

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

18th July 2021: Seventh Sunday after Trinity

Hazel writes:

Our Inclusive Church meeting on Thursday included some very moving presentations from three panel members and further discussion on how we might make others who are different to us feel more included in our community. I introduced some material developed by the Church of England: Living in Love and Faith, which will form the basis of our follow up on this topic for those who are interested in learning more about identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage. Look out for notification of dates for a five-week course in the autumn.

Next Sunday we have 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 **available from 1pm** 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 June Osborne preaches in a service from St. Peters, Senghenydd.
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from Westminster Abbey to mark the 400th anniversary of the death of Edmund Hooper.
 - On BBC 1: Sunday Morning Live at 10.30 a.m. – Sean Fletcher and Nina Wadia explore the religious and ethical issues of the day and
 - Songs of Praise at 1.15 p.m. – Catherine Jenkins is in Arundel visiting the castle gardens and the Roman Catholic Cathedral.

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.

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 a course tutor, or Debbie Adams who has completed the course. To request an application form and a schedule of dates, email bishopscertificate@southwark.anglican.org or telephone the Diocesan Office on 020 7939 9400 and ask for the Discipleship and Ministry Department.

Following the recent Refugee's Journey immersive exhibition at Coney Hill Baptist Church Deacon Laura MacBean has set up a JustGiving page to raise funds for **Hope Health Action's emergency appeal** for refugees in Uganda's BidiBidi settlement through a sponsored walk. She will walk 25 miles in the first week of July 2021 (the distance some of the refugees said they had fled to BidiBidi from their village in South Sudan) and build up to 128 miles by 31 July 2021. Please sponsor her here:

<https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/laura-macbean>

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 **United in Giving** campaign, which ran during April and May has resulted in some people signing up to the Parish Giving Scheme. If you would rather increase your financial contribution to St Francis or St Mary's churches by other means, please note that we can receive on-line donations through our websites, as well as through machines in both churches which accept contactless payment cards. Please do ask about these

ways of donating if these would suit you better than using cash, direct debit or a standing order.

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 flowers at St. Francis this week are for Margaret Thorne, in memory of her mother and have been arranged by Lesley East and Joan Burford.

Are you keen to help a small independent business survive as they emerge from the pandemic? A young couple with a carpentry business are about to lose their current workshop space. If you have a spare garage or workshop space with an electric supply, which you would be happy to let them use, with costs covered, please contact Toby and Saffron at TM12358@outlook.com or 07872 938235.

Glebe Housing Association are looking for a volunteer minibus driver for any of the following mornings each week: Mon, Tues, Thurs and Fri. You could make a real difference for residents who value being able to access local community activities and shops. You must have had a FULL UK Driving License for 2 years or more and this must include category D1, with no serious driving convictions. If you are interested, please contact the HR department at hr@glebeha.org.uk or call 0208 777 1122.

St Francis and St Mary's are working with the St John's Community Befriending Team to help tackle loneliness in the community by providing volunteer **Telephone Befrienders** for people referred by NHS Social Prescribers. More volunteers are always needed to give regular support to someone on the telephone. When asked about this opportunity, one befriender said:

I have found it very rewarding and so easy to do. The person I support says "it's so nice to hear a different voice and talk about different things". We normally have a lovely chat about what we've been up to and what's going on in the world and exchange ideas about gardening. Today she advised me to use porridge and garlic paste to help ward off snails. It's great to know that my volunteering has benefited both of us'.

If this is something you think you might want to be involved in, please contact Kate Dyer katedyer41@hotmail.com.

We are delighted to recommence our **Thursday lunchtime concerts at St. Francis** this year and we have some talented musicians happy to come and play for us. The dates for

your diary are: August 12th, August 26th and September 23rd. All commence at 12.45. Further details of programmes soon.

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

Mother and Father God,
As your children we have
been saddened to be apart
and felt denied human and
Divine love.

But we know you are
always closest to us in need,
so restore us from isolation
to your community of
broken and reclaimed souls,
your church redeemed by
your saving love,
through Jesus Christ our
Lord. Amen.

First Reading:

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Woe to the shepherds who
destroy and scatter the
sheep of my pasture! says
the LORD. ²Therefore, thus
says the LORD, the God of
Israel, concerning the
shepherds who shepherd
my people: It is you who
have scattered my flock,
and have driven them away,
and you have not attended
to them. So I will attend to
you for your evil doings,
says the LORD. ³Then I
myself will gather the
remnant of my flock out of
all the lands where I have
driven them, and I will bring
them back to their fold, and
they shall be fruitful and
multiply. ⁴I will raise up

shepherds over them who
will shepherd them, and
they shall not fear any
longer, or be dismayed, nor
shall any be missing, says
the LORD.

⁵The days are surely
coming, says the LORD,
when I will raise up for
David a righteous Branch,
and he shall reign as king
and deal wisely, and shall
execute justice and
righteousness in the
land. ⁶In his days Judah will
be saved and Israel will live
in safety. And this is the
name by which he will be
called: 'The LORD is our
righteousness.'

Gospel Reading:

Mark 6:30-34, 53-end

³⁰The apostles gathered
around Jesus, and told him all
that they had done and
taught. ³¹He said to them,
'Come away to a deserted
place all by yourselves and
rest a while.' For many were
coming and going, and they
had no leisure even to
eat. ³²And they went away in
the boat to a deserted place
by themselves. ³³Now many
saw them going and
recognized them, and they
hurried there on foot from all
the towns and arrived ahead

of them. ³⁴As he went
ashore, he saw a great
crowd; and he had
compassion for them,
because they were like sheep
without a shepherd; and he
began to teach them many
things.

⁵³When they had crossed
over, they came to land at
Gennesaret and moored the
boat. ⁵⁴When they got out of
the boat, people at once
recognized him, ⁵⁵and rushed
about that whole region and
began to bring the sick on
mats to wherever they heard
he was. ⁵⁶And wherever he
went, into villages or cities or
farms, they laid the sick in
the market-places, and
begged him that they might
touch even the fringe of his
cloak; and all who touched it
were healed.

Post Communion Prayer

Healing God, we who have
shared this bread and this
cup have shared a long time
in the wilderness; help us
Lord, now, to spread your
love into the world we now
return to:
may those who have felt
sad or lonely be comforted
by your people once more;
through Jesus Christ our
Lord. Amen.

The collect and post communion prayer, written by Rev Tim Coleman reproduced with his permission.

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Sermon – Rowena Griffiths

Sunday 18th July – Rest and Recovery

Today is the third and last in our series of services during which we have previously reflected on 'Lament' and 'God with Us'. This morning we will focus on God's healing power as we move forward after lockdown.

What an invitation - 'Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile' – more of that in a moment.

Today's Gospel from Mark is unusual as it comes bang in the middle of stories about Jesus' teaching & healing ministry.

It's also not included in the other Gospels, apart from Luke who mentions it briefly.

Here we have a dynamic sequence of events, frenetic at times, leading up to this command or invitation from Jesus to his apostles, or disciples as they will later be called, to 'Come away, to a deserted place by yourselves and rest awhile'. Some translations say 'Come away with me' but the invitation is to take responsibility for finding your own quiet place. Things happen fast in Mark's Gospel; one event follows quickly after another, emphasising that the time is short. Jesus moves swiftly, as do the events that led to his death and resurrection.

Imagine the scene, the disciples all return at the same time from their various missions, teaching and healing. They are all excited to be seeing each other again, all talking at once and desperate to tell Jesus what they have been doing, but it's difficult to get a word in edgeways with all the crowds following Jesus who have also gathered. Jesus senses how exhausted they must be and so issues them with this invitation to 'Come away'.

Could it be that Mark is deliberately trying to emphasize this busyness here and the importance of rest?

Those of us in Ministry all know the importance of taking time out to look after ourselves, but it's not that easy to do sometimes. Many Christians feel guilty when they take time away, but it is essential for our well-being, spiritual nourishment and growth if we are to carry on providing pastoral care for others. This is not only true for Christian Ministry but for all those in the Caring professions (like doctors, nurses, carers, therapists, ambulance drivers, the fire service & all other support staff).

You've heard the saying – 'Life is like a Mars bar – Work, rest & play' which puts it into perspective and it's important to keep this life balance, difficult as it may be.

The King James Bible translates this verse as 'Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile' and certainly, if you don't take this time out you will eventually come apart.

For this reason, all the members of our Ministry Team will be taking it in turns to take some time out over the next few weeks and months to recuperate and recharge so that we can carry on with God's work in our parishes.

In March 2020 our world was turned upside down by Covid19 and lockdown regulations. The whole country was confronted with fear, isolation, grief, powerlessness and despair. We were like sheep who had gone astray, lost and bewildered not knowing which way to turn.

The NHS was under immense pressure with so many deaths and hospitals full to overflowing.

We were all in some kind of turmoil and needed guidance during these unprecedented times. We had no idea that the pandemic and lockdown was going to last so long. Added to this we had to close our church buildings for many months and go online.

This was a time of enforced rest for many of us, but it was a very worrying time when we needed to put our trust in God and spend some time alone with Him in prayer. It was a time to evaluate what was important to us in our lives.

At the beginning it was a novelty for many people but not for those who had to shield and others with underlying health problems. Some of those who didn't need to shield appreciated some 'me time' away from busy work schedules and they were still able to go out to do certain things BUT boredom soon set in for many. Cracks started opening up in our Social Care system and the lack of services available due to staff shortages, with appointments cancelled and carers and family members were not allowed into homes. NHS staff were rushed off their feet and were called in to help on Covid wards away from their usual places of work. Mental illness escalated during lockdown, and it is estimated that when we do return to normal many people will still suffer from some sort of mental problem for years to come.

This is where we as a Church were able to step in to offer pastoral care and practical help via our extended Pastoral Care Team. We have kept in touch with our members through regular telephone contact, email, hand delivering material to people, shopping and much more. Our Ministry Team here at St Francis and St Mary's has met regularly throughout lockdown to organise and provide online worship and other material, and we had to get to grips with using Zoom. Both parishes pulled together to work as a Team which meant we were able to establish a new pattern of working by sharing and pooling our resources.

People were experiencing loneliness due to a lack of personal contact. They were frightened, anxious and cautious. Many felt jaded, tired, had no motivation and it felt like we were walking around in a wilderness.

We were like zombies, not knowing which way to turn, unable to engage with anything and many found it impossible to engage with their faith or any sort of scripture, asking 'Where is God in all of this?' Many people became depressed and some still can't get out of this vicious circle. If you, or anyone you know is feeling depressed, I encourage you to please speak to someone like your GP, or maybe someone on the Ministry Team, because you may need more specialist help to get through this trauma.

If we as a Church have failed any of you during this time – I'd like to say sorry.

We couldn't see a way out, but by trusting in God to guide us we can feel his peace and healing power.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd and recognised his disciples' turmoil and their need for rest.

In Mark 13:27 - Mark identifies Jesus as the divine shepherd, who will gather his sheep from the places where they have been scattered.

So we see that God is with us all the time and there are many examples of this in the Bible.

I quote from an article by Sam Wells, the Vicar at St Martins'-in-the Field on 'How the pandemic hit, and the next steps':

"Exile is the time Israel found it was closer to God than it had ever been in the Promised Land..."

God didn't let Moses or the people down but guided them by travelling ahead of them. God was there with them all the way.

Moses commanded the Israelites at a crisis point in their journey with these words: Exodus 14:14 - 'The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still'. There is a lesson here for us – when we are facing a crisis, we become anxious and go over and over things in our mind. We should instead lift our eyes towards God, be still in His presence, and spend time in prayer.

As God was with Moses there are other examples of how he is with us - he was with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in Daniel 3 as the fourth person in the fire. He was with the disciples in the boat on the lake during the storm. He was there on the Emmaus Road. In Psalm 23 he is protecting us, and he was with Jeremiah in his anguish and there are several more.

What we must remember is that God doesn't spare us or rescue us from any of these difficulties, but he is always with us as our shepherd and guide, giving us his peace, as this verse from Psalm 23 illustrates:

'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for you are with me.'

In Psalm 23, peace comes from being protected, even in times of danger. For Jeremiah, peace came from speaking and acting truthfully. He could then envision the peace that would exist when the nation was restored.

It will take time for all of us to get back to some sort of normal. We must be gentle on ourselves because together we have all been through a very difficult time. We can't change the past or what happened, so we need to look forward and embrace a new type of normal.

For me this is like the life cycle of a butterfly, which is a sign of new life that eventually emerges as something beautiful.

I'd like to end with another quote from Sam Wells:

"The pandemic has been a complete nightmare, but it can still be a gift, if it restores our clarity about our core purpose: to be with people in the night-time of their fear with faith, hope and love in the God who, in Christ, heals our past and frees our future."

In the darkness of unknowing, when your love seems absent, draw near to us, O God, in Christ forsaken, in Christ risen, our Redeemer and our Lord. Amen.

Prayer Pointers

- For ways to find rest and healing in Christ as we recover from the busyness of the pandemic lockdowns.
- For the meeting of St Mary's and St Francis' PCC next week – that we will prayerfully seek the will of God as we discuss worship and outreach in the weeks and months ahead.
- That everyone may still be cautious and sensible to prevent the spread of Covid even when restrictions are removed on Monday. For those who are clinically vulnerable who may be afraid to leave their homes for fear of contracting Covid.
- For local health services including our GP's and hospitals as they have to deal with the backlog of illness that has not been treated during the pandemic.
- For Zimbabwe, and especially for the people of our link parish of St Andrew's, Gweru as the Covid vaccination programme gathers pace in the country.
- For harmony amongst people of all ethnicities in our own country - for an end to racism in all its forms and especially on social media.
- For all those who are ill and for their friends and relatives – especially for Vicky Pearce and Julie Bailey – and all those unknown to us but known to God alone.