

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

23rd May 2021: Pentecost

Hazel writes: Today we will be celebrating the birthday of the Church at a **Churches Together in West Wickham service today at 6pm in Emmanuel Church and on Zoom.** The service will be followed by the CTWW AGM and an opportunity to talk to people from other churches outside afterwards (weather permitting). Zoom details have been circulated separately with this pew sheet.

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

St Francis' Church will be **open for private prayer** on Wednesday 26th May from 10.30-11.30am.

Resources and updates for the week ahead – This week our service will **live-stream at 10am** on 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 – Bishop of Bangor Rt. Rev. Andy John leads a service for Pentecost from St. Tudno's Church.
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from St. Pancras Church, London.
 - **On BBC 1:** Sunday Worship at 10.30 a.m. A celebration for Pentecost and
 - Songs of Praise at 1.15 p.m. Sean Fletcher visits a monastery in West Yorkshire to learn about Pentecost.

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>

Opportunity to help someone in need. Deacon Laura MacBean at the Methodist Church has been supporting a lady in her 50s who came to her two years ago as a safeguarding referral. Through a local charity she has been living in a variety of accommodation, but

she now needs to move somewhere to rest and refresh until she can move into a private rented place or find someone suitable to lodge with. We are looking for a Christian lady (or an older retired Christian couple) with a spare bedroom who could offer a few weeks' respite while we try to work out a longer-term solution. Please get in touch with Laura (laura.macbean@googlemail.com or 020 8249 8592) if you can offer some respite or more permanent lodgings and would like to find out more.

Our collections for **Christian Aid Week** have so far raised £1,176 including gift aid. It's not too late to give. We will be announcing a total for the whole of West Wickham at the Churches Together service tonight – do contribute as generously as you can. Physical envelopes can be given to Anita Curtis or Geoff Mussard, or placed in the letterboxes at the Vicarage next to St. Mary's or St. Francis' vestry door. Alternatively, you can donate on-line at <https://envelope.christianaid.org.uk/envelope/west-wickham>. Please Gift Aid if you can – adds an extra 25% at no cost to you.

St John's want your empty **crisp packets** to create survival kit blankets for rough sleepers and those in need. Recycling is a great way to save the oceans and this could make a real difference to people's lives! Have a look at our page to find out more (www.facebook.com/CrispPacketProjectWestWickham), or check out this video: <https://youtu.be/L5FWMca5BFY>. You can collect and wash crisp packets and bring them to the Foodbank donation points, or you can follow the video to make a finished sheet - we'd love you to join us!

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. There are also two webinars where potential members to join and gain an overview of the Synod and agenda for the 2021-2024 triennium and ask any questions that they may have. The dates have been set for Tuesday 8 June at 6pm and Wednesday 9 June at 2pm. Please speak to Hazel if you would like to register for either of these events.

Are you keen to get back to hearing live music? We are pleased to announce that the **Bromley Boy Singers** will be performing at their first concert this year in St Francis' Church, West Wickham on Saturday 12th June at 7.30pm. Tickets will be available from next week and details of how you can book will be included in next week's pew sheet.

If anyone would like a pedestal **flower arrangement** at either church in memory of a loved one or to commemorate a special anniversary etc., please contact Merri Womack (8777 8772) for St Mary's or Nicky Nightingale (nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk or 8916 9855) for St Francis'.

This week the pedestal at St. Marys has been provided and arranged by Merri Womack to celebrate John's 80th birthday last Friday. Happy Birthday John from us all.

Brian and Rowena Griffiths would like to say a big "Thank you" to everyone at St. Francis and St.Mary's for all the lovely cards, gifts and messages for their Ruby wedding last Sunday. Thank you also to Celia Barnes for arranging the stunning pedestal flower display at St Francis.

There will be a plant sale in the gardens after the 10.00 a.m. service at St. Mary's this week and all profits will be for Church funds. Thanks to all those who have provided plants.

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

Collect

Holy Spirit, sent by the Father, ignite in us your holy fire; strengthen your children with the gift of faith, revive your Church with the breath of love, and renew the face of the earth, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

First Reading: Acts 2: 1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.

³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them.

⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. ⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was

bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?' ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?

⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' ¹² All

were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' ¹³ But others sneered and said, 'They are filled with new wine.'

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem,

let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. ²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. ²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

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Bible reading from the New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicised Edition, copyright © 1989, 1995 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Gospel Reading**John 15: 26-27, 16: 4b-15**

²⁶ 'When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. ²⁷ You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

⁴ But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them. 'I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.

⁵ But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, "Where are you going?"

⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. ⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

⁸ And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement: ⁹ about sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ about judgement, because the ruler of this world has been condemned. ¹² 'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Post Communion Prayer

Faithful God, who fulfilled the promises of Easter by sending us your Holy Spirit and opening to every race and nation the way of life eternal: open our lips by your Spirit, that every tongue may tell of your glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sermon – Pentecost: Brian Griffiths

Pentecost – the Birthday of the Church – a festival that is different from the others we celebrate in the Christian year. Pentecost is a call to action. We celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide and strengthen us in our Christian life and at the same time we are challenged to harness the Spirit within us to change not only ourselves, but to change our world – to transform society and culture – to bring in God’s kingdom here on earth.

The reading from the Book of Acts is very familiar to us – it’s the account of how the Spirit came upon the disciples in tongues of fire and as a mighty rushing wind. The Hebrew word for this rushing wind is ‘Ruach’ – which can also mean the snorting of a horse – something very powerful. Some churches have the word ‘Ruach’ in their name to show how the Spirit inspires and energizes them.

The Spirit completely changed the disciples from a frightened, inward looking and confused group into a bold, outward looking and energized community. So the first church was born and we can see exactly what this community looked like and what they did in the second chapter of Acts, verses 42-46.

They prayed, studied, and ate together. They shared all things in common, gave money spontaneously and generously when the need arose. They were certainly not afraid to talk about their faith with others outside the community. But for me the two most striking features were these:

- Firstly, they went about doing good works to everyone – no one was excluded, and many signs and wonders were performed.
- Secondly, they really cared for one another in their community – they really looked out for each other – they had a deep love for each other.

In St Mary’s and St Francis’, we have developed a strong culture of reaching out beyond the walls of our buildings into the community of West Wickham and further afield. This is brilliant and mirrors exactly what that first church aimed to do. We have made a big effort to tackle food poverty by forging links with the Bromley Foodbank and having street collections and collection points for food and donations. We have projects concerned with mentoring in local schools, befriending those who are lonely and isolated and bereavement support. There’s a germ of an idea to help people struggling to manage their finances and another to help people with computer skills. When the disciples reached out beyond their own community the bible tells us that many signs and wonders were performed. I wonder what signs and wonders are happening, perhaps unbeknown to us, because we have reached out beyond the four walls of our churches. We should thank God that we have become quite an outward looking church. I have no doubt whatsoever that none of this would have been possible without ‘ruach’ – that powerful, enabling breath of the Holy Spirit.

Brilliant though all this reaching out to our community is, we should also remember our own community. Can we say that, like the first Church in Jerusalem, we have this deep love for each other, where we really care and where we really and truly look out for each other? The Greek word used to describe this deep love that was so evident is 'koinonia'. It's a word that is full of depth and challenge. It's translated as 'fellowship', 'partnership', 'participation' or 'contribution'. The richness of 'koinonia' indicates a community where relationships between the members are really very deep and extend far beyond a conversation over a coffee after church. 'Koinonia' is generous, hopeful, and centred on others rather than ourselves. It's about including everyone. Koinonia is a sign that the Holy Spirit is indwelling in our community of worshippers here at St Francis' and St Mary's. Koinonia is worked out in committed and supportive relationships one with another in our community. This is when our Christian life is at its most enriching – when it's lived out in community.

How do we at St Mary's and St Francis' measure up to koinonia? I think that there have been some real signs of Spirit filled community, especially during the lockdowns and when members of our community have fallen on hard times. One example that has impressed me was how people from St Mary's and St Francis rallied round to help Miriam and John when they had that horrendous incident in their home and had to move out to temporary accommodation. St Mary's immediately arranged a rota of people willing to provide regular meals for them and someone from St Francis' spontaneously offered them accommodation to tide them over whilst they looked for a more lasting solution. That's real fellowship – that's koinonia being lived out in a very practical and loving way.

However, we need to further develop this deep sense of fellowship – especially between our two churches. You've heard me speaking before about how I strongly believe the way forward now that we are, hopefully, emerging, from the pandemic, is to think of ourselves as one congregation with two buildings. Realistically, I also know that there are obstacles to this. We have developed one prayer circle, but I know that some people have voiced their concerns about having to be part of a prayer chain that involves what they see as a different congregation. I have even heard during the intercessions in one of the churches, the other described as 'the other place'. I know that some people are desperate to get back to the old pre-pandemic services of 9.15 and 10.45 in the mornings. Call me naïve, but I had never realized before lockdowns just how attached people are to their buildings. I heard someone say, when asked what they thought of the first communion back in church after the first lockdown in July last year, 'Well it was good to have communion again, but, for me, it was in the wrong church'. On reflection, that really, really challenged me. Have we erected barriers – fences – boundary posts – around our buildings? If we have then we have a long, long way to go to be anything like the community of that first Jerusalem church.

Taking down fences and boundary posts is challenging for a lot of us. It involves breaking down tradition – traditions that for many people are very near and dear to them. It involves some radical thinking. Again, the early church was very radical – and the reason it was radical was because they followed someone who was completely radical himself – Jesus – who had given them a radical gift – the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Earlier in this sermon, I spoke about how our new outreach would not have been possible without the power of the spirit – that mighty wind – ruach. I wonder what would be possible if we harnessed the power of that same spirit to change our community life together as St Francis' and St Mary's. Would it be possible to see ourselves as a community that had this deep care and affection for each other? Would it be possible to see St Mary's and St Francis as one community in two buildings? Would it be possible to put up gates – kissing gates, even, instead of boundary posts and fences?

We need each other – of that there is no doubt. For together we are much stronger – together we can do great things – together signs and wonders can be seen in our outward and inward communities. I think that the fact that currently we are worshipping together as one community Sunday by Sunday is a great sign of how the Spirit is moving and working amongst us.

You've probably heard about the giant Redwood Trees in California. They are considered the largest living things on earth and the tallest trees in the world. Some of them are over 300 feet high and over 2,500 years old. Now you would think that trees so large would have a tremendously deep root system, reaching down hundreds of feet into the earth. Actually, they have a very shallow system of roots. So how do they get so big and stand so long? It's because although they have shallow roots, they all intertwine - they are locked to each other. So, when the storms come and the winds blow, the redwoods stand. They don't stand alone; all the trees support and protect each other. St Francis' and St Mary's need each other – we all need to support and protect one another. Without that support and protection, we are pretty vulnerable.

Someone once said: "Fellowship is two people in the same boat, rowing in the same direction." We have proved in our outreach that we can pull together and steer a common course. Can we pull together as one community in our inward lives together as the United Benefice of St Mary's and St Francis, West Wickham? Can we have that deep love and care for each other that is nurtured through God's Spirit living and breathing in our life as God's people together? Like the wind, the Spirit moves us in different ways, uprooting us and grounding us in different ways of thinking and different relationships. To really experience Pentecost it is necessary to search for change and to allow ourselves to be changed. Change means new forms of thinking,

new commitments, and a challenge to be radical – just like Jesus. Like seeds, we must learn to let go so that through the breath of the Spirit – ruach - we can sprout into new and re-energised life!

Through the energy of the Spirit, we can be transformed into a vibrant community that looks outward to our neighbourhood and the wider world and, at the same time, looks inward to each other with this deep care and love that was so evident in that early church in Jerusalem. In his book 'Crazy Christians' Bishop Michael Curry says this: "Being a Christian is not essentially about joining a church or being a nice person, but about following in the footsteps of Jesus, taking his teachings seriously, letting his Spirit take the lead in our lives, and in so doing helping to change the world from our nightmare into God's dream." That just about sums it all up – 'Letting his Spirit take the lead in our lives'.

Let us pray that God will rain down his Spirit upon us today and that we may understand anew that we, God's people, are the church not the stones of these buildings in which we worship. We pray that the Holy Spirit will breathe fresh life on us, so that we can share that deep fellowship and care for each other and for our community here in West Wickham.

Prayer Pointers

- Thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit and for a deepening of the fellowship between our two churches of St Mary's and St Francis' that we may work as one to show God's love to our community in West Wickham.
- Give thanks for all our outreach work and that the Spirit may direct and energize all our future projects together.
- For peace in the Middle East – especially in Palestine – and for all who are trying to negotiate an end to the conflict.
- Give thanks for the success of the vaccination drive in our country and for a fair and equitable distribution of vaccines to the poorer countries of the world.
- For all who work to relieve poverty in our country – especially Christians Against Poverty – and for those who work across the globe – especially Christian Aid.
- For all local councilors and for those who serve on the London Assembly following the election earlier this month – for a sense of truth and justice in all their debates and decisions.

- 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 as she comes to terms with his passing and for the family of Joanne Hancock as they remember her tragic death five years ago.