

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

### 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2024: Third Sunday of Lent

#### Hazel writes:

Last week the wedding at St Mary's was a wonderful celebration that brought a real message of hope to Yuliya's family connections in Ukraine. If you'd like to hear Matt and Yuliya's story, you can do so on our livestream recording here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TrFkCRLeIn4> (watch the part between 3 and 27 minutes).

Another **congregational** celebration which has now been scheduled is my last Sunday with you. This will be on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> May when the joint service at 10am in St Mary's on that day will be followed by a lunch in the hall from 12noon. Additionally, there will be a **community** gathering with afternoon tea on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> April in the hall at St Francis' from 3pm, where people that I have made connections with from the community will be invited to come and say farewell. More details of both these events will follow in due course.

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 10<sup>th</sup> March**, we will have a Holy Communion service at 8am in St Francis' Church, and Mothering Sunday services at 9.15am in St Mary's Church and at 10.45am in St Francis' Church where we will be joined by the 7<sup>th</sup> West Wickham Scout Group.

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](mailto: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.

**Messy Church** is on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> March at 3.45pm in St Mary's when we will be looking at the events of Holy Week. Please do tell friends and neighbours with young families about this monthly congregation which meets after school on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Friday of every month.

**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.

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](mailto:g.scales566@btinternet.com)).

We will be bunching up the flowers for the **Mothering Sunday** service at St. Mary's from 10.00 a.m. in the vestibule on **Saturday 9th March**. Any offers of help would be much appreciated. Thank you.

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 online at <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/StFrancis-of-Assisi/concert-bycroydon-male-voice-choir/2024-03-09/19:30/tdvxgrdn> and will also be available after services from David Wada and Valerie Hamilton.

**St. Mary's APCM** follows the 9.15 a.m. service on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> March. Please make a note and try to attend this important event on the church calendar.

**The next Community Lunch at St. Francis** will be held on Sunday 17 March between 12.30-2.30pm in St Francis Church Hall - tickets are £8.00 payable in advance from Barbara Goodchild.

I am organising a group to the Churchill on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> May at 7.30 p.m. to see **WWOS production of Oliver**. If anyone would like to be included, please let me know this week. Thank you. Beryl 0208 289 8097 or [berylbolton@hotmail.com](mailto:berylbolton@hotmail.com).

**Hazel's final service** will be a joint service at **St. Marys at 10.00 a.m. on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> May**. This will be followed by drinks in the vestibule and then a buffet lunch in the Hall. Lists will be posted in both churches for people to sign up if they hope to attend or they can contact Beryl Bolton [berylbolton@hotmail.com](mailto:berylbolton@hotmail.com) or 07834983735 at St. Marys and Nicky Nightingale [nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk) or 07771 782914 to give their names and state whether they are vegetarian, vegan or have a food allergy. Final numbers are required by **Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> April**. Thank you.

**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.

**Gardening at St Francis** began on Saturday 2nd March and will continue monthly 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.

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](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 Gifty [office@stmarywestwickham.co.uk](mailto:office@stmarywestwickham.co.uk).

**Collect**

Eternal God, give us insight to discern your will for us, to give up what harms us, and to seek the perfection we are promised in Jesus Christ our Lord.

**First Reading:**

**1 Corinthians 1: 18-25**

<sup>18</sup> For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

<sup>19</sup> For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.'

<sup>20</sup> Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe.

<sup>22</sup> For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom,

<sup>23</sup> but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

**Gospel Reading:**

**John 2:13-22**

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. <sup>15</sup> Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.

<sup>16</sup> He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!'

<sup>17</sup> His disciples remembered

that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' <sup>18</sup> The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' <sup>19</sup> Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' <sup>20</sup> The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?'

<sup>21</sup> But he was speaking of the temple of his body.

<sup>22</sup> After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

**Post Communion Prayer**

Merciful Lord, grant your people grace to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil, and with pure hearts and minds to follow you, the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## REFLECTION – Hazel O’Sullivan

The gospel reading today is from when Jesus turned over the tables of those selling animals for sacrifice and of the money-changers. I’m going to ask you to read that in your own time later, because of course, we all know it don’t we? It happened when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and then he went straight to the temple and did this. It’s one of the few times where Jesus really gets angry, and it sets off those events of Holy Week.

But is this really the case? When you read it later, remember that in John’s gospel where this passage is from, Jesus is at the start of his ministry. This makes his anger and his actions even more radical, as no-one would have been expecting this in the holiest of holy places, from an unknown Galilean. No wonder people came out from Jerusalem after this event to check Jesus out.

The one part of the gospel reading that I want to focus on today is after Jesus has turned over the tables, in verse 18: The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” You see the Jews loved the miraculous – they remembered the parting of the sea that Moses accomplished, and the fire of the Lord that fell and burned up the sacrifice on Mount Carmel when Elijah prayed to God. They wanted to know what Jesus could do that gave him such authority to act in such a radical way – to have any value it had to be something that could match miracles such as these.

And this is where there’s a link to our reading from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians which James read. In v22 Paul recognises that Jews demand signs (that very same word – ‘sign’). So, looking back to the gospel reading, the sign that Jesus talks about in v19 is the destruction of the temple, which would then be raised in three days. He is, of course talking about his own death and resurrection. But I’m not sure that the Jews would see death on the cross in quite the same way as a parting of the sea or fire coming down from the sky. You see death on a cross was reserved for only the worst of people and it signified being cursed. This is why Paul says that Christ crucified is a stumbling block for Jews – because it’s not an impressive miracle and so, Jesus couldn’t possibly be a prophet of God, let alone his Son.

So, Jews demand signs. And while Jesus did perform a few miracles in his time, he didn’t do this to order and so it wasn’t seen as terribly impressive.

Of course, Jesus came not just for the Jews, but also for the Gentiles. The Gentiles who Paul was writing to were mostly Greeks and he says in the letter that it’s wisdom that impresses them. Now wisdom sounds more like something that Jesus did provide. His

teaching was full of wisdom. However, the message given through his actions wouldn't have seemed so wise in the eyes of Greeks. Allowing oneself to be taken and killed is simply foolish. And the idea that God might come down from heaven to earth and be involved in human affairs, well that just doesn't make sense – God is above all that! The Greeks' idea of wisdom was more about arguing and debating in a cerebral way, but the Christian message about God coming to earth so that he might die on a cross and be raised again, well that's just foolishness and nothing about being wise at all.

But Paul understood something about the Greek's idea of wisdom and so he argues in v21 that the world hadn't previously understood God through human wisdom, and so he had to come and show them a different way.

In v19 Paul quotes from Isaiah 29:14, a prophecy which says God will show that human wisdom is, in fact, foolishness and does not show God at all. Remember, human wisdom for the Jews was miraculous acts. This might be equated to some sort of success in worldly terms. We all want such success don't we – we talk about a successful career or success in sport. And for the Greeks, who saw human wisdom as the ability to argue and debate, well success can also be seen in political terms – today we might think of it as winning an election. However, if we're aiming for success in either of these ways, and we're reliant only our own strength or wisdom, it's more about knowledge and downright hard work. This often results in failure in worldly terms. Even if we are successful, we don't necessarily show God at all.

God's wisdom on the other hand is found in the message of the cross. This is where God's power comes from because the fact that Jesus overcame death by rising again brings us forgiveness, so we're not bound by that need to succeed or to do everything right. Yes, we try to do this, but when we fail, we know that we'll have another chance, but we do have to keep walking in God's path and following Jesus.

Here's a story which illustrates this contrast between God's wisdom and human wisdom.

*Imagine a village of creatures living at the bottom of a great crystal river. The current of the river swept over them all, going its own way, knowing only its own crystal self. Each of the creatures clung tightly to the twigs and rocks of the riverbed, for clinging was their way of life that each had learned from birth.*

*One creature said at last "I am tired of clinging. Though I cannot see it with my own eyes, I trust that the current knows where it is going. I shall let it take me where it will. Clinging, I shall die of boredom." But the other creatures laughed*

*and said "Fool! Let go and that current you worship will throw you, tumbled and smashed, across the rocks and you will die more quickly than from boredom!"*

*But the one heeded them not, and, taking a breath, did let go, and at once was tumbled and smashed by the current across the rocks. Yet, in time, as he refused to cling again, the current lifted the creature free of the bottom, and he was bruised and hurt no more.*

*And the creatures that he subsequently met downstream, to whom he was a stranger, cried "See! A miracle! A creature like ourselves, yet he flies! This must be our Messiah, come to save us all!" And the one carried in the current said, "I am no more Messiah than you. The river delights to lift us free, if only we dare to let go." They cried all the more, "Saviour!", while clinging to the rocks, and when they looked again, he was gone, and they were left alone, making legends of a saviour.*

When Jesus is asked for a sign after turning over the tables in the temple, he cryptically talks about his death and resurrection. He knew that this would happen even at the start of his ministry, but of course no-one else understood what he meant by saying 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up'.

Jesus is the true temple and the living word – he is the source of true wisdom and it's only by following him that we too can discover this wisdom, which seems so foolish to others in the world, but actually offers us a freedom unavailable elsewhere.

### **Prayer Pointers**

Pray for those who lead our nation: that they would take decisions with care and wisdom, always considering how we can live our lives and help others.

In the financial challenges that cities, towns and communities face we ask for a sense of fairness and justice, and a focus on those most in need of help and support.

Pray for the wars and conflicts that divide nations, thinking especially of the continuing war in Ukraine and the destructive fighting in Gaza, as well as the Israeli hostages still unreleased. We bring to God those on all sides of these conflicts – children, the elderly, fighters and families – who continue to suffer or have lost their lives in these past few days. We pray for the United Nations, NATO, The Red Cross and Red Crescent, and other agencies and organisations that have influence, that they would continue to seek a settlement.

We remember the divisions that cause war and ask that those who have influence and power in our own nation would always consider their words carefully and avoid using language and making statements that inflame divisions between communities and faith groups. Pray that faith leaders would be strong in condemning any words or actions that encourage people to turn against others.

Give thanks for our church, our community, and the many blessings given by God. We ask for help in growing and thriving as followers of Jesus.

Pray for our homes, that they would be places of calm and peace where all feel safe.

Pray for the schools in our community and remember the staff and school leaders as they face budget challenges and huge workloads.

Pray for our medical centres, surgeries and hospitals and all those who support others to find help and wholeness in complex and tough situations.

Pray for all those in pain, sickness and facing challenging decisions, especially Vicky Pearce, Jane Smith, Graham Stone, Rowena Griffiths, Daphne Dack, John Dack, Jack Bramwell, Sue Jones, Tina Hamilton, Barry Burford, Pam Tabner and Mark Christy.

Pray for those who are sad at the loss of those they love, remembering especially the family and friends of John Pearce and Brenda Humphrey.

A prayer from the World Day of Prayer, which focussed this year on Palestine:

*We pray for the women of Palestine, who even now are losing children and other family members. May their strength be a beacon of resilience, as they endure all challenges and pain with grace. Grant them courage to navigate adversity and may their aspirations for peace and prosperity shine brightly in the midst of these difficulties.*

*We pray for the healing of hearts and the restoration of peace. May compassion prevail over hatred and may the suffering of all those affected by the war be alleviated. Grant them strength, solace and hope for a brighter and harmonious future.*

*Pray for all families who have lost members: for the kidnapped, the missing and all who are still under the rubble. May the spirit of God grant them all patience and strength as they wait to be reunited. We pray for the end to all wars, especially in the land you called home. You are our Saviour, the one who taught us the real meaning of peace. Guide us and give us power to practice peace in our daily lives. Amen*