

'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead'. Those words of Jesus hit home, don't they? And just as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus at Easter so each Sunday is an affirmation of that same celebration: we proclaim that we are convinced that Jesus lives, and at his invitation we are united with him in bread and wine. Crucially, at the end of our worship we are sent out to 'love and serve the Lord', inviting others through word and deed to become similarly convinced.

Now the overall theme of our readings today is how we 'own' the good things God has given us. It's a fitting theme as we prepare for our Harvest Festival next week, and then for thinking about all that Stewardship means the week after.

This heightened awareness of 'ownership' and 'sharing' is part of what shapes our values, and as Christians we are called to live out a generous set of values, reflecting the generous love of God for all people.

You will be aware that this week the Church of England bishops issued a joint statement, calling for respect on all sides amid growing acrimony over the debate on Britain's withdrawal from the EU. The statement includes these points:

'In the last few days, the use of language, both in debates and outside Parliament, has been unacceptable.

'We should speak to others with respect. And we should also listen. We should do this especially with the poor, with the marginalised, and with those whose voices are often not heard in our national conversation. We should not denigrate, patronise or ignore the honest views of fellow citizens, but seek to respect their opinions, their participation in society, and their votes.

'The teachings of Jesus Christ call for us to be generous and humble servants; virtues which are for all leaders, whatever their faith.

'Our concern is also for the structure and the constitution of the United Kingdom. To use the words of Jesus, we must renew the structures that enable us to "love one another". Changes to our principles and values of government, if necessary, should be through careful planning and consultation.

'It is easy to descend into division and abuse – climbing out and finding unity again takes far longer. Further entrenching our divisions, whether from

uncertainty or from partisanship, is not worthy of our country nor the leadership we now need. We are a body that understands from our own experience the dangers of division. It is our view and most solemn warning that we must find better ways of acting.'

It is good to see the national Church, through the bishops, taking an active, prophetic part in our national life at this turbulent time. As fellow members with them of the same Church our words and actions must seek to heal division as we, to quote the Old Testament prophet Micah endeavour to, 'do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God'.

For many of us, an important part of life which brings people together is sport. Right now, we have two world class events taking place: the rugby world cup in Japan and the cycling world championships in Yorkshire! Rugby – traditionally described as a "thugs' game played by gentlemen" does a good job at promoting a friendly rivalry – and respect for authority and opponent alike. Perhaps unexpectedly, it also throws up occasional nuggets of wisdom, like this statement from Eddie Jones, England's coach: 'pressure only comes from not knowing what you're doing'.

I like that idea. As Christians, we should know what we're doing: we've been given all the affirmation, all the teaching – all the coaching – we need to be able to handle any situation; to know how to conduct ourselves.

And cycling? I wonder what the first thing is that you think of when you consider that sport. Not the deception of past doping scandals, I hope, but rather that it is very much a team game – and that it was this sport that proved to us the effectiveness of pursuing 'marginal gains'.

Marginal gains – the combination of tiny improvements, each of little consequence in themselves, but which taken together make a significant difference, can teach us how to grow in the Christian life.

Each day, we aim to become better disciples as we try to 'walk humbly with God'. And as we consider how we 'own' the good things God has given us, how we live out a generous set of values which reflect the generous love of God for all people, we might call to mind that beautifully simple prayer of Saint Richard of Chichester:

'Thanks be to thee, my Lord Jesus Christ,  
for all the benefits thou hast given me,  
for all the pains and insults thou hast borne for me.  
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,  
may I know thee more clearly,  
love thee more dearly,  
and follow thee more nearly, day by day.  
Amen.

Today, the twenty-ninth of September, is the festival of St Michael and All Angels. Michael is an important saint to this parish and benefice, being the patron saint of our churches in Hudswell and Downholme.

The name Michael means 'who is like God'. As we seek, day by day, to grow ever more Christ-like, we can be assured of God's guidance and protection as expressed by the special Collect for this day:

Everlasting God,  
you have ordained and constituted the ministries of angels and mortals in  
a wonderful order:  
grant that as your holy angels always serve you in heaven,  
so, at your command,  
they may help and defend us on earth;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Thanks be to God. Amen.