

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

20th June 2021: Third Sunday after Trinity

Hazel writes:

On Sunday 11th July our services will focus on stories of where we have seen **God with us** through the difficulties of recent months. If you have a story that you'd like to share with the congregations (either in-person, via video, or anonymously through me), please do be in touch so that we can discuss the best way of capturing the detail and enabling others to see instances of God so clearly at work amongst us. This is something that I am really excited about – recently I have heard so many stories of great things happening and if I could have the permission to share these with others, I know that we could have a service that will touch many people's hearts.

Next Sunday we have in-person Holy Communion services at **8am in St Francis' church** and at **10am in St Mary's Church**.

Morning Prayer is at St Mary's Church on Tuesday morning at 9am and at St Francis' Church on Wednesday mornings at 9.30am, followed by the church being **open for private prayer** from 10.30-11.30am.

Resources and updates for the week ahead – This week our service will be **uploaded by 1pm** to YouTube. All other files for this week 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 – John Bell of the Iona Community reflects on the world's favourite psalm – psalm 23.
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from the Chapel of King's College, Cambridge.
 - On BBC 1: Sunday Morning Live at 10.30am.
 - Songs of Praise **on BBC2 at 1.15 p.m.** Faith and Fatherhood.

Attending the exhibition at Coney Hill Baptist Church for **Refugee Week** really did highlight how little we really appreciate the difficulties faced by those living as a refugee. Even in a country that is relatively welcoming like Uganda, which does not turn away anyone entering their country, the physical, mental and emotional scars of hunger, disease and trauma run deep. Many people in refugee camps feel supported by

organisations such as Hope Health Action who facilitated the exhibition last week. If you want to support this organisation, here is a link to the donation page on their website: www.hopehealthaction.org/188/appeals.

Live music will be performed by Jacqueline Turner and Francesca Lauri on Sunday 27th June at 7.30pm in the Old Drawing Room at Beckenham Place Mansion. Limited tickets are available at £12 each from Jacqueline at jacqueline.turner@live.co.uk or 07507 681458.

We are pleased to announce that St Mary's will be hosting a **Prom Praise Watch Party** on Saturday 17th July at 5.45pm. An opportunity to gather with others, bringing your own picnic to watch and (restrictions allowing) sing along to live hymns and worship songs being streamed from All Soul's Langham Place. Tickets are free, but must be booked in advance, as capacity is limited, either on-line at www.stjohnsww.com/prompraise or through Geoff at tickets@mussard.org.uk or 020 8650 8389.

Please bring **Foodbank donations** to the Vicarage or St Francis' Church. Currently their biggest need is 'bags for life'. They also need jellies, instant whips, biscuits, tinned tomatoes, coffee, squash, deodorant, cleaning spray, antiseptic wipes and washing up liquid. Please do not bring any fresh food, or Baby milk as the foodbank cannot pass this on. You can also donate financially here: <https://bromleyborough.foodbank.org.uk/give-help/donate-money>.

Our **bereavement support bags** will be especially helpful in the months ahead. If you would like a bag to give to someone that you know who has lost a loved one, do take one from the back of either of the churches.

Do you feel you are being called to put yourself forward to be on the **Southwark Diocesan Synod**? Elections will take place by the beginning of July. The Synod brings people together from across the Diocese to drive mission, set strategies, shape priorities as well as appoint to a range of positions on boards and committees. It is a body which is advisory and is a place where important topics facing the church can be discussed. If you want to find out more, please take a leaflet which you will find copies of in both churches.

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.

This week the flower pedestal in the sanctuary at St Francis' is in celebration of Joan Burford's birthday, as well as Father's Day. It has been arranged by Annie and Kate.

Any items for the joint pew sheet to Beryl bbolton@ntlworld.com and items for the websites to brian.griff19@btinternet.com or Gifty office@stmarywestwickham.co.uk

Collect

God our saviour,
look on this wounded
world in pity and in
power; hold us fast to
your promises of peace
won for us by your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.

First Reading:

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

As we work together with
him, we urge you also not
to accept the grace of God
in vain. ² For he says,

‘At an acceptable time I
have listened to you,
and on a day of
salvation I have helped
you.’

See, now is the acceptable
time; see, now is the day
of salvation! ³ We are
putting no obstacle in
anyone’s way, so that no
fault may be found with
our ministry, ⁴ but as
servants of God we have
commended ourselves in
every way: through great
endurance, in afflictions,
hardships,
calamities, ⁵ beatings,
imprisonments, riots,
labours, sleepless nights,
hunger; ⁶ by purity,
knowledge, patience,

kindness, holiness of spirit,
genuine love, ⁷ truthful
speech, and the power of
God; with the weapons of
righteousness for the right
hand and for the left; ⁸ in
honour and dishonour, in
ill repute and good repute.
We are treated as
impostors, and yet are
true; ⁹ as unknown, and yet
are well known; as dying,
and see—we are alive; as
punished, and yet not
killed; ¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet
always rejoicing; as poor,
yet making many rich; as
having nothing, and yet
possessing everything.
¹¹ We have spoken frankly
to you Corinthians; our
heart is wide open to
you. ¹² There is no
restriction in our
affections, but only in
yours. ¹³ In return—I speak
as to children—open wide
your hearts also.

Gospel Reading:

Mark 4:35-end

³⁵ On that day, when
evening had come, Jesus
said to them, ‘Let us go
across to the other
side.’ ³⁶ And leaving the
crowd behind, they took him

with them in the boat, just
as he was. Other boats were
with him. ³⁷ A great gale
arose, and the waves beat
into the boat, so that the
boat was already being
swamped. ³⁸ But he was in
the stern, asleep on the
cushion; and they woke him
up and said to him,
‘Teacher, do you not care
that we are perishing?’ ³⁹ He
woke up and rebuked the
wind, and said to the sea,
‘Peace! Be still!’ Then the
wind ceased, and there was
a dead calm. ⁴⁰ He said to
them, ‘Why are you afraid?
Have you still no
faith?’ ⁴¹ And they were
filled with great awe and
said to one another, ‘Who
then is this, that even the
wind and the sea obey him?’

Post Communion Prayer

O God, whose beauty is
beyond our imagining and
whose power we cannot
comprehend: show us
your glory as far as we can
grasp it, and shield us
from knowing more than
we can bear, until we may
look upon you without
fear; through Jesus Christ
our Saviour.

Sermon - Brian Griffiths

Who Cares?

If we look up our gospel reading - the miracle of the calming of the storm on the Sea of Galilee - in bible commentaries we see many different interpretations. For many commentators this miracle illustrates how Jesus shows both his humanity (he's asleep on a cushion in the boat) and his divinity (he has power of the wind and the waves). Others will major in on the lack of trust that the disciples had in Jesus to deal with their situation. Others will note the way the disciples hadn't worked out who Jesus really was. However, the one thing that jumps out at me from the reading is the question that the disciples ask Jesus in the midst of their fear and in the teeth of the storm - "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" They are having their work cut out trying to keep the boat afloat baling the water out – it's all hands to the deck. Yet Jesus sleeps at the stern of the boat. "Come on Jesus. We're in real danger and you don't care."

During the past 18 months or so, life has been turned upside down. We have been in the grip of a global pandemic – the like of which has not been seen for centuries. We have had to endure three lockdowns and, for many people, this has been unbelievably hard. People have lost their loved ones to Covid 19, and to add insult to injury, they haven't been able to visit them in hospital at the end of their lives. Lockdown has caused a tsunami of mental health challenges because of isolation. Families were not able to see their parents in care homes for months on end. Many businesses were forced to permanently close and there's been the inevitable resultant job losses and unemployment – and I fear that we haven't seen the end of that yet. The health service was pushed to its very limits and is still struggling to cope with the backlog of serious illness that has built up as a result of Covid.

So, for many Christians, the burning question has been "Doesn't God care?" "Is God asleep?" "Why is God silent in the face of this world crisis?". It must have been the same during the two World Wars. My guess is that many in the trenches and those who faced the horrors of Dunkirk and the Normandy Beaches on D Day would have had these questions on their lips. "Where is God? Does he really care? Why does he allow all this suffering?". If you have ever watched a loved one slowly taken away from you by the cruelty of dementia or watched someone slipping away because of the ravages of cancer, you may well have asked God "Do you really care?" I know someone whose daughter had cancer going down to the bottom of their garden and raging at God echoing the disciple's cry: "You don't care". The same cry that parents of young people

who have had their lives cut short as a result of brutal knife and gun violence on the streets of our city will have voiced.

When we go through difficult times it's not unreasonable to think "God really isn't in control here. There is no rational explanation about why these bad things are happening." We often think that our prayers have not been answered – and that's been my experience during the pandemic – God has, by and large, been silent. I know that there are people who seem to have a 'hotline' to God. God really speaks to them – he directs their lives and answers their prayers. I envy them. I wish I had the number for the 'hotline'. Being absolutely honest, for me, it seems he is often remote. He's there, but he's inactive – he doesn't intervene – he might as well be asleep just as Jesus was in the stern of that boat on the Sea of Galilee. My guess is that I am not the only one here today who feels like this.

When Jesus does calm the storm, it's as if he's ever so slightly annoyed with the disciples for bothering him. **"Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?"** At first sight, this response from Jesus sounds quite cruel and brutal. It sounds completely unreasonable. So, is this miracle all about lack of faith? Is it about how little we believe God to be with us in the midst of life's storms? Maybe we believe God is there with us, but what we really want is a God who is active and in control. We don't want a passive God who seems as if he's asleep most of the time. Maybe the real learning point from our Gospel reading today is that God is there – he's experiencing the storms with us – he is with us in our fears and doubts. Is that how his power is revealed to us? His real care is in journeying with us, staying with us in the boat when the storms come and seem to overwhelm us. Maybe Jesus wanted the disciples to manage their fear by knowing that he was alongside them in their danger.

God often journeys with people experiencing the storms of life through you and I. We are the agents through which others see how much God cares for them. There's a Christian project that's been operating for a few years now that started off in a church in East Anglia – appropriately, it's called "Who Cares?" "Who Cares?" is a nationwide initiative where churches are working together to listen to the needs of local people and offer care and the hope of the Gospel. They went out into their community and asked one question – "What hurts the most?" or put another way "What's the one thing in life that's hardest to handle?" They wanted to understand the pain in their local community and explore how the church can offer a Christian response. Over 40,000 people have now responded to that question as part of the project. Every answer is different. However, these are the most common responses:

Loneliness: Money Worries: Physical Suffering: Death: Family: Injustice: Relationship Problems: Negative Emotions.

These have all been exacerbated by the Covid pandemic.

The bible has much to say and offers much hope to people experiencing all these issues – those who find that sometimes life is hard to handle. They need to know that there is hope and that they are not alone in their storms. Jesus can come into their boats through you and I, and by offering that hope they may discover that God is not silent and remote – he can bring peace and calmness in the storm. Our actions, our care and concern and witness will prove this. You may remember that we discussed this concept of coming alongside people in their storms of life a few years ago – it's called 'paracletis'.

In our Gospel reading there's quite a significant verse – Verse 36 states "Other boats were with him". We don't know what happened to the other boats – but clearly, they were experiencing the same storm. However, we know that the disciples were not alone on Galilee during that stormy night. The difference was that the disciples had Jesus in their boat.

The challenge of our Gospel message today is for us to realise and trust that God does care even though sometimes he seems remote, and to work out how we can come alongside those who are hurting or finding that life is difficult to handle – those who are lonely, or worried about finances, or having family or relationship issues, those who are bereaved, those in physical pain and all the other issues that hurt. How can we understand that pain in our own lives and in our local community here in West Wickham? How can we discover for ourselves and offer to others the care and presence of Jesus and the hope of the Gospel? Can we and they hear those serene words of Christ – Peace: Be Still?

Loving God, we bring to you the storms of our lives.

For ourselves and for others

we protest!

Listen to our pain.

Speak to us.

Help us to trust in you and not be afraid

Help us to bring peace and hope to others who are hurting

We want to hear your words:

'Peace, be still.'

Prayer Pointers

- For peace and stillness in the storms that life brings – for awareness of the presence of Jesus with us and alongside us. That we may have the courage to come alongside others in their storms and be Jesus to them.
- For businesses that were planning to reopen and now have to wait yet again. For the staff of the businesses that they may not lose hope.
- On World Refugee Day for protection for those who have fled their homes. For strength on their journeys and that they may find places of compassion at which to rest.
- For all those who are ill and for their friends and relatives – especially for Vicky Pearce and Julie Bailey.
- For all those who have died and for their loved ones who mourn at this time – especially pray for the soul of Michael Sanders and his wife Mary and for Sheila Green and her husband Ron as they come to terms with their passing.

A prayer from the Children's Society

We may be in the same storm but not all in the same boat.
Some of us may be almost asleep and totally at ease,
others of us may feel swamped by waves of anxiety, grief and loss;
still others are too anxious about their health to even leave shore.
Thank you that you are our protector, our guide, our brother, our Lord.
You alone command the wind and the waves.
Bless the work of The Children's Society around mental health with your
heavenly provision, that through it we would see your kingdom come.
Come into our hearts by the power of your Holy Spirit,
give us your peace which passes all understanding,
and lead us in your example to show radical compassion and care
to one another, for your glory.

A Covid-19 prayer

God of all times and places,
we long for freedom from the constraints of this virus,
bring us to a place of patience, we pray;
we long to go about our lives without fear,
bring us to a place of confidence, we pray;
we long to sing your praises in churches full of welcome,
bring us to a place of safety, we pray;
we long for a world in which vaccines are available for all,
bring us to a place of justice, we pray.
And so may we find healing and health
in the goodness of your grace. Amen.