

## SCRIPTURE FOR 2019

**Blossom Where You Are Planted** (1 Corinthians 7:20–24)

What is the mission of the church? Matthew's Gospel tells us that our commitment before Jesus is to go out, make disciples, baptise all who seek Him and teach all who will hear His truth.

In 2018, our parishes have been committed to this work - sharing the love of Christ with others and encouraging people to be the best they can be, serving in and through the Holy Spirit. This comes with my gratitude and thanksgiving for all that you do in service to the Lord, making a reality of the church to people who have little or no understanding of Christian faith so much more than bricks and mortar. We have been where people are, where they need us to be, at times of great sadness and of celebration – in all avenues of life and death. In weddings, baptisms and funerals, we have been opening people's eyes to the love of God for them personally. Our Prayer Chain and Parish and Care-Home Visiting are flourishing, meeting the needs of those in difficult spiritual, physical and emotional situations and, by our walking alongside them, offering Jesus' compassionate love. Our Lent Lectures drew remarkable people to share their fascinating life and faith experiences, giving all who attended new perspectives on how we can live out Jesus' teachings in our own lives. Their honesty about the difficulties of the situations they have faced and the ways by which they have been challenged by their faith were uplifting and empowering. Some of us found great joy in spending time together at Rydal House in Cumbria, walking in the beauty of God's glorious creation and deepening bonds of Christian fellowship. Mother and Toddler Groups, Messy Church and the many school services across the year have helped our young people to similarly grow in understanding of the Christian faith. We have been particularly blessed by the Children of Sparsholt and Wherwell Primary Schools leading services in our churches. Out of the mouth of babes has come a deepening of faith and discipleship across all ages and backgrounds. The fellowship of celebrating the seasons of our Christian year has, once again, been memorable. Benefice mission activities with Karis Kids were boosted by Carol and Alice Coleman's visit to Uganda. Our Summer Fete's were blessed with glorious weather and good crowds. We have had some lively special services for Pets and Harvest; breath-taking results from Auction of Promises; and the Trinity Service at Northwood Park welcoming Jill and Greg Vine from MAFF to share their very real ministry in East Africa was at once moving and motivating. Our missional spirituality has brought forth some excellent Peace and Wholeness services, prayer gatherings and Meditations across the year along with a Deanery Half-Night of Prayer at Crawley. All Souls remembrance, Advent and Lent meditations sat alongside a number of beautiful choral offerings – the highlights for me being the Wherwell Singers' Advent Compline and Winchester Cathedral Boys Choir at Sparsholt for Lenten Evensong in March. All this has happened in a flurry of regular services and national events such as the Centenary commemorations for the end of World War One. National safeguarding and GDPR regulations have been incorporated into our benefice administration across the year – my thanks to all who have worked hard to effect this. We have been blessed with yet more disciples coming forward as Licenced Lay Workers under the diocesan BCM training programme. Our congratulations to Carol Coleman, and to Di Payne and Andrew Kent who undertook a diocesan conversion course to update their previous training. One of the moving experiences of my year was to witness four of our parishioners being Confirmed in Winchester Cathedral on Easter Saturday. Our love and prayers are with Nia Davies, Kiera Bateson, Jenna Bunce and Robin Allardyce.

As we go forward into 2019, the Holy Spirit encourages us all to continue in this good work and to blossom where we are planted. Whoever and wherever we are, we each have the opportunity to share with others what it means to live the Christian way – as we respond generously with a cup of tea for a friend in need or cooking meals for Winchester Nightshelter; popping into Boaz to buy some of their delicious produce and sharing the joy of the community as we do so; in prayer for our fragile world and in our stewardship of God's creation. These are just a handful of ways in which we can reach out and dig deep in mission-shaped ways, encouraging others to find the joy we have discovered in Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

Yours in Christ, **Revd Jax Machin** Rector, The Downs Benefice 1<sup>st</sup> March 2019