

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

21st June 2020: Second Sunday after Trinity

Hazel writes:

Following last week's services I thought I'd share with you the painting that came out of Messy Church and the Sunday service, as well as the following piece that our friendly poet, Jane Smith, has written:

Storms of Life

The storms of life
They come and go.
Times of challenge
Fear and woe.
We cannot escape
The storms of life.
We all experience
Trouble and strife.
The waves threaten
To engulf our boat.
And we wonder if
We will stay afloat.

The skies darken
And the winds roar.
We feel we cannot
Take any more.
When in the distance
We see Jesus.
Upon the waves
He's come to save us.
We look to Him
Instead of the storm
For in His hands
Our lives belong.

He calls to us
To take a step
Of faith and trust
With no regret.
If we should falter
His hands are there
To lift us up
And hear our prayer.
In His arms
He holds us fast
Until the storms
Of life are past.



Next week we will hold a **Zoom vision meeting** to share something of a long-term vision for St Mary's/St Francis', with some ideas for things that we might need to do differently now as we come out of lockdown. There will be a meeting on Sunday 28th June at 11am, followed by a repeat with time for questions, on Tuesday 30th June at 8pm.

The churches are now **open for private prayer** at the following times:

- Mondays – St Mary's from 10.30am to 12noon
- Tuesdays – St Mary's from 2 to 3.30pm
- Wednesdays – St Francis' from 2 to 3.30pm
- Thursdays – St Francis' from 10.30am to 12noon

- Fridays – St Mary’s from 9 to 10.30am
- Saturdays – St Francis’ from 9 to 10.30am

If you would like to volunteer to supervise seating, the use of candles and books in the church and to clean at the end, please contact Beryl at St Mary’s on 020 8289 8097/ bbolton@ntlworld.com or Joan at St Francis’ on 020 8777 2034/ jandbburford@talktalk.net

Resources and updates for the week ahead – An audio file of the sermon and a video of the service have been posted to the websites for today. All other files have been combined together and posted as a pew sheet which has been sent on paper to those who have told us that they are not on-line. Please tell someone if you know of somebody who is not accessing this material.

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 exploring fatherhood;
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from Trinity College, Cambridge;
 - On BBC 1: Sunday morning live at 10.45am on ethical and religious issues; Sunday Worship at 11.45am – a service for Father’s Day; and Songs of Praise at 1.15pm on inspiring dads.

Joan Burford has recently heard from her oncologist to say that there is no trace of cancer in her head or body. Her treatment is still ongoing, but this is fantastic news. Joan thanks everyone who has been saying prayers for her over the past months: this is a positive answer to all those that have been said.

Are you missing seeing your friends from Church? We have set up a Zoom “coffee/tea & chat” for each Thursday at 2.30 pm. This will be an informal meeting for anyone who wants to meet, chat and catch up with their friends. We hope to meet regularly for just 40 minutes each week, but you don’t need to commit to joining each week. The log-in details have already been circulated, but please let me know if you do not have this information. Rowena

Any items for the joint pew sheet to Hazel and items for the websites to brian.griff19@btinternet.com.

Collect

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

Reading: Romans 6:1b-11

Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For whoever has died is freed from sin. ⁸ But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin,

once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Gospel: Matthew 10:24-39

²⁴ 'A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; ²⁵ it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

²⁶ 'So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷ What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸ Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. ³⁰ And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹ So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

³² 'Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will

acknowledge before my Father in heaven; ³³ but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

³⁴ 'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; ³⁶ and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸ and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

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.

Sunday June 21st: The Second Sunday of Trinity

Reflection:

Last Sunday, you may recall, when focusing on the story of Jesus walking on water, Brian challenged us to follow the example of Peter and get out of the boat. He made the point that Peter was fine all the time he kept his eyes on Jesus, but when he saw how rough the weather was, he became afraid and began to sink, calling on Jesus to save him, which, of course, Jesus did, but not without questioning his faith and asking why he had begun to doubt.

Towards the end of his talk, Brian suggested that Jesus is calling us get out of our boat, to come to him, to step out onto the choppy waters of faith. Then, in one of her emails, Hazel challenged us to take a risk for Jesus in the coming week.

Getting out of our boat. Taking a risk for Jesus. I wonder how you've got on with taking up those challenges.

I suspect I'm taking a risk in what I'm going to say in this talk – some of it may upset some of you. I hope it won't, but if it does, don't stop listening. Do give me a hearing right to the end.

If we want to know what it means to get out of the boat, to get out of our comfort zone and to take a risk for Jesus, we only have to look at today's Gospel reading.

As Jesus sends his disciples out to visit the surrounding villages, proclaiming that the kingdom of heaven is near, he gives them the instructions that we've just heard read, but first he gives them a warning. They can't expect to be treated any better than he was. If the religious authorities accuse him of being in league with the devil, they'll certainly malign his followers. If they eventually put him to death, the same may happen to those who follow him.

But Jesus tells them not to be afraid of this. And the reason they are not to be afraid is because there is nothing covered up that will not be uncovered. Or to put it another way, "Be sure your sins will catch you out." We've had some good examples of that in the last week or so, in relation to the "Black Lives Matter," protests.

So, for example, the Bristol born philanthropist Edward Colston, as we now know, made much of his money by investing in the Royal African Company, a slave trading organisation headed up by Charles II's brother, who later became James II. And when Colston sold his shares in the company, he sold them to William, Prince of Orange, when he became William III of this country. It was after selling his shares, that Colston began donating to charitable causes such as schools and hospitals in Bristol and

London. Was that an act of contrition? Who knows? But as Christians we have to remember what Jesus said to those who brought him the woman caught in adultery, “Let the one who is without sin amongst you cast the first stone.” Maybe Colston learned from the case of Zacchaeus, the tax collector, who also made his money from exploiting others, and did penance by giving half his possessions to the poor and repaying four times over those whom he had cheated. Redemption is at the heart of Christianity.

Now that is not to say that we should turn a blind eye to what Colston and others have done, but rather than dwelling on the past, I think it better to look to what we can do now to institute justice for our black countrymen and women.

Now it may be that going on protest marches is not for you, particularly as it contravenes the social distancing requirements, so perhaps one way of taking a risk for Jesus would be to call out those who make racist remarks or crack racist jokes in front of you. Or maybe to write to your MP expressing concern at the fact that between April 2018 and March 2019, there were 4 police stop and searches for every 1,000 white people, compared with 38 for every 1,000 black people – that’s nearly ten times as many. Or just look back over your life and see whether there are times when you have acted or thought in a racist way, in, for example, your attitude to immigration, and seek God’s forgiveness and, if possible, that of the person you treated in this way.

Jesus then moves on to telling his disciples not to fear those who can kill the body, but not the soul, but rather to fear him who can kill both the body and the soul, something that Jesus comes back to when he says that anyone who does not take up his cross and follow him is not worthy of him and when he adds “whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”

Whilst anyone can kill the body, only God has power over the soul, so pleasing God must take priority over pleasing those around us.

If we have to choose between conforming to the world and conforming to the values of God’s kingdom, then it must be God’s values every time. In this country, it’s unlikely that going against the values and norms of the country in which we live will cost us our lives, but in many places in the world today there are still Christians risking their lives rather than give up their faith.

One of those who have taken up the cross in following Jesus is Gao Zhisheng, a Chinese human rights lawyer who was first detained by the Chinese authorities in 2006. Before

this, he was notable for frequently taking on human rights cases, and was known for defending religious minorities.

Gao's committed involvement with such cases, he says, is strongly influenced by his Christian identity with its emphasis on morality and compassion.

Between 2006 and 2011 he disappeared many times and suffered beatings and torture. From 2011-2014 he served a prison sentence. He was released in August 2014, only to disappear again on 13 August 2017. His current whereabouts are unknown but, if he is still alive, he is believed to be in some form of detention.

Gao exemplifies what it means to find one's life by losing it for Jesus' sake.

Another way of understanding what is meant by "Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" is well illustrated by the Biblical scholar and commentator, William Barclay, who writes as follows:

There is no place for a policy of safety first in the Christian life. The person who seeks first ease and comfort and security and the fulfilment of personal ambition may well get all these things – but they will not be a happy person: for they were sent into the world to serve God and their fellows....

The way to serve others, the way to fulfil God's purpose for us, the way to true happiness is to spend life selflessly, for only thus will we find life, here and hereafter.

Such a person was William Wilberforce, who, incidentally, was maligned in his own day for putting the interests of African slaves before campaigning on behalf of British workers who also lived in terrible conditions at home. Even when failing health forced him to give up his seat as an MP, he continued his support for the anti-slavery cause, including attending and chairing meetings of the Anti-Slavery Society. He died just three days after hearing that the passage of the Slavery Abolition Act through Parliament was assured.

Surely one of Jesus' most startling statements is his claim that he has not come to bring peace to the earth, but a sword. However, I don't think that the military reference is to be taken literally. Rather we are to understand that if it comes to having to decide between our family and Jesus, our loyalty to Jesus must come first.

I may have mentioned this before. If so, I apologise, but most of you will know that our daughter, Liz, and her husband are missionaries in Japan. Liz openly admits that initially she was reluctant to leave this country and still misses being part of family celebrations and other events such as grandparents' funerals.

And Anne and I miss being close to our grandchildren as they grow up. Skype and Zoom are no substitute for personal contact, as we are all discovering during the current lockdown.

But the call to serve Jesus in Japan had to take precedence over family ties. And that's one of the problems that Liz has encountered in Japan, where family loyalties are strong and where converting to Christianity can bring potential converts into conflict with their family when they refuse to participate in the family-based religious ceremonies of Buddhism or Shinto.

So, then, some hard challenges in today's Gospel, to go with Brian's challenge to get out of the boat and Hazel's challenge to take a risk for Jesus.

But there is one part of the reading that I haven't referred to. Jesus is at pains to tell us just how much God loves us. And he does this by comparing God's awareness of the fate of a sparrow, which in human eyes is next to worthless, with his concern for us, whom he knows intimately, down to the number of hairs on our head.

So despite what Jesus has said, we are not to be afraid – he says this no less than three times in this passage. And we are not to be afraid because in God's eyes we are of great value – of more value than many sparrows, who are also valued by God.

Just think of that, we are valued in God's eyes and fully known to God. And more than that, if we give God the priority in our lives – that's what this reading is about in brief – then in return we will be rewarded by God with a fully satisfying life, what St John refers to as "life in all its abundance," both in this world and even more so in the life to come. Amen.

Hymn: All to Jesus I surrender. *A recording with lyrics can be found using the following link (but you may need to skip the advert first).*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pR4haH5dGrs>

Prayer Pointers.

For all scientists and researchers who are leading the way in understanding the Covid19 pandemic and communicate its gravity: We pray that they may be granted knowledge, wisdom, and a persuasive voice that Governments across the world will listen to.

For Christian missionaries throughout the world, especially in areas with high rates of Covid19 infection: We pray that the Holy Spirit may provide them with words of hope, and equip them to love and serve those around them.

For people who are facing redundancy and financial hardship in this current crisis and for those in work clubs and Job Centres who are doing their best to help them find new work: We pray that the jobseekers may not lose hope, and inspire your church to generously support them.

For our police services, working to keep the peace at a time when there is increased tension over inequalities in our society. May all those seeking to protest about these inequalities find peaceful ways to do so.

For our two congregations of St Mary's and St Francis. May we not be afraid to step out of our comfort zones and seek a new vision for our mission in West Wickham. May we learn by the Spirit to work together more closely and not be afraid to change – to take a risk for Christ.

Closing prayer: Loving Father, 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. Amen.