

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

13th June 2021: Second Sunday after Trinity

Hazel writes:

This week we are commissioning our four church wardens and the theme of our service is using our talents wisely for the glory of God – something that we believe these four people are doing. It is great that we will undertake this service within our own community, rather than it being done in at a central service for the whole Archdeaconry. Please do support your church wardens by being at the service – either on-line at 10am or physically at St Mary's church.

Next 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 16th June from 10.30-11.30am.

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 – Rev. Michael Youngson leads a service on story telling.
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from Queens Free Chapel. St. Georges Windsor.
 - On BBC 1: at 10.30 a.m. Sean Fletcher explores the ethical and religious issues of the day.
 - Songs of Praise **on BBC2 at 1.15 p.m.** Rev. Canon Kate Bottley explores a new pilgrim route to Durham Cathedral.

This year **Refugee Week** runs from 14-20 June and Hope Health Action, a charity linked with Coney Hill Baptist Church, is marking it by setting up a refugee simulation experience throughout the week, in the church building. This is an immersive walk-through exhibition where you can hear real-life stories from those who have made the journey from South Sudan to Bidi-Bidi, a refugee settlement in Uganda – the largest in Africa. Book your free tickets at www.hopehealthaction.org/forcedtofly.

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. 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.

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!

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 pedestal this week at St. Mary's has been provided by Jean Mathers for family birthdays and has been arranged by Merri.

Jean Mathers has a child's cot, which can also become a bed, with a new mattress which she is happy to give away to someone for a donation to St. Mary's. If anyone is interested please contact Jean on 0208 777 7629.

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

Faithful Creator,
whose mercy never fails:
deepen our faithfulness to
you and to your living
Word, Jesus Christ our
Lord.

First Reading:

Matthew 25: 14-30

¹⁴ ‘For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵ to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶ The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷ In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸ But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. ¹⁹ After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying,

“Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.” ²¹ His master said to him, “Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.” ²² And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, “Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.” ²³ His master said to him, “Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.” ²⁴ Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, “Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.” ²⁶ But his master replied, “You wicked and lazy slave! You knew,

did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹ For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰ As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Post Communion Prayer

Loving Father, we thank you for feeding us at the supper of your Son: sustain us with your Spirit, that we may serve you here on earth until our joy is complete in heaven, and we share in the eternal banquet with Jesus Christ our Lord.

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Sermon – Hazel O’Sullivan

The parable of the talents is one of those stories told by Jesus, which reveals a truth about the kingdom of heaven. It’s the kingdom of heaven which is referred to at the start of our reading when Jesus says, *For it will be like...* The “it” refers to the kingdom of heaven.

The story starts with a man going on a journey and he gives each of his servants talents. Jesus was talking about money. A lot of money. A talent was roughly what a labourer could earn in 15 years, so this man gave one servant £2million, the next £800,000 and the last servant £400,000. Some got more, some less, but all of them received a significant amount.

I think that the talents in this parable represent all that God gives us during our lifetime: our skills, our time, our resources, our money, our energy, our affections, our prayers, our words, our work, everything. And God asks us to invest our talents in the kingdom of heaven.

We’re at a critical time in the life of our churches now as we emerge from the pandemic. In my talk at the start of May, on the vision which we are creating for our future, I focussed on how our work of compassion, developing our local community and being a blessing to those who visit us will be undertaken by each of us being connected to Jesus. This is a vision of us creating something of that kingdom of heaven here in West Wickham. To do this we will need to use our talents – invest ourselves in kingdom work.

I believe this parable is a **happy appeal to invest what God has given us**, as well as a **deep encouragement**. I’d like to explore both of these now.

First, the happy appeal to invest our talents. I think it’s a happy appeal because the parable is about the character of Jesus.

This parable is centred on Jesus: *[The kingdom of heaven] will be like a man going on a journey*. That’s Jesus. Jesus is the man who went away. Jesus, having accomplished our salvation on the cross and rising from the dead, went away. He ascended to heaven and has remained there a long time, but he is coming back. Jesus is coming back. Until then *we*, his servants, are asked to be good stewards by investing the talents he’s given us in kingdom work until he returns.

But what does this parable reveal to us about Jesus’ character?

The third servant tells us Jesus is a harsh man, profiting where he didn't labour and taking what doesn't belong to him. He makes Jesus sound like a mafia don. Jesus condemns the servant for burying the talent. He calls him wicked and lazy, he takes the talent away from him, and casts him into outer darkness. If we accept this servant's assessment of Jesus' character, it's anything but a happy appeal.

I wonder, do you see Jesus like this? Do you see him telling you to get up out of your seat and *do more for God or you'll end up in hell? This would not be a great message to use when commissioning our church wardens for the year ahead.* And for the ministry team, who've been providing support to both congregations without much of a break for over a year now and we're yet to see much return on our investment in God's kingdom, the message to do more could be said to be disheartening.

I think what Jesus is saying is this: don't see me in the way this servant saw me, because this isn't a servant of mine at all, he's a pretender and doesn't understand anything about me. We know that for three reasons:

- Firstly, he buries the talent and doesn't give kingdom work a second thought until the Master returns. He has no kingdom interest at all.
- Secondly, this servant doesn't know who Jesus is and he slanders his character horribly. He calls Jesus a harsh man who reaps where he didn't sow. He blames Jesus for his slothfulness – I didn't invest it out of fear of you. It's your fault!
- Third, and most importantly, this man is cast into outer darkness because he had nothing to offer Jesus. But we know that no one enters the kingdom of heaven based on what we give to Jesus, but on what Jesus gave to us.

I think that, in terms of his character, the parable tells us that Jesus is amazingly giving and generous and gracious. We are given talents. Some more, some less, but all valuable, all precious. They all arise out of him giving his life for us. And then on his return, he rejoices with us and rewards us for the returns we offer him on the talents he gave us. He forgives us for those talents that we might have lost in pursuing the kingdom and he receives us into his kingdom, not as servants but as friends. This is why we invest in kingdom work: because the reward is something so wonderful, so amazing. Please, don't listen to the third servant. He was a pretender and a slanderer. Jesus is amazingly generous and gracious. That's who Jesus is!

Now the second part of what this parable is about is an encouragement. This parable contains an overview of our lives – what we were created to be and to do. What life

is really about. And I think that emerging from the pandemic, many of us will be rethinking some things about life. I said in the letter which I wrote in this month's magazine that we won't be reverting straight back to what we did before all of this kicked off, but we'll take our time to review, reflect and listen to what God is saying to us about that investment in the kingdom of heaven.

I hope that through this process of review, reflection and prayer we might find what God's priorities are for us. I suspect those priorities won't be focussed purely on things like making ourselves more comfortable, or jetting off for a great summer holiday, although you might do that too. No, God's priorities will be about investing the gospel of Jesus in the lives of people. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. ... Lost people. The only thing that can transition this tired old world into the kingdom of heaven is people.

God wants us to use our talents to spread the love of Jesus. Use them to witness to Jesus' generous, gracious character. Use them to be his hands and feet to go to the hurting, the broken, the outcast. And if your hands and your feet are somewhat out of commission now, God has still given you the ability to pray. Pray for people to know Jesus. People entering the kingdom of heaven is why Jesus came, and why he sends us.

So, this is what we'll be focussed on – people. And we'll be able to see what we've invested in the kingdom when we look at how much time and energy we've focussed on people. God created us with a deep desire to be relational because that's his measure of being productive. The third servant spent no time or energy being productive: he buried his talent and did nothing with it. I contend that this is entirely against being created in the image of God. Yes, if we're super busy we might need to slow down for a bit to get refreshed. But if we're doing very little and we're feeling tired and listless, what we probably need to do is get busy in service for the kingdom. There is a weariness that comes from not being busy and a joy that comes from serving the Lord! It's what we were created for!

So, we'll be spending time and energy on people. But that time and energy won't be the same for each of us and it won't be spent in the same way. Verse 15 tells us that the man gave to his servants varying amounts of talents *according to their ability*. The playing field isn't even. The Lord gives five talents to some, two to others, one to others. We shouldn't compare or be jealous. Life isn't measured by how we compare to others. It's not a competition.

Now, Jesus may not have given them an equal amount of talents but he did give them an equal amount of praise and reward. He was as pleased with the guy who doubled two talents as he was with the guy who doubled five talents. And when he asks the third servant why he didn't take the small step of investing the talent in the bank so at least there'd be interest, I think we can imagine he would have praised and rewarded that small step of faithfulness in the same way.

I think Jesus sees small things done in the background differently than we do. Yes, today we're commissioning our church wardens and you might look at them and think that they're the Christians who'll be well rewarded by Jesus. But equally, if you invest and give in what might seem like small, unimpressive ways, you will still be having a kingdom impact. More than you know. And Jesus is pleased more than you know. And so yes, if you faithfully and sincerely love and serve Jesus, you will be well rewarded.

Jesus honours all those who serve. Be encouraged.

Let's recommit to investing in the kingdom of heaven. Let's pray and work to make the next months a productive time for the kingdom. Let's have faith that God can use us to make a difference for the kingdom. The truth that this parable reveals is that the kingdom of heaven is a place where Christ reigns and, on that day when we come face to face with him, we might expect his response to what we've done to be: "that's it? That's all?" I think we'll be surprised to hear him say "well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into my joy." Then we'll talk to others who had the same experience: "did he say well done, good and faithful servant to you?" "Yeah, you?" "Yeah".

And we'll realize that the truth about kingdom of heaven that Jesus was telling us in the parable of the talents is that it is more about him, his grace, his love, his kindness, his encouragement, than it is about us. That's who Jesus is – he gives his life for us.

Will we do the same for him?

Amen

Prayer Pointers

- For the gift of the Holy Spirit to discover, nurture and use our talents in the service of Christ.
- For our four church wardens as they continue in their duties for our two churches, supporting our community and encouraging our ministry and mission.
- For the follow up to the G7 leaders' summit this weekend, that commitments which they make will be fruitful and for the benefit of the whole world.
- For our government and for the scientists who advise them as they face difficult decisions about lifting lockdown restrictions.
- Continue to 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 struggling to find new work because of redundancy as a result of the pandemic.
- For the three people injured in the car crash in West Wickham on Monday, for the crew of the air ambulance and all the healthcare professionals involved in their care, as well as those who witnessed the traumatic event.
- For all those who are ill and for their friends and relatives – especially for Vicky Pearce and Julie Bailey. Pray also for Bishop Christopher, who is recovering from surgery in Kings College Hospital.
- For all those who have died and for their loved ones who mourn at this time, as they come to terms with their passing – especially pray for the soul of Michael Sanders and his wife Mary and for Sheila Green and her husband Ron.