

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

**26<sup>th</sup> September 2021: Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity**

### **Hazel writes:**

My sermon this week introduces the **Living in Love and Faith** courses which will run this autumn. This is an opportunity to consider how your own experience of relationships – friendships, family and marriage – have formed you and influence your opinions on the ways in which our society is changing. These are important topics for the Church of England today and the course provides a safe space in which you can offer your views, as well as listen to others. My hope is that the courses will enable us to answer the question: how can I live a more abundant life? Please do sign up to one of the dates: the details are below in the pew sheet and there will be sign up sheets in both of the church buildings.

Next Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> October, we will have three **Holy Communion services** at 8am and 9.15am in St Mary's church and at 10.45am in St Francis' Church, which will be **St Francis' Gift Day**.

**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.

Our **Pet Service** will go ahead this year next Sunday afternoon (3<sup>rd</sup> October) in St Francis' church at 3pm. If you have a pet and would like to receive a blessing for them and their relationship with you, please do join us. We'll also be able to share stories of how our pets have helped us in the last year.

**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 – Harvest Festival from Holy Trinity Church, Westbury on Trym, Bristol.
  - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from Collegiate Church of St. Mary, Warwick.
  - On BBC 1: Songs of Praise at 1.15 p.m. – Aled Jones introduces memorable moments from Songs of Praise.

**St John's Autumn Fair** is at St Francis' Church Hall on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> 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](mailto:linktohopehighams@gmail.com) or 07796 338483).

**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.

Please let Hazel ([hazelos58@gmail.com](mailto:hazelos58@gmail.com) or 020 8777 5034) know which course you would like to attend and do engage with this material if you want to be included in our response to this important topic.

The **Men's and Women's groups** will be joining together on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> October at 8pm, when Beverley from the Trading Standards Team in Bromley Council will come to give a talk on scams. These are becoming more varied and difficult to spot, so it will be good to be up to date on what is out there.

There are two concerts at St Francis' Church in October:

- On Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> October at 7.30pm the **Croydon Male Voice Choir** will be performing – tickets from John Curtis ([john.curtis23@ntlworld.com](mailto:john.curtis23@ntlworld.com) or 020 8777 5973).
- On Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> November the **London Concert Chorus** have some joyous songs to lift our spirits and they will be joined by Jacqueline Turner. Tickets from Geoff Mussard ([tickets@mussard.org.uk](mailto:tickets@mussard.org.uk) or 020 8650 8389).

A big thank you to Ann Herbert and all her team of helpers for the fantastic **MacMillan Coffee Morning** last Saturday at St. Mary's. It was supported by many people, the garden and hall were busy for most of the morning, and the lovely weather added to the occasion. The result was a fantastic sum of £1329 after the remaining cakes were sold on Sunday

morning at St. Francis'. Thank you to everyone involved and to everyone who supported the event.

**Ann Dakin**, who is known to many, especially at St Francis', died on Monday this week after a long battle with cancer, including much time in hospital.

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](mailto:jandbburford@talktalk.net) or 020 8777 2034), who will be pleased to include you in the team.

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.

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 next week 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 going to experiment 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, please let Rowena know (8777 6112 or [rowena.griff19@btinternet.com](mailto: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** have been especially helpful to those who have lost loved ones recently. If you would like a bag to give to someone that you know, do take one from the back of either of the churches.

**Freedom from legal restrictions** 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](mailto: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](mailto:nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk) or 8916 9855) for St Francis'.

The flowers this week at St. Mary's have been donated and arranged by Annette Cordery.

There are now vacancies at St. Mary's and St. Francis', so please get in touch if you would like a pedestal. There is a list to sign in the vestibule at St. Mary's.

Wendy Carvalho has some new orange/yellow curtains that she does not need and would be pleased to give them to someone for a donation to St. Mary's. There is a patio door set and a large 6 ft window to match. Her telephone number is 8777 7888 if you would like more details. Thank you.

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**

Gracious God, you call us to fullness of life: deliver us from unbelief and banish our anxieties with the liberating love of Jesus Christ our Lord.

**First Reading: Num 11:4-6, 10, 14-16, 24-29**

<sup>4</sup>The ... Israelites wept again, and said, 'If only we had meat to eat! <sup>5</sup>We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; <sup>6</sup>but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.'

<sup>10</sup>Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, all at the entrances of their tents. Then the LORD became very angry, and Moses was displeased. <sup>11</sup>So

Moses said to the LORD, ... <sup>14</sup>I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me. <sup>15</sup>If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once—if I have found favour in your sight—and do not let me see my misery.'

<sup>16</sup>So the LORD said to Moses, 'Gather for me seventy of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tent of meeting and have them take their place there with you.'

<sup>24</sup>So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD; and he gathered seventy elders of the people and placed them all around the tent. <sup>25</sup>Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him and took some of the spirit that was on

him and put it on the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again.

<sup>26</sup>Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp.

<sup>27</sup>And a young man ran and told Moses, 'Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.'<sup>28</sup> And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, 'My lord Moses, stop them!' <sup>29</sup>But Moses said to him, 'Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!'

**Gospel: Mark 9:38-end**

<sup>38</sup> John said to him, 'Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.' <sup>39</sup> But Jesus said, 'Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of me. <sup>40</sup> Whoever is not against us is for us. <sup>41</sup> For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward. <sup>42</sup> 'If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck, and you were thrown into the sea. <sup>43</sup> If your hand causes you to

stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. <sup>45</sup> And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. <sup>47</sup> And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, <sup>48</sup> where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

<sup>49</sup> 'For everyone will be salted with fire. <sup>50</sup> Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.'

**Post Communion Prayer**

Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us, and make us continually to be given to all good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## Sermon – Hazel O’Sullivan: Living in Love and Faith

Are you living an abundant life? Could your life be more abundant?

I wonder if you remember Joe Biden’s Inauguration. There was a young poet, Amanda Gorman, shown here, who read a poem, ‘The Hill We Climb’, at the event. This was a poem which she’d written specifically for the event, on the theme of American Unity. It begins by asking: where can we find light in this never-ending shade? And it finishes by saying:

***There is always light, if only we are brave enough to see it. If only we are brave enough to be it.***



There is always light... Of course, as Christians, we know Jesus as the Light of the World and so, we can reiterate that conclusion that there is always light. But even if it’s there, do we always see it? Or do we, more often than not, only see the shade that surrounds us in the ways of this world? It’s by seeing Jesus, the Light of the World, in the people and situations around us that we’ll be able to live that abundant life that Jesus promised us in John 10:10 when he said: “I came that you might have abundant life.”

Are you living an abundant life?

What does Jesus mean by that phrase ‘abundant life’? Well, one thing that it’s not, is the way in which the Israelites behaved in our first reading. They’d been led out of slavery in Egypt but are now complaining and their complaint makes it impossible for the people to see God and to live an abundant life: all they can see is the shade. If you look at verses 14 and 15, even Moses can’t see the light – he wants to die, so that he doesn’t see his own misery.

The way that God brings back the light into their lives is by sharing the spirit among the 70 elders who are chosen to support Moses. By seeing God’s light in others, they were enabled to prophesy and to take on some leadership. By sharing with others and not stopping anyone from taking part in this (as Joshua tried to do in v28), Moses was able to lead the people much better. They were all able to live an abundant life.



By sharing with others, they were able to live a more abundant life. Are you living an abundant life? How could it be made more abundant?

When Jesus was alive as a human on earth, the Jews were still finding it hard to see the light and to live an abundant life. In our gospel reading, John thinks that it's only those who are close to Jesus who can reflect his light. However, Jesus himself tells the disciples that it can be anyone who is acting in his name, and he asks them not to block others from finding him. Jesus is inviting his followers to live abundant lives, freed and restored, seeing the image of God in themselves and in others. I wonder if we can see the light of the world (Jesus) today in ourselves, as well as in other people, especially those who are not like us. This is how we will live an abundant life – together with others who are different to us. Just because someone is not like us, doesn't mean that they can't show God's light.

***There is always light, if only we are brave enough to see it. If only we are brave enough to be it.***

Even within the church, sometimes we fail to live this abundant life. Every year in January we have a Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. I wonder if we could practice Christian Unity all year round, not just for one week. Sadly, rather than seeing the light, we see the shade of division. Divisions between denominations, divisions between different parts of the Anglican Communion, divisions even within the Church of England. We see shadows in different styles of worship and different theologies. Lockdowns have exposed some of these differences, as we've had to experience different places and styles of worship through services being streamed on-line, through being encouraged to find God in the garden or other places, and for us here in St Francis' and St Mary's by having our pattern of worship changed with more joint services. Some have thrived in these different situations, while others have found it difficult. It's not that one thing is better than another. They are different. But we all believe in Jesus, and we must not stop the other, like John was trying to do in v38 of our reading.

We all want to see the Light of Christ more in our society. Maybe, if we can look beyond our prejudices, we'll be able to do so. Jesus spoke in contrast to John when he says in v40 that whoever is not against us is for us. This is what an abundant life involves: doing stuff with others who are different to ourselves.

Are you living an abundant life?

One thing that we've done recently to break down some of the divisions between us, is to look at different aspects of being an Inclusive Church. The most recent of these meetings was on sexuality and gender identity, which is a critical issue for the Church of England to deal with at the current time. The Methodist Church has recently agreed to allow same-sex weddings in their churches and the Church in Wales has also enabled the blessing of same-sex relationships by their clergy. The position of the Church of England is not yet decided but there are some materials called Living in Love and Faith, that have been developed to enable everyone in our church to look at identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage, in relation to the good news of Jesus Christ. Instead of seeing ourselves as pitted against each other on this topic, Living in Love and Faith is designed to enable us to discuss the issues together, with respect for all and so see the Light of Christ in the other, whatever their view. And it's not just about our approach to same-sex relationships, it's about how we approach all relationships, including our own, so that we can live that abundant life which Jesus promised to us.

I am going to be running a Living in Love and Faith course over five weeks on four occasions in October and November – details are in the pew sheet. Here's a link to an introductory video:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/living-love-and-faith>

The Living in Love and Faith course gives everyone the opportunity to speak and to be heard, to explore our own identity and relationships and to explain our own feelings, without being criticised by another. The Church of England wants all views to be heard and, as I said before, the position on same-sex relationships is not already decided. It is difficult to say that people in a loving, faithful relationship, who believe in Jesus, cannot have God's blessing. Equally, those Christians who believe that marriage is only intended for a man and a woman also need to be heard and respected. An abundant life is one where people with different views are able to join together in an open discussion, without being criticised or demeaned in any way.

Some of you may be challenged by the idea of talking about sexuality, relationships and marriage, but it is only by discussing these topics openly that God's will can be discerned. I thought that the panel members for our Inclusive Church meeting on sexuality and gender identity were very brave in offering to speak and answer questions on this topic. As Amanda Gorman said in her Inauguration poem:

***There is always light, if only we are brave enough to see it. If only we are brave enough to be it.***

Will you be brave enough to find the light in our church? It is always there, but sometimes we need to be brave enough to find it in others, or to be brave enough to be it ourselves.

Are you living this kind of abundant life? How could it be made more abundant? Sign up for one of the courses and come along to explore this in a bit more depth. Amen

### **Prayer Pointers**

Continue to pray Afghanistan, for her Leaders that they rule with justice, integrity and impartiality and for her people as they continue to adjust to a new regime. May those who still seek to leave the country be able to do so without harassment, especially those who worked for or with the armed forces from the USA or Great Britain.

As the Climate Change conference of COP26 draws closer may those who attend take on board the seriousness of the effects of global warming and be prepared to make hard decisions about the future.

Pray for the people of La Palma in the Canary Isles, for all who have seen their homes and livelihoods destroyed and for those who have suffered bereavement or injury: may they find strength and comfort from their communities and their faith.

Pray for our own Church of England as she faces some difficult decisions for the future and comes to terms with some of the issues from the past that can no longer be ignored.

Pray for our Church Vision, that the two forthcoming concerts will be enjoyed by members of our wider community as well as people from the congregations.

Pray for the Living in Love and Faith Course that starts shortly for those who lead the groups and those who attend.

Give thanks for the baptism of Oliver Smith, a member of the Messy Church congregation yesterday. Pray that his parents and Godparents will provide good examples for him over the years to come.

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.

Pray for Ann Dakin a former choir member of St Francis who died on Monday and her family and friends. Pray also for Sabina Nessa, her family and friends and for all in this area of Southeast London who have died as the result of violence.