

# A Voice in the Wilderness ...

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

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## May 2007

Warm weather has recently hit the high country, turning the mud to hardened dirt pack and signaling the time for spring cleaning, for brushing up one's golf swing, for following pennant races, and for ... well, you fill in your own favorite springtime activity. At St. John's we look forward to the following events.

Your vestry will be taking in a one-day workshop in Glenwood Springs on **Saturday the 12<sup>th</sup>**.

At least one and perhaps two teams of golfers will represent St. John's at the annual Grand Swing, a golf tournament held at Grand Elk on **Monday the 21<sup>st</sup>** to benefit the Heart of the Mountains Hospice.

And our spring/summer music night will be held at the home of Karla and Fr. Spencer **6PM Friday June 1<sup>st</sup>**.

Fr. Spencer will be on vacation from **June 4—10**.

## *A Word from the Rector*

Many of you are familiar with the admonition attributed to St. Francis: “Preach the Gospel constantly; when necessary, use words!” The point, of course, is that the most powerful testimony about the Gospel is in the difference it makes in our lives. And just last Sunday, the Gospel reading made the same point. The people in the temple demanded of Jesus that if he were the Messiah that he “tell them plainly.” Jesus responded that he has indeed told them plainly, through the works that he does in his Father’s name.

We live in a world in which many of us find it difficult to talk with others about our faith. This can be either about our own uncertainties or it can be about respecting the privacy of others. So it can sound like good news that Jesus and St. Francis suggest that we put aside talking and preach the Gospel through our works. Well, it can sound like good news until we actually come to realize how difficult it is to lead a life that consistently lets the life of Christ show through. This is hard, at least as hard as talking about our faith, and we know that we all fall short of St. Francis’ ideal.

Sometimes when our own witness fails, however, we can be picked up by other parts of the church. Other Christians pick up the slack for us; or perhaps the church as a whole makes a powerful witness in our behalf. Ken Von der Heiden recently shared with the Saturday morning Men’s Bible Breakfast a wonderful example of this.

Most of you are painfully aware of the conflict between the Diocese of Colorado and the Rev. Don Armstrong, former rector of Grace Church and St. Stephen’s in Colorado Springs. Now is not the time to rehearse the accusations made by the diocese, nor the counter-charges made in response. (If you wish information about the situation, go to [www.coloradodiocese.org](http://www.coloradodiocese.org) and click on “Media Information.”)

Ken, as a member of the diocesan Standing Committee, has always quite properly kept confidentiality about the details of the ongoing investigation. But he did share with us a comment from one of the diocesan lawyers. The lawyer said that he was very glad to have worked on this case, because he had learned so much. About the law? No, he went on to say that he had learned a lot from how the diocese had handled the case—with generosity, respect, and compassion for all those concerned, bending over backward to observe due process, exemplifying fairness at every step; he had learned how human beings might better treat each other even under enormous stress.

None of us know what may lie ahead in this unfortunate story. But, however it is resolved, what a wonderful witness this is to the rest of the world! Thanks to our bishop Rob O’Neill for leading our diocese in a way that allows us all to participate in this Christian witness, for emulating St. Francis by preaching the Gospel constantly with deeds.

† Fr. Spencer

## *Notes about Ministries*

### **Fore!**

It is not too late to sign up for the Grand Swing golf tournament to support the Heart of the Mountain Hospice. The tournament will be played Monday, May 21, 8:30 in the morning. Good fun, good cause—even if the golf isn't. No truth to the rumors, started by Walter McLaughlin, that our team will be called the Holy Hackers.

### **A blooming Easter!**

Many thanks to all those who stepped up and made donations for our Easter lilies. We had a beautiful and fragrant Easter service. We received donations from the following persons:

- ❖ Deacon Sally and Don Hicks, in loving memory of their granddaughter Katie
- ❖ Florice and John Lietzke, in loving appreciation for their sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren
- ❖ Loretta and Walter McLaughlin, in loving memory of Ann and Alfred Menucci and Jerome and Frances McLaughlin
- ❖ Rae and Walter Wilson, in loving memory of Evelyn Wilson and Henry Hunt
- ❖ The Orr Family, in loving memory of Bill Orr, father and grandfather
- ❖ Katherine and Eric Mowrey, in loving memory of Lola Chester
- ❖ Jeanie Kemp, in loving memory of her father Luther Holley and in loving appreciation for the blessings of her family
- ❖ Jim Cartwright, in loving appreciation for his mother, Jean Cartwright
- ❖ Eleanor Holley, in memory of all loved ones lost
- ❖ The Kirk Lietzke family, in loving memory of Marty Thoen
- ❖ Ann and Lorie Wheeler in loving memory of their parents
- ❖ Shirley Siems
- ❖ Donna and Dick Evleth
- ❖ Sally and Gene Ackley
- ❖ Karla and Fr. Spencer in loving memory of Fr. John and Cassie Pyle

### **Wanted: a photo bug**

St. John's has in its possession several folders filled with pictures taken over the last several years. We still need someone to volunteer to sort through these and to mount them in photo albums to preserve more of St. John's history. Surely there are some folks who would really enjoy this work!

### **The Voices of "A Voice"**

Ever wonder where your copy of "A Voice in the Wilderness" comes from? It begins with Fr. Spencer, who creates most of the actual copy, with the occasional very welcome contribution of others. He throws everything at Catherine, who organizes it and forwards it to Nicole Robinson and Al Clark. Nicole sends it out to all those who receive it by e-mail. Al—with Betty's help—produces the hard copy edition and distributes it at church and by mail to those who are electronically, shall we say, less than up-to-date. Special thanks to Catherine, Nicole, Al, and Betty. And while we are at it, everyone is encouraged to spend items of interest to Fr. Spencer, who would appreciate contributions very much.

# *Updates from the Church Family*

## **Answering the call**

Catherine Volland—occasional summer visitor and editor of this newsletter—has just been named a postulant to the priesthood in the Diocese of Minnesota. Catherine is a graduate of Iliff Theological School in Denver and also helped out in the preparation of our confirmands two years ago. She can continue to serve in the Diocese of Colorado, at least until her ordination. So it will soon be “Mother Catherine.” Congratulations!

## **Moving to the mountain**

Jim Cartwright announced in church last Sunday that he has moved his mother, Jean, to the nursing home care program at Kremmling Memorial Hospital. Both Jim and Jean are delighted with the new arrangement, which will make it possible for Jim to visit on a more regular basis. We are all very happy with how this worked out.

## **Comings and goings**

Ken and Joan Von der Heiden recently returned from vacationing in New Zealand, where they had a wonderful time, including celebrating Easter in the Anglican Cathedral in Christchurch ... Walter and Rae Wilson are off visiting family in New Mexico ... Stu and Marilyn Findley are sojourning for a time in Washington State, where they will be tour guides at a fish hatchery, and where they will be closer at hand for the birth this summer of their first granddaughter! ... Al and Betty Clark have just returned from a visit to their old stomping grounds in Idaho Falls ... Jerry Woods will be returning to Granby the first week of May to enjoy reuniting with old friends and (we hear) to show off his new diesel pick-up.

## **The installation of a priest**

The Rev. Tim Thaden, formerly vicar at Trinity Church in Kremmling was installed as Rector of St. John Chrysostom, Golden, last Wednesday, May 2. Tim and Kathy have many friends throughout Grand County who all wish them well in their new ministry in Golden.

## **Reconnecting**

Don and Sally Hicks recently visited our former priest, Kelsey Hogue, at his and Debbie's new home in Scott's Bluff, Nebraska. They report that both Kelsey and Debbie are thriving. Kelsey is guiding the process of combining two smaller churches into one, now known as St. Francis's. They have land for a new church building, which they will be starting on in perhaps three years.

## *Updates from the Church Family, con't.*

### **A distinguished physicist**

Don Hicks has been named Distinguished Alumni of the Physics Department at his alma mater, Colorado State University. He and Sally visited campus to receive the award, and Don spoke with current students, mostly about getting jobs, according to Sally.

### **Another missionary journey**

St. John's prays weekly for two missionary efforts which we support: Joanne LeClair and Protus at the Kenyan Children's Foundation, and Dan and Nancy Clark, who have the extremely challenging ministry of working among Muslims in the south of France and in North Africa. But for the next month our prayers also go out to Cyndi Karnoscak, who is traveling and working with missionaries in France and Greece. Cyndi has previously spent several years doing mission work in Greece with her late husband.

### **The vision thing**

David Moen, who suffered a concussion and blurred vision while skiing while visiting here last winter, writes to say that unfortunately his vision has not improved since returning home to Bainbridge, Washington. The doctors are still hopeful that the damaged nerve will heal on its own, but if this hasn't happened in another three months, surgery will be considered. David and wife Fran are close friends of St. John's, who often visit while staying at Snow Mountain Ranch. Please keep David and Fran in your prayers.

## *From Your Senior Warden*

The Vestry is off to a great start this year, taking on new challenges as well as working on some “old business.” One of the persistent challenges is the stewardship of Cranmer Memorial Chapel. The winter weather took its toll on the old building, with leakage in the basement and warping of the floor and door jam. Walter McLaughlin and I scraped snow off the roof once and I came back later to finish the job. Ken Von der Heider took a turn or two scraping snow. Kirk Lietzke came to the flooded basement’s rescue with a pump. Thanks everyone for your help!

In spite of these efforts, the damage occurs. The Vestry has discussed this and decided to undertake further analysis of the building and its future. We decided to convene a sub-committee to evaluate the economics of maintaining a ministry at the chapel. The sub-committee, headed by Eric Mowrey, will study the costs of maintaining the building and the probable future costs, as well as the funds available to meet those costs. Fr. Spencer will prepare a report on the ministries including average attendance at services. We plan to have a final decision made by the end of the year. We are considering three alternatives: (1) continue status quo, (2) total renovation of the building, and (3) disposal of the building. The Vestry is mindful of the seriousness of this undertaking. This will not be an easy decision. Everyone recognizes the contribution of the chapel to the Winter Park community as the only church building in town.

The two primary responsibilities of a church vestry are to “take care of the parish finances and parish buildings” (from: *The Vestry Handbook*). When these two responsibilities conflict, as may be the case of Cranmer, we have a difficult choice to make. We encourage all who care about the chapel to offer constructive suggestions—and prayers can’t hurt!

*Brad*

## *Sermon of the Month*

*Sermon preached Sunday, April 29th*

“If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly,” the people gathered round Jesus in the temple asked. We can all sympathize with this demand. We all want it laid out for us clearly, plainly, easily understood, easy to make sense of. And then we’ll get it, right? I cannot read this Gospel without thinking of our recently departed friend, Betty Jo, and some of our bible studies. She would get so exasperated. I would try to say what I thought a difficult passage meant, and she would say, “Well if it means that, why didn’t they just say it that way?” I can just see her hands on her hips. Betty Jo, we—most of the time—and the people in the temple stand as one: please just tell us plainly.

Scholars sometime raise the question of what they call the problem of unbelief. Why is it that people hear the Gospel but do not accept it? Essentially, Jesus’ hearers in the temple are giving an answer to the problem of unbelief. Their answer is that the message is simply not clear enough. If they were told the truth plainly, then they could believe. But Jesus will have none of it! He says, “I have told you and you do not believe. The works that I do testify to me.” Do you hear that? Jesus is saying that the clearest and loudest testimony to him is in what he does. Would his listeners have believed if he had told them plainly that he was the Messiah? You see, that is what is so implausible: that people who had seen and heard Jesus wouldn’t accept the testimony of their eyes and ears but would suddenly believe if he would just tell them!

But, perhaps, when Jesus insists that people look at his deeds rather than what he claims for himself, he is making a deeper point. Perhaps it’s not just that plain words aren’t enough. Perhaps it is that words—any words—are not enough. Perhaps grasping who Jesus’ identity is not a matter of words, arguments, logic, or evidence. Perhaps it is more a matter of seeing, hearing, and then just “getting it.” Perhaps it is just a matter of “seeing” that this man—what he does and what he teaches—is of God. That there is a goodness and a beauty and a “rightness” that is so deep and powerful that it cannot be resisted. If this is what conversion is about, it is a much more powerful experience than simply hearing an argument and being convinced. Those seeking a “plain” truth so that they can understand and be persuaded are missing the point. They do not “get it.”

Jesus, I believe, wants us to see, hear, and to “get it.” But sometimes, often in fact, we are not in a place to “get it.” We are distracted. We have other commitments, agendas. Things, the world, get in the way. Surely we have all known what it is like to suddenly realize that something is true and that we have been told before that it was true, and that we were simply not in a place where we could see it. Or accept it.

So the problem of unbelief arises in another form. The problem now is that people are sometimes not in a position to be able to “get it.” And we need to understand when others are not in a place to hear. I think especially of people who are not in a place to be able to hear the Gospel, especially people near and dear to us. Probably all of us have people close to us, whom we love deeply, who do not “get it,” who do not see who Jesus is. We try to help them see—by telling and by showing through deeds, but they are not open; things are in the way; they are not in a place to hear. But the lesson of experience here is that even in these situations we are not to despair. A man that I loved very much tried to help me see who Jesus was at a time when I was not in a place to hear. And this good man died before I was in a place to hear. He never knew—in this life—that I came to be in a place to hear and that one of the voices that I heard, that I still heard, was his. That his testimony—both his words and his deeds—were not wasted.

This theme is echoed in the book of Romans that we are studying in our Thursday afternoon Bible Study. Paul confronts the problem of unbelief in a particularly dramatic case, that of Israel. As Paul is preaching his Gospel, Gentiles are hearing and accepting, but, in the main, Israel as whole is not. Why is this? Is God's promise to Israel going to fail? It may look that way. Paul says (11:28, Revised English Bible translation) that to judge from their response, they are against God and that they are lost. But, he goes on to say, judged by God's choice, they are loved by him, chosen by him, and in the end, Paul insists, all Israel will be saved. Israel's response—their inability to see who Jesus is—will not trump God's promise.

But if Paul is right about Israel, we must be able to say the same thing about the Gentiles, or about anyone. For if God's promise and his choice of Israel means that Israel will not be lost, then his choice of us and of all who do not respond means that they will not be lost. Even those who are not in a place to hear, even those who—if we judge by their response, are lost; even those, by God's choice, will be saved. In the end none will be snatched out of God's hand; in the end we are all sheep of the one shepherd.

“Tell us plainly,” so that we may respond. But fundamentally, in the end, it is God's choice not our response that will matter. And that is a response of grace, forgiveness, love, and acceptance. For all of us.

✠ Fr. Spencer