 20: 28)**

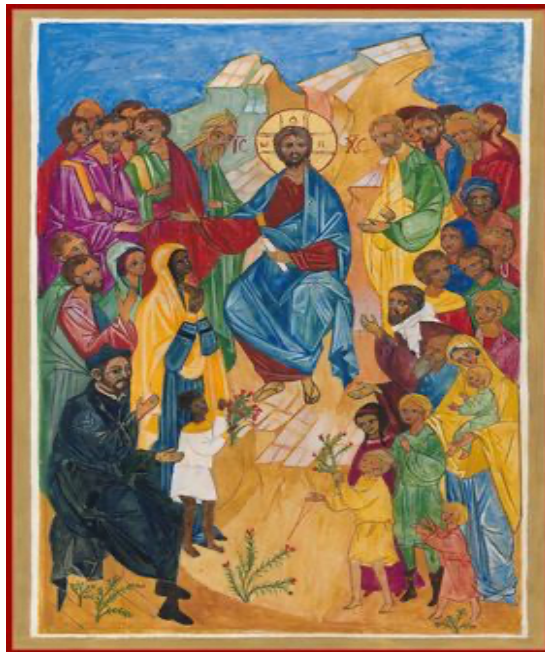
Thursday proved to be an emotional day for the Year 6 pupils of Sparsholt Primary School, as they celebrated their school career and prepared to move forward from the place of learning, friendship and spiritual sanctuary which has nurtured them and helped them to grow and flourish in the rich soil of Christian fellowship. We were luckier than other Year 6 year groups in the area who are sadly spending their final weeks of their primary school life in quarantine at home, due to the spread of Coronavirus, so our prayers were with these children too.

We began the day in a shady area of St Stephen’s Churchyard, where we prayed together, shared many poignant memories and sought Christ’s blessing on their futures. As a part of this process, each pupil, (along with members of staff, Headteacher Liz Hanratty, and with Sally Wesley and I representing the school Governors), chose a special stone and spent a while reflecting on its unique shape and size, texture and colour. We thought about how each stone represented our own unique lives, giving thanks for the gift of each other’s personalities, gifts and skills which have made this year-group such a special one.



***Source – Bing.com***

When we were ready, we each went and placed our stone under the canopy of a wise tree in the churchyard, as a Cairn to mark the memories and prayers we had lifted to God that morning. Throughout the Old Testament, cairns were erected to mark places of holy significance, where God's presence had been encountered by God's people. This special Cairn will be a marker for the children to be able to visit quietly in the time to come, to remember each other and to remind them they are loved by God, and that His presence and His love journeys with them throughout the twists and turns of their precious lives: God in service to them, just as they are growing in service to Him.



***Icon of Christ the Teacher – Source: Jesuit Institute***

It has been quite a week in all our lives, as Monday 19<sup>th</sup> July marked 'Freedom Day' as Lockdown restrictions were lifted in England, enabling people to return to some semblance of 'normal' life. Broadly speaking, the onus of responsibility for ensuring we worship and share fellowship in COVID secure environments has shifted from central to local control. Social distancing and the wearing of face-masks are no longer mandatory, and we are once again allowed to share physical contact and sing together. Bell-ringing is now permissible and there are no restrictions on numbers attending weddings, baptisms and funerals. This would all be cause for great celebration if not for the fact that the Coronavirus infection rate (R-number) is rising across the country, particularly for the Delta-variant.

Whilst it is clear that, as a nation, we shall have to come to terms with living with Coronavirus, we must equally do as much as we can to limit the spread of the disease among our congregations and the groups who use our facilities; being particularly mindful of the significant cohort of 'vulnerable' people among our worshipping populations. A number of people are finding the lifting of restrictions causes them to be in even greater isolation than before, because of their need to protect vulnerable members of their household or, like me, needing to stay well in order to fulfil work responsibilities.

We need to offer our faith communities a safe environment in which to gather and worship. I must also observe a somewhat selfish perspective for our Ministry Team - the cold hard fact is that if we have to self-isolate, we have no-one to take the many lay-led and sacramental services we have planned across the year.

It is therefore my view that we should serve our communities by proceeding with caution and maintaining many of the restrictions we currently have in place, until such time as the R-number reduces to acceptable levels. As with the decision taken by Transport for London, the NHS and major supermarkets, people attending our churches will be asked to respect the other by continuing to observe protocols of 1-metre social distancing, the wearing of face coverings and use of hand sanitiser. This condition will remain in place whilst the Coronavirus Delta variant continues to be rife in our Benefice villages and schools. Seats in services will continue to be booked.



***'The Servant Christ feeding the 5000' by Dirk A Walker***

On a happier note, this weekend sees the start of the Tokyo Olympics. This event has also been significantly affected by Coronavirus restrictions, and so our prayers are with all those athletes from across the world whose lives have been dedicated to their sport in order for them to compete at this level.

Charlotte Nash has written us an apposite reflection which I have great pleasure in bringing to you here, along with another top tip from our resident gardener, Austen Hooker.

Yours, in the blessing of Christ,

**Jax**

**Rev'd Jax Machin**, Rector, The Downs Benefice

## Run in such a way as to get the prize



MyMMANews

*Do you not know that in a race all the runners run,  
but only one gets the prize?  
Run in such a way as to get the prize.  
Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training.  
They do it to get a crown that will not last,  
but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.  
1 Corinthians 9:24-26*

Over the last few months, we have learnt how important sports are to our mental health as well as to our physical well-being and for the last few weeks we have been spoilt with sporting activities, Wimbledon, the Euros and the Tour de France. This weekend the Olympic Games begin, delayed by a year due to the pandemic, but this year they will be different from any other year. Because of the spread of Covid they will take place in empty arenas, there will be no crowds to cheer on the athletes. We will still be able to watch the skill of the athletes from the comfort of our armchairs, but such skill doesn't come naturally. Athletes train and practice hard to gain the level of fitness required to compete. Their lives are geared around training and practice sessions. They push themselves hard and they take time to learn more about their sport and ways in which they can improve. They put everything into winning the prestigious trophy.

St Paul was familiar with races which took part in the gymnasiums found on the outskirts of large towns. As he watched the runners, he likened the Christian life to a race in which we are all participators, the race of life. He writes to the Christians in Corinth and encourages them to '*Run in such a way as to get the prize*'.



Al Jazeera



Whilst watching sporting events over recent weeks I've picked out three brief points that may help us to run the Christian race.

Athletes train hard - they are focussed on winning the trophy. We are to have our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus who is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. We are to become more like him. Our training comes through reading the Bible, prayer and testing our faith as we put it into action. Being a follower of Jesus requires our focus and our dedication.

Secondly to be a good athlete requires resilience. Watching Wimbledon, I noticed the players who did well were those who put their faults behind them and took time to re-focus their attention. The Christian life is full of failure and making mistakes. We can give up or we can be resilient in tough times, persevering in our faith. The Bible never promises us an easy life. Paul's life was not exemplary, he was well known for persecuting the early Christians before his conversion. But later he writes of his life, *'Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize in Christ Jesus.'* Phil 3:13

We cannot afford to dwell on our past. God calls us back to himself, he forgives us and he has more work for us to do.



Canadian Olympic Committee

Thirdly, athletes are passionate about their sport. They love what they do and they are focussed on it. Perhaps a good question to ask ourselves is, what are we passionate about? Do we enjoy being a Christian? Do others see the joy of the Lord in our lives? It is a privilege that God has called us to follow him and that he loves us. Our passion does not necessarily manifest itself in a great show, we can be passionate for the Kingdom of God serving God quietly as his Holy Spirit directs us.

Perhaps more than ever this year, athletes at the Olympics are going to need to be passionate and resilient and have their eyes fixed on the trophy. It will be a very different experience for them as they take part without the crowds to cheer them on. We may often feel in our lives that we are running alone, but God is with us, he runs the race with us and he has a prize in store for all who faithfully run the race set before them.

Over the next couple of weeks, as we share the athletes' joy at taking part and winning medals, may we be encouraged by Paul's words,

*'Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training.  
They do it to get a crown that will not last,  
but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.'*  
1Corinthians 9:25



dreamstime.com

### **Collect Prayer for the Eighth Sunday after Trinity**

Almighty Lord and everlasting God,  
we beseech you to direct, sanctify and govern, both our hearts and bodies  
in the ways of your laws and the works of your commandments;  
that through your most mighty protection, both here and ever,  
we may be preserved in body and soul;  
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,  
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.  
Amen.



### **Acts 11:27 – 12:2**

During this time some prophets travelled from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them named Agabus stood up in one of the meetings and predicted by the Spirit that a great famine was coming upon the entire Roman world. (This was fulfilled during the reign of Claudius.) So, the believers in Antioch decided to send relief to the brothers and sisters in Judea, everyone giving as much as they could. This they did, entrusting their gifts to Barnabas and Saul to take to the elders of the Church in Jerusalem.

About that time king Herod Agrippa began to persecute some believers in the church. He had the apostle James (John's brother) killed with a sword.

### **Matthew 20:20-28 - Jesus Teaches about Serving Others**

Then the mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus with her sons. She knelt respectfully to ask a favour. 'What is your request?' he asked. She replied, 'In your Kingdom, please let my two sons sit in places of honour next to you, one on your right and the other on your left.' But Jesus answered by saying to them, 'You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink?' 'Oh yes,' they replied, 'we are able!'

Jesus told them, 'You will indeed drink from my bitter cup. But I have no right to say who will sit on my right or my left. My Father has prepared those places for the ones he has chosen.'

When the ten other disciples heard what James and John had asked, they were indignant. But Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that the rulers in this world lord it over their people, and officials flaunt their authority over those under them. But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

### Top Tips from Austen Hooker



**Source – Unsplash**

Towards the end of July, Austen always takes a long hard look at his fruit trees. A friend of mine, spent the first quarter of this year dashing out to his apricot tree each evening, determined to protect its buds from the cold spring nights. Sadly, the little furry apricots still succumbed to the cold. Austen wasn't at all surprised to hear this, as he reckons that unless your apricot tree is in the perfect location, you are only ever likely to get one crop of fruit in the tree's lifetime.

Fortunately, apples are far hardier in this country! Austen's top tip this week is to ask yourself whether you want one large perfect apple, or two small ones. For the perfect crop, Austen advises us to thin out juvenile apples to allow the remaining apples to grow larger and healthier. In this way, the tree expends its energy on the remaining apples. Apple tree thinning also reduces the weight of the fruit on the branches and prevents them from breaking under excessive weight.

But how much do we thin out? Austen's Dad used to recommend *'If you have two apples on a branch, that's one too many!'* So, I guess some judicious thinning means we will all have some delicious apple crumbles to look forward to in the autumn, even if the prospect of a home-grown apricot remains a gardener's fragrant hope!



## Service Schedule

*This schedule is correct at this time but may be subject to future alterations – please check on our website for the most up-to-date information.*

All services start at 10am, with the exception of Café Church, which starts at 4pm.

Please could you continue to book to attend services by contacting the Benefice Office on 01962 880 845 or [office@downsbenefice.org.uk](mailto:office@downsbenefice.org.uk)

Please would you also continue to wear masks until we are advised otherwise.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Ch</i>	<i>Cr</i>	<i>Li</i>	<i>Sp</i>	<i>Wh</i>
<i>25<sup>th</sup> July</i>	Morning Prayer		Holy Communion		
<i>1<sup>st</sup> August</i>		Morning Prayer			Holy Communion
<i>8<sup>th</sup> August</i>	Morning Prayer			Matins	
<i>15<sup>th</sup> August</i>		Holy Communion	Morning Prayer		
<i>22<sup>nd</sup> August</i>	Holy Communion			Morning Prayer	
<i>29<sup>th</sup> August</i>			Holy Communion		Morning Prayer
<i>5<sup>th</sup> Sept</i>	Harvest Festival		Café Church		Morning Prayer
<i>12<sup>th</sup> Sept</i>		Morning Prayer		Holy Communion	
<i>15<sup>th</sup> Sept (Wed)</i>			Holy Communion		
<i>19<sup>th</sup> Sept</i>	Holy Communion		Morning Prayer	Pet Service	
<i>26<sup>th</sup> Sept</i>		Harvest Service			Harvest Festival