

A Voice in the Wilderness

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST



MAY 2008

We welcome two special visitors to St. John's in May. On Sunday the 4th the Rev. Larry Donoghue will preach and celebrate while Fr. Spencer is with family in California. And on Sunday the 18th the Rev. Nina Stasser, a long time friend, will preach and celebrate while Fr. Spencer is in Florida for a conference.

In between, these Sundays we observe Pentecost on the 11th. And by this time, we should be nicely through mud season and looking forward to a typically marvelous Grand County summer after a particularly difficult winter.

On Monday the 19th St John's will be entering teams in the annual Heart of the Mountains Hospice benefit golf tournament at Grand Elk.

On Saturday the 31st join the Fuqua family and all of St. John's at 12:30 to celebrate the graduation of Nichole Fuqua.

A Word from the Rector

Our parish meeting of April 20 produced a great number of excellent ideas for moving St. John's ahead with an environmental agenda. Please see the Notes About Ministries Page (following) for a summary of the results of that meeting. It was suggested then that to ensure progress, it would be important that we name a "point person" or "czar" to oversee and follow up on these results. Alternatively, it might be better to spread the responsibility over two or three persons, depending upon the time requirements. It is clear that there is a great deal of support for making an environmental commitment an important part of St. John's future; if you have an interest and/or commitment to environmental values, please pray about whether you might be called to help us make this work. It will take a real commitment, but you will have lots of help.

There are other decisions about moving ahead at St. John's that we need to be making this year. Your vestry has established an all-parish retreat, scheduled for Saturday, August 2, to review where St. John's is and where we might be going. We have not had such a gathering for community reflection for over five years now, and it is time to revisit our discernment into the future. The Rev. Canon Lou Blanchard from the diocesan office will join us to facilitate this meeting. It will be appropriate to discuss any aspect of our life at St. John's, but topics will certainly include this new environmental commitment, our continuing ministry options at Cranmer Chapel, and how we might effectively use the Dunlap money donated to us last summer.

To prepare for this all day conference/retreat, we will have a celebration of our life at St. John's on the Friday evening preceding the retreat.

And to encourage some self-reflection and maybe even some soul-searching, on the Sundays leading up to the retreat I will lead teachings on what might be called "congregational analysis," or ways to think about the strengths, weaknesses, and essential characteristics of St. John's. This will be sort of an institutional "Meyers-Briggs" test, to get a sense of the character, personality, and "DNA" of St. John's, and it should be both revealing and entertaining. Understanding who we are is an important component in discerning what we might become.

Currently, as we come to the end of the Easter season, we are in a mode of celebration, but our lives as Christians need a balance between celebration and work. Come this summer, the balance will shift to work. Please continue to pray for St. John's, for our work together, and for our way forward. God bless you all.

Fr. Spencer

The Episcopal Church of St. John the Baptist

Granby, Colorado

Notes about Ministries

Report from the “green” meeting

Following the Sunday service of April 20, we had a good turnout (especially considering it was mud season) to discuss ways we might follow up on our Lenten teaching series on the environment. There was agreement that we wanted to not lose the insights or the momentum from these teachings, and there were many excellent suggestions for making St. John’s a greener church. What follows is a report from that meeting.

There were many excellent ideas presented. It was clear that being more environmentally conscious was something that could be reflected in all of our core values, and the suggestions listed are organized around those values. Clearly, we will not want or even be able to adopt all these suggestions; rather, the trick is going to be how to organize and institutionalize processes to see that something actually happens. It was suggested that we need a green “point person” or perhaps a small steering committee.

CARING FOR OTHERS

- Lightbulb ministry—to purchase and donate compact fluorescent lightbulbs to the Mountain Family Center for distribution
- Recycle—to offer a place for people to return CFL for recycling
- Shopping bag project—to hand out reusable bags at supermarkets
- To work with others on “trail days”
- To support community garden project
- To dedicate savings on our energy costs to expand outreach

NURTURING OUR OWN

- Add environmental piece to Sunday School program
- Inaugurate Arbor Day project

WORSHIPING WITH QUALITY

- Expand and promote St. Francis Day worship
- Organize ride sharing to church, other destinations
- Explore possibility of solar heating and other ways to make our worship space more energy efficient

INQUIRING INTO MEANING AND TRUTH

- Institute “green” bulletin board to promulgate information and ideas
- Offer more classes both for St. John’s and for community
- Offer book club reading on environmental topics

CELEBRATING

- Celebrate various “green” days
- Use parties to expand participation in trail, highway clean-ups

SHARING OUR FAITH

- Consistently publicize green activities
- Add environmental page to website, with green links

History is just one (darn) thing after another ...

Eleanor reports the donation of two new books to our downstairs library. In the wake of one parishioner’s expression of regret that he didn’t know much Bible history, we now offer two new resources. For a good overview there is Michael Grant’s *The History of Ancient Israel*, which has a good table of contents, enabling one to look up smaller sections on more particular topics. And for more detail there is *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, a collection of broad-ranging chapters by specialists. Both books begin with pre-history and come down to the first century after Christ.

Special thanks

When Fr. Spencer is away, regular parishioners can count on a good priest to fill in for him on Sundays. Most people may not realize, however, that it is also necessary to fill in for him at Cranmer Chapel on Saturday evenings. For this, we are all grateful to three volunteers who faithfully show up to lead Evening Prayer in Spencer’s absence. Special thanks to Gene Ackley, Loretta McLaughlin, and Ted Parker for showing the flag on these Saturdays.

Sermon of the Month

Sermon preached on Sunday, April 13

As we continue our reflections on the meaning of Easter, we have another Gospel reading about recognition. Remember that perhaps the deepest meaning of Easter is not just that Jesus is risen, but also that he is present to us here today, as present to us as he was in the resurrection appearances to Thomas, the other apostles, and to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. The challenge to us is to be able to recognize Jesus when we see him, even as Cleopas and his companion came to recognize Jesus in the scriptures and in the breaking of the bread.

Today's Gospel is a complicated and challenging one, so I want to focus on just one particular aspect of it: Jesus' assurance that his sheep will know his voice and will follow it. I sometimes feel like answering like Thomas, in next week's Gospel, when Jesus said "And you know the place to where I am going." Thomas said, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" Lord, I want to say, there are so many voices out there, so many competing and contradictory voices. How can we know your voice among all the others?

Like you, last week, as in any week, I heard many voices. One voice I heard came to me in a forwarded e-mail. It was from a Christian pastor, and it was—how shall I say it—an ignorant and hateful attack upon first, Islam, and secondly, Barack Obama, and thirdly the "liberal establishment." It told a made-up story about an Islamic Imam who was forced to concede that all Muslims are on Jihad to kill all non-Muslims. It warned that within 20 years, if we Christians did not awake to the danger, we would be a Muslim country under sharia law. And then it said that with Barack Obama, it would be even less time. It said that Obama was a Muslim, though of course he wouldn't admit it—and that the liberal media would never report it, and so on and so on. And with this passage, I tried to hear the voice of my shepherd in these words and failed. It was not just the substance of the views expressed—though there was great ignorance and/or misrepresentation going on. Radical Islam is a serious problem and it is possible to be opposed to it without hate. And it is certainly permissible to be critical of Obama, or any other political candidate; that's OK. And one can be also be critical of liberal views, or conservative, that's part of how we work things out together among us. But it was in the tone, the anger, the hatred, the lack of understanding and compassion for others—that it became clear that this was not the voice of the shepherd.

Of course it is possible to have strong disagreements—to hear powerful opposing views and still hear the voice of the shepherd. One of my favorite theological books is called "The Meaning of Jesus," by two theologians, one—Marcus Borg—quite liberal

and the other Tom Wright—quite conservative. What is beautiful about this book is that despite real and deep differences between them, they clearly like, respect, and love each other as brother Christians. In both these conflicting voices, I hear my shepherd..

And finally, Walter and Rae shared with me an article from their former diocese, the diocese of New Hampshire, which reproduced the foreword by Archbishop Tutu to Bishop Gene Robinson's book. In a piece of writing which clearly had an agenda, this agenda was subordinated to the Gospel, rather than the other way around. It was simply a beautiful piece of work.

Jesus said that we will know the voice of the shepherd-and distinguish it from that of the thief—and I am pretty sure that I sorted out these voices pretty well. But how? I think that to know how to recognize the voice of the shepherd, we must go back not just to the resurrection, but back to three days before, back to Good Friday and to the crucifixion. Because the crucifixion sums up, recapitulates, represents in the most powerful way the totality of Jesus ministry. Whether he was teaching, healing, preaching, feeding, forgiving, loving, and eventually dying and being raised up—all that he did was about giving of himself for others. He emptied himself, humbled himself, and became obedient, even unto death, to death on a cross. This was Jesus' entire ministry.

And so the question becomes, is the voice that I am hearing a voice that could conceivably have come from the cross? If it cannot, it is the voice of a thief. If the voice cannot conceivably be that of one who empties himself, humbles himself, it is the voice of a thief. If the voice cannot possibly come from one who is willing to suffer to serve, it is the voice of the thief. And if this same voice of the thief is simultaneously appealing to Jesus, then it is not just the voice of a thief, it is the voice of one who has hi-jacked the Gospel for his own advancement or his own agenda.

That is how we are to recognize the voice of the good shepherd. How is it we can go wrong? Only, I think, by not paying full attention. We get careless, we get caught up in the ways of the world, or of our own agendas. And so we need to be reminded to consider the man on the cross, and whether the voice we hear can be truly his.

So that we will follow the Good Shepherd; so that we will not follow a stranger.

Updates from the Church Family

With much pomp and circumstance

Joe and Monica Fuqua proudly announce the graduation of their daughter Nichole from Middle Park High School. Graduation ceremonies are Saturday morning, May 31st, at 10AM at the high school gymnasium. All St. John's parishioners are also invited to celebrate with Nichole and her family at the St. John's Parish Hall that Saturday from 12:30—3:30PM. Come let's celebrate together. And congratulations, Nichole. We love you, and we are proud of you!

With somewhat less pomp and circumstance

While we still have some tweaking that we want to do, it is now possible to visit our new website at www.stjohnsgranby.org. Many thanks to Jeff Harper for setting this up and to John McFee for agreeing to be our webmaster. Feedback is of course always welcome.

One step back, two forward

Pauline Friend took a step back last month when, after moving from Porter Hospital to a rehabilitation center, she contracted an infection and pneumonia. She is now back in the hospital, temporarily weaker in body, but just as strong in spirit. She is an inspiration to all those who have been able to visit with her; please keep her in your prayers.

Another transition coming

Sadly, St. John's is coming to the end of an era, as Jerry Woods is preparing to move to Pagosa Springs on a year round basis. Son Martin and his wife Betty Jean have been helping prepare Jerry and Betty Jo's longtime home in Granby for sale. We know that this move is a good thing for Jerry and his family, but it is a tough one for all of us. Jerry and Betty Jo, who died two years ago, have been at the center of the life of St. John's for close to fifty years. Jerry, we will miss you enormously, but we hope you can return occasionally, if only to reclaim your position as tractor driver for the St. John's entry in the 4th of July parade.

Something for everybody

For the last Sunday in Lent, St. John' probably became the only Episcopal Church ever to have a service in 17th Century English (Rite I) that included the song "Do Lord." We have heard of "blended" services, but this is getting ridiculous.

Copy me this

Our volunteers' office became somewhat more crowded recently with the addition of a large office size Minolta copier. This came compliments of the East Grand School District, which is updating its equipment. Monica Fuqua, who now works in this office, was alert enough to suggest that the machine be offered to St. John's, rather than simply thrown out. It is now established in our offices and is working out very well. Thank you, Monica!

May 2008

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
				1	2	3
			<i>Fr. Spencer on vacation April 28th through May 7</i>			8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM EVENING PRAYER AT CRANMER CHAPEL
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST				7 PM GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT MEETING		8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
PENTECOST SUNDAY 9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST	<i>Fr. Spencer at conference May 12th through May 19th</i>					8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM EVENING PRAYER AT CRANMER CHAPEL
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST	HOSPICE BENEFIT GOLF TOURNAMENT AT GRAND ELK			2 PM BIBLE STUDY		8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST				2 PM BIBLE STUDY	8 AM WORSHIP COM- MITTEE	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 3:30 PM GRADUATION PARTY FOR NICHOLE FUQUA * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL