

**Second Sunday before Advent,
Sunday, 15th November 2020**



Dear Friends,

'To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance.' (Matthew 25: 29)

There has been a great deal of grumbling and sour grapes out there this week, generated in the main part by those who have had their fill of Coronavirus restrictions. Their anger might well be considered justifiable, given that many folks have endured months of self-isolation and deprivation. However, the truly dreadful statistics which reveal the UK has now reached 50 thousand deaths to Coronavirus (the highest death rate in Europe) supports the Government's Autumn Lockdown in being equally justifiable.

Across the pond, a certain Donald J Trump has also responded with petulant bad grace to Joe Biden's victory in the US election. Yet, for many of us, this result comes as a great relief! Worries of global economic downturns swirl around news of breakthrough COVID-19 swab tests and 93% effective vaccines. Sometimes it feels difficult to see the wood for the trees; hard to hear good news amidst so much negativity. Hard to imagine how Jesus' words might have veracity in our modern times: *'To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance.'*



'Stormy Weather' by Judith Handford

And yet, shining through the stormy weather of this past week, there have been four rather remarkable exemplars of Jesus' message which I believe should point us safely out into His marvellous light.

The first was the Centenary commemoration in Westminster Abbey at the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior which took place on Armistice Day this Wednesday, 11th November at 11am. In a necessarily scaled-back though deeply moving ceremony, Prince Charles knelt to lay a wreath of roses and bay leaves which replicated the one laid by his Great-grandfather, King George V on 11th November 1920.

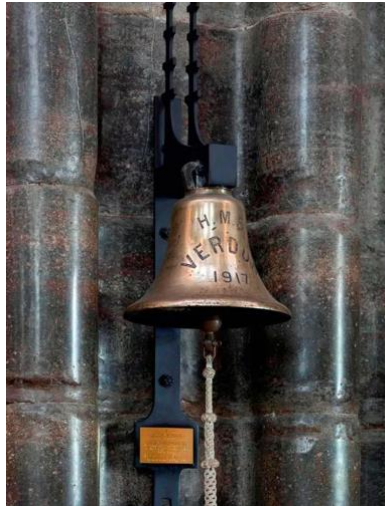


George V places a wreath coffin of Unknown Warrior, 11th November 1920
Image © 2020 Dean and Chapter of Westminster

The idea of a symbolic tomb to commemorate the dead of World War One, whose place of death was not known, or whose bodies remained unidentified, came from British Army Chaplain, The Reverend David Railton, who had himself served on the Western Front. The body of the unknown serviceman was transported from France to Dover on HMS Verdun, and on the morning of 11 November 1920, the second anniversary of the Armistice which marked the end World War One, was taken to Westminster Abbey where it was buried at the West End of the nave. The grave was filled with soil brought from the French battlefields, and the text inscribed on the tomb was taken from 2 Chronicles 24:16: *'They buried him among the kings, because he had done good toward God and toward his house.'*

For a hundred years, the Unknown Warrior has served as the ultimate symbol of sacrifice and loss. Their selflessness in the ultimate giving of their life for their fellow man is an example of our Gospel message today. The person who assiduously in service to God, using their time and talents in faithful service to God's people will be rewarded whereas those who bear no fruit for His kingdom here on earth will be punished.

Scrapped in 1946, after three decades of remarkable service, the bell of HMS Verdun was brought to Westminster Abbey to guard over its own final charge, the Unknown Warrior.



The Verdun Bell at the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, Westminster Abbey
Image © 2020 Dean and Chapter of Westminster

The second exemplar of this week is a moving account by Holocaust survivor, Eddie Jaku, who has marked his 100th birthday by publishing his memoir, *'The Happiest Man on Earth.'* When asked how he could possibly call himself the happiest man on earth having survived the horrors of Kristallnacht and the death of his parents in Auschwitz.



Eddie Jaku – radiomitre.cienradios.com

Seven decades on, Eddie Jaku still carries the tattoo engraved on his forearm: 172338. Eddie says *'I'm the happiest man because I was condemned to die. When they put the number on my arm, I became a number and I thought I would never make it through the war.'* But survive he did.

Eddie's philosophy has been to live his life *'doing for others what the Nazi's didn't do for me. They wanted to break me and make me miserable, so I have lived my life doing what they didn't do to me,'* pouring out the opposite values of hope, health and happiness into the lives of all around him.

Listening to him talking, I was touched by Eddie's concern for the generations who have followed him who don't take the time to smell the roses. He says: *'One flower is my garden, and one good friend is my world.'* Eddie encourages us all to value the positive blessings of our lives, no matter what we may each have suffered. When he was rescued by allied troops at the end of the war, Eddie weighed 28 kilos and had survived by scavenging for slugs and snails. He believes his victory over Nazism has been that he has lived to 100 years of age, and that he has devoted his life to happiness and love. His exemplary legacy is to tell us there is no place in our lives for hatred or bitterness. 'They are a disease, which destroy your enemy and in the process they destroy you too. You can be happy if you want to be happy. And you can be grateful for what you *do* have. It is in your hands.' May we all treasure each other with the same values of kindness, care and respect that Eddie has pledged his life to do.

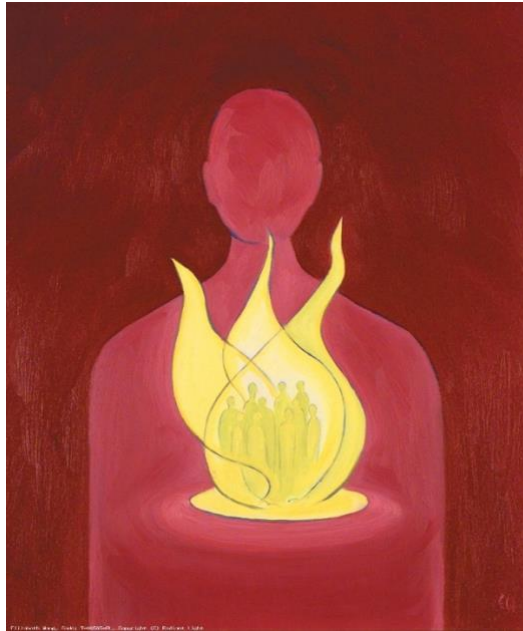


'The Good Samaritan' by Ladislav Záborský

The final two exemplars of Christ's call to serve God, bearing fruit for His kingdom are somewhat closer to home. This comes with my heartfelt thanks to each and every one of you who has sent donations to Karis Kids (either direct or by cheque via my Benefice Office). Karis Kids is a Winchester based charity, which works to support the poor and destitute in the slums of Kampala, Uganda. I had been asked whether our Benefice could raise £1,500 to support our sister Parish of St John's, Okuvu in Kampala.

The vicar, Reverend John, and his staff are paid only when their congregation is able to attend church, and this has been made impossible since March because of Lockdown restriction. As a result, by October, many people have been unable to work and there is a great deal of suffering within the communities.

Thanks to the abundance of God's grace at work in your generous spirits, Sparsholt Schoolchildren have raised a phenomenal £800 and, together with private donations, we have reached our goal of £1,500. Praise God and bless you for your faithful response. If, on reading this, you might still wish to donate, please contact the Benefice office on (01962) 880845 for details. Though we have reached our target, the ceaseless work of Karis Kids goes on.



'Radiant Light' by Elizabeth Wang

Last but by no means least in my list of exemplars, this week has seen the 'virtual' gathering of Churchwardens from across the diocese for the Archdeacon's Visitations. This is a legal mechanism through which churchwardens are admitted to their posts, and equally important, to thank each churchwarden for all they have done and are doing in service before God and for our churches and their parishes. This comes with my personal thanks and appreciation for the humbling support and help of each of my Churchwardens and those who work alongside and in lieu of them. I certainly could not do my work without you, and in the light of your faithfulness so our communities thrive in the brighter light of Christ your ministries among us point to.

Almighty and everlasting God,
By whose spirit the whole body of the church is governed and sanctified:
Hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people;
That in our vocation and ministry
We may serve You in holiness and truth
To the glory of your name. Amen.

Yours, in the abundance of Christ,

Jax

Rector, The Downs Benefice



The Unknown Soldier by Ralph McTell – commissioned for the Centenary

More than fifty thousand names
 Are carved on Ypres' Menin gate
 Of soldiers who have no known graves
 Just their destiny and date
 Witness and last testament
 Name and rank and regiment
 Is now all that survives
 From so many squandered lives
 And for every name inscribed
 The poor bereaved were left to mourn
 The passing of all those who died
 With no white cross on tended lawn
 No place to go to contemplate
 The sacrifice this wicked waste
 No footprint left to show where once they trod
 Allegedly known unto god
 From Ypres Arras Aisne and Somme
 Six unknown soldiers were exhumed
 A blindfold general picked one man
 And reverently they brought him home
 Six black horses drew the hearse
 Through silent London crowds immersed
 In deepest thought belief or wishful prayer
 That it might be their own boy there
 The metal tyres on the carriage wheels
 Played the tuneless requiem

The sky as grey as bayonet steel
Above the sombre hatless men
One more enemy to kill
That remaining sense of guilt
That through it all somehow they had survived
Returned to mothers sweethearts wives
Familiar streets their own backyards
Their medals and all praise ignored
Relieved to be his honour guard
And walk with him their true reward
While far from pomp and circumstance
Across the autumn fields of France
The trenches start to slowly fill and fade
The bloody page turned by the ploughman's blade
Thankfully we'll never know
If he was constant strong or frail
Scared or brave in equal parts
Country tanned or city pale
A carefree youth or thoughtful lad
Not wholly good or wholly bad
A bomb does not judge how you played your part
A bullet stops a lions heart
With softest cloth and gentlest broom
To sweep and wipe cathedral dust
Like dried tears from this marble tomb
Take care for he was one of us
In perfect irony and grief
The bride's bouquet becomes a wreath
And wrapped beneath dark angels folded wings
Tommy Atkins rests with kings.



Schedule of Services

All previously scheduled services are cancelled until further notice.

Churches Open for Private Prayer

Whilst Government guidelines prohibit our holding Sunday services during this Autumn Lockdown, our churches are currently allowed to be open for individual prayer at the following times:

St Mary the Less, Chilbolton	9am – 4pm, Sundays
St Mary's, Crawley	10am – 4pm, Wednesdays & Sundays
St Catherine's, Littleton	10am – 4pm, Wednesday & Saturdays
St Stephen's, Sparsholt	10am – 4pm, Wednesdays & Sundays
St Peter & Holy Cross, Wherwell	10am – 4pm, Sundays

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have issued a call for a **Month of Prayer** in response to the Lockdown, and across the diocese we will be answering their call to pray for our nation and to serve our communities. You can find resources and information about the diocesan response to the call for prayer on our Benefice website.

Please also see our website for updates and more prayer and service resources at: <http://downsbenefice.org/>



Collect Prayer for the Second Sunday before Advent

Heavenly Father,
whose blessed Son was revealed to destroy the works of the devil
and to make us the children of God and heirs of eternal life:
grant that we, having this hope,
may purify ourselves even as he is pure;
that when he shall appear in power and great glory
we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom;
where he is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

Matthew 25:14-30 - Parable of the Three Servants

Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. He gave five bags of silver to one, two bags of silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities. He then left on his trip.

The servant who received the five bags of silver began to invest the money and earned five more. The servant with two bags of silver also went to work and earned two more. But the servant who received the one bag of silver dug a hole in the ground and hid the master's money. After a long time their master returned from his trip and called them to give an account of how they had used his money. The servant to whom he had entrusted the five bags of silver came forward with five more and said, 'Master, you gave me five bags of silver to invest, and I have earned five more.'

The master was full of praise. 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!' The servant who had received the two bags of silver came forward and said, 'Master, you gave me two bags of silver to invest, and I have earned two more.' The master said, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!'

Then the servant with the one bag of silver came and said, 'Master, I knew you were a harsh man, harvesting crops you didn't plant and gathering crops you didn't cultivate. I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. Look, here is your money back.' But the master replied, 'You wicked and lazy servant! If you knew I harvested crops I didn't plant and gathered crops I didn't cultivate, why didn't you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have got some interest on it.'

Then he ordered, 'Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one with the ten bags of silver. To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away. Now throw this useless servant into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'