

**Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity
Sunday, 20th September 2020**



Dear Friends,

'So the last will be first, and the first will be last.' (Matthew 20: 16)

Last weekend, on Radio 4's flagship morning chat show 'Saturday Live,' sandwiched between some funny anecdotes from Charles Spencer on the fate and fortunes of his illustrious predecessors, I was deeply struck by an interview with a young woman, Sophie Carrigill, who is currently the co-Captain of Britain's women's wheelchair basketball team. I make no apologies that some of you have heard this story before, such is the effect it has had on me!

Now 26, Sophie was being interviewed about the tragic and life-changing car accident which befell her in 2010 during a family holiday to the United States when she was just sixteen. In the blink of an eye, the injuries she sustained left her paralysed from the waist down, and facing the reality that, not only would she never walk again, but that her hopes of the Olympic Gold she was tipped to win were also dashed. Yet, by the summer of 2012, Carrigill was on the Paralympic Inspiration programme seeking inspiration at the London Games. The rest is history!



Sophie Carrigill at the 2018 World Championships - Yorkshire Post

What caught my attention was that, during the interview, the presenter was desperate to twist what Sophie referred to as 'an unfortunate accident' into a sensationalist opportunity for blame. 'Hadn't the driver been drinking?' he asked. 'Yes,' replied Sophie, but only a small beer at lunchtime. He was tested and found to be under the legal drink drive limit.' Sophie went on to explain to the bemused presenter that, devastating though the situation had been, it was nonetheless simply an unfortunate accident. 'It's now 10 years since the accident and I've come out the other side much stronger, more powerful and more determined. I also really appreciate the small things in life - a nice summer's day, time with friends and family, because those things could have been taken away from me.'

We can all learn much from Sophie's remarkable maturity. Her generosity of spirit in her acceptance of her situation and her gratitude for everything she has been blessed with, points us to an understanding of what Jesus meant when He said *'the last will be first, and the first will be last.'*



'The First Shall be Last' by Justin Kunz

Jesus uses today's parable to illustrate how entrance to God's Kingdom is by grace.

God is the Landowner and believers are the workers. It is a story of perceived fairness on the part of the workers, that they should receive their just rewards for the hours of work they had undertaken. More than that, it is about their sense of injustice that the Landowner should choose to be as generous to other workers who they felt had not deserved the rewards for their labour equal to *their own* hard-won pay.

Jesus is speaking to those of us who might feel superior in their relationship with God and the church to others. It also speaks clearly to new Christians: reassuring them of God's grace to *all* who turn to Him.

Jesus asks us *'Are you jealous because I am generous?'*

His message is not about our being rewarded for faithful service or our expectations as to how our lives should pan out, but about salvation. It is a strong teaching about grace and God's generosity. We should not begrudge those who turn to Christ, even during their last earthly moments. Instead we should rejoice with them and for them. In this way there will be many people we don't expect to see in God's Kingdom. The criminal who repented will be there, alongside people who have believed and served all their lives. God's grace will bless each of them who believe with salvation.

This parable summons us to believe that God's justice, played out in the world, is not limited to human conceptions, where reward is commensurate with effort or merit. Instead, mercy and goodness challenge us to move beyond the limits of human justice. When we separate ourselves from others by our expectations and entitlements and the fear of changing our hearts to look beyond ourselves, we cut ourselves off from God's mercy. As we draw to the autumn of this tumultuous year, let us be a faithful people, rejoicing like Sophie Carrigill, in the immeasurable riches of the lives with which we have been blessed. Despite all the hand clapping at the beginning of the year, so many people around us continue to work hard, long hours for the good of our society, yet with no prospect of being paid a fair wage. Even worse, many of them are facing redundancy. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.



'Hospital Worker in Despair' from the 'Hold Still' Project - Kensington Palace

Perhaps it is a salutary warning for us, as we are faced with the prospect of diminishing incomes across our parishes and curtailed services during this time of Coronavirus, that we should think with God's generosity; remembering all the ways that God has been gracious and merciful to us. Then perhaps we will be better placed to open ourselves up to the needs of others in our society that we might *a//* be transformed by God's generosity.

Yours, in the grace of Christ,

Jax

Rector, The Downs Benefice

Schedule of Services for September and October 2020

Our churches are open for regular 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 |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 20 th Sept | 10am - Morning Prayer | | | 10am - Holy Communion | |
| 27 th Sept | | 10am - Harvest | 10am - Holy Communion | | 10am - Holy Communion for Harvest |
| 4 th Oct | 10am - Harvest | | | 10am - Holy Communion | |
| 7 th Oct (W) | | | 9.30am - Mid Week Holy Communion | | |
| 11 th Oct | | 8am - Holy Communion | 10am - Harvest | 10am - Harvest | 4pm - Evening Prayer |
| 18 th Oct | 4pm - Evening Prayer | | 10am - Communion | | |
| 25 th Oct | 10am - Holy Communion | 10am - 4th Sunday Worship | | | |



Collect Prayer for the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity

God, who in generous mercy sent the Holy Spirit upon your Church in the burning fire of your love: grant that your people may be fervent in the fellowship of the Gospel that, always abiding in you, they may be found steadfast in faith and active in service; 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.



Matthew 20: 1-16 - The Labourers in the Vineyard

Jesus told this Parable: 'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.'

When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'