

Fifth Sunday of Easter
Sunday, 2nd May 2021



Dear Friends,

'Abide in me as I abide in you.'

(John 15: 4)

Amidst news of escalating Coronavirus deaths in India, and the re-imprisonment of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe on yet more spurious charges in Iran during this past week, the news of the tragic death of Folajimi Olubunmi-Adewole, known as Jimi, as he leaped into the River Thames to save a drowning woman, has touched many hearts.

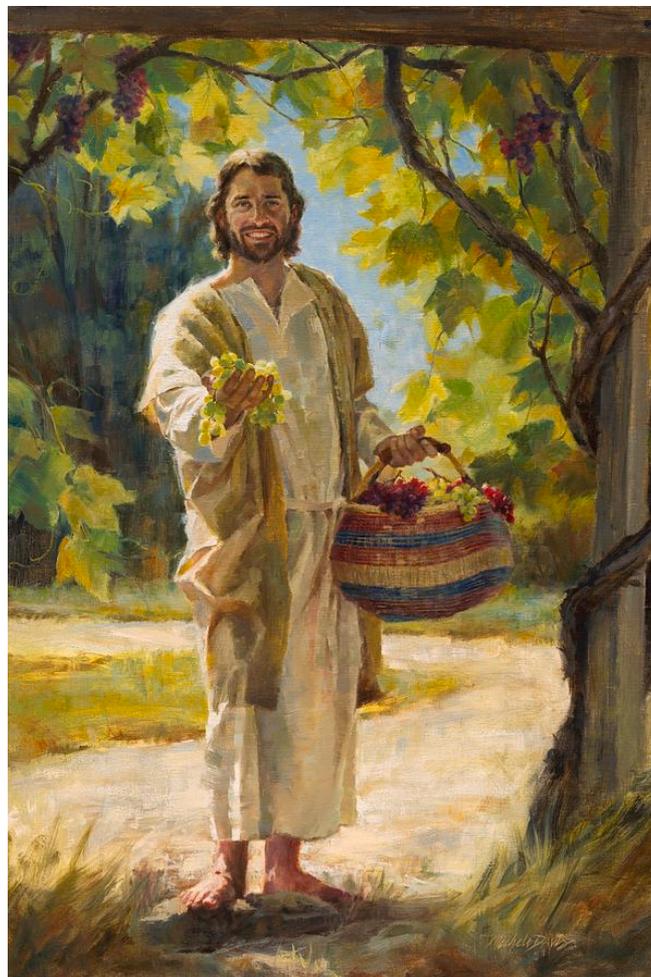


'Jimi with his parents in happier times' Source- MetroUK

Jimi's grieving parents have said of their 20 year old son, whom they describe as angelic, 'He is a hero, and always will be, we can't bring him back but we want him to be remembered forever for what he did. It was just like him to want to always try and help others.' Commenting on reports of Jimi Olubunmi-Adewole's death, London Mayor Sadiq Khan tweeted that Jimi 'was the best of us'.

As we reflect on Jimi's selflessness in responding to the needs of the woman, who has thankfully survived her ordeal, I pray that Jesus' words to the disciples, *'Abide in me as I abide in you,'* will give Jimi's distraught family a sense of God's comfort and peace in their lives. For their son is as close to Jesus as breath: with the soul of one abiding in the eternal light of the other.

These opening sentences of Chapter 15 are redolent with Christ's passion, as He walks with the disciples towards the Garden of Gethsemane. As they spend those last remaining hours with Him deep in complex and life-changing discussion, Jesus begins using examples of the vines hanging all about them to help the perplexed disciples to see how we are all connected through Jesus to the Father; needing that abiding proximity to God for our eternal flourishing, just as branches need their connection to the central vine for sustenance. Jesus teaches that no branch can even live, let alone produce leaves and fruit, by itself.



'The True Vine' by Michele Davis

As Jesus guides the disciples to the threshold of His death, He is at pains to reassure them they will not be left without His strength, which will come in the form of the Holy Spirit. Cut off from the trunk, a branch is dead, and just as a vine's branches rely on being connected to the source of their energy to bear fruit, so we will continue to depend on being connected to Jesus for the vitality of our spiritual lives.

Whereas the purpose of the vine is to produce grapes, the purpose of the fruit we produce is the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. Just as the grapes are fruit designed to feed God's people's earthly needs, so the fruits described by St Paul to the Galatians, are spiritual foods which feed us with God's love. And, Jesus tells us, such fruits are not only limited to these characteristics. Jesus will also bless us with answered prayer – in fact anything we seek from him in faith. This spiritual fruit will keep flowing into and through us as long as we abide faithfully in Jesus. And, as we abide in Him and He in us, so His Resurrection promise will enable us to love others as He first loved us.



'Jesus the Vine' by Gloria Ssali

Jesus is our only connection with the God who produces in us a fruitful life of righteousness and service. And right at the point of his death in loving service to another, the reality of Jesus' Easter promise as the source of that life will have become apparent to sweet Jimi. God rest his precious soul. May Jimi's generous love, which places him among the best of us, bear fruit in our lives as we strive to emulate his abiding example of living in Christ, and may Jimi's parents and all who loved him be comforted by the Holy Spirit.

Yours in the abiding love of Christ,

Jax

Rev'd Jax Machin, Rector, The Downs Benefice

An Easter Message from the Bishop of Winchester

Now that Bishop Tim's Easter message has been issued across the diocese, I print it here for you to read.



Happy Easter to you all.

It has been quite a year – and, of course, the great thing about Easter is the hope it brings even in our crises. Yet the crises that we're facing really are quite something.

First, we're aware that we're facing an environmental crisis. Climate change is becoming critical. Many of us, I'm sure, are committed to doing something about that personally. We also have an economic crisis. We know that financially we are going to have to repay all the money that we have borrowed. And that's going to hit us for about a generation or so.

We have been challenged about an ethnic crisis too. The Black Lives Matter movement has had a big impact about the way we've thought about ourselves. I think particularly white people have had to think about 'white privilege' and what that has meant. Not just to us in our own country, but the impact that has had over the centuries, particularly because of our British imperial background.

And then, fourthly, we've had a crisis around Europe. Brexit has made us all think very hard about who we are. Are we British? Are we English? Are we European? Then there's all the implications of our major trading partner being Europe; breaking up those arrangements has been quite something. And then lastly, my fifth crisis – and they've all begun with E you probably recognise – is the epidemiological crisis of the coronavirus. The facts and figures about the pandemic that we've been facing have really hit us hard as we realise just how many people have been ill, how many have died, and how many are still suffering with long Covid.

These big five challenges have all been quite something to face all in one year.

At Easter we remember another crisis, the crisis that happened to Jesus: the one who on Palm Sunday was celebrated, but by the end of the week was dead in the grave. His death brought to an end a ministry which so many people had loved, a nation had got behind, and yet here he was now at the end of it all, and it seemed as though this crisis was a crisis that reflected the mood of the nation. It was the end of something that was great and wonderful.

Then, unbelievably, he was risen. Easter, the sixth E., is the wonderful news that Christ is risen. He is risen through all the suffering, all the sickness, all the shortcomings of being human. He has made the world new.

So whatever crisis we face, even the crisis of death, Jesus has entered deeper and below that. He is the one who is still with us now as the Easter risen Lord. He can help us face any challenge. It is in hope of his risen life that we can go forward and face all these things that I have talked about.

As we say at Easter: Alleluia! Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

A very happy and hopeful Easter to you all.

**Rt. Revd Canon Tim Dakin,
Bishop of Winchester**



Service Schedule

Please see the Service Schedule for the coming weeks. As you know, you need to pre-book your seats in advance. Caroline McAulay will be back in the Benefice Office next week, so we are back to your being able to email and telephone your seat bookings for services again at: office@downsbenefice.org.uk and on **(01962) 880845**.

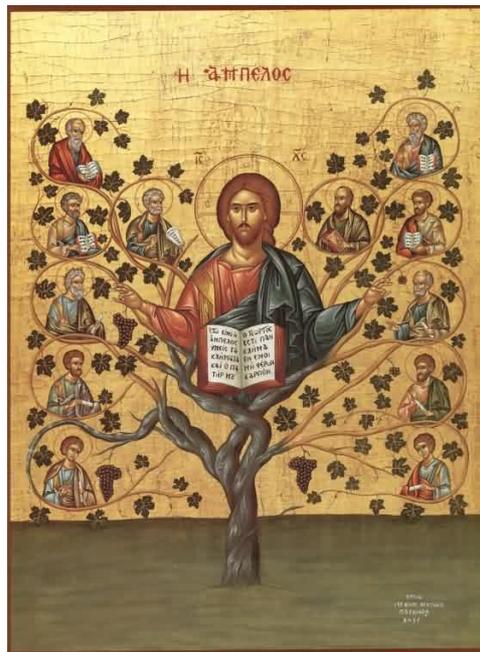
Our website www.downsbenefice.org continues to have the up-to-date service and other information and is updated daily.

Our services for May and June will be:

Date	Chilbolton	Crawley	Littleton	Sparsholt	Wherwell
2 May	Holy Communion			Morning Prayer	
9 May		Holy Communion			Morning Prayer
16 May			Morning Prayer		Holy Communion
23 May	Morning Prayer		Holy Communion + APCM		
30 May				Morning Prayer	Morning Prayer
6 June	Morning Prayer	Morning Prayer			
13 June				Holy Communion	Morning Prayer
20 June	Holy Communion		Morning Prayer		
27 June		Holy Communion			

Collect for The Fifth Sunday of Easter

Almighty God,
who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ
have overcome death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life:
grant that, as by your grace going before us
you put into our minds good desires,
so by your continual help we may bring them to good effect;
through Jesus Christ our risen Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.



John 15: 1-8 – Jesus the True Vine

Jesus says ‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.

Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.