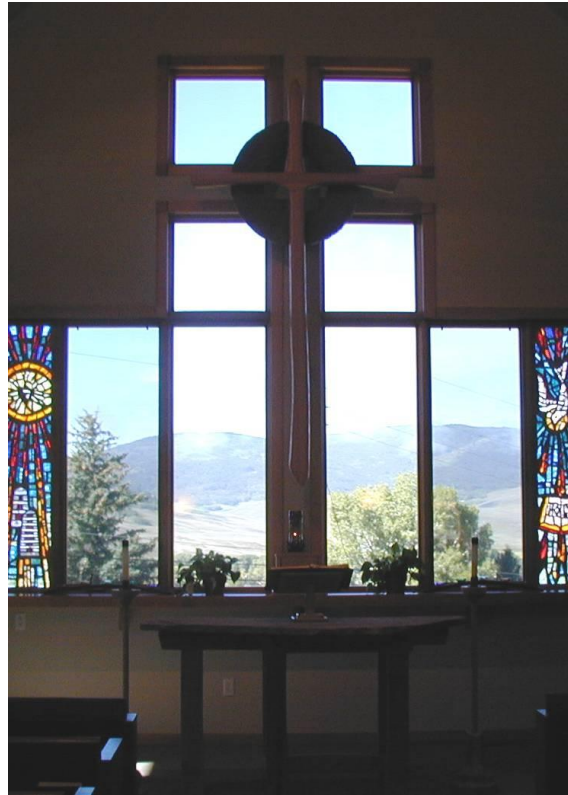


A Voice in the Wilderness

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST



MARCH 2010

Finally we are beginning to see some snowfall in Grand County to go with some brutally cold weather—and not a minute too soon, either. St. John's offers the following events in March to keep your hearts warm. If you are nostalgic for the old Rite I forms, your heart will be warmed by the 7:45AM service offered throughout the first five Sundays of Lent. If you are hungry for knowledge, bask in the glow of our adult education sessions on Anglicanism offered those same Sundays after the 9AM service. Exercise is what warms you up? A snowshoe outing is just the ticket for you. Here is what the month of March looks like at St. John's. And what could be better than the warm feelings always generated by our annual winter potluck/music night?

Saturday, March the 6th, is a red-letter fellowship day. Meet at 10Am at the Kawuneeche Visitors' Center in Rocky Mountain National Park for a snowshoe outing. Bring your own snowshoes and ski poles with large baskets. And in the evening at 5:30 we gather at the home of Tom Papatthakis and Lisa Von der Haar for our annual winter potluck/music night. Directions are available at the church and, by phone, at 887-9576.

Do not forget that for the Sundays of Lent (not including Palm Sunday) you have an opportunity to experience worship "old style" at our 7:45 Rite I service.

Sundays, March 7th, 14th, 21st, we continue our adult education series on aspects of Anglicanism. Sessions follow a brief coffee time after the service.

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A Word from the Rector

Are you under the impression that all books of the Bible are created equal, that is, that they are all equally inspired, equally important, equally nourishing, and equally valued? Well, to judge from the use we make of the Bible, this is certainly not the case. Of course, each of us has our own favorite passages, to which we return again and again. And if we judge by how often a book or a passage is read, pride of place likely goes to Psalm 23, 1 Corinthians 13, and perhaps Matthew 5-7 (the Sermon on the Mount). And if these are more likely to be read, it is because they are found by most to be more rewarding, more spiritually nourishing.

I am sure that each of us finds certain parts of the Bible more personally meaningful than others. For me, Psalm 40 is especially meaningful. The Gospel of John has always been my favorite, and I find Philippians especially beautiful and moving.

Just for fun the other day, I checked through our regular Sunday lectionary to see how the church “votes.” I wondered which books we most often read in our Sunday morning services. First place goes, not surprisingly, to the Psalms, since we read a psalm every Sunday. And after that, again not surprisingly, come the gospels, beginning with Luke.

But then it becomes less obvious. What would you guess? If you guessed Romans, you would be correct. In fact, we actually get slightly more of Romans than we do John. And then, staying with the New Testament, come 1 Corinthians and Acts, followed by Hebrews, Ephesians, and 2 Corinthians.

Apart from the Psalms, only three Old Testament books are read anything like as much as the New Testament books just mentioned. By far the most popular OT book is—Isaiah. Next comes Genesis, and then Jeremiah. All the other OT books are dipped into just occasionally. Several books are not read at all over the three-year cycle. So it is hard to argue that all scripture is equal in any substantive sense. If it is, then we should certainly be changing our reading habits. Interestingly enough, of the ten most read books, our Thursday Bible Study has read six and is currently reading Matthew, which will make it seven. What have we missed? Luke, Mark, and Jeremiah.

Lent is a good time to make or to renew one’s commitment to Bible reading, whether on one’s own or in group reading and study. I know that members of both the Thursday afternoon group and the Men’s Saturday Bible Breakfast group have grown spiritually through their study. Reading with a group not only allows one to hear different perspectives on a passage, but it also fosters fellowship and community. Won’t you consider joining one of these groups?

If you would be interested in group Bible Study, but cannot attend one of the current groups, please let me know this. We may be able to change meeting times or even begin a new group at a time and place that works for you.

We are nourished by God’s word, and the more we do read it and the more we come to understand it, the more nourished we are. You will find it well worth the investment of time and effort.

Fr. Spencer

Notes about Ministries

It's not called 'Fat Tuesday' for nothing

St. John's is writing fat checks to two local organizations that work to relieve hunger and poverty in Grand County. The Mountain Family Center and the Samaritan Ministries will share in the more than \$900 raised at our annual Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper. Thanks to all who supported it, and special thanks to Terry McFee who was organizer in chief this year.

Making a difference

St. John's was not the only Colorado Episcopal Church to dig deep to support the bishop's Epiphany Appeal for Haiti. The appeal raised a total of \$510,261, which will be funneled to earthquake relief through Episcopal Relief and Development and the Colorado Haiti Project. What a wonderfully generous outpouring of Christian love!

Boo!

While others may expect visits from ghosts, goblins, and other spooky things, we will have a very welcome visitor next Halloween. Sunday, October 31, marks the date when we will receive our next visitation from Bishop Robert O'Neill. While we will not have, to the best of my knowledge, any confirmations this visit, I hope that some of you who are new to our tradition may decide to be received into the Episcopal Church. Contact Fr. Spencer if you have any questions about this.

It's a blooming thing

Would you like to celebrate a Remembrance, Honorarium, Birthday or Anniversary and at the same time beautify our services with flowers on the Altar??? We have a sign up sheet (calendar year) on the Bulletin Board with envelopes to place your check in ~ \$30.00. We do Not do flowers for Lent but you can give \$10.00 for the Easter Lilies. It takes 18 Lilly's to decorate the church. If you would like this as a remembrance, etc. fill out an envelope. Also "MEMO" your check as Altar Flowers. Leave in Joan VdH's box or phone her @ 726-5189. I would like a 2-week lead-time.

All aboard!

Fr. Spencer was recently elected to serve on the board of directors of Habitat for Humanity. He expects to serve as liaison to the county clergy and will work to strengthen cooperation between Habitat and the churches. Habitat continues to hold their monthly meetings at St. John's. Fr. Spencer continues to serve as member and as secretary of the board of directors of Heart of the Mountain Hospice, which also meets at St. John's.

In full retreat

Actually your newly elected vestry is not retreating at all, but charging straight ahead. It met at High Mountain Lodge (Tom and Julie Beckwith, innkeepers) for its annual retreat over Friday night and Saturday morning, February 26-27, to organize and plan for the next year. A lot was accomplished, and we all look forward to very full and very productive year on all fronts. Your vestry consists of Walter Wilson (Sr. Warden), Amy Zacek-Smith (Jr. Warden), Kathe Morck, Loretta McLaughlin, Beth Magill, Tom Papatkakis, and Fr. Spencer.

Sermon of the Month

Sermon delivered February 21 (Lent 1)

There is certainly a long and distinguished history of wilderness stories in scripture. The best known is probably the forty years spent in the wilderness by the Hebrew people on their way out of slavery in Egypt to the promised land. Forty years! A feminist friend of mine insists that the only reason it took forty years was that Moses—just like a man—refused to stop to ask for directions. Theologically, however, she was quite wrong. It seems clear that these forty years were necessary years, years of trial, testing, and purification that prepared Israel for coming into the land. It was God’s plan that his people be tested and improved (if only in that the older generation was allowed to die off) so that they would be worthy of coming into the new land.

The Gospel story of Jesus’ forty days and nights in the wilderness is obviously based on the Exodus story. It is yet one more way in which Jesus is held up as “the new Moses.” He is in the wilderness to undergo hardships and temptations, and it is no accident that in each of the Gospels in which this story appears it comes at the very beginning of his ministry. Jesus, too, is being tested and tried by way of his being prepared for his ministry.

And today on the first Sunday of Lent, we enter our own liturgical period of testing and trial. We experience hardship and temptations and testing so that we may be prepared both for our own ministries (like Jesus) and so that we are ready to receive our promised gift

from God (like Israel). Only for us the gift we are readying for is that of sharing in the glory of Jesus’ life and ministry.

We use the term ‘wilderness’ rather casually these days. But to the Hebrews and to the Jews of Jesus’ time, wilderness was serious business. It was quintessentially *dangerous*. The Judean wilderness was nothing like the wilderness of, say 16th century North America, a land that could and did support much life. The Judean wilderness was desert—dry, forlorn, and unable to support much life at all. It was a land of serpents, scorpions, drought. It represented deprivation, possible attack, punishment—Danger. The word ‘God-forsaken’ comes to mind.

But if wilderness is a metaphor for danger, then to some extent we all live a wilderness experience, for we all live in a dangerous world, a world in which we are exposed to many evils. There are of course the physical evils of disease, accident, privation, and assault. But in the spirit of Jesus’ wilderness experience, perhaps we should concentrate more on the moral evils represented by temptations that are constantly around us.

It is an essential aspect of our lives as Christians that we go through a wide range of spiritual experiences, including joy in the gift of Christ (ritualized in Christmas), gratitude for his ministry of sacrifice for us (Easter), appreciation for God’s spirit among us (Pentecost), grief over Jesus’ suffering (Good Friday), and so on. It is not that we can separate out our actual feelings

this discretely. We may be depressed over an Easter or Christmas, and if something really good has happened in our lives, we may be in a very good mood on a given Good Friday. But our Christian liturgical calendar give us an opportunity to make real in our own lives an aspect of the Christian experience.

And part of that Christian life is the experience of being tested and/or tempted, just as the Hebrew people were and just as Jesus was. It is a part of the life of any Christian (or anyone else for that matter), because we all live the wilderness experience at times, because we all live in a world of dangers, both physical and moral. Lent ritualizes this experience in the same way that Christmas ritualizes the experience of joy at the coming of Christ.

This is why it is good to take on Lenten disciplines. To not take on some Lenten discipline, to not observe Lent in our lives, would be like not celebrating Christmas. It would be to fail to acknowledge or even to deny that the Christian life involves its trials as well as its joy. It would be to acknowledge and to make real to us the joy, while implicitly denying the struggle.

What a Lenten discipline might be will differ from person to person. But Jesus' trials—undertaken, I believe, to emphasize his solidarity with us in our trials—are suggestive.

When Satan tempts Jesus with turning stones into bread, Jesus refuses because one does not live by bread alone. This is the temptation of materialism, that all we need to thrive are material goods.. Any discipline that

reminds us that this is a temptation to be avoided is surely appropriate, so it is not at all inappropriate to ritualize this by giving up some special treat during Lent. And it is not appropriate to make fun of or to minimize someone for whom giving up chocolate, for example, successfully ritualizes the resistance to this temptation.

When Satan tempts Jesus by taking him to a high place and offering him the earthly authority over all kingdoms, Jesus is being tempted by power, control, and the manipulation of others. And we are reminded that Jesus never forces anyone to follow him, but only invites. Any discipline that reminds us that we are not to pursue power or control over others is also surely appropriate. So it would be a wonderful, if less common discipline, to consciously give up influence or control over those we live or work with, to live more lightly with our own agendas.

And when Satan tempts Jesus to throw himself off from the pinnacle of the temple and let God intervene to save him, Jesus answers that God is not to be put to the test. Here Jesus is resisting the temptation to make his relationship to God all about his own safety and security. And that, of course, is a temptation that we are all very much prone to. It is the temptation to make our faith all about our own health, security, welfare and not about our relationships to God and to others. Not about love, care and service to others. We are succumbing to this temptation, I think, when we allow something bad happening in our lives to undermines our faith. Of course if one's faith is all about our own welfare, then hits to our welfare

undermine that faith. But it is one of those temptations to be resisted.

I have seen people wrestling with this temptation and often losing. I have seen people—very good Christian people—handle human disaster in the lives of others without its threatening their own faith. They know about the holocaust, about the earthquake in Haiti, or about hundreds of thousands killed in tribal warfare in Africa. They see this suffering, and they are sorrowful, and they respond generously to help. But it doesn't shake their faith in God's love and care. But let a serious disease or accident happen to them or to a loved one, and suddenly it's "Where can God be in all this? Have we been abandoned? Does he not care any more?" It is logically bizarre to react so differently when the suffering is our own, but of course it is perfectly natural and human to do so. But any discipline that reminds us that our faith is not primarily about our own safety and welfare—perhaps a prayer discipline of praying for others and accepting more gracefully our own lot—is surely appropriate for Lent.

This is the first Sunday of Lent, and although the invitation to a holy Lent was issued last Wednesday, Ash Wednesday, it is by no means too late to reflect on how living a complete Christian life, acknowledging all aspects of it, should be reflected in our liturgical life by observing Lent, just as we observe the more joyous parts of the Christian calendar.

To take on a Lenten discipline; to acknowledge the wilderness, the place of moral danger, we live in is to find ourselves at Easter tested and prepared

more deeply for the joy of that season. Have a merry Christmas, yes, at the appropriate time. Have a happy or joyous Easter, yes, at the appropriate time. And for now, at this time, have a Holy Lent.

An Irish Blessing

(A Blessing from St. Patrick)

May the road rise to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
May the rains fall soft upon your fields,
And, until we meet again,
May God hold you in the hollow of His hand.

(Traditional Irish Blessing; origin unknown,
although some attribute it to St. Patrick.)

Updates from the Church Family

Rest in Peace

We mourn the death of Mandisa Ngobese, our friend from South Africa. Mandisa worked at the resort in Winter Park for a time last year and worshiped with several friends here at St. John's. His was not an easy time in the United States. Because the resort made a mistake on his paperwork he became ineligible to stay on on his work visa. Accordingly he turned himself in. Rather than allow him to return home, as he very much wanted to do, he was placed under arrest and held in an I.C.E. prison for several weeks before being deported—as if he had somehow done something wrong. All throughout this time of unjust suffering, he maintained a marvelous good will and did not seem to hold a grudge against this country. (Had this happened to any of us in a foreign country, I think we can imagine our reaction!)

Mandisa was apparently ill for a couple of weeks before dying. His widow called us with this news and to ask if we could help her and Mandisa's two small children. Vestry will take up this matter at its next meeting.

And again

Bob Lewis, partner of Peter Moore, died this past month in Galveston of complications from cancer of the throat. Bob and Peter visited us when they vacationed in Grand Lake and clearly loved St. John's and the people who welcomed them here. They were among the many very occasional visitors who supported St. John's financially as well. We hope to see Peter this summer.

Health Updates

We ask you to keep Carl Wells in your prayers. Carl developed another infection in his artificial hip. He was operated on Tuesday, Feb. 3, to remove the hip and to replace it with a "spacer" packed with antibiotics. It is hoped that after eight weeks of this treatment, the infection will be

eliminated and a new hip can be implanted. Carl faces many weeks of treatment and eventual recovery. Support him with your prayers and, when you can, your visits. And Dan Zacek-Smith was briefly hospitalized with what turned out to be an infection of the hand; this is now responding well to treatment, so Dan is back on track for recovery from his intestinal surgery of last month. Please remember Dan in your prayers.

I do, I do, I do

Susan Gorman (daughter of Betty Cranmer and occasional worshiper at St. John's) and her husband John will celebrate their 30th wedding anniversary with a re-affirmation of vows at St. Barnabas, Glenwood Springs. Fr. Spencer will join in the ceremony with St. Barnabas' new rector, Harrison Heidel.

March 2010

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	JAVA LAVA GROUP			2 PM BIBLE STUDY	2:30 GRAND PRAYER GROUP	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 10 AM SNOWSHOE OUTING * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL * 5:30PM MUSIC NIGHT
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
7:45 HOLY EUCARIST, RITE! * 9 AM HOLY EUCARIST * 10:30 ADULT EDUCATION				2 PM BIBLE STUDY	8AM WORSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING * 2:30 GRAND PRAYER GROUP * 5:30 VESTRY MEETING	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
7:45 HOLY EUCARIST, RITE! * 9 AM HOLY EUCARIST * 10:30 ADULT EDUCATION	JAVA LAVA GROUP			2 PM BIBLE STUDY	2:30 GRAND PRAYER GROUP	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
7:45 HOLY EUCARIST, RITE! * 9 AM HOLY EUCARIST * 10:30 ADULT EDUCATION				2 PM BIBLE STUDY	2:30 GRAND PRAYER GROUP	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
28	29	30	31			
9 AM HOLY EUCARIST	JAVA LAVA GROUP					

The Episcopal Church of St. John the Baptist

Granby, Colorado

