

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

**24<sup>th</sup> September 2023: 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity**

### **Hazel writes:**

Last week's events contributed to the vision for our united benefice:

- On Saturday the coffee morning hosted by Merri and John Womack had a real **community** feel, as we sat on their driveway with many of their neighbours dropping in. We raised over £400 for Welcare and Macmillan Cancer Support. Thank you to all who supported the event, helped on the day, and baked cakes in advance.
- On Monday we said goodbye to Brian Griffiths a long-serving member of our **congregation** and ministry team. He will be greatly missed.
- Our women's event on Tuesday gave us some **congregational** rest and relaxation over some games with an opportunity to reflect on how important play is for all of us and how the nature of play for children has changed over the years.

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

Next **Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> October**, we will have Holy Communion services at 8am in St Mary's Church and a joint service at 10am in St Francis' Church. This will be the Patronal Sunday for St Francis' Church and money raised through our **Gift Day** will be put towards improving access to our facilities in the form of a disabled access toilet in the hall and a second laptop which we can dedicate to livestreaming our services.

We are **NOT meeting this week** to pray for growth of the Church on Tuesday.

**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.

This **Thursday 28<sup>th</sup>** brings our current series of **lunchtime concerts at St. Francis** to an end, when Mr. Bullen brings several of his talented students from Langley Park Boys' School to entertain us. They have become a fixture in our season of concerts and always bring a good variety of music with them, so there is always something for

everyone. The concert starts at 12.45 and lasts approximately 45 minutes; and as usual tea and coffee are available before the concert. Come along and bring a friend; let's make a big welcoming St. Francis audience for these talented young people!

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 today.

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.

**St. Mary's Community Lunch** is on the first Wednesday of each month (apart from December when the Christmas one is one week later) at 1.00 pm. 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 on these very happy and sociable occasions, please contact Beryl Bolton on 0208 289 8097 or [berylbolton@hotmail.com](mailto:berylbolton@hotmail.com) to reserve your place. We would love to see you and you will be made very welcome. **The next one is on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> October.**

The **London Concert Chorus** will be singing at a concert in St Francis' Church on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> October at 7.30pm. Tickets (which include an interval drink) are available at £12 (or £6 for under 18s) from <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/st-francis-of-assis> or on the door.

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.

The **St John's Autumn Fair** is on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> October in St Francis' Church Hall between 11am and 3pm, raising money for Link to Hope, a charity that works with partners in Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria and the Ukraine to help the poorest and most

marginalised through education and social care. Crafty and tasty gifts available and refreshments to enjoy.

**Croydon Area Racial Justice Group's** Black History Month celebrations are on Saturday 28th October at St Matthew's Church, Redhill (timing to be confirmed). The theme will be the 75-year Windrush anniversary and its legacy.

**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@norley.com](mailto:giftynorley@norley.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.

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'.

The sanctuary pedestal at St. Marys this week has been donated by Joan Baker in memory of her sister and arranged by Merri.

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

Lord of creation, whose glory is around and within us: open our eyes to your wonders, that we may serve you with reverence, and know your peace at our lives' end, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## First Reading:

### Jonah 3:10 – 4:11

<sup>10</sup> When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. <sup>2</sup> He prayed to the LORD and said, 'O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and

merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. <sup>3</sup> And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.' <sup>4</sup> And the LORD said, 'Is it right for you to be angry?'

<sup>5</sup> Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.

<sup>6</sup> The LORD God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. <sup>7</sup> But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked

the bush, so that it withered. <sup>8</sup> When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, 'It is better for me to die than to live.'

<sup>9</sup> But God said to Jonah, 'Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?' And he said, 'Yes, angry enough to die.' <sup>10</sup> Then the LORD said, 'You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labour and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. <sup>11</sup> And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?'

**Gospel Reading:**  
**Matthew 20: 1-16**

**20** 'For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup> After agreeing with the labourers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard.

<sup>3</sup> When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; <sup>4</sup> and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. <sup>5</sup> When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. <sup>6</sup> And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you

standing here idle all day?" <sup>7</sup> They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard." <sup>8</sup> When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the labourers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first."

<sup>9</sup> When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. <sup>10</sup> Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. <sup>11</sup> And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, <sup>12</sup> saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the

burden of the day and the scorching heat." <sup>13</sup> But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?

<sup>14</sup> Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. <sup>15</sup> Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?" <sup>16</sup> So the last will be first, and the first will be last.'

**Post Communion Prayer**  
Almighty God, you have taught us through your Son, that love is the fulfilling of the law: grant that we may love you with our whole heart and our neighbours as ourselves; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## REFLECTION – Richard Ford

We all know the story of Jonah and the Whale, don't we? So, although today we've only heard the end of it, I don't need to remind you of what comes earlier. Or do I?

Let's start with my opening comment – what's wrong with it? Those of you who know your Bibles will know that I shouldn't have referred to a whale, but rather "a great fish."

That, perhaps, is being a bit picky, but what *is* worth mentioning is that we need to forget about the whale, or big fish, that tends to dominate people's memories when Jonah is mentioned, and focus on what the story as a whole is telling us about God.

I use the word "story" deliberately, because many Biblical scholars regard this as a parable about the nature of God and the nature of Jonah and his fellow Israelites, and even us today. They regard it as a parable because of the jokey way in which it is written – try reading it straight through and you'll see what they mean.

But even if we accept that this account is not historically accurate, we can't deny that Jonah himself is an historical figure, living around the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. In the second Book of Kings, we read how King Jeroboam II "restored the boundaries of Israel ..., in accordance with the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, spoken through *his servant Jonah...* the prophet from Gath Hepher."

But back to the Book of Jonah and its importance.

Jonah is sent by God to inform the people of Nineveh that their wickedness has offended God and that in forty days their city will be destroyed. However, Jonah's warning is heeded, and the people repent of their wickedness and God spares the city.

Now you'd think that Jonah would have been delighted at the success of his preaching. After all many of his fellow prophets had their prophecies ignored by the Israelites, with the result that the Northern kingdom was taken into exile in Assyria around 722 BC and later the Southern kingdom into exile in Babylon around 587BC.

But Jonah is far from happy and, having grumbled at God, goes off in a sulk. Why?

The problem is that Nineveh is one of the major cities in Assyria and Assyria is the dominant power in that part of the world and a threat to Israel. From Jonah's point of view, it would be better for Nineveh to be destroyed by God, rather than spared because of its penitence.

So angry is Jonah that he grumbles at God for being compassionate and merciful, turning it into an accusation against him:

‘O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. <sup>3</sup> And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.

In brief: I told you so. Now get out of my hair!

It is perhaps just as well for Jonah that God is merciful and slow to anger and doesn’t take him at his word. Instead, God decides to teach him a lesson and, given that this may well be a parable, us as well.

God provides Jonah with a bush, or in other translations, a plant or a vine, to protect him from the heat of the sun, thus enabling him to both metaphorically and literally, cool off. But then God arranges for the bush to die, once again causing Jonah to grumble. Jonah’s concern for the bush is purely selfish, or self-centred. Its death has caused him discomfort. Similarly, his response to God’s call on him to go to save those whom he regards as the enemy in Nineveh is self-centred – from Israel’s point of view, the point of view of those who are God’s chosen people, the destruction of a city full of Assyrians is something to be desired. But not from God’s point of view, for he says: “Should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?”

We’re not told Jonah’s answer but, as is so often the case with parables, we’re left to work out the answer for ourselves. How should we respond to *our* enemies?

In the New Testament, we’re given the answer when Jesus tells people: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”

We’ve talked in the past about God’s upside-down world, and we’re back in that place once again. And once again we’re being taught a lesson through the grumbles of one of our fellow human beings – this time the union representative of the day labourers, upset that those who have “borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day” receive the same pay as those who have only been working an hour or so.

And once again we need to remember that this is a parable, intended to make a point about the kingdom of heaven, about the nature of God. It's not intended to be a treatise on social justice and industrial relations.

So let's unpack it a bit, starting with those who are the last to be hired. They've been there all day, but no one has hired them. They're the ones that no one wants – we're not told why, but I'm sure that we can come up with reasons. Maybe they don't look strong enough for the work; maybe they're disabled in some way; maybe they look like trouble-makers, or maybe they're aliens, strangers. Whatever it may be, they're the misfits, the outsiders, the ones that no one wants to be friends with.

And we know from elsewhere in the Bible, including the Book of Jonah, that God has a heart for the outsider – the inhabitants of Nineveh are gentiles - and a heart that Jesus demonstrates so frequently in the Gospels.

So, for example, we're told earlier in Matthew's Gospel, when Jesus and his disciples are eating at Matthew's house, with a number of other tax collectors, and the Pharisees see this, they ask his disciples,

"Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" <sup>12</sup> On hearing this, Jesus says, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. <sup>13</sup> But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

But back to the parable. All the workers are paid the usual daily wage, in some translations, a "denarius," the same daily wage that a Roman soldier would have earned. But now think what would have happened if the landowner had paid his labourers proportionately. Those who came last would have received one eleventh of the daily wage: little, if any, food on the family table that night and the next morning.

What the landowner is showing is compassion to those in need. But this parable is also a parable about the kingdom of God, and the landowner in the parable represents God, the God whom Jonah refers to, quoting God's description of himself in the Book of Exodus, as a God, who is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing."

But if God is the landowner, then we are the labourers. And maybe God is giving us, who as Christians may be tempted to think that we are closer to God than others, a warning. Do you remember Luke's account of the exchange that Jesus had with one of the bandits who was crucified with him?



It's a perfect example of what Jesus was getting at in the parable of the workers in the vineyard.

Those of us who have been Christians for a long time may be a bit put out that someone like a thief or a bandit, and possibly even a murderer, can, within minutes of his death, be told that he is destined to spend eternity in the presence of Jesus.

What has he done to earn that? And that's the point. Apart from showing Jesus pity, he hasn't done much to earn salvation.

The same is true of some of the workers in the vineyard. Those whom the landowner takes on at the end of the day are those whom no one else wants to take on. Yet they get the same pay as those who have been working all day.

The message is clear, you can't earn salvation. It's a gift from God – what we call grace. And it's a very generous gift, showing us how compassionate and loving is the God whom we come here to worship.

And it's just as well that he is, because if we take a close look at ourselves, there aren't many, if any, of us who can claim that we have a right to spend eternity with God, for, as St John puts it, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

But all of us, however long we've been labouring in the vineyard, can be confident that in turning to God, he will extend to us his grace in full and offer us a place in his kingdom. **Amen**

## **Prayer Pointers**

Lord God, the world has strayed far from your standards. Pray for those for whom justice seems very far away, including those living in places where faith has to be hidden.

May European leaders working together to deal with the migrant crisis have wisdom. May they not see people just as excess numbers but take to heart their needs and what they are escaping from.

This week there have been scandals in the media about sexual abuse by people in the public eye; widespread corruption in the Metropolitan police force; overstretched probation services where bad decisions have led to loss of lives. In a world where closed doors hide so much injustice, we pray for justice to return. May we as God's people do all we can to stick up for the downtrodden and downhearted.

Pray for the people of Libya and Morocco: may aid reach them as quickly as possible and help to alleviate the suffering of the survivors.

Pray that all who follow your calling to spread your word, and your work in whatever situation, will open the way to a harvest of generosity. Ask for God's blessing on the work of organisations such as Tearfund, Oxfam, Christian Aid and Fair Trade.

Lord God, we are all workers in your vineyard. Give thanks for talents which we can use for God's glory. Pray for people who have no hopes or expectations of getting more than the bare minimum of money to get by and for those who waste their talents and don't use them as you intended.

Lord God, how we long for a world like the kingdom of heaven, where no one gets more or less than anyone else. Where everyone belongs and receives in equal measure.

Pray for people who are suffering in many ways, including by name Vicky Pearce, Jane Smith, Graham Stone, Rowena Griffiths, Daphne Dack, John Dack, Barbara Goodchild, Jack Bramwell, Sue Jones, and Tina Hamilton.

We think of those who have recently lost loved ones, remembering especially the family of Brian Griffiths: Rowena, Rhys and Gareth. May they find a light at this dark time, in the knowledge of your presence with them.