

St. James' E-pistle

October 4, 2013

Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

This Sunday, churches everywhere around the world will observe the delightful and quixotic Feast of St. Francis with the Blessing of the Animals. Although we will not have a formal blessing service, I will remain at church as I did last year for those who wish to bring their pets for a blessing.

To avoid confusion, this is how it will work. You go to church. If you have a pet that tolerates well sitting in the car for an hour, then you can bring it along with you. If you have an animal that needs to be at home during the service, don't worry. Just let me know that you're going to get it and that I should wait for you.

Again, this is a fun tradition that reminds us how important our non-human friends really are.

Having said that, we should also remember that St. Francis was not primarily all about animals. His focus as a monk was on prayer, on worshiping God in Christ faithfully, joyfully, lovingly. He spent his life in economic poverty because wealth, he found, got in his way of relating with God. He exhausted himself working for the benefit of the poor, the sick, and the disenfranchised (to use a modern term).

Oh, and Francis put a big emphasis on reconciliation - even where it seemed impossible or ridiculous. Remember the story of the Wolf of Gubio? Francis didn't slay the murderous wolf that terrified the townspeople. He didn't tame it. He spoke to it so that it and the people would reconcile and come to a mutually beneficial relationship.

Would that members of Congress had a St. Francis they could turn to.

I mention all this about Francis because what he really did, what we really honor him for, is essentially for being the Church. Or at least loving out the purpose of the church.

Because, I ask you, what is the purpose of the church? Isn't it to know God in Christ intimately, intensely, joyfully, lovingly? Isn't it to provide a place where we can set aside the temptations and distractions of the world in order to better focus our souls on Christ?

Yes, and more. The church's purpose is to lift up those who have been cast down, to enfranchise those who have been disenfranchised, to feed the hungry, but even more to help them feed themselves, to house the homeless but even more to help them house themselves on an ongoing, sustainable basis.

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And yes, perhaps primarily the church's purpose is reconciliation. If we are not actively working toward reconciliation in all aspects of our lives, we are falling short (which, of course, we are, but God can work with where we are). Churches are places where we need reconciliation because we constantly try new things and constantly come up with conflicting visions for how we should be and what we should do. That's okay as long as we see reconciliation as more important than getting our way.

By the way, the church's job is to work for reconciliation among others as well. That's not easy to do without thinking, "If they would just do it my way, it'd be okay." Especially if you think of something so frustrating and damaging as the government shutdown. But that's our job. If nothing else, we can and must pray for the congress - lovingly - that God will guide them to compromise and reconciliation.

This is what we are recognizing when we celebrate the Feast of St. Francis - that he showed us how to be the church.

But the pets are fun, too. Don't forget the pets.

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.”

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!

And remind people of the Special Tour for those with Mobility Issues. That tour is on October 5 at 6:30. There will be very little walking - all of it on even ground. Instead of going to the actors, they will come to you in a special area near the outside sacristy door of the church. Don't worry if you don't know where that is - a guide will take you there.

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. People have been asking about it all year.

Now what we need is volunteers! 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).

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

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

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

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, Joan Oetjen, 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: John Beyer, Austin Horne, Bryanna Burkhardt, Daniel Ogden, Aaron Burkhardt, Justin Bohlmann, Ann Dingee, Jada Jennings and John Bohlmann

Acolytes: October 6: Team II
October 13: Team III

Altar Guild: October 6: Team Number II
October 13: Team Number II

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8 a.m. Readers:	October 6: Angela Henry and Jim Smyth October 13: Debbie Belding and Sue deLorenzo
10 a.m. Readers:	October 6: Patty Caswell/Nancy Montero October 13: Regina Ardini/Justin Bohlmann
Ushers:	October 6: Nancy Montero and Anna Marie Pitcher October 13: Kathie Champion and Mary Gabel
Pledge Clerks:	October 6: Janet Bright and Joanne Lown October 13: Deb and Doug Belding
Coffee Hour Hosts:	October 6: Saira Shahani October 13: Jodi Triola and The Eames

This Week's Lectionary

Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4

Psalm 37:1-10

2 Timothy 1:1-14

Luke 17:5-10

Sermon Preached on
Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
(September 29)

"Disregard This"

You know, I love computers, but they drive me crazy at times - especially when I'm updating something and a pop-up box appears with a giant exclamation mark. It says, "Warning!" A lot of blah, blah, blah follows. I understand very little of what it says - except for the part that says there will be dire consequences if I don't do something else that sounds like more blah blah. Then it says, "If this does not apply to you, disregard this notice."

Usually, I just hit "disregard" and hope for the best. I mean, I'm never going to know if it applies to me until the computer blows up.

It's a lot like this little plaque my parents used to have in the house that read, "Repent!" There was a little asterisk next to it, and at the bottom in much smaller print, it read, "If you have already repented, disregard this notice."

We always laughed at and - you guessed it - disregarded it. After all, it's a joke. It wasn't directed at us. We are, for the most of us, disregarders of the message to change our ways. We're basically good people who like doing things the way we do. Want to know a little irony? Often the people who feel the guiltiest in life are those who really could disregard that message

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- they live lives of self-sacrifice and service.... But most of us... Well, let's see what happens in the old testament story.

When Amos proclaimed repentance to the people of Israel - or to be more specific, to the leadership class, the rich and powerful, those "who lie on beds of ivory, and lounge on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the stall; who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp...but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph..." they ignored him.

In fact, it was only when he started to predict the death of the king and destruction of the country that they kicked him out of the country. Nobody thought, "Wow, maybe we do trample the poor. Maybe we should reconsider how we treat the weak and powerless." What they thought was, "This kook is annoying. Get him out of here."

It's pretty much the same in the Gospel. As Jesus preaches to a mixed crowd, the leaders ridicule him for hanging out with the wrong sort of people - tax collectors and sinners. Jesus' response? First he says, "You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of others; but God knows your hearts."

Then he tells the parable we hear today. Now, as I said last week, people generally blamed the poor for being poor and utterly disregarded them. So when Jesus starts off with the rich man who feasted sumptuously and wore purple, he was describing the sort of person most of them either were or wanted to be. And when he described pitiful Lazarus covered in sores and starving, they probably felt nothing but revulsion. So it's a kick in the teeth when Jesus tells how they both died, but the rich man went to hell while the poor, worthless man went to heaven.

He makes it worse. The rich man naturally wants relief from his torment and he asks Abraham to have Lazarus bring him a drink. Now think about that. He's in hell, and he wants room service. From the guy who suffering he totally ignored. What kind of arrogance is that? But that's the point - he only saw his own suffering - never the value of the next guy, even the guy who society said was worthless.

But notice, not only do they disregard the poor in both the old and new testaments, but the disregard the warnings, too. They see the little asterisk that says "disregard this notice" and ignore the part that says, "if you have already repented." Which is to say, they see the part they want to. They ignore what they don't like.

Just like most of us. Only it's hard to disregard what Jesus says, because he's the son of God. And he is harsh today. He says, "Oh, hell is real. And it can come to you be disregarding those among you who suffer, who need help, who need a little dignity."

I want to pause for just a moment to look at how Paul deals with the issue of wealth and obligation in his letter to Timothy. Timothy is a leader in the church, some say the one Paul was grooming as his successor, and his letter to Timothy offers advice on how to lead the church.

Paul tells Timothy that everyone should strive to live quiet contentment. Be happy with what you have, no matter what it is. If you have food and clothing, that's enough. He does tell the rich that they should not be haughty and should be generous and full of good works, but he

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says that by doing so, they are "storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future." Ie., heaven.

Not to criticize Paul overly, but there is a distinct difference in tone between the advice he gives and the prophecy of Amos or the parable of Jesus. They are focused on the condition of the poor, the needy, the - in modern parlance - disenfranchised. Paul never mentions them. Granted, his situation is different, and there has been a lot of criticism from the powerful against Christians. He wants everyone to get along - he tells the Christians to pray for the leaders because God wants them to be leaders. He really wants to paint Christianity as no threat to the power structure because he's afraid of the whole thing being destroyed.

Be that as it may, there is some danger in this approach. When we focus on what we need to do to get to heaven, then we still ignore the people God puts in front of us. This is called noblesse oblige - the obligation of the nobles. That is, you have to give because it's expected of you, not because you really care about the beneficiary. That's why, for generations, charity was given to people without having a real positive impact. Only when we began changing our thinking from "Why should I do?" or "What do I have to give?" to "What does this brother or sister need?" that things got better.

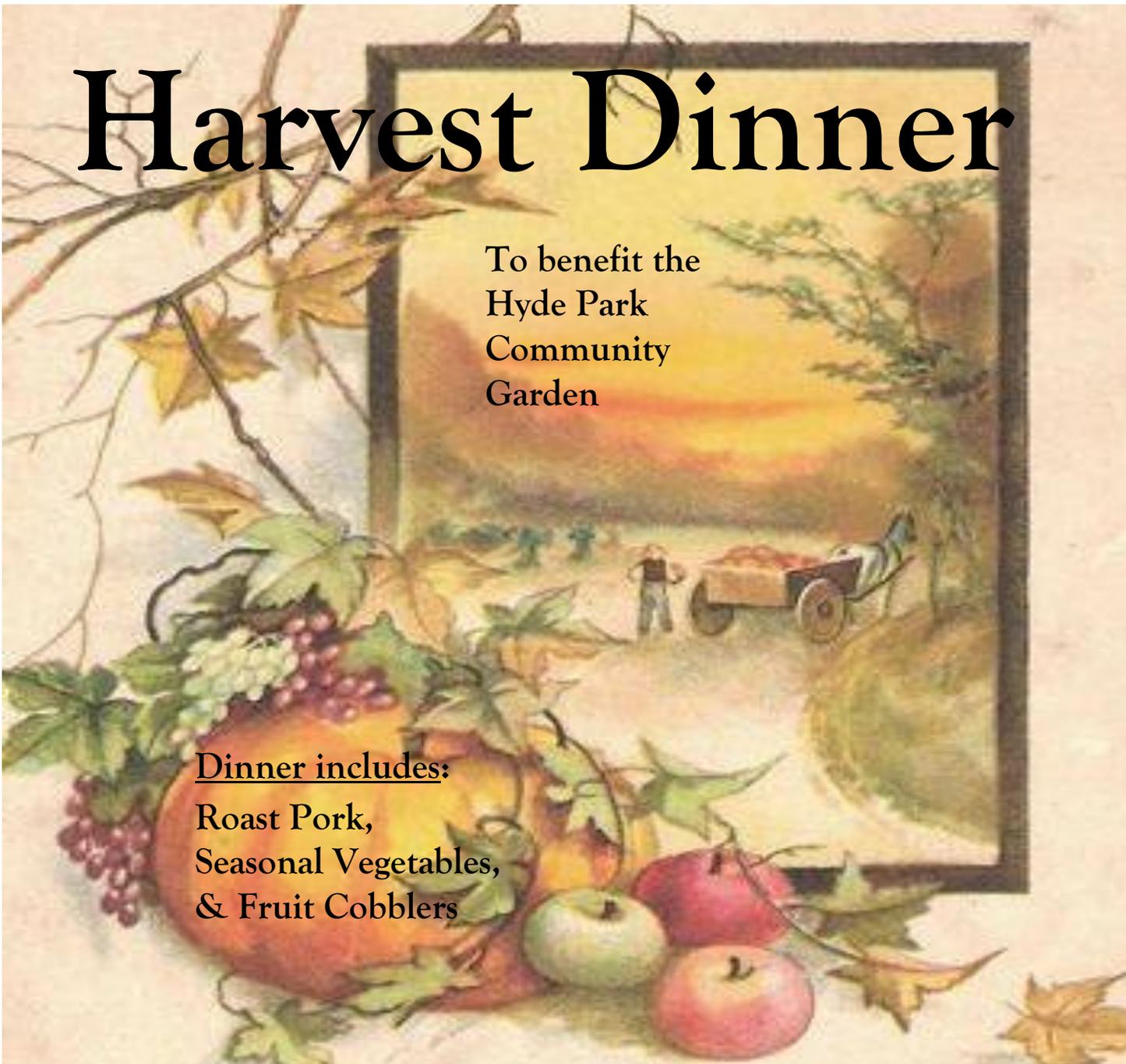
When you start out asking what people need, you respect them, and you discover they don't really want charity - they want a chance. They want education and loans to start businesses. There are other things too, of course - the point is, ask.

Either way, we do not have the luxury of ignoring those who Jesus put before us time and time again. We live in a world of haves and have-nots - and while it is no sin to be rich, it is a sin to live like the rich man and utterly disregard Lazarus.

And, for the record, it is foolish to disregard the message. Lazarus did and landed in eternal suffering. He wants Abraham to send Lazarus to his brothers to warn them, but Abraham says, "They have all the warning they need. It's been there all along - and even if a man were to come back from the dead (hint hint), they would ignore him because they don't want to hear."

It is not being rich that upset Amos or Jesus but the disregard of everyone else. We live in a world where perfect equity is nearly impossible. Some are rich, some are poor in every single country. But we can minimize the impact. Not only can we give our time and money - as we are called to - but we can, for example -change laws that benefit those who already have and harm those who have little or nothing.

Because we are called not merely to be quiet and content - attractive as that is. We are called to have regard for everyone. I know it's tempting to wonder if what God is saying applies to us. But let me encourage you with these words. It does. 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.