

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

2<sup>nd</sup> May 2021: Fifth Sunday of Easter

### Hazel writes:

As lockdown restrictions ease, we will be able to meet up with more people face-to-face. How can you make each one of these interactions result in you or someone else finding a closer connection with Jesus? This is the subject of our service today: staying connected with Jesus and so experiencing an abundant life. Do join us today and during the week at our inclusive church meeting on Thursday to explore how we can do this.

Next Sunday we have on-site services at **8am in St Francis' church** and at **10am in St Mary's Church**.

St Francis' Church will be **open for private prayer** on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> May from 10.30-11.30am.

**Resources and updates for the week ahead** – This week our service will be **on Zoom at 10am** and will be available to view on YouTube from around 1pm at the latest. It will also be **screened at St Francis' at 10am**. 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 – marking the centenary of the formation of Northern Ireland.
  - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from St. Peters, Eaton Square with the BBC singers.
  - **On BBC 1:** Sunday Stories at 10.45 a.m. – Kate Bottley shares the inspirational story of the U.K's first Muslim ballet school and
  - Songs of Praise at 1.15 p.m. – Claire McCollum marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Northern Ireland.

**Inclusive Church:** An invitation for the Zoom meeting on Mental Health and Wellbeing is attached to this pew sheet. The meeting will be at 8 p.m. on May 6<sup>th</sup> and speakers confirmed so far are Robin Thomson, author of "Living with Alzheimers: a love story," Andrew Wilson, former chaplain at The Bethlem Hospital, and our own Kate Dyer, GP. We are hoping also to have a school representative to talk about the impact of Covid

on students' wellbeing and other stress factors encountered by young people. Questions to put to the panel should be sent or phoned to Richard Ford:  
[richard.ford73@ntlworld.com](mailto:richard.ford73@ntlworld.com); 020 8289 2432.

The **St Francis' APCM** will be on Sunday 9th May after the Sunday morning services at 11.30am in church and on Zoom.

**Ascension Day is on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> May.** There will be a deanery-wide service of Holy Communion for Ascension Day at 7.30pm in St Edward's Church, New Addington. The Archdeacon of Croydon, The Ven Dr Rosemarie Mallett will be preaching. All are welcome.

**Christian Aid Week: 10-16 May 2021.** In February this year I had the unique experience of speaking to Rose and Florence in Kenya in real time thanks to Christian Aid and Zoom. They still struggle with drought and famine resulting from climate change. From severe drought to flooding, extreme weather robs them of what they need to survive; a reliable source of water. Through Christian Aid Week our prayers, gifts and actions can help communities withstand climate chaos; from building better earth dams to harvesting more water, to sowing drought tolerant crops, to demanding climate justice at the highest level. On **Sunday 16 May 2021** we will dedicate our prayers and thoughts to Christian Aid. Our donations will help families facing poverty and injustice. Money can also be donated during the week by visiting <https://envelope.christianaid.org.uk/envelope/west-wickham>, or by phone on 08080 006 006, or paper envelopes will be found on the seats outside both churches; please return the full envelope via the letterbox in St Francis's Vestry door or St Mary's vicarage door. Please gift aid your donation if applicable. Thank you. Anita Curtis & Geoff Mussard

Please bring **Foodbank donations** to the Vicarage or St Francis' Church. Currently they need desserts (including tinned rice pudding), biscuits, tinned potatoes, tinned tomatoes, Tinned Fruit, tinned soup, Tinned Cold meat, tinned fish, Toilet Rolls, washing up liquid and clothes washing capsules (but not liquid in bottles). 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>

St John's want your empty **crisp packets** to create survival kit blankets for rough sleepers and those in need. Recycling is a great way to save the oceans and this could make a real difference to people's lives! Have a look at our page to find out more ([www.facebook.com/CrispPacketProjectWestWickham](http://www.facebook.com/CrispPacketProjectWestWickham)), or check out this video: <https://youtu.be/L5FWMca5BFY>. You can collect and wash crisp packets and bring them

to the Foodbank donation points, or you can follow the video to make a finished sheet - we'd love you to join us!

As we look to support our community as we come out of lockdown, I am grateful to those who have already knitted or crocheted some more forget-me-nots for our **bereavement support bags**. These 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 let me know. Hazel

Do you feel you are being called to put yourself forward to be on the **Southwark Diocesan Synod**? Elections will take place by the beginning of July. The Synod brings people together from across the Diocese to drive mission, set strategies, shape priorities as well as appoint to a range of positions on boards and committees. It is a body which is advisory and is a place where important topics facing the church can be discussed. If you want to find out more, please take a leaflet which you will find copies of in both churches and speak to Hazel.

We are looking to have a consistent approach to dedicating **pedestal flower arrangements** in our church buildings in the weeks ahead. 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'.

**Next week** the main service is at St. Marys so please get in touch with Merri if you would like a pedestal for the 9<sup>th</sup> May.

A neighbour of Merri and John Womack has given an 18 month old **upright** armchair upholstered in duckegg blue/grey to see if anyone at our churches could use it. If anyone is interested, it is in the vestibule at St. Mary's but please contact Merri on 8777 8772.

Each week our "**coffee/tea & chat**" on Thursday at 2.30 pm is an opportunity to share with others. It is just 40 minutes and you don't need to commit to joining each week. Please let Rowena ([rowena.griff19@btinternet.com](mailto:rowena.griff19@btinternet.com) /020 8777 6112) know if you would like the log-in details.

Any items for the joint pew sheet to Beryl [bbolton@ntlworld.com](mailto:bbolton@ntlworld.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**

Risen Christ,  
your wounds declare your  
love for the world and the  
wonder of your risen life:  
give us compassion and  
courage to risk ourselves  
for those we serve,  
to the glory of God the  
Father.

**First Reading: Acts 8: 26-40**

<sup>26</sup> Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Get up and go towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' (This is a wilderness road.) <sup>27</sup> So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship <sup>28</sup> and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. <sup>29</sup> Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over to this chariot and join it.' <sup>30</sup> So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' <sup>31</sup> He replied, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. <sup>32</sup> Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: 'Like a sheep he was led to

the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth.'<sup>33</sup> In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.'<sup>34</sup> The eunuch asked Philip, 'About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?' <sup>35</sup> Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. <sup>36</sup> As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?' <sup>38</sup> He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. <sup>39</sup> When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. <sup>40</sup> But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

**Gospel Reading: John 15: 1-8**

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower.  
<sup>2</sup> He removes every branch in

me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

**Post Communion Prayer**

Eternal God,  
whose Son Jesus Christ is  
the way, the truth, and the  
life: grant us to walk in his  
way, to rejoice in his truth,  
and to share his risen life;  
who is alive and reigns,  
now and for ever.

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## Sermon – United in Vision: Hazel O’Sullivan

If you are part of this Zoom meeting, if you’re watching the video of it on YouTube or you’re reading the text of this talk, then you’re connected in some way to our two churches – St Francis’ and St Mary’s in West Wickham. I wonder what the reason is for your connection. Maybe it’s because you’ve always been a church-goer and this is the local church where you feel most at home. Maybe it’s because you knew someone at the church, found it a friendly bunch of people and ended up staying connected. Maybe you have family connections which remain important to you. Maybe there’s another reason. Whatever it is, I’d like to think that part of the reason for your connection with us is that this is a community where you feel linked to Jesus and the abundant life that he offers to his followers and that you’d like to see others being able to benefit from that life. This abundant life is not about being rich and enjoying luxury experiences. No, it’s about having authentic friendships with others, about cultivating community assets, such as cultural events and community organisations and about being a blessing to those who visit us (in person or virtually).

In today’s reading Jesus tells us that he is the vine and we are the branches. The fruit is something that we produce. It doesn’t grow directly from the vine, but from the branches as you can see in this picture. And it’s good fruit – grapes, wine, raisins, sultanas, currants, grape juice. Think about all that produce – it’s good stuff. Jesus calls us to an abundant life – one that gives fruit to good stuff, but only if we remain connected to him. Our vision is for us to be fruitful vine branches. I want to look firstly at what that fruit in the context of our lives here in WW might be and then at what we might do as a church community to remain connected to Jesus and make this happen.



The first part of our vision is to be people who have authentic friendships with others, especially those in need: we have a God of **compassion**. We already have links with the Bromley Borough Foodbank, but I wonder if we could get closer to those who are suffering, and even walk alongside them and have a personal encounter, which makes them an integral part of our community. We already do some of this in our bereavement support group and pastoral care, but we are also investigating opportunities for telephone befriending and debt advice and we’re hoping to restart our community lunches and the Place of Welcome in a way that makes them not just a

social event, but a personal encounter with a stranger which uncovers a pearl - inside of them, inside you, or maybe inside everyone involved.

The second part of our vision for being fruitful branches is cultivating community assets: what you might call the **'culture'** of West Wickham. We can uncover the abundance in our local community by celebrating the achievements of all the community groups that we have contact with:

- the 7th West Wickham scouts, who have just started a new group of cubs that meet at St Mary's on a Tuesday,
- the Rotary International groups who have been marshalling at local Covid-19 vaccination sites,
- the Bromley Boy Singers, who want to hold a concert at St Francis in the summer and
- the London Concert Chorus and the Matchbox Theatre who both contributed to Not the Big Christmas Sing.

This is a great set of human achievements and creativity which illustrate how we are all made in God's image. The fruit is there already, but do we recognise it as something that we might be able to give greater encouragement to and to give thanks to God for? Making stronger connections with these groups will enrich our lives and could bring others closer to Jesus.



And finally, we can recognise our **commercial** side as being part of our vision, so that we can be a blessing to those who visit us. Our two churches both have high quality spaces for people to use. The location of St Francis' just off the High Street is fantastic and it's wonderful to see the face of someone coming inside the church for the first time and finding unexpected joy when they see that window. At St Mary's the facilities in the church and both church halls are

excellent and highly sought after. So, we have a high profile with children's groups at St Mary's (including Muddy Boots and Boppin' Tots, who have both already returned to face-to-face



meetings) and the pre-school at St Francis' continues to be popular with local families. We also hope that markets will return to St Francis' soon and we might open up St Mary's church to external groups who could use the new audio-visual system.

As well as these three areas of mission: compassion, culture and commercial, which can all lead to a more abundant life for a variety of people, our vision includes how we might equip members of our **congregations** – that's you - to be able to bear fruit by being individually connected with Jesus. This might be at a time when you're engaged in one of these three areas of mission, or it might be in some other context. The fruit that we produce may not be directly connected with the church – it can be any way in which you show Jesus to another person. So, what kind of things might help you to do this? Well, we do try to include encouragement in our sermons and we hope that our corporate worship gives you a spiritual boost each week – that's why we've maintained it in some form or another throughout the pandemic; Morning Prayer continues to give a couple of encouraging reflections each day; our homegroups have continued on Zoom; we've bought materials to help in discipleship, such as the Live Lent booklets; we've invested in technological solutions to stay connected; and we are following our Inclusive Church programme to create a greater sense of belonging for everyone in our community. There's lots more that we'd like to do in this area, but it all helps each of us to remain connected to Jesus. That's what being part of a church, rather than an individual Christian provides. In the other reading this week from Acts, it was being connected with Jesus that enabled Philip to share what he knew about Jesus with the Ethiopian eunuch on the road to Gaza. The fruit that he created as a result was a person who went on his way rejoicing (v39). Wow! If that was the impact that we had on people who met us, wouldn't that be great?

I think that you'll agree that all of these things that I've talked about are positive things happening in our community. Our vision is for each of them to be inextricably linked with our two churches – St Mary's and St Francis' – like fruit growing on the branch of a vine, so that when someone comes across any of them, they gain a positive message about who we are – people of God and disciples of Jesus who want to share an abundant life with others. Abundant life is about having authentic friendships, cultivating community assets and being a blessing. You may think that doing all this is just too much – it will drain our energy, identity and focus and we don't have the resources to do all this stuff. And you'd be right - we don't currently have all the necessary resources for some of this but, rather than seeing only scarcity, let's see

these activities as sources of renewal which can help us to become a united community of hope.

We formed our Vision Group last year and I still believe that we have a great opportunity at this moment as we emerge from the last lockdown. The group has begun to develop the new and continuing ministries that I've talked of already and we'd really like to be able to do as much as possible, given the resources that we have. If you can't contribute any more of your time or talent, can you increase your financial giving by more? We are still looking at how we might resource these activities and more money may enable us to employ someone or to invest in better facilities. As I've said already, this is a key moment in the development of this vision, so an indication from you of the support which you can give in terms of time, talent and money is important now.

Critical to all of this is remaining connected to Jesus, not only on a Sunday morning, but all week long in prayer, in meeting with others in our community and in sharing something of our faith. I hope that you'll want to remain a part of this community of hope, whatever your connection with our two churches, so that we can move forward together, united in vision, and you can experience that wonderful fruit which will grow from us – a branch of the vine that's firmly connected to Jesus.

### **Prayer Pointers**

Pray that all in our congregation may bear fruit in plenty – that we may deepen our discipleship, nurture our fellowship with each other and that our churches may grow in inclusion. Pray for our outreach to our community and that more people may be drawn to feel that they belong with us and want to share in our faith.

Pray for all those training for ministry in the church – both lay and ordained. Especially pray for those from Southwark Diocese studying on the courses organised by St Augustine's College. Pray for all those nearing the end of their training and who will be beginning their ministries in the coming months. Pray that their lives may be an inspiration to others and bear much fruit.

During the past week there has been more violence on the streets of our city and more young lives have been lost. Pray for an end to mindless violence and gang culture. Pray for all those who work to bring peace to our streets and help young people turn

their lives around. Pray for youth workers and the police who have to investigate these crimes.

Pray for all those who are ill and for those who have had surgery or treatment recently – especially for Michael Sanders and Julie Bailey. Pray for those we know, and those known to God alone, who seek God’s healing grace. Pray especially for all those suffering from mental health issues and for their treatment teams and carers. Pray for peace in their pain, strength in their weakness and comfort in their sadness.

Pray for those who have died and help us to trust they are at peace with you. We pray that we too may share with them the joy and light of the Kingdom of Heaven. Pray that we may trust God not for ourselves alone, but for those also whom we love and who are hidden from us by the shadow of death; that, as we believe your power to have raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, so may we trust your love to give eternal life to all who believe in him.

#### Prayer for India during the Covid crisis

*I will say of the Lord “You are my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust”*

God of power and might, we lift our brothers and sisters in India to you. We pray for your protection. We pray for your provision. We pray for the nations of the earth to have compassion. When people are in need, you are our refuge. When people are scared, you are our refuge. When people are mourning, you are our refuge. Compassionate God, draw close to those who seek your refuge today.