

**Third Sunday of Epiphany,
Sunday, 24th January 2021**

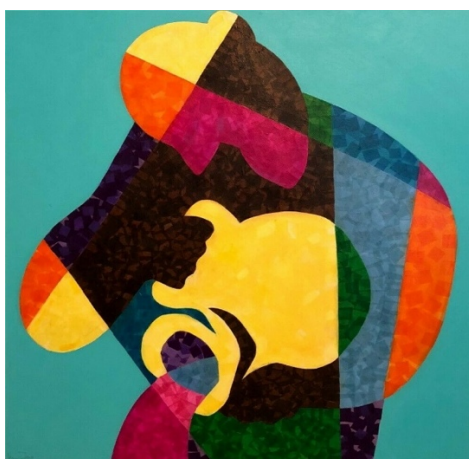


Dear Friends,

‘Do whatever He tells you.’ (John 2: 5)

It’s 5am on Wednesday, 20th January, on what would have been my dear mother’s 84th birthday. Storm Christoph is pounding against the bedroom windows as I sit safely in bed sipping hot green tea. Our youngest son, Alexander, is trying not to disturb the household as he prepares for work. He is a very clever, handsome, much sought after Landscape Gardener. Mum’s can say these things, of course, because we’re biased, but he’d undoubtedly be livid to hear me bragging – and might even rebuke me, like Jesus did his own mother, by calling me ‘Woman’!

As I sit, worrying about my precious, 24 year old son driving in, what feels to me like the middle of the night, to spend the day working in a force 10 gale, my thoughts turn to other mothers who no longer have their sons to worry over. My cousin’s own precious, 24 year old son, Charlie, sadly took his life by jumping off Beachy Head at New Year, and our family is reeling with the shock of his young life lost, as we try to piece together the ‘how’s’ and the ‘whys’ of his undiagnosed depression. His funeral will be on 2nd February, and the cruel twist of Coronavirus means that none of us will be able to be there in person to support his grieving parents and brothers.



‘Miracle at Cana’ by the artist, Diamond (theartistdiamond.com)

For many reasons besides, as dawn breaks, I sit with anticipation on the threshold of a worrying day for countless others. My prayers are with them. Many will have been flooded overnight. Many will have slept rough and hungry, soaked through and cold. Many will be suffering the symptoms of Coronavirus. In America, there is the threat of yet more insurrection and violence, as the day heralds the Inauguration of President Joe Biden as the 46th President of the United States of America; a man who himself knows the traumatic loss of his daughter and wife and, later in life, his son.

Depending on one's politics, there might be rejoicing that the capricious Trump has finally had his finger taken off the power button. Equally, there might be feelings of unease at the prospect of the new Democrat leader. Personally, I thank God for the political 'marriage' of a prayerful pair of adult peacemakers being installed in the Oval office. Kamala Harris will precede her historic appointment as the first Black, female and South Asian Vice-President, by standing alongside Joe Biden before God, in a Roman Catholic service at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington DC, where both would do well to heed Mary's sound advice: *'Do whatever He tells you.'*



'The Wedding Feast at Cana' by Paolo Veronese

The story of the wedding at Cana is intriguing. At one level, as I have told it through many weddings, this story of the miracle of water being transformed into wine becomes a metaphor for lives transformed by Jesus' love. Another intriguing aspect is the dynamic between Jesus and His mother.

The four Gospels are not brilliant at telling us about Jesus' childhood. In fact John and Mark don't mention it at all. Yet the tantalising glimpse we *do* have at the beginning of John's Gospel of Mary and Jesus as mother and son together, tells us that Jesus' childhood could not have been all that ordinary – for why else would Mary be expecting

Jesus to be able to solve the social disaster looming over the heads of the newly-weds as they realise the wine has run out?

We are thrown into a happy story of Jesus, his family and friends as they gather to celebrate the wonderfully joyful union before God of two people in love and with their lives ahead of them. Yet in the midst of this domestic tableau as disaster looms, we are also shown how Mary takes control - not only of Jesus' birth but also of the timing of His ministry in the world.



'Amphorae for the Wedding at Cana' by Joseph Matar

Mary's obedient 'Yes' to the Angel Gabriel is mirrored here in her much more assertive maternal 'look' to Jesus which speaks a million words and says *'Yes, you will work a miracle right here, right now!'* How many of us can identify with speaking to a young person in this way, when they have needed our directive encouragement, borne of the wisdom of years and experience? At Cana, the happiness of a family wedding is punctuated by the reality of Christ coming face to face with His mission here on earth. It is yet another glimpse of the battle Jesus was to face throughout His life of darkness and light, as we who read on can see the point to which this miracle draws Him.



'Marriage at Cana' by Jacopo Tintoretto

In this moment, we are privileged to see God at work. The gasp of the disciples as they taste the exquisite wine transformed from the mundane yet equally valuable water, gives them their first taste of Jesus' divinity and power. These disciples become the first worshipping community to fall to their knees before Jesus as they encounter God's glory through Him. They witness, just as Mary did, how God works through us in ways which almost always contradict the rules our world has formed around us.



'The Wedding at Cana' by Joseph Matar

As the day unfolds, it is fascinating to see the juxtaposition of the image of Trump and his family at their private 21-gun salute at Joint Base Andrews Air Force military facility, against the dignified and unifying Swearing In of Biden and Harris at a socially-distanced ceremony on the steps of the very Capitol building which had seen so much violence at Trump's behest only weeks before. We must pray for them all.

As I watched, I was reminded of the juxtaposition between the military might of Pontius Pilate gathering for the Passover as Jesus made His own historic, dignified entry into Jerusalem on a donkey that first Palm Sunday. This was the triumphal moment for which Jesus' first miracle at Cana was preparing the world: our salvation. It was also a moment for which Mary's maternal heart was also preparing. As she nurtured her beloved son through his childhood, she always knew she would have to face the agony of His death, as foretold by Simeon. It makes her stoic instruction to the servants at the wedding all the more remarkable: *'Do whatever He tells you.'*

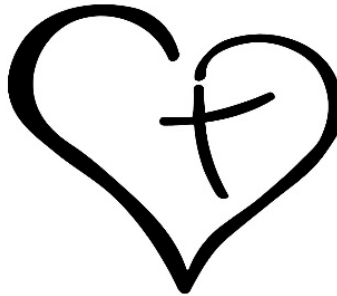
Mary's selfless faithfulness is also a directive steer for our lives. What she shows us is that, however traumatic and turbulent the suffering of our earthly experience, her clever, handsome, rather amazing and literally divine Son has transformed us through the blessing of His grace. May we, like the disciples at Cana, learn to live out what it means to proclaim 'Jesus as Lord' and find the spiritual discipline to do what He says!

Yours, guided by Christ,

Jax

Rector, The Downs Benefice

At our Morning Prayer on Zoom this week, Charlotte Nash gave an uplifting reflection and Lynda Hodgson brought us some moving prayers. I am grateful that they have given me permission to share them with you here.



The Way of Love

*‘As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.
Now remain in my love.’ (John 15:9)*

During the last couple of weeks there have been many reports about the pressure our doctors and nurses are facing. We hear of nurses working in intensive care who would normally be looking after just one patient, now having to look after four or five. At the end of their shift, like us, they cannot meet up with their friends. They cannot visit the pub or go to the gym to unwind at the end of a hard day’s work. So they go home, to do the same thing the next day, and the day after and day after. The pressure on them is relentless. In the very nature of their work they expose themselves to the virus.

They are putting the care and welfare of others above themselves daily. They are showing love and compassion as they treat their patients, as they sit at the bedside of the dying. They are God’s hands. Through their compassion and care, God is showing his love. Let us hold in our prayers, our doctors, nurses and NHS workers.

By contrast, in the US, we see what lust for power, manipulation and anger lead to as we have watched the ugly scenes at the White House on our televisions, scenes that we probably never dreamt we would see happen in a democratic, civilised country. Let us hold in our prayers President Joe Biden, and let us pray for peace and for the way of love to be demonstrated.

What about ourselves? We are probably feeling totally fed up with Lockdown, we’re finding it difficult, and I expect that whilst we watch other people rushed off their feet we may feel we’re not doing anything. Let us remember that by staying at home we are loving our neighbour; we are respecting our doctors and nurses and all who are working so hard on the front line.

The way of love is costly. The love of Christ is found at the cross, a place of pain and suffering.

Charlotte

Charlotte Nash, LLM

Prayers from Linda Hodgson

Dear Father, In the scripture from John 15: 12 and 17 we have Jesus using strong language – He tells us twice what he expects of us – saying ‘I DEMAND that you LOVE one another.’

In the King James bible it says it is His COMMANDMENT. In ‘the Message’ it’s called the ROOT Commandment. So help us Lord to carry it out – sometimes it goes against our nature; we put ourselves first and we hesitate to ‘Do the loving thing.’

With Covid restrictions we have to think again for new ways of communication and opportunities to love one another, but don’t be put off. It will give us joy!
Look at how we are using Zoom for keeping in touch!

We will find it easier to love one another, if we can only remember that God has made each one of us – all different – but HIS CHILDREN, and we all belong to HIM. He loved us first – Help us to see God in each one of His children.

Dear Lord, serving you as the NHS Workers are doing is indeed following that commandment. Give them continued strength as we thank God for their service to us all, and for the scientists who with Your help have brought us the vaccines. Praise the Lord for hope, and peace in the future.

A prayer by Susan LENZKES

Learning Love
Help me to love You
The way You
Deserve to be loved –
With doing, not dreaming:
With obedience, not oratories
On my feet and not just my knees.

As it says in 1 John 3:18

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth.
Thank you that we can say as your children:

Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come;
Thy will be done; On earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
Forever and ever, Amen.

Schedule of Services

After much prayer, and in response to the ongoing threat to public health of the new and virulent strain of COVID-19, our Benefice of five parishes has decided to suspend services until further notice in an attempt to model the Government's request of us all to stay at home and beat the spread of Coronavirus.

Instead, our Benefice website has many links to a wide range of digital resources from across the Church of England and within our Diocese, including our own recorded services. You will find all these resources at: <http://downsbenefice.org/>



Collect Prayer for The Third Sunday of Epiphany

Almighty God,
whose Son revealed in signs and miracles
the wonder of your saving presence:
renew your people with your heavenly grace,
and in all our weakness
sustain us by your mighty power;
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 2: 1-11- Jesus Changes Water Into Wine

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, 'They have no more wine.'

'Woman, why do you involve me?' Jesus replied. My hour has not yet come. His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water;' so they filled them to the brim.

Then he told them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.'

They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, 'Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.'

What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.