

**Third Sunday after Trinity
Sunday, 28th June 2020**



'Muntjac Deer, St Catherine's Churchyard'

Dear Friends,

My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to slip; your Protector will not slumber. (Psalm 121: 2-3)

Earlier this morning, I looked out of the Rectory window to see a gorgeous toddler slip and fall as they made a faltering run from their mother's side as she prepared to install them in her car. Though I could see the inevitability of the child's fall, I was too far away to scoop them up in my arms and save the day. A considerable amount of wailing ensued. But the mother calmly continued with her task of stowing a buggy in the boot and clicking a child car-seat into place. Only then did she turn to the child, who by now was an inferno of recriminatory tears! The mother had let her child wallow a little in the consequences of their actions. Assessing there to be no serious injury at stake, her seeming indifference to what had happened forced the child to live a little while in the situation: a precious lesson, allowing autonomous growth and learning to flourish in the young mind, yet all the while holding them in her unconditional maternal love. As she scooped the poor unfortunate babe up into her strong and protective arms, I glimpsed something of the immeasurable love of God, about which the psalmist, David, reassures himself and us to hold true: *'He will not allow your foot to slip; your Protector will not slumber.'* Such is the generosity of our Father's love for us and such is His personal concern for all people to flourish and grow equally.

I have today taken the funeral of a dear personal friend who, despite suffering with debilitating health problems since childhood, managed to live her life with a radiant joy which touched the hearts and lives of all who knew her. I think her illness taught her that each second of our lives count; that she couldn't overcome her suffering except through trusting her life to God, knowing He would hold her throughout the trials and joys of her life's journey. Listening to the evening news on the car radio as

I drove back from the Crematorium, I was saddened to hear of yet more racism against black people, this time at the hands of British police officers who should have known better than to abuse the trust two young girls had placed in them. Two Metropolitan Police officers have been arrested for allegedly taking pictures of the bodies of two sisters found murdered in a London park and circulating them to members of the public. Tragically, the girls were the daughters of The Venerable Mina Smallman, the Church of England's first female black and minority ethnic Archdeacon. We must lift them all up in our prayers and resolve to stand against the sorts of injustices which threaten to distort the right to justice, peace and harmony in our society for us all.



'Te Deum Laudamus' by Margaret Zylla

Reflecting on this desperately sad news, I should like to share with you another image which I have been blessed to witness this week, which offers something of a counterpoint to the alleged actions of those two police officers.

Earlier this week, I found myself in the A&E department of Winchester Hospital with a dislocated knee, having earlier slipped and fallen out of my bath after taking a shower. As a result, I have been able to experience first-hand the phenomenal work of the NHS during Coronavirus Lockdown. Courteous, gentle and incredibly generous, each and every one of the nurses, doctors, radiologists and admin staff I met were selfless in their concern and treatment of me. Philip and Anne Meitner's wonderful daughter deserves a special mention! *'He will not allow your foot to slip; your Protector will not slumber ...!'*

Whilst waiting to be seen in a specially laid out 'socially distanced' A&E reception area, two black police officers arrived to check in a white man in his mid-thirties, to whom both the officers were hand-cuffed on either side. No social distancing possible for these officers, (save for the obligatory face masks we all wore), as they gently sat their charge down in a row of three seats. The lad began to tell the officers his life-story. Brought up in a succession of Care Homes and violent family relationships, this poor man had succumbed to alcohol and drugs and the inevitability of a string of convictions and prison stretches. Sitting in A&E, he had no recollection of the recent events which had led to him being charged with violent assault, save that, now sobered up, he felt great remorse and regret for his actions. The police officers were wonderful with him: supportive, non-judgemental and deeply generous in risking their own health to sit so closely alongside him in these times of viral pandemic. The lad fell asleep with his head resting on the shoulder of one officer. As I was called into a consulting room, I caught the gaze of the other policeman and was able to whisper my thanks and blessings to them both for the evident compassion their charge was receiving, perhaps for the first time in his life. Tears welled in the officer's eyes as he gave me a gentle nod of his head. But for my early morning slip of the foot, I should never have had the privilege of witnessing the humility and grace of these men, or have come close to understanding the sadness of the young man's life. And without a dodgy knee to focus on, I doubt I'd have ever managed to navigate the emotions of a dear friend's funeral.



'The Good Samaritan' - Rembrandt

Psalm 121 and Matthew's Gospel reading this week teach us a fundamental truth. First that God's generosity to us is unconditional; that he will not let us stumble and fall. Second, and this is what Jesus is teaching the twelve disciples in Chapter 10 as he prepares them to be sent out to take His Good News to the people, that whilst the earth is our home, the gift of Creation which God has given us is not to be abused. In return for His generosity, God expects us to live our lives in gratitude and service – before Him and between each other. He encourages us to live on earth rejoicing in the beauty of our world and all its creatures, and in return, demands of us that we live in that same reciprocal generosity – that we tend the earth and care for its peoples. The Prophet Micah sums up this reciprocal action perfectly in his template for a faithful human life: *'And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.'* (Micah 6:8).



'The Boy Jesus in the Temple' – He Qi

Jesus tells the disciples: 'If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.' Every unselfish action we offer out to our fellow pilgrims along the journey of life is noted by God, just as if we were giving of ourselves to Him directly. The mother teaching her child lessons in life; my friend living every second of her life in praise and thanksgiving rather than in self-absorbed pity; our NHS staff working against the odds to guide us all safely through Coronavirus; the police officers showing compassion to their detainee – all these are profoundly important actions of selfless generosity into which we are all called. We are not asked to be unselfish to the extent that we act recklessly with our lives, but that we value the gift of life itself and use every second of it to work for the good of each other and the planet we have been asked to steward. God notices. God knows. God will not let the foot slip of anyone who learns from whom their help truly comes!

Given the disruptions of my week, this newsletter is unavoidably short, for which I apologise. I urge you to watch the Café Church video Carol Coleman has yet again faithfully produced for us, in the 'Generous June' series from the Dioceses of Winchester and Sheffield, which is designed to help us understand the generosity of God and how His great love for us can influence all aspects of our day to day lives.

With love in the generosity of Christ,

Jax

Rector, The Downs Benefice



Psalm 121 - Assurance of God's Protection

I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From where does my help come?
My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.

He will not allow your foot to slip;
your Protector will not slumber.
Behold, the Protector of Israel
will not slumber or sleep.

The LORD is your keeper;
the LORD is the shade on your right hand.
The sun will not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.

The LORD will guard you from all evil;
He will preserve your soul.
The LORD will watch over your coming and going,
both now and forevermore.

Collect Prayer for the Third Sunday after Trinity

Almighty God, you have broken the tyranny of sin and have sent the Spirit of your Son into our hearts whereby we call you Father: give us grace to dedicate our freedom to your service, that we and all creation may be brought to the glorious liberty of the children of God; 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.



Pentecost Icon – Source Unknown

Matthew 10: 40-42 (NIV) - Jesus Teaches the Twelve

Jesus said to the disciples: 'Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.'