

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

3rd October 2021: Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity

Hazel writes:

Here's a picture of our **prayer boats** which have been sent to Christian Aid to form part of their campaign to influence the COP26 conference in Glasgow next month.



We continue to reflect on how we can better look after our planet, this week focussing on our care for animals at our pet service, as we celebrate St Francis, the patron saint of animals. There is much going on in our churches and the attached flyers are for you to be able to share news of these events with your friends and neighbours.

Next Sunday 10th October, we will have a **Holy Communion service** at 8am in St Francis' Church and our **Harvest Service** at 10am in St Mary's church. Harvest donations at both of these services will be split between the Bromley Borough and Shrublands foodbanks.

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** is today 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.

Messy Harvest is this Friday – 8th October – at 3.45pm in St Mary's, when we will be reverting to our previous practice of starting with activities, followed by a celebration, which will be livestreamed at around 4.45pm on our Messy Church Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/MessyChurchWestWickham>

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.
- The BBC have the following programmes to watch and listen to:
 - Sunday Worship at 8.10am on Radio 4 – from Croydon 7th Day Adventist Church – a service of renewed and eternal hope.
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from Worcester Cathedral on the Feast of St. Michael and all Angels.
 - On BBC 1: Songs of Praise at **2.45p.m.** –Westminster Abbey hosts 60 years of Songs of Praise with special guests and hymns.

The **Living in Love and Faith** five-week course will begin this Thursday morning at 10.30am, in St Mary's Church. A course on Zoom will start next Tuesday evening (7.30-9pm) from 12 Oct to 9 Nov. Please contact Hazel if you would like to be part of either of these courses. Future dates are:

- Tuesday afternoons (2-3.30pm) from 9 Nov to 7 Dec: venue TBA
- Thursday evening (7.30-9pm) from 11 Nov to 9 Dec on Zoom.

Please do engage with this material if you want to be included in our response to this important topic.

Men's and Women's Groups will be joining together on Wednesday 6th October at 8.00 p.m. at St. Francis Church when Beverley from the Trading Standards Team in Bromley Council will 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.

Coffee & Chat on Zoom is this Thursday – 7th October at 2.30pm. If you would like to come and meet others for a chat, please do join us. If you would like to do this, but do not have the log-in details, please let Rowena know (8777 6112 or rowena.griff19@btinternet.com).

Please let us know if you have booked, or are thinking of booking, a place on **The Southwark Diocesan Spirituality Day, 'Wells of Salvation', next Saturday 9th October, 10.00 am-1.00 pm, in Southwark Cathedral** so that we can make arrangements to travel together. This is a morning of meditations, prayer, sung worship and restoration. Tickets cost £5 and are 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

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

- on **Saturday 9th October at 7.30 pm. Croydon Male Voice Choir** –tickets from John Curtis (john.curtis23@ntlworld.com or 020 8777 5973).

- on **Saturday 16th October, 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) or 020 8650 8389.

Our Zimbabwean Link Parish, **St. Andrew's in Gweru** has another new priest, Rev. Fr. Meso Sabastian. Zimbabwe has just come out of its third lockdown and the churches are only open to people who are fully vaccinated (up to a maximum of 100 people), with everyone else receiving audio sermons. Fr. Sebastian asks for energy and protection while they bring God's presence to parishioners during these trying times.

October is **Black History Month** and we will be showing a **film**, Green Book, which won a BAFTA Best Picture award. The film is inspired by the true story of the world class classical and jazz pianist, Don Shirley and the friendship formed with his chauffeur following the adversity faced in their travels through the racially charged deep south of the US. Come to St Mary's Church on Wednesday 20th October from 7.15pm, when refreshments will be available, to start the film at 7.30pm.

I was unable to open any **Children's Society Boxes** last year due to Covid, but I will shortly be resuming my Autumn collection of the Boxes, I would therefore be grateful if they could be brought into St. Francis when it is convenient. Alternatively, I can arrange for them to be opened at home. Many thanks. Christine Morton (Tel No. 020 8777 9213).

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>.

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 or 020 8777 2034), who will be pleased to include you in the team.

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.

Freedom from legal restrictions have enabled 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 by sitting 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.

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. Marys this week have been donated by Miriam and John Richards for family birthdays and have been arranged by Merri.

There are now vacancies at St. Marys 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. Marys.

Wendy Carvalho at St. Marys 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.

A big thank you to Ann Herbert and all her team of helpers for the fantastic **MacMillan Coffee Morning** on 18th September at St. Mary's. It was supported by a large number of people and the garden and hall were busy for most of the morning and the lovely weather added to the occasion. The result was the 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.

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

Almighty God, we praise you for the many blessings you have given to those who worship you here: and we pray that all who seek you in this place may find you, and, being filled with the Holy Spirit, may become a living temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.

First Reading:

1 Peter 2: 1-10

Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. ² Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. ⁴ Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and ⁵ like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For it stands in scripture: 'See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever

believes in him will not be put to shame.'⁷ To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner',⁸ and 'A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall.' They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Gospel Reading:

John 10:22-29

²² At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the portico of Solomon. ²⁴ So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, 'How long will

you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.'²⁵ Jesus answered, 'I have told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify to me;²⁶ but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ What my Father has given me is greater than all else, and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand.

Post Communion Prayer

Father in heaven, whose Church on earth is a sign of your heavenly peace, an image of the new and eternal Jerusalem: grant to us in the days of our pilgrimage that, fed with the living bread of heaven, and united in the body of your Son, we may be the temple of your presence, the place of your glory on earth, and a sign of your peace in the world; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sermon – Hazel O’Sullivan

I wonder why you are here this morning. Maybe there’s a role that you’re carrying out – a welcomer, part of the choir or doing our intercessions later. Maybe you’ve come to see others – it’s a good opportunity to catch up. But I hope that the prime reason you’re here this morning is to worship God and that being here with these people – whether that be in person, or virtually, helps you to do that.

Last week, I was talking about the abundant life which means seeing Jesus, the light of the world, in others and in our experiences. It’s knowing the source of that abundant life, that leads to a desire to give thanks for it and so to worship God.

In both our readings today, we see another reason why this is an abundant life and we worship God for it. Jesus calls us who believe in him, his sheep and, in verse 29 of our gospel reading, he recognises us as greater than all else. This mirrors what Peter says in his letter, that those he’s writing to are God’s own people. Think about that ... we are God’s own people who are better than anything else. I don’t know about you, but that makes me feel rather special – it indicates that mine is an abundant life. It’s another reason to come and worship God.

Today is St Francis’ Gift Day – a festival of dedication and this is mirrored by the situation that Jesus was in in the gospel reading. The Festival of Dedication is an annual celebration, known as Hanukkah, when the Jews remember what happened in 167BC. Let me tell you the story.

It was the third winter after the disaster when the enemy had come and trampled all over the city of Jerusalem. Many had been killed, many captured. These foreigners were now worshipping their own gods in the temple, offering sacrifices that would never have been allowed before. Revolution was brewing and came to a head when a sudden attack led to the tyrant being overthrown and the city liberated. Three years to the day of the original disaster they solemnly purified the temple, offered the proper sacrifices, lit the lamps and prayed to God that they might never suffer such a thing again. And they commanded that every year a festival should be kept commemorating the occasion – this was the first Hanukkah. The tyrant was Antiochus Epiphanes, a Greek king, and the hero of the resistance, was Judas Maccabaeus. He went on to start a dynasty that lasted for a hundred years.

In Jesus’ day, every time the Jews celebrated Hanukkah, they thought about God and liberation, giving thanks that they had the temple back again and recognising how their liberators had become kings.

So here was Jesus, walking in the temple on this festival day, suggesting that he himself was some sort of liberator and king. This was a very controversial message. Forget about the pastoral image of a shepherd with sheep on the hillside, surrounded by happy children, this is a message about power and rule, about God appointing a true king in place of the many who’d vied for the title over the years. Jesus’ claim is based

on his union with God the Father, and this is the foundation of our faith today. Jesus was not just a good teacher and prophet, but he is the Son of God and brings us a promise of forgiveness and eternal life – a true abundance.

So, this is why we come to worship God: because of the true abundance that we have been given by him.

This might be why we come, but why do we come here to the church building to do this? What difference does it make coming here, or watching this livestream rather than another?

I'm going to start with another story. This is about a Spartan king who boasted about the walls of his city to a visiting monarch. The visiting monarch looked around and could see no walls. He said "Where are these walls about which you boast so much?" His host pointed to his bodyguard of magnificent troops, saying "These are the walls of Sparta, every man a brick."

The point is clear: the king felt greater protection from his army than he could from a wall, however high, or thick or long it was. Also, the troops were many in number and so could achieve much more than any person on their own who commits to serve their country and defend her from her enemies. Similarly, a brick is useless by itself, but when it is made into a wall or a building, such as the one that we're in today, it becomes magnificent. And so it is with the church. An individual Christian can accomplish little by themselves. This is why our keeping in touch, our Coffee and Chat and our continuation of on-line services is so important: Christianity is about making that abundant life that we might experience on our own even more abundant by taking time out to remind ourselves of the great things that we've seen during the week and catching up with others to hear their stories of seeing Jesus, the light of the world.

In coming to church, whether that be on-line, on paper or in person, we are bringing to God our offerings of what's happened during the week – our volunteering, our household tasks, our paid work – not as a chore or a burdensome obligation, but as a joyful act through which we become significant. God's own people, as Peter calls us in verse 9.

And for some, coming to a particular place is important because it enables that sharing with others and worship of God in the same place.

This week we are trying out what a return to our previous pattern of services might feel like in our new normal. We need to recognise that this brings additional pressures on our church community as it requires more readers, intercessors, sacristy assistance, welcomers, live-streamers, coffee servers, choir members, as well as the organisation of all these people. If you think you might be able to assist with any of these roles, please do make an offer, as we will need more to be involved if we are to have more than one Sunday each month when we have 9.15 and 10.45 services.

When this coming together in worship is not seen as an obligation, but as a joyful act, which reminds us of God's compassion, his grace and the abundant life that Jesus offers us and I spoke about last week, then truly Jesus has become the cornerstone of our community of faith. Yes, the building is a helpful focal point, but without Jesus as its cornerstone, it's a community hall that we meet in for a social.

Peter gives us some advice about how we might go about making Jesus the cornerstone of our church. Firstly, it's about stripping off malice, guile, insincerity, envy and slander, so participating less in disparaging gossip or in trying to outdo one another in being successful. And secondly, it's about taking on pure spiritual milk, the word of God and sharing in each other's abundant life. Being here and contributing in some way to the worship, which includes what goes on behind the scenes and happens before and after the service, is a privilege that enables more of God's glory to be revealed.

So, let's use this opportunity of the St Francis' Gift Day to remind ourselves of what our worship brings – a revelation of who God is and how Jesus is the cornerstone of our community. We give thanks to God for our abundant life and the revelations we have received this week and we dedicate ourselves – our time and our money – to standing together with our brothers and sisters, both here, in our other church building this morning, as well as on-line or participating in another way. And we recognise that being God's own people makes us significant – we are privileged to have that relationship with him, but that also brings a responsibility and a desire to give him greater service, both inside and outside the church community.

So, much to reflect on in that question: why are you here this morning?

Amen

Prayer Pointers

Give thanks for the life and work of St Francis and pray that we will follow his example for daily life. Pray that all our Church activities will be to the glory of God. As both our Churches continue to be more open post lockdown help us to be sensitive to the vulnerable members of our community.

Continue to pray for the people of Afghanistan as they continue to adjust to a new regime and her leaders, that they rule with justice, integrity and impartiality.

Pray for the people of Zimbabwe as they emerge from a third lockdown; for St Andrews' Gweru our link parish and her new priest Rev Fr Meso Sabastian who asks for energy and protection while they bring God's presence to parishioners during these trying times.

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

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.

For the people of La Palma in the Canary Islands as the volcano continues to be a threat to people and property.

For all those who are ill and for their friends and relatives – especially for Vicky Pearce, Julie Bailey, Carole Hubbard, Conor Owlett– and those unknown to us but known to God alone.

We remember Christine Harley who died recently, as well as Ann Dakin and John Tasker: may they rest in peace and rise in glory. We pray for their families and friends as they mourn their passing. Pray for all who have lost their lives through violence.