

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

26th March 2023: Fifth Sunday of Lent

Hazel writes:

Today we finish our sermon series on unanswered prayer, finding that our prayers are always answered, but not always in the way in which we expect. This itself can be a painful experience that is difficult to accept. If anyone would like to talk about this topic of unanswered prayer, but has not been able to bring up their experience in one of the Lent Groups, please do be in touch with me and we can meet for reflection on the issues raised.

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

Next **Sunday 2nd April**, we will have Holy Communion services for Palm Sunday at 8am in St Mary's Church and a joint service at 10am in St Francis' 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.

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.

We have a **women's event** on Tuesday 28th March in St Francis' Church when we will be reflecting on whether we feel that we still need to stand up for women's rights. We will listen to a clip from a podcast on sexism and gender bias to get us talking about this, and then have an opportunity to reflect on what it's like to be a woman in Afghanistan today - an injustice that we really shouldn't ignore. There'll be refreshments to share in, and all are welcome, so do bring a friend.

This week there is a first meeting of a new **network of Eco Churches** in Bromley Borough on Weds 29th March in Christchurch URC, Petts Wood at 7.30pm. If you would like to join us this week, please contact Richard (richard.ford73@gmail.com or 020 8289 2432).

We are supporting our local foodbanks with **High Street collections** on Friday 31st March and Saturday 1st April from 10am to 1pm. If you would like to volunteer some

time on either day, please be in touch with Tim Shingler (tim.shingler@ntlworld.com or 020 8402 8286).

We will be holding our monthly **Action Aid coffee morning** on Saturday 1st April between 10.30am and 11.30am at St Francis' Church.

We will be editing **St Francis' Electoral Roll** from 2nd April - 15th April in time for our APCM in May. If your name is not on the Roll and you wish to be included, please let me know before the 15th April. If your name is on the Roll by then you will be able to vote and stand for any vacancies, etc. at this year's Annual Meeting. Please also let me have any changes of address, telephone numbers, emails etc. before this date. If you wish to know more or would like an application form please contact me at:- rowena.griff19@btinternet.com or 020 8777 6112. Many thanks, Rowena Griffiths.

St. Mary's Hall Booking Officer

St. Mary's need someone to take over hall bookings from Jackie Greatorex as she is retiring from the post after 13 years. If you think you might be able to help with this, please get in touch with Jackie on jackiegreatorex@googlemail.com as soon as possible to find out more what is required. Jackie is still prepared to do any purchasing for the hall and the cleaning but needs to hand over the administration of all hall bookings.

From Wednesday April 5th our **Warm Space at St Francis'** will only be opening on the 1st Wednesday of the month from 10.30am-1pm. Thank you to Marion and Theresa for volunteering to do this. If anyone else is willing and available to take on regularly opening the Warm Space on another Wednesday of the month from 10.30am-1pm please get in touch with Kate Dyer (katedyer41@hotmail.com or 07808 468591) or Marion Barry (whitelandm@yahoo.com or 020 87771470).

We are clearing out some cupboards in the **choir vestry at St Francis'** prior to refurbishing the space, so that this is more usable as a community meeting room. There are many copies of the **Book of Common Prayer**, some of which are now on one of the window-sills in the church. Please take as many as you would like to have.

A new **community garden** is being developed at the rear of St Francis' Church together with St John's Church. This is starting off as a small group, who will meet on a Thursday morning and will expand through referrals from social prescribers based in GP surgeries. We are hoping to have a formal opening ceremony at the end of the summer.

A Celebration of John Cooper's life will be held at The Bluebell Cemetery, Old London Road, Halstead, Sevenoaks, Kent, TN14 7AE on Monday 3rd April at 3pm followed by a gathering nearby. Please contact pcooper746@gmail.com if you are hoping to attend.

Our Youth Club leaders are running an **Easter Egg Hunt** on Saturday 8th of April from 10am to 4pm. The activities and hunt will be available to take part in all day: drop in for however long you like, whenever you like! There will be plenty of games and activities running alongside the Easter Egg Hunt as well as the sale of cakes, tea, and coffee. The link to pre-book tickets (cost of £3) is: <https://www.Ticketsource.co.uk/st-Francis-of-Assisi>. You can turn up any time between 10 am and 3 pm to take part in the activities (pay on the door if you prefer). If you would just like to come along to socialise, we would also love to see you there! Please do invite family, friends and neighbours: all are welcome.

A **local Ukrainian woman**, employed at Glebe School, and her adult son are looking for new accommodation. If you know of anyone who would be able to house them in two bedrooms as a sponsor, or who has a two bedroomed property they could rent to them, please ask them to contact Hazel. They have a caseworker who can help in dealing with all the necessary paperwork under either scenario.

In 2023, 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 of the churches if you do not have access to the internet.

Coronation Celebration Get-together Sunday 7th May at St. Mary's. This will take place at about 12 noon, following drinks after the joint service at 10.00 a.m. on the 7th May. The cost will be £10 a head (£5 for children under 14). All food, tea, coffee and soft drinks will be provided but you must bring along your own alcoholic drinks. Please contact Beryl Bolton 0208 289 8097 or berylbolton@hotmail.com for a ticket if you hope to come along and payment must be made at time of booking. Numbers must be in by Monday 1st May in order to allow time for organising amounts of food etc.

A **West Wickham Choir Concert** is planned for Saturday 15th July. The choir is now sufficient for us to go ahead but we can do better with more voices! Please ask any singing friends and neighbours to make contact if they would like to join – our rehearsals will be extensions of choir practices usually on Thursday evenings at St.

Francis, or occasionally Friday evenings at St. Mary's. These will begin in April. Thanks Geoff. Contact via geoff@mussard.org.uk or 020 8650 8389 - or at the organ after main services at both churches.

Church Keys at St. Francis' You may have noticed that the doors to the Church kitchen and the Youth Room have been replaced with stronger more suitable doors. If you were a key holder previously, these will no longer work. PLEASE return the keys to the old doors to David Wada, both Yale and mortice – Thank you. There is a key attached to a wooden block to the Youth Room door in the Kitchen on top of the microwave. Additionally, there is a key to the Kitchen Door hanging on a chain by the door which can be used to unlock the door. The Kitchen Door MUST BE UNLOCKED if the church is in use as this is a Fire Exit. Please do not remove either of these keys from the building as they are used regularly, and the replacement cost is high. Thank you all for your help and support in this matter.

Please bring **Foodbank donations** to the Vicarage or St Francis' Church. Currently they require canned vegetables, canned hot meat, cold meats, UHT milk, bleach and desserts. 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

Gracious Father,
you gave up your Son
out of love for the
world:

lead us to ponder the
mysteries of his
passion,
that we may know
eternal peace
through the shedding
of our Saviour's
blood, Jesus Christ
our Lord.

First Reading:**2 Corinthians 1: 3-5**

³ Blessed be the God
and Father of our
Lord Jesus Christ, the
Father of mercies and
the God of all
consolation, ⁴ who
consoles us in all our
affliction, so that we
may be able to
console those who
are in any affliction
with the consolation
with which we

ourselves are
consoled by
God. ⁵ For just as the
sufferings of Christ
are abundant for us,
so also our
consolation is
abundant through
Christ.

Gospel Reading:**John 20: 19-21**

¹⁹ When it was
evening on that day,
the first day of the
week, and the doors
of the house where
the disciples had met
were locked for fear
of the Jews, Jesus
came and stood
among them and
said, 'Peace be with
you.' ²⁰ After he said
this, he showed them
his hands and his
side. Then the
disciples rejoiced
when they saw the

Lord. ²¹ Jesus said to
them again, 'Peace
be with you. As the
Father has sent me,
so I send you.'

**Post Communion
Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ,
you have taught us
that what we do for
the least of our
brothers and sisters
we do also for you:
give us the will to be
the servant of others
as you were the
servant of all, and
gave up your life and
died for us, but are
alive and reign, now
and for ever.

REFLECTION – Hazel O’Sullivan

We’ve looked at a number of questions around unanswered prayer so far in this sermon series – How am I going to get through this? Why aren’t my prayers being answered? Where is God in all of this? And now we come to the last question – when? When will my prayers be answered? Because we know that our prayers will be answered – that’s what Jesus has promised us. Maybe not in the way that we anticipated we’d get an answer to prayer, but there will always be an answer. However, sometimes we might miss that answer.

There are two parts to this talk: the first about when our prayers might be answered in this life and the second about when they might be answered in the next life after we die. This is encapsulated in two verses from the first letter of Peter:

[Jesus Christ] has given us a new birth into a living hope through [his] resurrection from the dead,⁴ and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading,
1 Peter 1:3-4

The answer to prayer is always some kind of new birth, which is offered firstly in our living hope and secondly in an inheritance.

Looking firstly at our living hope this can come in three ways:

1. The first is through our suffering. Over the last three sermons we’ve looked at three days: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday. And now we come to Easter Sunday when the women go to the tomb and find Jesus’ body has disappeared. They weren’t expecting this! The first woman to get there was Mary Magdalene. She especially had suffered at the cross: Mary, Jesus’ mother, and John had been given each other, but Mary Magdalene had received nothing. Until today. Jesus is revealed to her first and most easily because of her suffering. If she hadn’t suffered at the cross, she might not have been there at his grave on Sunday morning. And, if you think back to our Lent Group sessions on The Beatitudes last year, we can see that Jesus recognises this in his teaching. It’s the poor in spirit, the meek, the mournful, those who thirst who are blessed. Those who have suffered with unanswered prayer can often have greater sensitivity to an answer to prayer than those who have never faced tough times. Next time you see someone who has it all, pray for them as they don’t know that peace that only Christ can give. It’s this peace that’s offered to his disciples on the evening of that Easter Sunday when Jesus appeared to them in a locked house. They too had suffered through the past

three days, but they had to wait a bit longer than Mary Magdalene before their prayer was answered and they met with Jesus.

In his book, *God on Mute*, Pete Grieg talks about Sheila, who suffered years of a debilitating illness. In a letter that she wrote to him she says that she feels sorry for those who go through life free of all troubles, because they never discover the gift of God's strength. She feels blessed at 80 years of age because she has suffered. I wonder if you recognise that encountering Jesus is more desirable than miracles and explanations. Without Jesus, we can become bitter, not better.

2. The second way in which living hope might come to us is in recognising what is good, even in tough times. There is always something good. I have a book written by Sheila, that friend of Pete Grieg's called "Talking & Walking with God". In this book she looks at how different bible verses reflect human nature, and I was struck by how her section on Romans 8:28 illustrates how hope might be found:

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28

The interpretation that's sometimes given to these words is that Christians always have good things happen to them. But we know that's not true. The point is that God can use every circumstance and bring some good out of it. Seeing something to be thankful for in the toughest situations we face is a wonderful and liberating antidote to despair and we shall surely find some cause for thankfulness if we search diligently.

Some of you will know Terry Leggatt, a prisoner who was in the secure unit at Bethlem Hospital and visited St Francis' on escorted trips. He's been back in a prison since December 2019 when he was told he had to complete one last programme, which might take a year, before being able to apply for a place in an open prison. That was over three years ago, since when he's been in a coma with Covid, his stepfather has died, leaving his mum on her own, and she's now in hospital, so it was impossible for him to speak to her on the phone on Mother's Day. He has lost everything, and I was the only person he was able to speak to this week. He's not had an answer on his parole hearing for over a year now, so this prayer for a place in an open prison remains unanswered. However, he could still see something positive in being able to speak with me and he's still strong in his faith, saying he was relying on a verse from Proverbs:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.

Proverbs 3:5

3. The third way in which we might find living hope now is by asking “what am I here for?”. This is what Jesus did on the cross and he found that he was there to save us from our sins. We are all called to pour our lives into something much bigger than ourselves, whether that be a career, a role where we’re caring for a loved one, or a particular project, or a hobby that gives us inspiration. And each of these callings may result in a time of unanswered prayer, but that doesn’t mean that this isn’t a part of God’s epic story. Back in 2019 we followed another course, called Paraclesis, where we thought about how we could take the learning from our own experiences and use it in journeying with others through their tough times. A verse from our first reading is foundational to this thinking:

[God] consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. *2 Corinthians 1:4*

Maybe this is the answer to your current unanswered prayer – that it will be a part of your calling to serve God.

So, these are the three ways in which our living hope (an answer to unanswered prayer) can come through Christ’s resurrection: the understanding that the greater our suffering, the greater our joy; finding something to be thankful for at all times; and using our experience to help others and serve God.

Now it may be that none of these seem to offer you living hope currently, but then we come to the other way in which the resurrection gives us a new birth and that’s through the promise of eternal life. This is an inheritance stored up for us in heaven and which we receive when we die.

Some of you will know that I find it a real privilege to take a funeral. Being able to help a family understand that their loved one is in a place where there’s no more crying or pain is a real blessing. We don’t know for certain what happens when we die - it’s a mystery. However, if you think about the place where you’ve been happiest, it won’t be far off what heaven is like. I wonder what surroundings you might choose for your happiest place. Maybe a beach, a garden of flowers, or a mountain top. And I wonder who you’d be sharing that place with – maybe friends, family or you might be on your own. And what is it that you’d be doing? Eating and drinking maybe, or doing something physical like swimming, or possibly relaxing – lying in a hammock, reading a book. Whatever it is, that’s what heaven is like for you. But you know the best thing about heaven? You don’t need to travel to get there; it comes to you. It’s like when

you're told there's a beer, or a cream cake, in the fridge. You don't need to get into the fridge and stay there to enjoy it, you can have the beer or the cake in the place where you are now.

We all approach death in different ways. Some of us might fear it, others might be hopeful about it. We will all be saved, though, if we believe in Christ. However, our journey to that state will be different.

The way in which we deal with our unanswered prayers will be part of that journey. Seeing unanswered prayer as an opportunity to experience God with you, or to understand him better, or to gain other blessings through helping others or being supported yourself through difficult times can reveal an answer to prayer, if not the one that you've been praying for. This is the peace that Jesus offered to his disciples in the locked house on Easter Sunday and this is what he offers to us today. There'll be different ways in which each of us can find that peace for ourselves and I hope that today and every day, whatever your situation, you'll always be able to find something to give thanks for – this is what Jesus has given to us - a new birth into a living hope and into an inheritance. Nothing can take that away from us. Amen

Three items which are relevant to this topic have come to my attention during this week while I've been preparing this sermon. Rather than including them in the sermon and making it much too long, I include them here:

BROKEN WINGS by Jane Smith

My wings are broken
And I thought I couldn't fly
But something inside me said
"Have one last try."

My body is weary
And I thought I couldn't go on
But something inside me said
"Look how far you've come."

My spirit is crushed
And I thought I couldn't cope
But something inside me said
"Never give up hope."

My heart is shattered
And I thought it would never mend
But something inside me said
“It isn’t the end.”

My soul is grieving
And I thought it would never heal
But something inside me said
“Keep being real.”

My mind is troubled
And I thought I’d never find rest
But something inside me said
“You are blessed.”

My life is restricted
And I thought I was worthless
But something inside me said
“You have purpose.”

Excerpt from “The Prophet” by Kahlil Gibran

Then a woman said, Speak to us of Joy and Sorrow.
And he answered:

Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.

And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears.

And how else can it be?

The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.

Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter’s oven?

And is not the lute that soothes your spirit, the very wood that was hollowed with knives?

When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy.

When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.

Some of you say, “Joy is greater than sorrow,” and others say, “Nay, sorrow is the greater.”

But I say unto you, they are inseparable.

Together they come, and when one sits alone with you at your board, remember that the other is asleep upon your bed.

Verily you are suspended like scales between your sorrow and your joy.

Only when you are empty are you at standstill and balanced.

When the treasure-keeper lifts you to weigh his gold and his silver, needs must your joy or your sorrow rise or fall.

Verses from the hymn: "It is well with my soul"

When peace like a river
attendeth my way
when sorrows like sea-billows roll;
whatever my lot
You have taught me to say,
"It is well, it is well with my soul."

Though Satan should buffet,
if trials should come,
let this blessed assurance control,
that Christ has regarded
my helpless estate,
and has shed His own blood for my soul.

My sin – O the bliss
of this glorious thought –
my sin – not in part – but the whole
is nailed to His cross;
and I bear it no more;
praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul.

But Lord, it's for You –
for Your coming we wait,
the sky, not the grave, is our goal:
O trump of the angel!
O voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope! Blessed rest of my soul.

Prayer Pointers

Pray for all whose prayers seem to go unanswered – for those who wonder where God is in their storms of life. Pray for those whose faith is shaken by what is happening to them. May they find consolation and peace in Jesus.

In our benefice pray for our Messy Church Team and for all the children who attend. Pray that they may learn about the love and joy that Jesus brings.

In the Southwark Diocesan Prayer Cycle, pray for the congregation of St James & St George, Hatcham and their Vicar, Kingsley Akwasi-Yeboah (V)

After yet another week of violence on the streets of London pray for the families of those injured and murdered. Pray for peace on the streets and for those responsible for bringing the perpetrators to justice.

In the light of the report into the Metropolitan Police last week, pray that officers may show integrity in their lives, fairness in their judgments, and for courage to stand alongside each other for what is right in times of stress and conflict.

Pray for those who are devastated by their current situations. Hold before God the people of cities in Ukraine that have been destroyed in the war there; the people of Syria and Turkey who lost homes and livelihoods in the recent earthquake; those who have lost jobs because of the current economic situation.

Pray for those people in our communities who are ill, grieving or in 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, 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, John Cooper and Mary Gearing and their families. Hold before God those for whom it is a time of anniversary and those for whom the pain never seems to get any better.

Offer our own personal prayers and thanksgivings. Help us always to remember that Jesus will be with us, beside us, within us and his love will guide us on the way forward.