

# A Voice in the Wilderness

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST



## APRIL 2009

It is hard to feel really penitential for Lent when the weather has been so gloriously beautiful—until last week, when we had another good dose of winter. Perfect for that penitential feeling. This April is a big month for St. John's, as we say not "Good bye," but "until we meet again" to Fr. Spencer who leaves on sabbatical, and greet the first of our wonderful set of guest priests. Be sure to come out to experience worship with talented priests of different styles.

Holy Week opens on the 5<sup>th</sup> with our observance of Palm Sunday.

During Holy Week be sure to join in worship on the 9<sup>th</sup>, Maundy Thursday, for traditional Foot washing and stripping of the altar, and on the 10<sup>th</sup> for Good Friday services.

And then on the 11<sup>th</sup> we observe Easter Vigil liturgically the single most important service of the year.

And of course we celebrate Easter Sunday, followed by brunch and Easter egg hunt on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Brunch will be an opportunity to say goodbye to Fr. Spencer and Karla.

Finally, be sure to welcome the Rev. Nina Stasser, our first guest priest, who will celebrate and preach on both the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 26<sup>th</sup>.

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## A Word from the Rector

I think that most of you know by now that I have been planning for a three month sabbatical, which will begin immediately after Easter Sunday. We can share our “farewells” and good wishes at our Easter Brunch, and after that Karla and I are off—and you are on your own.

But of course you are not on your own. As I have been preparing for the Sabbatical, St. John’s, collectively, has been planning for moving ahead in my absence. This process has involved many people, and I am grateful to them all. The goal has been to maintain as much of our usual ways as possible, while simplifying the tasks of both laity and supply priests. The process began last fall with a sabbatical planning working group consisting of Terry McFee, Joan Von der Heiden, Gene Ackley, Loretta McLaughlin, Lorie Wheeler, Eric Mowrey, and Deacon Diane Bielski. I will discuss the results of this work on our ministries page. Here let me just alert you to who your guest priests will be, and then share with you some of the plans I have for the three months away.

Here is the schedule for my replacement priests:

April 19, 26	The Rev. Nina Stasser
May 3	The Rev. Catherine Volland
May 10	The Rev. Larry Donoghue
May 17	Brother Robert Hugh
May 24 -June 28	The Rev. Michelle Danson
July 5, 12	The Rev. Larry Donoghue
July 19	ME!

This is a wonderful line-up of talented priests, and you will be getting sketches of their lives and activities in the weeks ahead so that you will have some familiarity with them when they are with you.

The bishop has said that he wants priests to have generous sabbaticals and that any sabbatical should be a mix of travel, education, family work, and R & R. You have indeed provided me with a generous sabbatical, and I mean to be faithful in my use of it. During the three months I will spend almost half of it traveling. Part of this time will be spent in California to strengthen family ties and, especially, to spend time with my mother, thinking about her future care. The rest will be spent in New York City, where I will be taking an intensive study course in contemporary spiritual autobiography at General Theological Seminary. I will also find time to visit old friends and old favorite museums, parks, and theaters—favorites from the nine years I lived there. For R & R there will be long walks with Jake and Karla, as well as a few “good walks spoiled” on golf courses.

At home, I hope to find time for daily reading even when I am not at the seminary. On my reading list are some books on “missional church,” or how the church may become a

“mission” to its community, as well as a large study on contemporary secularity by the Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor (winner of the prestigious Templeton Prize), a study of Old Testament Theology by Walter Breuggemann (dean of contemporary OT scholars), and some long-delayed novels, including especially James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, which I have long hoped to read before I die.

Finally, Karla and I hope to be able to put the Boulder house in order so that we might put it up for sale later this year. This will mean doing a lot of little simple things myself (idiot proof things) and being home to coordinate various larger repair and upgrading projects.

So I expect to be busy. I hope to return rested, rejuvenated, with new ideas for moving ahead with our ministry together, and very glad to see you all again. Please all of you take care of yourselves, worship well, serve well, that I will return to a St. John’s even more strong and more healthy than it is now.

God bless you all, and thank you so much for the opportunity for rest and growth that lies before me.

Fr. Spencer+

## Notes about Ministries

On the Rector's page, I promised to tell you more about how our ministries will be going forward in my sabbatical absence. What everyone will notice first, of course, are the Sunday morning worship services. There are being covered by a talented group of supply priests; I know you will be well served by them. As for some of the behind the scenes stuff, Deacon Sally, with the assistance of Loretta McLaughlin and Monica Fuqua, will be choosing the music and producing the bulletins. There will be no insert for the prayer list or for announcements. The Prayers of the People will be read from the forms available in the prayer book, and announcements will be presented from the floor by Senior Warden Kathe Morck or someone appointed by her.

Holy Eucharist will be offered at the Saturday Cranmer Chapel service for the Sundays of May 23 through June 27, inclusive, by the Rev. Michelle Danson. We will have lay-led Evening Prayer for the Saturdays between April 18 and May 16. We have asked the bishop for permission for Deacon Diane to offer Eucharist from reserved sacrament for the Saturdays of July 4 and 11.

This newsletter will be edited and produced by Joan Von der Heiden, who handled this chore before my arrival here. And you thought you were retired, Joan. If you wish to contact the church in my absence, the only way to do so will be by mail or face to face with a church officer or leader. Both telephone and e-mail will not be taking messages; people will be referred to the mails or, in case of emergency to Senior Warden Kathe Morck. Kathe, with Diane's help, will handle the mail and make sure that everything gets to the appropriate persons. Financial, legal, and insurance matters will be handled, as before, by Treasurer Eric Mowrey and by Lorie Wheeler.

For normal pastoral care issues, Deacon Diane will be available. In the event of extraordinary needs, The Rev. Catherine Volland will be available. If she is unable for some reason to respond, Diane and Kathe will be able to call upon the supply priest scheduled for that particular week, The Rev. Michael Mortvedt (vicar at Trinity Episcopal Church, Kremmling), and also the Rev. Christy Shain-Hendricks (Rector, St. John's Breckenridge and Missioner of the Northwest Region).

Thanks to all who are pitching in to cover a base (or two). All told, I think you are going to make it! If you have any questions about any of these arrangements or anything else that concerns you, be sure to ask Fr. Spencer.

### **A little helping hand**

Many thanks to Loretta McLaughlin and to Monica Fuqua for coming in as office volunteers last month. We got a lot of useful things done. Please consider volunteering for this ministry upon Fr. Spencer's return in July.

## Sermon of the Month

*Sermon delivered Sunday, March 15*

“Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!”

What a cry of pain that must have been. Jesus enters into the outer courtyard of the temple where the moneychangers are at work. Why are moneychangers necessary? Well, Jews would come from all over the empire to make sacrifice in the temple, and they would need to purchase animals to offer up on the altar. And the money they would have would of course be Roman coin. And Roman coin was forbidden in the temple. The images on the coin were considered blasphemous and, on top of that, some coins declared Caesar to be God. All such coins had to be changed into Jewish currency. This was a business. And of course the animals had to be purchased. This was also a business. And it was a necessary business to support the sacrifice system of Jewish worship.

What was Jesus’ primary problem with this business? Some think that it really was about the location of the activity. The problem is that the temple is being profaned, that its purity is not being upheld.

That may be correct. But there are other passages from the gospels that suggest strongly that Jesus wasn’t particularly uptight about purity regulations. Remember that the he had no problem with the Sabbath being “profaned” if it served the value of loving your neighbor as yourself. “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” And

when he was accused of violating the dietary laws, Jesus insisted that what when into one’s mouth did not defile, but only what came out of one’s mouth, i.e., what one said. Finally, in Matthew, when a violation of the temple is charged, Jesus is quoted as saying that something greater than the temple is at stake here, i.e. the Kingdom of God. So I really don’t believe that Jesus’ problem with the moneychangers was about purity of the temple.

There is a bigger point at issue here, and that point is our relationship to God and what it is based upon. I suggest that Jesus’ point is that when we come to worship God, whether it be a temple, a church, at one’s bedside or at a table—when we come to worship God, we are not in a marketplace.

A marketplace is a place of transaction or exchange. One party offers something in exchange, and another accepts it. This is a normal and essential part of our daily lives. We all make such exchanges all the time. But Jesus is saying, *not* when you come to worship God. When we come to God, we do not come to exchange anything. The system of sacrifice assumes that we do. It assumes that we offer up a sacrifice to God, and he accepts it and gives us back, in exchange, his favor and blessing. The system of works righteousness assumes the same thing. It assumes that we offer God behavior that he approves of, and he gives us back, in exchange, favor, blessing, and salvation.

Jesus is saying that are relationship with God is not a trade. Our relationship with

God is just that—it's about relationship. That is why, I think, that Jesus says that properly understood the Law is about loving God with all our heart, mind, and soul, and about loving one another. Loving another person, human or divine, is not about exchange. It's not a commercial transaction.

But surely we don't fall into this primitive trap, do we? Of course we do; all the time. Anytime one prays "God, if you will just do this (or get me out of this mess), I'll never do this again—anytime one prays like this, one is making the relationship into a trade, a commercial transaction; one is making the Father's house into a marketplace.

I once had a parishioner who from one year to the next cut his pledge to the church in half. When I asked about it (I needed to know if he had a problem with the church or with me or with God), the reply was that he was busier now and could only come to church half as often as before. His relationship to the church—and maybe to God—was being treated as if it were a commercial transaction. And not as relationship. He was making his church into a marketplace. But a church is not about an exchange of goods and services. We must not treat the church, whether we are consumers of church or whether we are producers of church—and most of us are both—as a vendor of religious services that are to be exchanged.

It is not just that commerce and faithful relationship are different. We can actually use the model of transaction, of commerce, to protect ourselves from the threat of genuine relationship. We can do this at the personal level. How often do we refuse to accept a gift from

another (or they refuse to accept ours), insisting that we give something back in exchange. Sometimes this is about our not wanting to be in relationship with another. Gifts are about relationship and commitment to one another. Exchange is commerce. If we feel we need to give back, it may be because we don't want to be indebted, or committed, to another.

And some people do this same thing with God. As Richard Rohr has said, religion is one of the very best ways to avoid a genuine commitment to God. People offer God all sorts of things: sacrifice upon an altar; observance of all sorts of religious obligations. Some people think religion is primarily about liturgical worship; they are wrong. It is primarily about being in faithful relationship to God. Some believe that religion is primarily about outreach; they are wrong too. It is primarily about faithful relationship with God.

To offer up anything to God rather than this faithful relationship is to offer God an exchange, a commercial transaction. It is to make his house a marketplace.

Stop making my Father's house a marketplace.

## Updates from the Church Family

### News flash!

Some of you will have already heard that the judge's ruling is in on the legal battle over ownership of the property associated with Grace and St. Stephen's church Colorado Springs. But if you have not, the judge has ruled that the property and buildings do indeed belong to the diocese of Colorado and not to those clergy and parishioners of St. Stephen's who left the Episcopal Church. Those parishioners loyal to the diocese will take possession of the property the first week in April.

### On the mend

We are so pleased to report that Eleanor Holley is doing extremely well after surgery on her back two weeks ago. She will be in a brace for a few weeks yet, but she is up and about and, best of all, pain free for the first time in a long while. Way to go, Eleanor.

### On a very sad note

We are deeply sorry to pass along the news that Joyce Ackerson has been diagnosed with terminal cancer. She will be spending the time left to her in Texas with her son and daughter-in-law. She is at peace in the Lord and reports that the time since the diagnosis has been one of great healing. Keep her and her family in your prayers.

### Like topsy!

As those of you who are here at St. John's on a regular basis will have surely noticed, we have a lot of new members! We will acknowledge and celebrate this fact at our Easter Sunday service, when we will have the first formal incorporation of new members ceremony since Fr. Spencer's arrival. (Of course, we *have* had new members before; now we will begin to celebrate them appropriately.)

### "Hopalong" Douglas

Longer-term members of St. John's will remember "Hoppie" Douglas. We caught up with her by phone the other day to see how she was doing. Hoppie now lives in Seattle near two of her children and her grandchildren, and at the age of 88 (is that possible?) she is thriving. She enjoys the Northwest, although she allows that she does actually miss the snowfalls, at least the gentle, pretty, ones. She walks daily and is in better health and in better condition now than she has been in years. She sends her greetings to all here, and she knows that she has our affection and best wishes.

## **EPISCOPAL RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT LENTEN PROJECT:**

Lent offers us the opportunity to reflect on our lives, our neighbors and our world. We began our Lenten journey with Episcopal Relief and Development's meditations, Peace and Compassion, and were asked to remember our neighbors in need around the world and to join the effort to address three specific Millennium Development Goals: 1.) To reduce child mortality, 2.) To improve maternal health, and, 3.) To combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases.

As you read each day's meditation perhaps you were particularly drawn to a specific story that resonated within you asking for a response. During each Sunday in Lent a short vignette painted a picture of how ERD was able to help alleviate suffering through humanitarian aid. Remember the plight of Elize, her husband, and their 8 children living in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a land where malaria runs rampant. The children had been infected several times and a large part of the family's limited income had been spent on medical treatment. Thanks to the Nets For Life program, Elize received training to identify malaria symptoms and prevent the spread of the disease and received a long-lasting insecticide treated net for her home. Since then, no one has contacted malaria and now Elize is organizing her neighbors in community action to prevent malaria.

There is an African proverb that says, "Sticks in a bundle, are unbreakable." When we read stories of places in the world where children die before the age of 5 due to diarrhea caused by drinking unclean water, or, children become heads of their household when their parents die of AIDS we can easily become overwhelmed by the enormity of the circumstances and our ability as just one person to bring about any kind of solution. Through supporting ERD we can make all the difference in the world! Each of our Lenten gifts, whether great or small, taken together and combined with the Lenten gifts of Episcopalians nationwide combine to make a real difference in the lives of those most in need.

As we complete our Lenten journey and arrive at Easter Sunday feeling God's power to alleviate suffering, may we look back over the days of Lent and follow through on God nudging us to come to the aid of our brothers and sisters around the world who are hungry, sick, and poor. Please remember to send in your Lenten offering in the envelope provided in the meditation, or, you can donate online at [www.er-d.org](http://www.er-d.org), or, call 1-800-334-7626 ext. 5129. All gifts are tax deductible. Thank you for your part in bringing about hope and healing.

**A GROUND BREAKING EVENT!** Habitat for Humanity of Grand County has invited us to mark our calendars now and save the date for the ground breaking ceremony for the 2009 Habitat House. Meet the new Habitat family and help celebrate the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> Habitat house on Saturday, April 25, at 10:00 AM on Grand Avenue between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Streets in Hot Sulphur Springs (look for the Habitat banner). Pray for nice weather but short of a full scale blizzard the ground breaking will occur as scheduled.

**ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION:** Fr. Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest, founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and author of numerous books will be in Colorado this month for the following presentations.

- St Andrew United Methodist Church, 3350 White Bay Drive, Highlands Ranch on Friday, April 24 at 7 PM  
“Action and Contemplation: The Balancing Act of All Spirituality”
- Montview Boulevard Presbyterian Church, 1980 Dahlia Street, Denver on Saturday, April 25  
10 AM: “The Path of Descent: The Biblical Theme of Themes”  
1:30 PM: “The Path of Descent Workshop: Exploring and Sharing our Understanding of the ‘Theme of Themes’ of the Bible”

Tickets (General Seating)

\$25 for both lectures OR \$15 for any one lecture

\$15 for the workshop

\$10 for a box lunch for Saturday

Go to [www.montview.org](http://www.montview.org) for registration information. Information line: 303-355-2095 Ext. 125.

## April 2009

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
			1	2	3	4
						8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
9 AM PALM SUNDAY HOLY EUCARIST * 10:30 VESTRY MEETING				6 PM MAUNDY THURSDAY SERVICE	10 AM GREEN TEAM MEETING * NOON STATIONS OF THE CROSS * 6 PM GOOD FRIDAY SERVICE	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL * 8 PM EASTER VIGIL
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
9 AM EASTER HOLY EUCARIST * 10:30 EGG HUNT/ EASTER BRUNCH						8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
9 AM HOLY EUCARIST						8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
26	27	28	29	30		
9 AM HOLY EUCARIST						