

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

### 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2021: Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

#### Hazel writes:

This Sunday (22<sup>nd</sup> August) we have our **afternoon tea** at St Mary's from 3 to 5pm. Our plan is to meet in the gardens, but we will go ahead in the event of rain, meeting in the hall, with the doors and windows remaining open for ventilation. There will be an opportunity to reflect on the vision for our churches, as well as on the feedback received from members of the congregations.

Next Sunday (29<sup>th</sup> August) we have Holy Communion services at **8am in St Francis' church** and at **10am in St Mary's Church**.

**Morning Prayer** is at St Mary's Church on Tuesday morning at 9am this week and next week. From September we will be switching to Thursday mornings. It is also said at St Francis' Church on Wednesday mornings at 9.30am, followed by the church being **open for private prayer** from 10.30-11.30am.

**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](http://www.churchofengland.org).
- The BBC have the following programmes to watch and listen to:
  - Sunday Worship at 8.10am on Radio 4 – A church adventure with poet Jay Hulme
  - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from St. Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh.
  - On BBC 1: Songs of Praise at 1.15 p.m. Claire McCollum explores stories of fossils, faith and science along the Jurassic Coast.

We have an unusual concert recital for our **lunchtime concert** at St. Francis on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> August at 12.45pm when Ayako and Yohel present their lovely programme of music for violin and viola. We are hoping that pianist Martin Sharpe will also be able to join them. Come along and bring a friend (or two). Our last concert in the series will be on 23<sup>rd</sup> September and further details will be given at a later date.

**Coffee and Chat** has been a great way of keeping up social interactions while there have been restrictions on what we can do and who we can meet up with. There is still a place for this amongst those who are unable to get out and meet with others, so we are going to continue with it, but hold it once a month at the normal time of 2.30 p.m. on the first Thursday of every month, with the first date being Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> September. Please let Rowena ([rowena.griff19@btinternet.com](mailto:rowena.griff19@btinternet.com) /020 8777 6112) know if you would like the log-in details.

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 week 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.

Booking has now opened for the extremely popular **Bishop's Certificate Course** starting in September. There are five taught modules (5 weeks per module) and a final residential weekend module as follows:

- Following - about the New Testament
- Remembering - about the Old Testament
- Exploring - about the history of the church and what it means to be Anglican
- Believing - about what Christians believe
- Deepening - about living, serving and praying as a follower of Jesus
- Expecting - about putting your future into God's hands

For 2021/2022, there are four options to participate. Tuesday evenings at Trinity House, near London Bridge, Wednesday evenings online via 'Zoom', Thursday evenings online and Saturday mornings at Trinity House. The cost of the course is £220 which includes the residential event at Wychcroft. For more information about the course speak to Brian Griffiths our Reader who is also a course tutor, or Debbie Adams who has completed the course. To request an application form and a schedule of dates, visit [bishopscertificate@southwark.anglican.org](mailto:bishopscertificate@southwark.anglican.org) or telephone the Diocesan Office on 020 7939 9400 and ask for the Discipleship and Ministry Department.

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](mailto:rowena.griff19@btinternet.com)

Please bring **Foodbank donations** to the Vicarage or St Francis' Church. Currently their biggest need is "bags for life". They also need jellies, instant whips, biscuits, tinned tomatoes, coffee, squash, deodorant, cleaning spray, antiseptic wipes and washing up liquid. 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>.

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](mailto:nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk) or 8916 9855) for St Francis'

The flowers at St. Mary's this week have all been provided by Eloise and Steven for their wedding yesterday and arranged by the ladies on the flower rota.

Our **High Street collection** of non-perishable and monetary donations for Bromley Borough Foodbank raised a total of £320 and a car-load of food and toiletries was taken to the warehouse – thank you to all the volunteers and those who donate to this organisation in whatever way.

Congratulations to **Debbie Adams** from St Mary's who received a letter from Bishop Christopher last week, accepting her for training as a Reader. Her course begins in September, and she will continue to be a valuable member of our ministry team. She is both excited and delighted about this new and life-changing challenge that God has given to her.

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

**Collect**

God of constant mercy,  
 who sent your Son to save us: remind us of your goodness, increase your grace within us, that our thankfulness may grow,  
 through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**First Reading:**

**Joshua 24: 1-2a, 14-18**

Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. <sup>2</sup> And Joshua said to all the people, <sup>14</sup> 'Now therefore revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put

away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. <sup>15</sup> Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.'

<sup>16</sup> Then the people answered, 'Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; <sup>17</sup> for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the

house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; <sup>18</sup> and the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.'

**Gospel Reading:**

**John 6: 56-69**

<sup>56</sup> Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. <sup>57</sup> Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup> This is the bread that came down from heaven,

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not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever.’<sup>59</sup> He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.

<sup>60</sup> When many of his disciples heard it, they said, ‘This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?’<sup>61</sup> But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, ‘Does this offend you?’<sup>62</sup> Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?<sup>63</sup> It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are

spirit and life.’<sup>64</sup> But among you there are some who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him.<sup>65</sup> And he said, ‘For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.’<sup>66</sup> Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.<sup>67</sup> So Jesus asked the twelve, ‘Do you also wish to go away?’<sup>68</sup> Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.’<sup>69</sup> We have come to believe and

know that you are the Holy One of God.’

### **Post Communion Prayer**

God of all mercy, in this eucharist you have set aside our sins and given us your healing: grant that we who are made whole in Christ may bring that healing to this broken world, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

## Sermon: Richard Ford

Imagine that you are a Jew who has heard about this wonder worker called Jesus and have been drawn to join the crowds who have gathered to hear him teach. You're sitting there listening carefully, perhaps attracted by much of what you have heard him saying, when you hear him declare the following:

Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them. (v.56)

And it's not the first time that Jesus has said something like this. A few moments earlier, he declared:

Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. (v.54, 55)

And at this point, as a true Jew, alarm bells begin to ring. But why is that?

The answer is to be found at the beginning of the Old Testament, where God through Moses, taught the Jews that they were not to eat anything which still had its lifeblood in it. In the Book of Leviticus, we read:

If anyone of the house of Israel or of the aliens who reside among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut that person off from the people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement.

Therefore, I have said to the people of Israel: No person among you shall eat blood, nor shall any alien who resides among you eat blood. (Lev. 17.10 ff)

Even today strict Jews will only eat meat which is kosher, which has had the blood drained from it before cooking.

So is it any wonder that John tells us later that "Because of this – eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood - many of Jesus' disciples turned back and no longer went about with him?"

For us today, who have both hindsight and the experience of sharing in Holy Communion, or the Eucharist, it is easier to see what Jesus is getting at. When we hear the words recited during the Eucharistic prayer: "This is my blood given for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins," we can see how they look forward to the crucifixion –

when Jesus literally pours out his lifeblood on the cross to bring us back into a right relationship with God, and also how his words look back to what Moses was teaching the people in Leviticus:

“The life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar.”

In giving up his life on the altar of the cross Jesus becomes the sacrifice which atones for the sins of the whole world, and after which there is no longer any need for animal sacrifice. Jesus having once and for all offered himself as the Lamb of God, there is no longer any need for the sacrificial lambs of the Jewish Passover or the rituals of the Day of Atonement.

But a word of caution, when Jesus says “But the one who eats this bread will live forever,” (v. 58) he doesn’t mean that regular attendance at Holy Communion is all we need to be guaranteed eternal life, for that would be to take Jesus’ words out of context. Rather these words must be understood in the light of the whole of Jesus’ teaching, both his words and his actions, and especially his teaching about repentance and forgiveness. When we eat Jesus’ flesh and drink his blood, as we do in Holy Communion, if we do this as an act of faith and having repented of our sins, we receive the forgiveness for which Jesus gave his life.

But more than this – we also draw the strength to live our lives as Jesus’ followers from listening to what he has to say to us in the accounts of his teaching in the gospels, and from what the Holy Spirit, the gift which Jesus promised his disciples would lead them “into all truth,” revealed to the early church and still reveals to us to today, and we also draw strength from meeting him in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

But we also need to look at what follows from eating Jesus’ flesh and drinking his blood. Jesus says that those who do this “have eternal life,” or, as he also puts it, they “abide in me and I in them.”

Just think what that means. Jesus, the Word or Son of God, who was and is with God from the beginning of time and who took part in the creation of the universe, is willing to abide in us, his creatures, if we are prepared to abide in him.

And this is what is meant by eternal life – to abide in Jesus and to have Jesus abiding in us throughout eternity. And the way to have Jesus abiding in us is to have faith. Earlier Jesus had promised his disciples that “anyone who hears my word and believes him

who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgement, but has passed from death to life.” (John 5.24).

In other words, beyond death, we shall continue to spend eternity in the presence of Jesus.

And that, surely, is something to celebrate.

But that was not the case with some of Jesus’ listeners, for we are told that “because of this (what Jesus had been saying) many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him,” (6. 66) having already said that “this teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” (6.60)

For them, the difficulty lay partly in what I have already referred to, their taking literally the idea of having to drink Jesus’ blood and eat his flesh, but I think, too, that they would have found difficulty in accepting the idea of abiding in Jesus and Jesus abiding in them, because that involved, as Jesus put it, hearing his word and believing in him who sent him. Now I don’t suppose that many in Jesus’ day would have had difficulty in believing in God, although many do today.

No, where the difficulty lies is in “hearing his word,” for this statement means more than simply hearing what Jesus says. It means hearing and doing. It is in this way that we abide in Jesus and he abides in us – when we live out his teaching, day by day, week by week and year by year.

And that can be costly, for it has implications for how we use our time, our talents and our money. From earliest times, Christians have proclaimed “Jesus is Lord,” meaning that all we are and all we have belongs to him. But do we fully recognise what that means? How frequently, for example, have we sung those words of Frances Ridley Havergal, “Take my silver, take my gold, not a mite would I withhold,” without really thinking through what they mean?

I, for one, am certainly glad that we serve a forgiving God!

And doing things Jesus’ way can frequently put us at odds with the rest of society, when we find ourselves challenged to opt out of doing something because it is contrary to our Christian beliefs: “throwing a sickie,” for example, because we don’t want to go into work, fiddling our tax return, or, and I’m sure that this one no longer applies to most of us here, indulging in premarital sex.

My son tells me that you could tell the Christians at university – they were the ones who got married early!

And sometimes it means doing something that some in society disapprove of, such as standing up for the rights of asylum seekers or supporting the idea of rescuing migrants seeking to cross from France to this country. It can mean being prepared to challenge comments, such as those recently made by Nigel Farage, that the lifeboat service was operating a “migrant taxi service” and facilitating illegal migration. Events in Afghanistan make this an even more relevant challenge at the present time. And it can mean challenging those of racist views and their comments.

But the fact that you’re here this morning suggests that you don’t find yourselves in agreement with those disciples who found what Jesus was saying “hard” and turned back and no longer went about with him.

Rather you side with Simon Peter, who when Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” replied, “Lord to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

Peter was prepared to commit himself to Jesus.

And committing ourselves to God is a key theme in our first reading this morning.

Joshua challenges the Israelites to turn their backs on the gods their forefathers worshipped and the gods worshipped by the surrounding tribes, declaring, “But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” And that is also a challenge that we must face up to. Are we tempted by the false gods of, say, materialism, of celebrity worship, of hedonism?

Or can we answer, like Joshua, “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord?”

And do we respond like Peter, “Lord to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Amen.

### **Prayer Pointers**

- That we may show truth, righteousness and faith in our lives. Through the example of our lives may we bring peace and salvation.
- For the people of Afghanistan in their difficulties and all who are fleeing as refugees from that country.

- For everyone affected by the earthquake in Haiti – for the families of the victims and for all who are involved in the rescue effort and treating the injured.
- For the families and friends of those murdered in the Plymouth shooting and for the police officers who witnessed the crime scenes.
- For Debbie Adams as she begins her training to become a licensed Reader in our benefice. Pray that God will grant her wisdom and grace to bring the message of the Gospel to us and to our wider community.
- For our two congregations in St Mary's and St Francis' – that we may encourage each other in our words and in our acts of kindness.
- For all those who are ill and for their friends and relatives – especially for Vicky Pearce and Julie Bailey – and all those unknown to us, but known to God alone.

Lord Jesus Christ, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. You are our rock and our salvation. Gently lead us and guide us. Go with us into your world.

**Amen.**