

A Voice in the Wilderness ...

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

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The dry, hot winds of summer are starting to blow, and we can only pray that the recent fire at the YMCA is not a harbinger of more to come. But with all the dead trees and piles of slash around, people are nervous. Kudos to those who are doing fire mitigation work on their properties.

Celebrate the 4th at the Granby parade and gets lots of free candy thrown from our St. John's float.

If the Winter Park Art Fair is coming up – and it is – can St. John's annual Anglican High Tea be far behind? Be sure to save time during the day on the 21st to indulge yourself with this special treat.

The second of our three services of Compline on the Lake will be the 22nd at 5PM at the Grand Lake Marina.

Loaves and Fishes Sunday is the 29th. Shopping lists will be distributed for two Sundays before the ingathering.

And it may yet not be too late to obtain tickets to the Central City Opera's performance of *La Traviata* on the 29th for St. Paul's Central City "Day at the Opera" fundraiser.

A Word from the Rector

Having just returned from a clericus of the Northwestern Mission Region held in Vail, I have been reflecting on the state of our church at various levels: parish, diocese, national church, communion.

First, I want to share with you the positive feeling at the clericus (a gathering of clergy to share news, ideas, support). Clergy were there from the churches in Dillon, Breckenridge, Buena Vista, Glenwood Springs, Leadville, Aspen, Craig, and Vail. It was heartening to hear the positive news that everyone had to share about what was going on in their churches. And Bishop O'Neill also had good news from the diocese. Despite all the distractions associated with our well-publicized disputes, the Episcopal Church is growing in Colorado. We have twice as many congregations that are growing than we did two years ago, and overall average Sunday attendance is up over the same time period.

Second, although these distractions certainly have a negative influence upon time, energy, and resources, the diocese is continuing to move ahead with dynamic plans for increased ministry. The bishop shared two dreams. One is for a state of the art convention and camping center to serve the diocese. Described as a BHAG (a big, hairy, audacious goal), this will be a major project over many years, involving significant fundraising. A second and more immediate goal is to establish a diocesan missionary for Hispanic ministry. It was stressed that this is to be a ministry to bring Hispanics and non-Hispanics together in worship and not to establish a separate entity.

Third, the Rev. Bruce McNab (Aspen) reported on the work of the diocesan task force, meeting to recommend to the bishop a way forward for Colorado. He reported that the task force has come to believe strongly that our diocese needs to find its own way, regardless of what actions our national church or the international Anglican Communion might take. Our path must be about who we are and what our own vision is, and not simply reactive to others. He stressed that even more important than the product of their work is the process that they are going through. Our task force—consisting of very different people with very different styles and ideas—is bonding in Christian love and community in a way that bodes very well for the diocese. If only, Bruce said, the national church and the Communion could model this kind of community.

But we still do face significant challenges. Until the legal action involved in returning certain Colorado Springs properties to the diocese is completed, we will continue to see a siphoning off of energy and resources.

And the diocese continues to struggle with a very small budget compared to other comparably sized dioceses. Unfortunately, for reasons having nothing to do with theological differences, Colorado churches have a long history of not adequately funding their diocese. I am proud to say that St. John's pledges and fulfills its pledge of 15% of our total pledge and plate income to the diocese. If all parishes and missions did the same, the budget of the diocese would double, the bishop reported.

It is hurtful, at least to me, to realize that not all our sister parishes and missions are willing to make this commitment, and we know that some of the churches who do not have resources that dwarf those of St. John's. And I wonder how these churches preach financial

stewardship to their members, when they themselves do not model good stewardship—when they themselves will not take the appropriate percentage off from the top of their own income to share with the wider church.

But it is not for us to judge. Our task is to be joyfully faithful, and it is inspiring to see that our diocese is responding faithfully as well. We know that good things are happening at St. John's—that God's work is being done here, and that the same can be said of the Diocese of Colorado.

✠ Fr. Spencer

Notes about Ministries

A fair turnout

Despite low attendance that Sunday, we hear good reports from the Volunteer Fair held after services on June 10. Highlighted by a power point presentation by Don Hicks on administration and finance, the fair was an opportunity to visit, to learn, and to share ideas on various ministry opportunities at St. John's. Thanks to Don and to Brad Orr for overseeing this project.

"You light up our life!"

Worshippers at St. John's on Sunday, June 24th, the feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist (tr.), were greeted with two new, and quite splendid, banners featuring our patron saint. These were, of course, the good work of Deacon Sally Hicks, who has gifted St. John's with many banners and other visual delights over the years. In a burst of creative activity, she has also donated banners of bright red and orange flames for Pentecost, which we broke in May 27th, and two banners featuring mountains for permanent display in the parish hall. Thank you, Sally, for continuing to make such a contribution to our worship life.

I think that I shall never see

A ministry announcement as lovely as a tree. Or a flower and rock garden with a pathway and bench. The next time you are at St. John's be sure to check out the back lawn area next to the columbarium. A delightful area for rest and/or contemplation is under construction, compliments of the Morck family. The tree went in last year, and Makenna and Kathe put the finishing touches on rocks and a well-chipped pathway just last week. Flowers and bench coming to a location near you very soon. Thanks, so much, Bill, Kathe, and Makenna.

From the mission field

We have received wonderful newsy reports both from the Clark family in Marseilles and from Joanne LeClair with the Kenyan Children's Foundation. Both ministries are active and productive, and the full story can be found at a church bulletin board near you (just outside the kitchen). Check them out.

Updates from the Church Family

Boo-hoo!

We regret having to report that Phil Maes, Jeannine Aberg-Maes, and Alexandra are leaving us. Phil has accepted a position as head of human services in whatever county Salida is located in, and is leaving this month. Jeannine and Alexandra will be following in August. We know that this is clearly a good move for the family, but this is of course a serious loss for St. John's and to each of us personally. We will miss you! We hope you will be able to get back occasionally to visit.

On the mend

Pauline Friend underwent surgery on June 22 at Porter Hospital. It was a long procedure, but Pauline is recovering well and expects to be home with son Bruce in a few days. This should be the last surgery she will need after a tough couple of years. When she is sufficiently recovered, Pauline plans to move to Arizona year round. Fortunately we still have family here in Grand County to lure her back occasionally.

"I can see clearly now . . ."

Great news from Fran Moen that husband David's vision has been improving in the wake of his ski accident. It's looking like he may not need surgery at this point.

"Now you see them, now . . ."

Some of us had the pleasure of seeing Karen and Peter Hronek during their visit to Grand County three weeks ago. They both looked good, and it was especially good to see Peter getting stronger and with his sense of humor still well intact. Unfortunately, a whirlwind schedule of visits took its toll on Peter's energy, and they had to return to Arizona before a visit to St. John's on Sunday that they had planned. Next time!

A guy named Joe

Our Thursday afternoon Bible study last week had a surprise visitor when Joe Wetherill dropped by to say "Hello." Joe is in good shape and looking forward to his 90th birthday this September, which he hopes to celebrate in Grand Lake. Unfortunately, Joe finds it very hard to get up and out early enough to worship with us Sunday mornings.

Another victory in a "grudge match"

Gene Ackley reports that once again the Episcopalians outshone the Presbyterians in participation in the annual Habitat Hobble on June 16. So be sure to tease all your Presbyterian friends unmercifully. (Normally, we recommend mercy, but in this case we will make an exception.)

Updates from the Church Family, con't.

He's a retiring sort

Congratulations to John McFee, who has officially joined the ranks of the retired, joining wife Terry in this blessed state. This will enable them to spend more time at their Florida condo. But when in Colorado, they will be full time in Grand Lake, which will be nice.

How does she do that?

We are delighted to report that in her very first year of participation, Jessica Kemp has been scoring very high (a couple of third places) in statewide gymnastics competition. Congratulations, Jessica, and keep up the good work—from all those of us who have trouble touching our toes!

A priesting in our future

It was announced in church two weeks ago that Catherine Volland (full time member of the Cathedral in Denver and part-time with us here) has been accepted as postulant for the priesthood in the Diocese of Minnesota. Catherine is a graduate of Iliff School of Theology in Denver and has helped Fr. Spencer with confirmation classes at St. John's. We will celebrate by hearing Catherine as guest preacher on Sunday, July 8. Be sure to make it to support Catherine.

Sermon of the Month

Sermon preached by Fr. Spencer on Sunday, June 10, 2007

“You are the man!” When Nathan said these words to David just about 3,000 years ago, he did not mean what people mean at golf tournaments when they yell, after a good shot, “You da man!” David has a serious problem of self-recognition; he does not recognize himself as the man he is. He has committed terrible actions, actions which he surely knew were wrong. But he probably rationalized them. “Of course I shouldn’t have committed adultery with Bathsheba, but I was weak and, after all, I didn’t intend that she should get pregnant. And, then, well, it was important to protect the state and the office of the king from scandal, so I’ve got to cover it up. But then Uriah wouldn’t cooperate and, well, you know, after all, he might have been killed in the fighting anyway.” And so on.

David did not recognize himself as the sinner he was until Nathan helped him see his actions through the eyes of others. David had the same problem that all of us have to some degree or another. We tend to rationalize our own actions in ways that we do not allow for in others, and so we do not see ourselves truly. And neither do we see the other person truly. Nathan actually provides a great service to David. By having his own actions described to him in a way that enabled him to judge them as if they were performed by another, and then hearing the accusatory words “You are the man!—You are the man you just condemned,” David is forced to see himself as he truly is.

What this story suggests to me is just how much we need—and how difficult it is to exercise—“moral imagination.” The imagination to put ourselves in the shoes of others and to see both the other and ourselves from a point of view not our own.

And I think that this failure of moral imagination is one of the contributing factors to the poisoning of discourse in our society and in our church. We see it all the time in political discussions between two disputants when each insists upon attributing to others the worst possible motives. Can we have the moral imagination to grasp that those who disagree with us might have motives as good as our own? Can we come to see how the issue might look to others? Opponents of the war in Iraq are routinely accused of wanting the U.S. to lose, even of being traitors; is it really so hard to imagine that from that point of view, ending the war is in the best interest of the country? Defenders of the president’s policy in Iraq are routinely accused of stubbornness and denial of reality; is it really so hard to imagine that from that point of view, it still seems possible that victory can be obtained there? Must we assume that their problem is one of bad motives?

I think of moral imagination whenever I hear anyone who, like nearly all of us, was raised in relative privilege—strong homes, safe neighborhoods, freedom from want, good schools—argue for getting tough on the underprivileged who have difficulty measuring up to society’s expectation. It is as if such people believe that all their middle class values, including their work ethic, would somehow be just as they are if they had grown up on streets infested with drug dealers and gangs. Can we have the moral imagination to consider that we might not be the people we are without all the advantages we have had?

Here’s another question. What is our response to illegal aliens to be? Do we see them only as lawbreakers—as people to be punished? Or can we have the moral imagination to ask

ourselves what choices we might have made, had we been in their shoes, had we found it extremely difficult to support a family in Mexico, with opportunities for economic success just across the border. Would all of those who are loudest in their denunciations of illegal immigrants themselves have chosen to remain in poverty rather than to cross a border for economic opportunity?

There is a saying, that one should not judge another until one has walked a mile in their shoes. (And someone has responded, Yes. That way you are a mile away from them and you still have their shoes!) This saying is a plea for the exercise of moral imagination.

Moral imagination. The ability and the willingness to imagine what we would do in another's shoes and what they might do in ours. The ability to imagine how a situation or an issue might look to a well-meaning person on the other side of that situation or issue.

Nathan helped or, rather, forced David to see who he was. David was able to see, and it dramatically changed him.

And what does all this have to do with the Gospel of Jesus Christ? This moral imagination is essential to living into the Gospel, if only because it is an essential part of the Golden Rule. Only through the use of moral imagination can we even begin to treat others as we would have them treat us. But beyond that, only moral imagination can enable us to live together in community with differences, because it enables us to respect others with differences; it is an essential part of not making ourselves the center of all things or the measure of all things. It is at the root of perhaps all the Gospel virtues, including generosity, hospitality, and the demand to see Christ in others.

The challenge "You are the man!" is the challenge to see ourselves truly, to see others truly, so that we may live together in respect and love. So that we may live the Gospel.

† Fr. Spencer