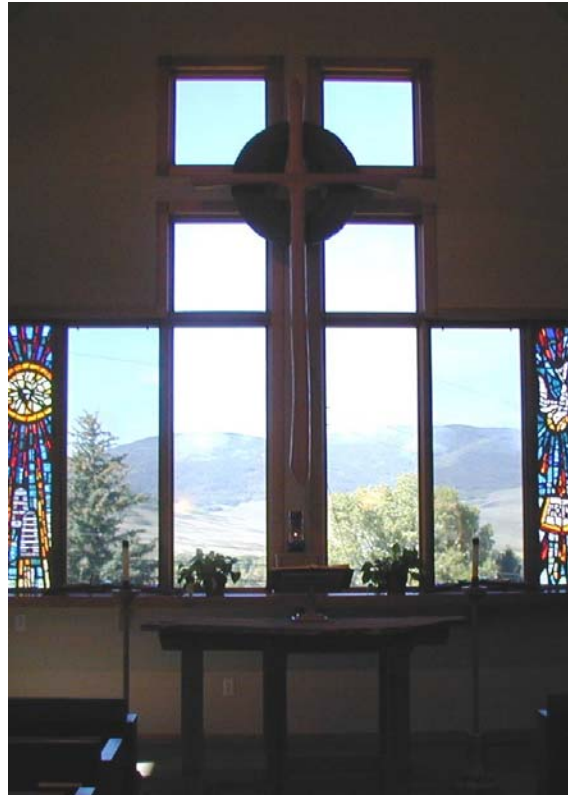


A Voice in the Wilderness

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST



AUGUST 2008

As we head into the dog days of summer—here in Grand County they should probably be called “puppy” days, given our mild temperatures. And, after a late start, we are having a lovely summer of beautiful mornings, mild afternoons, and cool evenings.

This month we welcomed the Rev. Lou Blanchard, Canon Missioner for Evangelism, Church Growth and Congregational Development, to lead us in a day’s work of reflection on St. John’s future. This edition of the newsletter has been delayed so that we could report to you on this meeting. But for the record:

We kick off this month with a dessert reception for Canon Lou on Friday the 1st at 7PM in the parish hall. Then on Saturday the 2nd we will gather at 8:30AM, again in the parish hall, for coffee and snacks before getting to work at 9:00.

The diocese’s annual Loaves and Fishes Sunday will be observed on Sunday the 10th, having been transferred from the busy weekend of the 3rd.

The last Compline on the Lake service will be held at 5PM on Sunday the 17th. We meet as usual at the Grand Lake Marina.

And a “heads up” that Fr. Spencer will be on vacation from September 1 through September 10.

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A Word from the Rector

Note: Because of the length of the sermon preached the Sunday after our parish meeting, I am combining the sermon and rector page into one for this month. The sermon will also serve the purpose of informing you about the outcome of the meeting.

Sermon preached on Sunday, August 3.

We have a number of visitors with us this morning, and it is great to see you. You are all very welcome, but I fear you will have to put up with hearing about some of our “in house” matters this morning.

For we have just yesterday held an all-day parish “retreat” during which about twenty five of us spent a lot of time talking, thinking, praying about St. John’s and looking for a focus for our future lives together here. The meeting was facilitated by the Rev. Lou Blanchard, Canon Missioner of the diocese for evangelism, church growth, and congregational development. The project involved identifying community problems, then looking to see how our assets, strengths, and weaknesses matched up with those problems, and finally examining our own responses to these matches to see where our own energies, our own inspirations lay. We depended upon the Holy Spirit to move in each of us to determine where the energy for mission was most pronounced. Or to put it another way: where we felt the Spirit leading us.

It turned out, and I skip a lot of intermediate steps, that there were three areas of great energy for mission. The first was to be a beacon for environmental protection issues here in Grand County. The second was to move systematically and powerfully to serve our students and other young persons. And the third was to grow a powerful prayer ministry here at St. John’s and in the wider community. (This last grew out of a desire to expand the summer Compline on the Lake program and to establish an ecumenical contemplative prayer group.)

If you weren’t at the retreat, I don’t know how these strike you just hearing them cold. Perhaps one or more excite you. I hope so. But in any case I ask you to honor the process that we went through and to accept that this is where we feel the Spirit is leading St. John’s. I ask you to honor it by seeking a ministry that draws you, that can excite you, and by pitching in to help make a difference. We will need the commitment of all of us in moving ahead.

I do want to add one more thing. Because I did not fully understand how Lou planned to proceed, I believe I misled some of you about the nature of the process. It was more structured, more programmatic, than I anticipated. I had promised some of you that you would have opportunities to share your thoughts in certain areas, and it turned out that you did not. In particular I led you to believe that we would explicitly discuss the question of the future of Cranmer Chapel and particular policies and strategies for church growth. And you didn’t.

I am sorry about that in one way. But in another, I believe that the Spirit was moving more powerfully in the absence of those discussions. Sure, we might have debated about the future of the chapel. But in following our hearts toward these three ministries, it became absolutely clear that the chapel had to be a part of them. We may have challenges in keeping the building viable, but we must do so. And as for church growth, at one point I made the comment that we weren't talking much about growth. And then Terry (McFee) made a very wise comment. She reminded me that it is churches with mission and with energy and excitement behind that mission that grow. In discerning where our energy for mission lay, we were setting the groundwork for a growing church. There will still be plenty for our Growth and Development Committee to do; there will always be useful things to do to encourage growth and to discourage decline, but the most important thing will always be the mission, the ministries of the church.

I especially like the "storms on the Sea of Galilee" stories in the Gospels. And the one we heard this morning reminds me of a story from my own recent past. Some of you may have heard me tell this before, but you know that won't stop me from telling it again.

When I was a year into my discernment of a call to ordained ministry, I went before our diocesan Commission on Ministry for approval. Everything up to that time had been very positive, very encouraging, and validating of my call. And then the commission turned me down. I was invited to spend another year in discernment, to make a number of changes in how I went about it, and to return in a year for another meeting with them if I so chose. But, still, I was rejected.

I was devastated. I had been so sure of my call, and I struggled to find a meaning in their decision. What was going on? And the next Sunday, I was worshiping at St. Francis Center in Denver when the Gospel was just going to be read. And I felt a conviction coming over me that I was to listen especially carefully to this Gospel. And I heard a "Sea of Galilee" story, though a slightly different one. Today we heard the story of Peter bravely stepping out onto the storm-tossed sea only to lose faith and start to sink. Jesus reaches out to pull him up, and "when he got into the boat, the storm ceased."

In the version I heard that Sunday morning some eleven years ago, the disciples are straining at the oars of their boat, trying to make headway against the strong winds. They see Jesus coming toward them and are frightened. He steps into the boat, and they are immediately at the other side of the lake, at their intended destination.

When I heard that story back then, I knew I was to identify with the disciples. I had been working so hard to make progress toward ordination and now I was not making progress. I came to see that I had made this process about me; it was my struggle. I came to see that I needed to give that struggle up, to relax, and to give it up to Jesus. I needed to let Jesus into the boat. The disciples were committed to getting the boat to the other side, but it wasn't enough. I was committed to my discernment process, but it

wasn't enough. Jesus wasn't in the boat, and until Jesus is in the boat, we are talking about our own human agendas, not about Christian mission.

A minute ago, I asked you for your commitment. Certainly without the commitment of the whole church, nothing of value will happen. But it cannot just be our commitment to an agenda. It is a good thing to work to protect the environment. But if Jesus is not in the boat it is merely good citizenship, and not Christian mission. It is good to reach out to help young people. But if Jesus is not in the boat, it is merely being neighborly, and not Christian mission. It is not Jesus' work.

This is why I have come to believe that the third area of energy—the growth of a prayer ministry is not simply a third ministry along side the other two. It is this prayer ministry that will ensure that Jesus is in the boat. It will ensure that the other two ministries are genuinely Christian ministries and not human agendas.

So we have much to do. We will move toward a ministry to spread an enthusiasm for environmental protection. We will move toward a more powerful reaching out to serve our young people. But none of this will mean anything, unless we let Jesus into the boat. When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. That is, when *Jesus* got into the boat, the wind ceased.

Notes about Ministries

Suffer the children to come to me: Safeguarding God's Children is the name of the program the diocese uses to train all those in the church who work with children. This training is essential to making our work with children just as safe a place for them as possible. All those who volunteer to work with children must have this training, and the training will be made available at St. John's early this fall. In order to be able to offer this training at regular and convenient times, it will be helpful if we have more than one person trained as workshop leaders to offer the training. Fr. Spencer will be re-taking this workshop training on Saturday, August 16th, in Glenwood Springs. If you have an interest in helping with this ministry, please contact him. If you are interested, but cannot make this date, please talk to him or to Terry McFee about other possible training dates throughout the year.

Feed my sheep: Loaves and Fishes Sunday is being observed this year on August 10. By participating, we join with Episcopalians all around the diocese in gathering in food for distribution to local food banks at a time in the year when donations from other sources tend to be down. (But it turns out that people still need to eat year round!) Be sure to pick up a bag and a shopping list from the church on Sunday the 3rd (or from the church office during the week), and let's simply overflow the altar area with bags and bags of groceries. See Deacon Diane with any questions.

Table service: And speaking of Deacon Diane, she has received permission from the bishop to begin serving at the table, assisting Fr. Spencer there, as well as exercising the deacon's prerogative to read the Gospel, invite the prayer of confession, and to pronounce the dismissal at the end of the service. It is very good to have the services of a deacon again; we have missed this since Deacon's Sally's retirement. Thank you, Diane!

Men need not apply! Our new St. John's women's group will meet on the third Friday of the month at 3PM. (Which has inspired some to suggest that it be called "Trinity." In August the meeting will be held at the home of Sally Hicks. If necessary, call here for directions at 887-3921. Go to it, ladies.

St. John the Orphan? We're not sure why, but financial support for our new St. John's mosaic, now hanging in the narthex, is lagging. We need several more donations of \$100 shares to cover the costs of the commission. If you have meant to support this artwork and have not yet done so, please send a check to St. John's with a notation "mosaic." Half and quarter shares are also very welcome.

Updates from the Church Family

Family updates

The Perils of Pauline: Good news from the Morck family. Pauline Friend is now out of the rehab facility where she has been for such a long time and now ensconced in St. Andrew's Village, a lovely assisted living facility in Aurora. Her address is St. Andrew's Village #334, 13801 E. Yale Ave, Aurora, CO 80019. Her cell phone number is 970-509-0000. (Now how did she manage to get *that* number?) Directions are posted on the parish bulletin board.) Fr. Spencer was treated to an excellent dinner in their elegant dining room last week. And prior to that Loretta McLaughlin and Carol Stott joined Pauline for lunch, at which a good time was had by all.

More new faces: Mike and Kathy Hulley and their adult daughter Jill, who have visited St. John's several times in the past few months, have announced their desire to join St. John's. Welcome Mike, Kathy, and Jill! This continues the wonderful trend of this year, which has seen new members almost every month.

When it rains, it pours:

The Robinson-Davis family continues to struggle. With Toby still struggling in his return from kidney surgery and little Kayla facing months of vision therapy, now Nicole has come down with an unidentified viral infection. West Nile, suspected at one time, has now, Praise God, been ruled out. If you wish to help the family contact Joan Von der Heiden about meals or Fr. Spencer about helping out with the children. And please keep Toby, Kayla, and Nicole in your prayers.

Boys will be boys . . .

Even when they are "Fathers." Fr. Spencer will be on vacation the week of September 1 for his annual "boys' golf week" with his brother from California and old school buddy from Michigan. Save any problems for his return; he will have enough on the golf courses of Grand County.

August 2008

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
					1	2
					7 PM DESSERT RECEPTION	8:30 AM ALL PARISH RETREAT * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
9 AM HOLY EUCARIST				2 PM BIBLE STUDY * 3 PM OUTREACH COMMITTEE MEETING		8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
9 AM HOLY EUCARIST * 10:30 AM VESTRY MEETING * LOAVES & FISHES				2 PM BIBLE STUDY	3 PM WOMEN'S GROUP	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
9 AM HOLY EUCARIST * 5 PM COMPLINE ON THE LAKE				2 PM BIBLE STUDY		8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
24/31	25	26	27	28	29	30
9 AM HOLY EUCARIST				2 PM BIBLE STUDY * 7 PM GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT MEETING		8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL