

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Episcopal Church of St. John the Baptist



MARCH 2009

Lent falls largely into March this year, including the five Sundays leading up to Palm Sunday, and our landscape matches the mood of the season. To be out walking is to have to watch one's step for fear of slipping or even turning an ankle on the uneven icescape. (No cruel comments, please, from those of you in Arizona!) Indoors, the best place to be this month, features our annual Lenten teaching series, focused this year on mission in its many forms at St. John's.

Please note that for the five Sundays in March, St. John's will offer a Rite I Holy Eucharist at 7:45 in addition to the regular 9AM service.

We welcome Becky Jones from the diocesan Jubilee ministry on Sunday the **1st** to speak to us about jubilee ministries and our Cranmer dinners.

The following Sundays, the **8th**, **15th**, **22nd**, and **29th**, will feature, in order, Fr. Spencer, Deacon Diane, Rob Taylor from Mountain Parks Electric, and Cyndi Karnoscak presenting on different aspects of our mission.

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And, as an experiment, at 4PM on Thursdays the 12th, 19th, and 26th, Fr. Spencer will be “hanging out” at the Rocky Mountain Roastery in Fraser, available for shared coffee and conversation.

A Word from the Rector

Over the last several weeks, I have been reading and thinking a lot about mission, about the church’s mission, God’s mission, and how the two are connected. We know that to bring people to God is an important part of Jesus’ work, and therefore our work as well. We think of this as evangelism and, traditionally, we Episcopalians do not do this so well.

There are various models for bringing people to know God, and two of them are reflected in the schoolroom exercise known as “show and tell.” So one model is to tell them about Jesus. As is well known, this has never been the favorite model of Episcopalians. We are more attracted to the “show” and not to the “tell” of “show and tell.” We like the saying attributed to St. Francis: “Preach the Gospel constantly; when necessary, use words.” We like to think that we can demonstrate and evangelize through our example. We like the sentiments of the song “They’ll know we are Christians by our love.”

This tendency to want to show rather than tell the Gospel shows up in one way of trying to attract new members. It was once widely believed, and it is still impossible to get away from this notion entirely, that if we simply are a good enough church—good worship, good music, good preaching, good outreach, good coffee, good Sunday Schools, etc.—and were friendly and welcoming, well then, we would attract people to come join us. This is a natural and seductive view, but it presumes a different world and a different time than the one in which we live in. One recent seminary graduate observed that he was beautifully trained by his seminary, and if ever the 1950s come back, he will know just how to do church. But the 1950s aren’t coming back, and we live in a very different place.

For one thing, there is no expectation that people who are un-churched will be looking around for churches to join. If I had to guess, I would say that among the many visitors (guests!) that we entertain at St. John’s, there are no more than two or three individuals or couples a year who live here and are coming in order to see if we are “good enough” or the right church for them to grow. The model of our being church here for those who wander in to appreciate and to join is wholly unrelated to the world we live in.

So if people in the community in which we live do not come to us to see how good a church we are (!), the only other thing for us to do—other than to shrivel up and die—is to take the church out to the community. And this is the model I have been

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reading about—the model of a church that is “missional,” that sees itself as sent out, as much sent out as missionaries to China or to Europe, to bring people to God.

If this makes as much sense to you as it does to me, then we have a lot of work and a lot of thinking to do about how what we do as a church can be missional—taken out to the world around us. I know that I will be working on some of these questions over the course of my upcoming sabbatical, but perhaps we can get a head start on this work in the adult education sessions we have scheduled for the five Sundays in Lent: We will be reviewing some of our key ministries.

- March 1 Becky Jones of Jubilee Ministries at the Diocese of Colorado (Cranmer dinners)
- March 8 Fr. Spencer on the missional church
- March 15 Deacon Diane on our schools ministry
- March 22 Robert Taylor of Mt. Parks Electric on carbon footprinting (Green Team)
- March 29 Cyndi Karnoscak on mission work in the community (off-site worship)

It is not the responsibility of these people (other than for me) to answer the question about how we become more missional in our work. They are talking about ways in which we do outreach or ministry; it is for us to explore how this ties into not just doing good works, but also into showing people the Gospel, into bringing people to Christ.

One small experiment I am trying this month is to institute a “Coffee with Clergy” program. On Thursdays at 4PM during the month of March (except for March 5th, when I am away), I will be out in the community (in particular, the Rocky Mountain Roastery in Fraser) sipping coffee and hanging out. If it works with your schedule, drop by to join me for conversation about God, the church, the meaning of life, whatever. It is a small step, but it will be Christians coming together to be the church in a setting outside the church. And it may lead to much more.

+Father Spencer

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Notes about Ministries

Green, green, the church is green

Your St. John's Green Team is making a real splash these days, offering first two versions of a St. John's cloth bag and now a tee shirt, and for only \$5.00, too. All items sport the Episcopal Church shield and the name of the church, as well as Cranmer Chapel. Kudos to Brad Orr for arranging this. Be sure to buy him out and show the St. John's name around the county.

The don't call it Fat Tuesday for nothing

St. John's did its best to put weight on as many people as possible in support of the Mountain Family Center at our annual Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper. We served about 70 people and raised close to \$700 for the Center. Many members of the Center and its board (on which Deacon Diane serves) attended and helped with serving.

And what does 'shrove' mean, you might ask? Actually several people did, which sent your rector scurrying to his reference shelf. It turns out that 'shrove' comes from the old English word 'shrive', meaning to experience confession and absolution. This used to be done on Tuesday in preparation for Lent. And so, now you know that whenever you offer confession and receive absolution on Sunday morning, you are being shrived! Or shrove? Mardi Gras sounds like more fun, though.

They say "never volunteer,"

But Fr. Spencer is very grateful to Loretta McLaughlin and Monica Fuqua, who have offered to come into the office occasionally to help with office work of various kinds. Right now it looks as if we are talking about perhaps getting a call and coming in once every few weeks for a couple of hours, probably on a Thursday or Friday. Please call the church office if you would be prepared to be on a rotation offering this service. Fr. Spencer says he had lots of fun putting together a list of things for the first volunteers to do, and that he is very grateful for the help. This help means primarily that lots of useful but not absolutely necessary things get done, rather than being continually postponed.

Have we got talent, or what?

We were treated in February to two special presentations by our own parishioners. On February 8, Cyndi the outreach committee sponsored a potluck fundraiser for CrossLink Ministries, the organization for mission work in Europe that Cyndi Karnoscak's heads up. She presented an overview of her work to support missionaries there. And then on February 22, Joe Rooyackers, an independent financial planner, made a presentation on current financial conditions and challenges, with lots of historical context and review of various investment opportunities. Both sessions were well attended and well-received. Thanks to both Cyndi and Joe for sharing their experience and knowledge with us.

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We've got to get organized around here,

And that's what your new vestry did at the annual vestry retreat held at Fr. Spencer and Karla's home over February 5th and 6th. We spent time getting to know each other, enjoyed a movie and discussion together, and clarified schedules, goals, and ground rules for the upcoming year. Please do keep vestry in your prayers as we faithfully try to conduct the business and oversee the ministries of St. John's.

Sermon of the Month

Sermon preached Sunday, February 22

Last week I suggested that God wasn't easy; you have to say Yes. But of course not everyone is in a position to say "Yes," to God's invitation to come into his kingdom. One must "receive" the invitation or better, one must recognize the invitation before one can accept it.

That is what the Feast of the Epiphany is all about. It is about the wise men recognizing who Jesus is so that they can respond to the invitation. And throughout the Sundays between Epiphany and Lent, we revisit the theme of recognition, of manifestation, of knowing who Jesus is. I think of this time of the year as being about "Lone Ranger moments." Remember how at the end of each Lone Ranger episode, someone would ask "Who was that masked man?" And the answer was always "Why, don't you know? That's the Lone Ranger!" Similarly we get episodes from Jesus' ministry, and the disciples and others struggle with the question, "Who *is* this guy?" And the answer is "Why, don't you know? That's Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God!" And this series of identification moments builds until the last Sunday before Lent—this Sunday, culminating with the Transfiguration story. And we get this story every year.

For that is what the Transfiguration is—the manifestation of Christ as God son and as the vehicle of invitation into God's kingdom. There are some intriguing details—what is this about Moses, Elijah, and the three dwellings?—but I've preached on them in other years. But what is fundamental about the T-figuration story is that in a perfectly normal sequence of events, Peter, James, and John take a hike up a mountain with Jesus and in this perfectly normal context they are dazzled in the seeing of divinity in Christ.

One usually sees this described as Jesus being objectively changed, as the disciples seeing something radically weird, strange, and powerful in Jesus. But it doesn't have to be read that way. It can be read so that we see the transfiguration as how they perceived Jesus. As something that happened subjectively in the disciples

Now that is not the most natural way to read it. But I think it has value. The value does not lie in making the experience as subjective and hence doing away with anything miraculous. I am not interested in trying to take the miracles out of Jesus' life; anyone who accepts the miracles of creation, incarnation, and resurrection has no need to try to explain away a miracle as simple as clothes turning dazzling white.

No, the value of a more subjective reading lies in our understanding transfiguration as something that *we* can participate in. For we all need moments of transfiguration in the sense of being dazzled by the sudden apprehension of the presence of God in an ordinary event. The three apostles had this experience when they suddenly came to see the ordinary-appearing man they knew as Jesus as shining with God's presence.

We have a "transfiguration" moment anytime we behold something perfectly ordinary and are "dazzled" by the apprehension of the divine in it. And every transfiguration moment is an invitation or, perhaps, a reminder of the invitation before us to enter into God's kingdom.

I am sure that you all have moments that you can identify as transfiguration moments. I have a few. One was when I served as lay chalice bearer; I would bend down to the altar rail to offer the cup to a worshiper and just be "dazzled" by the sense of God's presence there, by the divine beauty of it. Another was in talking to an advanced multiple sclerosis patient who was struggling to get just a word or two uttered; I was "dazzled" by the sudden recognition of Christ in this person. And on a more abstract level, I remember as a seeker reading the beatitudes and being so struck by, so "dazzled" by, the divine beauty in them.

If we never see reality transfigured in this way, then we never get the intimations of the kingdom of God, and we may never be in a place to say "Yes" to the invitation to accept, to enter within. I suggested last week that God wasn't easy; we have to say Yes. The only challenge is to "see" God in the world around us. To be dazzled. To know our own Transfiguration moment.

Updates from the Church Family

Getting to know you

For three Thursdays in March—the 12th, 19th, and 26th—Fr. Spencer will be hanging out at 4PM with a cup of coffee at the Rocky Mountain Roastery in Fraser. All members, but especially newcomers to St. John’s, are invited to drop by for conversation. Think of it as an open house away from home, and feel free to bring a friend.

Whatever happened to . . . Janice Allmacher?

Janice reports that she has never been busier. She lives in an “age-qualified” community south of Denver, but spends a lot of time on the go. She has taken recent mission trips to Honduras and to Gulfport, Mississippi to help build housing. She has also traveled to New Zealand on a good will tennis tour and takes occasional trips with a singles group she belongs to. There may be a mission trip to Italy in the future. Knowing Janice, we are not surprised that she keeps up with an ambitious Bible Study. (We also happen to know she finds time for golf and skiing.) The Grand Lake home she and David had remains unsold, and she seldom makes the trip up to Grand County. But we have her promise that if she is ever here on a weekend, she will be back to visit with her “beloved mountain family.” We’ll hold you to that, Janice!

A great St. John’s welcome to

Dan and Susan McClean have declared their intention of joining St. John’s and of being truly “incorporated” into the community. They occasionally worship at Cranmer Chapel and sometimes at St. John’s, and they will not be truly full time up here until they sell their house in Lone Tree. Anyone want to make an offer? Seriously, it is great to have you with us, Dan and Susan, and we look forward to getting to know you.

Fly away home

At last, and after an excruciating five weeks, our friend Mandisa Ngobese has been “allowed” by Immigration and Naturalization to return to his home in South Africa. I say “allowed” because, despite the fact that all he wanted to do was to go home, INS had to incarcerate him for a month, going through all the process of deportation.

So nice to see you again,

It was a great treat to see Nichole Fuqua back for a visit and worshipping with us again. She continues to do really well in her classes at the University of Nebraska, Kearny. And Jim Cartwright hosted his former rector from Santa Fe for several days in February. Fr. Spencer had the privilege of offering a prayer of blessing for the Rev. Michael Milligan on the anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood.

March 2009

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7:45 AM & 9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST * 10:30 ADULT EDUCATION * 11:30 VESTRY MEETING				FR. SPENCER OUT OF OFFICE * 4PM COFFEE W/ RECTOR AT RM ROASTERY	3PM CENTERING PRAYER GROUP	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
7:45 AM & 9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST * 10:30 ADULT EDUCATION				2 PM BIBLE STUDY * 4PM COFFEE W/ RECTOR AT RM ROASTERY	3PM CENTERING PRAYER GROUP * 5PM DINNER AT CRANMER CHAPEL	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
7:45 AM & 9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST * 10:30 ADULT EDUCATION				2 PM BIBLE STUDY * 4PM COFFEE W/ RECTOR AT RM ROASTERY	WOMEN'S GROUP MEETS AT NOON * 3PM CENTERING PRAYER GROUP	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
7:45 AM & 9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST * 10:30 ADULT EDUCATION				2 PM BIBLE STUDY * 4PM COFFEE W/ RECTOR AT RM ROASTERY	3PM CENTERING PRAYER GROUP * 5PM DINNER AT CRANMER CHAPEL	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
29	30	31				
7:45 AM & 9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST * 10:30 ADULT EDUCATION						