

Ninth Sunday after Trinity
Sunday, 1st August 2021



Dear Friends in Christ,

Jesus told them, 'This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one He has sent.' (John 6: 29)

Earlier today, a girlfriend sent me a photo of her beautiful teenage daughter, taken at the Seven Dials Column on the threshold of London's Soho, which captured the young girl's thrill in experiencing the metropolis ... under the watchful eye of her aunt!

The setting took me back a few years to an encounter I'd had with a rough-sleeper at that very same Column. Rather than giving him the money he was asking for, I decided to go and buy the man a coffee and a pastry. But, to my astonishment, when I took the food to him, he looked in the bag and gave it back to me with a snort, saying, '*I don't like those cakes and I've already had coffee!*' In the moment, I confess I was rather taken aback at his attitude. However, on later reflection, I realised that in my unthinking arrogance, I had made a grave mistake.



'Seven Dials Roundabout, London' Image -Time Out

What I realised I had done was to salve my own conscience at the man's predicament by imposing my idea of a solution upon him, rather than engaging with him at a deeper level. The problem wasn't that I'd wanted to help him, or that I was mindful of not wishing to give him cash for fear he would spend it on booze or drugs, but in the fact that I'd made an assumption about his needs - and had then got miffed when he pointed out the error of my ways! Perhaps if I had gone and spoken with the man *before* making my purchase on his behalf, I might have discovered what he was really looking for and been able to help him in a more focussed and nourishing way. Instead, I had foisted my own desire for instant gratification upon a soul who clearly had enough burdens to bear without my adding to them. I wonder how many other well-intentioned folk had done something similar in his life.



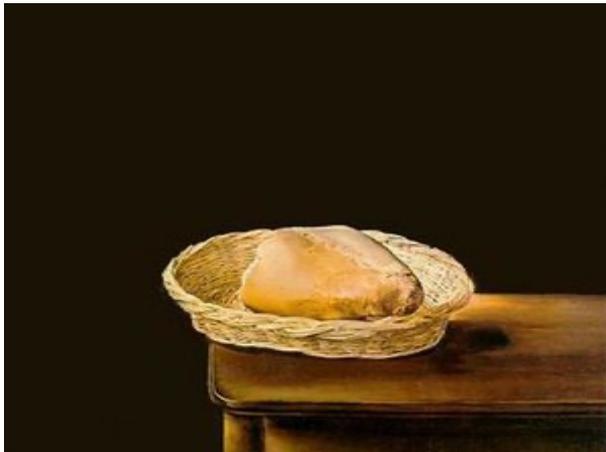
'The Supper at Emmaus' by Rembrandt

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus is teaching a similar message. He is helping the crowds of people who had come searching for him to see the difference between instant gratification and lasting fulfilment.

The crowd in question were most likely some of those 5,000 He had already fed and who were now in pursuit of Jesus, wanting a repeat of *more* miracles – seeking Jesus out to feed them and heal them, hoping never to go without food again. They were poor and worried where their next meal might be coming from. From John's account of this situation, it is clear that Jesus isn't angry or frustrated with them, but He does ask their heads and stomachs to look beyond lunch-time!

For many of these people, this meeting with Jesus will be a turning point in their lives. Up until now, they have been passive spectators. They have followed Him, watched and eaten – and have probably had a really exciting time. But now, Jesus is forcing them to make active spiritual choices.

Probably like me when the rough-sleeper rebuffed my coffee and cake, the crowd don't want to see the meaning behind Jesus' actions and words. 'Show us another miracle to help us believe', they say. But Jesus doesn't let them wriggle out of making a commitment to Him. *'I am the bread of life,'* He tells them. *'Do you want it or not? This is the only thing God asks of you: Believe in me!'* The effect is electric -the crowd go quiet. They don't want to go hungry again, but neither do they know whether they want salvation. They can only think of gratifying their immediate needs. Jesus is telling them to look beyond their next meal to satisfy their deeper spiritual longings.



'Basket of Bread' by Salvador Dali

My experience with the man at the Seven Dials Column taught me a salutary lesson. Ever since, I have made a point of talking with the disadvantaged people I encounter. Sometimes I can help them, and other times their needs are too complex. Either way, I have discovered that it is taking the time and trouble to listen which means most to the person living rough. They so often feel invisible as the world rushes past them. Spending time in conversation, however briefly, helps us to deepen our understanding of someone else's experiences and shapes the focus of our empathy. On occasion, such precious engagement changes our lives forever.

Jesus is the bread of salvation, who longs to feed us forever. Even unto death, He is at pains to help us see that we can only satisfy our spiritual hunger if we build a right relationship with Him. Bread (and even pastries and cake) must be eaten to sustain our daily lives, for sure. But we must believe in Jesus, and nurture our closeness to Him to ensure we are sustained for eternity.

Yours, hungry for Christ,

Jax

Revd Jax Machin, Rector, The Downs Benefice



Photo Courtesy of John Cleverley, Sparsholt

Given the weather set for this week which will allow little opportunity for gardening, it seems fitting to rest Austen Hooker's Top Gardening Tips in favour of this gem of a poem from our beloved 'Poet in Residence', Sheila North. Enjoy!

And Then It Rained by Sheila North

And the rain did rain, and then it rained some more,
The waters rose alarmingly and stretched from shore to shore.
The trickling brook became a stream, the stream gushed full and strong,
The stream became a river, banks bursting all along.

The rivers grew and forged new paths joining one another,
And the rivers became lakes and even hills began to cover.
But Noah had been busy, planning for many days,
Designing and creating a craft to survive the waves.

He worked long hours with family, all day and through the night,
An amazing Ark appeared on which all creatures would alight.
He foresaw the floating craft of immense stature and stability,
A seaworthy haven saving all living creativity.

And the water in the lakes grew and fathoms deepened more,
Until new oceans were born, all was water no shore.
No visible land, all immersed where crops and nature grew,
Catastrophic floods had covered all the earth we knew.

But the Ark had saved all creatures, was crammed from wall to wall,
With insects and bugs so tiny and giraffes majestic and tall.
Two of every creature, onto the craft they came,
The winged and finned, exotics, domesticated and tame.

All lived in peace and harmony, no hunting or discord,
Male and female of every species amicably transported on board.
And in every direction all of the time all you could see was sea,
Horizon met water all around but the unrestrained Ark sailed free.

The dove was released and she flew and she flew, rest she could not seek,
Then returning again from a flight long and hard a leaf held in her beak.
The flood was receding, heavy rains at last had ceased,
The Ark would find landfall and all on board could finally be released.

And Noah threw open the doors very wide, the Ark now flooded with sun,
Animals peacefully departed their craft, its purpose spent and done.
They travelled across the continents life to continue and share,
As a rainbow encompassed our universe, promising love and eternal care.



Collect Prayer for the Ninth Sunday after Trinity

Almighty God,
who sent your Holy Spirit to be the life and light of your Church:
open our hearts to the riches of your grace,
that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in love and joy and peace;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

John 6:24-35 - Jesus, the Bread of Life

The next day the crowd that had stayed on the far shore saw that the disciples had taken the only boat, and they realized Jesus had not gone with them. Several boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the Lord had blessed the bread and the people had eaten.

So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went across to Capernaum to look for him. They found him on the other side of the lake and asked, 'Rabbi, when did you get here?' Jesus replied, 'I tell you the truth, you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you understood the miraculous signs. But don't be so concerned about perishable things like food. Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that the Son of Man can give you. For God the Father has given me the seal of his approval.'

They replied, 'We want to perform God's works, too. What should we do?' Jesus told them, 'This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent.' They answered, 'Show us a miraculous sign if you want us to believe in you. What can you do? After all, our ancestors ate manna while they journeyed through the wilderness! The Scriptures say, 'Moses gave them bread from heaven to eat.'

Jesus said, 'I tell you the truth, Moses didn't give you bread from heaven. My Father did. And now he offers you the true bread from heaven. The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.'

'Sir,' they said, 'give us that bread every day.' Jesus replied, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'



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

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>1st August</i>		Morning Prayer			Holy Communion
<i>8th August</i>	Morning Prayer			Matins	
<i>15th August</i>		Holy Communion	Morning Prayer		
<i>22nd August</i>	Holy Communion			Morning Prayer	
<i>29th August</i>			Harvest Festival Holy Communion		Morning Prayer
<i>5th Sept</i>	Harvest Festival		Café Church		Morning Prayer
<i>12th Sept</i>		Morning Prayer		Holy Communion	
<i>15th Sept (Wed)</i>			Holy Communion		
<i>19th Sept</i>	Holy Communion		Morning Prayer	Pet Service	
<i>26th Sept</i>		Harvest Service			Harvest Festival