

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

17th March 2024: Fifth Sunday of Lent – Passion Sunday

Hazel writes:

As part of my address at the St Mary's APCM today, I will be reflecting on how much more can be done when time is spent at the start of the day in prayer, and how being connected with others in the church can give us new insights and a different perspective which, in turn, deepens our faith. During this week, there has been some reflection on the Mission Action Plans of the two churches and it was striking that people in both groups recognised the value of receiving an email reflection on two bible passages each weekday. Do let me know if you'd like to be added to this list, so that you can be part of this group strengthening our **congregational** links and deepening faith.

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. The 9.15am service will be followed by the St Mary's Annual Parochial Church Meeting.

Next **Sunday 24th March**, 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.

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.

In 2024, the **Bishop of Southwark's Lent Call** is raising money for projects in Zimbabwe and the Diocese of Jerusalem. Our offertory on Easter Sunday will go towards the appeal, but if you would like to donate in the meantime, you can do so via the Diocese of Southwark website at www.southwark.anglican.org/lentcall. There is also more information on the projects and on associated prayer activities in the church buildings

if you do not have access to the internet. Please take a pack of information if you would like to and this will be replenished as necessary.

Additional services during Holy Week this year are as follows:

- **Maundy Thursday** (28th March): Holy Communion at 7.30pm in St Francis'.
- **Good Friday** (29th March): Churches Together service at 11am in St Francis'; An Hour at the Cross at 2pm in St Mary's.

We have a **concert with afternoon tea** on Saturday 13th April at 3pm, when Clara Coslett and Jacqueline Turner will perform a selection of musical theatre songs. Entry will be by ticket only (£6), so that we know how many to cater for. You can get tickets in person at St Francis' Church, or on-line here: <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/St-Francis-of-Assisi>.

Hazel's final service will be a joint service at **St. Marys at 10.00 a.m. on Sunday 5th May**. This will be followed by drinks in the vestibule and then a buffet lunch in the Hall. Lists have been posted in both churches for people to sign up if they hope to attend or they can contact Beryl Bolton berylbolton@hotmail.com or 07834983735 at St. Marys and Nicky Nightingale 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 21st 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 will continue on the first Saturday of each month from 10am to do light gardening, weeding, and trimming of the front and side beds. This will be 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.

We have received a certificate of thanks from **Bromley Borough Foodbank** for the donations made during January and February which weighed a total of 83.95kg. Many thanks to all those who have contributed. Please keep the donations coming in by using the boxes outside either the Vicarage or St Francis' Church. Currently they require tinned vegetables (including potatoes and tomatoes), hot and cold meat tins, cooking sauces, UHT milk, squash, UHT fruit juice, coffee, desserts, washing up liquid and toilet rolls. 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

Gracious Father, you gave up your Son out of love for the world: lead us to ponder the mysteries of his passion, that we may know eternal peace through the shedding of our Saviour's blood, Jesus Christ our Lord.

First Reading:

Jeremiah 31: 31-34

³¹The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD.

³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the LORD', for they shall all

know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Gospel Reading:

John 12: 20-33

²⁰Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' ²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour. ²⁷'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—"Father, save me from this hour"?

No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.

²⁸Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' ³⁰Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine.

³¹Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.'

³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Post Communion Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you have taught us that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters we do also for you: give us the will to be the servant of others as you were the servant of all, and gave up your life and died for us, but are alive and reign, now and for ever.

REFLECTION – Carol Coslett

In today's gospel reading we gain a glimpse of Jesus reacting with two of his disciples. Philip and Andrew came to tell him that some Greeks had arrived asking to see him. As he so often did, Jesus answered indirectly. He didn't say, "Send them away" or "Sure let them come in." Instead, he took the moment to teach – to lay out a reality that his followers needed to understand. It was as if Jesus were saying, "Oh, they want to see me, do they? Okay, I will let them see what I am all about. I will let them know what God is doing."

His reply to Phillip and Andrew indicated his readiness for what would be his final days and the climatic encounter between the ways of the world and the way of God. He said that it was time for him to reveal what all humankind would see about him and his role in the divine drama. *"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."* So today we turn our attention to prepare to face the cross ... the Passion of our Lord. But to be glorified ... what did that mean?

It must have excited the disciples and the Greeks because surely, they thought that by being "glorified" Jesus meant he would make all things well. They had recently experienced Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, so perhaps they thought he would work even greater wonders and bring an end to their difficulties in life. Or, maybe, they were thinking about one of the traditional expectations of how the Messiah would restore Israel – by a glorious military victory. Maybe they thought he meant it was time for him to prevail over all the world's kingdoms and bring about Justice and Peace, with all the leaders working in harmony and bowing down to his greater wisdom.

Any such euphoria though would have been short-lived because it was a different kind of wonder that would be revealed, a different kind of conquest that Jesus had in mind – the conquest of the cross. Jesus immediately began to explain about what lay ahead. In a similar way, as we worship today, one week away from Palm Sunday, our gospel reading lets us see what lies ahead for us in making the Holy Week journey.

Jesus used a parable to explain how not only Greeks, but everyone, would see him. *"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."* A seed, by itself, is only a small piece of matter. If eaten, it provides a little bit of nourishment. If left in the blazing sun, it can dry up and lose its value. If sealed in a jar, it can remain viable for centuries. But even then, it is only *potentially* powerful. But if it is buried and dies beyond its present condition, it can release all that is contained within – the very nature and substance of a whole stem of ripened wheat.

His own death and resurrection would be the way through which, not only his disciples and curious Greeks, but all humankind, could see Jesus – truly see what he was all about. It was by dying that the power of God contained in Jesus would be fully released. By “glorified,” Jesus meant crucified. Jesus was saying that only by his death could true life come. Just as a grain of wheat, remaining unfruitful in the protective security of a barn, can only release its power by being buried and dying to what it has been.

Making sure there would be no mistaking the stark reality of what he meant, Jesus added this amplification to the parable: *“Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”* So, what was true for Jesus, he said, was also true for his followers. Those who would truly see him would know that only by their deaths to the values of the world could they gain true life. The Christian reality is that only in dying to self can the power of God be embraced and released. Jesus laid out this model not just for the disciples to see but also to emulate. He said, *“Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.”*

History tells this story for when concerned and committed people are prepared to die for their cause, much can be achieved. It was by the deaths of the courageous faithful that Christianity first grew. There are contemporary examples too ... think of Alexei Navalny ... not a Christian at first, but he found a faith during his trials. Prepared to speak out for change, for justice, determined to live his life standing firm in his convictions. The ancient Christian writer, Tertullian, summed up saying *“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”* And new seeds are now buried: what Navalny upheld and challenged will continue because of his convictions and sacrifice.

Often, people become of real use to God by burying their own goals and desires. Think about the saints. Think about your personal heroes. Aren't they the ones who put aside personal safety and security for the sake of others? Haven't they abandoned selfish gain and the advancement of personal need to meet the needs of others? Whenever the world gains spiritual health, it often owes such a condition to those who spend their strength and give themselves away: to God and to others.

In today's gospel, Jesus lets us see an initial view of him as – the perfect example – of the kind of life the loving God may require ... full of risks and not always easy. The world teaches that we will live longer and prosper more if we watch out for ourselves, if we are careful and avoid risk. If you ever speak to a financial advisor, they always safeguard themselves before any advice by asking clients to undertake a risk assessment, and that way they can judge what level one is prepared to risk one's savings. To avoid the risk of spread of the Covid virus we were all asked to remain in

our homes safe and secure. But as we all know during that time, we were denied many of the freedoms and experiences of what makes up a full life. We couldn't do the things we normally might do, but in that circumstance, we made this sacrifice for the good of other people.

Jesus teaches us that in our life we cannot just stay home and hide away from life's challenges, and the experience of the world around us. If we do that we may live longer or in greater comfort, but we will not live as well. Jesus helps us see that real living – genuine, meaningful living – involves much more. To have life and to live life to the full there will be risks, and as Christians we should be prepared to take them, to experience all that life gives us.

Only by living our lives to the full, with utmost integrity, firm in our convictions will we be able to keep our true lives, our true selves. Jesus calls us into a “give-it-away” faith. He calls us into a realm not of our ordinary world, but into one that stands in sharp contrast – the world of God. Jesus calls us beyond the common, selfish goals of false security. He calls us to see him – to see his vision – a new view of life, a life of meaning and of glory.

Unlike his fellow Jews, Jesus viewed glory not as the acquisition of power, or the ability to control their own destiny after centuries of foreign rule, but he looked at glory as the ability to serve others for a greater purpose. In the encounter in today's gospel, he taught that only dying to self can bring forth the kind of redeemed life God has in store for us; only by spending life can we retain it. Only in this context can we do what the Greeks hoped to do – see Jesus for what he is for the world. Only in the context of dying to self and living in God can we see the essential Jesus. Only in this way can we see him for what he really is – the living image of God.

And there is a certain amount of risk, for we are never quite sure that what we plant will bear fruit ... but we have to try for *“Unless a grain of wheat is planted, it will remain just as it is ... a grain of wheat with no shoots or life.”* Jesus had to die to his old self in order to be redeemed and glorified on the third day. But suffering and pain, and sorrow, must come first, and we must seek to discover, as the Greeks did, asking to see Jesus, that to live our lives to the full may mean losing a part of ourselves in order to follow Jesus.

As we move rapidly towards Holy Week and journey to the cross, we can follow him into a life of true meaning and become transformed by what we see. Let us be the grain of wheat planted so that new shoots can begin to grow.

Prayer Pointers

Thank God for his Son, Jesus, who knew when his time had come to suffer. Give thanks that he was willing to die for us and that he defeated death and lives in us and through us.

Pray for:

- a time of peace across the world in many nations, including Gaza, Israel, Palestine, Ukraine and Haiti.
- respect between people, where all realise that the words they use may cause upset, harm or danger to others.
- compassion to be shown to all people by all leaders, and that we too may have compassion for them.
- peace and refuge for the royal family in the health and relationship issues that they are going through under the public gaze.
- wisdom and compassion from our politicians as they balance political views with the needs of all people, so that they may be a positive example of wisdom and grace.
- unity and hope in our struggling communities.

Give thanks for all those who work and live to bring joy and release to others through entertainment and the creative arts, especially those who have received awards in recognition of their abilities and the gifts you have given them. Pray for those whose work is under threat because of funding cuts, asking that they will not feel devalued.

Pray that we, at St Francis' and St Mary's, may grow in numbers, but also in spiritual depth and in commitment to serving our community.

Pray for healing and hope for those who are suffering through illness and sadness, especially for Vicky Pearce, Jane Smith, Graham Stone, Rowena Griffiths, Daphne Dack, John Dack, Jack Bramwell, Sue Jones, Tina Hamilton, Barry Burford, Pam Tabner, Mark Christy and David Taylor