

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

18th February 2024: First Sunday of Lent

Hazel writes:

Lent has now started, following our Ash Wednesday service this week. Our services over the next few weeks will therefore be ones that encourage us to take a close look at our spiritual lives, but also how much we are living out the whole of our lives in a way that helps others to see the love that God has for everyone. If you want to join a Lent group but have not yet spoken to a leader about this, please do contact Nicky or Debbie before their meetings this week. If you'd rather try out your own spiritual practice, can I suggest joining our Morning Prayer email group (just drop me an email at hazelos58@gmail.com), or subscribing to the Church of England series of reflections at <https://www.churchofengland.org/faith-calling/what-we-believe/lent-holy-week-and-easter/watch-and-pray-lent-reflections>.

This week we have Holy Communion services at 8am and 9.15am in St Mary's Church and at 10.45am in St Francis' Church.

Next **Sunday 25th February**, we will have Holy Communion services at 8am in St Francis' Church, at 9.15am in St Mary's Church and at 10.45am in St Francis' Church. There is also a **wedding** in St Mary's Church at 3pm, when Matt Owen and Yuliya Gantseva will be marrying. All are welcome to join us at this special service.

We are hosting a Churches Together in West Wickham service for The **World Day of Prayer** on Friday 1st March at 10.30am in St Francis' Church. This is an opportunity to come together with others to find out about the blessings and challenges that people face in different places and this year the focus is on the country of Palestine, which will be very interesting.

On **Sunday 3rd March**, we will have Holy Communion services at 8am in St Mary's Church, and a joint service at 10am in St Francis' Church.

We meet to **pray for growth of the Church** on Tuesday mornings between 10-11am at 130, The Avenue. Please contact Jean Pogose for more information: (dennis.pogose@ntlworld.com or 8289-5996).

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.

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 18th.

We have **three Lent Groups** meeting, all looking at a film "Chocolat" to explore what it means to be human and to grow. There are more details in the magazines. The groups which can take additional people both meet at St Francis' Church in the refurbished choir vestry. Both have watched the film, but if you would still like to join a group, please contact Nicky or Debbie as follows:

- Wednesday evenings at 8pm. Please contact Nicky Nightingale (nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk or 07771 7682914) if you'd like to join this group.
- Friday mornings at 10.15am, with one exception when the meeting will be on a Thursday. If you want to join this group, please contact Debbie Adams (debadams64@icloud.com or 07943 330244).

Gardening at St Francis will begin monthly on Saturday 2nd March from 10am to do light gardening, weeding, and trimming of the front and side beds. This will run alongside our **Action Aid coffee mornings** which run 10.30-11.30 am. All welcome: just turn up with your trowel or secateurs. The more people involved the easier it will be. Thank you, Kate and Valerie.

St Mary's are hoping to re-site their **defibrillator machine** outside the hall, so that it is available 24/7. Following a WhatsApp survey, it seems that local residents would be willing to support this project financially, and we have done a door-to-door leaflet drop. Please do take a leaflet if you know of someone else who would like to make a donation, or if you would like to do so yourself. Many thanks.

Easter Egg Outreach Once again, I am happy to order "**The Real Easter Eggs**" for those who would like to buy them for their children, grandchildren, great-nephews and nieces, or even their spouses, etc. The eggs are made from FairTrade chocolate and include a copy of the Easter story in colourful book form. There are three kinds available:

- Original (milk chocolate) - £4.50
- Dark - £5.50
- Special Edition - £9.99 (includes Easter card, an extra chocolate bar and the Easter story)

Order forms will be posted in both churches from Sunday, but you can also contact me by email or phone (richard.ford73@gmail.com, 0208289 2432). In order to get free delivery, I need orders by Sunday February 25th, at the latest. Richard Ford

The next **St. Mary's Community Lunch** is on Wednesday 6th March at 1.00 p.m. in St. Mary's Hall in The Avenue, West Wickham. The cost is £6 for a 2-course lunch and tea or coffee. If you would like to come along and join us, please contact Beryl Bolton on 0208 289 8097 or berylbolton@hotmail.com to reserve your place. We would love to see you and you will be made very welcome.

There's a **Fundraising event for Welcare in Bromley** on Thursday March 7th at 7.45pm in Bromley Little Theatre, which some of our congregation will be going to. This will be a preview of 'Notes from a Small Island' by Bill Bryson, adapted for the stage. Tickets must be purchased in advance from Gillian Scales (tel: 020 8663 3173 or email: g.scales566@btinternet.com).

The **Croydon Male Voice Choir** will be giving a concert at St. Francis Church on **Saturday 9th March at 7.30 p.m.** The choir has recently acquired a dynamic new musical team and have an extensive repertoire, including classical choruses, hymns and choral anthems so this is one not to miss. Tickets are £12 including refreshments and are available on line at <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/StFrancis-of-Assisi/concert-by-croydon-male-voice-choir/2024-03-09/19:30/tdvxgrdn> and will also be available after services from David Wada and Valerie Hamilton.

February's edition of **The Bridge**, the Southwark Diocesan newspaper, has been published with an article about The Big Christmas Sing and the Christmas Tree Festival on page 5. Here's a link to the electronic copy: <https://southwark.anglican.org/newsevents/news/the-bridge-newspaper/>. Paper copies are available in the church buildings.

We will continue to collect items for the **Bromley Homeless Starter Pack Scheme** for those starting out in a new home with nothing. Starter packs for families in need include cutlery, crockery, duvet covers (not duvets), pillow slips, tea towels, saucepans, frying pans, bath towel, toothbrushes, etc. Please continue to bring any excess items that you have in cupboards at home.

Please bring **Foodbank donations** to the Vicarage or St Francis' Church. Currently they require tinned vegetables, hot and cold meat tins, cooking sauces, UHT milk, squash, UHT fruit juice and jam. They have plenty of 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 or 8916 9855) for St Francis'.

Any items for the joint pew sheet to Beryl berylbolton@hotmail.com and items for the websites to Gifty office@stmarywestwickham.co.uk.

Collect

Heavenly Father,
your Son battled with the
powers of darkness,
and grew closer to you in
the desert: help us to use
these days to grow in
wisdom and prayer that
we may witness to your
saving love in Jesus Christ
our Lord.

First Reading:

1 Peter 3: 18-22

¹⁸ For Christ also
suffered for sins once for
all, the righteous for the
unrighteous, in order to
bring you to God.

He was put to death in
the flesh, but made alive
in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which
also he went and made a
proclamation to the
spirits in prison, ²⁰ who in
former times did not
obey, when God waited
patiently in the days of
Noah, during the building
of the ark, in which a few,
that is, eight people, were
saved through water.

²¹ And baptism, which this
prefigured, now saves
you—not as a removal of
dirt from the body, but as
an appeal to God for a
good conscience, through
the resurrection of Jesus
Christ, ²² who has gone
into heaven and is at the
right hand of God, with
angels, authorities, and
powers made subject to
him.

Gospel Reading:

Mark 1: 9-15

⁹ In those days Jesus came
from Nazareth of Galilee
and was baptized by John
in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just
as he was coming up out
of the water, he saw the
heavens torn apart and
the Spirit descending like
a dove on him. ¹¹ And a
voice came from heaven,
'You are my Son, the
Beloved; with you I am
well pleased.'

¹² And the Spirit
immediately drove him
out into the wilderness.

¹³ He was in the
wilderness for forty days,
tempted by Satan; and he
was with the wild beasts;
and the angels waited on
him.

¹⁴ Now after John was
arrested, Jesus came to
Galilee, proclaiming the
good news of God, ¹⁵ and
saying, 'The time is
fulfilled, and the kingdom
of God has come
near; repent, and believe
in the good news.'

Post Communion Prayer

Lord God, you have
renewed us with the
living bread from heaven;
by it you nourish our
faith, increase our hope,
and strengthen our love:
teach us always to
hunger for him who is
the true and living bread,
and enable us to live by
every word that proceeds
from out of your mouth;
through Jesus Christ our
Lord.

Collect

Almighty God, by the prayer and discipline of Lent may we enter into the mystery of Christ's sufferings, and by following in his Way come to share in his glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

First Reading: Romans 4:13-25

¹³ For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

¹⁶ For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and

be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, ¹⁷ as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations')—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸ Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become 'the father of many nations', according to what was said, 'So numerous shall your descendants be.'

¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰ No distrust

made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² Therefore his faith 'was reckoned to him as righteousness.'

²³ Now the words, 'it was reckoned to him', were written not for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Gospel Reading: Mark

8:31-38

³¹ Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my

followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸ Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

Post Communion Prayer

Almighty God, you see that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves: keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

REFLECTION – Ken Bryan

I just love Mark's gospel. The way he is in such a hurry to tell everything as quickly as possible and as succinctly as possible. He could even be considered a modern writer of bullet points or punchy tweets. Here we have his very short sharp sentence of Jesus after his baptism by John and time in the wilderness telling us what this means.

'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.' These three statements summarise what Jesus teaches.

The time is fulfilled, yes the time has come. God is doing something new. God has sent Jesus to fulfil the Jews expectation of a Messiah. They had been waiting centuries for this moment for God to intervene in human history. They had been looking for a leader who the scriptures had described as a shepherd, a servant, a conqueror. Jesus would not tell them if he was the promised Messiah but he told his followers to see what was happening and make up their own minds.

Mark, however, is convinced and begins his gospel with the words 'The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God'.

Jesus' ministry begins in humble form as he comes to be baptised by John in the Jordan. Jews didn't need to be baptised. This was only for Gentiles, but here Jesus wants his ministry to receive God's blessing in the form of a dove and the words of commissioning. He is then immediately led by the Spirit into the wilderness for a time of preparation, reflection and challenge.

The second statement is 'the Kingdom of God has come near'.

Jesus made the Kingdom of God central to his teaching. It wasn't a physical place, and it wasn't a particular group of people. Jesus used it as a way of describing what the world is like when God is accepted as king and obeyed. In God's Kingdom, the sick are healed, the hungry are fed, the oppressed find justice, peace is established and suffering ends for all. Now that he has come, the Kingdom has begun to break through, and he was to demonstrate that, by his actions as a healer, miracle worker, in feeding the hungry, and focusing on the poor and the outcasts of society.

Jesus was pointing to a time when the Kingdom would be made perfect in heaven but for now, he was encouraging people to do what is good not out of fear for the consequences but because they knew it was right. He wanted people to love one another in the way that he loved them.

The third statement is 'repent and believe the good news'. Here is the challenge to his followers as the Kingdom can only come about if they take action. If they repent, that is turn around, to change their direction. They must see themselves as God's children and model themselves and their actions on Jesus. They must seek justice wherever it is denied. They must work for peace. They must give themselves selflessly on behalf of the poor. They must love people unconditionally. This too is our call as people of the Kingdom in this 'in-between' time, after Jesus has lived and before God brings all things to a climax in the perfection of heaven.

When Mark says 'He saw the heavens open' I don't think it really means a door in the sky opened, but that God's dimension behind ordinary reality is open to be seen. It's as if an imaginary curtain is pulled back and we see a different reality. Sometimes in our lives we can see, or hear, or understand what is really going on but for the most part we live our lives believing that there is a different reality near at hand. We walk by faith and not by sight. We read the story of Jesus' life, and learn to see and hear in it, the heavenly dimension to his life and for us. For us to live in a new way with a new understanding from the time of our baptism and also our confirmation. We can and should continue to believe that the curtain is drawn back for us, and God's words are spoken to us.

If we study God's words in scripture (and maybe during Lent we will be reading more) we may come across difficult passages. Our reading from 1 Peter could be one of them. But a little study and some help from wise books might be beneficial.

The passage from 1 Peter says four things: Jesus after his death made a proclamation to the spirits in prison; secondly these spirits had been disobedient in the days of Noah; thirdly Noah building the ark points to baptism; and fourthly that baptism is less about washing clean but more about 'the appeal to God of good conscience'.

What do they mean?

The whole passage is about giving encouragement to people who are likely to or who are actually suffering from unjust treatment because of their faith. Just like Jesus who suffered unjustly and paid the ultimate price at the hands of those in authority.

Jesus is announcing victory over all authorities, temporal and heavenly. Human authorities embody spiritual authorities which stand behind them. As verse 22 says: 'Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him'.

He has won the victory over all spirits, their ultimate power is broken.

The story of Noah involves people being rescued through the great flood it can be easily seen as a link to baptism, a rising to a new life through water.

But not just a washing to be physically clean but for the cleansing of our sins and preparing us to be of good conscience with God for when we might be tested by the world.

We need to know this to support in prayer our Christian brothers and sisters who are going through persecution now but also to prepare ourselves as we might one day face the same.

I understand that there is to be a TV series by Michael Sheen coming out this week called 'The Way' which turns the tables and has people from this nation facing the persecution that we see elsewhere in the world. To the extent that those involved are forced to make the decision to leave their homes and everything behind to save their lives.

Being a Christian is not always easy and in today's society we are continuing to be marginalised. We are not in the mainstream as we have been in the past. This can make for an uncomfortable time. But we have to get used to a new reality as it has been for many in the past as well as today elsewhere in the world.

It is for us to be in the world but not of the world.

Summing up, the gospel message could be as God said of Jesus at his baptism: "you are my son, the beloved with you I am well pleased."

God now looks at each one of us, not as we are in ourselves but as we are in Jesus Christ, saying "you are my child with you I am well pleased." Now that is an amazing thought. That God will see us through Jesus and be pleased with us. No need for us to be hard on ourselves knowing that we fail at every turn. But to be confident that through Jesus we can be the best that we can be. And have a loving God supporting us and being with us at every step of our journey of life.

We are truly now living in God's kingdom.

Amen.

Prayer Pointers

We are thankful for the comforts and the peace we know. We pray for those who do not know such comfort and peace:

- people in homes that are insecure.
- people in Gaza and Israel who remain in the headlines and the people of Ukraine, as well as many other war-torn parts of the world that never make it to the headlines.
- for those in our communities who are struggling to live in peace, remembering families where there is breakdown and mistrust; young people who are bullied at school; those who are abused behind closed doors and whose pain is known only to God.
- for those who are sick; those who are awaiting diagnoses; those who have been given bad news; those who are struggling with their mental health or dementia; those who are dying and for those who care for them. We pray particularly for Vicky Pearce, Jane Smith, Graham Stone, Rowena Griffiths, Daphne Dack, John Dack, Jack Bramwell, Sue Jones, Tina Hamilton, Tim Curtis, Barry Burford, Pam Tabner and Mark Christy.

Think of times this week when you have seen the world spoiled by the selfishness of others, in the litter dumped in the streets, plastics polluting our rivers and streams, sewage pouring into our seas. Remember times when you have failed to be a good steward of God's world this week...perhaps when you couldn't be bothered to recycle your waste, when you bought more than you needed, or if you've driven the car when you could easily have walked.

A prayer for Lent:

As we walk into the long weeks of Lent, may your Spirit rest upon us.

As we look to the example of Jesus, who in the wilderness chose the difficult path, help us to know that you are with us – though the way ahead may be hard and we so often falter and fail, strengthen us for the journey ahead, and teach us to trust in you.