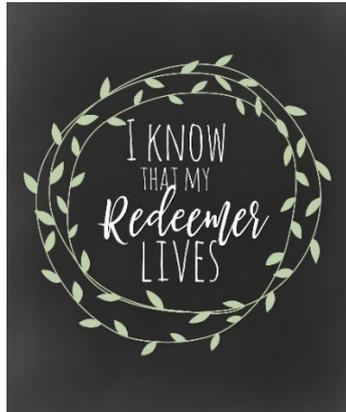


**Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity
Sunday, 29th August 2021**



Dear Friends in Christ,

‘For I know that my Redeemer liveth’ (Job 19: 25)

This is the kind of faith we need today - that we KNOW our Redeemer lives, even during the worst trials of our lives. Our hearts are with all those in Afghanistan, whatever their religion and none. I am sure you join with me in struggling to find words to understand the despicable killings of innocent men, women, children and animals by IS extremist groups in these past days. It feels impossible to imagine the suffering those poor people are enduring, and the fear they must be facing: wondering where their next meal is coming from, what the next hours might bring, where their loved ones are. The photographs are harrowing, and I am mindful these dear souls are suffering so much in addition to battling the threat of Coronavirus.

These are the times when our own faith must prompt us to reach out in humanitarian support in whichever way we can – whether that is by making a monetary donation to UNICEF and other refugee-supporting charities; donating items such as clothing and basic hygiene products; and writing to your MP to put pressure on the Government to allow refugees to seek shelter in the UK. And, importantly, we can pray to Jesus, our Redeemer and our guide.



How to help Afghanistan - Image: GETTY

We are given Mark's gospel this week, in which we hear Jesus telling us *'For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come.'* Surely then, having faith in Christ and knowing that our Redeemer lives in each of us must encourage us to listen to our hearts telling us to respond to the evil actions of others by acting in love, and by living out the teachings of Jesus by *'loving one another.'*



'The Bridge in Autumn' by Serguei Toutounov

On Tuesday of this week, our Zoom Morning Prayer group heard a fascinating reflection from Andrew Norriss at Chilbolton on Near Death Experiences, as he looked at St Paul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. Intent on killing Christians, the evil actions of Paul's heart were stopped in their tracks as Jesus showed him how to live in the way of love.

Andrew has kindly agreed for his reflection to be shared here, and Charlotte Nash has also kindly allowed me to share her prayers with you all. I pray you will take comfort from their words in these dark times, and that you will be encouraged to renew your commitment to help those in our fragile world who are currently unable to help themselves, through no fault of their own.

Yours, redeemed by Christ,

Jax

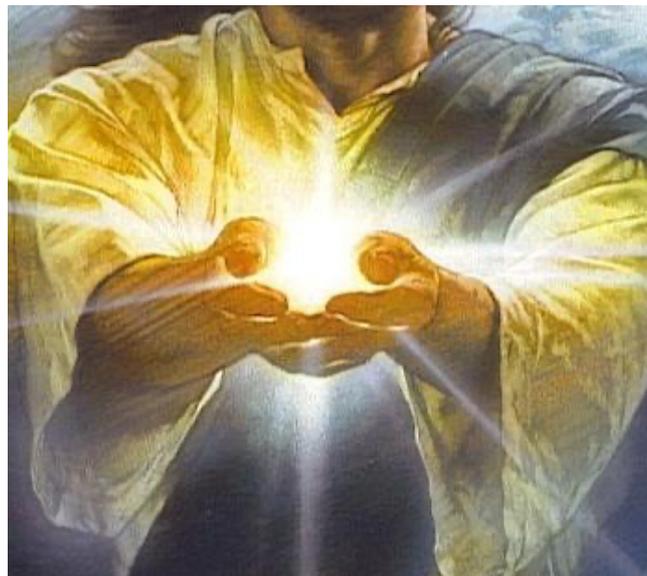
Revd Jax Machin, Rector, The Downs Benefice

Reflection from Andrew Norriss



I've been reading a lot about NDE's recently, and in case you've not come across the phrase, an NDE or Near Death Experience is what happens when someone dies, goes to... somewhere on the 'other side' – but then comes back, and can describe what they saw. NDE's have been recorded all through history, but the number of such stories has grown exponentially in recent times with modern medicine's ability to resuscitate people when they would normally have died.

Although every NDE is different, the stories people tell tend to have several features in common. Regardless of the age of the person, or their culture, or their religious beliefs, or lack of religious beliefs, most of them will describe similar things. They usually start by saying how they found they had popped out of their body and were somewhere on the ceiling, looking down on the operating table for instance, or hovering in the air looking at the wreck of the car they'd been driving, and wondering at first what is going on.



Source - Pinterest

That's usually followed by a journey, being drawn somehow through space, and then... meeting someone. The person they meet might be an angel, or Jesus, or very often a friend or deceased relative, who has come to welcome them. There's a huge variation here, but most experiencers will describe a feeling, almost too wonderful to express, of coming home, of remembering who they really are, and being greeted with an overwhelming, unconditional love that will even years later, reduce them to tears as they try and describe it.

There are several other common features of an NDE, but because this is only a Near Death Experience, at some point the angel, or Jesus, or the loving grandparent says this is not your time and you need to go back because you still have work to do. Mostly, people say they were extremely reluctant to return, but they do, and that leads to what I often find is the most interesting part of the experience.



'Paul's Conversion on the Damascus Road' by Bartolome Esteban Murillo

One of the most consistent and extraordinary things about an NDE is how dramatically they change the whole path of people's lives. They are going in one direction, as St Paul was on the road to Damascus, then some event snatches them up into this extraordinary experience, and afterwards, everything is changed. People who have had an NDE frequently change their career, usually to something that earns them far less money, but at that point money no longer has the same importance. Sometimes they join a church. Sometimes they leave a church. But the biggest change is the realisation that they are no longer afraid of dying, because they don't just believe they are eternal beings, they know they are. They have experienced the fact.

Listening to and reading these accounts – and there are thousands of them in various places on the internet – has had a powerful effect on me. They are snapshots, extremely moving snapshots, of people facing the deepest questions of life, I find them enormously helpful, hopeful and encouraging. They remind me, too, that when I die, as the man tells his wife in one of my favourite southern gospel songs, it just means...

I'll be waiting on the far side banks of Jordan

I'll be sitting drawing pictures in the sand

And when I see you coming, I shall leap up with a shout

And come running through the shallow waters, reaching for your hand.



Prayers by Charlotte Nash

Lord Jesus, we thank you for the gift of life and for your desire that we should have life in all its fullness, we know that for each one of us that will look different.

We thank you for the opportunities to experience our world in all its beauty and wonder. We thank you for our families and our friends; for everything that is good and makes our lives richer and fuller.

As we consider our own lives, knowing that we are not in this world forever, may it create in us a greater desire and willingness to serve you and others, and to make the most of every opportunity. Spare us Lord from being anxious and pre-occupied by the expectation of our death, for you created us for living.

We pray in the words of the Psalmist:

Teach us dear Lord, to number our days well,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,
that we may rejoice and be glad all of our days.
May the favour of the Lord our God rest upon us
and establish the work of our hands,
confirming the work that we do.

As we rejoice in the gift of life, we pray for those who are fearful for their lives today remembering especially the people of Afghanistan and those who have a reason to be fearful. Lord, they are so desperate and we feel so helpless to help them. We cry out to you for justice; for leaders to have wisdom to do what is right. We pray for the future of Afghanistan; for the vulnerable, for women and their children and the place they hold in society, and for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Lord, have mercy upon them.

God of glory, God of all grace, you promise us everlasting life. Shine your light in our hearts that we may work towards bringing you kingdom on earth. Show us the work you have for us to do this week, and may we not be so busy or distracted that we miss these opportunities, but may our lives be open to what you are saying and to the needs of others. Amen.

Top Tips from Austen Hooker

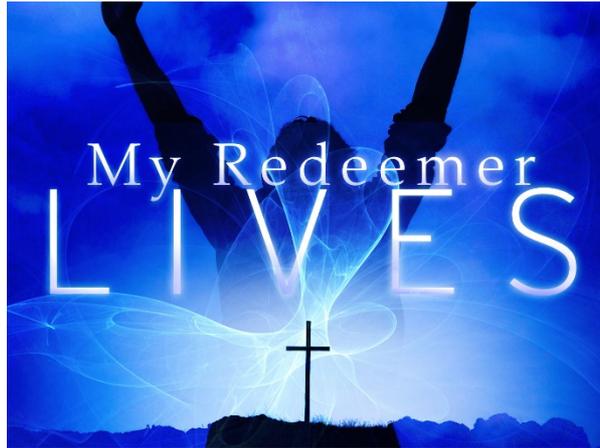


Source – Bing.com

This week, Austen is encouraging us to prune our roses and deadhead our pelargoniums, lavender and other flowering plants which might have ‘gone over.’ In particular, we need to look at grafted plants which might have reverted to stock and which no longer flower in the way we might want them to. In the Rectory garden, one inherited standard rose has flourished all summer, putting out a huge amount of shoots and leaf growth – but no flowers at all! Austen tells me that this plant has become ‘blind,’ possibly as a result of this year’s weather conditions. I am taking his advice and will use this sunny weekend to prune the bush right back to help it concentrate its energies on flowering next season!

Collect Prayer for the Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity

Almighty God,
who called your Church to bear witness
that you were in Christ reconciling the world to yourself:
help us to proclaim the good news of your love,
that all who hear it may be drawn to you;
through him who was lifted up on the cross,
and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.



Mark 7: 1-8; 14-15; 21-23 - The Tradition of the Elders

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles. So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?' He said to them, 'Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,

‘This people honours me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me;
in vain do they worship me,
teaching human precepts as doctrines.’

You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.’ Then he called the crowd again and said to them, ‘Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.’

For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.’

Schedule of Services

This schedule is correct at this time but may be subject to future alterations – please check on our website for the most up-to-date information.

All services start at 10am, with the exception of Café Church, which starts at 4pm.

Please could you continue to book to attend services by contacting the Benefice Office on 01962 880 845 or office@downsbenefice.org.uk

Please would you also continue to wear masks until we are advised otherwise.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Ch</i>	<i>Cr</i>	<i>Li</i>	<i>Sp</i>	<i>Wh</i>
<i>29th August</i>			Harvest Festival Holy Communion		Morning Prayer
<i>5th Sept</i>	Harvest Festival		Café Church		Morning Prayer
<i>12th Sept</i>		Morning Prayer		Holy Communion	
<i>15th Sept (Wed)</i>			Holy Communion		
<i>19th Sept</i>	Holy Communion		Morning Prayer	Pet Service	
<i>26th Sept</i>		Harvest Service			Harvest Festival