

# A Voice in the Wilderness ...

The newsletter of  
**The Episcopal Church of St. John the Baptist**

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## April 2007

Spring is in the air, and kids are taking break from school, mud is replacing snow, golf clubs are getting cleaned up, and—most importantly—we prepare for another journey through Holy Week, our participation in the events of Christ's last week on earth. Please try to join us in the all the following events or, if you are not currently resident in Grand County, seek out another congregation of faithful Christians with whom to celebrate.

On Palm/Passion Sunday, the **1<sup>st</sup>**, join our procession (with Pepe the donkey) into Jerusalem to set up the events of Holy Week. Holy Eucharist is at our regular 9AM time.

Participate in the events of the Last Supper on the **5<sup>th</sup>**, as we observe Maundy Thursday with foot-washing and the stripping of the altar.

Join in Jesus' last journey to Golgotha as we do the Stations of the Cross on Friday the **6<sup>th</sup>** at noon. And at 6PM we observe regular Good Friday service with Veneration of the Cross. There will be no Eucharist.

On Saturday the **7<sup>th</sup>**, we celebrate the single highest point of the Christian year, the Easter Vigil service, at 5PM at Cranmer Chapel and 8PM at St. John's. If you have not attended an Easter Vigil service recently, you owe yourself this experience.

And of course we celebrate Easter Day with festive Eucharist, Easter Egg hunt, and Easter brunch, sponsored by the Outreach Committee in support of fighting world hunger.

## *A Word from the Rector*

There is nothing like the powerful celebration of a Holy Week to help put the distractions of church quarrels and politics in perspective and to be reminded of what this church is really about. We are blessed at St. John's that we worship in a community that takes controversial issues seriously, but not personally, and that cares about what happens in the wider church, but is not obsessed with it.

We all insist that the work of the church is about mission and that political disagreements must not be allowed to interfere with mission. So the work of the church goes on. We care for others; we nurture our own, we worship with quality; we inquire for meaning and truth; we celebrate all of life; and we share this faith, this way of life, with others (our core values). We do these things because we do not take the issues personally (it's not about us) and because we are not obsessed with what is going on in the wider church. And Holy Week reminds us of what is truly important in our work here and who we are doing it for.

But it is not simply that Holy Week distracts us from the unpleasantness going on in the wider church. Holy Week also provides the meaning, the theology, for responding to it. For as we walk through Holy Week, we can participate in Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and remember that it was not too long ago that we could celebrate a (much more) unified church and Anglican Communion. As those cheering Jesus did not foresee the events of the coming week, neither did we foresee the events unfolding to disturb our ecclesiastical confidence. And we can participate in Jesus' arrest, beating, conviction, and execution. We can hit rock bottom with Jesus on Good Friday. And we can despair over Holy Saturday.

Until Easter Morning. And then we can no longer despair. As we emerge from our wilderness experience into the bright light of Easter, we rise to share in the life of the risen Christ. God always brings life out of death, and if God brings life out of death, how much more certainly will he bring life—new life—out of the travails of the Church. The bones of this old church may be dry, but not so dry that they will not be raised to dance and sing!

Easter demands that there be no such thing as a Christian pessimist. As Paul says, we know that God works through all things for good to them who know the Lord. "All things" includes our own weaknesses and sins. God has, God does, and God will continue to work through the Episcopal Church—despite ourselves.

✠ Fr. Spencer

## *Notes about Ministries*

### **Art and Architecture Committee re-formed**

Kudos and our appreciation to Terry McFee, who has agreed to take on the chairmanship of the old Art and Architecture Committee, now restructured as Art, Architecture, and Landscape (AAL) Committee. The committee's work had been essentially "on hold" since Karen Hronek had been forced to give up her work there. There is much to do around the church and Cranmer Chapel, so the committee has a full slate. Assisting Terry are committee members, Fr. Spencer, Deacon Sally, Sally Ackley, Michael Cervantes, Al Clark, Leah Lietzke, Kathe Morck, and Joan Von der Heiden.

### **A little learning ...**

... can be a very good thing, and we had a lot of good things going on during our Lenten teaching service. All five sessions had strong and lively turnouts, as Fr. Spencer led five sessions exploring the history, theology, and liturgy behind the use of the Nicene Creed in our worship. Thanks to all for supporting this series.

### **A holy table service**

The following persons were installed as members of Altar Guild as the March 25 Sunday service: Joan Von der Heiden (head), Gene Ackley, Betty Clark, Donna Evleth, Eleanor Holley, Deb Lynd, Marilyn Orr (in absentia, from her Sunday School classroom), and Rae Wilson. A big "Thank You" and round of applause for all these folks whose work is vital to every service we hold at St. John's.

### **Our man in Haiti; our couple in France**

Check out the newspaper clippings from the Boulder Camera posted in the Parish Hall. They published an extensive two part series of articles on the work of the Colorado Haiti Project. It is a splendid in-depth look at the diocesan mission work in Petit-Trou de Nippes, featuring the work of the priest we pray for weekly, Fr. Kesner Gracia (note not Garcia; and isn't "grace" a great name for a priest?) Stop by to browse the articles and to see the picture of Fr. Gracia, putting a face to a name we pray for so regularly.

And check the bulletin board in the communication center outside the kitchen for the latest newsletter from Dan and Nancy Clark, our missionaries in France to the Muslims of France and North Africa. There are also great pictures included with the news. And for our friends outside of Grand County, you can check the attachment to this newsletter.

### **Cross my palm**

A brief but lively party was held the Friday before Palm Sunday to construct palm crosses for distribution at the Palm Sunday service. Monica Fuqua was the guiding spirit, as she instructed an eager crew in just how to fold the palms in order to produce the perfect cross. The eager crew consisted of Al and Betty Clark, Deacon Sally, Betty Cranmer, Tyler Orr, Marilyn Orr, Jeanie Kemp, Jessica Kemp (and a Lutheran friend), Alexandra Maes, and Fr. Spencer. All went from klutzes to experts in just a few minutes.

## *Updates from the Church Family*

### **A very “Friendly” surprise!**

March 25 turned out to be a very special day at St. John’s, as Pauline Friend, with son Bruce, paid a surprise visit for Sunday services. Most of us did not know that Pauline had improved enough to be able to handle our altitude, but although she was packing oxygen, she showed her typically buoyant and upbeat personality. By the time you are reading this, Pauline will likely be in Arizona for several weeks before returning to Denver for the summer. It has been a long and difficult road back for Pauline, and it was a wonderful treat to see her looking and sounding so good. Keep up the good work, Pauline, until we no longer need to give these updates. (People are getting tired of these bad puns on your name!)

### **More good news**

Sally Ackley continues to do well as she rehabs from surgery to repair her badly broken arm and shoulder, injured in a fall on the ice last month, and she expects to be back in church for Palm Sunday or Easter Day at the latest. It will be good to see her back. Her recovery is hastened by good “pet therapy” from Golden Retriever Cady, the newest addition to the Ackley household.

### **Bravo, Jeff!**

Jeff Harper, snow board instructor, website designer, and documentary film maker extraordinaire, traveled to Munich, Germany, in February after the film he edited was named one of three finalists for a VAST award. The VAST award is an international ski video competition. This year they received over 100 entries from all over the world. Jeff’s film, which was made for Winter Park, received awards for best editing and best overall film. Congratulations, Jeff.

### **Boys will be boys**

Fr. Spencer welcomed his brother Richard for several days in mid-March for a visit highlighted by two trips to the ski slopes. They had never skied together before and had a good time giving each other a bad time, if you know what I mean. Spencer teased his brother about falling down once, though he had to concede that the fact he (Spencer) skied into him and knocked him over may have had something to do with it. Both look forward to the annual “Boys’ Golf Week” in September. (Richard is better at golf, too.)

## *Sermon of the Month*

*Sermon preached by Fr. Spencer on March 25<sup>th</sup> (Lent 5)*

Those who sowed with tears will reap with songs of joy. What a wonderful image the psalmist offers us! What a wonderful promise for people of faith! We may struggle now; we may be rejected and abused now, but the promise is that if we persevere in faith, there will be joy.

It is the familiar Gospel message of reversal. We see it in the passage Jesus cites from another psalm: the stone the builders rejected will become the cornerstone. Prophets who are rejected will be vindicated. Small insignificant Israel will become the light to the nations. Jesus—the weak and despised and humiliated Jesus—arises in triumph.

We can all cite many cases in which individuals took a stand and were vilified for it, but persevered and triumphed. These people often come to be seen as great prophets. I haven't seen the movie *Amazing Grace* yet, but it tells the story of Bishop Wilberforce in England, who was rejected and abused for his abolitionist stand against slavery. It had to be difficult—he sowed with tears, but reaped with songs of joy. He is vindicated and honored. Think of the abuse that Martin Luther King took as he sowed the seeds for the civil rights movement; he sowed with truly bitter tears and now has a national holiday named for him. Or think of the abuse and the rejection early women's rights activists suffered. They sowed with tears and came to reap with songs of joy. All these people knew rejection and abuse, but today the ideals they urged are at the cornerstone of our modern conception of justice.

And in this respect they shared in the sufferings of Christ. As Christ was rejected and became the cornerstone, so were they rejected and yet came to conquer. Surely, it is to be expected that if one faithfully carries Jesus' message, one will find rejection and abuse. It is to be expected and, as Paul says, it is to be treasured as part of sharing in Christ's suffering.

Perhaps these reflections are relevant to our experience in the Episcopal Church today. At least it is one way of understanding our current situation. We are experiencing rejection and abuse both from within our own church and from around the world, from people who, we would normally expect to be our friends and supporters. We are being rejected for living into our faith as best we can, and for those of us who value being in the Anglican Communion, we are sowing with tears.

Sowing with tears? Well, I, for one, feel like crying when I think that the Christian church of which I am a part cannot manage this disagreement without bitterness and division. The newspapers reported on Wednesday that the Episcopal Church refused to compromise its autonomy (or, perhaps, to share its authority; it is so hard to describe these things in neutral terms) by turning power over to Third World bishops. And we refused to back away from a commitment to full equality for all—including gay men and lesbians. The papers suggested that this almost surely means that we will be punished by other Anglicans around the world, well, I felt like crying. And I felt like crying the day before when I read another story. The papers reported that despite the abuse and the rejection from their leaders, the churches of the global Anglican Communion were continuing to receive millions of dollars from the Episcopal Church. And one critic of the national church responded to this news by accusing it of trying to buy off the consciences of poor people with bribes. Imagine if we were cutting off support; then we would be accused of being vindictive and of punishing people who disagree with us. I felt like I was sowing with tears.

So we are suffering. But is it Christ's suffering? Is our suffering to be identified with Jesus'? Well, if it is to be Christ's suffering, we certainly must respond as Christ responded. Not only must we be true to the Gospel as we can best understand it, we must remain loving; we

must continue to reach out; we must forgive those who may hurt us. That was Christ's response to suffering and, as hard as it may be for us, it must be ours.

But whatever our response, the question remains: Is our suffering, our rejection, one with Christ's? Another way of putting this is to ask the question whether my assimilation of these biblical texts to our current situation is valid? I think we must answer that we cannot know this for sure. It is true that some of our church's critics are very big on certainty. They are certain enough that ECUSA is off the rails, and it does not seem to many of us that they are very open to any different understanding. But we can never be certain that we know that mind of God, especially when many good and faithful Christians differ with us. We can only discern, and pray, as powerfully as we can that we sow not only with tears, but with truth and wisdom.

If this is true, if it is fair to see these texts as about us here and now, then—like Wilberforce, M.L. King, and those supporting the full inclusion of women in the church and in society—we can be confident that the rejection we are experiencing is indeed the same rejection that Christ experienced, and that in the end we will reap with songs of joy. We can be sure that what is now rejected will become the cornerstone. This is a promise that we have.

And if it is not true, if we are indeed in ways we cannot understand, off the rails, if we are wrong; then we have another promise. We have the promise that our trespasses will be forgiven. Even as we forgive those who trespass against us.

✠ Fr. Spencer