

**Second Sunday after Trinity  
Sunday, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2020**



***'Salvator Mundi' by Leonardo Da Vinci***

Dear Friends,

**'Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD!  
He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked.'**

(Jeremiah 20: 13)

The enigmatic image above of Leonardo's *'Saviour of the World'*, reminds me of Clive Thompsett's joke about Da Vinci's *'Last Supper'*, which finds Jesus and his disciples arriving at a Jerusalem restaurant and asking if they have a table for 26. 'But there are only 13 of you,' the owner replies. 'Yes,' says Jesus, 'but we're all going to sit on one side!' Across the centuries, humour has certainly been a powerful communicator and lifter of moods. In this time of Coronavirus, the gentle presence of humour has been a wonderful way of helping reconcile us to the difficulties of isolation. In this brave new world of social media technologies, I have very much appreciated being able to share the daily round of WhatsApp 'funnies' with my nearest and dearest.

Since time immemorial, music and song have also blessed us with a similar gift and the beneficial effects on our mental and physical wellbeing of their calming, unifying and uplifting potential are well documented. In this past week we have much to sing about as our parish churches slowly begin to open! My thanks go to all those working very hard in our Benefice to enable this to happen. Sing to the Lord! Give praise to the Lord indeed!

This week, we have learned of the death at the great age of one hundred and three of the Forces' Sweetheart, Dame Vera Lynn. Listening to her daughter speaking of Dame Vera's remarkable life, it seems she realised she could communicate through singing from a very young age. During World War II, the lyrics to her songs and the intimate way in which she conveyed them touched the lives of countless thousands of men, women and children across the world. Far away from home and facing incomprehensible difficulties, Dame Vera's intoxicating voice reassured and encouraged those listening that we would all meet again. No wonder Her Majesty the Queen used these lyrics to convey an effective and emotionally charged message right to the hearts of her subjects at the outbreak of this current war against an invisible and deadly adversary.



***'We'll Meet Again' Vera Lynn in 1942***

Some six hundred years before the birth of Christ, the prophet, Jeremiah, also knew the power of song: *'Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked.'* These words of praise come at the end of a long lament of despair for help from God in the face of great crisis for Israel – notably the religious reforms of King Josiah in 622BCE together with many years of catastrophic political upheaval after his death, and the subsequent destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the exile of the people of Judah by 580BCE. Feeling isolated and bereft before a people who would not listen to his prophecies of destruction as they continued their idolatry and disobedience against God, Jeremiah's lament to God turns to a sudden burst of joyful song! In this shift from desolation to hymnody, we understand that Jeremiah has heard words of reassurance from God, filling the

prophet with a renewed sense of God's powerful presence and support. Just as surely as Dame Vera filled the hearts of despondent and exhausted troops with hope, so Jeremiah was brought from the depths of despair by God's words of strength and courage. In our contemporary predicament, we too would be wise to reflect on the power of prayer; on the understanding that, despite all he suffered in his difficult life, Jeremiah prevailed and was given new life because of his faithfulness to God.



***'Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem' by Rembrandt***

In her recent excellent reflection in this series of Letters, Charlotte Nash spoke about breath as 'a powerful biblical metaphor for life.' *'I can't breathe'* are the distressing words of an innocent Coronavirus victim. The virus invades their lungs without being invited in. The world over, human beings have come together, united in determination to fight the exigencies of this terrible disease. In these past weeks, we have heard the cry of a different sort of innocent victim. *'I can't breathe'* were the last words of George Floyd, killed in America by a police officer because of the colour of his skin. Another uninvited invasion, this time not caused by an *external* threat to human beings, but by an *internal* prejudice which has been given the power of expression by a world which doesn't care so much about the injustice of racism as it does to an existential, personal threat, particularly to the lives of the rich and powerful. The resounding cries of many people prior to Lockdown might well have been *'I can't breathe,'* as the pace and pressures of modern life sucked them dry of meaning and purpose. Measures of expectation and entitlement have become impossible pressures in societal trials against people who cannot match up to or give of themselves that which others expect or want of them.



***'Christ Before the High Priest' by Gerrit van Honthorst***

Growing up in the beautiful surroundings of the New Forest, my children encountered racism and prejudice by a process of projection. That is, these things affected them because others imposed these negative views and attitudes upon them. Is this the way most people learn to be racist? On the first day of his new career in his Secondary education, I received a call from my son's Headteacher. He had been suspended for being racist. Knowing instinctively that my son would not really even understand the concept of racism in his own experience, I asked the nature of the offence. That lunchtime, he had offered the girl sitting next to him at the table a piece of fruit from his own over-stacked lunch box. It was a banana. She took offence. So did her parents. He was suspended. The Head acknowledged my son's bewilderment, but the charge stood. Over the years, both children developed a friendship. They worked through the misunderstanding between them: she recognising her sensitivity as a beautiful young woman of colour, and with all the heightened first-day nerves of a new school in misinterpreting a friendly gesture, and he learning a tough insight into the reality of her previous life experiences of racism.

In another situation, at a swimming pool, my three children learned for the first time in their little lives that mummy was different! As we were putting our outdoor clothes into a locker, a woman objected to my disfigured leg and complained to staff that I should not be allowed into the water in case I infected someone. I was born with an encapsulated congenital vascular malformation or *nevus flammeus*, commonly known as a Port Wine stain, which extends from the small of my back and travels the length of my left leg to the tip of my toes, with a flourish of livid red blotches along its course. The woman's complaint was upheld. I had to watch my children swimming with their father from the viewing platform. These reactions often happen. Even in recent weeks, on a hot day in a socially distanced supermarket queue I heard a small child behind me say to her mother 'Ugh, what's that on her leg?' I turned to see a very embarrassed woman trying to quieten her daughter. I smiled and explained to her 'Do you like my leg? This is how God decided to colour me in!' She smiled too and the mother looked mightily relieved! I have often wondered why I have been blighted with this unsightly condition and have spent my life trying to disguise it. However, in that moment, I recognise the Holy Spirit did something rather wonderful. At the tender age of 58, I found in my response to the little girl a personal acceptance of my own body. I came home and ordered two pairs of shorts from M&S online! We all have the power to change our thoughts and beliefs for the better, however ingrained they have become.



***'The Holy Family with the Little Bird' by Bartolome Esteban Murillo***

In today's scripture from Chapter 10 of Matthew's Gospel, we are listening to part of a dialogue in which Jesus prepares His disciples for persecution. He brings the prophecies and experiences of Jeremiah bang up to date and gives them some hard hitting facts about getting their priorities right - focussing their lives on God, no matter what the cost. Jesus knew that living for God often brings out hostility and persecution from every corner of society – not just from obvious places of power and authority but sometimes even from within our own families, and from our friends.



***From 'The Last Supper' by Michelangelo***

Jesus warns us to be on our guard as we tell others the Good News in His name, but He also encourages us to know how infinitely precious we are to God. How God knows everything that happens to us all – even the humblest of sparrows. Jesus tells us that God values and numbers every hair on our head. In fact, we are so precious to God that He sent His only Son to die for each and every one of us. Jesus tells us we must never fear threats or trials because nothing can shake God's love for us or dislodge the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through us. Instead, He tells us that those who stand up for Christ in spite of their troubles will receive great rewards – they will be held up by Christ before His Heavenly Father: *'Don't be afraid of those who want to hurt your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.'*

This text and this divine advice is important in light of *Black Lives Matter* and all that the death of George Floyd has invoked. Andrew Kent, another of our thoughtful and talented BCM Lay Ministers gave a reflection this past Tuesday in Morning Prayer and he has been kind enough to allow me to offer it to you here.

Please also check The Downs Benefice website for updates on Church Opening (days and times may change) and also please watch the Café Church service video in the 'Generous June' series. My thanks, as ever, to Carol Coleman – yet another member of our dedicated Ministry Team!

With love in the compassion of Christ,

**Jax**

**Rector, The Downs Benefice**

**Reflection for Zoom Morning Prayer – given by Andrew Kent, 16<sup>th</sup> June 2020**



***'Black Lives Matter' by James Eades courtesy of Unsplash.com***

The Black Lives Matter campaign sparked by the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis has rightly re-focussed public attention in America and Britain on the enduring consequences of the appalling 18th and 19th century African slave trade with the Americas. Slavery has been a fact of human life throughout recorded history, into modern times. There is no country in the world which has not at some time had a system of slavery. In some African countries it continued officially into the 1960s, and widely throughout the Middle East into the 1970s. Perhaps not generally realised, it was only in 1996 that the last slave institution in Ireland was closed - the so-called Magdalene Laundries. Worked to the bone, beaten and abused, the experiences of women held in the 'care' of the nuns in Ireland's notorious Magdalene Laundries is the stuff of nightmares. Yet, despite legal abolition across the world, slavery is still firmly entrenched in parts of Africa and the Middle East today.



***'The women of the Magdalene Laundries spent their lives scrubbing, bleaching and ironing' source unknown courtesy of The Daily Mail online***

And modern slavery continues, largely unseen, in many countries - including ours - in the shape of the forcible detention of predominantly young women in domestic service, and for sexual exploitation. We are lucky in this country, as in the USA, that our democracies allow us to protest publicly about slavery and its enduring legacy, and looking back there have been changes for the better, albeit not enough, and not quickly enough. Other oppressed minorities are not so fortunate. The brutally repressive Chinese regime gives no such opportunity to the million Uighur Muslims who they detain in prison camps; and the Myanmar military regime gives no quarter to the million Rohingya Muslims who they have forced from their homes.



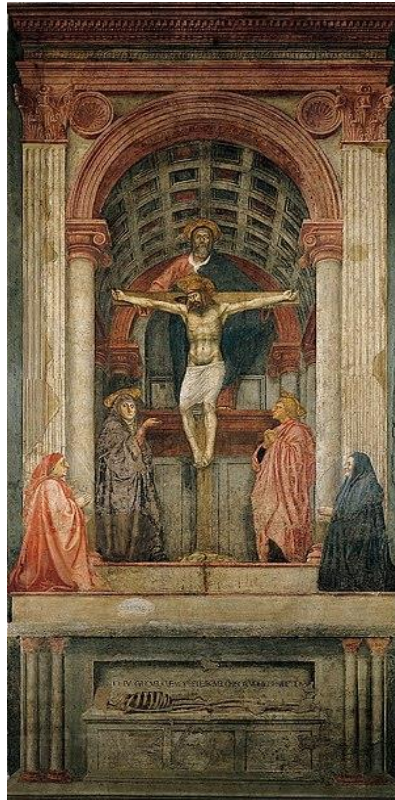
***'Black Lives Matter' by Nathan Dumalo courtesy of Unsplash.com***

But I turn to what Jesus Christ told us in Luke's Gospel. He said violence is not the way forward. We see from some of the *Black Lives Matter* demonstrations that violence can be motivated by vengeance - and vengeance often prompts retaliation, thus perpetuating the cycle of violence. Christ tells us 'Love your enemy – pray for those who mistreat you – do to others as you would have them do to you – forgive and you will be forgiven' (Luke 6: 27-36). And, as we hear in the Psalms, if we put our trust in the Lord who stands firm around us for evermore; and if we persuade others to follow the teaching of Christ; fairness and justice can *and will* prevail!

## **Andrew**

Andrew Kent  
**Churchwarden and BCM Lay Minister**





***'The Trinity' by Masaccio***

**Meditation by Andy Raine**

I am not here to pass judgement  
or point the finger at anyone.  
My name was written in the sand  
as one who is forgiven.  
Strengthened with hope, impervious to shame,  
I will walk freely like the freshness  
of the dry lands after rain.  
Let light spill out of heaven  
through my life,  
dispelling mediocrity and silent blame.  
Too many people, guilt-stricken, wounded,  
walk in regret,  
feeling bad about failing,  
apologise even for breathing.  
Raw belief, a passion for others  
grows in me,  
encircling each moment  
with instinctive prayer.  
I will carry the freshness  
of the dry lands after rain.  
Compassion lives in me again.

***A Prayer of Thanksgiving for the Life of Vera Lynn***



Heavenly Father, we lift before you the life of Dame Vera,  
and give thanks for the blessing of her long and faithful life.

As you know when the smallest sparrow dies,  
so you also know the gift of her voice and compassionate heart,  
which brought Your comfort, peace and hope to so many  
in the face of adversity and death, in the cause of peace.  
As we pray for her grieving family, may they too know your peace;  
That Dame Vera is safely home in the glory of  
Your eternal light.  
Amen.



***Vera Lynn on 4 Month Visit to Troops in Burma, 1944,  
as The Battle of Kohima raged nearby***

## **Matthew 10:24-39 (NLT) Coming Persecutions**

Jesus spoke to the 12: 'Students are not greater than their teacher, and slaves are not greater than their master. Students are to be like their teacher, and slaves are to be like their master. And since I, the master of the household, have been called the prince of demons, the members of my household will be called by even worse names!

But don't be afraid of those who threaten you. For the time is coming when everything that is covered will be revealed, and all that is secret will be made known to all. What I tell you now in the darkness, shout abroad when daybreak comes. What I whisper in your ear, shout from the housetops for all to hear!

Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell. What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows.

Everyone who acknowledges me publicly here on earth, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But everyone who denies me here on earth, I will also deny before my Father in heaven. Don't imagine that I came to bring peace to the earth! I came not to bring peace, but a sword. I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. Your enemies will be right in your own household!

If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it.



***'The Tribute Money' by Masaccio***