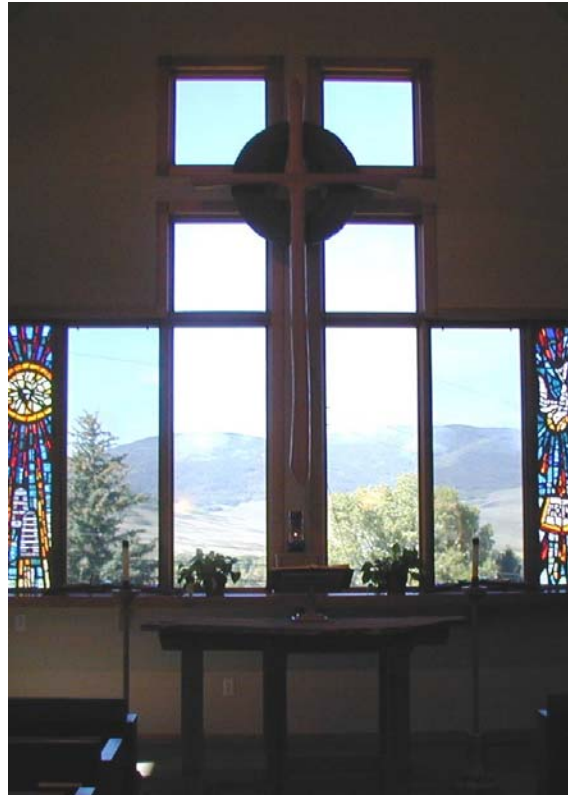


A Voice in the Wilderness

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST



NOVEMBER 2007

Yes, the signs of the coming winter are becoming harder and harder to ignore. Golfers are glum; skiers are beginning to get excited. But we at St. John's are getting excited for other reasons: upcoming visits from two of our favorite clergy.

On Friday the 2nd and Sunday the 4th we welcome the Rev. Nina Stasser, who will preside and preach, respectively at our All Faithful Departed and All Saints' Sunday services.

And on Sunday the 11th we celebrate a visitation from our bishop, the Rt. Rev. Robert J. O'Neill. The bishop will preach and celebrate Holy Eucharist with us and then meet with parishioners afterward.

Fr. Spencer will be out of the office from the 1st–6th on silent retreat and from the 13th–15th for the annual diocesan clergy conference.

Sunday the 18th we will mark Hospice Month with a presentation of the Hospice Tree from Heart of the Mountain Hospice immediately after Sunday services.

Thanksgiving Day the 22nd will be the first Cranmer Dinner of this ski season.

A Word from the Rector

The Gift of a Bishop

There are usually several choices for a theme to share with you on this page. This month, for example, I could certainly write about our stewardship pledge drive and about how we need to move ahead more powerfully in our commitment to giving financially to St. John's.

Or I could share with you my plans for my silent retreat at the Jesuits' Sacred Heart Retreat Center the first week of November and how we all need times of spiritual refreshment.

And a little reflection would undoubtedly turn up other possibilities. But this month, there is really no question about what to share with you. The standout event of this month is the visitation on Sunday, November 11, of our bishop, the Rt. Rev. Robert O'Neill. Bishop Rob will be with us for that Sunday's service and, as of this writing, we expect that he will be joining us for coffee hour and for a general discussion of the state of the diocese and of whatever else he—and you—want to share with one another. This is a rare and special treat. I hope that each and every one of you will make every effort to attend to welcome the bishop.

But this is not just about affording the bishop a good St. John's welcome or about trying to impress "the boss." Bishop Rob is a gifted pastor and preacher, and the chance to hear him is an opportunity for us to be fed spiritually. It is a gift to be received gratefully. It is also a time for us to hear about all the good things going on in the Diocese of Colorado right now. For some strange reason, the Denver papers do not run articles on growing congregations, on increased ministries, on great plans for the future moving forward. No, we get articles on church politics and on our problems, not on our successes. Come to hear the bishop and to hear how our church is faithfully moving ahead to preach and to practice the Gospel despite the obstacles.

Theologically, the bishop represents our connection the broader church, what in the creeds we refer to as the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. It is the bishop that represents our connection not just to the Diocese of Colorado and not just to the Episcopal Church USA, but to the worldwide Anglican Communion, to the wider church across space (the entire world) and across time (all of historical church). We are one not just with each other, but with all the saints in all times. And the bishop is the outward and visible sign of this inward and spiritual truth. Come to experience the bishop as sacrament of the unity of the church.

All this would be true of anyone sitting in the bishop's chair. But more specifically and at a human level, we are blessed to have a remarkably gifted man—organizationally, politically, and spiritually—as our bishop. Come on November 11 to see these gifts at work and to take pride in the leadership and the direction of the Diocese of Colorado.

Notes about Ministries

A friend returns

As those who attend services on Nov. 4th will have cause to know, our old friend Nina Stasser, raised up for ordination to the priesthood from this parish, has retired from her last position in the Diocese of Utah and is settling into retirement with husband Dick in Denver. Congratulations Nina and Dick, and welcome back to God's country. Be sure to attend Sunday the 4th as Nina fills in for Fr. Spencer to renew acquaintances.

Hospice Tree

One tree the beetles have missed is the Hospice Tree. If your curiosity is piqued as to just what a "hospice tree" is, be sure to attend services Sunday, November 18 to find out. November is Hospice month, and this will be an excellent opportunity to learn more about the wonderful work being done by Grand County's Heart of the Mountain Hospice.

Openings at the inn

Most of you will know about the Cliffview Assisted Living Center in Kremmling. What you may not know is that although historically it has been difficult to gain admittance to Cliffview, there are currently several openings. If you are close to someone who might need assisted living arrangement, please contact Fr. Spencer or else call 970-724-3530 for more information.

Sermon of the Month

Sermon preached on Sunday, October 14

There were ten lepers who approached Jesus, asking for healing. Jesus simply gave them a task to do — go the priests — and when they obeyed, they found themselves made clean. One of them thought to return to Jesus with praise and thanks. One of them — the Samaritan. And Jesus is left to wonder, What about the other nine? Does only one of the ten return to celebrate the healing by expressing gratitude and giving God praise? Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?"

One important exercise in making scripture real to us is to imagine ourselves in the story, often in different roles. I hope that none of us have any difficulty in imagining ourselves in the role of one of the ten lepers. The lepers are unclean and in need of healing. They need to be made whole.

And if we understand the lepers of the story to represent not just themselves, but to include us, then I think we can see that, whatever our physical condition, we are unclean and in need of healing. Remember Isaiah. "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips." We are all unclean — that is, unrighteous; we are all in need of healing, in need of being made whole in the way that is most important — spiritual wholeness.

The lepers approach Jesus to seek wholeness. And where do we go to seek the wholeness we need? Yes, we go to Jesus. But not to the incarnate Jesus, who is no longer among us. We go, in our need, to the Church, to the Body of Christ. To that institution founded at Pentecost in the power of the Holy Spirit to continue the healing and saving work of Jesus. The church, at its best, when it is healthy, is an instrument of healing and of wholeness in our lives. It has certainly been that instrument in my life, and I hope the same is true for each of you. That you are more healthy, more whole, better integrated, and spiritually more powerful because of the work of the church in general and because of your life here at St. John's in particular.

And so we celebrate — and this celebration of praise and thanksgiving means that we can identify not just with the ten lepers, but more specifically with the Samaritan leper in particular. We, as we are healed, return to Jesus praising God and thanking him for our healing. We do this through our worship, through our outreach, through our fellowship, and in all that St. John's makes it possible for us to do.

I sometimes refer to two different kinds of Christianity — the Christianity of the stick and the Christianity of the carrot. The former is about being a Christian to avoid bad things: God's punishment, our own guilt, even our own unhealthiness. Whatever it is, it is about being a Christian because one is afraid of something and flees to church to avoid it. The Christianity of the carrot is about being drawn to something because it is in and of itself beautiful. And there is a beauty in being healed, in being spiritually whole, integrated. And this beauty is something to be celebrated.

This week kicks off our annual pledge drive, and our theme this year is celebration. Yes, we need to increase giving to the church for any number of good reasons. But the best reason is that giving to the church — this instrument of God's healing — is the appropriate way to express praise and gratitude for this healing presence in our lives.

You will be receiving in the mail this week a letter and some information from the stewardship committee about your pledge for the coming year. Please take the time to read these materials and to spend some time in prayer over the questions raised there. Please consider the place of St. John's in your own quest for spiritual growth and your own need to celebrate that by supporting this healing work of the church.

And then resolve — in whatever way and to whatever degree makes sense for you — to identify in this gospel story with the Samaritan leper — the leper

who in experiencing God's healing returned with thanks and praise.

Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?"

