

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

17th January 2021: Second Sunday of Epiphany

Hazel writes: Staying connected and listening for God's call are themes running throughout this weekend's activities: Messy Church, Sunday morning communion and the on-line mini-retreat. My prayer is that this will help you to remain connected and to hear God in whatever way he may be calling you to over the coming year.

Next Sunday, 24th January there will be an on-line **communion service** at 10am.

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 – from All Saints Leighton Buzzard with Alexander, BBC Radio 2 Young Chorister of the year.
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from Chapel of Merton College, Oxford.
 - On BBC 1: Songs of Praise at 1.15 p.m. with new presenter Brenda Edwards who sees how faith is put into action in East London.

Please bring **Foodbank donations** to the Vicarage or St Francis' Church. Currently they need UHT Milk (Urgent), Fruit Juice (Urgent), cold meat, vegetables (particularly carrots), desserts, shaving gel/razors. There are large stocks of pasta, rice, beans, soup, cereals, tea and toilet rolls and these items are politely discouraged at the present time. Thank you for your continuing support.

Just before Christmas we had a note of thanks from Amanda Stone at the Bromley Borough Foodbank:

Your help is essential to the work we do as we strive to assist people with the underlying issues which have brought them to a crisis point and to help them find ways to maximise their income so they can break free from needing to rely on food aid. We thank you again for partnering with us and take this opportunity to wish you a very Merry Christmas and a happier year in 2021.

Even though we may be isolated in lockdown, we know that we are united in Christ with other Christians. This is celebrated in particular during the Week of Prayer for

Christian Unity, which begins this year with an **on-line mini retreat** on Sunday 17th January from 6.30 to 8pm. Coney Hill Baptist Church are then hosting a prayer morning on Friday 22nd January: 9.30-10.30am. The links for both these meetings are circulated separately with the pew sheet.

We have a **Burns Night event** on Saturday 23rd January at 7pm via Zoom to celebrate all things Scottish. Do bring something Scottish to share - a kilt, hat, scarf, photo, drink, meal, music, poem (anything!!). Bill Bowman (ex-minister from Emmanuel, who is Scottish) will be telling us about Burns Night traditions and why Robert Burns is important to Scotland. A link for this meeting is circulated separately.

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 sadly learned this week that **Ivy Sheen** who would have been 100 years old next week had died peacefully in her sleep at home. Ivy was a member of St. Mary's choir for many years and although she had not been able to come to church for a long time, she still received home communion. We remember her family at this time.

Free offer of material. Someone with a connection to our churches is sorting out some items and has 22 rolls (yards & yards) of various materials to donate to someone, or an organisation which would be able to use them. If you have any ideas of who might be able to use these, or if you'd like to see pictures of them before offering a connection, please let Hazel know, so that we can facilitate this.

The Rotary Club is offering **FREE Work Club workshops** to help with a job search on-line via Zoom. They all run from 10-11am on the following dates:

- Tues 19th Jan – Sort out your finances
- Weds 27th Jan – CV writing
- Thur 4th Feb – Job search
- Fri 12th Feb – Interview skills
- Weds 17th Feb – Ace your LinkedIn profile
- Thur 25th Feb – Start your own business

To book your place, email rotaryworkclub@gmail.com

Any items for the joint pew sheet to Beryl bbolton@ntlworld.com and items for the websites to brian.griff19@btinternet.com or Gifty office@stmarywestwickham.co.uk.

Collect

Eternal Lord, our beginning and our end: bring us with the whole creation to your glory, hidden through past ages and made known in Jesus Christ our Lord.

First Reading:

1 Samuel 3: 1-10

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³ the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the LORD called, 'Samuel! Samuel!' and he said, 'Here I am!' ⁵ and ran to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call; lie down again.' So he went and lay down. ⁶ The LORD called again, 'Samuel!' Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call, my son; lie down again.' ⁷ Now

Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, 'Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰ Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'

Gospel: John 1: 43-51

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.' ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.' ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip

said to him, 'Come and see.'
⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' ⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, 'Where did you come to know me?' Jesus answered, 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.'
⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' ⁵⁰ Jesus answered, 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.' ⁵¹ And he said to him, 'Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'

Post Communion Prayer

God of glory,
you nourish us with your Word who is the bread of life: fill us with your Holy Spirit that through us the light of your glory may shine in all the world.
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

TALK: HIS MASTER'S VOICE – Brian Griffiths

O God, help us to listen to your Word with understanding, to receive it with faith and to obey it with courage, for Jesus Christ's sake. AMEN

One of the most famous company logos is the image of the dog listening intently into the horn of an old gramophone or phonograph. There is a true story behind this picture. It is based on a painting by Liverpool artist, Francis Barraud in 1898, titled 'His Master's Voice'. Of course, this is where the company name HMV comes from. Francis' brother Mark died, but left recordings of his voice on a wax cylinder. Whenever Francis played them, Mark's dog – Nipper – would run over to the machine and listen intently. He truly recognised his master's voice. Of course, the logo appears on gramophones, radiograms, radios and record labels. In the 1970's, a bronze statue of the dog and phonograph was awarded by the record company 'EMI' to artists who had sold more than 100,000 recordings.

Our Old Testament reading this morning from the first book of Samuel tells us about the call of the young boy in the Temple. Someone who heard and eventually recognised his master's voice and who was called by name to be God's messenger. Samuel's mother was Hannah. Hannah was unable to have children and this caused her great anguish. Every year she would make a pilgrimage to the Temple. Eli, the priest saw her praying silently about this as he sat near the temple doorpost. He predicted that God would grant her wish to have a child. So, Hannah did become pregnant and gave birth to Samuel. When Samuel was still very young, she took him to the Temple and brought him to Eli so that he could serve in the temple and dedicate his whole life to God. In Chapter 2 of the book she recites wonderful words of praise to God – it's called the Song of Hannah – and it almost mirrors what we know as The Magnificat – the song of praise Mary the mother of Jesus recited when she met Elizabeth in the Gospel of Luke.

Our reading takes up the story as Eli, who is slowly losing his sight, sleeps in the Temple at night and Samuel is resting near the place where the Ark of The Covenant was kept. Suddenly a voice starts calling to him, "Samuel! Samuel!" Notice that Samuel is called by name – we'll come back to that theme later. Now, seeing that Samuel was a child and worked with Eli, it was probably not all that unusual for him to hear his voice called throughout the church, with Eli needing him to help him with something. So naturally, Samuel is quick to his feet, and runs to Eli saying, "Here I am. What do you need?" Eli's startled response is, "I didn't call you. Go back to bed." Three times this happens. The Lord calls Samuel, and Samuel runs to Eli saying, "Here I am."

Eli finally works it out. If Eli isn't calling Samuel's name, then it must be God. God is the one calling out to Samuel. So, he tells Samuel what to say the next time the Lord calls him – "Speak, for your servant is listening – Listen to your Master's Voice." This is where our reading ends. However, if we read further, we find that when Samuel does

listen to his master's voice, the message that he is given to tell Eli is very hard and uncompromising. Bear in mind that Samuel is only a young boy – he's a child. He was told that Eli was to be judged because Eli and his sons had been guilty of corrupting the Temple offerings. Eli's sons have been taking the best parts of the animal sacrifices offered to God and eating them for themselves and Eli had done nothing to stop them. And so, corruption and an abuse of power had leaked into the church. Eli and his sons put their desires and needs above those of the people they were serving. So God called little Samuel, who did not even know the Lord, to be the one to confront Eli and his sons. This theme of receiving uncompromising messages and being called to difficult tasks runs through the bible when people truly listen to their Master's voice.

Our Gospel reading today follows the theme of people meeting God – this time his Son, Jesus. Like Samuel, they recognise Jesus through being introduced to him by other people. Philip responds to Jesus' call to follow him and he goes and finds Nathanael and exclaims that he has met the promised Messiah. When Nathanael discovers that Jesus is the son of Joseph the Carpenter from Nazareth, he replies 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Nathanael expected the Messiah to come from Bethlehem as was foretold in the Old Testament. He couldn't believe that Jesus lived in a rough town like Nazareth. People often judge others on where they came from. I have seen church people turn their noses up at other Christians who spent their formative years in a council house. Philip's reply to Nathanael was 'Come and See'. What follows in the encounter shows how deeply we are known by God. Jesus tells Nathanael that he was a good Israelite and that he'd already seen him under a fig tree. The fig tree is quite significant in this context. We read in Micah Chapter 4 that ***God's chosen people shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.*** This is part of the passage we often use on Remembrance Sunday which is about the faithful Israelites patiently looking forward to the Messiah who would bring a new and lasting peace. Fig trees were often used as places where people could find shade and pray. So Jesus knew that Nathanael was a good and righteous man who was waiting for the promised Messiah. It is the fact that Jesus knows Nathanael by name and knows he is a good man that makes him exclaim ***'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!'***

Just as Eli helped Samuel to hear God's voice and Philip helped Nathanael to discover Jesus, we too are often guided to meet God and hear our Master's voice through other people. I remember going to Southwark Cathedral, maybe about 15 years ago, to the Reader's Licensing Service. As part of the liturgy, the licensed readers present in the congregation have to stand up and reaffirm their vows and commitment to the ministry of a Reader. I was sat next to a lovely Irish lady who looked and spoke like Mrs Doyle from the TV show Father Ted. After the service she said to me 'It's lovely to see younger Readers here. Tell me, did you hear the voice of God?' To which I replied:

'No, actually I heard the voice of the Vicar'. For it was Vicar Hopkins in Port Talbot who recognised God calling me to ministry. Reader ministry was not something I ever sought for myself. I am convinced that ministry, whatever form that takes, finds us – we don't find ministry. Ministry is our response to our Master's voice.

When God has spoken to me, it has always been through other people. My guess is that it has been the same for many Christians. So, we should always give thanks for those who have helped us to hear our Master's voice. Likewise, we too should be looking for opportunities to help others hear their Masters' voice. However, it's easy to be downhearted when people don't share our enthusiasm for Jesus. We might even wonder if we have made a mistake. But it is not up to us to form someone else's relationship with Jesus. We can trust Jesus himself to do that, in his own time and with his own words, as he did for Nathanael.

The words 'Come and See' are pivotal in the calling of the disciples in the gospel of John. If you look at the verses before our reading today two of John's disciples ask Jesus where he is staying and Jesus replies 'Come and See.' It's exactly the same response that Philip gives to Nathanael. 'Come and See!' Jesus takes them away to a quiet place – away from the hustle and bustle of daily life – so that they can truly listen to and learn from their Master's voice.

We too can invite people to 'Come and See'. That's all we have to do. God does the rest – we just do the inviting. As Ken mentioned in his sermon last week, in a world that is hurting, God wants us to make a difference. Our message has to be 'Come and See our God who is alongside us, caring and loving. Come and See our God who has a plan and purpose for each one of us. Come as you are.' We make the invitation through each and every small act of love and by offering those three short words 'Come and See'. Let us all pray that God will show us many opportunities in our daily lives to help others hear their Master's voice.

Come, Holy Spirit, that we may see and taste the grace of God afresh. Come, Holy Spirit, that we might share the grace of God with others and invite them to come and see. Come, Holy Spirit, that we might bear witness with our whole lives to the grace of God through each and every act of love and care.

Amen

Prayer Pointers

Loving God we went into lockdown in obedience. May we show the same obedience when we hear your call. Enable us to trust in you to lead and direct us. Help us to always listen for your voice calling us by name and guiding us May we help to bring others to meet you.

We thank you that you know us and care for us as a father cares for his children. Pray that we may show that same care for our relatives, our friends and those in the wider community. Even though our churches are closed for services, help us to keep worshipping God through every act of service and expression of kindness we show to those around us.

Continue to pray for peace in our world – especially this week for peace and harmony in the USA in the build-up to the inauguration of their new President and Vice-President next week. Pray for all world leaders in the difficult decisions they have to make, especially in relation to the Covid pandemic – that they may now the difference between right and wrong and have the wisdom to make just decisions.

Pray for all those who are ill and for those who have had surgery or treatment recently – especially for John Godfrey. Hold before God our NHS as the medical professionals deal with the large numbers of Covid patients on the wards of our local hospitals. Pray for all those who are suffering with mental health issues as a result of the new lockdown – especially those who have lost their jobs and those who are struggling financially.

God is always ready to greet us and call us home. Pray for those whose earthly life has come to an end – especially for Ann Dale and for her husband Harry and her best friend Bridget Adams; Ivy Sheen and her family - Joan, Margaret and Martin and for Kathleen Fletcher, her husband Peter and her daughter Gill. May they now experience your greater glory and may their families be brought comfort in knowledge of this promise for those who have died in faith.

Loving God, thank you that you are transforming the old ways of church into new ways of being church. During lockdown, let the power of your transforming Holy Spirit change our thoughts and actions. Enable us to emerge into a truly caring and compassionate world that has been transformed by your love. May our words and our deeds show that the spirit of Christ dwells in us. We look to you Lord to inspire us to

find ways to transform the way we can meet during lockdown in love and fellowship, in Jesus name. ***(Coffee Shop – Sunday Coventry and Nuneaton Methodist Circuit)***