

ST. MARY OF NAZARETH /ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI – WEST WICKHAM 22nd November 2020: Christ the King

Hazel writes:

For those who are on-line, the video will again be broadcast live from 9.45am, with a 15-minute time of gathering and sharing of news. The service itself will start at 10am. Please do make use of the 'chat' function before 10am, so that we know who's with us watching – there are some instructions given later in the pew sheet on how to do this. Next week we are also thinking of having a Zoom meeting after the service, for some more chat, a bit like having a coffee after the service. Do give feedback on this way of worship. I look forward to 'speaking' with you on Sunday morning.

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 are opening 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.

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 as shown in this picture. Please deliver your Christmas donations by the end of November as hampers are already being packed. Thank you for your continuing support.



Resources and updates for the week ahead – A video of the service has been posted to the websites for today. All other 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 – Liberation in lockdown Rev. Dr. Paul Mathole leads worship from Holy Trinity in Platt, Manchester.
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from Chichester Cathedral.
 - On BBC 1: Songs of Praise at 1.15 p.m. Girls semi-final of young chorister of the year presented by Katherine Jenkins.

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 are now in the last week of the **St Mary's Christmas Market**. Please make your orders for a hamper before Wednesday 26th November by contacting Debbie on 07943 330244 or Gifty on 07813 797757 or email office@stmarywestwickham.co.uk. The live draw will take place on Saturday 28th November at 2.30pm and can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCq1RdXI27bTlompT6lCPoGQ>.

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, so **last chance** to purchase tickets this week. Thank you for your support and to all those who have already bought tickets.

Many of our congregation and friends have supported the **Good Shepherd Mission to the Homeless** inspired by Sr Joan nearly 40 years ago. Sadly, the current restrictions have meant that their work is not able to continue. The charity is being wound up and we have been asked to pray that street homeless people will be housed during and after the pandemic.

We have been working on some **Advent resources** together with St John's church in Layhams Road, where the church building will be open for some quiet time on Friday 4th December from 3pm to 7pm for reflection on the Advent theme of hope. Hope in your life may have been hidden by the difficulties that we have all faced over the past few months. Advent is a time to uncover that hope and prepare for our celebration of Christ's birth.

Disabled or Differently-abled? at 8.00.p.m. on Tuesday December 1st 2020. Have you ever wondered how you would cope if you were disabled? If you haven't, or even if you have, this is your opportunity, 25 years after the passing of the Disability Discrimination Act, to hear from those who have lived with this condition and to ask any questions you may have either in advance or on the night. Speakers include Revd Tim Goode, Diocesan Disabilities Officer; Rowena Griffiths and Julia Cernoch. Questions can be sent to Richard Ford; richard.ford73@ntlworld.com. If you wish to remain anonymous, just let Richard know or put them through his letterbox: 7 Sylvan Way, West Wickham, BR4 9HA.

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.

It is not possible for members of the congregation to attend **Margaret Marsh's funeral** in person due to the current coronavirus restrictions. There will be an on-line link available for the service at the crematorium which will start at 2.45pm on Thursday 3rd December. You can log on at <https://www.obitus.com/> and use the following to gain access: username- Kefo8769; password- 851680. The video can also be viewed for 28 days afterwards using these details.

Lighting the Lamps.

We will need six helpers for the service of Lighting the Lamps on Christmas Eve, to be available from 3.30pm. Please contact David Wada if you feel able to help.

NOT the Big Christmas Sing is all going on-line this year. A video will be premiered on YouTube at 4pm on Saturday 5th December, including material from members of our congregations, as well as our friends from the Matchbox Theatre, songs from the London Concert Chorus and some information on Christian Aid's Climate Justice Campaign. The team organising this event do hope that you'll join us at this time.

Bromley Borough Foodbank Christmas Hampers

On Saturday 19th December, St Francis is acting as a distribution centre for Bromley Borough Foodbank Christmas Hampers. We need a team of drivers to deliver these hampers. Ideally each driver will take a passenger with them to help with the delivery as parking at some of the homes might be difficult. We are going to have 150 hampers to deliver. 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.

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 is attached to this week's email 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.

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.

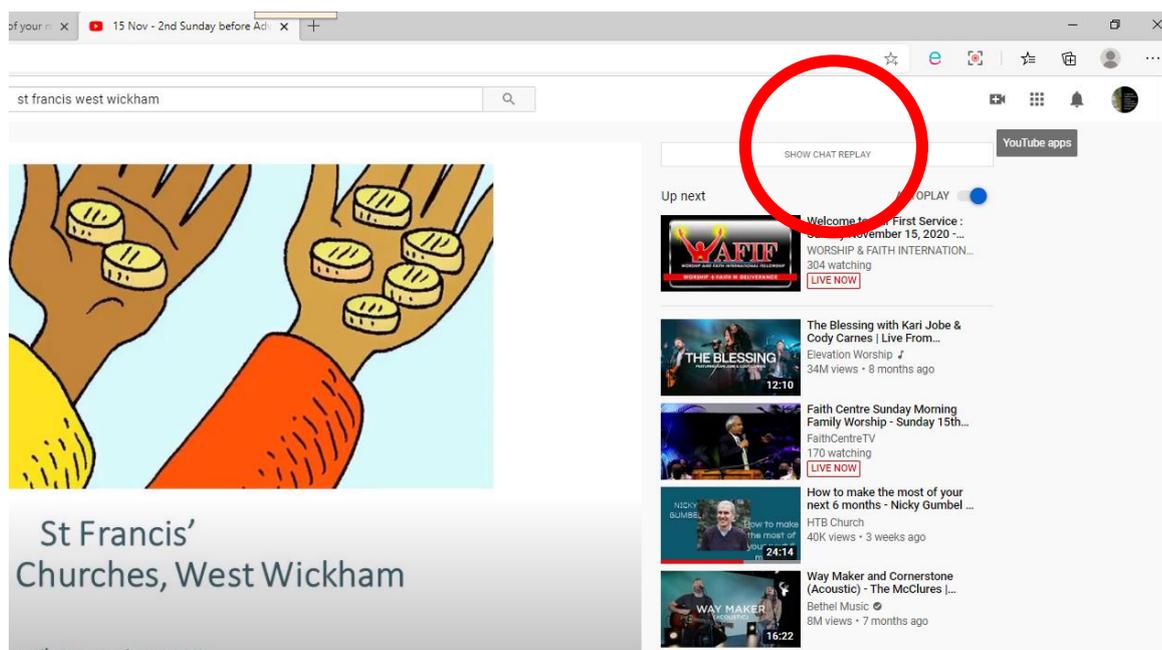
St Francis and St Mary's on-line services: YouTube chat function

It was great knowing that we were all watching the Sunday service together last week. Some managed to work out how to use the chat function. We'll do something similar this week too, so here's some guidance on how to access the chat:

You will need to watch the premiere on YouTube and set up an account with them, but you can do this quickly when you start the video, by clicking on the YouTube icon in the bottom right of the screen:



If you are already watching on YouTube, but don't have an account, you will be able to open the chat to the right hand side of the video when it is not playing in full screen mode:



Collect

God the Father, help us to hear the call of Christ the King and to follow in his service, whose kingdom has no end; for he reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, one glory.

First Reading:

Ezekiel 34: 11-16, 20-24

¹¹ For thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. ¹² As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³ I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the

watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. ¹⁴ I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD. ¹⁶ I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.

²⁰ Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹ Because you pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them

far and wide, ²² I will save my flock, and they shall no longer be ravaged; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.

²³ I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd.

²⁴ And I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

Gospel:

Matthew 25: 31-46

Jesus said to his disciples ³¹ 'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand

and the goats at the left.

³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;

³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?

³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or

in prison and visited you?” ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

⁴¹ Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them,

“Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’

Post Communion Prayer

Stir up, O Lord, the wills of your faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may by you be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

TALK: Our response to disabled inequalities - Hazel

I'm going to begin today with a consideration of one of our famous local celebrities from the past. This person moved here from London in his early thirties with a young family to a place just over five miles away in a bid to shun society, calling this "the extreme edge of [the] world." He secluded himself in his home and spent his days walking, napping, reading, and playing backgammon. Sounds like a typical lockdown day ... This man was immensely wealthy and he kept a big secret, which he felt might be judged by others to be as bad as murder. He wasn't exactly a modern day thinker: he considered women inferior to men and blacks a lower race, but that wasn't his secret - this was a time when such prejudices were not questioned. He became immersed in a competitive culture, and this way of thinking pervaded his whole career. He was an agnostic who is buried in Westminster Abbey. Maybe you've already twigged who I'm talking about. It is, of course, Charles Darwin.

It was Charles Darwin's theory of evolution or 'natural selection' that was his big secret early on in his career. This theory has been re-worded by some as 'survival of the fittest', a phrase which, over time, has been applied well beyond its origins to justify all manner of callous behaviour.

In today's passage from Ezekiel, God uses the image of a shepherd selecting domestic animals not on the basis of their strength or 'fitness' but, in an almost contra-Darwinian fashion, the animals are selected because they are victims of aggression or weak in some way. Ezekiel is clearly condemning situations where those in power get richer while the powerless get poorer. And the disparity between rich and poor in the world has never been greater than today. We seem to be getting even better at following that Darwinian mantra 'survival of the fittest'.

So, as Christians how should we respond to this shift in society? How can we provide a place where the weak can not just survive, but thrive, as the shepherd in Ezekiel did for the sheep in his flock who'd been scattered.

This is one aspect of the challenge that Richard gave us last week; to ask ourselves whether we are using the gifts God gives us responsibly. He pointed forward to today's gospel reading on Jesus' parable about the sheep and the goats and so we might use this parable to discern what our response to inequalities in society should be by asking: are we using the gifts God gives us to meet the needs of the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the sick and those in prison?

However, understanding this parable at a deeper level you'll find that, just as in Ezekiel, Jesus offers a counter-Darwinian teaching which is even more radical than at first sight.

We are currently exploring Inclusive Church, something that Brian talked about in his sermon in September on taking down boundary markers and including all. We looked at race and ethnicity in the summer in the light of the George Floyd murder and Black Lives Matter protests around the world. Today I'd like to look at another aspect of being an Inclusive Church and that's disability. Brian started to look at this by highlighting the difficulties that those with learning difficulties and mental health issues experience in finding acceptance in churches.

This is timely as we have recently had the 25th anniversary of the Disability Discrimination Act and there have been a number of TV programmes on the progress that's been made over the past 25 years, but how the disabled still have problems accessing things that others find easy. I am using the term disability in a very broad way, as any sensory or mobility impairment, learning disability or mental health problem. This includes autism and hidden disabilities such as epilepsy, arthritis, dyslexia, diabetes, ... and many others. Many people have more than one impairment.

Look again at that list (in v35-36) of the people that Jesus gave his listeners a challenge about: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the sick and those in prison. I wonder if you've ever thought about how these people came to be in those situations at the time when Jesus lived. It's likely that they, or a member of their family, had a disability of some kind (in this widest of senses). In Jesus' day if you had a disability, or some long term sickness that prevented you from working or looking after other family members, then you'd be completely shunned by society, as there was a belief that the sight loss, the paralysis, the mental health problem, or whatever it is, is the price that you're paying for a sin of some sort. Therefore, anyone who was disabled (and their family) was likely to be left out of society, not only because they were different, but because there was a judgment made about their worthiness for friendship.

There was a societal change that Jesus was encouraging. There wasn't a benefits office or a Foodbank that those who were hungry, as a result of their disability, could go to and anyone who approached them to help would have been shunned themselves. The societal change that Jesus was encouraging represented a much bigger shift than just giving a bit extra or volunteering on the odd occasion for those who'd come upon bad times.

So, looking again at that question about our response to inequality, on one level I can ask whether I've donated to a charity, or whether I've volunteered to meet the needs of the hungry or the sick. This is good, but it follows a medical or charitable model, seeing the person being helped as a problem to be fixed. It doesn't meet the Inclusive Church standard of making those who are excluded, feel included. Instead it may perpetuate inequality, because through such actions I might feel good about my volunteering (maybe giving myself a pat on the back: I'm better than another who's not helping); or I might feel pity for the ones helped: I'm glad I'm not so disadvantaged. This doesn't help at all towards inclusion but perpetuates the social exclusion that exists.

Now, I'm not saying don't do these things. However, we must recognise that this is not the only way of responding to the gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged.

What someone who feels excluded is looking for is not to always be on the receiving end of help, but to be a part of a group and to contribute to the good of everyone. It's not about giving a jolly welcome and saying 'hi' but sitting and chatting in a non-judgmental way.

This may end up exposing our own weaknesses, which is partly why it's such a difficult path to take. Enjoying life to the full today is often seen as being successful in sport, being good academically or being able to afford a posh meal out, or an overseas holiday. Those who are unable to participate in such things can be made to feel unwelcome in a subtle way because they remind us that we are also vulnerable and live a fragile life and that's not something we want to own up to. However, the church is one place where this shouldn't be the case because in God's eyes no one group of people has an advantage in being able to relate to God – you don't need to be physically able, you don't need to be intellectually high-powered, you don't need to have a certain standard of living. Jesus reconciled us all to God through the cross. We need to embrace difference, rather than feel that we need to allow for it.

Where Christ is King, there will be a better life for everyone, because we all get to participate. We can all access worship opportunities, we can all feel at the centre of a community, coming on our own terms. In the past we might have seen the disabled as needing separate provision. What an inclusive church does is: it enables the mainstream provision to be accessed by those who would normally feel unable to be a part of the community.

We're going to explore this a bit more at another Zoom meeting, similar to the one we had in the summer. The details are included in the pew sheet and there'll be a formal invitation sent out next week. This will give an opportunity to talk to someone who has experience of disability of some sort and to find out what leads to a feeling of exclusion. I hope that this will enable us to create a church community where everyone can come as they are.

It's not about the survival of the fittest because nothing and no-one is perfect. As Leonard Cohen sang: there is a crack in everything – that's how the light gets in. If Jesus is King and the light of our world, let's uncover those cracks and let that light in.

Amen

Prayer Pointers

Pray for people with disabilities and learning difficulties that they may see dignity, acceptance of equality and self-sufficiency in their lives. That they be empowered to serve God and participate fully in worship, free from prejudice, persecution or discrimination of any kind. Help us all, through the Holy Spirit, to work together to do whatever we can to achieve this.

Give thanks for all who volunteer to feed and clothe the homeless, visit prisoners and care for those who are ill at home or in hospital and pray that they may have sensitivity and compassion in all their encounters. Give thanks for all those from St Mary's and St Francis' who have taken part in the Good Shepherd Mission to the Homeless over the years and for those who are dealing with the winding up of the project at this time. Pray that street homeless people will be housed during and after the pandemic.

For all in Government and the scientists and medical professionals who advise ministers and MP's. Pray that they may seek wisdom and compassion in working out how best to combat Covid19 as we approach the end of this second lockdown. Pray that we may all obey the rules and restrictions whatever they may be to save lives and protect our NHS.

For all in care homes across the country especially those in our local homes. Pray especially for those suffering from Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease and those who care for them. Pray for relatives who may not be able to visit their loved ones due to

Covid19 restrictions and for those whose loved ones no longer recognise them. Pray that love may find a way in the midst of this disease. May relatives and carers show patience and compassion and be instruments of grace.

Coronavirus Prayer for Peace (written by Jane Smith from her new book 'Where The Concrete Breaks')

In these uncertain times, help us to stay calm. To care for one another and not to spread alarm. Help us to make each day the best that it can be and to use this situation as an opportunity to put our trust in you, receive the peace you give. In the restrictions show us how to live. We may not be able to meet face-to-face, so help us to stay connected in many different ways.