

ST. MARY OF NAZARETH /ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI – WEST WICKHAM

23rd August 2020: Eleventh Sunday after Trinity

Hazel writes:

A couple of weeks ago we focused on Zacchaeus. Here's a picture of that tree to remind you of the message that Jesus brings salvation, changing all lives for the better, just like he did for Zacchaeus. Last week Richard followed up with looking at what 'better' might look like – equality, compassion and justice. This week we see why we, as Christians, bring that 'better' to others freely in response to our salvation, living out our identity in Christ.



At the end of June we had a couple of **Vision meetings** on Zoom and I promised to include the text of my presentation in the magazines. This was included in the St Mary's magazine, but I inadvertently missed it out of the St Francis' publication. It is attached to this pew sheet and will be circulated to others who receive the magazine in hard copy only. This could be a real opportunity for St Francis' and St Mary's to work together in reaching out to our community. Please do pray about this over the coming months and let us know about any ideas that you feel God is placing on your heart in this connection. *Hazel*

On Wednesday 26th, **Midweek Communion** will be at St Francis' at 10.45am. Next Sunday, 30th August there will be services of **Holy Communion** in St Mary's at 8am and at 10am in St Francis'. There will also be a service available **on-line** from 9am.

The church buildings will continue to be **open for private prayer** in August at the following times:

- Tuesdays – St Francis' from 2 to 3.30pm;
- Thursdays – St Mary's from 10 to 11.30am.

It is unlikely that we will continue this in September, but please do contact someone in the ministry team if you feel you would like to continue having the churches open during the week.

Chere Sargon, a member of the congregation at St Francis', died on 9th August. Her funeral service will be in St Francis' Church on Friday 4th September at 3pm. The family have said that those who knew Chere are welcome to attend the service, but

please would you let Hazel (hazelos58@gmail.com or 020 8777 5034) know in advance if you would like to be there.

The **St Francis' APCM** will take place after the service on Sunday 20th September. This meeting will be held both in church and on Zoom. Everyone is welcome to join us at this meeting, but only those who are on the electoral roll can vote for matters that need approval, such as new members of the PCC. If you would like to be added to the electoral roll, please would you contact our Electoral Roll Officer, Rowena Griffiths at rowena.griff19@btinternet.com or on 020 8777 6112 before Sunday 30 August.

Please bring **Foodbank donations** to the Vicarage. Currently they need cold meat, custard, small bottles of squash, jelly, Instant Whip, mashed potatoes, jam, coffee, washing detergent, **male and female shampoo (very urgent)**, shaving gel/foam, adult & children's toothbrushes & toothpaste. There are large stocks of pasta, beans, soup, UHT milk, rice, cereals, tea, toilet rolls and tomatoes and these items are politely discouraged at the present time. Thank you for your continuing support.

Resources and updates for the week ahead – An audio file of the sermon and a video of the service have been posted to the websites for today. All other files have been combined and posted as a pew sheet which has been sent on paper to those who have told us that they are not on-line. Other worship and resources that you might want to listen to or look at on Sunday:

- The Church of England's national virtual service will be available on their website at www.churchofengland.org.
- The BBC have the following programmes to watch and listen to:
 - Sunday Worship at 8.10am on Radio 4 exploring the inspiration of listening;
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 with The Gesualdo Six;
 - On BBC 1: Sunday Morning Live at 10am and Songs of Praise at 1.15pm celebrating The Salvation Army.

Each week our "**coffee/tea & chat**" on Thursday at 2.30 pm is an opportunity to share with others. It is just 40 minutes and you don't need to commit to joining each week. Please let Rowena (rowena.griff19@btinternet.com /020 8777 6112) know if you would like the log-in details.

Any items for the joint pew sheet to Hazel and items for the websites to brian.griff19@btinternet.com.

Vision for St Mary's and St Francis' Churches

I have had some time to reflect recently - maybe you have too. I've also been reading and listening to thought pieces such as the Rethink series on Radio 4 and articles in the Church Times. These reflections have led me to believe that we have a moment of opportunity - the way in which we come out of lockdown will be vital to our future as two churches in West Wickham.

Much of this thinking is based on a one-year course – Mission Shaped Ministry – that I have been attending with Ken Bryan and Nicky Nightingale. Bishop Jonathan invited me to bring a team to the course, recognising that we need to do things differently if we are to grow our churches. This is not about getting people inside a building on a Sunday morning, but about making disciples who live a life following Jesus – it's all about serving, teaching and worshipping God in many different ways. It has been exciting to be thinking about this – talking about bringing people to faith is inspirational. However, we can't just follow the first idea that comes to mind. The key is working out specifically what it is that God is calling us to in West Wickham, so that we have a clear vision of the future. There is no particular agenda at this stage, but we do know that we have to do something.

When I arrived in West Wickham in 2015, my question was whether this was one benefice or two churches. Anecdotally combining churches doesn't work as numbers decline further, so to date I have focussed on being a vicar in two separate churches. In 2016, there were two Mission Action Planning groups and a number of projects started as a result: at St Mary's the Sunday Club was revitalised and Messy Church developed further, while at St Francis' we opened a Place of Welcome and held the Festival of Peace in 2018.

Recent experience

In June we had a service focussed on the story of Jesus walking on water and thought about how Coronavirus seems like a storm that has shone a light on inequalities and injustices. Some have started to recognise that life shouldn't be seen as 'us and them', only 'us'. Following on from this, I had two conversations with people who are keen to work with others. The first was an independent business in the High Street who said that he'd opened because he just wanted to be there to serve community. The other was with an organisation, asking whether we are doing anything for the community and can they support us?

So, what are we doing? We opened the buildings for private prayer in June and for Sunday services in July. I wonder whether this is something for the community or only for us. Maybe you've felt uncomfortable worshipping on-line and can't wait to get back 'into the boat', with everything as it was before, but is this possible, or do we need to look at a 'new normal'?

One consequence of lockdown has been fear. Fear of loss. From discussion with others, what people fear losing most is fellowship with others. Fellowship is not something that we're looking to replace, but we might need to do it in different ways. Although we haven't met together in person, we have had on-going communication with individuals in congregations & leaders in community. Many have told us that they've got to know others in the church community much better through lockdown and I believe that some relationships have developed.

Working together in our ministry team we have been able to make changes quickly and meet the challenges that we have faced. We have had to take risks, but by giving God priority in what we are doing, we can see that he is definitely with us. Working in this way has also emphasised the importance of relationships and how God has made all things interconnected.

Setting a vision

So, how can we use this learning from our course, from our lockdown experience and from talking with others in the community and the congregations as an opportunity? What we need firstly is a clear picture of a better tomorrow which has been given by God. This will involve prayer – individually and together – to gain a sense of God’s rhythm and God’s presence in West Wickham. Scripture teaches us that seeing God’s work and God’s future clearly is difficult, but when we do see these things, it’s energising; it’s a time when you can say that ‘the kingdom of God has come near’ (Luke 10:9).

Before we then take that vision out into the community, we need to have formed a sense of that kingdom within ourselves, so that we can be a people of wholeness, balance & tranquility – a light in the darkness. In his sermon on 28th June Ken talked about following four strands: listening and learning, strong fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers (Acts 2:42).

Will you join me?

This time last year, I had just been inducted and collated as Vicar of the two churches. I had been on pilgrimage beforehand and had tied in that experience with our Paraclesis material. I created a photobook to illustrate this and the picture at very end linked with Mary’s response to God in Luke 1:38: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord”. I sense that God is calling us now to create a vision for West Wickham and work towards this through more joint projects and worship.

We cannot delay this beyond our time of coming out of lockdown and I am looking to form a vision group during September. Will you join me in responding to God’s call and giving him priority, so that we can have that abundant life promised by Jesus in John 10:10?

Collect

God of glory,
the end of our searching,
help us to lay aside
all that prevents us from
seeking your kingdom,
and to give all that we have
to gain the pearl beyond all
price, through our Saviour
Jesus Christ.

First Reading: Romans 12:1-8

I appeal to you therefore,
brothers and sisters, by the
mercies of God, to present
your bodies as a living
sacrifice, holy and acceptable
to God, which is your
spiritual worship. ² Do not be
conformed to this world, but
be transformed by the
renewing of your minds, so
that you may discern what is
the will of God—what is
good and acceptable and
perfect.

³ For by the grace given to
me I say to everyone among
you not to think of yourself
more highly than you ought
to think, but to think with
sober judgement, each
according to the measure of
faith that God has

assigned. ⁴ For as in one body
we have many members,
and not all the members
have the same function, ⁵ so
we, who are many, are one
body in Christ, and
individually we are members
one of another. ⁶ We have
gifts that differ according to
the grace given to us:
prophecy, in proportion to
faith; ⁷ ministry, in
ministering; the teacher, in
teaching; ⁸ the exhorter, in
exhortation; the giver, in
generosity; the leader, in
diligence; the
compassionate, in
cheerfulness.

Gospel: Matthew 16:13-20

¹³ Now when Jesus came into
the district of Caesarea
Philippi, he asked his
disciples, 'Who do people
say that the Son of Man
is?' ¹⁴ And they said, 'Some
say John the Baptist, but
others Elijah, and still others
Jeremiah or one of the
prophets.' ¹⁵ He said to them,
'But who do you say that I
am?' ¹⁶ Simon Peter
answered, 'You are the

Messiah, the Son of the
living God.' ¹⁷ And Jesus
answered him, 'Blessed are
you, Simon son of Jonah! For
flesh and blood has not
revealed this to you, but my
Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell
you, you are Peter, and on
this rock I will build my
church, and the gates of
Hades will not prevail against
it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys
of the kingdom of heaven,
and whatever you bind on
earth will be bound in
heaven, and whatever you
loose on earth will be loosed
in heaven.' ²⁰ Then he sternly
ordered the disciples not to
tell anyone that he was the
Messiah.

Post Communion Prayer

Lord of all mercy,
we your faithful people
have celebrated that one
true sacrifice which takes
away our sins and brings
pardon and peace:
by our communion keep us
firm on the foundation of
the gospel and preserve
us from all sin; through
Jesus Christ our Lord.

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**TALK: The freedom offered by Christ is the foundation of the church
and gives each of us our identity.**

Last week Richard said that Jesus was not afraid to be political. In our gospel passage today, he's being especially political. He came into the district of Caesarea Philippi and asked his disciples about who people thought he was. The fact he was in Caesarea Philippi at the time is significant. Herod the Great's son, Philip, had established this city as the place where he'd rule the land in the east of Galilee from, whilst remaining a puppet of the Romans. Naming it after both the Roman Emperor, Caesar (who was thought by the Romans to be God), and himself, (the king of the Jews in that area), made this city a place where Jesus would be in conflict with both the Romans and the Jewish ruling classes, were he to be recognised as the Messiah (the Son of God and King of the Jews).

So, it's on his entry into this place that he asks his disciples 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' and 'Who do you say that I am?'. When Peter answers that he believes Jesus to be 'Messiah', Jesus recognises that this revelation hasn't come from any human being – it is surely God-inspired. The reason for this is that anyone openly declaring Jesus as 'Messiah' ran the risk of being imprisoned. It was dangerous talk, as it ran counter to both the idea of Caesar being God and Philip being king. Peter is showing signs of thinking in a way that turns the world upside down. It's this revelation (that Jesus is the Messiah) which Jesus himself says he will build his church on (v18). The church of today is built on those people, like Peter, who, through the ages, have believed this revelation to be true. The buildings of church are purely a symbol. They are a symbol of all those people who meet in that place, and elsewhere, and who work together to do things (often radical, political things) in the name of Christ. It is the people who make up the church.

So, Jesus was political. Peter was beginning to get the message and be political. And the church, the people of God, are also called to be political. This is exactly what Paul was asking the Romans to be when he says in his letter (in v2 of the first reading) 'Do not be conformed to the ways of this world if you are to discern the will of God'.

I don't see myself as political in a worldly sense, but I can see how not being conformed to this world does call me to be political, if I'm to prioritise all those things that Christ taught his disciples about. Those things that Richard talked about last week - equality, compassion and speaking about justice for the poor and the oppressed. This is political.

Let's look at how this being political might affect us as the church and as individuals through our identity. If I was asked who I was, I might reply that my identity is multi-faceted – a wife, a mother, a vicar. If I see these identities from a worldly approach, I become driven and bound by what's generally seen as success and what others expect. Politics in a worldly sense is geared towards everyone working to create success in the system. This binds us to a particular way of behaving. For example, as a mother, I want my children to do well, to meet someone that they'd like to settle down with, to remain healthy. And so, I insist on hard work at school, I organise wholesome out of school activities and take them to meet up with friends. And all these things are good, but why am I encouraging them? Is it because that's what's expected by others (by the system), but I see it (and maybe my children also see it) as a bind? Or is it because I find my identity in Christ and I can see that making the most of opportunities that come our way and following the inspiration of the Holy Spirit will enable me to show my children that they are loved by God and can be inspired by the Holy Spirit? There's a freedom in deciding to work hard at school as a result of responding to God's love and finding our calling in life through the experiences that we gain, rather than that's what's expected by the system.

As a Christian, I can find an identity in being a mother, but combining this with my identity in Christ, I'm a mother who's freed up to love my children, so that they know themselves as children of God, with hope for the future, always on the look out for opportunities. They are not bound by what others might think of them and what the system sees as success. And they too have the potential to be freed of the stresses of this world. Finding one's identity in Christ means that we know ourselves to be saved. Saved from being bound to particular ways of behaving, through Christ's death and resurrection, which shows us how much God loves us.

The worldly political system is geared towards being a successful economy and people working hard to be part of that success. The focus in election campaigns is on individuals gaining identity from their own success. You're asked to vote for someone because they'll ensure that there are opportunities available. What actually happens where the ways of this world are followed is that there's a policy made to create opportunities and that's then implemented, so politicians become bound up with that particular way of approaching the issues. And no matter if it creates unforeseen consequences for other individuals – it's the success of the system that's important. You only have to look at the examination fiasco of the past week to see how the way of the world was focussed on maintaining standards. And for some time, people were

bound by that system. Thankfully, those in government were able to see the heartache that this caused and made the U-turn that freed those who had been oppressed by the system.

I wonder where you find your identity. If you were asked the question 'Who are you?', what would the response be? Is it tied up with the systems of this world – I'm a mother, a wife, a vicar and I'm working for the success (in worldly terms) of my family and church? Or can you allow Christ to transform you to see yourself as a child of God, saved by Christ, inspired by the Holy Spirit to be a servant of all?

Jesus is political. He knows his identity as Messiah and he's not afraid of acting to show how this identity operates in a way that's counter to the ways of the world, such as healing the Canaanite woman's daughter, as we saw last week. But Jesus also knows that shouting this message about his identity from the rooftops is a dangerous thing to do and so he tells his disciples not to tell anyone. He doesn't allow himself to be bound by the ways of this world, but he also doesn't antagonise the ruling classes.

If we are really part of the church, built on the revelation that Jesus is the Messiah, then we have to be political and prioritise the equality, compassion and justice that Richard was talking about last week. We might not be shouting about it from the rooftops, but we do need to free ourselves from the ways of this world and allow our identity in Christ to drive our behaviours – in our own lives and in our community – in a quietly political way.

Amen

Prayer Pointers:

Pray that we at St Mary's and St Francis may find our identity as radical disciples – rooted in equality, compassion and justice for all. May we find courage to speak out for those whose voice is suppressed or ignored and not be afraid to counter the culture of our day.

Thank God for the gifts he has showered upon us to use for his glory in the worship in our two churches. For preachers, intercessors, lesson readers and all others who make our services flow smoothly and effectively. We especially thank God for all those who work quietly behind the scenes keeping in touch with the congregation during lockdown and continue to care for those who are unable to worship with us at the moment.

For all those who have received 'A' level and GCSE results this month - for those for whom this is a defining moment in their lives. We pray for those going on to University and other Higher Education and for those leaving education to enter the job market. We pray that they may find fulfilling careers in the future.

Continue to pray for those who have lost their jobs as a result of the Covid19 crisis, especially those who face eviction from their rented homes or are forced to use food banks. For all who work with the unemployed especially those in Job Clubs. We hold before God those who assist the unemployed with debt counselling, especially those who work through the Christians Against Poverty organisation.

For those who are ill at this time especially for those who are suffering depression or other mental illness as a result of the Covid 19 lockdown. Pray for all those who support them – our local GP's and mental health support services. Pray for those who are coping with bereavement that they may find comfort in the loving arms of Christ.