

A Voice in the Wilderness

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

FEBRUARY 2008



The snow continues to pile up, the wind seems to blow constantly, and one wonders when the sun will shine again. Apparently the weather records book doesn't show it, but the winter of '08 certainly seems to be one of the least pleasant of recent years. Still, we mountain folk are hardy and we soldier (probably not the best term?) on..

February is a day longer than usual this year, and a good thing too, so that we can fit in all the activities we have planned. In addition to regular services and Bible Studies, we get a really early start on Lent this year with Ash Wednesday falling on the 6th. And this means, of course, that the annual Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper falls on the 5th. There is a Stations of the Cross offered on the first Friday of Lent, the 8th, at noon. The annual vestry retreat is scheduled for Friday and Saturday the 8th and 9th. A busy week!

Perhaps the highlight of this Lenten season is the wonderful Lenten teaching series entitled "A Christian's Responsibility for the Earth" lined up for five consecutive Sundays beginning the 10th, with several excellent guest speakers lined up. Be sure to check out the Rector's page for more information on this series.

A Word from the Rector

Super Tuesday? Clinton vs. Obama and Romney vs. McCain? Who cares? The big election news for St. John's comes out of our Annual Meeting of January 27, when Gene Ackley, Loretta McLaughlin, and Walter Wilson were all unanimously elected. Loretta and Walter begin three year terms as vestry members, and Gene was elected to serve one year as Junior Warden (the final year of Jeannine Aberg-Maes' term). Thank you all so much for serving. In other news, Terry McFee and Joan Von der Heiden were named co-Senior Wardens for the year. Both Terry and Joan wished to help out, but neither felt they could take on the entire responsibility. So with the blessing of the diocese, they have agreed to divide responsibility. (I foresee lots of 3 ½ to 3 ½ votes coming up this year!)

And whereas, there are rumors that the U.S. government might not balance its budget this year, Treasurer Eric Mowrey presented St. John's third consecutive balanced budget, having successfully met the last two. If you are receiving this newsletter electronically, you will find a copy of my "state of the parish" report attached.

As we approach February 6 and the earliest Lenten season in over a century (the earliest possible is just a day earlier), I hope that you are all thinking about the season and about how you might use it to grow in Christian faith. And I might usually use this space to reflect on ways to deepen this faith. But this year, I'd like to share with you some not at all unrelated thoughts about the questions we will be discussing during our Lenten adult education series. For years—actually, centuries—Christians have not done a very good job of thinking through the implications of all of God's creation. We think a lot about his having created *us* and what that might mean for our relationship to God. But we have tended not to think through the fact that we humans are simply the creation of the sixth day. The creation of the first five days was also deemed by God to be good, and quite in advance of our own existence. God loves not just human beings, but all of creation.

As we move through Lent, we will explore these questions and their implications. Under the general title "A Christian's Responsibility to the Environment," we will hear five presentations:

February 10 "Caring for the earth: the Biblical authority"
Fr. Spencer

February 17 "Thinking Globally"
Tim and Roberta Killeen
NCAR (National Center for Atmospheric Research)

February 24 "Acting Locally"
Rob Taylor (Mountain Parks Electric)

- March 2 “Environment in crisis: the case of Haiti”
The Rev. Janet and Ronald Fullmer
- March 9 “Global meets Local: the forests of Grand County”
Brad Orr
U.S. Forest Service

This is a wonderful opportunity to hear from a variety of experts on the nature of the environmental challenges we face and what options we have for dealing with them. Once we have had the chance to hear, discuss, and digest these questions, it will remain for us as a congregation to decide what all this means for us and how we might grow into a community with more reverence for the world God has created for us to live in.

We are not alone in thinking about moving in this direction. I know that environmentalism is a major concern for Bishop O’Neill and that this program certainly has his blessing. And outside our own denomination, there have been remarkable developments bringing together mainline denominations and conservative evangelical churches to support environmental causes. There is something in the wind here, and I hope that we can take full advantage of these opportunities to grow in understanding and in commitment to caring for the Creation.

See you after church during Lent for these teachings.

God’s blessings on you all,

Fr. Spencer+

Notes about Ministries

Missionaries' return

Dan and Nancy Clark, son and daughter-in-law to Al and Betty Clark, have announced that they are returning to the U.S. this summer. After 24 years of mission work—most of it southern France and North Africa, bringing the Gospel to non-Christian Arabs (Can you imagine much harder a mission field?), they will be moving to Idaho, practically in Al and Betty's backyard. We have been praying for their work for years; please continue to keep them in your prayers for this time of transition and for clarity about the nature of God's plans for them in Idaho. God bless all this family: Dan, Nancy, Aimee and Andre.

More mission news

Please keep Joanne LeClaire, Protus, and their work with Kenyan children in your prayers that they may be safe from the growing political unrest and violence there.

Books do furnish a church

Now that the Art, Architecture, and Landscape committee have furnished the downstairs "common area" with bookshelves, our newly volunteered librarian Eleanor Holley has been stocking them with various books, tapes, and CDs. There are many excellent resources to be found there, including Christian fiction, many spiritual classics, books on various aspects of Anglicanism, histories, biographies, bible commentaries, etc. Be sure to check out the library if you have not done so lately. And be sure to check this space in future newsletters for descriptions and reviews of some of the titles available.

A Bible renaissance at St. John's

St. John's offers two Bible studies, each on a weekly basis, and both are thriving. The Men's Bible breakfast meets Saturdays at 8AM to discuss the next day's readings. This group regularly draws anywhere from four to nine regulars. The 2PM Thursday afternoon group has also been flourishing after several years of "intimacy," i.e. three or four members, we have in the last few months grown to a robust eleven members. This is surely a tribute both to the desire for biblical learning and also the fun that we have in studying together. Why not consider joining one of our bible studies? (Everyone's doing it!)

Making a joyful noise

Many thanks to John and Florice Lietzke for opening their new home for our January Music Night. We had a wonderful time in good food and wine, fellowship, and singing. In addition, Fr. Spencer led the group in a house blessing. The new home was well and truly blessed, as all new homes should be, and all present were blessed by the entire evening.

Sermon of the Month

Sermon delivered Sunday, January 13, 2008

When, years ago, I studied the philosophy of language, I read a small but elegant book called “How to do things with words.” It was a study of the relationship between what we might call actually doing something vs. “only” saying something. And one of the insights of the book is that sometimes “only” saying something really *is* doing or accomplishing something.

As Christians we should be open to this idea. Remember the Creation story. God did something—he created, by saying something. “And God said,” and so it was. God needs only to say something for it to be done. How to do things with words, indeed!

Let it be said right at the front. None of us can do things with words in the way in which God can. Our words do have consequences in the world, of course, but that is mostly about how other people respond to our words. I may say, please give generously to our pledge drive (and I do say it), but whether or not anything is done beyond saying the words is not within my control, but with those who may hear the words.

But there is another way in which we do things with words that doesn’t depend upon the outside world’s response. When I am conducting a wedding ceremony and utter the words “I now pronounce you husband and wife,” I am not describing a situation that may or may not be true. I am making it true in saying the words. And when the couple responds “I do,” they are not merely predicting that they will be faithful, they are making a commitment. Philosophers call sentences like this ‘performatives’; in saying them we are performing an action, we are making it true that

something is accomplished. So, there! I can do things with words, too..

But so can you. Consider what it is to promise something. I say that I promise to be at a certain place. This is different from predicting that I will be there. If I say I will be there, I may be right or wrong, what I say may be true or false, depending upon whether I am indeed there. But if I say “I promise,” then I have promised, whether or not I actually follow through. I may break the promise, but in saying those words, I have done something; I have succeeded in promising, which is more than just saying something; it is performing an action.

The same thing is true when we say words that embody a commitment. A commitment is a type of promise, and like a promise, a commitment may be insincere, but it remains true, even if it is insincere, that it is a genuine commitment. In saying the words of a commitment, one has performed the act of making a commitment.

When Jesus was baptized by John, he—Jesus—was performing a symbolic action that embodied a commitment, his commitment to God’s work. This is why I believe it was necessary for Jesus to be baptized. Not, of course, because he had sinned. Which is why John was reluctant to baptize Jesus. John didn’t see that there was another reason why Jesus wished to be baptized. It symbolized Jesus’ commitment to God’s work.

And this fact connects our baptisms to that of Jesus. For our baptism is about *our* commitment to God’s work. It is something we share with Jesus, and it emphasizes that our ministries are but extensions of Jesus’ ministries. Jesus did not say any particular words at his baptism, but implicit in his being

baptized, it is the same commitment to God's work that we make explicit in our own baptismal covenants.

Virtually every Sunday in this church we say the words of the Nicene Creed. I have a performative understanding of our saying these words. (I do not say that you must share this understanding.) In saying them, I do not necessarily believe every word of the creed to be true. Indeed, there are words and phrases that, for all of my study of the Creed, I do not fully understand. And perhaps for most of us there are parts of the creed that we do not understand fully or that we may think we understand but are not sure we actually fully believe. Then why do we say these words? I believe that we are performing an action. When I introduce the Creed, I use the words "Let us reaffirm our commitment to the tradition of the Apostles." When we say the creed, we are not simply saying what we believe; we are committing ourselves to the Christian tradition, however we as individuals may sort out our understanding of that tradition.

We will in just a minute be renewing our baptismal vows. In responding to the familiar questions that I will pose to you, you are not just saying that you believe these things or predicting that you will respond to this belief in certain ways, about which you may be right or wrong. You are committing yourselves to God's work and you are reaffirming your solidarity in Christ, your solidarity with his baptism, his commitment.

Notice that when Christ made his commitment, being baptized by John in the Jordan River, God's response was immediate. "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." This approval, this sense of God being pleased, came immediately with the commitment; it didn't wait until the fulfillment of the promise. Jesus didn't actually have to

successfully carry out his mission before God expressed his pleasure. Similarly, when we reaffirm our baptismal vows, when we make this commitment, I believe that God is pleased. We know that we, unlike Jesus, will often fail in our carrying out the commitments—even with God's help. But in the sincere making of the commitment—in the performance of that action, God is well pleased.

*I can almost hear
the words out loud,
"This is my people, my
beloved, with whom I
am well pleased."
When you are finished
uttering the words of
the covenant; when
you have performed
the action of
committing yourself to
Christ's ministry; listen
carefully. See if you
cannot hear those
words.*

Updates from the Church Family

On the mend

We are very pleased to report that both Catherine Volland and David Moen are much improved. Catherine, diagnosed with hepatitis is getting much stronger, and we hope to see her at St. John's soon. David, recovering from a stroke, is now home and rehabilitating there. Despite the fact that it is still difficult for him to use a keyboard, he reports by e-mail that he is definitely improving. He does note, however, that the rehab work is one of the hardest things he has ever had to do. Keep up the good work, David!

Shoulder season, indeed!

Jim Cartwright reports that he will undergo surgery to repair a torn rotator cuff this Ash Wednesday, Feb. 6. The surgery will be done at the hospital in Steamboat Springs, and Jim will recuperate for a time at Kremmling Memorial Hospital. While there he will be able to visit with his mother Jean. (Talk about, it's an ill wind that blows no good!)

February 2008

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
					1	2
						8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST * 10:30 ADULT EDUCATION		5 PM – 7 PM PANCAKE SUPPER	6 PM Ash Wednesday Service	2 PM BIBLE STUDY	Noon - Stations of the Cross * Vestry retreat 8 th & 9 th (off site)	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST * 10:30 AM ADULT EDUCATION				2 PM BIBLE STUDY		8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST * 10:30 AM ADULT EDUCATION				2 PM BIBLE STUDY		8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
24	25	26	27	28	29	
9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST * 10:30 AM ADULT EDUCATION				2 PM BIBLE STUDY	8 AM WORSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING	

RECTOR'S REPORT

TO THE 2008 ANNUAL MEETING

St. John's, Granby, January 27, 2008

As it was the last two years, this report is organized around St. John's statement of core values.

- 1. Caring for others**—This area has been covered by the Report from the Outreach Committee.
- 2. Nurturing our own**—See the report from children/youth. Pastoral care remains a priority for me, and while there were a number of occasions throughout the year requiring visiting and support both in homes and hospitals, there were fortunately no catastrophic losses to deal with. The only funeral I did this past year was for former member, Robert Edwards.
- 3. Worshiping with quality**—With the help of an active and engaged worship committee, we continue to try to enrich our worship experience. In the past year, we have figured out how to do a St. Francis Day Blessing of the Animals' service (transfer the day to a warmer month!), introduced a new regime for Prayers of the People, and moved to the new Revised Common Lectionary. We are currently in the process of an instructed Eucharist, trying a new Eucharistic Prayer, and reviewing our "customaries" for lay readers, acolytes, ushers and greeters. Visitors often comment on how much they like our services.
- 4. Inquiring into meaning and truth**—One of our goals for adult education was to bring in more outside teachers with a wider range of backgrounds and specialties. In the past year we have had three CU professors present on Islam, Russian icons, and C.S. Lewis' Narnia. Coming up in Lent we will have the chance to hear several specialists present on environmental issues. I remain open to suggestions for topics you would like to have in future adult education programs.
- 5. Celebrating all of life**—Music nights remain at the center of our parish fellowship program, now supplemented by Activity/Dinner Groups. I will work with our new Junior Warden to explore other possibilities (movie nights? A revival of the sports and game day?). We believe that God rejoices when his people have fun together, and we want to give God lots of occasions for rejoicing. Give Gene your suggestions.
- 6. Sharing the joy of this life with others**—We will have our long-awaited St. John's web site up and running very soon. The site is "stjohnsgranby.org"

Administration and finance are not core values, of course, but they underlie our ability to live into our values effectively. We continue to inch our way toward a greater degree of rationality in our financial and administrative procedures and record keeping. Our current level of operating income is not sufficient to enable us to hire a regular bookkeeper/office person, so vestry has recommended that we employ a short term contract worker to aid us in setting up sustainable office procedures. This search is still ongoing.

There are a few unfulfilled goals from last year that are still on our agenda. One is the just mentioned continuing effort to improve office and financial procedures. Another is the reformation and revitalization of the Evangelism (or church growth) committee. Another is the establishment of a procedure of background checks for all those working with children. A fourth is the establishment, further development, and maintenance of the parish website. (My thanks to John McFee for agreeing to be the site manager.)

I will urge the new vestry to consider adopting the following as goals for the new year:

1. A plan for the use of the generous Dunlap bequest that contributes to church growth
2. The adoption of a plan for making St. John's and its members more environmentally responsible
3. The re-establishment of a functioning prayer chain. (Betty Cranmer)
4. A decision on the long-term future of Cranmer Chapel

Some of these goals will certainly be met. Some will probably see progress without any final resolution. Others may prove more problematic. But we will persevere toward making St. John's the best church that we can make it.

It is interesting to note that this "State of the Parish" report is being delivered just a day ahead of President Bush's "State of the Union" address. Although his report will be interrupted for applause far more often than this one was, I think that we can say that, for all the unfinished business, the state of the parish is sound. It is sound because of your commitment and generosity in time, talent, and treasure; you make St. John's a very special place to be. When we are tempted to be frustrated at what remains undone, it is important to remember the progress that we have made together. Much has been accomplished; the most important of which are that God is worshiped here and people are loved here. This is a powerful base upon which to build. We ask God's guidance and his continued blessings for this new year.