

**Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity
Sunday, 6th September 2020**



Dear Friends,

'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'
(Matthew 18: 20)

This morning, I ate my first fresh fig of the year. Indescribably delicious, figs hold a special place in my heart! Their advent in late summer heralds the changing season from August into bountiful autumn, just as the rich flavour of dried figs herald Advent and the coming of Christmas. Writer, Deborah Lawrenson, in her novel 'The Lantern' describes figs beautifully:

It was one of those days so intensely alive and aromatic you could hear as well as smell the fig tree in the courtyard. Wasps hummed in the leaves as the fruit ripened and split; globes of warm dark purple were dropping, ripping open as they landed with sodden gasps. The pulse that pumped out the sweet, heady scent was quickening as I bent down to pick the fallen figs, then pulled them apart to find insects were already drunk on their scarlet hearts.



'Still Life with Figs' by Julian Mellow-Smith

The unctuous joy of figs, heavy and velvet in the palm of my hand, has me sinking to my knees in praise and wonder at the riches of this world. God's love for us feels very close.



'In His Glory' by Yongsung Kim

In today's Gospel reading, Matthew draws us to Jesus' loving heart on the subject of conflict resolution. For those of us who have been following the lectionary readings week by week, this is a somewhat jarring departure from the path we've been on. Suddenly, we've jumped from listening to Jesus as He tells his disciples of His coming suffering and death and resurrection. Our lectionary has also jumped over Jesus' Transfiguration in Chapter 17 - in which Peter, John and James have a taste of the glory that will be Christ's once His suffering is complete.

Today, we land half-way through Chapter 18 after a great deal of argument amongst the disciples about which of them would be the greatest amongst them in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus has to explain that the disciples' status or perceived position is not what counts. Chapter 18 also documents Jesus' teaching the disciples how to avoid sinning against other people: against temptation, against judging others - and now He is teaching them how to handle situations where other people sin against *us*.



In this passage, we hear Jesus talking about conflict and how we should handle disagreement – using the tools of empathy and love not the weapons of hatred and violence. When someone wrongs us, we often do the opposite of what Jesus recommends. We turn away in hurt or anger or resentment or revenge. By contrast, Jesus tells us that we should go to that person *first* and seek redress, as difficult as that may be. Of course, there are also circumstances when this is not the best idea at all – and we must go to the proper authorities, but Jesus yet encourages us to take this step within the prayerful support of the family of the church. Equally, there are times when this is not the best idea either as the Church is also guilty of much historic abuse in God’s name – we only have to look to the Crusades for that!

Throughout this chapter, Jesus tells the disciples that what counts is how our lives might be transfigured by living in His own Godly image. He explains that what *really does* transfigure us is in taking a long hard look at ourselves, being honest about our own faults rather than the faults we see in others. This means setting our own lives straight by listening to Jesus’ word, in sharing the Eucharistic meal He gives us, and then in living out Christ-shaped values with others by our behaviour and example the way of Christ, which is to love one another.



'Blue Evergreens' by Iris Scott

What I hope is reassuring to us all is twofold. First, we can be reassured that, even with Jesus right there with them, the disciples still tripped up, still judged each other, worked from a place of personal pride and power rather than out of love for the other. The second reassurance is that Jesus understands! Jesus showers the disciples (and us) with compassion as he guides us all back onto the right path with Him. Time and time again!! We should always remember that wherever disagreement arises, God is there with us.

Jesus recognises that sometimes, something as unintentional as an unkind comment or an ill-judged gesture even between family and friends can escalate into conflict beyond all comprehension. Jesus tells us that when God is brought into the centre of any dispute between Christians, there can only be one outcome: LOVE!

Isaiah 1:18 and 19 tells us: 'Come now, let's settle this,' says the LORD. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool. If you will only obey me, you will have plenty to eat. But if you turn away and refuse to listen, you will be devoured by the sword of your enemies.'



'Though Thy Sins Be As Scarlet' by Joel Kirk Richards

When we listen to the Lord, laying down our own selfish or negative patterns of behaviour, trusting Jesus with our futures, something rather wonderful happens. *'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'* When we are obedient to God, Jesus will forgive us and remove even the most indelible of stains. And where two or three believers gather, forgiven and filled with the Holy Spirit, they become a powerful force for good.

We begin to see the goodness in each other; our mood lightens and our outlook brightens. Ridding ourselves of conflict and hatred gives space for us to see the many blessings of our lives, just as we have been doing during Lockdown. As Bernard Fink writes, we have 'come to value the tiny things – moments hardly noticed and long forgotten... Yet now, these memories are transformed: sparkling with the inner light of the love they contain.'



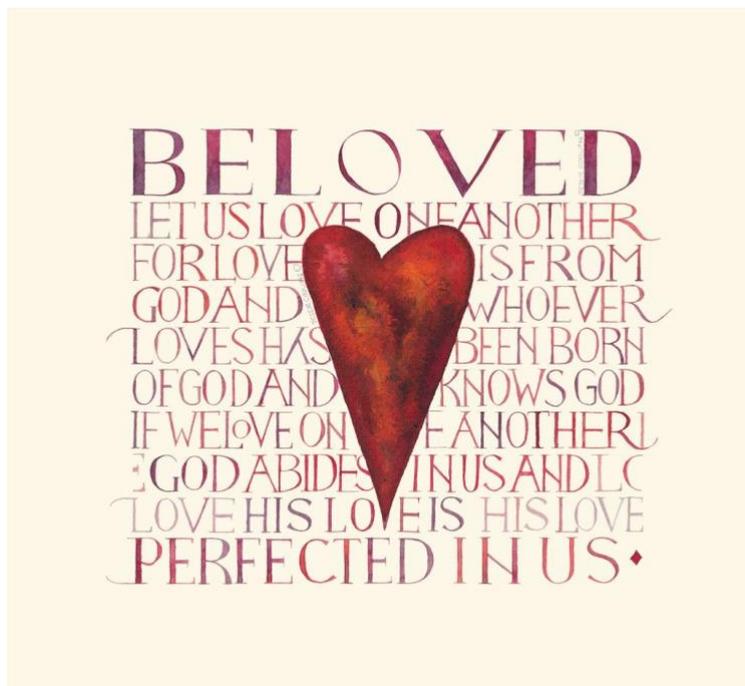
'Still Life with Figs' by Pierre Auguste Renoir

In such a moment of revelation, a simple, natural and perfectly beautiful fig has the gift of illuminating the depth of God's love for us. We are surrounded by His bountiful generosity – constant pointers to the lengths our Creator God will go to love us and sustain our lives in every dimension. All we have to do is love Him and each other for our world to be transformed.

Yours, in the reassurance of Christ,

Jax

Rector, The Downs Benefice



'Beloved' from 1 John 4: 7-12 by Tess Cooling

Schedule of Services for September and October 2020

Remember that our churches are open for daily prayer and for Sunday services - please see our website for more details at: <http://downsbenefice.org/>

All seats at our services need to be booked in advance. Please see the table below and book your seats by either calling or emailing the **Benefice Office** on **(01962) 880845** or office@downsbenefice.org.uk

	Chilbolton	Crawley	Littleton	Sparsholt	Wherwell
6 th Sept	10am HC		11am Outside + 'Show'		CLOSED after Wedding on 5th
13 th Sept		10am HC		10am Morning Prayer	10am Morning Prayer
16 th Sept (W)			9.30am Mid Week HC		
20 th Sept	10am Morning Prayer			10am HC	
	12.30pm Airborne Forces Prayers @ Stonefield Park				
27 th Sept		10am Morning Prayer	10am HC		10am HC
4 th Oct	10am Harvest			10am HC	
7 th Oct (W)			9.30am Mid Week HC		
11 th Oct		8am HC	10 am Morning Prayer	10am Morning Prayer	4pm Evening Prayer
18 th Oct	4pm Evening Prayer		10am HC		
25 th Oct	10am Holy Communion	10am 4 th Sunday Worship			
Key		Lay-Led services			
		Holy Communion			

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.



Matthew 18:15-20 - Reproving Another Who Sins

'If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'