

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

21st February 2021: First Sunday of Lent

Hazel writes

This week we begin our Lent sermon series following 'The Nail' by Stephen Cottrell, who is now the Archbishop of York. As explained in the service last week, we will look at Christ's crucifixion from the point of view of different people – this week we are imagining what motivated the Roman Centurion and how he responded to all that happened. The home groups meeting next week on Zoom will pick up on this character to explore the story more. If you would like to join one of these groups, there is still time to do so. Please would you contact the relevant leader who will let you know the relevant link for accessing the meetings:

- Richard Ford (richard.ford73@gmail.com or 020 8289 2432) if you'd like to meet on a Monday evening at 8pm;
- Nicky Nightingale (nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk or 07771 782914) if you'd like to meet on a Wednesday evening at 8pm;
- Ken Bryan (kennethabryan@aol.com or 07939 535996) if you'd like to meet on a Friday morning at 10.30am.

You can join different meetings each week if we know about this in advance.

St Francis' will be **open for private prayer** on Wednesday 24th February from 10.30-11.30am. This will be a quiet time for reflection without any music.

Next Sunday, 28th February there will be a **service of Holy Communion** livestreamed on our YouTube Channel at 10am. The service will be available to watch on demand soon afterwards.

Resources and updates for the week ahead – A video of the service has been posted to the websites for today. All other files 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 St. Aloysius RC Church Glasgow – Lent 1 Jesus and the Father united.
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from Chapel of St. John's College, Cambridge on Ash Wednesday.

- On BBC 1: Songs of Praise at 1.15 p.m. – Katherine Jenkins visits L' Abri Fellowship to explore Christian faith and hospitality.

On Tuesday 23rd February at 8pm we have an **open meeting** with Bromley Civic Society, who will be giving a virtual tour and history of Bromley's Seven Town Centre **Parks and Gardens**. Followed by the opportunity to ask questions and talk about gardens. The meeting will be on Zoom and details are included in a flyer sent with this pew sheet.

Please bring **Foodbank donations** to the Vicarage or St Francis' Church. Currently they need UHT Milk, Tinned Potatoes, Tinned Vegetables (particularly carrots), Long life Fruit juice, Tinned Fruit, Tinned Fish, Tinned Cold meat, Toilet Rolls. Thank you for your continuing support.

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 /020 8777 6112) know if you would like the log-in details.

The **World Day of Prayer** is on Friday 5th March. St John's will be hosting a Churches Together service at 10.30am on that day on Zoom. More details will follow next week.

Any items for the joint pew sheet to Beryl bbolton@ntlworld.com and items for the websites to brian.griff19@btinternet.com or Gifty office@stmarywestwickham.co.uk.

Bishop of Southwark's Lent Call 2021

Week 1 – Croydon Episcopal area:

St Matthew, Redhill Food Bank

The food bank at St Matthew, Redhill, has been helping people in food poverty since 2012 when Maureen and Peter James, members of St Matthew's congregation, had the idea to begin the project. They began by storing food in a small cupboard at the back of the church; now, in order to meet demand, the food bank has to use two Portakabins in the church car park for storage.

Clients are referred to the food bank by the local council or other local agencies such as Welcare, the Diocese of Southwark organisation that works with families and children. This may be for a number of different reasons including benefit delay, redundancy, sudden illness, an unexpected bill, bereavement, or because clients' income is too low to enable them to make ends meet. St Matthew's food bank aims, without judgement, to provide local families and individuals with essential food supplies to keep them going until a longer-term solution can be found.

It is an independent charity which is also a part of the life of the church, and has more than 40 volunteers, all of whom work together to help to feed more than 100 households per week. The average cost of a food parcel for each household is £30.

David, who has been supported by the food bank, says: "I was in a desperate situation after going without food for six weeks and the food bank deliveries to my home helped saved my life. The volunteers do a magnificent job and I can't thank them enough. Without them I would not be here today. They have given me confidence and hope to carry on."

St Matthew's food bank offers 93 types of food, depending on a household's requirements. Each week it receives donations of around £2,200 worth of food but even this is not enough to meet the continued rise in need.

The members of the food bank say that demand keeps on going up, especially during the pandemic, even though Surrey is the second wealthiest county in the UK: hidden poverty is an acute problem in the local community, and the work of the food bank in Redhill is a reminder that there is need everywhere, something that is important to remember when thinking about and praying for our parishes. The fact that the food bank operates out of the church helps to ensure that those who worship there are very much aware of what is happening in the local area and this helps to focus prayer and action.

The food bank also helps the church to reach out to, and to become more of a part of, the local community. As a result, there has been incredible support and regular

donations from local businesses, schools and other community organisations. Dedicated local fundraisers have also helped in generating donations.

The work of St Matthew's food bank carried on through the COVID lockdowns and need continues to be acute. Despite regular gifts of food and goods, more are needed each week. As a result, the food bank buys in an extra £700 of food each week and a further £200 of fresh food so that households can be helped. The food is sorted by three volunteers, three times a week, who make up bags of different sizes for those who live alone, couples, families of four and families of more than four. Nappies and other items needed by individual families are added at the point of distribution and a small treat is added to each bag.

The food is sorted in one building and distributed from the church so 150 boxes of food are moved around church premises each week, with a total of 13 volunteers involved in packing and giving out the food and other household goods. The food bank offers the service three times a week. Where necessary, parcels are delivered to those who, for whatever reason, are unable to visit the premises.

As well as the practical help that the food bank gives to those in need, the volunteers provide a much-needed listening ear for people experiencing difficulties. For some, the volunteers at the food bank are the only people they see or feel they can confide in. Such help is part of the way in which the church at St Matthew's can provide a support structure for those in need in their area.

Another of the food bank's clients, single mum Sandra, says: "The food bank staff are amazing. My family and I would not have survived without them over lockdown."

Please pray for those involved in working at the food bank at St Matthew, Redhill and those who use the service. Give thanks for their work and pray for justice so that those who are in need can return to being able to support themselves.

If you can give to support the work of the food bank, please consider doing so through the Bishop of Southwark's Lent Call: southwark.anglican.org/lentcall

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:

Psalms 22: 14-18

I am poured out like
water, and all my bones
are out of joint; my heart is
like wax; it is melted within
my breast; ¹⁵ my mouth is
dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to
my jaws; you lay me in the
dust of death.

¹⁶ For dogs are all around
me; a company of
evildoers encircles me. My
hands and feet have
shrivelled;

¹⁷ I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat over
me;

¹⁸ they divide my clothes
among themselves, and for
my clothing they cast lots.

Gospel:

Mark 15: 25-39

It was nine o'clock in the
morning when they crucified
him. The inscription of the
charge against him read,
'The King of the Jews.' And
with him they crucified two
bandits, one on his right and
one on his left. Those who
passed by derided him,
shaking their heads and
saying, 'Aha! You who would
destroy the temple and
build it in three days, save
yourself, and come down
from the cross!' In the same
way the chief priests, along
with the scribes, were also
mocking him among
themselves and saying, 'He
saved others; he cannot
save himself. Let the
Messiah, the King of Israel,
come down from the cross
now, so that we may see
and believe.' Those who
were crucified with him also
taunted him. When it was
noon, darkness came over
the whole land until three in
the afternoon. At three
o'clock Jesus cried out with
a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema
sabachthani?' which means

'My God, my God, why have
you forsaken me?' When
some of the bystanders
heard it, they said, 'Listen,
he is calling for Elijah.' And
someone ran, filled a sponge
with sour wine, put it on a
stick, and gave it to him to
drink, saying, 'Wait, let us
see whether Elijah will come
to take him down.' Then
Jesus gave a loud cry and
breathed his last. And the
curtain of the temple was
torn in two, from top to
bottom. Now when the
centurion, who stood facing
him, saw that in this way he
breathed his last, he said,
'Truly this man was God's
Son!'

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.

TALK: The Roman Centurion at the Cross - Brian Griffiths

The Roman Centurion responsible for the crucifixion detail was completely changed by the events of that first Good Friday. He was changed so dramatically that two of the gospels (Matthew and Mark) state that he exclaimed 'Truly this man was God's Son'. Luke is slightly different in that he states the Centurion said 'Truly this man was innocent'. So what changed the Centurion? What drove him to make these remarkable assertions?

A posting to Jerusalem was one thing that all Roman soldiers dreaded, especially during the Passover festival. The garrison would have been on high alert – too many people in the city – too much chaos and confusion around the Temple. The Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, didn't want to be there either. He had to try and curry favour with the High Priests so that he could keep on the right side of Caesar. What the Centurion wouldn't have given for orders to return to Rome where he would have been treated as a privileged soldier. Despite all the chaos surrounding the Passover festival, the soldiers had to get on with their daily duties which included meting out Roman justice – arrests, jailings, floggings and, of course, the ultimate punishment – the death sentence by crucifixion. The Centurion and his soldiers were well practiced in doing the job efficiently. The day before Passover was no different – three men were to be crucified – two thieves and Jesus. There was a custom of releasing a prisoner on Passover. So Pilate released the radical anarchist and murderer Barabbas. Jesus was sentenced because Pilate was afraid of the crowd and the High Priests.

I wonder if the Centurion ever thought about the prisoners he was executing? He may well have reflected on why Jesus was facing the death sentence. After all, Jesus had done no wrong, only proclaimed himself as the promised Messiah and criticised the High Priests. As he was to discover, this crucifixion was by no means normal. Jesus had already been flogged and beaten by a group of soldiers in the garrison so when the crucifixion party arrived he was very weak. All the prisoners carried their own cross – Jesus could barely support the weight of the heavy beam so as the sorry procession negotiated the narrow streets of the city, the Centurion took some pity on him and pressed a bystander to carry the cross for him. Eventually they reached the hill called Golgotha outside the city where crucifixions normally took place. All three of the prisoners were stripped of their clothes and nailed to their crosses.

This is where it all became very different. Jesus was unlike any other prisoner that the Centurion and his detail had nailed to the cross. No screams when the nails went in to his hands and feet – no foul mouthed language directed at the soldiers. In fact Jesus

actually asked for forgiveness – forgiveness for the Roman soldiers - the enemies of the Jews – forgiveness for the very people who caused him such excruciating pain – forgiveness for those killing him. For the Centurion this was unbelievable!! What did he mean? The soldiers knew what they were doing – carrying out orders. They had no choice. Jesus had a choice – he could have pleaded his innocence. He had been performing miracles – healing people and lately even raising a man from the dead. Indeed, he had healed the servant of another Centurion – stationed in Capernaum. So, the Centurion must have reflected on why didn't he perform a miracle before Pilate – he would almost certainly have been released a free man. Yet it seemed as if crucifixion was his choice. What kind of a man was the Centurion killing? By and large, Jesus was silent on the cross. He did cry out once about being abandoned by God – someone passing by said he was quoting from the Jewish scripture. He said he was thirsty and someone offered him drugged wine to dull the pain, but he refused.

His words about forgiveness would have seared through the Centurion – burned right through to his heart. I doubt that he had ever experienced such compassion before. The passers-by mocked him mercilessly – the soldiers were used to it all – but for Jesus it seemed especially cruel and barbed. Yet, he accepted every word of it – Father forgive them – forgive the executioners, forgive the mockers, forgive the doubters, forgive those who denied him justice, forgive the so called religious leaders who dragged him before Pilate in the first place, forgive his friend who betrayed him.

Then something extraordinary happened. At midday day the sky turned black. The sun was blotted out. Thunder crashed and lighting flashed. Then came the earthquake that ripped the ground apart. This must have been absolutely terrifying for the Centurion and the crucifixion detail. It is possible that the thunder, lighting and earthquake prompted the Centurion's exclamation 'Truly this man was God's Son'. However, I wonder if what really inspired him was the forgiveness Jesus showed. Roman soldiers were used to cruelty and brutality. They showed no mercy. Yet Jesus had only showed them love and forgiveness. It came from his heart – it cost him his life. Could it be that the Centurion realised that he had been looking at the very heart of God – at God's infinite mercy and love. Clearly, he needed no more convincing - he knew that he had killed an innocent man – he had killed Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. Yet Jesus had forgiven him. That forgiveness changed his life forever. Truly, he was the Son of God.

Prayer Pointers

On the cross, Jesus forgave the Centurion, his betrayer, the so-called religious people who were disturbed by his teaching, and those who bullied and abused him with their mocking. Pray that we may be generous with our forgiveness to those who have hurt us. May others see Christ in our lives when we forgive them. Pray for all those who have been bullied or abused, especially those who have suffered abuse in the church.

Pray for our congregation at St Francis' and St Mary's that we may emerge from this lockdown stronger and more united. Pray that God may show us ways in which we can work together as Christ's body to share the good news of the Gospel in our community. Pray that we may see ways to build gates in the fences that have existed in the past.

Pray for our Government – for our Prime Minister, the Cabinet Ministers and the Government Advisers as they make difficult decisions to plan a roadmap out of this lockdown. Thank God for all the progress made in driving cases and rates of Covid19 down especially for all those who plan and administer the vaccination programme – for all those who work long hours in the vaccination centres.

Pray for all in our local care homes – the residents and the carers – who are isolated and cannot see their friends and relatives as a result of Covid restrictions. Pray especially for those residents suffering from dementia and Alzheimer's Disease who may be very confused because their routine has been disrupted. Give thanks for the kindness and dedication of the care staff.

Pray for all those who are ill and for those who have had surgery or treatment recently –especially for Geoffrey Smith and John Godfrey. Continue to pray for all the staff in our local hospitals who are still under pressure with the numbers of Covid patients on the wards. Pray that they will find their rest in the arms of Jesus. May he be their source of replenishment when weary, and their source of hope in such overwhelming times.

We give thanks for all those who now see face to face the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven. Pray for those whose earthly life has come to an end –especially for Ivy Sheen, Samuel Akadi, Dennis Barcoo and Margaret Taylor. May they now experience your greater glory. We pray for those who mourn the recent death of those they've loved, especially Ivy's family -Joan, Margaret and Martin; Samuel's fiancée, Amy and his young son Isaac and for Darren and Mark Barcoo mourning the death of their father, Dennis.