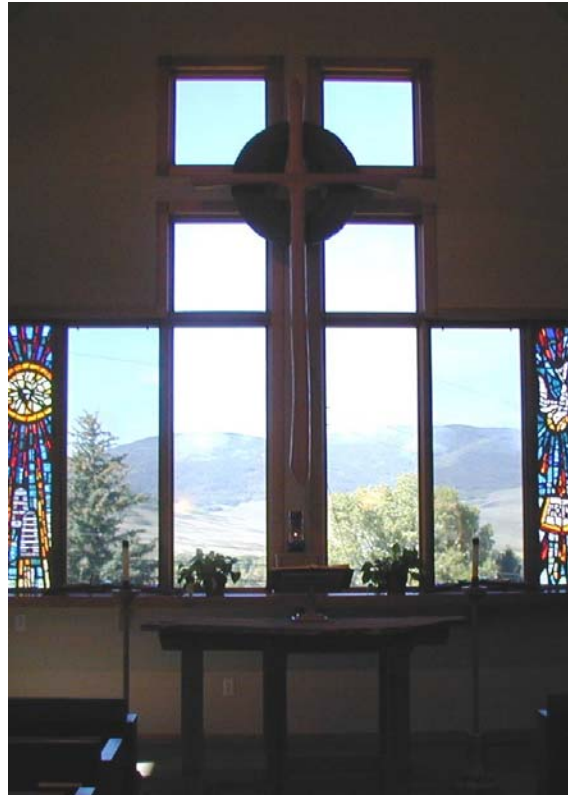


A Voice in the Wilderness

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST



DECEMBER 2009

St. John's wishes all a very happy New Year as we begin the new Christian calendar year. It is a time for preparation and readiness for the truly big cosmic things, but also for smaller events such as preparations for our own Advent teaching series, our Children's Pageant and Decoration Party, and our various services of celebration throughout the Advent and Christmas seasons. Come celebrate with us!

Try to attend as many sessions of our teaching series on the Episcopal tradition as you can. In December we offer two sessions on our prayer book, following services on Sunday the 6th and Sunday the 13th.

Sunday the 20th is a big day for us. Following the service our children present their annual Christmas Pageant, which is followed by our annual "decoration party," with holiday refreshments, to decorate the church for the Christmas season.

And our traditional Christmas Eve Lessons and Carols program is offered on the 24th at both Cranmer Chapel (5PM) and St. John's (8PM). Christmas Day service is at 9AM.

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A Word from the Rector

On the first Sunday of Advent in this year we heard a very short passage from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. And it began with the words "How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you?" In previous years, I have latched on to that verse as a vehicle for expressing to all of you what joy you bring to me in my priestly ministry. I remember that one year it was a children's service, and it became an opportunity to share with the children what a joy they were to all of us. And surely it is important that we take the time to do what Paul did in this letter—to tell people close to us, who matter to us, whom we love, that we take great joy in them. And because Advent 1 is the anniversary of my coming to St. John's—eight years ago now, you took advantage of last Sunday to thank me for my service here.

In response, I would like to say that it may surprise some of you that I am often reminded of the joy I take in you during our yearly financial stewardship pledge drive, which we are now finishing up. (Or perhaps as some of the stricter grammarians among you might prefer: our pledge drive, up with which we are now finishing!) Why? Because I can see, and sometimes hear from you, about how you so faithfully struggle to support our life in community here and our Christian ministries.

This is reflected in different ways. Already, with less than half of our expected pledges received, I have seen several of you increase your pledge up from what it was to one "full share" of \$3,000. [See either of our two stewardship mailings for a definition of "full share."] I can almost hear in those pledges people saying "Well, it's a little more than I planned, but I guess I can stretch out a little more in able to signal my support for St. John's. I take joy in these people.

Already, we have in hand two generous pledges from new members. This is especially critical for us, as we try to offset generous givers who have moved away in the last couple of years. And in these pledges, I can hear people saying, "We may be newcomers here, but we have found a loving spiritual home, and we are prepared to take an active part in supporting it" I take joy in these people.

Every year we receive several very modest pledges from people who visit us only very seldom. And we still receive pledges from people who have moved away and cannot attend here at all. That these people—non-attendees or very occasional attendees—wish to show their commitment is a beautiful thing. I take joy in them.

And there is usually a pledge that is extremely small from someone who clearly is giving from very limited resources. The best example was dear Pat Geminden, who before she died faithfully pledged every year her few widow's coins. (I apologize for breaking confidentiality in sharing pledge information of an individual; I do not think she would mind.)

And I have received so far two anguished notes in which people who clearly love St. John's explain to me that their new conditions mean that they have to lower their pledges. And another note in which people say that will give more than their pledge if it turns out they can. I take joy in these people.

There is a story behind each pledge, small or large, and although I sometimes do, I usually do not know what that story is. Nor should I. Often when a pledge card comes across my desk, I have no idea what that particular pledge "means." And perhaps when I say that I can almost hear a story behind a pledge, I am quite wrong.

But I do know that every pledge of any amount indicates a commitment to St. John's, to who we are, to what we are, and to what we believe in. Each one is a beautiful thing, and each one is something to take joy in. I hope that in sharing the above and my joy that each of you can share in the joy of belonging to this church made up of so many faithful members, doing all that they can in whatever circumstance they find themselves.

Fr. Spencer+

P.S. Please know that this letter is about money because it is written at the time that I am thinking about finances and financial giving to St. John's. It is certainly not the case that there is any special connection between my joy and financial giving. There is this same joy around any kind of giving to St. John's or participation in its activities. I could make the same kind of list around volunteer work or shared activities of any kind—worship, education, outreach. There are many other ways in which I feel joy in St. John's, including every time I see a volunteer working around the church, every time I see a lay minister contributing to our worship services, and, indeed, every time I see any of you in church. God bless you all.

Notes about Ministries

Are priests necessary?

There is an old joke about bishops, which asks the question “Are bishops necessary,” and answers it “Well, they must be, because why else would we ever have them?” And in our tradition there are certain things that we do reserve for priests, but it is good to be reminded of how much good ministry happens with lay leadership. Did you know that there are four active groups at St. John’s that were founded and led by laypeople? Longest running is the Saturday morning Men’s Bible Breakfast, started by Don Hicks and its leadership shared among the members. Trinity, the women’s group shares leadership, with some good diaconal support, since Fr. Spencer doesn’t qualify to join. The contemplative prayer group meets Friday afternoon under the leadership of Sharry Erzinger (with good help from Kaye Piper), and the missional conversation team meets every other Monday morning, with Stu Findley the primary organizer. God bless all these leaders and all who participate in these groups. They add greatly to the health and vitality of St. John’s.

More to be thankful for

Another ministry that was started and continues under lay leadership is the entire Cranmer Chapel dinners program. We have primarily Joan Von der Heiden to thank, for she makes it all possible, but we also give thanks this season for the help of Bruce Byrd, who arranged for the donation of several beautiful turkeys this year for the opening Thanksgiving Day dinner and for Beth Collins and Jim Magill, whose donation of time and work went beyond the call of duty.

And yet more

Thanks also to Kirk Lietzke whose company has now completed the work of building a new retaining wall to cover and to protect the previously exposed foundations of Cranmer Chapel. They also did some reshaping of the landscape to direct the flow of melting snow away from the building. And for those of you who seldom attend the Saturday evening service there, we have seen significant growth in attendance at this service.

“I can see clearly now . . .”

Fr. Spencer has been experimenting in the bulletin preparation process, and beginning this month there will be available service bulletins in a larger print format for those with impaired vision. If you might find a large print version helpful, be sure to ask the usher to provide one.

Sermon of the Month

Sermon preached on Sunday, Nov. 1,
2009

And a happy All Saints' Day to you. Today we celebrate the lives of the saints—all of them.

Which means what? Who are the saints? When they come marching in, just who do we see in that number? The narrow definition includes just those actually canonized in the Roman tradition or accepted in other traditions as being really, really, “special.” This would include Peter, Paul, and Mary. And John and Paul and George. (Not Ringo, sorry; there is no St. Ringo.)

The broad definition includes us all, at least all of us believers. Paul uses this definition when in a letter he often refers to the members of one of his churches as “the saints.” There is often confusion between these two understandings. For just one example, in one our hymns this morning we sing, “We feebly struggle, they in glory shine,” which has the saints as very different from us. And in another hymn we sing “And there’s not any reason, no not the least, why I should be one (a saint) too.”

This is the first year since I have been at St. John’s that we have not observed two days—one for the “special saints” on All Saints’ Day and one for the rest of us “saints” on All Faithful Departed, or All Souls’ Day. Originally the two observances were separated because of the doctrine of purgatory. The special saints died and went directly to be with Christ—so we celebrated.

The rest died, and not being perfected, went to purgatory—so we prayed for them that their time there might be shortened.

Today—in our church—we do not accept the doctrine of purgatory. Nor do we believe that canonized saints were necessarily “perfected.” And many of the rest of us may well be spiritually as advanced as some of the canonized. So—I have been persuaded that theologically we really cannot justify splitting our remembrance of the dead into two categories. This morning we do two things: we celebrate the lives of the saints—canonized and not (broad definition), and we both celebrate and remember those known to us who have died.

For we believe that they are all in the hands of God. The author of the Wisdom of Solomon tells us that the souls of the righteous are in the hands of God, yes, but we must make allowance for his Old Testament theology. We are all of us—regardless of the degree of our righteousness—in the hands of God. And to say this is to make an affirmation of trust. To say that we are in the hands of God is to say that we trust God to protect and care for us.

When I was preparing these words, suddenly a story my father liked to tell me came to mind. A boy was on a roof without a ladder, and his father was on the ground trying to get him to jump off into his arms. Come on and jump, he said, I’ll catch you. Finally the boy screwed up his courage and jumped. And his father withdrew his arms stood

back and watched him land hard on the ground. “Just let this be a lesson to you, son,” he said, “Never trust anyone.” I am not sure why my father was so fond of that story.

But our Father is one in whom we do trust and that trust extends unto death. One of my favorite lines from the burial service goes as follows. “If we have life, we are alive to the Lord, and if we die we die in the Lord. So, then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s possession.”

This is a statement of trust. This sustains us. It sustains us in our trials now in this life; it sustains us in facing our own deaths; and it sustains us in dealing with the deaths of those whom we love.

And it all comes back to trust. Think of how virtually all of our life in faith rests on this trust. Which can waver, but can which always be renewed by our life together and our shared experiences in God.

All of our life in faith? Well, it is trust that casts out doubt. It is trust that underlies courage. It is trust that comforts. It is trust that leads to celebration. And this morning we do celebrate. We celebrate the exemplary lives of the special saints. But we also celebrate the more ordinary lives of those who were especially close to us personally. We celebrate those lives that have been well led. We celebrate the times shared, and the gifts we have known from those departed.

And we do so in trust—that they, and we, are in the hand of God.

Updates from the Church Family

Sailing, sailing

Jim Cartwright is recently returned from a cruise (his first!) in the waters off Mexico. He had a great time, despite (as he claims) there being no shipboard romance. (Didn't this cruise come with a guarantee?) Welcome back, Jim.

Retiring sorts

Because they worship with us at Cranmer Chapel, you may not have met two of our newest members, the Rev. Jim and Helen Keeseey. Jim, a retired Methodist minister, and Helen live way back in the woods back of Tabernash and find it easier to get out for evening services than for morning. Jim and Helen have also organized a Parkinson's support group that meets monthly at St. John's. If you know them from activities outside the church, be sure to greet them as fellow members when you next see them.

Fancy meeting you here . . .

Fr. Spencer was delighted to run into Cyndi Karnoscak at (where else?) City Market last week. She was in town to see about business with her house. She reports that married life is good, and she radiates happiness. She and Jim (Wigdal) are settling into their new life together after honeymooning in France.

To your good health:

Ray Singler, husband to Roxanne, is recovering well after some difficult times from a "resurfacing" of his knee. (Why do I have this image of laying asphalt coming to mind?) Occasional guest Susan Gorman (daughter to Betty Cranmer) is doing very well after a procedure to regularize electrical impulses in her heart. Mike Ackley (son to Gene and Sally) is also doing well after his heart operation. Richard Hicks (brother to Don) attended the Cranmer Chapel Thanksgiving dinner in good health and good spirits after his operation. Pauline Friend (mother to Kathe Morck), however, is hospitalized again, this time for problems with her kidneys. Please keep Pauline in your prayers, along with Dan Zacek-Smith who is still struggling with incompletely diagnosed intestinal disease.

December 2009

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
		1	2	3	4	5
						8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST * 10:30 ADULT EDUCATION	10:30 AM MISSIONAL CONVERSATION (JAVA LAVA)			2 PM BIBLE STUDY	2:45 PM CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST * 10:30 ADULT EDUCATION * 11:30 VESTRY MEETING				2 PM BIBLE STUDY	NOON TRINITY WOMEN * 2:45 CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST * 10:30 AM CHILDREN'S PAGEANT * 11AM DECORATING PARTY	10:30 AM MISSIONAL CONVERSATION (JAVA LAVA)			5PM LESSONS AND CAROLS @ CRANMER CHAPEL * 8PM LESSONS AND CAROLS @ ST. JOHN'S	9AM HOLY EUCHARIST	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
27	28	29	30	31		
9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST				2 PM BIBLE STUDY		