

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

26th February 2023: First Sunday of Lent

Hazel writes:

Now that Lent has started, we focus on prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Our sermons during Lent are designed to help with the focus on prayer and you may have given something up for Lent, so following the fasting aspect. If you want a pointer towards the almsgiving discipline of Lent, the **Bishop of Southwark's Lent Call** is raising money for projects that work to improve mental health and well-being. Our offertory on Easter Sunday will go towards the appeal, but if you would like to donate in the meantime, you can do so via the Diocese of Southwark website at www.southwark.anglican.org/lentcall. There is also more information on the projects in both churches if you do not have access to the internet.

This week we have Holy Communion services at 8am and 10.45am in St Francis' Church and at 9.15am in St Mary's Church.

Next **Sunday 5th March**, we will have Holy Communion services at 8am in St Francis' Church and a joint service at 10am in St Mary's Church.

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

The World Day of Prayer is on Friday 3rd March. There will be a Churches Together Service at 10.30am on that day in Coney Hill Baptist Church. All are welcome.

Resources and updates for the week ahead – Each week our service is livestreamed on YouTube at 10am or before. All other files for this week have been combined and included in this pew sheet which will be sent on paper to those who have told us that they are not on-line.

St Mary's Annual Parochial Church Meeting will be held on Sunday 12th March after the 9.15am service. As well as a report on the past year, we will also be looking to recruit new members of the PCC. If you are interested in being a Deanery Synod rep (including opportunities to visit other churches and see what they are doing) or to help with administrative activities associated with running our church as PCC Secretary (and so gain a greater insight into how God is working through the church), please do speak with any current members of the PCC. We are a friendly group who would appreciate anyone with new ideas to offer. Additionally, after 13 years of managing our hall

bookings, Jackie Greatorex is looking to hand this on to someone else. We will discuss this at the APCM, but if you'd like some details about what's involved before then, please do speak to Jackie.

St. George's Supper will once again be held at St. Mary's on Saturday 22nd April at 7.00 p.m. in the hall. This will be a three-course meal of prawn cocktail or melon, roast beef with all the trimmings, trifle and coffee and the cost will be £15 per head. You will have to provide your own alcoholic drinks. Places can be booked through Beryl Bolton on 0208 289 8097 or berylbolton@hotmail.com when you can provide your choice of starter. Payment must be made at time of booking and profit will be for church funds.

Lent Groups this year will reflect on unanswered prayer. If you are not already a member of a Home Group and would like to join one of the following groups to go a bit deeper in our understanding of how prayer works, please contact the following:

- Monday evenings: meet on Zoom – 8-9.30pm (contact Richard Ford on 020 8289 2432 or richard.ford73@ntlworld.com)
- Thursday mornings: meet at St Francis' – 10.30am – 12noon (contact Debbie Adams on 020 8777 7834 or debadams64@icloud.com)

We are slightly changing how we run our **Sunday morning communion services** to get an appropriate balance between returning to previous traditions and enabling everyone to feel safe in the church buildings:

- We continue to distribute communion by the priest dipping the wafer in the wine, but will review whether to return to the common cup at Easter. If we do, then those who do not want to share the cup can still receive communion in one kind only. Please do speak to Richard or Hazel if you have a strong view one way or the other.
- On any livestream we show what is happening in the church during communion. If you do not want to be seen on the livestream when receiving communion, please speak to Hazel, Richard or a warden on duty and we will bring communion to you.
- Sharing the peace can now be done in closer proximity, with a handshake or similar, but please be mindful of what each individual will feel comfortable with.
- With smaller numbers of people attending the services in the church buildings, it will help us to feel part of one community if we sit closer together. Please sit towards the front and in the middle of the buildings. This will also make it easier for you to sing along with the hymns.

Churches Together in West Wickham are opening up **Warm Spaces** on five days each week (normally 9am-5pm) providing somewhere warm for people to meet in for free. This is also an opportunity to meet with volunteers from other churches and share

some social time together, so if you are looking for some company, do join in at the following locations: ·

- On a Monday at West Wickham & Shirley Baptist Church
- On a Tuesday at Coney Hill Baptist Church
- On a Wednesday at St Francis' Church
- On a Thursday at West Wickham Methodist Church
- On a Friday at Emmanuel United Reformed Church

Please bring **Foodbank donations** to the Vicarage or St Francis' Church. Currently they require milk (long life), coffee, sweets, cooking sauces, soup, rice, tinned potatoes and other vegetables. They are well stocked with pasta, cereal, tea and biscuits. Please do not bring any fresh or frozen 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>. Thank you for your continuing support.

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 there is a list to sign in the vestibule at St. Mary's) or Nicky Nightingale (nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk or 8916 9855) for St Francis'.

No flowers now during Lent.

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.

Collect

Heavenly Father,
your Son battled with
the powers of darkness,
and grew closer to you
in the desert: help us to
use these days to grow
in wisdom and prayer
that we may witness to
your saving love
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

First Reading:

Romans 5: 1-5

5 Therefore, since we
are justified by faith,
we¹ have peace with
God through our Lord
Jesus Christ, ² through
whom we have obtained
access to this grace in
which we stand; and we
boast in our hope of
sharing the glory of
God. ³ And not only that,
but we also boast in our
sufferings, knowing that
suffering produces
endurance, ⁴ and
endurance produces
character, and character
produces hope, ⁵ and
hope does not

disappoint us, because
God's love has been
poured into our hearts
through the Holy Spirit
that has been given to
us.

Gospel Reading:

Mark 14: 32-37

³² They went to a place
called Gethsemane; and
he said to his disciples,
'Sit here while I
pray.'³³ He took with
him Peter and James
and John, and began to
be distressed and
agitated. ³⁴ And he said
to them, 'I am deeply
grieved, even to death;
remain here, and keep
awake.'³⁵ And going a
little farther, he threw
himself on the ground
and prayed that, if it
were possible, the hour
might pass from
him. ³⁶ He said, 'Abba,¹
Father, for you all things
are possible; remove
this cup from me; yet,
not what I want, but
what you want.'³⁷ He

came and found them
sleeping; and he said to
Peter, 'Simon, are you
asleep? Could you not
keep awake one hour?

Post Communion Prayer

Lord God,
you have renewed us
with the living bread
from heaven; by it you
nourish our faith,
increase our hope, and
strengthen our love:
teach us always to
hunger for him who is
the true and living
bread,
and enable us to live by
every word that
proceeds from out of
your mouth;
through Jesus Christ our
Lord.

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REFLECTION – Hazel O’Sullivan

Brian gave us an introduction to this sermon series last week and left us with that image of him in the hospital bed or the CT scanner, with Jesus lying beside him. This is how he has found peace. That peace which only God can give. You may still be asking HOW!! All that spiritual stuff: well, it’s OK for people like Hilary Fife and Brian, but I need something more practical. I’ve been at a series of bedside visits in the past month. Some who’ve been near to death, others who are very ill, but not at the end of their life. One woman said: “I’m scared”. When you’re stuck in bed and you can’t get up, it’s most frustrating, especially if you have that overwhelming feeling of being scared. You have time to reflect, but if all you’re reflecting on is that thing which you’re scared of, it’s definitely not going to bring peace, no matter how close God is.

So, how can we know that God is there with us to bring peace? I want to use the readings this morning to illustrate how Jesus did this at his hour of need.

The Gospel reading is set later in the evening after the Last Supper, when Jesus was in a quiet place - the Garden of Gethsemane - and he was praying. But before settling down to pray, he was open and honest about what he was feeling and told his three closest disciples that he was deeply grieved, even to death. He didn’t cover this up from his friends. We too need to be honest when we’re facing tough times. And, if someone can’t take that honesty, well you have to ask, are they really a friend? Do this and surround yourself with those that you know you can be honest with. They will be there to support you through the difficulties.

It was then, and only then, that Jesus went to pray. He’s praying to God. God, who is there alongside us always. Yes, even in the hospital bed. So, let’s reflect a bit on who God is.

Firstly, God is love: (1 John 4:16). How’s your relationship with God? Jesus could pray to God at this, his toughest hour because he saw God as his loving father. This is a father that he felt very close to. God is someone he calls “Abba”, which here, today might be translated as “Daddy”. This is a close, intimate relationship. Now, maybe this isn’t what your relationship with your father was like. I know that it wasn’t what my relationship with my dad was like as a child or is like now. When I was a child my mum and dad did what was seen as most acceptable: she gave the care, and he was the breadwinner and gave the discipline when it was needed. This was not someone I felt very close to – sometimes I was scared of him, because I didn’t want to hear that harsh tone of voice when I’d done something wrong. As a result, I have had to imagine God in a different way, not as my own father, but as a surrogate father, caring and loving.

Now, the only way that you're going to know God in this way is to have someone that you can look upon as that caring and loving father. I didn't have any man that I was very close to when I was young. However, I did have a good relationship with one woman - my long-term boyfriend's mother. So, if it helps, do call God 'mother'!

As well as having that vision of a loving and caring God, it also helps to be able to remember the past good times in life, and how God has provided such opportunities in the past. If you struggle with this, then instead maybe have a few favourite bible verses that you can meditate on in prayer when you're feeling down. Some time ago a number of people in the Morning Prayer group went through an exercise of picking out favourite bible verses. This might be something you could do to find that God that you know you can turn to in times of trouble. For me, psalm 27:1 is one of these verses:

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Turning to scripture such as this isn't done to deny what's happening. It's done to be able to face up to it. But that's only possible by owning our difficulties and sharing them with others, and with God. In his book, *God on Mute*, Pete Greig talks about tears being the best kind of prayer. Remember, God is love and if that's the case, he'll be able to take the honesty of your tears.

However, you might still be wondering about the answer to that question HOW? How is all this going to help me get through this time of unanswered prayer? Surely opening up and being honest about how tough life is, well, that's just going to make me feel worse! And here we come to another aspect of who God is: God is mystery.

I'd like to illustrate this with a true story. Russian novelist Alexander Solzhenitsyn was imprisoned by Stalin in a Siberian gulag, where he was made to slave away in sub-zero temperatures. One day he could take no more. He discarded his shovel and slumped onto a bench. He waited for a guard to beat him to death – he'd seen it happen to others and he thought anything would be better than the pain he was in. Before this could happen though, a fellow prisoner approached him, silently scratched the sign of the cross in the mud beside him and scurried away. Solzhenitsyn stared at those two lines scratched in the dirt, and the message of the cross began to converse with his sense of despair, so that he recognised that the hope of all mankind was represented in that simple cross. Picking up his shovel, he slowly went back to work. Nothing but the message of God's suffering could have inspired Solzhenitsyn to return to work that day.

It was the power of the cross that showed him that everything was possible for God – even in a Siberian concentration camp. Especially in such a place.

We may not understand how it happens, but recognising that God is with us and that God knows what it is to suffer, we can have hope. This is what is promised in our other reading for today. In Romans 5, verses 4 and 5, St Paul says:

... suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

It may take some time to work out the mystery that is God, but in time through scripture, through the friends that he gives us and the tears that we shed, we can find strength to get through life's difficulties, and so we can have hope.

So, how can we know that God is there with us and that he brings us peace? It may sound silly, but it's through prayer to a loving, but mysterious God, as well as the support of others. Praying to help you through a season of unanswered prayer may sound ridiculous, but that's how our mysterious God works.

If you still think you'll struggle on your own to really understand this, do think about joining one of the Lent groups. By sharing some of our stories with others we might get an insight into how this works in real life. Don't worry, you don't have to share anything if you don't want to. But knowing that there is a group of people that you might feel safe doing so with, may be all that you need.

This is what I was doing in those bedside visits during the past month – listening to the stories of others and showing that God is there with the person suffering and through him, bringing strength and hope to get through the difficult time. At Jesus' toughest moment in his life, he prayed for the strength to get through it. This gives us an insight into how we too can do this.

And I want to finish with another story to illustrate this:

An Irishman, Joseph Scrivens, graduated from Trinity College, Dublin in 1841. He then fell in love with someone from his hometown, they soon got engaged and planned their future together. On the eve of their wedding, Joseph's fiancé was riding over to see him, and he went out to meet her. As she crossed the bridge towards him, her horse bucked and threw her into the river below. Joseph ran to the river and plunged into the icy waters, but it was too late. His bride was already dead. Heartbroken, Joseph emigrated to Canada where eventually he fell in love again. They were due to

get married when his fiancé, Eliza, fell ill. They repeatedly postponed the wedding, but three years later Eliza died. Joseph would never give his heart to another. After some years, back home in Ireland, Joseph's mother was facing a tough time and he wrote her a poem to comfort her. Several years later a friend found a copy of this poem in a draw at his home and was deeply moved when Joseph told him 'The Lord and I wrote it together'. It includes the lines:

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.

You may recognise that poem as the hymn, 'What a friend we have in Jesus'. We're going to sing it later in the service and I hope it shows you something of God's love and support in tough times and how this can be accessed through prayer.

Amen

Prayer Pointers

Hold before God all those who feel completely overwhelmed by the situations they find themselves in, who ask the question 'How am I going to get through this?' Pray that they may realise that they are not alone, and that Jesus is alongside them.

Hold before God, our link parish of St Andrew' in Gweru in the Diocese of Central Zimbabwe. Pray for the continued growth and activity of the church guilds: Anglican Church Men, Mothers' Union, Anglican Women's Fellowship, St Agnes', St Peter's, Youths' and Children's ministry

Continue to pray for everyone trying to bring some relief to the suffering in Turkey and Syria. Hold before God those who are involved in the ongoing rescue and recovery effort, give them the resilience and patience they need to keep going. Pray for the medical teams arriving to tend the wounded.

In the Southwark Diocesan Prayer Cycle, pray for the congregation of St Edward the Confessor, Mottingham, their Vicar Catherine Shelley and the Ministry Team.

On the anniversary of the war in Ukraine, pray for an end to the suffering and for a peaceful and just agreement to stop the fighting.

Pray for those people in our communities who are suffering at the moment, with illness, grief or situations that are very difficult. In our congregations pray for these by name –Mark Outten, Vicky Pearce, Mike East, Jane Smith, Joan Burford, Graham Stone, Rowena Griffiths, Daphne Dack, John Dack, Barbara Goodchild, Karen Plummer, Fred Hinkley and Nina Tilling – and those known to God alone.

Hold before God all those who have died in the faith of Christ crucified. Pray especially for Stuart Froment, Joyce Town, Margaret Creedon, and John Cooper and their families.

Offer our own personal prayers and thanksgivings - all those things that worry us; those situations we feel helpless in; those decisions that burden us; those losses that overwhelm us, and all that we are thankful for.