

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

4th October 2020: St Francis' Patronal Festival

Hazel writes:

It was good to meet as **Churches Together in West Wickham** on Sunday evening, especially to hear about some of the interactions that people had experienced with God's creation - the stag beetle nest, stars in a clear night sky, noticing the variety of trees and listening to birdsong. What a great reminder of the beauty we have around us - something that's so important to remain focussed on as we head into autumn and winter.

Our **Pet Service** is this afternoon (4th October) at 3pm. There is an invitation for a service on Zoom, which has been sent round to all those receiving the pew sheet. If you have a pet and would like to receive a blessing for them and their relationship with you, please do join us. We'll also be able to share stories of how our pets have helped us in the last few months.

On Wednesday 7th October, **Midweek Communion** will be at St. Mary's at 10.45am. **Messy Church at Home** is on Friday 9th October at 3.45pm: you can view at <https://www.facebook.com/MessyChurchWestWickham>. Next Sunday, 11th September there will be services of **Holy Communion** in St. Francis at 8am and at 10am in St. Mary's there will be a non-eucharistic service for Harvest. There will also be a service available **on-line** from 9am.

Today is **St Francis' Gift Day**. This has been an incredibly tough time for both of our churches, with a significant loss of hall income and a drop in other donations. Individuals have also had financial difficulty, leading to an 89% increase in need for emergency food parcels in April, compared with the same month last year. Funds raised through the St Francis' Gift Day will be split between church general funds and the Bromley Food Bank, who we will be supporting at Harvest. Please do give generously to our appeal, which will help us to recover from the impact of the virus and meet the needs of the community. If you would like to make a direct transfer to the St Francis' bank account, the sort code and account number are 40-52-40 and 00022722 - please use 'Gift Day' as your reference.

We will be having a **Harvest Supper** on Saturday 10th October via Zoom at 7pm. An invitation with the Zoom log-in details is being sent with this pew sheet. Amanda from the Bromley Foodbank will tell us about the past, present and future news of the organisation. Bring your own food and drink and we'll also share some stories of things

we want to give thanks for - a photo, a link to a film or piece of music on the internet, or a poem or prayer that you particularly like. It will be great to share our blessings and get to know others better.

Our **Harvest Service** will be held on Sunday 11th October at 10am in St Mary's Church and there will also be a harvest theme at the 8am service in St Francis' Church. We will be collecting donations of non-perishable foods and toiletries for the Bromley Food Bank. Please come along, or watch on-line, to give thanks for all we have and bring some donations for those who have less. **Donations** will be gratefully accepted next Saturday and Sunday mornings. Details of items currently most needed are listed below. Thank you all for your support. Items can be brought along and placed in the North aisle at St Francis or the vestibule at St Mary's on Saturday between 10 and 12noon and next Sunday at our Harvest services. It is also possible to donate items by leaving them in the box outside the Vicarage at any time.

Currently the **Bromley Food Bank** need cold meat, custard, small bottles of squash, jelly, instant whip, long life fruit juice, sponge puddings, sweets, washing detergent (non-bio), shaving gel & razors, children's toothpaste & toothbrushes and Christmas food dated 2021 onwards. Currently there are large stocks of pasta, beans, soup, UHT milk, rice, cereals, tea, toilet rolls and tomatoes and 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 marking Black History month with Amanda Khozi Mukwashi CEO of Christian Aid.
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 live from Guildford Cathedral.
 - On BBC 1: Songs of Praise at 2.00 p.m. – Kate Bottley visits those who have shaped her faith journey.

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.

Joe Gilbert's funeral will take place on Friday 16th October at 1.30 p.m. at St. Marys. Due to Covid restrictions it will not be possible for members of the congregation to attend but anyone who would like to pay their respects could go to the church before or after the service.

Debbie and James Adams would like to thank all friends from St. Mary's and St. Francis for the flowers, cards and greetings on the occasion of their Silver Wedding last week.

St. Mary's Draw tickets – There are just 3 or 4 remaining envelopes of draw tickets in the vestibule. If anyone who is attending St. Marys can take and deliver any of the remaining ones it would be much appreciated. Thank you.

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

Collect

O God, you ever delight to reveal yourself to the childlike and lowly of heart: grant that, following the example of the blessed Francis, we may count the wisdom of this world as foolishness and know only Jesus Christ and him crucified, who is alive and reigns with you, now and for ever.

First Reading:

1 Kings 8:22-30

²² Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands to heaven. ²³ He said, 'O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and steadfast love for your servants who walk before you with all their heart, ²⁴ the covenant that you kept for your servant my father David as you declared to him; you promised with your mouth and have this day fulfilled with your hand. ²⁵ Therefore, O LORD, God of Israel, keep for your servant my father David that which you promised him, saying, "There shall never fail you a successor before me to sit on

the throne of Israel, if only your children look to their way, to walk before me as you have walked before me."

²⁶ Therefore, O God of Israel, let your word be confirmed, which you promised to your servant my father David.

²⁷ 'But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! ²⁸ Have regard to your servant's prayer and his plea, O LORD my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today; ²⁹ that your eyes may be open night and day towards this house, the place of which you said, "My name shall be there", that you may heed the prayer that your servant prays towards this place.

³⁰ Hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray towards this place; O hear in heaven your dwelling-place; heed and forgive.

Gospel: Matthew 21: 12-16

¹² Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of

those who sold doves. ¹³ He said to them, 'It is written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer";

but you are making it a den of robbers.'

¹⁴ The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, 'Hosanna to the Son of David', they became angry ¹⁶ and said to him, 'Do you hear what these are saying?' Jesus said to them, 'Yes; have you never read, "Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself"?'

Post Communion Prayer

Father in heaven, whose Church on earth is a sign of your heavenly peace, an image of the new and eternal Jerusalem: grant to us in the days of our pilgrimage that, fed with the living bread of heaven, and united in the body of your Son, we may be the temple of your presence, the place of your glory on earth, and a sign of your peace in the world; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

TALK: – Celebrating our church

I must admit to feeling overwhelmed at the moment. The uncertainty surrounding what we will and won't be able to do as a result of the coronavirus restrictions is becoming wearing and the guidance from national and local church authorities comes at the last minute with somewhat vague wording. The political environment in the US with their upcoming election and in the UK with the emergency powers that our government has does make you feel as though democracy is being dismantled. And then there's the Black Lives Matter protests around the world and the consequences of the environmental emergency being played out in wildfires and increasingly violent storms. So yes, a feeling of being overwhelmed and stressed is most definitely there and (from listening to others in ministry) is shared with many others. Maybe you're feeling in a similar place.

So, recognising that we're in this difficult time, is it appropriate that we should be having a Patronal Festival and celebrating St Francis? Wouldn't it be better to just say that we can't have such a celebration this year and just not bother?

I think it's the opposite: there's even more reason to reflect on and give thanks for our church here. If we share our experiences with each other and with God, we can recognise better that we're all in this together and give support to each other, so that we might be able to turn around that feeling of being overwhelmed and stressed into a feeling of hope and joy. Our biblical texts today show how people who were in a difficult place turned to God in celebration and for support and ended up finding something new.

Our first reading is a prayer that King Solomon said when he had built the first temple in Jerusalem. Solomon knew that the future of Israel was dependent on following the ways of God. They were surrounded by other hostile nations and were beset by tension between the different tribes. Building the temple as a place where people could come into the presence of God and to seek his help was central to Israel's theology and worship.

Having a building to worship God in continues to be a central aspect of the Christian faith today. I wonder how you felt during lockdown when you couldn't come to church and find yourself in the presence of God. Maybe you found yourself in the presence of God in new places – I encouraged sacred spaces to be created at home just before Easter and walks in the garden or on the local streets may have helped to connect you with God. But still, I'm sure that returning to the church building, if you've been able to do so, and whichever one that is, will have been a spiritually significant time.

So yes, we do need to say thanks for our church buildings.

In our gospel reading Jesus was at the temple in Jerusalem, but he found that it was no longer a place where he could feel God's presence because it had become a market place with money-changers and traders who had set up there. Later in the reading, Jesus directed his anger towards the chief priests and the scribes even more than the traders and money-changers, when they criticised children for shouting out praise to Jesus for healing the blind and the lame. If children weren't allowed to praise God in his own temple for transforming the lives of disabled people, there was definitely something wrong.

So, Solomon focussed on the building and Jesus focussed on the people in turning a difficult situation into a hopeful one through a connection with God.

When we say 'church' today, we also mean not only the buildings that we come to in order to find God, but also the people who make up our church community. Church for us has to be those who are here today – on-line, in-person or absent but still a part of that community. If we can't find God with these people, that suggests a tension which needs to be resolved, just like Jesus was looking to resolve the tension that he felt when he was in the temple, due to the exploitation of fellow worshippers that was going on.

Today is St Francis' Day and we're here in a church building that's dedicated to him. St Francis was also involved in rebuilding a church, just as Solomon was and Jesus was attempting to do on his visit to the temple. St Francis first experienced God's call when he was in a dilapidated church, San Damiano, and heard God asking him to 'repair my falling house'. Francis sold some of his father's goods to pay for a repair of the physical church and as a result was disinherited. He subsequently led a life of poverty, building up what is now known as the Order of Franciscans – a church community, which is incredibly supportive of its members and of those who they seek to help.

So, in each of these cases, someone has been to a place of worship in difficult circumstances and has been led to seek God's help in transforming their own, or other people's, lives for the better. Solomon came to say a prayer of dedication for the temple, so that Israel might be assured of a continuation of God's covenant – something of great importance given their vulnerable situation. Jesus came to drive out the money-changers and traders from the temple and to encourage children to praise God in that space – a comparison that completely turned normal thinking on its

head. St Francis made a commitment to God in a church building which led to him starting up a religious order that has gone to help many people in difficult situations.

So, yes, we're currently in a difficult place with all that's happening in the world today, but that's a very appropriate time to be coming before God and saying thanks for all those who have gone before to show us the way of building up God's church, both the physical spaces, and the community of people that make up the church.

At this time, we as a community are suffering from a fall in income, as our hall users have not yet returned. And there are many individuals locally who are suffering as a result of their jobs or hours being cut, so that they are turning to the Foodbank for the basic essentials of life. This is definitely a time for us to build ourselves up as a community and to support others around us who are suffering, so I commend to you our Gift Day today. All funds raised today, or subsequently with a 'Gift Day' label will be split between church funds and a donation to Bromley Foodbank. For those of you from St Mary's, you too will have a chance to donate to the Foodbank next week at our Harvest service and you can also make additional donations to the church at any time. For those unable to get to the church buildings, we have set up a JustGiving page for Bromley Foodbank which will enable gift aid to be claimed as well.

In verse 13 of the gospel reading Jesus calls the temple 'my house'. The church today has to be a place where Jesus is at the heart of the worship; where Jesus is recognised as the one through whom we have that close intimate relationship with God as a result of his coming to earth, living amongst us and dying for our sins. This is how we make our churches houses of prayer.

So let's not use the current pressures and restrictions as a reason to give up our traditions and our commitments to help others. No, let's make it an opportunity to build up our churches through prayer so that we become a community of people who are thankful for spaces to worship God. Where Jesus is at the centre and we take him out into the world to effect great transformations and show God's glory there.

Amen.

Prayer Pointers

That we may see that the church is not confined to a building. May we see, like St Francis, that the church is people. May our focus be to help others see God through the way that we interact with them. May the Holy Spirit overflow from our lives into our community so that the Kingdom of Heaven may be built up here in West Wickham.

For the Ministry Team here at St Mary's and St Francis as they work to plan and carry out worship and pastoral care during this Covid crisis. Pray especially for Hazel, our vicar, and for all the team that they may not feel overwhelmed by the tasks facing them in the weeks and months ahead. May all our worship and caring be blessed and bear much fruit.

For Governments around the world as they make decisions about how to deal with the rise in Covid19 cases. Pray especially for our own Government – both national and local – as they have to make hard choices balancing public health with trying to keep businesses open. May their decisions be wise and for the good of everyone.

For all who are working with the unemployed at this critical time – job centres and work clubs. Pray especially God's blessing on the Bromley Work Club being launched by West Wickham Rotary Club next week. For all who are stressed and downhearted because their search for new work is proving difficult. May they find support in their searching and success in finding new employment.

For all who work in the NHS especially those in our local hospitals as they prepare for the winter season and increased admissions.

For all who are facing lockdown again in various parts of the country, especially for those who live alone who are afraid of isolation and not seeing children or grandchildren. For all who reach out to them as carers.

For your continued blessing on our Thursday 'Coffee and Chat' and for all in St Mary's and St Francis who undertake pastoral care in the name of Jesus.