

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

12th September 2021: Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity

Hazel writes:

Last week in my sermon I suggested that we might try to influence those who will meet at the COP26 conference in November, so that they take notice of the climate injustice that is currently faced by the very poorest of people. A small thing that you can do is to join with Christian Aid in their campaign to create an installation of thousands of prayer boats at the conference. Instructions to **create a prayer boat** are attached to this pew sheet and are available in each of the church buildings. Please make up one or more prayer boat(s) and leave them in one of the churches, so we can develop our own display at the end of the month before sending the boats to Christian Aid to form part of their campaign.

Next Sunday 19th September, we will have **Holy Communion services** at 8am in St Mary's church and at 10am in St Francis' Church.

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

Resources and updates for the week ahead – This week our service will be **livestreamed 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.
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from St. David's Cathedral on the eve of the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
 - **On BBC 1: Songs of Praise at 1.45 p.m.** –Sean Fletcher discovers how Pendle in Lancashire has inspired radical Christians.

We are starting a small group for those that might want a more spiritual approach to dealing with difficult things in life. This will be based on the **Alpha** material and will meet face to face starting in the middle of September. If you (or someone that you know) might benefit from sharing with others in a confidential setting and exploring faith further, please do be in touch with me. Hazel

Coffee & Chat on Zoom is now held every first Thursday of the month. We will also experiment with a **Coffee & Chat in person** on the third Thursday of the month. The first of these will be at 2.30pm on this Thursday 16th September in St Francis' Church. If you would like to come and meet others for a chat, please do join us. If you would like to do this, but cannot make this date, please let Rowena know (rowena.griff19@btinternet.com or 8777 6112).

MacMillan Coffee Morning – Saturday 18th September 10.30 – 12 noon at St. Mary of Nazareth Church. Please come along and support the Coffee Morning at St. Mary's in the gardens and hall. There will be a raffle and Ann Herbert (anndrew@hrbt.org or 8464 1609) would be very appreciative for any donations of cakes and offers of help on the day. If you cannot make it, please donate to our JustGiving page at www.justgiving.com/fundraising/stmarycoffeemorning

Every Wednesday we open St Francis' Church for an **hour of private prayer** from 10.30 - 11.30am. If any others would like to join those who volunteer in being there to enable this to happen, please contact Joan Burford (jandbburford@talktalk.net or 020 8777 2034), who will be pleased to include you in the team.

I was unable to **open Children's Society Boxes** last year due to Covid, but I will shortly resume my Autumn collection of the boxes at St Francis', I would be grateful if they could be brought into St. Francis Church when it is convenient. Alternatively, I can arrange for them to be opened at home. Many thanks. Christine Morton (Tel No. 020 8777 9213).

If anyone has any **1lb jam jars** with lids they don't need, could they please take them to St. Marys vestibule as these are required by those making marmalade for sale later in the year. Thank you.

We have an in-person **women's event** on Wednesday 22nd September at 8pm in St Francis' Church, when Maxine from Kaleidoscope Domestic Support Group will tell us about how this group supports women in the local area. Refreshments will be served. Please do come along and bring a friend.

The last **lunchtime concert** at St Francis is on Thursday 23rd September at 12.45 pm. More details later

St John's Autumn Fair is at St Francis' Church Hall on Saturday 2nd October from 11am to 3pm. All proceeds go to Link to Hope, a Christian charity that rebuilds lives and communities in Eastern Europe through education and social care. Please do put the date in your diary and think about donating Christmas Jumpers and Posh Frocks for one

of their stalls, baking a cake or making jam/chutney for their stall of home-produced goodies. If you can help in any way, please contact Milly Johnson (linktohopehighams@gmail.com or 07796 338483).

Please bring **Foodbank donations** to the Vicarage or St Francis' Church. Currently they need bags for life, cooking sauce, toothbrushes, children's toothpaste, and hair conditioner. They are well-stocked with pasta, cereals and baked beans and 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>.

Thanks to all those who have contributed stories about '**God with Us**' for the magazines and our special service in July. If you have any further stories to share, please do send them to Hazel (with a request for anonymisation if you'd prefer), so that we can continue to share these in different ways.

Last month Messy Church introduced our new **Bug Hotel** at St Mary's. This is now in need of some furnishings – sticks and dry leaves - for the bugs to feel at home. If you want to walk with a purpose, please do collect some of these on your travels, bring them to St Mary's and put them into the Bug Hotel, or leave them beside it and someone from Messy Church will put them into the structure.

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.

Freedom from legal restrictions will enable us to make changes in our public worship, but Covid 19 is still a threat. Please do come to one of the services to see how we are maintaining safety by asking everyone to observe the following:

- Keep your mask on, unless you are exempt or if you are leading the service in any way.
- Observe social distancing and only sit where there is a green tick, so maintaining at least 1m between people from different households.
- If, when you are sitting, you are concerned about others being too close to you, feel free to move to another seat.

One-way systems will remain in place. The sharing of the Peace will continue in a socially distanced format and arrangements for administering Communion, bread only, will remain the same for the time being.

Booking has now opened for the extremely popular **Bishop's Certificate Course** starting in September. There are five taught modules (5 weeks per module) and a final residential weekend module as follows:

- Following - about the New Testament
- Remembering - about the Old Testament
- Exploring - about the history of the church and what it means to be Anglican
- Believing - about what Christians believe
- Deepening - about living, serving and praying as a follower of Jesus
- Expecting - about putting your future into God's hands

For 2021/2022, there are four options to participate. Tuesday evenings at Trinity House, near London Bridge, Wednesday evenings online via 'Zoom', Thursday evenings online and Saturday mornings at Trinity House. The cost of the course is £220 which includes the residential event at Wychcroft. For more information about the course speak to Brian Griffiths our Reader who is also a course tutor, or Debbie Adams who has completed the course. To request an application form and a schedule of dates, visit bishopscertificate@southwark.anglican.org or telephone the Diocesan Office on 020 7939 9400 and ask for the Discipleship and Ministry Department.

Some of us will be going to **The Southwark Diocesan Spirituality Day, 'Wells of Salvation' on Saturday 9th October, 10.00 am-1.00 pm, in Southwark Cathedral. Cost £5.00.** This is a morning of meditations, prayer, sung worship and restoration. Speakers include - the Venerable Justine Allain Chapman, the Archdeacon of Boston, author of *The Resilient Disciple*, writer and broadcaster Nick Mayhew-Smith, Bishop Christopher with oboe player Amy Roberts and members of Southwark Cathedral choir. Tickets available from: <https://spirituality-day.eventbrite.co.uk>. If you would like to join us and are not on the internet or need help with booking your ticket please contact Rowena Griffiths for further information on 8777 6112 or rowena.griff19@btinternet.com

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 or 8916 9855) for St Francis'

The **flower pedestal** this week at St. Marys has been donated by Margaret Bond, Michelle Graydon and Beryl Bolton in memory of Joy Yallop and has been arranged by Beryl. There are now vacancies at St. Marys commencing the week 26th September so please let Merri know when you would like a pedestal and she will let you know the dates available.

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

Collect

Lord God, defend your Church from all false teaching and give to your people knowledge of your truth, that we may enjoy eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

First Reading:

Isaiah 50: 4-9a

The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.

Morning by morning he wakens -wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.

⁵ The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backwards.

⁶ I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting.

⁷ The Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame;

⁸ he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend

with me? Let us stand up together.

Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me.

⁹ It is the Lord GOD who helps me; who will declare me guilty? All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.

Gospel Reading:

Mark 8: 27-38

²⁷ Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' ²⁸ And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' ²⁹ He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.'³⁰ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.³¹ Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter

took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸ Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'

Post Communion Prayer

Keep, O Lord, your Church, with your perpetual mercy; and, because without your human frailty cannot but fall, keep us ever by your help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all

things profitable to our
salvation; through Jesus
Christ our Lord.

Sermon – Richard Ford

This is the sermon which Richard will be using at St Francis' church for the 8am service, based on the readings. The same readings will be referred to by Jon Mann, our visiting speaker from The Children's Society, although his talk will obviously be a little different to this. We may be able to share something of it with you later in the weekend or next week.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing. How often have we said, "If I'd known then what I know now, I wouldn't have done... or said... or thought... what I did." I wonder if Peter ever felt that way when he looked back on those days when he journeyed with Jesus around Palestine, before Jesus' death and, especially, his resurrection revealed that he truly was the Son of God. We know that he bitterly regretted his denial of Jesus on the night of his trial, but did he feel the same way about his rebuking of Jesus that we heard about just now?

It's easy for us to be critical of Peter because we know how the story ends, but Peter was caught up in the midst of it. It's easy for us to be critical because we come at this incident from a Christian perspective, but Peter comes at it from a Jewish perspective. So let's try for a moment to look at from Peter's viewpoint.

He's witnessed Jesus calming the storm, he's seen him feed the five thousand and, later, the four thousand and he's experienced him walking on water.

As a result of this, when Jesus asks his disciples who they think he is, Peter has no hesitation in answering, "You are the Christ." "Christ" being the Greek for the Hebrew "Messiah," the anointed one of God.

Given that, why does Peter rebuke Jesus when he says that he must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law and be killed and after three days rise again? It's because as far as Peter and the other disciples are concerned that's not what should happen to the Messiah.

In Peter's day, the understanding about the Messiah was that by defeating all Israel's enemies, especially the occupying Romans, he would restore Israel's great nation status, and he would, among other things, renew Jerusalem, cleanse the Temple and initiate the perfect reign of God.

What he wouldn't do is to die at the hands of the political and religious authorities. What Jesus was suggesting was an upside-down view of the world as far as Peter was concerned.

We, of course, now know why Jesus had to go to the cross - in order to reconcile sinful mankind with God. But that is something which Peter and the others have yet to learn.

In passing it's worth noting that what Jesus sees lying ahead is what Isaiah prophesied in our first reading this morning, in the voice of one who has come to be known as the Suffering Servant:

I gave my back to those who struck me,
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I did not hide my face
from insult and spitting.

⁷ The Lord GOD helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame;

⁸ he who vindicates me is near.

Jesus knows that what lies ahead includes indignities and insults and worse, but he has "set his face like flint," and will not be deflected by the temptation to avoid it that Peter presents.

But if there is worse to come for Jesus, there is also worse to come for Peter and the other disciples. But not just for them, for us also, since Jesus calls the rest of the crowd to him before going on to challenge them to join him on his journey to the cross.

When Jesus says that those who follow him must take up their cross, he's not talking about having to put up with some relatively minor inconvenience, he's talking about literally being prepared to put our lives on the line. Peter, we know, was crucified. And many thousands of Christians since have died rather than give up their faith and are still doing so today. The *Christianity Today* website claims that every day, 13 Christians worldwide are killed because of their faith, with Nigeria currently the most dangerous country in which to be a Christian.

Now it's unlikely that we shall be required to give up our lives for our faith, but when Jesus says that those who follow him must deny themselves, that's something that we can't escape. But what does denying ourselves mean?

Donald English, former General Secretary of the Division of Home Mission for the Methodist Church amongst other roles, describes it as follows:

If you clutch your life wholly to yourself, protecting it against all others, asserting your rights, needs and privileges, you lose it because it isn't life any longer. If, however, you acknowledge that life is not yours by right, that all is privilege, and that it is to be lived in the love that the gospel story reveals, self-giving love, then you possess it wholly. There is now nothing to lose and everything to gain.

William Barclay puts it rather more succinctly, suggesting that if we are tempted to claim that all this is too demanding, it is, in fact, "better to burn out than rust out."

And the former Bishop of Durham, Tom Wright comments, "Jesus is not leading us on a pleasant afternoon hike, but on a walk into danger and risk. Or did we think that the kingdom of God would mean merely a few minor adjustments in our ordinary lives?"

I am well aware that this is probably the most challenging part of all Jesus' teaching, but it is something that asks of us a serious response. I am also well aware that we won't always be able to live up to these standards but it is vital that we seek to do so.

If you want a quick check on where you stand in relation to Jesus' demands, ask yourselves what you do with your time and your money, because that will tell you what is important to you.

Of course, we won't always get it right, but we serve a forgiving God, more ready to forgive than we are to seek forgiveness.

One final point: Jesus' comment that "Some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power," has puzzled many, perhaps because they think it refers to Jesus' Second Coming." Clearly it doesn't. Rather, perhaps, it refers to Jesus' victory over death, revealed in his resurrection, and the way that Christianity spread, in just 30 years, in the lifetime of some of those listening to him, from the relatively insignificant country of Palestine, through Asia Minor and on to Egypt, Rome and Greece, so that today a third of the world is Christian.

Amen

Prayer Pointers

- That our words may be a blessing to those who hear them. May they spread peace within our congregations and in our community of West Wickham.
- For our local schools as they return after the summer break. For all who teach and learn in them.
- For everyone affected by the events in Afghanistan – for those who are now refugees around the world and those who remain and have to adjust to life under new rulers.
- For our Explorers, Scouts, Cubs, Beavers and Brownies as they meet again. Give thanks for all the leaders who give up so much time to bring fun and friendship for the young people.
- For all in Government especially MP's and local councillors. For wisdom and justice in their decision making.
- For all in ministry in our Diocese – those who point us towards God. Especially for Jonathan, our Bishop of Croydon, who announced this week that he will retire in the Spring next year. May all ministries be blessed and bear much fruit.
- For all those who are ill and for their friends and relatives – especially for Vicky Pearce, Julie Bailey and Carole Hubbard – and all those unknown to us but known to God alone.
- For the soul of John Tasker, who died recently, and for his wife, Sheila, mourning his loss.

God, help us to know when to speak powerfully, and when we need to be gentler. Help us remember that our words are very powerful things, and that we need to use them carefully. Amen