

## A Story for Rainy Days

[Proverbs 3:1-8](#), [James 5:7-11, 13-18](#)

15<sup>th</sup> July is St Swithun's Day. I haven't looked at the weather forecast for today, but it is said that if it rains on this day, then it will rain for the next forty days.

Why might this strangely named saint be associated with the threat of a long period of non-stop rain? Our winter and early spring saw us have what felt like forty days and forty nights of non-stop rain, anyway!

We know remarkably little about Saint Swithun, beyond the ten years in the ninth century when he was Bishop of Winchester. The region of Wessex was very powerful at the time, and Swithun was a close friend of King Egbert. Swithun had asked that he should be buried without fuss on his death, and his request was honoured.

In 971 AD, just over a century after his death, a new cathedral was being built in Winchester. Swithun's remains were dug up and reburied in a grand shrine. The new Bishop, Ethelwold, refused to listen to the warnings that this would bring about dreadful storms. It is said that it rained for forty days from 15<sup>th</sup> July, 971, just as foretold.



Is Swithun's story just an account of a Bishop's stubbornness and a link to the stormy weather which can strike at this time of year? Is that it?

Whilst this is the part of the story which people remember, it does not represent the reason why Swithun was made a saint. He was a man of deep faith and holiness, who followed God humbly and acted wisely. Not many people will know that as well as the forty days of rain, Saint Swithun's day is also remembered because of miraculous cures which occurred.

Our two readings for today are encouragements to follow that same path of humility and wisdom, rather than chase after the exciting, but misleading story which everyone says is true. We are called to be discerning people; in this age of instant news and opinions being touted as facts on social media, how do we pursue God's wisdom and truth?

Our reading from Proverbs 3 reminds us: "Trust in the Lord with all of your heart and lean not on your own understanding." The image of leaning over, letting something or someone take your weight, is very powerful. The proverb shows that our understanding alone is not a safe thing to lean on. We make

assumptions, work from partial knowledge or self-confidence. Instead, our whole confidence should be in God.

The reading from James 5 also encourages us to “stand firm” in faith. He too directs us to put our confidence in God. This is not an unthinking, naïve kind of confidence, however. Life can be very tough and we are under strain. Where to turn in such circumstances? Life can also be filled with great joys. James repeats the same instruction: Pray. Ask God for help, thank him for his goodness, trust him to listen and guide you.

We should therefore remember Saint Swithun not because of his association with forty days of rain as revenge for a rash act and instead because he is a pattern for trusting God, walking with him in humility, being true to our calling of faith and encouraging others with integrity.

### **The Collect for Saint Swithun’s Day**

Almighty God,  
by whose grace we celebrate again  
the feast of your servant Swithun:  
grant that, as he governed with gentleness  
the people committed to his care,  
so we, rejoicing in our Christian inheritance,  
may always seek to build up your Church  
in unity and love;  
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.

**Rev’d Vicky Barrett**

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<sup>i</sup> Images used under the Creative Commons Licence:..Sant Swithun’s Shrine in Winchester Cathedral (WyrdLight.com); Statue from Stavanger Cathedral (Nina Aldin Thune)