

Twelfth Sunday after Trinity
Sunday, 4th September 2022



Dear Friends in Christ,

‘Salt is good, but if it has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?’ (Luke 14: 34)

This morning I took a friend to hospital for eye surgery. We arrived 20 minutes early, parked easily. My friend was greeted by a nurse at the ward reception area, and was told their operation was the first on the surgeon’s list. Nothing unusual about that you might say. Except that the M3 gave us a clear run to Basingstoke, the car park was empty, the receptionist was relaxed and welcoming the nurse looked rested and cheerful !... and the surgery wasn’t cancelled. Alleluia!!!

As I came back to my car, I found myself feeling overwhelmed, admittedly not for the first time, as I prayed for all the visits and procedures, medical expertise and kindnesses which would take place in that hospital building on just one day. However difficult and frustrating we might, at times, find access to GP’s, ambulances or medical treatment, I am mindful that our NHS, and the private healthcare system which augments it, must surely be a blessing. My additional prayer today, is that whichever politician is voted in to replace Boris Johnston as our Prime Minister, might have the courage to ensure our healthcare system is managed effectively for all, including the many hundreds of thousands of staff for whom medicine is a vocation; their commitment to meeting the needs of others a palpable gift of salt to us all.

By direct contrast to the blessed order of my morning, the horrors unfolding in Pakistan, as torrential floods decimate families, homes and livelihoods is humbling in the extreme: a stark reminder of both how precious and precarious our lives can be. News footage shows whole villages swept away; people surviving without food, clean water, sanitation and shelter. Many are staring in numb disbelief at vast areas of water where once their homes and local communities existed. Since the beginning of the Monsoons in June, *‘almost a third of the country has become submerged by the heaviest rainfall in a decade,’* Pakistan’s Climate Change minister has said. Almost 33 million people have been affected. (Source - BBC New 1.9.22)

Yesterday, the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) launched an emergency appeal to help those affected by the flooding. I urge each of you to contribute whatever you can – online at: dec.org.uk If you have difficulty doing this, but wish to donate, please call our Benefice Office for support. Our donations, however small will be salt and to those affected.



Source: The Free Press Journal

Do you find how the scripture (either set for the Sunday or a particular word or passage you have been given) mirrors the current predicament in which you find yourself personally or about which you are praying. I certainly have this weekend as the message from Jesus in Luke's Gospel speaks into the cost of our discipleship. Jesus uses the image and taste of a vital yet common commodity, salt, as a means to show us simply what He means. Salt can lose its flavour and potency if it is left in damp conditions. When it dries out again, nothing of its sharp flavour remains – only the musty smell and taste of the mouldering conditions in which it had been left. It is worthless.

Jesus is packing quite a punch when He warns us that we too become worthless disciples if we give all the outward signs of piousness and humility and yet fail to live out our Christ-like faith from our hearts. All those I have spoken of already in this letter today, who are devoting themselves to the care and wellbeing of others, both in the UK and across the globe in weather ravaged and war-torn places, are living out what it means to be salt in the world. As your minister, it is easy for me to roll out a Gospel message, though not quite so easy to live it for myself. Jesus is saying that the cost of discipleship involves real commitment, real pain, real sacrifice, real love.

At a funeral on Thursday, I was touched by a prayer which spoke of the deceased as 'having carried the cross of Christ in her earthly suffering.' In my thoughts, I went on to reflect that, not only had the dear lady borne her intense physical suffering with humility and grace, she had also used every ounce of her being to work for others in the pain and suffering she knew they too carried. This is the sort of commitment Jesus is asking of us, too. He isn't asking us to be super-human. But neither is Jesus asking us to simply be 'nice' people, but 'new creations,' fashioned in Him. The cost of discipleship, of following Jesus, will be different for each of us. For some, it might be the need to re-prioritise our time and energies, for others it might be looking at our relationships and discerning which are healthy and which draw us away from Christ's values. For yet others, it might be an opportunity to make financial commitments or offer our particular gifts and skills where we have plenty of resources to share.



Christ Carrying the Cross by Hieronymus Bosch

Whatever we do, however little it seems to us, Jesus is making clear that He sees the searches of our hearts and knows the gifts we offer out to others in His kingdom. Blesséd is the soul who has no more energy than to pray, or the group of friends who take a home-cooked meal to a bereaved neighbour. Jesus says that the cost of discipleship means we give up everything to live His way – meaning that we give up all the old social conventions and pressures that keep our focus away from God.

In this past week, many thousands of people have lost everything they possess through no fault of their own. How will we, as Christians, help them? What looks to be most pragmatic for us as a Benefice is to support the DEC appeal, as mentioned above. The UK government will match what we donate pound for pound – and we can also increase our giving by ensuring we tick the 'Gift Aid' box where applicable.

In other walks of life, we are called to do everything in discipleship. You will be pleased to know that my friend's eye surgery has been a success. Our drive home from hospital was punctuated with acclamations of joy 'I can see that bird!' 'I can see that woman's face!' 'How beautiful that tree is!' 'I can see your wrinkles!'

Of all the blessings this restoration of sight has brought, the thing that humbled my friend the most was the gentle, reassuring voice of the surgeon, who said, *'Welcome, let's help you. Please, just call me John.'* We will taste the fragrant salt which poured from this eminent Eye Specialist's humility and generosity of spirit for many years to come.

How salty are you?

Yours, in the discipleship of Christ,

Jax

Revd Jax Machin, Rector, The Downs Benefice

Collect Prayer for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

Almighty and everlasting God,
you are always more ready to hear than we to pray
and to give more than either we desire or deserve:
pour down upon us the abundance of your mercy,
forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid
and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask
but through the merits and mediation of 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.



Luke 14: 25-33 - The Cost of Discipleship

Now large crowds were travelling with him; and he turned and said to them, ‘Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, “This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.” Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace.

So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions. ‘Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored.

Schedule of Services

Now that all national Coronavirus restrictions have been lifted, it is no longer necessary to book seats in our parishes for services. Neither is it mandatory for you to wear masks in church. However, Coronavirus is still very much with us. There are a number of people in our villages with it at present, so we are encouraging people to observe social distancing measures.

Date	Ch	Cr	Li	Sp	Wh
28 th August			Morning Worship	Morning Worship	8am – Holy Communion (BCP)
4 th September	Morning worship	Holy Communion	Show Service in the Littleton & Harestock Show Marquee		
11 th September			Holy Communion		Patronal Festival Morning Worship
18 th September	Holy Communion	Harvest Festival			

	12 Noon – Airborne Forces Remembrance Service at Stonefield Park		6pm - Peace & Wholeness Service	8am – Holy Communion (BCP)	
25 th September			Harvest Festival	Pet Service	8am – Holy Communion (BCP)
28 th September			Mid-week Holy Communion		
2 nd October	Harvest Festival		4pm - Café Church – <i>in the Church Room</i>		
9 th October			Holy Communion	Harvest Festival	Harvest Festival
16 th October	Holy Communion with REME	Morning Worship	6pm – Peace & Wholeness Service	8am – Holy Communion (BCP)	
23 rd October			Morning Worship	Morning Worship	8am – Holy Communion (BCP)
26 th October			Mid-week Holy Communion		
30 th October	3pm – All Souls Service (<i>with Wherwell</i>)	Holy Communion		6pm - All Souls Service	