

ST. MARY OF NAZARETH /ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI – WEST WICKHAM
13th September 2020: Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity

Hazel writes:

At Messy Church this week we were preparing for **World Peace Day** on **Monday 21st September**. Today we all have an opportunity to rebuild the world beyond the pandemic if we work together peaceably. Let's mark one day as a moment when we all strive for peace. Please do contribute a dove or other peace sign at either church building to show our support for peace. If you are not able to get there physically, send a picture of your dove, bi-nka-bi collage or bridge and I'll put together a picture of our support for this important day. If you're not sure of the relevance of these, look at the video (<https://www.facebook.com/MessyChurchWestWickham> also available through the website), or the document that's been posted for Messy Church.

On Wednesday 16th September **Midweek Communion** will be at St. Francis at 10.45am. Next Sunday, 20th September there will be services of **Holy Communion** in St. Mary's at 8am and at 10am in St. Francis. There will also be a service available **on-line** from 9am. Please note the location of in-person services above is different to that stated in the magazines.

Now that we have been open for **public worship** for a few weeks, more people are familiar with the arrangements within the buildings and we are making up rotas for volunteers to be involved in the 10am services. These volunteers will ensure that social distancing and hygiene precautions are taken by everyone in the building. If you would like to volunteer, 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.

The **St Francis' APCM** will take place after the service on Sunday 20th September, beginning at 11.45am. This meeting will be held both in church and on Zoom. If you would like a copy of the papers for this meeting, please contact Nicky Nightingale on 07771 782914/nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk. A separate sheet with details of the Zoom log-in has been sent with this pew sheet.

Please bring **Foodbank donations** to the Vicarage. Currently they need desserts (jelly, Instant Whip, sponge puddings etc), tinned fruit, rice pudding, custard, cold meat (ham, corned beef or luncheon meat), toiletries, small bottles of sanitiser. There are large stocks of pasta, long life milk, rice, baked beans and soup, so these items are politely discouraged at the present time. Thank you for your continuing support.

Resources and updates for the week ahead – All files 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 – Rt Rev Nick McKinnel, Bishop of Plymouth, commemorating the 400th Anniversary of the Mayflower.
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from Neresheim Abbey Germany with Royal Academy of Music Chamber Choir.
 - On BBC 1: Songs of Praise at 1.15 p.m. with Aled Jones on the 400th anniversary of the sailing of the Mayflower from Plymouth.

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.

We will be holding a **Macmillan Coffee Morning** on Friday 25th September in the gardens at St. Mary of Nazareth from 10.30 to 12 noon, **weather permitting**. Cakes and donations will be gratefully received. We will be adhering to all the government's latest regulations, so there will be a presence on Zoom and the in-person numbers will be limited – more details next week. Please bring your own mug.

Will members of **St. Mary's** please note that **donations** can now be made directly from our website using the link on the first page. Bob

For the past few years St John's have held their **Autumn Fair** in St Francis' church hall. This year they have taken it on-line, with many artists, crafters, artisan makers and small businesses from across the country joining in to raise money for Link to Hope, who send shoeboxes of gifts to families in Eastern Europe. These families often have to make a choice between buying food or fuel at Christmas time – buying presents is just not a priority. Here's a link to the site for the Autumn Fair:

<https://linktohopehighams.wixsite.com/autumnfair>

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

Collect

Merciful God,
your Son came to save us
and bore our sins on the
cross:
may we trust in your mercy
and know your love,
rejoicing in the righteousness
that is ours through Jesus
Christ our Lord.

First Reading: Romans 14: 1-12

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions. ²Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. ³Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgement on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. ⁴Who are you to pass judgement on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. ⁶Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God.

⁷We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves.

⁸If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰Why do you pass judgement on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgement seat of God. ¹¹For it is written, 'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.'

¹²So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

Gospel: Matthew 18: 21-35

²¹Then Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' ²²Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.'²³ 'For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves.

²⁴When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, "Have patience with

me, and I will pay you everything." ²⁷And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow-slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, "Pay what you owe." ²⁹Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." ³⁰But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹When his fellow-slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³²Then his lord summoned him and said to him, "You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?" ³⁴And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt. ³⁵So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'

Post Communion Prayer

Lord God, the source of truth and love, keep us faithful to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, united in prayer and the breaking of bread, and one in joy and simplicity of heart, in Jesus Christ our Lord.

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TALK:**INCLUSION NOT EXCLUSION**

It seems an age since the Government decided to put the country in lockdown back in March to protect us from the Covid-19 virus. Slowly shops and services are being opened up and transport services increased. Schools have re-opened and, of course, we have been allowed to begin worshipping together in our churches. We have had to get used to a 'new normal' – including wearing masks in shops, trains, buses and in church. There has been so much we have had to adapt to – so much to accept as new ways of living and worshipping. In St Mary's and St Francis, we've had to get used to new patterns of worship – services changing times and alternating between the churches week on week, new ways of celebrating communion, new ways of meeting together (the dreaded 'Zoom' meetings) and new ways of carrying out pastoral work. It's to our credit that, by and large, we have accepted these changes. We might not want to accept the changes and many of us would love to go back to life before lockdown. However, we have no alternative if we are to stop the spread of the virus – we have to accept things as they are at present to protect ourselves and others from illness.

Today's reading from Paul's letter to the Romans is all about acceptance. The first verse of our reading goes thus:

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions.

For the word 'welcome' we could use the word 'accept'. So, taking another version of the bible we could read:

Accept all the Lord's followers, even those whose faith is weak. Don't criticize them for having beliefs that are different from yours.

In other words include everyone, exclude no-one. I have been reading a fascinating book recently. It's entitled 'The Lost Message of Paul' by Steve Chalke. In case you didn't recognise the name – Steve Chalke is the minister of Oasis Church in Waterloo and set up Oasis Academies – a group of 52 schools around the UK, many of them in Croydon. In his book Steve Chalke is convinced that the church has misinterpreted Paul for centuries. He states:

Paul was the great includer; a revolutionary who saw a new inclusive world dawning and gave his life to help bring it in

Paul welcomed everyone to the faith – he accepted all those who followed Jesus. A lot of Paul’s writing was addressed to fledgling churches where people were disagreeing about all sorts of issues. In our reading from Romans today, Paul writes to deal with divisions about what food was acceptable to eat and also to tackle the issue of what to some people were special days and to others were just ordinary run of the mill days. For Paul, these disagreements were not helping the mission of the early churches. He urges them to accept one another and to welcome each other even if some new followers had very different views.

Many members of Paul’s infant churches had put down ‘boundary markers’ especially those who were formerly of the Jewish faith. Paul really didn't believe that there was anything wrong with Judaism at all. Let’s not forget that he was a Jew and through his lifetime would have identified himself exactly that way. He comes to believe that through Jesus all the benefits that the Jews have enjoyed have now been extended to the whole world. There could be no boundary markers in the church. Today we still have boundary markers. Have you been filled with the Holy Spirit? Do you speak in tongues? Not to ask too many awkward questions in home groups. Sometimes, it's about attendance - about being at mass, or being baptised, or about not being divorced, or a practising gay man or woman. Some boundary markers are quite ridiculous. A friend of mine was telling me that when he started worshipping at a new church, one of the first things someone said to him over coffee after the service was “Of course, we’re all professional here!” The impression he got was that to be accepted in that church you needed to be in a profession or a retired professional. What sort of image does that conjure up? Boundary markers are alive and well in the 21st Century church. I wonder what the boundary markers are in St Francis and St Mary's. I’m not going to speculate – I’ll leave that hanging in the air for you to you to think about – maybe in the home groups.

For Paul, the only boundary marker is being human. For Paul, if you are human and have faith – you’re accepted as a follower of Christ. Welcoming and inclusion are key to making church work. Whatever our views and preferences we are all servants of the one master, Jesus. So, we should each know our own minds. How we think is key to how we live. And though ‘welcome’ is an action, ‘looking down on’ or disagreeing is an attitude, and one that leads to passing judgement. It is not consistent with the renewed way of thinking Paul expects.

Recently, there has been much in the news about inclusion and acceptance. ‘Black Lives Matter’ has been a massive movement about acceptance of everyone regardless of the colour of their skin. This has reared its ugly head in the church in February this year. A black theology graduate was turned down for a curacy position by a parish in St Alban’s Diocese because the makeup of the parishioners in the area he had applied to

work in was 'monochrome white working class' and it might make him feel 'uncomfortable'. The statement was listed as one of two reasons why he was not a 'match' for a curacy role. That's blatant exclusion not inclusion. That's so far away from a welcoming parish that it's off the scale. As it happens, that graduate won the prestigious 'Theology Slam' competition during lockdown.

There are so many ways in which the church, which should be including and welcoming, turns out to be exactly the opposite. Our new vision is to engage more fully with the local community here in West Wickham. The starting point for that vision has to be that we are a welcoming, accepting and inclusive congregation. If we can't adopt this concept from the get go, then we might as well forget the vision now.

Like Paul, for us here in St Mary's and St Francis, the only boundary marker must be that everyone is human. You've probably heard of 'Inclusive Church' – it was mentioned during our Zoom session on Black Lives Matter a month or so ago – and two years ago Hazel and I attended the annual Inclusive Church lecture at St Paul's Cathedral. Inclusive Church was set up in 2003 and campaigns for inclusion in all aspects of church life. They ran a training session and asked participants what inclusion is. Here are a few definitions that delegates drew up:

'Everybody is in, no matter who, or what or why'

'Inclusion is looking after everyone – good or bad'

'Inclusion is all people on a equal footing'

'Welcoming all as children of God'

'Inclusion is belonging'

'Inclusion is giving people a second chance despite their previous actions and flaws'

'Inclusion is being listened to, valued and remembered'

'Accepting people for who they are not what they are'

Several churches in our locality are signed up and active members of 'Inclusive Church' – St Barnabas, Beckenham; St George, Shirley; St Edward, New Addington; St Augustine, South Croydon; St Christopher's, Warlingham; St Stephen's, Norbury and Thornton Heath; all three churches in Alison Judge's Team Ministry; St Leonard's, Streatham; St John, Upper Norwood and Southwark Cathedral.

It is a major commitment for any church to sign up to membership of Inclusive Church, but if we believe, like Paul did, that all are welcome, no-one is excluded, everyone is valued and all are in, then it is a cause and organisation that is worthy of our support. This might seem quite radical, but then being a follower of Christ is about challenging society which often excludes rather than includes. How radical can we be in St Mary's and St Francis?

Often, people who have learning difficulties or mental health issues find it difficult to be accepted in churches. So, I want to finish with a poem written by Morten Cernoch who worships at St John's here in West Wickham and loves to be included in their services. He is autistic and doesn't communicate by speech. However, he does write the most amazing poetry and here's one he wrote about Leu Gardens that he visited in Orlando, USA. I should add that Morten is 17 years old now, but he wrote this poem when he was 9.

Luscious palms that have enormous leaves

Elegant fronds that I can tap as I please

Unbelievably tall bamboo trunks thrusting up to the sky

Great wonders of nature that make me not want to die

Almost every plant imaginable created by God

Realms of the miraculous, others just odd

Delicate roses pleasant to sniff and to stroke

Each one scented uniquely, giving me hope

Now I realise we weren't meant to all be the same

Surely there must be some place for me in life's game?

Paul would say the place for Morten in life's game is as a follower of Jesus, loved, valued and embraced as one of God's children.

May the God who created a world of diversity and vibrancy, be with us as we embrace life in all its fullness.

May the Son who teaches us to care for stranger and foreigners, be with us as we try to be good neighbours in our communities.

May the Spirit who breaks down our barriers and celebrates community, be with us as we find the courage to create a place of welcome for all.

Prayer Pointers

That we may be led by the Spirit to be inclusive congregations. May St Francis and St Mary's be known as churches who accept everyone who believes and trusts in Christ Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. May we put aside past prejudices and learn to include all in our fellowship. For all who feel excluded from churches that they may find restoration, healing and love.

Continue to pray for Governments around the world who have to make what are sometimes unpopular decisions to combat the Covid-19 virus. For all scientists advising Governments on testing regimes and control measures. Pray especially that everyone takes responsibility for ensuring rules to control the spread of infection are obeyed.

Pray for peace in our world, our communities and our homes. For all peacemakers and for those who work hard to bring reconciliation where there are opposing sides in disputes. Pray that we may follow Christ's example of bringing peace and harmony.

For local businesses who may be impacted again by the new Covid-19 restrictions being imposed on Monday. For businesses that were already struggling after lockdown – for employers and their staff as they may face an uncertain future.

For all those who are ill, remembering those we know and love who are closest to us. Pray especially for all those whose mental health has suffered as a result of lockdown and are still afraid and anxious about venturing out of the homes and making contact with others. Give thanks and pray for all who offer care to the elderly and disabled in their homes and day centres.