

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

29th August & 5th September 2021:

Thirteenth & Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity

Hazel writes:

Last week was a busy one, with Stephen Howe's birthday celebrations, a wedding on Saturday and our afternoon tea on Sunday. Please do read my message below about feedback from the congregations and the vision for the United Benefice which we shared at the tea. It was great to see so many people at these occasions and to be able to look forward to doing some more of these social events in the autumn, God willing. Here's a picture of the wedding from the livestream for those who might be interested.



Next Sunday 5th September, we will have **Holy Communion services** at 8am in St Mary's church and at 10am in St Francis' Church. On Sunday 12th September there will be a **Holy Communion** service in St Francis' church at 8am and a **Service of the Word** in St Mary's at 10am when we will have a visiting speaker from **The Children's Society**.

Morning Prayer is at St Mary's Church on this Tuesday morning at 9am and then we are switching to Thursday mornings at 9am. It is also 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.

Coffee/tea & chat is now held monthly and will be on Thursday 2nd September at 2.30 pm. This is an opportunity to share with others on-line. We will trial an in-person event as well later in the month. Please let Rowena (rowena.griff19@btinternet.com /020 8777 6112) know if you would like the log-in details for the on-line version.

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. There will be no pew sheet next week, but we are going to trial a **livestream from St Francis' at 10am** on YouTube. 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 – A smaller Greenbelt Festival seeks a future better balanced world of hope and justice.
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from St. Olave's York with Ex Corde Vocal Ensemble.
 - **On BBC 1:** Songs of Praise at 1.15 p.m. – Rev. Kate Bottley visits a zoo in Bristol and recalls other times of faith and fun.

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.

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.

We are going to start a course, which will be a small group for those that might want a more spiritual approach to dealing with difficult things in life. This will be based on the **Alpha** material and will meet face to face starting in the middle of September. If you (or someone that you know) might benefit from sharing with others in a confidential setting and exploring faith further, please do be in touch with me. Hazel

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 have enabled us to make small 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 observing 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 is open 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, 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

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'

The flowers at St. Mary's this week were provided by Eloise and Steven for their wedding last weekend and were arranged by Annette Cordery.

The last **lunchtime concert** at St Francis is on Thursday 23rd September at 12.45 pm. More details later.

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

At last week's afternoon tea, we shared an overview of the feedback gained from members of the congregation and a summary of the vision for the United Benefice moving forward, which continues to be developed based on my sermon on bearing fruit from Sunday 2nd May this year. The paragraphs below are a copy of this information. There are also copies available in both churches if you would like to study this in more detail and to discuss it with members of the vision group or the ministry team. Hazel

Feedback from congregation members

46 respondents: 19 from St Mary's, 27 from St Francis'

- Although 25 wanted the 10am service to continue, 42 will attend a **9.15am or 10.45am service** on a Sunday. We will gradually explore how a transition back can be made possible.
- The other activities which people would like to continue are **pew sheets delivered by email/to the door** (40 respondents) and **regular Foodbank donation points** (30 respondents).
- **Keeping in touch by phone and/or email** is another activity people would like to see continued (25 respondents). Others include **sermon and prayer pointers in the pew sheet** (23 respondents) and **church magazines** being available online (24 respondents).
- The activities which have been missed the most are **social activities** (30 respondents) and **community lunches** (23 respondents). Others include **home groups meeting in person** (18 respondents), **Saturday morning coffee** at St Francis' (17 respondents) and **Women's group meetings** (15 respondents).

These are the activities that we will explore re-starting.

Vision for the United Benefice

Compassion:

- Foodbank links
- Telephone befriending
- Bereavement support
- Work with Christians Against Poverty

Culture:

- Links with 7th West Wickham Scouts
- Youth Group
- Other hall users
- Festival of Arts in 2022
- Community gardening

Commerce:

- Promoting church hall space
- Use of churches: concerts, cinema



Congregation:

- Regular Sunday worship pattern
- Social activities, incl. coffee & chat
- Home Groups
- Inclusive Church discussions
- Messy Church
- Men's and Women's groups
- Walking group

Collect

Almighty God,
you search us and know us:
may we rely on you in
strength and rest on you in
weakness, now and in all our
days; through Jesus Christ
our Lord.

First Reading:

James 1: 17-27

¹⁷ Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸ In fulfilment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures. ¹⁹ You must understand this, my beloved, let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. ²¹ Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls. ²² But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. ²³ For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; ²⁴ for they look at themselves and, on going away,

immediately forget what they were like. ²⁵ But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing. ²⁶ If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Gospel Reading:

Mark 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, ² they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. ³ (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; ⁴ and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles. ⁵ So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, 'Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?' ⁶ He said

to them, 'Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written,

"This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me;⁷ in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines."⁸ You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition.'

¹⁴ Then he called the crowd again and said to them, 'Listen to me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile.

²¹ For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, ²² adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.'

Post Communion Prayer

God our creator, you feed your children with the true manna, the living bread from heaven: let this holy food sustain us through our earthly pilgrimage until we come to that place where hunger and thirst are no more; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Collect

Creator God, whose Son Jesus Christ lived once in Palestine, yet whose arms flung wide on the cross, embrace all time and space in redeeming love, grant that we may use the earth's resources in a way that lasts throughout the earth for generations to come, by the power of the sustaining Spirit.

First Reading: Gen 9:8-17

⁸Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹'As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.'

¹²God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.' ¹⁷God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.'

Gospel Reading:**Matthew 22:34-40**

³⁴When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶'Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?' ³⁷He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'" ³⁸This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." ⁴⁰On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

Post Communion Prayer

God our creator, as we are refreshed by your word today and reminded that we are redeemed by the love of Christ in our communion, may we now find strength to sustain our planet as we journey on through life.

Sermon – Ken Bryan

One consequence of the pandemic is that we have had our traditional Sunday worship totally disrupted for months. For a long while not even being allowed to enter our two church buildings. Our worshipping traditions have had to be halted and changed and even changed again. We might not have been happy with this situation but we have adapted and had to rethink what is most important to us in our faith. Is it us we serve or is it God that we serve?

In our gospel today Mark is probably writing this passage for Gentiles as the words in brackets explain things that would be known only to Jews.

The Pharisees and the scribes were not about to have their traditions changed, let alone not be observed. They were down from Jerusalem so were probably not only important people themselves but were going to report back to the highest authorities. They would have been watching everything that Jesus did and compiling a list of charges that they could bring against him.

The oral traditions of the elders that they were saying should be observed had been developed over the years to expand the meaning of scripture. All those people who were listening to this challenge would have been interested because it concerned how they lived their lives.

But what the Pharisees have been doing is raising these oral traditions to equal the words of scripture. They were changing or negating the purpose and spirit of God's law. They are so concerned about these traditions that they are missing the point, believing that they should go through life fulfilling all these rules of tradition without actually thinking about being committed in their hearts to the spiritual intention of the law. In effect their human teaching is superseding God's law.

What traditions do we live by that in reality are not red lines of behaviour but just what we have got used to? And we say must be done this way.

Yes certain things are socially acceptable like the clothes we wear and when we wear them. And how we behave in certain settings. But they are not the same for everyone and should not be used to drive us apart.

In a family you would not expect boys and girls to dress exactly like their parents. Their hair styles would be different. Their eating habits may be different as some may be vegetarians or vegans. But they are still members of the same family and able to fulfil their part in family life.

Washing of hands has become a new tradition. Twenty seconds with soap and water. Not only for personal hygiene but also to help others by stopping the spread of the virus.

The wider community has different outlooks and values and habits. And our church family and local community to which we belong are full of people with different lifestyles.

What is important is what comes out of us in speech and actions which defines who we are and what we are and who we follow.

We could be fed good words or bad, helpful actions or selfish actions, but it is what we decide to do and say that defines us. We all have many conflicting influences in our lives. Which we sift and take on board or reject to make us into the people we want the world to see and what we feel God wants us to be.

Like food which goes into the body and passes through, so negative thoughts can enter our minds but can pass through and be rejected as paths that we do not wish to go down.

Jesus is showing them and us that inner attitudes are more important than outward standards.

In life we do look to traditions to guide us in our actions. In families, in communities, nationally and internationally. (Many outsiders believe every English man wears a bowler hat and carries an umbrella.) These join us together and can bring coherence and order. It is learned by observation and practice, sometimes taught, sometimes observed or assimilated. Both societal and religious.

It is a shame that the people who were criticising Jesus for an issue like the washing of hands before eating were missing the freedom that Jesus was bringing and the sick that were being cured, evil spirits cast out and sins forgiven.

These traditions, however must not get in the way of us. As it says in James be doers of the word and not merely hearers. To be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger.

This reminds me of a time many years ago when a group of us met and befriended an American, Michael, who was over here seeing the sights. He had the limitations of Cerebral Palsy so could hardly walk and his speech was very limited. It was difficult to understand him so he had a plastic wallet with an alphabet and numbers so that he could point and spell out a conversation. In fact he could tell a very good joke that way. He was accompanied by a carer who was ex US army by the name of Jim Pepper. As he had been a sergeant in the army he was the real Sergeant Pepper. Still that's another story. Michael was very intelligent and witty and was actually a TV script writer as he could get all his scripts written by typewriter, if very slowly.

It was when we were out with him that we could feel the looks that he was being given by those passing by who knew nothing about him. Some would look with concern, others with indifference but some showed actual distain, and would probably have ridiculed him if he was on his own.

This made us all realise that we should be slow to judge others who don't look like us. Surely this applies to so many situations that we might find ourselves in these days. We are called to care for orphans and widows and I am certain that includes people less fortunate than ourselves.

As we develop our vision for us here in our United Benefice let us seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

May we not let traditions get in the way of true worship. Worship from the heart.

After all worship is not just about sitting in church, praying or singing God's praise. Not to say that these things are wrong or not pleasing to God. We are after all beings who are called to praise God.

But it is about doing. Doing God's work here in this place and wherever we are.

Loving God and loving our neighbour.

Amen

Prayer Pointers

- That our two churches of St Mary's and St Francis' may be open to change, being renewed in Christ and not clinging to past traditions unnecessarily. May we look to Jesus for guidance as we seek to bring the Kingdom of God to our community and to each other.
- For the people of Afghanistan in their difficulties. For all involved in the evacuation effort and for all who are fleeing as refugees from that country that they may find new lives in safety and security.
- For everyone affected by the earthquake in Haiti and for those experiencing the floods and weather damage in Eastern USA – for the families of the victims and for all who are involved in the rescue effort and treating the injured.
- For all organisations fighting for justice in the world especially for those seeking to rid the world of racism and inequality, relieve hunger and bring medical aid to the poor and disadvantaged.
- Continue to pray for an end to street violence in our city. For the emergency services who have to deal with the aftermath and for all working to turn young people's lives around and give them a sense of purpose.
- For all who are preparing to start training for ministry in our Diocese – for ordinands, pastoral auxiliaries, readers and pioneer ministries. For all who will be starting the Bishop's Certificate Course in a few weeks – that they may truly grow in faith and life.
- 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.
- For the soul of John Tasker, who died recently, and for his wife, Sheila, mourning his loss.

Lord, you know each of us inside and out. You know our deepest failings, yet still you love us. You also know our deepest needs and our deepest hurts. Give us the courage to face these places of pain and difficulty. Give us the wisdom to ask for help from others and the grace to accept it. Give us the insight to see where others need our support and to be prepared to go that extra mile for them.