

**Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity  
Sunday, 27<sup>th</sup> September 2020**



Dear Friends,

***'God is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.'*** (Philippians 2: 13)

This past week, as you will be aware, the Government has needed to revise Coronavirus protocols. These changes come into effect this coming Monday, 28<sup>th</sup> September. Sadly, wedding parties will now be limited to 15 people including the bride and groom. Funeral parties are still able to number up to 30 people. We have not yet received any clarification about Baptisms. Worship services will remain as they currently are: each parish church has calculated the maximum numbers of people who can enter church for services in 'bubbles' or as individuals. The need for you to book a seat at a service remains imperative. In our benefice, we ask you to book seats via Caroline in the Office. Please remember that she finishes work at 5pm on Friday, and is not therefore able to process any bookings emailed or phoned in after that time for services due to take place on the same Sunday! This process works for all concerned – as we would not want you to have a wasted journey to a service if there are no available spaces left.



***'Wot no mask?' a cygnet at Hengistbury Head considers her options!***

In our Gospel reading this week, there seems to be something of an elephant in the room! Matthew records yet another episode of the Temple hierarchy grouping together to question Jesus, in the hope of wrong-footing Him into contravening blasphemy laws. The question the Chief priests REALLY want to ask is: *'Are you the Messiah?'* All their subsequent questions, and implicit in the answers Jesus gives, are whirling around this central issue: *'Are you the Messiah?'*

The Chief Priests have a vested interest in this – because only the Messiah would have authority over the Temple. The only person who might conceivably have greater authority than the Chief Priests was God's anointed one. Now here was Jesus, a carpenter's son from Nazareth showing up in Jerusalem at the holiest shrine, which had been ruled for centuries by the Chief Priests. And for a moment, He took it over – no wonder they start asking indignant questions: *'By what right are you doing this?'*



***'Dainville 1966' by Clément Serveau***

So, a quandary for Jesus. How He must have hated this political dance! If Jesus admitted that His authority came direct from God, the Pharisees would indeed accuse Him of blasphemy. Yet if He said He was acting on His own authority, He would be ridiculed. In truth, the Priests and Pharisees didn't want an answer, they wanted to trap Jesus. Like the painting above by Clément Serveau depicting the decay of materialism in the mid-1960's, how Jesus' heart must have been devastated by the attitudes and actions of the spiritual leaders of His time, whose vested interests in preserving their income stream and status had blinded them to the truth of God being right there in the midst of them!

Although it might take some deciphering in 2021, Jesus' answer was a master stroke! He answered these scheming men with a seemingly unrelated question which lay bare their motives at a stroke! In so doing, Jesus exposed how the Pharisees only wanted an answer if it supported their own self-interest.

Jesus' question of the Temple leaders about John the Baptist '*Did John's authority come from heaven or is it merely human?*' turns all their scheming entrapment plans on end and puts them on the spot!

Now, whichever way the Priests answer, they will be in trouble.



***'Jesus Teaching the Elders in the Temple' by Grant Romney Clawson***

But Jesus isn't finished. He presses home his point with use of a parable about the man and his two sons. The first son, who rudely tells his father '*NO*' has a change of heart, and mirrors Jesus' reference to tax collectors and prostitutes. These people's immoral lives seem to also be saying '*NO*' to God, yet when they hear John, they change their minds, repent their life-choices and follow God's will. The second son, by contrast, though he politely agrees to do his father's work, is apathetic, just like the Chief priests who keep slavishly to the rules, yet do nothing to live out God's will. Only now, the Messiah is standing amongst them all in the Temple, calling them to account, and they don't like it!

Today, the message for us is crystal clear: We must respond to Jesus, allowing Him to confront us at times when we have behaved like the second son and said '*YES*' to God whilst going off in the other direction. How often do we too just 'go through the motions?' Our actions must match our words! Second, we are called to encourage others to hear the Good News of Jesus as we proclaim Him as the Messiah of the world. Today, Jesus sends us out to work for Good in His name that we might bless others with the truth of His radical love!

Yours, in the will and work of Christ,

**Jax**

**Rector, The Downs Benefice**

## Schedule of Services for September and October 2020

Our churches are open for regular prayer and for Sunday services - please see our website for more details at: <http://downsbenefice.org/>

**All seats at our services need to be booked in advance.** Please see the table below and book your seats by either calling or emailing the **Benefice Office (9-5 Monday to Friday)** on **(01962) 880845** or [office@downsbenefice.org.uk](mailto:office@downsbenefice.org.uk)

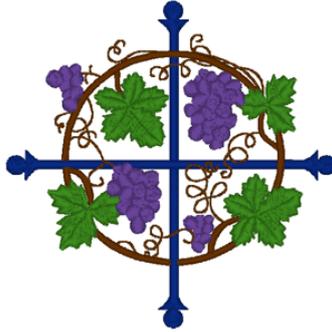
	Chilbolton	Crawley	Littleton	Sparsholt	Wherwell
27 <sup>th</sup> Sept		10am - Harvest	10am - Holy Communion		10am - Holy Communion for Harvest
4 <sup>th</sup> Oct	10am - Harvest			10am - Holy Communion	
7 <sup>th</sup> Oct (W)			9.30am - Mid Week Holy Communion		
11 <sup>th</sup> Oct		8am - Holy Communion	10am - Harvest	10am - Matins	4pm - Evening Prayer
18 <sup>th</sup> Oct	4pm - Evening Prayer		10am - Communion		
25 <sup>th</sup> Oct	10am - Holy Communion	10am - 4th Sunday Worship			



*'Jesus in the Temple' by Heinrich Hofmann*

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

God, who in generous mercy sent the Holy Spirit upon your Church in the burning fire of your love: grant that your people may be fervent in the fellowship of the gospel that, always abiding in you, they may be found steadfast in faith and active in service; 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.



### **Philippians 2:1-13 - Imitating Christ's Humility**

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.



***'The Parable of the Two Sons' by Jamini Roy***  
**Matthew 21: 23-32 - The Parable of the Two Sons**

When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?' 24 Jesus said to them, 'I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?' And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." So they answered Jesus, 'We do not know.' And he said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.'

Jesus went on to say, 'What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.