

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

5<sup>th</sup> February 2023: 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday before Lent

### Hazel writes:

As you may have read in the magazines, we are setting up Lent Groups to meet and reflect on unanswered prayer: why does God so often seem to be silent in the midst of suffering? These groups will follow a series of sermons given in the next few weeks and will use course material based on a book “God on Mute” by Pete Greig. Why not make a commitment this Lent to follow the sermon series (in person wherever possible) and then sharing with others to go a bit deeper in our understanding of how prayer works. There will be the opportunity to join the following groups if you are not already a member of a Home Group:

- Monday evenings on Zoom – 8pm -9.30pm
- Wednesday evenings - TBC
- Thursday mornings – 10.30am – 12noon

This week we have Holy Communion services at 8am in St Mary’s Church and a joint service at 10am in St Francis’ Church.

Next **Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> February**, we will have a Holy Communion service at 8am in St Francis’ Church and non-eucharistic services at 9.15am in St Mary’s Church and at 10.45am in St Francis’ Church.

**Morning Prayer** is held each week in St Francis’ Church on Wednesday morning at 9.30am, followed by the church being **open for private prayer** from 10.30-11.30am. It is also held in St Mary’s Church on Thursday morning at 9am.

**Resources and updates for the week ahead** – Each week our service is livestreamed on YouTube at 10am or before. All other files for this week have been combined and included in this pew sheet which will be sent on paper to those who have told us that they are not on-line.

The **Bereavement Support Group** will meet on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> February at 2.30pm in Emmanuel Church, The Grove, West Wickham.

**Messy Church** is this week on Friday 10<sup>th</sup> February at 3.45pm in St Mary’s Church with craft, games, a story, a song and food for all the family.

**Valentine’s Ploughmen’s Lunch Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> February 12.30 p.m. in St. Mary’s Church Hall** organised by the men of St. Marys. There is a list to sign up in the vestibule

at St. Marys or you can book your place through Beryl Bolton 0208 289 8097 or [berylbolton@hotmail.com](mailto:berylbolton@hotmail.com). You will need to indicate whether you wish for tomato or mushroom soup and whether you wish for ham, pate or cheese with your ploughmen's. The cost is £10 and all profits will be for church funds. There will also be a raffle. Numbers will be limited to 40 so book early to avoid disappointment. There are just a few places remaining if anyone wishes to come along.

**Thanks from Barbara Goodchild** and her family to all those who sent cards, made telephone calls and came to Tony's funeral. She has been overwhelmed by everyone's response and has appreciated people's thoughts.

Barbara Plummer's funeral service is on **Tuesday 14th February** at 11.15am in St Francis' Church. If you would like to go to the reception afterwards at Club Langley, please let Kay Mussard know for catering purposes: [kay@mussard.org.uk](mailto:kay@mussard.org.uk) or 8650 8389.

Come to our **coffee morning** at St Francis Church Hall on Saturday 18th February 10.30-11.30am. There will be tea, coffee and cake and an introduction on how to do CPR and how to use our defibrillators in an emergency. Any funds raised will be donated to the British Heart Foundation.

Please contact Nicky ([nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk) or 8916 9855) or Liz ([stevelizbraemar52@sky.com](mailto:stevelizbraemar52@sky.com) or 8777-2745) if you would like to provide any cakes.

**St Mary's electoral roll** is now being updated. If you consider yourself part of the church, but are not on the roll, please ask Chris Fitzgerald for an application form for enrolment. Those who return forms by Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> February will also be able to vote at the APCM next month.

**Ash Wednesday** is on 22<sup>nd</sup> February and there will be two services of Holy Communion and Ashing held for Churches Together in West Wickham on that day:

- In St Francis' Church at 10.45am
- In Emmanuel Church at 7.30pm.

Do join us for this important date when we start Lent.

The **World Day of Prayer** is on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> March. There will be a Churches Together Service at 10.30am on that day in Coney Hill Baptist Church. All are welcome.

We are slightly changing how we run our **Sunday morning communion services** to get an appropriate balance between returning to previous traditions and enabling everyone to feel safe in the church buildings:

- We continue to distribute communion by the priest dipping the wafer in the wine, but will review whether to return to the common cup at Easter. If we do, then those who do not want to share the cup can still receive communion in one kind only. Please do speak to Richard or Hazel if you have a strong view one way or the other.
- On any livestream we show what is happening in the church during communion. If you do not want to be seen on the livestream when receiving communion, please speak to Hazel, Richard or a warden on duty and we will bring communion to you.
- Sharing the peace can now be done in closer proximity, with a handshake or similar, but please be mindful of what each individual will feel comfortable with.
- With smaller numbers of people attending the services in the church buildings, it will help us to feel part of one community if we sit closer together. Please sit towards the front and in the middle of the buildings. This will also make it easier for you to sing along with the hymns.

**Churches Together in West Wickham** are opening up **Warm Spaces** on five days each week (normally 9am-5pm) providing somewhere warm for people to meet in for free. This is also an opportunity to meet with volunteers from other churches and share some social time together, so if you are looking for some company, do join in at the following locations:

- On a Monday at West Wickham & Shirley Baptist Church
- On a Tuesday at Coney Hill Baptist Church
- On a Wednesday at St Francis' Church
- On a Thursday at West Wickham Methodist Church
- On a Friday at Emmanuel United Reformed Church

Please bring **Foodbank donations** to the Vicarage or St Francis' Church. Currently they require milk (long life), coffee, sweets, cooking sauces, soup, rice, tinned potatoes and other vegetables. They are well stocked with pasta, cereal, tea and biscuits. Please do not bring any fresh or frozen food, or baby milk as the foodbank cannot pass this on. You can also donate financially here: <https://bromleyborough.foodbank.org.uk/give-help/donate-money>. Thank you for your continuing support.

If anyone would like a pedestal at either church in memory of a loved one or to commemorate a special anniversary etc., please contact Merri Womack (8777 8772) for St Mary's (or there is a list to sign in the vestibule at St. Mary's) or Nicky Nightingale ([nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk) or 8916 9855) for St Francis'.

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**

Eternal God,  
 whose Son went among  
 the crowds and brought  
 healing with his touch:  
 help us to show his love  
 in your Church as we  
 gather together,  
 and by our lives as they  
 are transformed into  
 the image of Christ our  
 Lord.

**First Reading:**

**Isaiah 58: 1-9a**

Shout out, do not hold  
 back! Lift up your voice  
 like a trumpet!  
 Announce to my people  
 their rebellion,  
 to the house of Jacob  
 their sins.  
<sup>2</sup> Yet day after day they  
 seek me and delight to  
 know my ways, as if  
 they were a nation that  
 practised righteousness  
 and did not forsake the  
 ordinance of their God;  
 they ask of me righteous  
 judgements, they  
 delight to draw near to  
 God.

<sup>3</sup> 'Why do we fast, but  
 you do not see? Why  
 humble ourselves, but  
 you do not notice?'  
 Look, you serve your  
 own interest on your  
 fast-day and oppress all  
 your workers.

<sup>4</sup> Look, you fast only to  
 quarrel and to fight and  
 to strike with a wicked  
 fist.

Such fasting as you do  
 today will not make  
 your voice heard on  
 high.

<sup>5</sup> Is such the fast that I  
 choose, a day to humble  
 oneself?

Is it to bow down the  
 head like a bulrush, and  
 to lie in sackcloth and  
 ashes?

Will you call this a fast,  
 a day acceptable to  
 the LORD?

<sup>6</sup> Is not this the fast that  
 I choose: to loose the  
 bonds of injustice, to  
 undo the thongs of the  
 yoke,

to let the oppressed go  
 free, and to break every  
 yoke?

<sup>7</sup> Is it not to share your  
 bread with the hungry,  
 and bring the homeless  
 poor into your house;  
 when you see the  
 naked, to cover them,  
 and not to hide yourself  
 from your own kin?

<sup>8</sup> Then your light shall  
 break forth like the  
 dawn, and your healing  
 shall spring up quickly;  
 your vindicators shall go  
 before you the glory of  
 the LORD shall be your  
 rearguard.

<sup>9</sup> Then you shall call, and  
 the LORD will  
 answer; you shall cry for  
 help, and he will say,  
 Here I am.

**Gospel Reading**

**Matthew 5: 13-20**

<sup>13</sup> 'You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

<sup>14</sup> 'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. <sup>15</sup> No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

<sup>17</sup> 'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to

fulfil. <sup>18</sup> For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

<sup>19</sup> Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

**Post Communion Prayer**

Merciful Father,  
who gave Jesus Christ  
to be for us the bread  
of life,  
that those who come to  
him should never  
hunger:  
draw us to the Lord in  
faith and love, that we  
may eat and drink with  
him at his table in the  
kingdom,  
where he is alive and  
reigns, now and for  
ever.

## REFLECTION – Richard Ford

At first glance, the opening of our gospel reading appears to be a collection of somewhat disconnected sayings, a jumble of salt, light and good deeds, followed by some rather startling comments on the Law and a trenchant criticism of the Pharisees. It's all quite disorientating, especially when we discover that Matthew's reference to salt losing its saltiness comes just after Jesus' delivery of the Beatitudes, in what we know as the Sermon on the Mount, whereas Mark includes it just after Jesus has advised his followers that if their eye offends, they should pluck it out (Mark 9.50), and Luke's version comes after Jesus has said that those who wish to follow him must give up all that they have (Luke 14.35).

Now this isn't totally surprising, since it's highly likely that in his three years as a wandering teacher-preacher, Jesus re-used his material, but reshaped it according to his audience. How reassuring it must have been to his disciples to hear themselves referred to as the "salt of the earth!" After all, we still use it as a compliment today.

Moreover, when we consider these verses more carefully, and it might be a good idea to have the readings in front of you, when we consider these verses more carefully and look at them through the lens of Jesus' calling as the Messiah, we can begin to see that they are not quite so disjointed as may first appear.

So, let's begin, by thinking about how they relate to Jesus as the Messiah.

From the days of Abraham, the Jews had been God's chosen people, chosen to reveal the true nature of God and his desires for his creation to the rest of the world, so we find God telling Abraham, "I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed." (Genesis 26.4).

And later, through the prophet, Isaiah, God says of the Israelites, "I have given you as a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind" – that is spiritually blind.

I haven't got time to go into it in detail this morning, but we can see running through the Old Testament a constant pattern: the Chosen People, the Jews, grieve God by departing from his ways, ignoring the warnings of the prophets; they are punished; they turn back to God; things go well, but they turn away again, again ignoring the prophets; and are punished again, and so on.

Although in this way, the Jews fail in their role as the Chosen People, God's plans for the world he has created are not to be thwarted, nor is his intention that all nations are

to be blessed through the Jews, and so the long-promised Messiah enters the world in the form of Jesus, a Jew, but also the Son of God.

It is he, along with his followers, who will take on the role of being the Chosen People, who will reveal the true nature of God and his desires for his creation. Jesus, you might say, becomes the new Israel, the one through whom God is working his purpose out, as Arthur Campbell Ainger's hymn puts it.

It is for this reason that Jesus describes his followers as salt, for they, like salt, will purify and cleanse the world, preserving God's purpose for it. And, unlike the city of Jerusalem, the capital of the Israel and set on a hill, a city of a people who have failed in the task that God had called them to, they will be the light of the world, just as Jesus is described by Simeon in Luke's gospel as "A light for revelation to the Gentiles," that's you and me.

What the good deeds are to which Jesus then refers will start to become apparent in the second half of our gospel.

Before we look at that, though, we need to recognise that when Jesus talks about the Law and the Prophets, he is talking about what we call the Old Testament, the Jewish Bible. One of the ways in which biblical scholars talk about the Old Testament is to refer to it as "the progressive revelation of God to humankind." And Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God – as he says to his followers, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14. 9) It is in this way that Jesus is able to claim that he has not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, "but to fulfil them."

Jesus then goes on to focus more specifically on the Law. Given that later in Matthew's Gospel, as well as in those of Mark and Luke, we see Jesus not only defending his disciples from accusations of breaking the Sabbath law by picking corn to eat and also his right to heal on the Sabbath (Matt. 12. 1-14), we may find it surprising that he says here, "Anyone who breaks the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven." Even more surprising is that he goes on to say that "unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees... you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

So, what is Jesus getting at? He is, I think, making a distinction between the letter and the spirit of the law. We can see that in the way in which he defends himself and his disciples from the accusations by the Pharisees that they are breaking the Sabbath law by working; the disciples by picking something to eat and Jesus by healing.

The problem was that over the years the teachers of the law had sought to define as fully as they could what was “work.” So, for example, hot food might be kept warm by covering with clothes, feathers or dried flax, but not by covering with damp herbs or straw – which could produce fresh heat, and thus work, on the Sabbath day. It was interpretations such as this that made it very difficult for people to avoid breaking the Law, although the Pharisees attempted to do so, and which led Jesus to assert that the Law was made for humankind and not humankind for the Law (Mark 2. 27). It was intended to make life easier for people, not more difficult.

Our reading from Isaiah also demonstrates the difference between observing the letter of the law and keeping its spirit.

Through Isaiah, God tells the people that he’s not happy with the way in which they keep the rituals of their faith, such as fasting, but ignore what lies behind those rituals.

So, he accuses them of abusing fasting, using it to serve their own interests and exploiting their workers, and even finishing the day quarrelling and fighting amongst themselves. God is not interested in their putting on sackcloth and covering themselves in ashes if it doesn’t impact on the way in which they live out their faith.

Rather than fasting, what God wants is for his people to fight for justice and to challenge oppression when they see it. God also wants his people to be generous to those in need. For God, our living out what we believe is much more important than the rituals of worship, which are only of value when they help us to understand more fully what God wants of us.

As Isaiah puts it: share your bread with the hungry, bring the homeless poor into your house, when you see the naked cover them. Jesus makes the same point when he tells his followers, in the parable of the Sheep and the Goats, that they will be judged on how they feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, care for the sick, and visit those in prison.

We can’t say that we don’t know what God wants of us.

But what does this have to say to our country in relation to its treatment of immigrants? Or to the way in which the NHS is administered? Or to us about how we respond to the homeless? Or to the police about the fact that if in our country, you’re black, you’re much more likely to be stopped and searched than if you’re white.

Unlike Isaiah, we don’t live in a country which sees itself as God’s Chosen People, but as Christians, we should see ourselves as fulfilling that role. As we saw in our gospel,



Jesus tells his followers that they, so we also, are the light of the world and that they, and we, should not hide that light, but rather let it shine before others.

In other words, there may be times when we are called to stand up for what we believe, even when that runs counter to the popular view, which more often than not, is motivated by self-interest.

So, for example, it is good to see the churches being central to the provision and support of food banks, to providing night shelters for the homeless and warm spaces for those struggling to heat their homes during the cold winter months, and to have projects such as Eco Church encouraging us to take global warming and climate change more seriously. If you're unsure what Eco Church is, have a look in this month's parish magazines.

It is in this and other ways, such as those identified in our reading from Isaiah, that we as Christians can respond to Jesus' call to "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

Amen.

### **Prayer Pointers**

Pray that the Holy Spirit may open our eyes to see God at work in our world; and open our hearts to understand God's purposes for our world – that we might share God's wisdom and be salt and light for the world.

Pray for God's blessing on all who minister in the church especially all who preach and lead worship in St Francis' and St Mary's as they help us to be salt and light in our community and homes. Give thanks for those who brought us to faith.

In the Southwark Diocesan Prayer Cycle, pray for the congregation of St Philip and St Mark, Camberwell and their Priest in Charge, Helen Harknett.

Hold before God those in our church family who are facing difficult times: illness, unemployment, family problems, and other needs perhaps known only to them.

Pray for those who suffer because of war and aggression. Hold before God the continuing war in Ukraine and conflicts in other countries around the world. Pray for just and peaceable solutions.

Pray for those we know and love, our family, friends, and neighbours who are in need this day especially for the physically and mentally ill. In our congregations pray for these by name –Mark Outten , Vicky Pearce, Mike East, Jane Smith, Joan Burford, Graham Stone, Rowena Griffiths, Daphne Dack, John Dack, Barbara Goodchild, Karen Plummer and Keith Morley – and those known to God alone

Hold before God all those who have died in the faith of Christ crucified. Pray especially for Tony Goodchild, Barbara Plummer and Stuart Froment and their families.

Offer our own personal prayers and thanksgivings - all those things that worry us; those situations we feel helpless in; those decisions that burden us; those losses that overwhelm us, and all that we are thankful for.