

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

9<sup>th</sup> May 2021: Sixth Sunday of Easter

### Hazel writes:

We had an excellent discussion on Thursday evening about mental health and well-being and how the church can help people in a distinctive way by bringing compassion through a listening ear. Mental health is not a topic to be afraid of, but one to be approached with the love of Jesus. *Perfect love casts out fear* (1 John 4:18)

This is exactly the kind of activity that we could do more of as part of the vision that I outlined in my sermon last week. Our Inclusive Church discussions are an important element of this.

The **St Francis' APCM** is today after the Sunday morning service at 11.30am in church and on Zoom. All are welcome: even if this is not your own church, the meeting is open to all. An invitation has been sent out with this pew sheet with the Zoom details of the meeting.

Next Sunday (Christian Aid 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 12<sup>th</sup> May from 10.30-11.30am.

The **Bereavement Support Group** will meet on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> May at 2.30pm in Emmanuel Church, The Grove.

Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> May is **Ascension Day** and there is a Deanery-wide service of **Holy Communion at St Edward's, New Addington at 7.30pm**. The Archdeacon of Croydon, The Ven Dr Rosemarie Mallett will be preaching. All are welcome.

**Messy Church at Home** is on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> May at 3.45pm on Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/MessyChurchWestWickham/](https://www.facebook.com/MessyChurchWestWickham/)

Between Ascension Day (13<sup>th</sup> May) and Pentecost (23<sup>rd</sup> May), the church recognises a period of prayer to refresh our faith: **Thy Kingdom Come**. The group receiving Morning Prayer reflections will follow a prayer journal during this time and extra copies are available at both of our church buildings, or you can ask Hazel for a copy to be delivered.

**Resources and updates for the week ahead** – This week our service will be **live-streamed 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](http://www.churchofengland.org).
- The BBC have the following programmes to watch and listen to:
  - Sunday Worship at 8.10am on Radio 4 – Archbishop of York, Stephen Cottrell leads a service on prayer.
  - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from the Old Royal Naval College with Trinity Laban Chapel Choir.
  - Songs of Praise on **BBC2 at 1.15 p.m.** Brenda Edwards visits a new church community reviving one of Swansea's historic chapels.

**Christian Aid Week 10-16 May 2021.** In February this year I had the unique experience of speaking to Rose and Florence in Kenya in real time thanks to Christian Aid and Zoom. They still struggle with drought and famine resulting from climate change. From severe drought to flooding, extreme weather robs them of what they need to survive; a reliable source of water. Through Christian Aid Week our prayers, gifts and actions can help communities withstand climate chaos; from building better earth dams to harvesting more water, to sowing drought tolerant crops, to demanding climate justice at the highest level. On **Sunday 16 May 2021** we will dedicate our prayers and thoughts to Christian Aid. Our donations will help families facing poverty and injustice. Money can also be donated during the week by visiting <https://envelope.christianaid.org.uk/envelope/west-wickham>, or by phone on 08080 006 006, or paper envelopes will be found on the seats outside both churches; please return the full envelope via the letterbox in St Francis's Vestry door or St Mary's vicarage door. Please gift aid your donation if applicable. Thank you. Anita Curtis & Geoff Mussard

On **Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> May**, St John's Church are having Covid-safe **WALKABOUT SALES** from 11am to 3pm. Proceeds will go to Christian Aid. If you follow the suggested route round the sales points, you'll walk about 5,000 steps (roughly half of what some women in Kenya have to walk every day to collect water). To avoid cash handling, please bring change or use the contact-free e-envelope using this link:

<https://envelope.christianaid.org.uk/envelope/st-johns-west-wickham>

We would welcome any donations for sale. The four sales will be:

1. **BOOKS AND CARDS** at 44 Coney Hill Road. Please deliver your good quality, second-hand books from 8 -12 May to this address (they may be left in the porch) or contact Jonathan on 07774 422120 for queries or collection.
2. **TOYS, GAMES AND PUZZLES** at 95 Chestnut Ave. Please deliver good quality, second hand toys, games or jigsaw puzzles (1000+ pieces welcome) to this

address (leave in the porch) or to SJs (56 Croydon Road) on Mondays or Fridays between 10 am and 12 noon. Any queries please ring Roger on 020 8462 4077.

3. **PLANTS** at 80 Kingsway. Please ring Philippa on 07981 276976 to let us know in advance what you are expecting to be able to provide and then deliver plants on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> May or by 10am on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> May to either 80 or 81 Kingsway.
4. **CAKES** at 7 Sylvan Way. It would be helpful to have some idea of how many cakes we will have so we'd be grateful if you could ring Sybil on 020 8462 5643 to let us know what you are expecting to be able to provide. Please deliver homemade cakes, tray bakes or bags of biscuits on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> May or by 10 am on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> May to either 7 or 11 Sylvan Way. Please cover all cakes fully and label clearly, with details of ingredients if nuts are included.

**Joyce Town** will be celebrating her 102<sup>nd</sup> birthday on Sunday 16th May. If anyone wants to send a card, please contact Rowena ([rowena.griff19@btinternet.com](mailto:rowena.griff19@btinternet.com) /020 8777 6112) for her address.

We will be celebrating the birthday of the Church at a **Churches Together in West Wickham service on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 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 will be circulated nearer the time.

Please bring **Foodbank donations** to the Vicarage or St Francis' Church. Currently their biggest need is 'bags for life'. They also need desserts, biscuits, tinned tomatoes, coffee, squash, Tinned Cold meat, ladies' deodorant, cleaning spray, washing up liquid and clothes washing capsules or powder. 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>

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](http://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!

As we look to support our community as we come out of lockdown, I am grateful to those who have already knitted or crocheted some more forget-me-nots for our **bereavement support bags**. These 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 let me know. Hazel

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 and speak to Hazel.

We are looking to have a consistent approach to dedicating **pedestal flower arrangements** in our church buildings in the weeks ahead. If anyone would like a pedestal 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](mailto:nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk) or 8916 9855) for St Francis'.

The pedestal at St. Mary's this week has been provided by Beryl for her belated 80<sup>th</sup> birthday and has been arranged by Merri.

A neighbour of Merri and John Womack has given an 18-month-old **upright** armchair upholstered in duck egg blue/grey to see if anyone at our churches could use it. If anyone is interested it is in the vestibule at St. Marys but please contact Merri on 8777 8772.

There will be a few **plants for sale** after the **10.00 a.m.** service today and if anyone has any plants they could donate we will have another sale after the 10.00 a.m. service on **23<sup>rd</sup> May**. All profits for St Mary's church funds.

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](mailto: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](mailto:bbolton@ntlworld.com) and items for the websites to [brian.griff19@btinternet.com](mailto:brian.griff19@btinternet.com) or Gifty [office@stmarywestwickham.co.uk](mailto:office@stmarywestwickham.co.uk)

**Collect**

Risen Christ,  
by the lakeside you  
renewed your call to  
your disciples:  
help your Church to  
obey your command  
and draw the nations to  
the fire of your love,  
to the glory of God the  
Father.

**First Reading:****Acts 10: 44-48**

<sup>44</sup> While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. <sup>45</sup> The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, <sup>46</sup> for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, <sup>47</sup> 'Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' <sup>48</sup> So he

ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

**Gospel Reading:****John 15: 9-17**

<sup>9</sup> Jesus said 'As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. <sup>11</sup> I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

<sup>12</sup> 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup> I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know

what the master is doing; but I have called you friends because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

<sup>16</sup> You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

<sup>17</sup> I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

**Post Communion Prayer**

God our Father,  
whose Son Jesus Christ  
gives the water of  
eternal life: may we  
thirst for you,  
the spring of life and  
source of goodness,  
through him who is  
alive and reigns, now  
and for ever.

## Sermon – United in Giving: Hazel O’Sullivan

In our gospel reading, Jesus calls his disciples, his friends. I wonder who are your friends? Maybe you have friends who you met at school that you’re still in touch with, friends from work, friends that you’ve shared other things with. I wonder who you’d say is your closest friend? Is this the same kind of friend that Jesus was talking about?

When Jesus was talking about friendship, he was talking about a friendship where you don’t get to choose whether you’re a friend. It’s not like on Facebook where you can ask someone to be a friend and they can ‘confirm’ or ‘remove’ you from their list of friends. No, Jesus gives his friendship to his disciples, and to us, as a gracious gift. And this means that Jesus has some surprising friends. The crowd in Jericho were surprised when Jesus went to eat at the house of Zaccheus, a tax collector: someone that they saw as a sinner and definitely not a friend to them. However, Jesus gives love and joy with his friendship and this is what binds him to his friends, whoever they are.

I think that Jesus’ friendship has to be seen as a gift. A gift to be cherished rather than a prize to be pursued. It’s not about anything that you’ve done to earn his friendship, but it’s all about his love and joy. The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, once commented that ‘We are all on the receiving end of the same grace.’ Being part of a Christian community, sharing together in Christian worship, is a great equaliser. Each one of us is chosen by God. We are all God’s adopted children – beloved by him. And Jesus is a friend to us all - a friend who loves us and who laid down his life for us; a friend in whose company we can have joy. In the reading from Acts we see that the message of Jesus’ love and friendship and the gift of the Holy Spirit is for everyone.

I wonder how this compares with those friendships which you thought about at the start. Are they marked out by love and joy? Would they lay down something of their life for you and vice versa?

So, what is it that you give to Jesus in response to his gift of love and friendship?

I want to look at four models, which have been influential in inspiring Christian giving in the past, before suggesting that we might need a new model for thinking about our giving.

The first model is the one that Jesus himself set when he asked a rich young man to sell all he had and follow him (Mark 10:17-23). The rich young man wasn’t able to do this, and he grieved at the thought of not being able to have that gift of abundant eternal

life which Jesus offers. Many years later, someone who did follow this type of call and giving to Jesus was St Francis of Assisi and we obviously have a close connection to him which might mean that this model still has some appeal.

The second biblical model of giving comes after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, in Acts, Chapter 2, where we hear of Christian communities sharing everything that they had in common. This is where deep fellowship, worship and material goods and money are shared out, resulting in goodwill, encouragement and growth in the size of the community. This is the model followed by Benedictine and other monasteries.

Over the years the church has found these first two models of giving to Jesus rather too challenging to be implemented and sustained. I'm not suggesting that we adopt either of them, but it's interesting to consider the radical nature of the original biblical models for Christian giving. The third model of giving to look at is the one that the church in the UK was founded on. This is a benefactor model, where the local landowner funded the church. This meant that there wasn't the need for a commitment in time and effort, but, because the church was flourishing, the poor in the parish were looked after and the individuals who gave financially felt themselves to be close to God and they felt that they were promised a path to heaven for themselves and their loved ones.

As our historical structures of class and patronage have broken down, we've now moved primarily to a fourth model of giving - a stewardship model, where we, the local congregation, give our own time and money to the church in recognition of God's sacrificial love for us in Jesus, so that we can care effectively for human needs and grow our community.

As these four models have developed, sadly the link between our giving and the abundant life full of love and joy, which Jesus calls us into as a friend of his, has been lost. We see our giving as an exchange: we give in response to God's love in order to meet the costs of the church and to continue the activities that we want to run. We give our time, talent and money more out of duty than out of joy.

I'd like us to look at giving in a different way. In a way that mirrors more closely God's love for us. This gift of love isn't given out of duty. It's not seen as an exchange. No, it's a gift that's given freely with no expectation of what might come back in return. It's

given to benefit the recipient, not the giver. It's given to show something of what heaven is like and how relationships in that place can flourish.

Last week I talked about the vision of what being connected to Jesus and producing the fruit of an abundant life might look like – having authentic friendships, cultivating community assets and being a blessing for others. Giving to produce such fruit doesn't come with a guaranteed return. But it's only through giving to Jesus that we can gain those things that really matter and which money cannot buy – love, joy, peace, salvation. I urge you now at the end of our series, United in Giving, to come to Jesus. Come to Jesus, your friend who laid down his life for you, in prayer and make a commitment to give freely and generously. And that's in both time and money.

Practically this may mean going back over the other sermons in this series to remind you of what it is that we have to give thanks for, what it means to be generous, as God is generous and what our vision is for us to live lives connected to Jesus, our friend, and produce the fruit of an abundant life.

Practically this may also mean taking the United in Giving leaflet for the church that you feel a part of and following the advice on what you can do to increase the financial amount that you give and to make this contribution through the Parish Giving Scheme – a mechanism that will really help us to know that we can build up our mission to bring God's love to the people of West Wickham.

If you have any questions about the Parish Giving Scheme, do talk to our treasurers – David Wada and Bob West. If you have any ideas that you'd like to contribute to our vision, do talk to me. And I pray that through prayer and the commitments being made by you at this time we will be able to continue sharing God's love with others and introducing them to Jesus, our friend, who offers that abundant life full of love and joy.

Amen

### **Prayer Pointers**

Pray for a closer sense of community in our congregation – that, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, our relationships with each other may deepen and that we may all truly care and watch out for each other. Pray that we may be radical disciples whose love and caring becomes a key feature of our church which attracts



more to join us on our journey with God. Pray that our love for each other and for our community may encourage people to become the next generation of worshippers at St Mary's and St Francis'.

Pray for all in leadership roles in the church especially for those who lead our Diocese of Southwark – for Bishop Christopher and the Area Bishops, and for all clergy and laity who lead parishes. In our own Deanery of Croydon Addington, pray for our Area Dean, Debbie Forman, and for God's blessing on the mission of all the churches in our Deanery. Pray especially for St John Selsdon as they prepare to welcome their new Rector – Younis Francis, and for St Francis', Monk's Hill as they reach out to their community with their 'Food Stop' project.

Pray for all who have felt that they are not fully welcomed in churches for reasons of sexuality, struggles with mental health or disability. Thank God for organisations such as 'Inclusive Church' who work to break down barriers and help churches to become places of welcome for everyone. Pray that we at St Mary's and St Francis' may be an open, welcoming and inclusive congregation reflecting the love of Christ for all.

Pray for our city of London and all who govern in the city and boroughs. Pray for the person elected to be the Mayor of London following the election on Thursday. Pray that our city may flourish once again following the Covid pandemic. Pray that society in London may be transformed, revived and healed by the grace of God and that we, as Christians connected with our community, may play our part in this healing through prayer and acts of love.

Pray for all those who are ill and for those who are having treatment or surgery at this time –especially for Michael Sanders and Julie Bailey. Pray for those we know, especially our relatives and friends, and those known to God alone, who seek God's healing grace. Pray especially for all those suffering from mental health issues and for those who care for them. Pray that those who are ill may find peace in their pain, strength in their weakness and comfort in their sadness.

Pray for those who have died and help us to trust they are at peace with you. We pray that we too may share with them the joy and light of the Kingdom of Heaven. Pray that we may trust God not for ourselves alone, but for those also whom we love and who are hidden from us by the shadow of death; that, as we believe your power to have raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, so may we trust your love to give eternal life to all who believe in him.

### Continuing Prayer for India during Covid Crisis

God of power and might, we lift our brothers and sisters in India to you. We pray for your protection. We pray for your provision. We pray for the nations of the earth to have compassion. When people are in need, you are our refuge. When people are scared, you are our refuge. When people are mourning, you are our refuge. Compassionate God, draw close to those who seek your refuge today.