

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

11th July 2021: Sixth Sunday after Trinity

Hazel writes:

Our services this week will focus on how God has been with us during the time of the pandemic: sometimes in surprising ways. Please do bring your prayers of lament to the services, where you will be able to place them in our prayer wall. We will also continue to collect the feedback questionnaires this week to help us with changes to make over the coming months.

Next Sunday we have Holy Communion services at **8am in St Mary's church** and at **10am in St Francis' 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.

The **bereavement support group** will meet on Wednesday at 2.30pm in Emmanuel Church, The Grove.

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 – a service led by Canon Simon Doogan and the Rev. Jan Stevenson.
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from Chester Cathedral - the Chester Summer Music Festival 2012.
 - 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.
 - Songs of Praise **on BBC2 at 1.15 p.m.** – Aled Jones visits Cheddar Gorge and Gemma Hunt meets the new worship band Bright City.

Our first **Thursday lunchtime concert at St. Francis** is this Thursday July 15th, when Paolo Rinaldi will play a popular programme of Chopin. Other dates are August 12th, August 26th and September 23rd. All commence at 12.45. Further details of programmes soon.

Our **Inclusive Church** meeting this week will focus on gender identity and sexuality. The event will be held on Thursday 15th July at 8pm online via Zoom. In the past Christians who have understood themselves to be homo- and/or transexual have felt an inner turmoil. On coming out some have lost leadership positions in their church, faced social rejection and suffered mental health issues. Three speakers with personal experiences of these issues will form the panel for this event. A Zoom invitation is being sent out with this pew sheet.

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>.

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 geoff@mussard.org.uk or 020 8650 8389.

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.

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 pedestal at St. Marys this week has been provided and arranged by Annette Cordery for family birthdays.

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.

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.

A reminder for those at St. Mary's who have a Children's Society box to please hand in to Dave or Wendy Taylor for the annual count. Thank you.

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: Psalm
85:8-end**

⁸ I am listening to what
the LORD God is saying;
he promises peace to
us, his own people,
if we do not go back
to our foolish ways.
⁹ Surely he is ready to
save those who honour
him, and his saving
presence will remain in
our land.
¹⁰ Love and faithfulness
will meet;
righteousness and
peace will embrace.

¹¹ Human loyalty will
reach up from the earth,
and God's
righteousness will look
down from heaven.

¹² The LORD will make us
prosperous,
and our land will
produce rich harvests.

¹³ Righteousness will go
before the LORD
and prepare the path
for him.

Gospel Reading:

John 14:25-29

²⁵ "I have told you this
while I am still with
you. ²⁶ The Helper, the
Holy Spirit, whom the
Father will send in my
name, will teach you
everything and make
you remember all that I
have told you.

²⁷ "Peace is what I leave
with you; it is my own
peace that I give you. I
do not give it as the
world does. Do not be
worried and upset; do
not be afraid. ²⁸ You
heard me say to you, 'I

am leaving, but I will
come back to you.' If
you loved me, you
would be glad that I am
going to the Father; for
he is greater than I. ²⁹ I
have told you this now
before it all happens, so
that when it does
happen, you will
believe.

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.

Sermon – Hazel O’Sullivan

God with us – 11th July 2021

To illustrate how God has been with us in the pandemic, I have four stories to share from people within or connected to our congregations. If you are able to access material on line, you can see them on our YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/channel/UCq1RdXI27bTlompT6lCPoGQ, but for those who are restricted to reading them, I didn’t want you to miss out, so have included them here in full.

1. Kay Mussard writes:

I went with some others recently to Winchester Cathedral and encountered God in so many ways. When the guide was telling about a Star of David that features in one stained-glass window and how David had written many of the Psalms, our experience of Home-Group discussions on the psalms became relevant, and we were able to offer detailed, alternative comments and to make connections. We then saw the tomb of Henry de Blois and linked that to our latest read in the church Book Group. We saw the memorial to William Walker, the deep-sea diver who saved the building from collapse by spending six years working under water among the foundations. At our next Home Group Richard reminded us that Walker’s tomb is in Beckenham Cemetery and that he died in 1918 during another pandemic, that of Spanish ‘Flu. Everything came together. Everything seemed to happen for a reason. The Cathedral and its history reminded us that people survive troubled times and helped us to recognise that our troubled times of Covid will doubtlessly shape our future. That day our encounter with God made our tiny place in God’s great plan of much more significance, and the future seemed to be all the more hopeful.

2. Mary Sanders: When Mary called me to say her husband, Michael, had died and to ask if I could take the funeral, she was thinking we’d have it at Beckenham Crematorium. However, she really wanted to make it more personal, which can be difficult at the crematorium. After further discussions over a number of days, we agreed that we’d do it at St Mary’s, for a number of reasons. Firstly, Mary had helped in the past at Messy Church and so felt very much at home in that building, even though she’s a member of St Francis’. Secondly, their daughter, Daniela wanted to speak, but she lives in Australia, so we needed to find a way of

linking across to the other side of the world. And thirdly, Mary herself was from the US and so there were other family members who'd like to be able to watch on a livestream, which as you know is possible from St Mary's. It wasn't until the day itself that I was able to see how God was so clearly involved in this decision. It was Norman, Michael's brother, who provided the final piece of the jigsaw. When he came into the church, he told me how he and Michael had been scouts at St Mary's. They grew up in Pickhurst Rise and that day he really felt that he'd come home. Later in the day it was Norman, at 92 years of age, who asked everyone at the reception after the service to explain how they each knew Michael and found himself learning new things about his brother as a result. God so clearly with us.

3. Terry Leggatt: Some of you will know Terry from when he visited St Francis' church on a Friday and Saturday – his first escorted visits out of prison for many years. In December 2019 Terry was moved to Whatton Prison near Nottingham, and he's kept in touch with a number of people from the church since. We heard in March that he was in hospital with Covid, and he then went rapidly downhill, being on a ventilator and unable to speak. Prayers were sent around the prayer chain. An update from Terry's friend, Adrian in April brought no good news – Terry had been in a coma then for six weeks. We expected the worst but kept praying. I now have a letter dated 19th May from Terry – it was the first he wrote after coming out of the coma – something that none of the doctors, nurses or prison staff expected to happen. Terry's letter states that without those prayers, he doesn't believe he'd be alive today – a miraculous healing and real proof of God with us.

4. Jane Smith: Jane has been shielding for most of the past year and lives on her own. She writes:

A few months ago, I started a gratitude journal, where I wrote down at least three things that I was grateful for that had taken place at the end of every day. Sometimes it was just something simple like I had appreciated the beautiful sky from my window or heard the call of a tawny owl one evening. Another time it might be giving thanks for a friend who emailed me or for my groceries being safely delivered. My journal is full up now, but I often look through it and remind myself of all the different things for which I am grateful. I haven't started another gratitude journal, but I am still in the habit of looking back over each day and remembering how I can be grateful.

Jane also wrote a poem called GRATITUDE, which may help anyone wanting to be reminded of how God is always with us:

Grateful for the dawn
As the birds start to sing.
Grateful for the sun-
The warmth that it brings.

Grateful for the trees
Coming into leaf.
Grateful for the flowers,
Butterflies and bees.

Grateful for my family
Although we are apart.
Grateful we are one
In spirit and in heart.

Grateful for my friends
For keeping in touch.
Grateful for my Godson,
Whom I love very much.

Grateful for my therapist
Giving me her time.
Grateful for all those
Who are patient and kind.

Grateful for the groceries
Delivered to my door.
Grateful for the workers
In the supermarket store.

Grateful for the sunset,
The colours in the sky.
Grateful for the moon
Shining pure and white.

Grateful for my bed,
Where I can sleep and rest.
Grateful that I am
Well and truly blessed.

So, you see, there are so many things to be grateful for over the past 18 months, but perhaps the most important is that God was with us, and he still is. Let's look a bit further at what this might mean.

Firstly, let's think about God. We've heard so many different stories – Kay's story is about a God making connections between so many different things. Mary's is about God providing all that was needed for her husband's funeral, despite it seeming impossible. Terry's is about a miraculous recovery and Jane's is about finding gratitude. And in the past two magazines, we've had stories from Tony about God's presence in a most unlikely character and how Merri had a sense of being calm and safe through God's protection at a difficult time. And there's another coming in the next magazine. The thing about all these stories is that they are so different, which tells us something about God – that he might be different things to different people and so bigger than any of us can imagine. So, if you have something happen to you that you think might be God, well, yes, it's important to test it out, but it's very likely that it is God, no matter how unusual something seems.

The second word in our theme today is 'with'. God with us. God is not doing everything for us, so we can just sit back and let life happen. No, the person whose story it was, or other people, were all very active in those situations described today. So often, God acts through other people coming alongside us, or vice versa. A couple of years ago we followed a Lent programme called Paracletis and this is what that was all about – journeying with others, just as God journeys with us, often through other people. The other thing about that word 'with', is that it shows us just how far God is prepared to go to be with us and meet us where we are. He came down to earth from heaven when Jesus was born – that's the furthest anyone has ever travelled for someone else. And he comes alongside us whatever our situation. Yes, he wants us to turn towards him and recognise him with us, but he's there whether we recognise him or not.

And finally, God is with US. That's all of us. It's not just me, or just you, it's the whole of the human race. And yet, in each of the stories that we've heard, it seems as though God is working personally for one particular individual. This is how all of God's stories work – they seem to be focussed on one individual or a group of people and yet the story has a truth for many others. The Bible is full of these stories of 'God with us' – God with an individual, such as Moses, but through Moses, he led the whole of Israel out of Egypt. God with an individual, such as David, but through David, who killed Goliath, he saved the army of Israel, this time from the Philistines. The Old Testament

is littered with many, many stories about God being with individuals and helping them in times of trouble. And in the New Testament we see Jesus coming as 'God with us' to again help individuals to overcome difficulties of life. The New Testament also contains many references back to the Old Testament. So often, a writer remembers a story of God's presence with the Israelites and this gives the New Testament Israelites reassurance that he will be with them again.

And it can do the same for us – that's why I have told those stories of God with us, so that we have the evidence of that promise which Jesus made in today's reading. You can see in verse 27 that Jesus promised his disciples (and us) that he would leave his peace with us. His peace, which is the knowledge that God is with us, and the peace which that knowledge can bring. I want us to be able to take that peace into our final, healing, service next week.

And the other thing which this peace, that Jesus has promised, can bring is the ability to banish anything that you might be worried about. You can do this by writing a prayer of lament if you haven't done so already (or maybe you've got a second one to write now). Having written the prayer, give it to God, physically by placing it in our prayer wall here beside me, or spiritually, by practicing that stillness, that calm, which only our own memories of God with us can bring.

You can also increase the sense of peace by telling others of your stories. We remember something so much better if we've told it to someone else and it also brings blessings to those who hear it. So go on, do tell other stories to each other, or, if you'd like to share it more widely, do tell me and I'll share it with your permission.

Using our stories of God with us and our memories of times past can bring about healing. This is our theme for the service next week.

Amen

Prayer Pointers

- Thank God for the surprising and unexpected ways he has blessed us with peace and goodness during the pandemic
- For hope and confidence as we move out of Covid restrictions as a community in West Wickham and as our United Benefice. That, as the Body of Christ, we may embrace the opportunities for outreach and to deepen our fellowship with each other.

- For God's blessing on our forthcoming Inclusive Church meeting. That we may be able to listen to and value the experiences of those who will be on the panel at the meeting.
- Continue to pray for an end to violence on the streets of our city. For the police who have to investigate these crimes and for all who work to change the hearts and minds of young people.
- As we approach the start of the Olympics in Japan pray for sportsmen and women across the world – for fair competition and harmony amongst all who will compete.
- 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.