

Sixth Sunday after Trinity
Sunday, 19th July 2020



Dear Friends,

'The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!' (Matthew 13:43)

Since many of you have finally found the time to tidy your sock drawers during Lockdown, let's start this week's newsletter with a themed conundrum: If you have 20 socks in your drawer, all in perfect pairs, and you lose 5 – at least how many full pairs must you still have – and how many at most? (*Answer at end of letter!*)

We have Jeff Williams, Director of Education for Winchester and Portsmouth Dioceses, to thank for this brain-teaser. Jeff went on to highlight the plight of the homeless who are back on the streets, having been cared for under Local Authority direction during Lockdown.

The reality is that most homeless people are men – and they routinely have foot infections as they typically have just one pair of socks, and with infrequent foot care



and washing, the outcome is too obvious. So one national charity isn't asking for money, but for new socks to give to people at homeless night shelters and soup kitchens. What a simple, but transformative act of kindness we can all do – carry a pair of new socks in our pocket or bag, and just give them to someone living rough. The effect will be physical!

As few of you are walking through our towns at present, I was wondering if our Benefice might be able to help bolster supplies of socks to Winchester Nightshelter and the Basics Banks in Andover and Winchester in a different way. We have a **Basics Bank collection box in the porch of St Catherine's church at Littleton**, and I will also **place a box at the door of the church in which we are worshipping each week**. All pairs of new socks (for men or women) will be gratefully received!



'Sound II' installation in Winchester Cathedral by Antony Gormley

I'm writing this newsletter on Wednesday, 15th July, and since I opened my eyes this morning, I've been on tenterhooks waiting to see if it rains. Now 3 o'clock in the afternoon, the sky over Winchester is a deep violet colour and looks threatening – but so far, so dry! Given the parched soil hereabouts, why should a much needed downpour be of concern to me? Because today is St Swithun's Day, when we celebrate the life of the Anglo-Saxon Patron Saint and Bishop of Winchester - and perhaps plan our umbrella usage for the next 40 days!

For, as folk-lore has it:

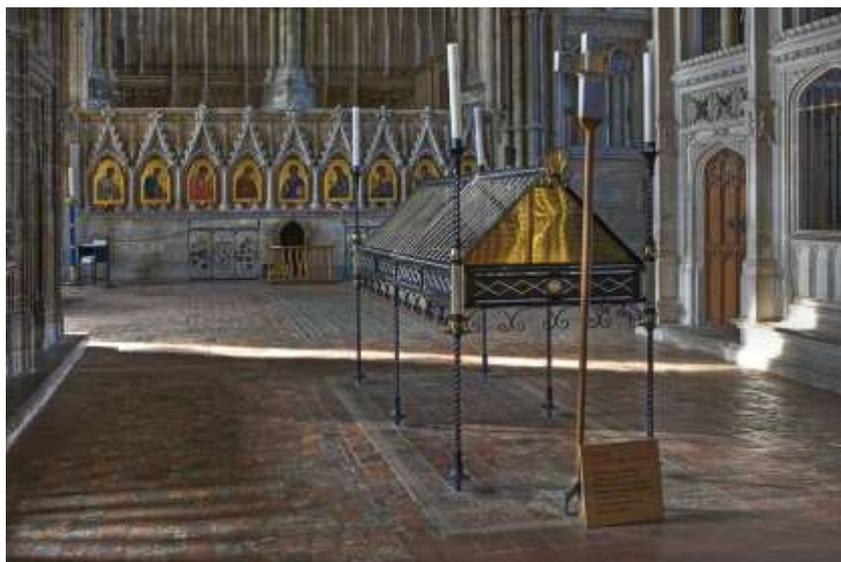
*St Swithun's Day if thou dost rain,
For forty days it will remain:
St Swithun's Day if thou be fair,
For forty days 'twill rain nae mare!*

Born in the 9th Century, there is very little known about Swithun's life. Ordained priest in the year 830, Swithun became Bishop of Winchester in the year 852 and remained in post until his death in 862. He appears to have been the trusted adviser to Egbert, Saxon King of Wessex. A humble, righteous and studious man in life, sadly his faithful Christian teaching and spiritual acuity seem to have been overlooked. For, as the rhyme above suggests, it was the manner of Swithun's death and burial, rather than his life, which has become of lasting interest across the centuries.



'St Swithun, Bishop of Winchester' - Alamy Stock Photo

Swithun asked to be buried simply in the churchyard by the gate, so that parishioners would walk over him as they passed to and from services. So it came to pass, until a decade later, when Bishop Æthelwold chose Swithun as the Patron of the recently restored Cathedral. Swithun's bones were dug up and moved into an ostentatious shrine within the Cathedral on the 15th July 964 – despite dire warnings that an exhumation would cause turbulent storms. The day's ceremonies had barely got under way when a torrential rainstorm began. The rain was so heavy that the ceremony of translation was abandoned – and the downpour continued for a further forty days. Some of Swithun's remains are entombed in Winchester Cathedral, and a plaque marks the original place of his burial.



***'St Swithun's Shrine in the Retrochoir of Winchester Cathedral'
Courtesy of WyrdLight.com***

So began the tradition that if it rains on St Swithun's Day, it will continue to rain for a further 40 days and that if it is sunny on 15th July, then a run of 40 days of dry weather will likely ensue. The site of Swithun's shrine has many claims of miraculous healings which were said to have occurred. Swithun, who was later Canonised, is unique among saints, in that his Feast Day is commemorated on the day his remains were moved rather than on the date of his death! Thus, we recall Swithun in the context of summer storms rather than remembering him for his righteous Christian holiness. I wonder what he would make of it all!



'The Wheat and the Tares' – Stained Glass Window in Ely Cathedral

St Swithun was a gentle Christian man who was loved by the people of Winchester and its fertile, rural villages. His wise spiritual teaching encouraged ears to listen; and for those who truly heard, to grow and flourish in relationship with Jesus, their Saviour and Redeemer. These faithful mediaeval people, whose survival depended on the quality of Hampshire's soil and its husbandry, on its rivers and maritime connections so vital for trade, would have understood the parables of Jesus which Matthew's Gospel records so vividly.

In the example of the Wheat and the Tares we are given today, just like that of the Sower we read last weekend, Jesus is comparing God's Kingdom to the work of a sower who sows good seed. In the previous parable, Jesus explained how sometimes a seed would fall on rocky ground where it died, yet at other times it fell on rich, fertile soil and flourished.

The metaphor was all about how we listened to God's word. Jesus was trying to get us to see the difference between the sorts of people who *heard* God, and those who chose to *ignore* God - or those who only made half-hearted attempts to hear and who, through their indifference, lost sight of His sovereignty along the way. Whether we are destined to great service, or devoted to simple actions like giving out clean socks to the homeless, God sees all the intentions and actions of our hearts.

Jesus was talking about the difference between the sorts of people who *heard* and those who *truly listened* and whose lives were transformed by really listening to God; allowing themselves to be changed by His call on their lives to love one another and to live in the truth of Christ's resurrection. St Swithun is an example one of these faithful people.



***'Tríptico del Jardín de las delicias' by Hieronimus Bosch -
'The Garden of Earthly Delights'***

In this week's parable, Jesus is tweaking this message. It is still all about whether we simply *hear* or whether we allow God's words, through Jesus, to transform the way we think and act. The 'tares' or the weeds are people who don't know Jesus. Unbelievers and believers live in the world side-by-side - yet we all look the same! Jesus is asking us to recognise that those whose lives are *really* transformed by God's word – really turned upside down by their faith, will still have to live in a world where other people are completely unwilling or unable to allow Christ to transform them. Yet at the final harvest, at the Day of Judgement, the tares will be uprooted and thrown away and the wheat harvested. Those who listen to Jesus must not be deterred by those who do not!

Jesus tells us how *'The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!'* As He warns the people around Him at the time, so Jesus calls *us* not just to *hear* His word, *but to listen to it* because God's harvest or judgement of all peoples is coming.

St Swithun has laid down centuries of rich soil in Hampshire, to which Winchester Cathedral and the faithful people of this Diocese are a lasting legacy. We believers are to make ourselves ready, by ensuring our faith is sincere, and, as we live out this faith, that we must serve God by helping others to share that same faith in Christ's unconditional love for us all.



Captain Sir Tom Moore - Investiture at Windsor Castle

On Friday of this week, centenarian campaigner and World War Two veteran, Captain Tom Moore was invested by Her Majesty the Queen in a ceremony at Windsor Castle. Captain Sir Tom, who celebrated his 100th Birthday in April, has raised nearly £33million for health service charities by walking laps of his Bedfordshire garden.

What an inspiration he is! And how moving that Her Majesty came out of self-isolation especially to honour him. People like Captain Sir Tom and Queen Elizabeth, like St Swithun before them, are shining examples of Christian souls who have listened to Jesus, and in listening, have devoted their lives in the quiet and determined, yet no less holy vocation, of living their lives in His service.

Stop Press! It was clearly a busy day for the Queen on Friday! Congratulations to Her Majesty and the Royal Family as Princess Beatrice and Edoardo Mapelli Mozzi became husband and wife at a secret Royal Wedding in Windsor Castle on Friday morning.

Don't forget that our first gathering for Morning Prayer takes place **this Sunday morning** at **10am in St Mary's, Crawley**. Please see the foot of this email for the schedule of services for the next seven weeks in our Benefice. Please call the Benefice Office on (01962) 880845 if you wish to book a seat for any of these services. Alternatively, stay at home and watch the Café Church video, faithfully put together by Carol Coleman and her team.

Yours, in the service of Christ,

Jax

Rector, The Downs Benefice

PS: Answer to Socks brain-teaser: You have at least 5 of your 10 starting pairs, if you lost 5 socks from 5 different pairs ... but you *could* have as many as 7 full pairs left, if 4 of the socks happened to match!

Pause to reflect on Sea Sunday



Given that Sea Sunday is often celebrated on the same Sunday as St Swithun, I have got my dates mixed up a bit this year. Sea Sunday is traditionally held on 12th July each year, so we should have made mention of it last Sunday, though, if you remember, that edition of my Newsletter was set to commemorate Srebrenica and

The Battle of Britain. As a number of our parishes support the work of The Mission to Seafarers, it is important for us to stop and give thanks for all Seafarers and those who minister to them.

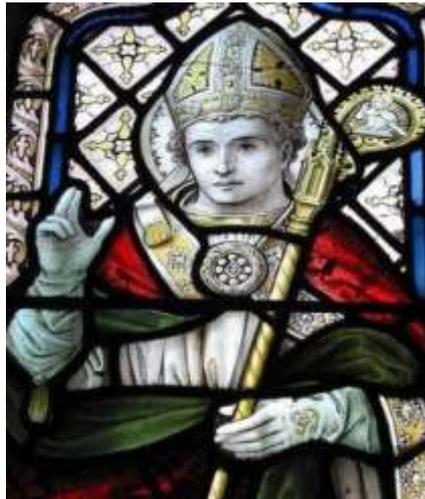


A Prayer for Sea Sunday

Lord God, Creator of land and sea,
bless those who work at sea.
Be with them in fair weather and foul,
in danger or distress.
Strengthen them when weary,
lift them up when down
and comfort them when far from their loved ones.
In this life, bring them safely to shore
and, in the life to come, welcome them to your kingdom.
For Jesus Christ's sake, Amen.

Collect Prayer for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity

Merciful God,
you have prepared for those who love you
such good things as pass our understanding:
pour into our hearts such love toward you
that we, loving you in all things and above all things,
may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire;
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.



Matthew 13:24-30. 36-43 - The Parable of Weeds among the Wheat

Jesus put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'

Jesus Explains the Parable of the Weeds

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, 'Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.' He answered, 'The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!'

Dear Friends,

Returning to Church

From this coming Sunday, 19th July, we are very much looking forward to resuming a limited schedule of worship in our Benefice churches. As my Newsletter set out last weekend, over the next seven weeks, to 30th August, we will offer one 10am Benefice service each week. Please see the table below to see which service will take place where. Our first gathering will be a service of Morning Prayer at Crawley, however we will also be offering a mix of Holy Communion and Morning Prayer in subsequent weeks. Caroline McAulay in our Benefice Office also uploads the website with prayers and new resources each day. Please visit our Website on: www.downsbenefice.org.

Short-Term Schedule for the reintroduction of Sunday services in The Downs Benefice - 19th July 2020 to 30th August 2020

	19 th July	26 th July	29 th July	2 nd August	9 th August	16 th August	23 rd August	30 th August
All Services will begin at 10am								
Chilbolton				HC		MP		
Crawley	MP							
Littleton			HC				HC	
Sparsholt	Closed	HC		Closed	MP			
Wherwell							Closed	HC
ALL SEATS MUST BE BOOKED VIA THE BENEFICE OFFICE								

I hope this table is self-explanatory, but if you do have any queries, please contact the **Benefice Office** on **(01962) 880845** or office@downsbenefice.org

Hopefully, this mix of services and prayer resources will meet individual needs.

It is our purpose to be a Christian community of prayer and praise and welcome, so it is important to take this tentative step and to embrace Christ's promise that *'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.'* For some of you, this opportunity to resume Sunday worship is a long awaited blessing, but others may feel anxious about venturing into church again. It is normal to feel concerned, and no-one will be judged if they are not ready to return yet. Each of us must make the decisions that are right for our own circumstances. For those who are unable to be in church, as I have set out above, we continue to offer resources on our Benefice Website, and Charlotte Nash offers a chance for you to join Morning Prayer from the Northumbria Community by Zoom each Tuesday morning.

Should you wish to read further, the Government has issued detailed [Guidance for the safe use of Places of Worship](#). Additional guidance has been produced by the [Church of England](#).

Reflecting on the changes

When the Government issued the order to suspend Public Worship back in March, we all experienced a decision which, whilst right, rational and loving towards our neighbour, was deeply painful. We have had to endure these difficult months without resort to the sanctuary of our parish churches and have, without doubt, been changed as a result. In some ways this has been a welcome shift. So we must praise the actions of the Holy Spirit, working ahead of us always, even in Lockdown!

We, in The Downs Benefice, have done our best to embrace the challenge presented by the Covid-19 crisis and to continue to live out our Christian calling by different means. It has not always been easy, but response to my weekly Newsletters and our 'virtual' services has been encouraging, as has your willingness to share music, books and resource ideas which Caroline has uploaded. I am particularly grateful for all your emails expressing delight in the ways we have kept our benefice of faith alive! We hope that you have found strength and comfort in being part of this community. Many people, who would not ordinarily worship with us in physical churches, have become a rich part of our electronic worshipping community. Amen to that.

The relaxation of Lockdown rules in these past couple of weeks, confronts us with a new set of decisions and it is right that we approach these with an equal amount of consideration and care. We are entering a time when rebuilding can begin, but when we also need to reflect on the events of this year, mourn our losses and contemplate how we have been changed. We cannot, nor should we, rush back to 'normality.' Progress will be gradual, but also intentional and considered. We will need to absorb and implement the new guidelines and everyone in the congregation will need time to adjust, as each person's personal circumstances allow.

I reiterate that, if you remain in an '*at risk*' category and need to shield, or simply do not yet feel comfortable with attending a physical church service, please do not feel guilty. My only concern is for your health and wellbeing. God knows you and loves you, and makes His face to shine upon you, whether you worship with us physically or not. And so do I. We will pray for all our church family who cannot be with us, and will rejoice when the time comes that we all *can* come together.

You will find the [Morning Prayer](#) and [Holy Communion](#) booklets on our Website, should you wish to join us from the safety of your home.

Worship in church

For those attending worship in the coming weeks, you will notice a number of changes and you will be required to follow certain guidelines to ensure everyone's health and safety. We have carried out Risk Assessments for each parish church based on the guidelines issued by the Government and the Church of England, and have taken the following necessary measures:

- **Physical distancing:** Everyone is reminded to continue observing the Government's guidance on physical distance and to maintain a distance of 2m wherever possible between people of different households. Spacing will be marked out on the pews in church to help you to do this. You are asked to avoid physical contact with people from outside your household (such as shaking hands) and to leave church directly after the service.
- **Capacity:** Ensuring people can maintain a safe distance within the church will mean that our seating capacity is significantly reduced. All seats must be booked in advance – **Please contact the Benefice Office to book seats on (01962) 880845 or office@downsbenefice.org.uk** All seats will be booked in a way that tries to ensure each person or household has access to at least one of their preferred services.
- **PPE & Hygiene:** Hand sanitiser will be available in church and everyone is reminded of the importance of regular hand washing. The church is being cleaned regularly and will be cleaned on Friday evenings in preparation for Sunday worship.
- **Lavatories:** Toilet facilities will NOT be available in any parish church during this phased return.
- **Face Coverings:** The use of face masks is not obligatory in church, but it would be appreciated if you wore one, as an act of consideration for others, particularly once they become obligatory in all shops on 25th July 2020.
- **Orders of Service:** For the time being, all service materials will be printed in a single-use pew sheet. You are asked to please take these sheets away with you at the end of the service and dispose of them at home.
- **Music:** Sadly, the current regulations do not allow singing in acts of worship.
- **Collections:** We encourage you, should you wish, to make any donations using the plate which will be located at the back of church. Please speak to a Churchwarden or call the Benefice Office on **(01962) 880845** to set up a regular donation via the secure Parish Giving Scheme.
- **People who are symptomatic:** Everyone is reminded that the Government's guidance on testing, tracing and self-isolation remains unchanged. If you have **symptoms of Covid-19 (a new continuous cough, a temperature or a loss of taste or smell)**, you should **NOT come to church**. Instead, you should self-isolate and immediately seek medical advice.

With every blessing, and with my continuing prayers,

Jax

Revd Jax Machin, Rector of The Downs Benefice