

St. James' E-pistle

January 1, 2016

Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

Happy New Year! I hope you had a fun, safe celebration and are ready to look ahead to new and wonderful adventures.

I struggled to come up with a resolution for this year. There are so many things I could improve about myself. I could become better organized, study more, work to become better at pastoral care, create more programming for the church. And indeed, I will work on all of those things, resolution or not.

But I admit I've been too preoccupied with other things to worry about resolutions. My biggest preoccupations these days are the Fireside Chat and the Epiphany Pageant. In a way, they speak to each other, though I didn't see it at first.

The Fireside Chat is about Slavery in New York, and the Church's role in it. This has been extremely challenging for me. I am no expert and feel wholly inadequate for this important job. In fact, if you have some expertise in this area, please do contact me so that we can talk. And please do come Thursday night, so when I ask for questions or comments, you can add your knowledge!

Either way, however, the job has fallen to me, and take this responsibility seriously. I also feel I have learned a tremendous amount in preparing for it. It has also been sobering to think that our church was not exemplary in even a small way with regards to slavery.

I do hope you will make a special effort to attend this Fireside Chat because it tells us a lot about ourselves, and it shows our past in ways we may not love but need to know in order to move forward.

Ironically, just three days later, we will have our Epiphany Pageant. I say ironically because as you all know, Epiphany is the day we celebrate Christ being made known not just to the Chosen People but to ALL people. It's the day we celebrate God's love, God's call, God's mission open to ALL God's children. In short, it's a day to remind us precisely why something like slavery, or racism, or sexism or homophobia or xenophobia are all contrary to God's will.

God has declared his love for all. God has reserved judgment for Christ alone. And God has tasked each of us with the wonderful and daunting mission of reaching out to all people with the GOOD News of Jesus Christ.

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Both the Fireside Chat and the Epiphany Pageant speak to this need to heed God, to see Christ in the eyes of our neighbor. I think you'll also just have a good time at them. It's important to see the joy and love of life in all things, and there's plenty of that!

I believe these two events are two of the more important non-liturgical events that we've had in a while. Certainly, they are a great way to start the new year.

Grace and Peace,

Chuck+

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The News of the Church



Sunday School Play was Inspiring! Many thanks to members of the Sunday School who wrote, directed and acted in "The Night Before Jesus." It was a great performance and fun!

Fireside Chat - January 7: Please join us Thursday, January 7 at 7:00 pm for the first Fireside Chat of the season. The title is: "Slavery, New York and the Church." As the title implies, it is a challenging topic, but rich and fruitful.

Epiphany Pageant: On Sunday, January 10, we will hold our Epiphany Pageant. It will take place during the 10 AM service - actually, it will replace most of the first half of the service, so you'll get out about the usual time. We think you'll like this one!

Sunday School News: There will be no Sunday School on January 10 because of the Epiphany Pageant. Come watch the show!

Pageant Rehearsals: We only have a week to rehearse the Pageant, so here is our rehearsal schedule:

Saturday, January 2 at 10:30 AM. (for those who can make it)

Sunday, January 3 at 11:30 AM

Tuesday, January 5 at 6:30 PM

Saturday, January 9 at 10:00 AM (final dress rehearsal)

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Men's Breakfast: The January breakfast is on January 23 at 8:00 AM and will be at the parish hall kitchen for a clean-up day.

Annual Meeting: The Annual Meeting will be on Sunday, January 24 this year, starting with voting and the Holy Eucharist at 9:00 AM. All members in good standing who are 18 or over are eligible to vote. A member in good standing is a member who has been regular in worship and giving for the ministry of the church for the past year.

The News of the Diocese

Diocesan Cycle of Prayer: Please pray for these diocesan ministries this week. If you want to check out the entire year's calendar for intercession, it's simple to find - go to <http://www.diocesen.org> and click under "Beliefs and Practices."

3 All Angels' Church, Manhattan

4 Grace Church, Manhattan

5 St. Andrew's Church, Manhattan

6 On The Epiphany of Our Lord Jesus Christ,; we pray that we may share the light of Christ in the world.

7 St. Mary's Church, Manhattanville, Manhattan

8 Grace Church, West Farms, The Bronx

9 On the feast day for Julia Chester Emery, we pray for the continuing mission of the diocese.

Praying For Peace Everywhere:

Let us continue to light a candle for peace in the Holy Land - and everywhere. Prayer is our most potent antidote to hatred.

1. Candle for Peace

Please also light a candle on Fridays - holy to both faiths - for Peace

Let us Light Candles for Peace

Two mothers, one plea:

Now, more than ever, during these days of so much crying,

on the day that is sacred to both our religions, Friday, Sabbath Eve

Let us light a candle in every home - for peace:

A candle to illuminate our future, face to face,

A candle across borders, beyond fear.

From our family homes and houses of worship

Let us light each other up,

Let these candles be a lighthouse to our spirit

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Until we all arrive at the sanctuary of peace.

2. **The Mothers Prayer:**

God of Life:

You who heals the broken hearted, binding up our wounds.

Please hear this prayer of mothers.

You did not create us to kill each other

Nor to live in fear or rage or hatred in your world. You created us so that we allow each other to sustain Your Name in this world:

Your name is Life, your name is Peace.

For these I weep, my eye sheds water:

For our children crying in the night,

For parents holding infants, despair and darkness in their hearts.

For a gate that is closing – who will rise to open it before the day is gone?

With my tears and with my constant prayers, With the tears of all women deeply pained at these harsh times

I raise my hands to you in supplication: Please God have mercy on us.

Hear our voice that we not despair That we will witness life with each other, That we have mercy one for another, That we share sorrow one with the other, That we hope, together, one for another.

Inscribe our lives in the book of Life

For Your sake, our God of Life Let us choose Life.

For You are Peace, Your world is Peace and all that is Yours is Peace,

May this be your will

And let us say Amen.

*Sheikha Ibtisam Mahameed and Rabba Tamar Elad-Appelbaum
English Translation Amichai Lau-Lavie*

Please keep the following people in your prayers:

Ruth Blanding, John Bohlmann, Susie Buhalis, Mariel Carter, Joann Clark, Michael Day, Dottie Drake, Ross Eames, Jr., Linkin Ewalt, Steven Foote, Heather Francese, Jack Gordy, Robert Guariglia, Harold Hall, Dalton K., Edie Kline, Barbara Knakal, Ashley Konyn, Rosemary Leuken, Joanne Lynn, Doris Mack, Gordon Mackenzie, Virginia Mackenzie, Andrew Mendelson, Rev. Tim Millard, Charles Pardee (husband of Sally), Clifford Plass, Gerald Plass, Grace Plass, Linda Plass, Deborah Porach, John Robinson, John Ross, Richard Secor, James Sheeky, Naomi Sleight, Marguerite Spratt, Janice Syedullah, Tracy, Candace Vincent, Cassidy Way, Cliff Wells and Shawn Wheeler.

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Schedules

A Note about Schedules: The names you see below are those listed on their respective schedules. There are often times when, due to sickness or travel, substitutes are asked to fill in or trade positions. This will probably NOT be reflected in the lists below—so, if there is an inconsistency between what you see here and what you see on Sunday, that is alright.

Birthdays (this past week):	Betsy Eames
Birthdays (next week):	John Golden; Sanjana Shahani; Ryan Seagren; Chris Granados-Kramer
Acolytes:	January 3: Nancy, Kirstin and Deirdre Mae January 10: Russell, John Beyer and Anna
Altar Guild:	January 3: Team Number I January 10: Team Number I
8 a.m. Readers:	January 3: Angela Henry and Jim Smyth January 10: Debbie Belding and Lucille Ogden
10 a.m. Readers:	January 3: Russell Urban-Mead and Judy Douglass January 10: Pageant – no readers needed
Ushers:	January 3: Bill and Regina Ardini January 10: Patty Drake and Pat Keeffe
Pledge Clerks:	January 3: Tanya Hall and Anna Marie Pitcher January 10: Joanne Lown and Janet Bright
Parish Cycle of Prayer:	January 3: Mary Grosskopf; Andy, Tanya, Braeden and Riley Hall January 10: Liz Handman and Franklin Santos and Bela Quines and Chris Santos; Angela Henry
Coffee Hour Hosts:	January 3: TBA January 10: TBA

This Week's Lectionary

Jeremiah 31:7-14

Psalm 84

Ephesians 1:3-6,15-19a

Luke 2:41-52

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NOTE: Audio recordings of some sermons are now available on St. James' website, www.stjameshydepark.org Look under "Worship"

Sermon Preached on First Sunday after Christmas (December 29)

"Growing Up"

Today, I want to look at Paul's epistle (and maybe the gospel reading a bit). I want to look at Paul because of what I did yesterday. This may take a while to get around to, so stick with me. Yesterday, Nick and Chris and I went rock climbing. Actually, it was wall climbing at an inside wall climbing gym. Nick is very good at it. Chris is quite good. I am not. I am a newbie. So when we got there, after I had to fill out the waiver that says I know the risks, etcetera, a woman half my age took me around the gym and showed me what I could and couldn't do.

At one point, when she said I couldn't do something - can't remember what - I innocently asked, "Why?" The look on her face nearly blew me away. I knew that look! It was my look when the boys were little, and they learned that word: Why? Why? Why?

I was tempted right then and there to ask "Why?" after every rule. I figured if I pushed with enough "Why's" she'd eventually crack and say, "Because I said so!" You'll be glad to know I restrained myself.

But it's this "Why?" that brings me to the point today's sermon and Paul's letter to the Galatians. You see, Paul gets straight to the point in this letter more than in any of his epistles. His point is that under the Law, we were slaves, and under Jesus, we have faith so are free.

Unfortunately, this phrase he uses, "We are justified by faith," is often misunderstood or abused. Too often, we think it means, "Just believe, don't think," or "I have faith, so I can do whatever I want - or don't have to do anything else."

For context, Paul was writing to a group of people who had thought Jesus was wonderful until a group of other Christians came and convinced them that they couldn't really have any part of the Kingdom of God until got circumcised. That is, until they performed a specific ritual. Paul was saying, "No! It's no longer about following these rules! It's bigger!"

Let's see if we can make it a little clearer. But to do so, let's think of that child who drives his or her parents crazy with "Why? Why? Why?"

If you're a parent, you know that infants are immobile - they stay where you put them. That doesn't last for long. Before you know it, they're rolling over, and you're building walls of some sort - usually a pillow to keep them from rolling off the bed. One blink of an eye later, they are crawling all over the place, and you have installed child gates at the stairs and in front of the fire

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place or whatever other dangerous and delicate places you have. Now you are not only protecting your child from stuff, but you're protecting your stuff from your child. The walls you build are very concrete.

But kids keep growing. Soon, you have to employ a new kind of wall. It is the word, "NO!" It's often accompanied with a physical restraint until the child learns that NO means NO. At first that works. But they keep growing. And then they learn to speak. They learn to ask, "Why?"

You, as a parent, want to give reasons. But sometimes those reasons go over their heads, and you end up with, "Because I said so!" or "Because I'm the Dad." And you can back it up with a return to physical walls like sitting in the corner or going to bed early.

You and I know this only goes so far. Because eventually, adolescence is going to kick in. NOW, you have to employ reason. "I want you to take out the garbage because the garbage is full. And besides, it makes the house unpleasant and can spread disease." Oh, and because I said so!

There is hope! Because at some point, the walls change. They move from external force, to reason, to an internal compass - your child will do something because they simply know it is right. At that point, they move away.

Paul's point to the Galatians is that before Jesus, we were small children. We followed the law because it gave us walls. It said, "Do this or else." But with Jesus, we grow up. We see the reason behind the laws - Love. The love of God for us, and the love God calls from us.

Jesus, in becoming one of us, LIVES that love and in doing so helps us mature - helps us understand what it means to be loving. Helps us WANT to love, too. Paul calls this faith, but John, in his gospel, calls it grace and truth.

In Jesus, God calls us to live lives of grace. In Jesus, God calls us out of slavish adherence to laws - doing it because we are told to - and into a deeper truth. The law of love is written in our hearts. We love because we are filled with love.

Paul is saying to the Galatians, doing something according to the rules is pretty empty if it's not done in love. Faith is understanding God's love and living accordingly.

You might say that the Advent of Jesus is a bit like the onset of adolescence. We begin to grow more deeply in our understanding even as we question who we are and who God is. We ask "Why?" a lot! We all know it's a dangerous time in our development because nothing seems as safe and secure as it did when we were penned in by all the walls.

But God trusts that the love written in our hearts will see us through to the next, fully mature stage. That's the gift of Christmas - Jesus becoming one of us and showing us what it is like to take down those physical walls.

So the next time you hear a kid ask, "Why, why, why?" smile. Because you know the real answer is, "Because I love you." Amen.