

St. James' E-pistle

October 11, 2013

Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

I had a nice lunch this week with the new Methodist minister, the Rev. Kregg Gabor. We talked about all sorts of things including those things that churches get sidetracked with - those things that make us lose our way. He referred to a book that said churches often lose their sense of vision. By vision, the author means a sense of calling by God - revelation even.

Well, I went home and thought about it. Later that same day, I was sent an article by an old high school friend (and priest). It had a lot in common with my previous conversation. The title? "7 Warning Signs Your Church is Struggling".

I'll get to those warning signs in a moment, but I want to be clear that this isn't one of those hand-wringing, worrying or scolding articles. Nor do I have any intention of hand-wringing, worrying or scolding. It's always good to look at our own collective spiritual life and re-assess where we're going. This isn't an indictment of what we've been doing - because we've been doing some great things - but when I get two "hits on the head" in one day, I think maybe we're due for a look under our spiritual hood.

As I look at these 7 warning signs, I don't think they necessarily apply to us - not all of them anyway. But I'd like to invite you to look at them. What do you think? Where are we "struggling" in the words of the article, and where are we hitting the nail on the head?

Here are the 7 warning signs:

1. More Memories than Vision: A sure sign that your ministry is slipping into atrophy is when you pine for the "good ole days" or you look back fondly on what happened did years ago. If what has happened seems better than what is going to happen ... you may be slipping into irrelevance. Is the view in your rear view mirror bigger than the one in the front window?
2. No Sacrificial Giving to Next Generation: No one is going to pass on the message of Jesus to the next generation than you and your leadership. If you can't identify the areas where you are preferring the next generation over your generation than you might be creeping towards your demise. Does your senior leadership team actively support and resource ministries with younger generations?
3. Never Say No: A sure sign that a church has lost its way is that it's lost its ability to discern what activities push it towards its mission and which don't. The end result is a church with a lot of activity but no progress. Busyness does not equal effectiveness. Churches with clear

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vision are defined more by what they avoid doing than what they choose to do. When was the last time your leadership decided against a good idea to pursue the great one?

4. Form Over Function: Organizations that have lost their grip on making a difference become more concerned with the "how" of ministry rather than "why". Policies, procedures and past practice drive the activity of the church rather than the mission you are called to. This is a delicate balance because systems help churches grow ... but if they become the obsession of leaders they will destroy your organization. Are you more concerned with the wineskin than the wine?

5. Lack Faith Based Risks: Churches that make an impact are taking risks ... actual risks. They put stuff on the line to accomplish what they believe God is calling them to. They step out in trust asking God to give them clarity for the next steps. When was the last time your pulse quickened because of something you risked as a church?

6. You Don't Eat Your Own Dog Food: If the staff of the church wouldn't attend if they weren't getting paid ... it's a sure sign something is seriously wrong.

7. Narrow Donor Base: On a practical note ... if there is a very small donor pool funding the mission of the church it's a sign of the church's inability to engage a broader community. Why hasn't your church been able to connect with more than a handful of donors?

I see areas where we may have fallen into complacency or even fatalism. It's not fatal, you might say, but if we want to be the Body of Christ, we might want to look carefully.

I would like to ask each of you to consider especially what your vision for St. James' is. Not what you'd like to see us doing so much as what you believe God is calling us to collectively. We can't be everything, and we don't have to be everything, but we can be the church God wants. So let me hear it - where are we being called? If you give that question some serious thought, it ought to get your heart pounding a little - in a good way.

Looking forward to hearing your insights,

In Christ,

Chuck+

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The News of the Diocese

The Election of a Bishop Suffragan: On Saturday, December 7th, our Diocese will elect its next Bishop Suffragan.

Please keep all who are involved in the process in your prayers:

“Almighty God, giver of every good gift: Look graciously on your Church, and so guide the minds of all who shall choose a Bishop Suffragan for our Diocese, and all who offer themselves as candidates, that we may receive a faithful pastor, who will care for your people and equip us for our ministries; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

World Food Day - October 16th: Do you know where your next meal is coming from?

For 50 million of our American brothers and sisters, many of them children, the answer is “NO”. Each day is a struggle not only to find food, but most importantly, nutritious food that feeds the body with minerals and vitamins and proteins rather than sugar and salt and empty calories. In other words, a diet consisting of fruits, vegetables and meat or other protein sources.

Each year on October 16th the world-wide community comes together to celebrate World Food Day in honor of the founding of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in 1945. With over 150 countries participating, it provides an opportunity for all of us to heighten our awareness of the issues behind poverty and hunger.

To help highlight specific areas for action and to provide the world-wide community with a common focus, World Food Day has adopted a different theme each year since 1981. Some of the most recent themes have been: “World Food Security: The Challenges of Climate Change and Bioenergy”, “Achieving Food Security in Times of Crisis”, “United Against Hunger” and Agricultural Cooperatives - key to feeding the world.”

For World Food Day - 2013 the theme is “Sustainable Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition.” Sustainable food systems are vital if each of us are to maintain good health and are vital if each of our children are to reach their full physical and intellectual potential.

So what is a sustainable food system? “It is one that produces nutritious diets for all people today while also protecting the capacity of future generations to feed themselves. It uses resources efficiently at every step along the way from farm to fork. It’s getting the most food from every drop of water, plot of land, speck of fertilizer and minute of labor that saves resources for future generations. It’s turning waste products like manure and food scraps into

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valuable fertilizer or energy in addition to using safe and effective methods to control losses due to pests and diseases.” (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations)

World Food Day is a conscious awareness reminder to each of us that HUNGER and POVERTY are alive and active in our communities, in our country and throughout the world in which so many of our fellow neighbors struggle to find their next meal. The question for each of us: What are we doing to assure a sustainable food system that will be available for generations to come?

Deacon Gail

Coming October 26th - Volunteer Opportunities to Make a Difference: Do you like to paint or work in the garden or cook?

On Saturday, October 26th Habitat for Humanity of Dutchess County is coordinating a local “Make a Difference Day” in the City of Poughkeepsie. There are many homes in the city that are in need of some TLC.

Volunteers are needed to:

- * Perform minor exterior repairs
- * Paint the exterior of houses
- * Clean up and replant gardens
- * Cook and serve lunch for volunteers

In addition, volunteers with construction, painting and landscaping experience are needed to lead teams of unskilled volunteers.

Young people ages 16, 17 and 18 who are interested in becoming a volunteer are most welcome; however, they must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Is this something that interests you? For further information or to say “Yes, I’ll be a “Make a Difference Volunteer”, please contact our local Habitat for Humanity office by calling 845-475-9336 or by visiting the volunteer section of their website: www.habitatofdutchess.org

Deacon Gail

Mid-Hudson Regional Council: “A Place at the Table, Celebrating Our Diversity!” is the theme for this year’s Mid-Hudson Regional Council, planned for Saturday, October 26 at St. Luke’s, Beacon. Each parish will bring a dessert and a talent that displays their diversity. [Fr. Chuck’s Note: I am looking for folks to help with dessert for the Regional Council. There

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needs to be enough for 50 small servings - not sure what that means, but my impression is pretty small. Please help! Contact me if you can.]

ALSO: Val Stelcen, Executive Assistant to the Bishop for the Mid-Hudson Region, sent the following announcement:

As we are approaching the Mid-Hudson Regional Council on Saturday, October 26th, one of the things that need immediate attention is finding people who would be willing to stand for election as representatives on the Mid-Hudson Executive Committee. We have a number of people who are rotating off or who are opting not to stand for another term. We have openings for both lay and clergy representatives. Terms are for one year and are renewable for up to four terms and then mandatory rotation off. It is not an onerous task – we meet about 5 times per year. Meetings are in the evening beginning over dinner at 6:00 pm and usually ending no later than 8:30 pm. The committee deals with the program life of the Region and administers the Board of Managers Funds that are specifically designated for work in the Mid-Hudson Region. If you have questions about the work of the committee, please don't hesitate to contact me.

The News of the Church

Graveyard Tours. Thank you to everyone who signed up to be a tour guide. We now have plenty!

What we want now is YOU. We are looking for guests to come enjoy these tremendous performances. Encourage your family and friends to be part of it!

Tickets sales are ongoing, so order yours today. Tickets are available on the website at <http://stjameshistoricgraveyardtours.com>.

Tea Room Volunteers Needed: We are fast approaching the very successful, much anticipated TEA ROOM on October 19th. People have been asking about it all year.

We need volunteers to bake and serve (and clean up). We ask you to sign up as soon as possible so menus and checks can be printed. There are clipboards in narthex that list specific jobs and specific desserts that we need. However, if you have any questions at all, we encourage you to contact Deirdre Mae Micker (883-0943) or Christina Wardell.

Again, this very successful event is entirely dependent on contributions. We don't purchase any desserts or lunch items (we have an expanded lunch menu this year).

So join us, and help make it another smashing success!

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Youth Cooking For Hillcrest House: Hello St James youth or their parents --

I am cooking for the Hillcrest House homeless meal on Saturday Oct 12 from 10-2 at the St James parish hall kitchen. All of you are invited to come and help cook for all or part of that time.

Please let me know if you're interested! I realize now that Oct 12 is on Columbus Day weekend and some of you are already committed elsewhere. I didn't realize that when I offered to take that date back in January when I signed up. If you'd like to come, and bring a friend, that is fine, as long as your friend is ready to work! Hope to see some of you on the 12th!

Wendy Urban-Mead

Congratulations to Laura Kinne and John Murphy, who will be married this Saturday, October 12th!

Harvest Dinner: Please see the flyer attached at the end of this E-pistle.

St. James' Concert Series: The Cupcakes. Sunday, October 20, 2013 at 3:00 p.m. at the Chapel. Recipe for cupcakes: Start with 3 uber-talented women; add 5-6 instruments (3 at a time); then cream together with a bouquet of awards for songwriting and independent music. Stir in 6 CDs, sprinkle with jingles, tours with famous people, production credits, and videos. Ice the whole thing with humor and harmony. No need to bake - The Cupcakes definitely do the cooking! Lyn Hardy has performed folk, rock, old time, contra, blues, and country music in the USA, Canada and Europe since 1965. Elly Winger got her start in the NYC Folk Revival scene playing blues and ragtime guitar in the basket houses of Greenwich Village. Janice Hardgrove is a former jingle singer for national corporations such as McDonalds and Pepsi.

Tickets sold at the door. \$12 ADULTS; \$10 SENIORS; FREE children 12 & under. Complimentary refreshments (featuring cupcakes, of course). Call the office at 845-229-2820 for info.

Secretary Vacation: Our secretary, Dyan, will be taking Fridays off through November, using up unused vacation time. It would be great if someone could sit in the office on those days to answer phones and receive mail. She's normally in the office till 2:30 or 3:00. If you can help, just give Dyan or Fr. Chuck a call at 229-2820. Thanks!

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Please keep the following people in your prayers:

Janet Arms, Ruth Blanding, John Bohlmann, Kurt Burkhardt, George Buso, Michael Day, Jane Gagliardoto, Jack Gordy, Harold Hall, Jolanda Heijenbrok, Brooke Helton, Rev. Don Hoger, Barbara Knakal, Rosemary Leuken, Andrew Mendelson, Rev. Tim Millard, Clifford Plass, Gerald Plass, Deborah Porach, Don Renten, John Robinson, Marty Schroeder, Richard Secor, James Sheeky, Naomi Sleight, Debbie Stone, Gloria Veach, Candace Vincent, Cassidy Way and Cliff Wells.

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:	Betsy Wardell and Dot Craft
Acolytes:	October 13: Team III October 20: Team IV
Altar Guild:	October 13: Team Number II October 20: Team Number III
8 a.m. Readers:	October 13: Debbie Belding and Sue deLorenzo October 20: Angela Henry and Lucille Ogden
10 a.m. Readers:	October 13: Regina Ardini/Justin Bohlmann October 20: Russell Urban-Mead/Deirdre Mae Micker
Ushers:	October 13: Kathie Champion and Mary Gabel October 20: Andrew and Tanya Hall
Pledge Clerks:	October 13: Deb and Doug Belding October 20: Tanya Hall and Anna Marie Pitcher
Coffee Hour Hosts:	October 13: Jodi Triola and The Eames October 20: Deidre Micker and the Gausepohls

This Week's Lectionary

2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c

Psalm 111

2 Timothy 2:8-15

Luke 17:11-19

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Sermon Preached on
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
(October 6)

“Faith and Fear”

In the last week's news there have been more shootings, the woman who went berserk in her car in DC, that biker gang that attacked a family in their car in New York... And of course, the shut down Across the street from here is the Vanderbilt Estate. You'll notice it's closed. On Facebook, I was amazed to learn just how many of my friends are being furloughed. They're afraid they won't be able to eat.

We live in a world where there is one very big, dominant emotion. Fear. We fear poverty, we fear mother nature, we fear zombies - but most of all we fear each other.

One of the things that I fear the most these days is simply talking to anyone about issues that are important. The shutdown? No way. Health care? Forget it. The atmosphere is so charged and the rhetoric so angry... It's like being a small child in a family where the parents always yell and scream - and the child hides in a corner, constantly afraid of setting them off, always walking on eggshells.... That's what our country feels like. We're all that small child, and at the same time the screaming parents.

These aren't really new experiences. Habakkuk the prophet writes of crying to God that there is violence, strife and contention all about, and that the wicked are perverting Justice. It's like nothing has changed.

Good thing we can also turn to scripture for answers, right?

So, what do our lessons give us?

Paul says we're given a spirit of power not cowardice.

Habakkuk says that the proud aren't right in their spirits, but the righteous live by their faith.

Jesus says if we have the faith of a mustard seed, we can move whole trees with a word. Oh, and that once we've performed these great acts of faith, we're not to think it's any big thing - just doing our jobs.

This does not seem helpful.

When everyone is screaming around me, I just don't feel very powerful. Or to be more precise, I don't feel a good kind of power. Once I start screaming or acting out, I feel power surging through me, but it's destructive power that wants to harm those I'm fighting with. That is not the power of

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God - it is perverted and wrong, and we are called to reject that kind of power. Better to be the frightened child.

And to say as Habakkuk does, "well, at least you've got your faith", doesn't make it better either. He hints that, yes, things in this life are pretty miserable, but God will get the proud in the end. So be patient. Have you ever been in a painful, frightening situation, and someone says, "Just have faith?" Hard to imagine what that even means.

Jesus doesn't seem to help either. His disciples are desperate to have more faith because they're on their way to Jerusalem and sense that things are getting intense, even out of control. They say, "Increase our faith!" And he replies with that frustrating mustard seed. "If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry bush, throw yourself into the sea, and it would."

It sure sounds like he's saying, "You don't have ANY faith or you'd be performing miracles." More people have come to me about this little line and said, "Is there any hope for me? I guess I don't have any faith because I can't even make a bush twitch."

So, to recap, we're in a frightening and frightened world where everyone is at everyone else's throats. In response, we're told to have faith, not be afraid, and feel the power.

... Which actually is a pretty good response. Have faith, fear not, and feel the power. The problem isn't what we're told but what we understand.

Faith is not this magic wand like in Harry Potter. Faith is trust - trust that we are not left alone - even when we are the small child cowering in a corner amid all the screaming and shouting, faith is God wrapping his arms around us, holding us. It doesn't change the violence and contention, but it can change us.

And what Jesus said about it being a tiny seed - he was saying that the faith that's already in you may be so small that it feels like nothing - yet it can grow at any time. There's never too little, it's never too late.

What's more, there is power in that faith, but it's not the power to beat others whether physically or verbally. The power God gives us is to let go. Let go of the anger and the fear - to walk among it and yet let it pass over us without becoming part of it. Which we can do - little by little - when we begin to trust.

We can only do God's real work of seeking reconciliation in the world when we let go of the wrong kind of power, the destructive power. That may seem dumb to the world - "fight fire with fire" is the world's motto - but it is the wisdom of God. It's hard. I feel cowardly more often than I feel healthy power or faith. But on occasion, when my focus is on how much God loves me in this mess, I can let go. I can trust. I can walk in faith amid the fear. And that's when that mulberry bush begins to twitch. AMEN.



Harvest Dinner

To benefit the
Hyde Park
Community
Garden

Dinner includes:
Roast Pork,
Seasonal Vegetables,
& Fruit Cobblers

Where: St. James' Episcopal Church, 4526 Albany Post Rd., Hyde Park, NY

When: Friday, November 1, 2013 - Two Seatings: 5:30 p.m. & 7:00 p.m.

Tickets: Adults \$15, Children 10 & over \$10, Children under 10 free.

Call the Parish Office for Reservations: 845-229-2820.