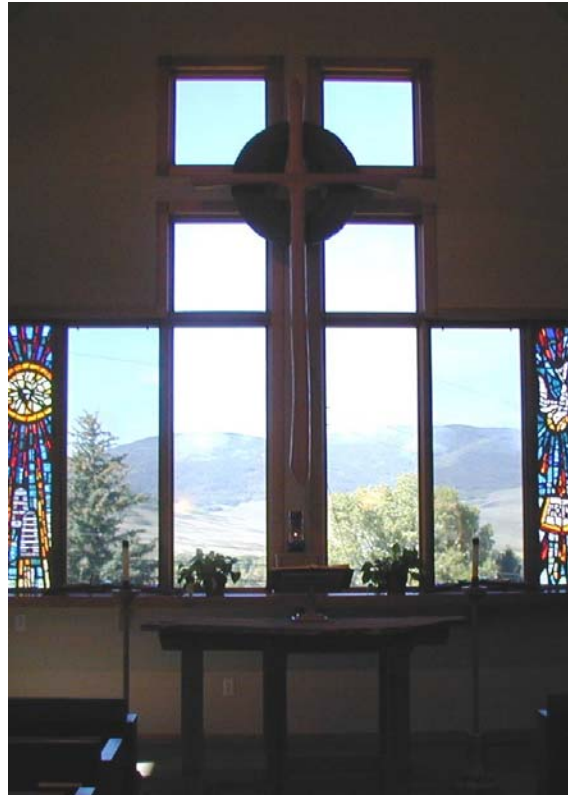


# A Voice in the Wilderness

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST



## NOVEMBER 2008

Believe it or not, as these words are written, we are currently experiencing a heat wave—people are bicycling, hiking, even taking lunch out of doors. We will undoubtedly pay heavily for this, come December or even sooner. But in the meantime, we enjoy. For the month of November we look forward to the following.

On Monday the 3<sup>rd</sup> we observe All Faithful Departed day, remembering those we love who have died with Eucharist and reading of names. Service time is 7PM.

Fr. Spencer will be away at Clergy Conference from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup>.

Enjoy dinner and a movie on Saturday the 8<sup>th</sup> as we show *Contact*, starring Jody Foster in the parish hall. Dinner is at 6PM with movie and discussion to follow.

And on Sunday the 30<sup>th</sup>, we observe Advent 1 and the beginning of a new liturgical year with the first of three adult ed teachings on spirituality and daily life.

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## A Word from the Rector

Oh, boy. It's time for a really fun discussion—an update on our current pledge drive. And, believe me, I'd much rather be talking about our values, ministry, and worship. But

. . . .

The actual presentations and mailings for this year's drive took place between the Sundays of September 21<sup>st</sup> and October 5—which was in-gathering Sunday. Today, a month later, we have received 26 pledges for a total of \$86,120. Of the 26 pledges received, 12 reflect an increase over last year's giving, 4 reflect a decrease, 8 show no change, and two are new pledges. One individual has indicated that (s)he will not be able to make a pledge this year.

There is considerable good news in this data. The fact that almost half of those pledging have increased giving is extremely heartening. (Thank you!) Some of the increases are modest, and I take this to indicate that people are giving about as much as they can, but want to signal their increased commitment to St. John's. (Thank you!) For those who were unable to maintain giving at prior rates, we understand. We know that we are in a difficult economic environment, and we thank you just as enthusiastically for what you are still able to do to support St. John's.

What gives pause in these figures is that a full month after the appeal, we have only 26 pledges, down from 41 last year. So we are still 15 pledging units short. And the \$86,000 pledged is about \$30,000 short of what has been pledged in each of the last two years. Friends, we have several new commitments to ministry here (in particular, to the environment, to our local schools and youth, and to expanding worship opportunities into new venues), and we have a lot to do just to be able to maintain the work of St. John's at its current level. If St. John's is not to take a step backward, we need your support.

If you have not yet pledged your financial support to St. John's, please do so, soon, so that your vestry will know what resources we have to work with as it puts together the 2009 budget. You may pick up a pledge card from the office or else simply indicate in a letter what your pledge is.

If you are a year-rounder and a pledger from last year, please try to match or increase your pledge for next year.

If you are a seasonal or occasional worshiper here, then please consider what proportion of your total giving you would like to set aside for St. John's. I would love it if every part-timer would make a pledge, even a very modest one, simply to indicate your support for St. John's being here for you when you are in Grand County.

If you are a newcomer to St. John's, or someone who has not pledged here for some other reason, please register your commitment here in the form of a pledge of financial support. If all non-pledgers—whether newcomers, or part-timers, or whatever—were to pledge, we could raise the numbers of supporters by nearly 50% over last year. And this would take a lot of pressure off those who necessarily find it hard to increase giving at this time. The bottom line is that if you are reading these words, then St. John's needs you and your financial support. Please do what you can, remembering, "Where your treasure is, there your heart is also." (Matthew 6:21)

God bless you all and God bless St. John's and the community we love.

Fr. Spencer+

## Notes about Ministries

Ministries Page

### Ministries taking shape

We are pleased to report that St. John's is taking steps to see that its new ministry priorities will be supported by leaders, both lay and ordained, and support teams. Brad Orr is leader of the new St. John's Green Team, which is meeting to establish priorities for environmental ministries. Sharry Erzinger has established a regular group meeting for centering prayer, and Cyndi Karnoscak has agreed to lead the "off-site worship" program on her return from her current European mission trip. Deacon Diane Bielski is actively coordinating volunteer teams to work as mentors and tutors for local schools. We are tentatively scheduling a complete review of all these initiatives for our Lenten teaching series. Stay tuned, and be sure to contact one of these leaders, or Fr. Spencer, if you'd like to participate.

### Who says it's not easy being green?

From Brad Orr and his "Green Team" come the following reminder/suggestions for saving gasoline:

1. Avoid unnecessary acceleration and braking.
2. Do not top off your gas tank.
3. Turn off your engine rather than allowing it to idle for more than one minute.
4. Do not warm up your engine for more than a few seconds; newer cars do not need as much warming up as older models.
5. Remove unnecessary weight before trips.
6. Reduce speed from highway limits to 55-60 mph.
7. Use cruise control when possible (except in hilly terrain).
8. Maintain proper tire inflation.
9. Organize your errands and use carpooling to reduce trips.

### About those changes

Last month we reported that for the month of October we would experiment in the worship service with introduction of clergy at the beginning of the service and with touching of persons in the pews next to you during the Lord's Prayer. After a month's worth of trial and some feedback, Fr. Spencer will make it a point to introduce himself and Deacon Diane when there are visitors or "guests" present. We will *not* encourage touching of pew-neighbors during the Lord's Prayer. Please do this only if you know your neighbor and can be certain that the physical contact will be welcome.

And for the season of Advent, we will try another innovation—the singing of the Lord’s Prayer. We will use the musical setting of the Belmont Mass, which will be familiar to some of you. For the others we will introduce the music at pre-service practice. Your worship committee hopes you enjoy this beautiful setting of the prayer.

**The \$30 appeal**

Many of you will have heard the story of the man who stood up during last month’s diocesan convention, offered a \$30 check, and challenged all Colorado Episcopalians to match it. Already, thousands of dollars have been raised through this appeal for the diocesan budget, with the aim of moving it from a bare-bones balanced budget to a budget driven by our needs and challenges – a mission-based budget. Our dream is to write Bishop O’Neill a check that will represent \$30 from every member of St. John’s to support the mission-based budget. If you have not done so, will you please send a check made out to St. John’s with the words ‘mission-based budget’ on the memo line? This can make such a difference in the work of our church here in Colorado. Thank you!

## Sermon of the Month

Sermon preached on Sunday, October 12<sup>th</sup>

There is a modest little joke that I rather like. It's about a man who is seeing the Pacific Ocean for the first time. His reaction? "It's not as big as I expected." Okay, so I said it was a modest little joke! But the point is that somehow this fellow was underwhelmed by what can only be described as an incredibly awesome sight.

I thought of this joke in reflecting on our reading from Exodus this morning. You know, we often condescend to the Old Testament. In translating from ancient Hebrew culture into our own, it is too easy to emphasize how much they didn't understand about the world they lived in and about how much more "sophisticated" we are than they were. And of course we do know much more than they could. But they certainly experienced genius in their people at roughly the same rate we do in ours today. And in fact, theologically, I would say that they were surely more touched with genius than our own society is. Remember that they were working out this monotheism thing pretty much from scratch, whereas we are standing on their shoulders. And the reading from Exodus highlights one of the ways in which they get something right and we don't.

For, when we reflect upon God, we are like the man looking at the Pacific; we are not sufficiently overwhelmed by the power of this God. And the Hebrew people—especially the author of the Exodus passage, gets it.

Moses understands that the presence of God is a huge, powerful, even dangerous presence. To be in the presence of God; to look upon his face would be to die. . . (By the way, the Hebrew word for face is the same as that for presence.) We humans cannot touch the divine without being blown away by its great power and awe-fulness.

This theme is found elsewhere in the Old Testament. Remember that when Isaiah was called, he declared that he was doomed, that no sinful man could be in the presence of God and live, the gap between God's goodness and our sinfulness was just too huge. And when Ezekiel hears his call from God, he did not look upon the glory of God. What he reported was that he saw something like the appearance of the glory of God. Look at all that distancing: he not only doesn't actually see the glory of God; he doesn't even see the appearance of it, but only *something like* the appearance of God's glory.

There is a consistent understanding that it is dangerous to be in God's presence. But we, today, have the concept of a God who is much tamer and safer than this. We emphasize the compassion and the goodness of God, and I certainly do not want to lose this. But in our constant imagery of God as comforting presence, as support in time of trouble, as loving Father—we tend to see God as a tame presence. We lose the sense of awe that we should feel when we are in God's presence. I do not suggest that we should think of God as a danger to us, but that we should have the sense of a great powerful presence in the

way that we would, say, in the presence of a magnificent ocean, or the Grand Canyon.

Annie Dillard wrote a wonderful essay on this topic. She wrote the following:

On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, making up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies hats and straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offence, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return.

“We should all be wearing crash helmets!” What a wonderful line. But we have lost this sense of power, this sense of “awe-fulness” of the God we worship. It is all gentle Jesus, meek and mild. And we lose the sense of danger that we see in the story of the overturning of the tables of the money-changers in the temple. And we fall into the mistake of assuming that following this Jesus is always going to be about

safety and never about stepping out into danger, as Annie Dillard says, to where we can never return.

It is not that we need to give up the fundamentals of the Gospel, which are still about God’s grace and his love for us. We are not to be fearful Christians; we are to be confident in our acceptance by God and in our ultimate salvation. But for a people who pride themselves on the Anglican virtue of being able to hold opposites in tension, we have mostly lost this tension. We have wholly embraced the easy comforting side at the cost of the sense of adventure.

So in our prayers and in our worship, let’s not simply rest comfortably in God’s presence, but let’s take the time and make the effort to step back and consider the grandeur, the power, the amazing power, the remarkable nature of God and how his great goodness, his power, his infinite nature are also a little scary. And that being in this presence is an adventure, is exciting, is full of awe.

Our faith needs both these poles, both comfort and adventure. And this is something that we moderns need to re-learn from those unsophisticated Hebrews.

## Updates from the Church Family

### On the mend

We have two parishioners who are healing up from significant surgeries. Al Clark is breaking in a new knee, so to speak, and it was really good to see him at church last Sunday, a mere week and a half after the operation. And Carl Wells is rehabbing with a new titanium shoulder at his and Allie's home in Denver. Both patients received a rousing phone greeting from their fellow "bionic heretics" at the Saturday Men's Bible Breakfast. In addition, Rae Wilson has come through her cataract surgery splendidly, and is seeing much better than before.

### At the movies

We have been enjoying our most successful movie series in several years. Deacon Sally has led large turnouts in discussions of two provocative movies, *Secondhand Lions* and *Millions* in October. Don't miss the finale on Saturday, November 8, when after a 6PM dinner, we will view and discuss the Jody Foster film, *Contact*.

### Getting bugged

A number of our folk have been suffering from some sort of bug—not fully a cold and not fully the flu, including Fr. Spencer, who was considerably under the weather for the October 30 service. Primary symptoms are intermittent periods of weakness and difficulty concentrating over a week or so. Here's hoping we have seen the last of it.

### Activities, activities

Activity groups are being formed for the upcoming year. Those who sign up are organized into groups of three or so families, couples, or individuals. During the course of the year, each group will attempt to get together two or three times for fun and fellowship. Please call the church office at once if you have not signed up and would like to participate. This has proved a very popular and effective way to build up the bonds of Christian community.

### Faith Matters

(It certainly does!) Fr. Spencer is now contributing a column entitled "Faith Matters" to the local newspaper on a rotating basis with other clergy in the area. If you do not see the Ski-Hi News and would like to see Fr. Spencer's columns, please let him know at the church office. To date, he has written on biblical environmentalism, Christians and political discourse, and current conflict in the Anglican Communion.

## November 2008

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
						<b>1</b>
						8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>
9 AM HOLY EUCARIST	7 PM ALL FAITH DEPARTED		FR. SPENCER OUT OF TOWN THROUGH 7TH			8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>
9 AM HOLY EUCARIST * 10:45 AM VESTRY MEETING				2 PM BIBLE STUDY		8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 10 AM GREEN TEAM MEETING * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>
9 AM HOLY EUCARIST				2 PM BIBLE STUDY	8 AM WORSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
<b>23/30</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>29</b>
9 AM HOLY EUCARIST				THANKSGIVING		8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL