

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

15th November 2020: Second Sunday before Advent

Hazel writes:

As there are no in-person services for the next few weeks, we'll use our on-line service as an opportunity for people from both congregations to 'gather together'. For those who are on-line, the video will be broadcast live from 9.45am, with a 15-minute time of gathering and sharing of news at the start. The service itself will start at 10am. If you join after this time, you can go back to the start, or you can watch from the time when you join and see what happened beforehand by going back to the start at the end. Hopefully this will make it feel much more like an in-person service. Please can I encourage everyone to watch from 10am, or a few minutes before, and make use of the 'chat' function, so that we know who's with us watching. Do give feedback on things you like, ways in which God has spoken to you through the service, how we might improve what's included, or other things that might be helpful in an on-line forum. I look forward to 'speaking' with you on Sunday morning.

Returning to lockdown this month has made us appreciate how helpful and necessary it is to keep up all forms of communication - paper-based, telephone, email and on-line video. At the start of the last lockdown the video was not available to us. If you value this means of communication and would like to thank God for what we are able to provide, do make a donation to our JustGiving page at <https://www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/hazel-osullivan>, as a thank you to Hazel's daughter, Olivia, for the help that she gave in starting this facility. Details were given in the last magazine that was published. Rather than repeat the information here, do revisit that publication, which is available on-line at <https://www.stmarywestwickham.co.uk/whats-on/magazine/> and <https://www.stfranciswestwickham.co.uk/about-us/church-life/magazine/>.

Although we cannot hold in-person services at our church buildings, we can access them for **private prayer**. As it's located near to the High Street, we have decided to open St Francis' church at the following times each week:

- Wednesdays from 10.30am to 11.30am
- Saturdays from 10am to 11.30am

If you'd like to pray at St Mary's, please do go in if you have your own key, making sure to hand sanitise, wipe down any seats used and lock up at the end. If you don't have a key, please call Stephen Howe on 020-8249-0315 to make an arrangement for access.

Last week we distributed a document giving details of ways to contribute to the **St Mary's Christmas Market**. This year we cannot accept donations of food and other items to sell, but we can take monetary donations, either by a direct payment to our bank account at sort code 60-23-22, account number 35265450 (please use the reference 'market') or through a JustGiving page at <https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/stmarychristmasmarket>. This was the way in which many people said they would prefer to contribute to our fundraising this year, so please do make a donation at this time.

Please bring **Foodbank donations** to the Vicarage or St Francis' Church. Currently Bromley Borough Food Bank need jelly, instant whip, sponge puddings, and shaving gel and contributions to Christmas hampers in the form of cake, mince pies, fizzy drinks and yule logs (but please make sure any of these items are dated after 26th December). 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. As well as our own service at 10am, other worship and resources that you might want to listen to or look at on Sunday include:

- 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 8.10 am on Radio 4 - Rev. Drs Doug Gay and Carolyn Kelly explore how faith responds to the complexities of life.
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from Ely Cathedral on Armistice Day.
 - On BBC 1: Sunday Morning Live at 10.30 a.m. and Songs of Praise at 1.15 p.m. when Aled Jones explores his 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.

The Southwark Diocesan Board of Education are hoping to recruit **Foundation Governors** to support their schools. If you are interested in finding out more, please contact Penny Cox at beablessing.sdbe@gmail.com.

On Saturday 19th December, St Francis' church is acting as a distribution centre for **Bromley Borough Foodbank Christmas Hampers**. We will need a team of drivers to

deliver these hampers. Ideally each driver will take a passenger with them to help, as parking at some of the homes might be difficult. We are going to have 150 hampers to distribute. If this is something you think you can help with please contact Kim Teare (kim_teare@hotmail.com), Cheryl Davies (bc14-dav@ntlworld.com) or Kate Dyer (katedyer41@hotmail.com). Thank you in advance to anyone that can spare a few hours to help those less fortunate than ourselves.

Advent wreaths are a symbol of Advent. They are made of a circle of evergreen laid flat to represent eternal life. Four red candles are arranged around the circle and one candle is in the centre. Advent is a journey through the Christmas story. Christians use this wreath to celebrate advent, lighting one candle each Sunday till Christmas Day when the last central candle is lit, representing Christ the light of the world. This year the first candle will be lit on November 29th. It is particularly significant this year as we may not be able to see our families and also makes a nice table decoration for Christmas. If anyone would like to place an order please contact Merri Womack on 8777 8772. The cost of an advent wreath is £8.

Brian Griffiths has created a **catalogue of woodwork** he has produced using his scroll saw and his lathe. All the craft is being sold in aid of St Mary's and St Francis' Churches. The catalogue was attached to an email a few weeks' ago to St Francis' and St Mary's congregations. Details of how to buy one of the 52 items listed and illustrated are included in the catalogue. Please contact Brian by telephone on 0208 777 6112 or by email at brian.griff19@btinternet.com to reserve a piece.

Tickets for 2 raffles, one for an 8" square Christmas cake and one for a luxury hamper worth £50 are now available from Beryl Bolton (8289 8097 or bbolton@ntlworld.com) at £1. each. Your names will be added to a list of numbers for however many tickets you require and I will either arrange to pick up the money or if anyone could drop it off to me it would be appreciated. The draws will be made on the 28th November at the same time as the large Christmas Draw. Thank you for your support and to all those who have already bought tickets.

St. Mary's Christmas card table – it looks increasingly unlikely that we will be able to arrange to have this facility this year so Kay and Geoff have very kindly offered to act as postmen, as it was felt receiving cards might be even more important for some people than normal years. If you can put all your cards in a large envelope or a carrier bag in a bundle (with the surname and address if you know it) and deliver this to **35 Oakfield Gardens by Monday December 7th** Kay and Geoff will then sort them out after leaving

for a couple of days and deliver them during the following 2 weeks. If anyone is unable to get someone to deliver them or deliver them themselves to Kay and Geoff, arrangements can be made to pick them up.

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

Collect

Heavenly Lord, you long for the world's salvation: stir us from apathy, restrain us from excess and revive in us new hope that all creation will one day be healed in Jesus Christ our Lord.

First Reading

1 Thess. 5: 1-11

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. ² For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ When they say, 'There is peace and security', then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! ⁴ But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; ⁵ for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. ⁶ So then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; ⁷ for those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for

us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Gospel - Matthew 25: 14-30

¹⁴ 'For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵ to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶ The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them and made five more talents. ¹⁷ In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸ But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹ After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, "Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents." ²¹ His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." ²² And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, "Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents." ²³ His master said to him, "Well

done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." ²⁴ Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵ so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." ²⁶ But his master replied, "You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? ²⁷ Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return, I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸ So take the talent from him and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹ For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ³⁰ As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Post Communion Prayer

Gracious Lord, in this holy sacrament you give substance to our hope: bring us at the last to that fullness of life for which we long; through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

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TALK: Richard Ford

On 15th October, just over 4 weeks ago, as I scanned my inbox for the day's emails, I found one from M&S, entitled "Get ready for Christmas." And there, when curiosity led me to open it, stood a picture of a brilliantly decorated Christmas tree.

Now I appreciate that Covid-19 has put the brakes on people's spending, making life difficult for the retail sector, but advertising Christmas before the Autumn half-term break is a bit much. I don't think even our ministry team had started thinking about Christmas that early, and after all Christmas is our festival, or at least it was until the world of commerce tried to claim it for its own.

But today, November 15th, our New Testament reading reminds us that Advent *is* on its way, with its call not just to prepare ourselves to celebrate the coming of God among us in human form, but also to prepare ourselves for Jesus' Second Coming as King and Judge.

Our reading from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians begins:

"Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you."

And why is it that they don't need to be told anything about this? It's because "the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night."

In saying this, Paul is echoing the words of Jesus himself, recorded in both Luke and Matthew's Gospels:

"But understand this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You must be ready because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

The key point that both Jesus and Paul are making, is that what is important is not *when* Jesus returns, but whether we are *ready* for that meeting when he comes as King and Judge.

Our readings this morning suggest that there are at least two ways in which we need to be prepared:

Paul focuses on what we might call "life-style"; Jesus, as reported by Matthew, on how we exercise the responsibilities that God has given us.

Let's start with Paul and what he has to say about lifestyle. Having referred to Jesus' Second Coming as being "like a thief in the night," by which he means unpredictable, he then goes on to tell the Thessalonians, and by implication us, that they shouldn't be surprised by the Second Coming because they are children of the light and children of the day, unlike those who live in darkness.

What Paul has done is to move on from the unpredictability of the Second Coming, represented by the "thief in the night," to reminding the Thessalonians that they should be ready for the Second Coming by living the kind of lives which are pleasing to God. They are children of the light, where "light" means good, respectable, pleasing to God, whereas "darkness" refers to that which is evil, unacceptable, displeasing to God.

The problem, of course, is that the darkness can sometimes seem attractive.

I don't know how many of you have seen the musical, "The Phantom of the Opera," but in one of its numbers, "The Music of the Night," the Phantom is trying to seduce the heroine, using lines such as:

Touch me, trust me, savour each sensation.
Let the dream begin, let your darker side give in
To the power of the music that I write,
The power of the music of the night.

Heard without the music, the insidious nature of the temptation is rather more apparent than when the beauty of the music almost conceals the evil intention of the Phantom.

And that, of course, is the nature of evil, that it can appear superficially attractive, which is why Paul has to remind his readers, or listeners – Paul's letters were almost certainly read out at the gatherings of the early Christians in much the same way as we read them out in our churches today – Paul has to remind his listeners that they should be children of the light and shun "The Music of the Night."

He develops this idea by saying that "they should not fall asleep as others do, but keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night." And getting drunk here stands for all those other actions which those who commit them might well regret in the cold light of day and will certainly regret on the Day of Judgment.

Paul then goes on to remind his audience that the way to avoid being consumed by the darkness is to put on the breastplate of faith and love, and the helmet of the hope of salvation.

If we do this, he writes, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Given what Paul has just said about Christians remaining awake and not sleeping, not giving way to temptation as others do, we may wonder why he now refers to Christians being asleep.

The answer is that he now using “asleep” to refer those who have died or who will die before the Second Coming.

Paul, then, has reminded us that our lifestyle should be such that we are ready to encounter Jesus whenever that may be.

The parable of the talents reminds us of our *responsibilities* as Christians. One of the problems with parables such as this one is that we are so familiar with them that we almost switch off when we hear them or read them. Moreover, we may fail to recognise how much Jesus’ teaching has influenced our use of language.

Take the word “talent” for example. Originally it referred to a weight, then to a sum of money, before it acquired the meaning that it has in the phrase “Britain’s got talent.” And it was a considerable sum of money – one talent was equivalent to what a day-labourer in Jesus’ day could earn in 15 to 20 years.

So even the slave in the parable who was given one talent was being given a considerable amount of money and so a considerable amount of responsibility.

As ever with Jesus’ parables, there is what we might call a local application and a wider application.

At the local level, the master in the story is God and the slaves are the Jews, the chosen people. The wicked and lazy slave, the one who buried his talent, probably stands for the Pharisees and the religious authorities who were entrusted with the Law and the Temple, and who were called by God to be a blessing to all nations.

Instead they kept the Law and the Temple to themselves, as shown by their general hatred of Gentiles, the non-Jews, with whom they would have no dealings, and by the way they ostracised those who were unable to keep the Law, such as shepherds and

other outcasts, who because of the nature of their work would have been unable to keep, for example, all the rituals of washing themselves and their utensils before meals.

Those who are rewarded as good and trustworthy slaves are those who respond to Jesus' teaching as he challenges the attitude of the Pharisees; those who are prepared to change their understanding of the nature of God and what he wants of and for us, as they begin to apply, for example, Jesus' commandment to love their neighbours as themselves.

And what about the way in which we apply the parable today?

Almost certainly we need to understand that it relates to how prepared we are to give an account of how we have lived up to the responsibilities which God has seen fit to give us.

At one level, this may indeed be how we have used our money, but it goes beyond this. A chapter or so further on in Matthew's gospel, we come to the parable of the sheep and goats, where the division into sheep and goats is based on how people have responded to the needs of the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the sick, and those in prison.

In some cases, the way in which we use our money may be part of the answer, but in others it may be the personal touch which is more important.

And in other cases, in relation to the requirement to meet the needs of the stranger, it may be how we relate to asylum seekers and other refugees.

Or maybe the responsibilities for which we are answerable are the spiritual gifts which God has given us, such as serving, teaching, encouraging, showing compassion, and leadership, which Paul has listed in chapter 12 of his first letter to the Corinthians.

Now in case you're feeling somewhat daunted by all this, remember that we're not all expected to perform to the same level. In Matthew's account, people are given different levels of responsibility, and there is a difference in what they achieve. The one given 5 talents increases it to 10; the one given 2 talents increases it to 4. Both are referred to as "good and trustworthy."

In Luke's version of this parable, each of the slaves is given the same amount, £10, but whilst one doubles it to £20, another only adds another £5, but both are rewarded.

In both cases it is only the slave who makes no attempt to use what he has been given who is rejected.

We worship a God who is what we might almost describe as irrationally generous, but who does expect us to make some attempt to use responsibly the gifts which he gives us.

And that is the God to whom we must be prepared to give an account at any time of how we have lived and how we have used what he has given us. Amen.

Prayer Pointers

Pray for Christians around the world who are being persecuted for their faith, especially those who are active in sharing the gospel. May God's peace reign on those regions where Christians are not permitted the freedom to live out their faith in safety. Bless and encourage those who work to support oppressed believers on the ground, often risking their own lives to do so.

Thank God for all the talent he has showered upon our two congregations of St Francis and St Mary's. Pray that we may use and develop these talents and gifts for his glory. May we not be afraid to take risks with our gifts in God's service to build up God's kingdom here in our community.

Continue to pray for the people of the USA following the presidential election last week. Pray for the new president-elect and for a peaceful transition of administration. For peace and harmony between the different political parties and on the streets of the cities and towns there.

Thank God for the news that a vaccine has been developed against Covid19 and for all the scientists and support staff who have worked so hard in such research. Pray that the final trials may be safe and for the healthcare professionals who will be involved in administering the vaccine in the coming months.

Hold before God all those who are ill especially those who we know and love. For those who have recently been diagnosed with serious illness. Pray that their treatment may not be delayed. Pray for all who work in hospitals and hospices especially those

who care in St Christopher's Hospice. May they and those they care for know your presence and your peace.

A prayer for the Second Lockdown (by Andrew Nunn, Dean of Southwark Cathedral)

Lord Jesus, who entered the locked room and made yourself known to your friends; be with us in this lockdown that we may be aware of your presence and know your blessing upon us.