

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

19th September 2021: Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity

Hazel writes:

Last week we had a visiting speaker at our 10am service: Jon Mann from The Children's Society. A bullet point summary of his talk is included within this pew sheet. This was the first time he'd spoken at a church since before the pandemic and it was most interesting to hear how their work with young people has adapted, with an emphasis on those young people who have little support from others.

Next Sunday 26th September, we will have **Holy Communion services** at 8am in St Francis' Church and at 10am in St Mary's church.

Morning Prayer is held in St Francis' Church on Wednesday mornings at 9.30am, followed by the church being **open for private prayer** from 10.30-11.30am. It is also held at St Mary's Church on Thursday mornings at 9am.

Resources and updates for the week ahead – This week our service will be **livestreamed at 10am** on YouTube. All other files for this week 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. Dr. David Bruce explores how hope can be found in situations of despair.
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from Edington Priory during the 2021 Festival of Music within the Liturgy.
 - On BBC 1: Sunday Morning Live at 10.30 a.m. – Sean Fletcher & Nina Wadia explore the ethical and religious issues of the day and
 - Songs of Praise at 1.15 p.m. – Rev. Kate Bottley joins Christians in Hackney as churches plan for Harvest Festival.

Every Wednesday we open St Francis' Church for an **hour of private prayer** from 10.30 - 11.30am. If any others would like to join those who volunteer in being there to enable this to happen, please contact Joan Burford (jandbburford@talktalk.net or 020 8777 2034), who will be pleased to include you in the team.

Our final **Lunchtime Concert** of the season is this Thursday 23rd September at St Francis at 12.45 p.m. We are very happy to confirm that the students of Langley Park School will

be coming along to give us a very varied programme showcasing their many talents. Everyone is welcome to come to St. Francis and to bring a friend. See you there!

Living in Love and Faith is an inclusive look at the Church's approach to marriage and same sex relationships. It is rooted in scripture, in reason, in tradition and theology and seeks to include the views and experiences of everyone in the Church of England. We will be holding a five-week course on different dates in October and November to help you consider how questions about identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage fit within the bigger picture of the good news of Jesus Christ. You then have an opportunity to give your own feedback on what it means to live in love and faith together as a Church. Dates and times when you could attend are:

- Thursday mornings (10.30am-12noon) from 7 Oct to 4 Nov: venue TBA
- Tuesday afternoons (2-3.30pm) from 9 Nov to 7 Dec: venue TBA
- Tuesday evening (7.30-9pm) from 12 Oct to 9 Nov on Zoom
- Thursday evening (7.30-9pm) from 11 Nov to 9 Dec on Zoom.

More information will be given on this topic next week. Please do engage with this material if you want to be included in our response to this important subject.

I was unable to **open Children's Society Boxes** last year due to Covid, but I will shortly resume my Autumn collection of the boxes at St Francis', I would be grateful if they could be brought into St. Francis Church when it is convenient. Alternatively, I can arrange for them to be opened at home. Many thanks. Christine Morton (Tel No. 020 8777 9213).

If anyone has any **1lb jam jars** with lids they don't need, could they please take them to St. Marys vestibule as these are required by those making marmalade for sale later in the year. Thank you.

We have an in-person **women's event** on Wednesday 22nd September at 8pm in St Francis' Church, when Maxine from Kaleidoscope Domestic Support Group will tell us about how this group supports women in the local area. Refreshments will be served. Please do come along and bring a friend.

St John's Autumn Fair is at St Francis' Church Hall on Saturday 2nd October from 11am to 3pm. All proceeds go to Link to Hope, a Christian charity that rebuilds lives and communities in Eastern Europe through education and social care. Please do put the date in your diary and think about donating Christmas Jumpers and Posh Frocks for one of their stalls, baking a cake or making jam/chutney for their stall of home-produced goodies. If you can help in any way, please contact Milly Johnson (linktohopehighams@gmail.com or 07796 338483).

Please can we continue with our influence on the COP26 conference in November by joining with Christian Aid in their campaign to create an installation of thousands of prayer boats at the conference. Instructions to **create a prayer boat** are attached to this pew sheet and are available in each of the church buildings. Please make up one or more prayer boat(s) and leave them in one of the churches, so we can develop our own display at the end of the month before sending the boats to Christian Aid to form part of their campaign.

Coffee & Chat on Zoom is now scheduled for every first Thursday of the month. We are also experimenting with a Coffee & Chat in person on the third Thursday of the month. If you would like to come and meet others for a chat, please do join us. If you would like to do this, but cannot make this date, or do not know the log-in details, please let Rowena know (8777 6112 or rowena.griff19@btinternet.com).

Please bring **Foodbank donations** to the Vicarage or St Francis' Church. Currently they need bags for life, cooking sauce, toothbrushes, children's toothpaste, and hair conditioner. They are well-stocked with pasta, cereals and baked beans and please do not bring any fresh food, or baby milk as the foodbank cannot pass this on. You can also donate financially here <https://bromleyborough.foodbank.org.uk/give-help/donate-money>.

Thanks to all those who have contributed stories about '**God with Us**' for the magazines and our special service in July. If you have any further stories to share, please do send them to Hazel (with a request for anonymisation if you'd prefer), so that we can continue to share these in different ways.

Last Messy Church introduced our new **Bug Hotel** at St Mary's. This is now in need of some furnishings – sticks and dry leaves - for the bugs to feel at home. If you want to walk with a purpose, please do collect some of these on your travels, bring them to St Mary's and put them into the Bug Hotel, or leave them beside it and someone from Messy Church will put them into the structure.

Our **bereavement support bags** will be especially helpful in the months ahead. If you would like a bag to give to someone that you know who has lost a loved one, do take one from the back of either of the churches.

Freedom from legal restrictions will enable us to make changes in our public worship, but Covid 19 is still a threat. Please do come to one of the services to see how we are maintaining safety by asking everyone to observe the following:

- Keep your mask on, unless you are exempt or if you are leading the service in any way.
- Observe social distancing and only sit where there is a green tick, so maintaining at least 1m between people from different households.
- If, when you are sitting, you are concerned about others being too close to you, feel free to move to another seat.

One-way systems will remain in place. The sharing of the Peace will continue in a socially distanced format and arrangements for administering Communion, bread only, will remain the same for the time being.

Some of us will be going to **The Southwark Diocesan Spirituality Day, ‘Wells of Salvation’ on Saturday 9th October, 10.00 am-1.00 pm, in Southwark Cathedral. Cost £5.00.** This is a morning of meditations, prayer, sung worship and restoration. Speakers include - the Venerable Justine Allain Chapman, the Archdeacon of Boston, author of *The Resilient Disciple*, writer and broadcaster Nick Mayhew-Smith, Bishop Christopher with oboe player Amy Roberts and members of Southwark Cathedral choir. Tickets available from: <https://spirituality-day.eventbrite.co.uk>

If you would like to join us and are not on the internet or need help with booking your ticket, please contact Rowena Griffiths for further information on 8777 6112 or rowena.griff19@btinternet.com

If anyone would like a pedestal at either church in memory of a loved one or to commemorate a special anniversary etc., please contact Merri Womack (8777 8772) for St Mary’s or Nicky Nightingale (nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk or 8916 9855) for St Francis’.

There are now vacancies at both St Marys and St Francis commencing the week 3rd October, so please let Merri or Nicky know when you would like a pedestal. There is a list of available dates up in the vestibule at St Mary’s.

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

Beryl is away next week so any items for the joint pew sheet should be sent direct to Hazel. Thanks.

Jon Mann's talk last week on The Children's Society.

- THANK YOU. Over the past 30 years St Mary's and St Francis' have raised over £30,000 to support our work.
- Jesus and his followers were on a journey, and at The Children's Society, we often work with young refugees who have been on journeys fleeing war torn countries or persecution because of things like their gender, sexuality or religious beliefs.
- Befriending enabled me to help someone who has no access to family or friends. When he was moved to Essex, he said "Jon, I don't like it, I don't understand them here, they speak funny". It's little things like regional dialects, which I take for granted, that a young refugee may struggle with. During the pandemic we had to move to telephone conversations, which didn't work, as he was looking for someone to meet with him in person.
- Subsequently I got matched with a young Vietnamese boy. We built a relationship over the phone and then met in person. He complained that all his friends were working, but his immigration status meant he couldn't work. I suggested going for a run, which helped. He was also taking an English language course but found it boring. By talking, I discovered he likes music and DJ-ing. Now he's engaged with passing the course because he could go on to access an electricians' course and become a sound engineer.
- We also tackle exploitation or county lines as it's known. We go into hotels or bus depots and give staff training on how to spot the signs of exploitation, such as travelling alone, having lots of people coming in and out of a room, or material signs like new trainers or gadgets which they can't explain where they come from.
- Another thread of our work is mental health, where we give therapeutic support. For example, with one young boy his parents died, and his aunt sold him to a gang who trafficked him into a UK cannabis factory. Our therapeutic worker identified that he hadn't had time to process his grief, but after six weeks, he said he didn't need to see them anymore. Actually, this young boy wasn't used to a charity providing something for free and he was keen to stop using our services as thought we'd charge him or ask him to do something that perhaps he didn't want to do.

The Children's Society takes a two-pronged approach:

- We have volunteers working face to face with young people, providing therapeutic support, teaching about safe or unsafe relationships. Through this direct work, in a couple of years we have helped around 16,000 young people, but this only treats the symptoms and not the causes of the issues.
- However, the information we receive from the front line is fed back into the organisation, so we can lobby the government for change and this indirect work has a bigger impact. Recent changes in legislation have impacted the lives of 5.4 million young people.

In our reading, Jesus asks 'Who am I'? Peter has an answer but is this what Jesus was looking for? The same can be said with the young people we work with: if someone is to ask who am I, what would the answer be? an asylum seeker? a young refugee? Both are correct. However, first and foremost a young person is created in God's image.

Collect

Lord of creation,
whose glory is around and
within us: open our eyes to
your wonders, that we may
serve you with reverence
and know your peace at
our lives' end, through
Jesus Christ our Lord.

First Reading:

James 3: 13 – 4: 3, 7-8a

¹³ Who is wise and
understanding among you?
Show by your good life that
your works are done with
gentleness born of wisdom.
³ You ask and do not receive,
because you ask wrongly, in
order to spend what you get
on your pleasures.
⁷ Submit yourselves therefore
to God. Resist the devil, and
he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw
near to God, and he will draw
near to you. Cleanse your
hands, you sinners, and
purify your hearts, you
double-minded.

Gospel Reading:

Mark 9: 30-37

³⁰ They went on from there
and passed through Galilee.
He did not want anyone to
know it; ³¹ for he was
teaching his disciples, saying
to them, 'The Son of Man is
to be betrayed into human
hands, and they will kill him,
and three days after being
killed, he will rise
again.' ³² But they did not
understand what he was
saying and were afraid to ask
him. ³³ Then they came to
Capernaum; and when he
was in the house he asked
them, 'What were you
arguing about on the
way?' ³⁴ But they were silent,
for on the way they had
argued with one another
about who was the
greatest. ³⁵ He sat down,
called the twelve, and said to
them, 'Whoever wants to be
first must be last of all and
servant of all.' ³⁶ Then he took
a little child and put it among
them; and taking it in his
arms, he said to
them, ³⁷ 'Whoever welcomes
one such child in my name
welcomes me, and whoever
welcomes me
welcomes not me but the
one who sent me.'

Post Communion Prayer

Almighty God,
you have taught us through
your Son that love is the
fulfilling of the law: grant
that we may love you with
our whole heart
and our neighbours as
ourselves; through Jesus
Christ our Lord.

Sermon – Richard Ford

Sunderland, 1970. I'm in my first year of teaching, known then as the probationary year, in a boys' grammar-technical school. We're in a staff meeting, and the question of discipline comes up. Now I should add that in those days, and it's possibly the still the case, Sunderland and its near-neighbour Newcastle, were very masculine societies.

You didn't see men pushing prams, and you demonstrated your masculinity by the number of bottles of Newcastle Brown, you could down in an evening. You see similar demonstrations of masculinity among the supporters of the Magpies and the Wearsiders, Newcastle and Sunderland football clubs, when they stand shirtless in the middle of winter roaring on their teams.

But back to the staff meeting and the discussion about discipline. Southmoor Grammar Technical was a school in which all the staff were allowed to use the cane, except the probationers. I wasn't a great supporter of corporal punishment, so I made the point that it was more difficult for those of us in our first year to maintain discipline when it was known that we weren't able to use the cane, when the rest of our colleagues were. My hope was that the use of the cane would be restricted, so you can imagine how I felt when the head declared that in that case probationers would also be allowed to use the cane.

The head, if you'll excuse the pun, had clearly got hold of the wrong end of the stick. He hadn't understood what I was getting at.

And at least twice in today's Gospel reading it's clear that Jesus' disciples haven't understood what Jesus was getting at.

Not for the first time, Jesus tells his disciples that he is on his way to his death at the hands of the religious authorities, but that after three days he will rise. And they just can't get their heads around that, but they're not prepared to ask Jesus what he means. Maybe that's because of the way that Peter was rebuked, as those at the 8 o'clock service heard last week, when he tried to dissuade Jesus from going ahead with his journey to Jerusalem and the fate which awaited him there. Jesus had turned on Peter and exclaimed: "Get behind me Satan. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

No disciple wants the ignominy of being called "Satan" in front of his colleagues, so they kept quiet.

In passing, I wonder how often that is true of us, that we don't have in mind the things of God, but the things of men?

How often do we look at things from a secular point of view, rather than seeing them from God's perspective? For many people it seems perfectly logical that we should shut our borders to large numbers of refugees and if they want to risk their lives in fragile boats in the busy shipping lanes of the English Channel, then that's up to them, but don't expect us to rescue them and welcome them into our already crowded country.

But that's not God's way!

In Leviticus 19.33-34, we find: "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God."

And then in Matthew we have: "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; 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*, 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." (25. 34-36)

But back to the disciples' lack of understanding about what Jesus was getting at when talking about his forthcoming death and resurrection. Why was this?

First, as we discussed last week, it wasn't their understanding of the role of the Son of Man, the Messiah. Throughout their lives, the disciples would have thought of the Messiah as a leader in the line of their great King David: someone who would rid them of the occupying Roman forces, establish them as a leading nation, cleanse the Temple and bring in the perfect reign of God.

And the way to do that didn't involve dying at the hands of those self-same occupying forces, having been betrayed by their own religious leaders. That wasn't why they had become Jesus' followers.

And what was all this about rising from death three days later? Their experience of death was that when you died you stayed dead. Yes, it was true that they believed that there would be a general resurrection of the dead at the end of the present age, but not before that.

So what Jesus was sharing with them was beyond their capacity then to believe.

But it's not beyond ours.

We have seen the evidence for the Resurrection, not just in the pages of the Bible, but in the actions of those same disciples, and others who, in obedience to Jesus' commission to make disciples of all nations, went out to spread the Good News of what Jesus had done for us on the cross, how he had conquered death and opened the way to eternal life by paying the price for the sins of all humankind.

Further evidence that the disciples had got hold of the wrong end of the stick and misunderstood the nature of the Kingdom of God, which Jesus was proclaiming both by his words and in his deeds, is provided by what follows. We are told that as they journey on to Jerusalem, they are discussing which of them will be greatest. From Matthew's account of this incident it is clear that this refers to being greatest in the Kingdom of God.

Again, we can see how very human this is. For many people status, or power, is important. And the danger that it presents is well described by James, the brother of Jesus in our first reading today, where we heard him say:

But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. (3.14-16)

If you want evidence for the truth of this, just think of people like Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin, or more recently Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump, people who will go to any lengths to gain and retain power. No wonder that we find James warning against the desire for power.

In doing this, he is very much following in the footsteps of Jesus, as demonstrated in our Gospel when he embraces a small child and tells his disciples, "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

In Jesus' day, children, apart from within their own family, had no status. Welcoming a child, or looking out for them and caring for them, wasn't going to help you climb the greasy pole of promotion or success. If that was your goal, you needed to be entertaining people of influence, people of greater status than yourself, not children.

But that wasn't and isn't the way in God's kingdom. In God's Kingdom, if you want to be first, you must be last, and the servant of all, just as Jesus demonstrated when, at the Last Supper, he washed his disciples' feet, and even more significantly in the hours that followed when he allowed himself to be put to death in one of the most painful ways possible.

And why did he do this? In order to bring us back into a right relationship with God. Here we see the creator of the universe, in the person of Jesus, becoming the servant of the whole of humankind. No wonder, Graham Kendrick refers to him as "The servant king" and begins one of his other hymns with the words "Meekness and majesty" before he says of Jesus that he is:

Perfect in innocence
Yet learns obedience
To death on a cross

Suffering to give us life
Conquering through sacrifice....

Truly this is an upside down world. In God's world, serving the least enables us to serve the greatest. No wonder the disciples found it difficult to come to terms with.

But what about us? How do we go about putting all this into practice in our lives?

One way is to pay heed to what we heard from James, where he encourages us to show our wisdom and understanding through living a good life, one that is characterised by deeds, that is good deeds, done in humility. Earlier we heard James condemning bitter envy and selfish ambition, which I suggested could be seen in some historic and contemporary national leaders. But this desire for power is not restricted to those who have climbed to the top of the greasy pole. We can sometimes see it in those around us, or even feel it in ourselves.

And what is the antidote? James outlines it in the words that follow:

But the wisdom from above, that is wisdom as it is understood in God's kingdom, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. (3.17)

Amen

Prayer Pointers

For our local schools as they return after the summer break. For all who teach and learn in them. For new university and college students as they begin their studies and for those returning this year as they adjust to an academic year that will be rather different to the one just past.

For everyone affected by the events in Afghanistan – for those who are now refugees around the world, for those still hoping to leave and for those who remain and have to adjust to life under new rulers. For the new leaders of the country that they will have the wisdom to rule justly and impartially.

For all youth organisations especially our Explorers, Scouts, Cubs, Beavers and Brownies as they meet again. Give thanks for all the leaders who give up so much time to bring fun and friendship for the young people. May all Youth Organisations find the people they need to help run them.

For all in Government our MP's, especially those whose position has changed in the recent reshuffle and for our local councillors. May all have wisdom and justice in their decision making.

For all in ministry in our Diocese – those who point us towards God. Especially for Jonathan, our Bishop of Croydon, who has announced that he will retire in the Spring next year. May all ministries be blessed and bear much fruit.

For our Women's Group meeting next week and the final lunchtime concert at St Francis.

For all those who are ill and for their friends and relatives – especially for Vicky Pearce, Julie Bailey, Carole Hubbard, Conor Owlett and Christine Harley – and all those unknown to us but known to God alone. For the soul of John Tasker, who died recently, and for his wife, Sheila, mourning his loss.