

ST. MARY OF NAZARETH /ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI – WEST WICKHAM
20th March 2022: Third Sunday of Lent

Hazel writes:

We continue to be horrified by the killing and destruction that is taking place in Ukraine. There are two fundraising events coming up to support the humanitarian response, the first at St Francis' on Saturday 2nd April – see below. We will also be continuing in our prayer vigils for Ukraine in the church buildings, but are changing the times to be as follows:

- Tuesday from 6.30-7.30pm in St Francis';
- Thursday from 9.00-10.30am in St Mary's.

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

Hymns at 9.15 a.m. in St. Mary's – Ten thousand reasons (Bless the Lord) - Be still for the presence of the Lord – Faithful One, so unchanging – Jesus stand among us – I will sing the wondrous story.

Hymns at 10.45 a.m. in St. Francis – Praise to the Lord - Bread of heaven, on thee we feed – I will sing the wondrous story – Colours of day.

St. Mary's APCM will take place in the hall following the 9.15 a.m. service today.

Next **Sunday 27th 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.

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 at St Mary's Church on Thursday morning at 9am.

Resources and updates for the week ahead – This week our service will be livestreamed on YouTube from St Mary's at **9.15am** on Sunday. All other files for this week 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. Dominic’s Priory, Newcastle-upon-Tyne with Father Dermot Preston.
 - Choral Evensong at 3pm on Radio 3 from Truro Cathedral.
 - On BBC 1: Songs of Praise at 1.15 p.m.- Katherine Jenkins joins a young and growing congregation at Gas Street Church, Birmingham.

We will be making a start on our **gardening work at St Francis’** from 2.00pm on Saturday 26th March. Hopefully there will be a good group there. If you have and friends or family who might like to lend a hand, please feel free to invite them.

Hayes Symphony Orchestra are performing some operatic and orchestral pieces in St Francis’ on Saturday 26th March at 7.30pm. Tickets (£10) will be available on the door, or you can pre-order by calling 07824 443989.

Coffee & Chat is on the first Thursday of each month at 2.30pm on Zoom. Our next date is likely to be the last of these meetings. If you have been part of this group and cannot make the date or would like the log-in details for our last meeting, please let Rowena know (rowena.griff19@btinternet.com or 8777 6112).

Please bring **Foodbank donations** to the Vicarage or St Francis’ Church. Currently they require tinned hot and cold meat, tinned potatoes, tinned vegetables, long life fruit juice, tinned fish, chopped tomatoes, rice, custard, rice pudding. They are well stocked with pasta, cereals and baked beans. Please do not bring any fresh 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.

St Francis’ is hosting a **‘cake and craft’ event** on Saturday 2nd April raising funds for the **Link to Hope Ukraine Appeal**. Link to Hope is the organisation which is supported by the St John’s Autumn Fair each year and they already have volunteers on the ground helping Ukrainian refugees in Romania, Moldova & Bulgaria, as well as Ukraine. Book a workshop here: <https://fb.me/e/6jZILHyGn> or drop in for some tea and cake any time from 2-5pm.

The funeral of **Cynthia Symes** will take place on Friday 8th April at 11.30 a.m. at St. Mary’s and be followed by a reception at Club Langley, 2 Hawksbrook Lane, BR3 3SR. Please reply to the family before 31st March on 07954 345092 if you are going to attend the reception.

We are holding another **High Street foodbank collection** on Saturday 9th April for money and non-perishable food and household goods. If you would like to volunteer some time at our stall, from 10 am to 3 pm please contact Tim Shingler on 07785 772649 or email tim.shingler@ntlworld.com. The collection takes place on the corner of The High Street and Ravenswood Avenue.

There is a **concert for fuel vouchers** on 9th April in St Francis' at 7.30pm. Bromley Borough Food Bank believe there will be a high demand for these vouchers in April and beyond when prices are due to rise, and we would like to be able to support them in this provision. There will be a bar before the performance and during the interval. The performers are Che, a talented young classical piano duo who play individually and as a four hand, and Trifonics, a string Trio who have played across the UK and on stages around the world. Tickets can be booked via <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/st-francis-of-assisi>

Each year the Bishop of Southwark has a **Lent Call** which raises money to support projects throughout the diocese and in our link dioceses of Zimbabwe and Jerusalem. Details of the projects being supported in 2022 are available here: <https://southwark.anglican.org/news-events/events/len-call/resources/> there are also hard copies available in each of the church buildings to borrow or read while you are there. There are envelopes available for donations during the next few weeks and the offertories on Easter Sunday will also go towards this appeal.

Two local ladies have set up a **befriending service** called Companions offering help with hospital appointments, shopping or days out. There are leaflets about this service in both of our churches, or if you'd like more information, contact either Andrea (07506 686238) or Maria (07939 120718) or by email at companions22@btinternet.com.

Eco Church is a tool to help us in treasuring God's earth. It's an online survey which looks at:

- worship and teaching
- management of church buildings
- management of church land
- community and global engagement
- lifestyle. You can see the detail of questions asked here:

<https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Eco-Church-Survey-v2-January-2018.pdf>. If there are any things that you would be interested in looking at in more detail, please contact Nicky Nightingale at nicholanightingale@hotmail.co.uk or on 8916 9855.

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'.

No flowers now until Easter.

Any items for the joint pew sheet to Beryl berylbolton@hotmail.com and items for the websites to brian.griff19@btinternet.com or Gifty 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:

Isaiah 55: 1-9

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

³ Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

⁴ See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.

⁵ See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know

you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel for he has glorified you. ⁶ Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; ⁷ let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. ⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.

⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 13: 1-9

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² He asked them, 'Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?' ³ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they

did. ⁴ Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.' ⁶ Then he told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. ⁷ So he said to the gardener, "See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?" ⁸ He replied, "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

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 – Richard Ford

The season of Lent is a time for reflection, of self-assessment in relation to how well we are living out the Christian life and, having identified those areas in which we fall short, for as Paul says in his letter to the church in Rome, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3.23), accepting our need for penitence.

That’s why from Ash Wednesday at St Francis’ Hazel and I have been wearing purple stoles, for purple symbolises penitence, and the altar frontals in both churches use what is known as Lenten array, which is a rough or homespun fabric. It may have an off-white colour, or it may be made without any dye. Use of Lenten array follows the custom from the late Middle Ages of using dark or drab colours during penitential seasons.

Appropriately enough, both our readings today have at their centre the idea of penitence or repentance.

At the beginning of our reading from Luke, it appears that Jesus, who would soon be on his way to Jerusalem, together with his Galilean followers, is brought news that soldiers of the Roman Governor, Pilate, have executed an unknown number of Galileans as they were making their sacrifices in the Jerusalem Temple. Galileans were known as being rebellious people, so it may be that they had broken an important Roman regulation, although this would be no justification for the way in which they were treated.

Jesus’ response is interesting, for rather than commenting on the justice or otherwise of their treatment, he instead poses the question, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans?” His answer: “I tell you no.”

Behind this question lies the belief in Jesus’ day that a calamity such as this would only befall those who were particularly sinful, a belief that Jesus challenges further when he goes to say, “But unless you repent, you too will perish,” with the implication that those listening to him were also sinners.”

To ram home the point, Jesus then refers to the incident in which a tower in the Siloam area of Jerusalem collapsed, causing eighteen deaths, concluding, “Do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?” and adding once more the need for those listening to repent, or they, too, would perish.

So what are we to make of this?

It seems likely that Jesus is making both a specific and a general point about the need for repentance.

We know from elsewhere in the New Testament, such as Jesus' comment when his disciples were admiring the Temple, that "the day will come when not one [of its] stones will be left on one another, every one of them will be thrown down," (Luke 21.6), that he was concerned that the Jews were heading for disaster if they were to attempt to overthrow the Roman occupation. His worst fears were fulfilled in AD 66, when the Jews did indeed rise up in rebellion.

As a consequence, the emperor, Vespasian, dispatched an army of approximately 60,000 soldiers who methodically went through northern Judea restoring order as they went, until they reached Jerusalem in AD 70. They then laid siege to the city, establishing an encampment completely encircling the city. Anyone caught trying to escape was executed, sometimes by crucifixion, and hung on the city wall for all to see. After five months the walls were breached, the Temple was burned down, and the city was left ruined and desolate. The contemporary Jewish historian, Josephus, records that over one million Jews were killed and 95,000 taken as prisoners, of whom he was one.

All this Jesus foresaw, and when he hears what has happened to the Galileans at the hands of Pilate's men, he takes the opportunity to call on the people to repent, to turn their backs on violence and to take the path of peace, or, as he says, they, too, will perish, like those whose blood was mixed with the blood of their sacrifices.

That, then, is the short-term significance of Jesus' call to repent.

But beyond that lie its longer term and wider applications, the ones that apply to us. First, those whose lives are marred by tragedy and misfortune are no greater sinners than those who appear to sail through life without any problems - the comment that "I must have done something wicked to deserve this," just doesn't apply. Conversely, there is no room for self-congratulation on the part of those whose lives appear to consist of one success after another. As Jesus is recorded as saying in Matthew's gospel, God "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Matthew 5.45). In this life, God treats all equally.

But the parable at the end of our gospel reading suggests that that might not be true in the life to come. Once again, however, I believe that Jesus is speaking with both a short-term and a long-term application.

Jesus' listeners would know that the word "vineyard" in Jesus' parables more often than not referred to the Jewish people. The prophet Jeremiah, for example, relays to the people God's message that he had planted them "like a choice vine of sound and

reliable stock,” asking how they have now turned against him “into a corrupt, wild vine?”

So, at one level, the parable is aimed at the Jewish religious authorities, represented by the fig tree, which despite having been planted for three years and come to maturity, is not producing any fruit. At the request of the gardener, possibly representing Jesus, the owner, God, gives it one more year of careful nurturing, Jesus’ ministry, to become fruitful. If this fails, then the tree is to be cut down.

We’re not told what happens to the tree, but from what I’ve said earlier about the destruction of Jerusalem, it’s clear that the Jews failed to heed Jesus’ warning, with dire consequences.

But what about the long-term application of the parable? How does it apply to us?

For us I think the parable has two things to say. First it tells us of God’s generosity and love. Although the fig tree appears unlikely to fruit, God is prepared to give it one more chance.

Secondly, we’re told that that chance is time-limited. If after one more year, the tree still remains unfruitful, then it’s the chop! In other words, there is no time to waste. God is calling us to repent in the here and now, not at some time in the future.

And that takes us back to the beginning of this sermon. This season of Lent is the time when we need to review our lives, to see whether we are living them in the way that God calls us to. Are we bearing fruit? And if we’re not, then God is offering us the chance to repent.

Our reading from Isaiah makes a similar point, when the prophet says:

“Seek the Lord while he may be found;
call on him while he is near.
Let the wicked forsake his way
and the evil man his thoughts.
Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him,
and to our God, for he will freely pardon.”

Again, there is a sense of urgency – “seek the Lord while he may be found.” Don’t leave it till sometime in the future, for which of us knows how much time we have left on this earth?

And if you think that identifying yourself with the wicked and the evil person is a step too far, don't forget what I quoted from Paul at the beginning of this sermon: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," and Jesus' assumption that all those listening to him needed to repent. In comparison with the perfection of God, what Paul calls his "glory," we are all imperfect and therefore in need of God's forgiveness. And the way to receive his forgiveness is to repent.

So, as I said earlier, we should use the season of Lent to take stock of our lives and identify those areas where repentance may be necessary.

And our reading from Isaiah gives us an idea of what is meant by repentance, for it is more than just saying sorry. The prophet writes "Let the wicked forsake his way." Repentance involves forsaking, leaving behind, all that comes between us and God. This idea is put particularly graphically in the Book of Proverbs:

"As a dog returns to its vomit,
so a fool returns to his folly." (26.11)

And if our repentance is genuine, then, as Isaiah says, God "will freely pardon."

How freely God will pardon is made clear in a conversation Jesus has with Peter, who asked him how many times he should forgive his brother, suggesting seven times. Jesus' response was "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy times seven." And if that is what God demands of us, is he likely to be any less forgiving himself?

But that God is so generous in his forgiveness is not something that we should trade upon. Our repentance must be genuine, with a real intention to change our ways, but if we should fail, despite our efforts to succeed, we can, as Isaiah says, "Turn to the Lord and he will have mercy." Amen.

Prayer Pointers

Pray for time and space to examine our lives and seek repentance. Thank God that he forgives us and enables us to start again.

Pray for St Mary's as they hold their Annual Parochial Meeting this Sunday. For all who will be elected churchwardens and PCC members. For strong and lasting bonds between our two churches.

For Glass Door – an emergency night shelter and support for the homeless operating in Kingston and supported by the Bishop of Southwark’s Lent Call.

Pray for those who are struggling in our neighbourhoods and families: people who are fearful for the future because they are lonely or ill in mind or body. In our congregations pray especially for Barbara Colpus, Julie Bailey and Vicky Pearce.

For the family of Jamie Gilbey, a young volunteer on the weekly soup run supported and staffed by members of St Mary’s and St Francis’, who is missing and presumed to have come to harm. For the specialist police officers supporting his family and those involved in the investigation.

For the soul of Carole Hubbard, for her husband Malcolm and all her family; for the soul of Robert Davis, for his wife Marian and all his family; and for the soul of Cynthia Symes, for her husband Archie, her daughters Joanna and Michelle and all her family. May God help them all to begin again.

Offer our own personal prayers – our deepest needs, our fears, our joys and thanksgivings and for all those who we love dearly.

A Prayer for Ukraine

God of strength and peace, send your blessing on the people of Ukraine. Sustain them in their struggles, hold them in their fear, protect them from all danger, and be for them the hope they desire.

(Composed by Andrew Nunn – Dean of Southwark)

Bishop of Southwark’s Lent Call Prayer 2022

Loving and saving God, we thank you that you have given us a home with you in heaven, help us work to enable others to feel at home in our communities. Give us your generosity of spirit that we might work with our neighbours to bring hope and peace to those around us. Amen.