

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

17th September 2023: 15th Sunday after Trinity

Hazel writes:

It was very special to be visited by the deanery pilgrimage last Saturday, to welcome others from our deanery **community** and to have tailor-made prayers said for both of our churches.

Last Sunday's services for Creation Sunday offered a chance to reflect on how we as **congregations** take care and look after creation. If you haven't done it already, do calculate your carbon footprint at <https://footprint.wwf.org.uk>. If you let me know what it comes out at, I will calculate an average for the united benefice, and we can see how fast we can make changes to reduce this average over the years ahead.

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 24th September**, we will have Holy Communion services at 8am in St Francis' Church and then 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.

The **funeral of Brian Griffiths** will take place on Monday 18th September at 1pm in St. Francis' Church with refreshments afterwards from 3.15pm at The New Inn in Hayes. Everyone is invited to wear something red.

Our next **Women's event** is at St Mary's in The Avenue, West Wickham on Tuesday 19th September at 8pm in the main hall. This will have a games theme and we'll reflect on how games have changed over the years, why fewer children play outside, and

why they prefer the box to the toy. Please bring any favourite game that you'd like to play with others. There will also be some light refreshments to enjoy. Come along (with a friend) and have some fun.

Our next **Community Lunch** at St Francis' for senior citizens and those living on their own will take place on Sunday 24th September in St Francis Church Hall from 12.30pm to 2.30pm. If you would like to come and join others. Tickets are on sale from Barbara Goodchild on 0208 777 8782 and are £7.00 in advance.

The **Harvest Supper** is on Saturday 30th September at 7.00 p.m. in St. Mary's Hall taking the form of a bring-and-share. There is a list in both churches for you to sign up if you intend to come along and to advise what you will be bringing. Tickets £5 to cover the cost of desserts and tea and coffee. Lists will be removed after next Sunday's services.

The annual **pet service** is an opportunity to give thanks for all the support our pets give to us. It will be at St Francis' Church on Sunday 1st October at 3pm. Bring your pet (or a picture of your pet) for a prayer of blessing. Tell your neighbours, friends and family that they are welcome to join us.

The diocesan **Prayer and Spirituality Day** is on Saturday 14 October, 10am—1.15pm at Southwark Cathedral, £5.00, with the theme of *Rest* and culminating in a service of anointing for healing and wholeness. There will be the opportunity to reflect on rest for the whole person, and sleep. There will also be silence, meditation, musical nocturnes, and prayers for peace. The event will take place underneath a vast, suspended artwork — The Museum of the Moon, by Luke Jerram. Entry is by ticket, and you need to book online in advance here: <https://Rest-Southwark2023.eventbrite.co.uk>. Or let Hazel know that you would like to attend and give her your ticket money.

St. Mary's Christmas Market is on Saturday 25th November. If you are interested and can help in any way at all please contact Gifty giftynorley@nortey.com. If you are new to the Market and can spare an hour or so to man a stall, please contact Gifty. We are also looking for a face painter if you know anyone who could help. Now is the time to start collecting large jars with lids for the pickled onions. Please leave in St. Mary's vestibule. Any offers of homemade jams, marmalade, pickles etc. will be gratefully received. Thank you.

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.

Copies of **The Bridge** are available in both churches.

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

Lord God, defend your Church from all false teaching and give to your people knowledge of your truth, that we may enjoy eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

First Reading:

Genesis 50: 15-21

¹⁵ Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, 'What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?'

¹⁶ So they approached Joseph, saying, 'Your father gave this instruction before he died, ¹⁷ "Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you." Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father.'

Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, 'We are here as your slaves.' ¹⁹ But Joseph said to

them, 'Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God?

²⁰ Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. ²¹ So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.' In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

Second Reading:

Romans 14: 1-12

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarrelling over opinions. ² Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. ³ Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgement on those who eat; for God has welcomed them.

⁴ Who are you to pass judgement on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵ Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. ⁶ Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also, those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God.

⁷ We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. ⁸ If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰ Why do you pass judgement on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgement seat of God. ¹¹ For it is written,

‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.’

¹² So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

Gospel Reading:

Matthew 18: 21-35

²¹ Then Peter came and said to him, ‘Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?’ ²² Jesus said to him, ‘Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

²³ ‘For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵ and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you

everything.” ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.

²⁸ But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow-slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, “Pay what you owe.” ²⁹ Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you.” ³⁰ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he should pay the debt.

³¹ When his fellow-slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³² Then his lord summoned him and said to him, “You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you.” ³⁴ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he should pay his entire debt.

³⁵ So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.’

Post Communion Prayer

Keep, O Lord, your Church, with your perpetual mercy; and, because without you our human frailty cannot but fall, keep us ever by your help from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

REFLECTION – Carol Coslett

“Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.” (Corrie Ten Boom: The Hiding Place, 1971)

Have you ever heard the saying: *“Be careful what you wish for, or what you pray for – it might come true.”* I used to say that to my children when they pulled a funny face or objected to something wishing they could do something else, or I would say the wind might change and you’ll stay like that! In other words you might actually get what you want but in the long term it might not be for the best or what you were actually after.

And there’s a prayer many of us pray daily or at least once a week – “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Is that what we really want? We know we want God’s forgiveness. Of that, we are quite sure. However, we are not so sure about the second part, about the way we forgive others.

Let me tell you a story from “The Hiding place” about Corrie Ten Boom. Martin (My husband) wrote a musical based on the book and the film portraying the commitment to faith and forgiveness. It tells of how Corrie Ten Boom and her Dutch family, saved many Jewish people during World War 2 in Holland; of her experiences in Ravensbruck concentration camp, and the death of her sister Betsie. It is a story of strength and enormous faith and forgiveness.

In one of the songs **“No Hate Corrie”** that Martin wrote, Betsie and Corrie sing:

Don’t let the shadows hide your soul, no hate, Last night I saw the house where we will live to tell the world, no pits so deep his love’s not deeper still, we will show them how to love. We will teach the world to heal the wounds of hate in their hearts.

In her book she recalls this incident:

It was in a church in Munich where I was speaking in 1947 that I saw him - a balding heavyset man in a grey overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat, the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones.

Memories of the concentration camp came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights, the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the centre of the floor, the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment of skin.

Betsie and I had been arrested for concealing Jews in our home during the Nazi occupation of Holland. This man had been a guard at Ravensbruck concentration camp where we were sent.

Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: "A fine message, fraulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!"

It was the first time since my release that I had been face to face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.

"You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk," he was saying. "I was a guard there. But since that time," he went on, "I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein," - again the hand came out - "will you forgive me?"

And I stood there - and could not. Betsie had died in that place - could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

For I had to do it - I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. "If you do not forgive their trespasses," Jesus says, "neither will your Father in Heaven forgive your trespasses."

*Still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. **But forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart.***

"Jesus, help me!" I prayed silently. "I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling."

And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

"I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart!"

For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then.

We know that we are not nearly so quick to forgive others as we hope and pray that God forgives us. The Psalmist says, **"The Lord is full of compassion and mercy, slow to anger and of great kindness."** So that is good news, to know we only have to ask for forgiveness, say sorry and start again. But when wrong has been done to us, victims of personal tragedy, a victim of terrorist attack, a murder of a loved one, loss of innocent life through war, genocide ... I could go on ... how do we find it in our hearts to forgive? Are we full of compassion and mercy?

And yet, this is how Our Lord taught us to pray – forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

In our Gospel reading, Peter comes to Jesus and asks, “Lord, if someone sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?”

Peter always asks the questions that we would like to ask. He is so practical and eager to do the right thing. Following Jesus around was not always easy and Peter is often jumping in getting the wrong idea! Peter felt that generosity was important and he had heard Jesus talk about forgiveness, but surely he thought there must be some limit. Peter must have done his homework before questioning Jesus, for Jewish traditional teaching says that a person should forgive another who has sinned against him as many as four times. So, Peter, earnest and eager, tries to be even more extravagant than the rabbis, and he adds three more times. He asks, “Should I forgive a person even up to seven times?”

Seven times is a lot. It’s three more than the rabbis. It is a lot of times to turn and forgive someone who has sinned against you. Perhaps Peter was expecting Jesus to praise him for even suggesting such extravagant forgiveness. Perhaps Peter was hoping for a pat on the back, a gold star for the day, for an A+ on his forgiveness exam.

This doesn’t happen. Rather, Jesus turns and says, “No, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.” In other words, without limit. Peter wants a rule, a measurement, so he holds wide his hands and says, “This much, Lord? Should I forgive even this much?” And Jesus says, “No, much more than that. You’re not even using the right scale. As far as the east is from the west, that’s how much you should forgive.” It’s such an enormous amount of forgiveness, it would be senseless to try to calculate how much or how often.

There has been a fair amount of social science research on forgiveness. It turns out that forgiveness is good for you. People who forgive have lower levels of anger, anxiety, and depression, are more agreeable and emotionally stable, and may also have gained some health benefits, like lowering cholesterol and less likely to experience heart attacks. Forgiveness is an active process in which you make a conscious decision to let go of negative feelings whether the person deserves it or not. The science research has shown that learning how to forgive is a skill that can be developed and practiced and can lead to greater satisfaction and happiness in life.

So Jesus tells the story of the two debtors with whom the king wished to settle accounts. One was brought owing ten thousand talents. This is an extraordinary amount of money ... it was greater than a King's ransom ... more than million pounds. It was an amount no one could pay, yet the king forgave him the debt out of care for his wife and children. The man forgiven then attacked a fellow slave who owed him a hundred denarii, the sort of money we might easily carry in our purses or pocket. He was not merciful and put the slave in prison. He was a hard man and demanded what were his by rights. His fellow slaves were distressed and reported to the king, who had the unforgiving slave put in prison until he could pay his debt, which of course he would never be able to do.

This tells us of the danger of an unforgiving heart. Hatred, vengeance resentment can all poison lives. Forgiveness cannot be poured in if forgiveness is not given out. And Peter asking the question is part of the problem. For the spiritual danger is that when we focus on our virtue and character strengths, we may become a bit too preoccupied with ourselves. And the real danger happens when we start thinking of our character strengths as accomplishments of our noble, virtuous, righteous selves. From the reading in Romans - Paul asks: *"Why do you pass judgement on your brother or sister?"* We can too easily slide into self-righteousness. Who is a truly forgiving person and who is not? Who deserves forgiveness and who does not? And maybe question even the extent and limits of forgiveness: "seven times seems about right." But we *"will all stand before the judgement seat of God"* and each be accountable to God for our own actions.

Forgiveness, like love grows only by our giving it out. When it comes to our relationship with God, it is not just the righteous bit that God deals with, but rather God seeks a relationship with our whole being, our full humanity...the good and the bad; our every thought, word and deed. And we cannot claim forgiveness if we are unable to forgive others. We are all utterly dependent on the unconditional, unmerited grace and mercy of Christ, who has removed our sins as far as the east is from the west.

That's the dilemma Corrie Ten Boom wrestled with when coming face to face with the guard from Ravensbruck. He could never rewind the actions he took, Corrie's sister, Betsie could not be returned to life on earth, but Corrie knew that God would forgive, and did completely through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And she knew she must strive to do the same.

"Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart."

We forgive, then, because God forgives. And when we pray the Lord's Prayer we say "Forgive us ... As we forgive"

Amen

Prayer Pointers

Offer up prayers for our troubled world thinking of those situations where forgiveness could bring so much healing and power:

- in prisons where there is much unrest.
- in countries – such as the Ukraine – where war is no longer a headline, but where people live each day with uncertainty and terror, and a peaceful resolution cannot be imagined and the hurt just gets deeper.
- in areas – such as Morocco and Libya – affected by such terrible natural disasters, we ask that aid will reach where it is most needed.

Pray for people who have had tough lives, and only known unkindness and violence. For those who don't understand what love and forgiveness are. For people who have had things happen in their lives that they can't forgive. For people whose lives are eaten up by guilt over things they have done.

Pray for the sick, in body mind and spirit. May they know your healing touch in the way they need it most. Think especially of Vicky Pearce, Jane Smith, Graham Stone, Rowena Griffiths, Daphne Dack, John Dack, Barbara Goodchild, Jack Bramwell, Sue Jones, and Tina Hamilton.

Pray for those who have lost a loved one, remembering especially Rowena, Rhys and Gareth mourning the loss of their husband and father, Brian Griffiths.