

St. James' E-pistle

November 15, 2013

Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

I attended a "walkabout" of the candidates for bishop suffragan this Tuesday and was favorably impressed. We submitted questions in writing, and most of them, I believe, were asked. Some were not, of course, but I was very pleased with most responses and feel good about our future in this diocese.

One question which I wish had been asked, one which I only thought about after the event, is this: Describe a moment in your life of deep (spiritual) doubt. How did it resolve, if at all?

I would have asked that question because I believe each of us goes through moments - some lasting for years - in which we wonder if we've been fooling ourselves, if God is there at all. Or if God is there, what kind of God is it?

I think about this as I look at reports of utter devastation in the Philippines. Tragedies have a way of bringing faith into sharp relief - and they often either strengthen our faith or shatter it. We either throw ourselves on God's mercy or question why a loving God would allow this to happen?

Having faced some life-altering hard times myself, I understand the temptation to think no God would ever do such-and-such to me. The problem with that is, these hard things happen every day to someone. They have been happening every day since the dawn of humanity. Whether it be natural disaster or human cruelty or just bad luck, not a day doesn't go by when someone doesn't face tragedy. When I was in my own dark night of the soul, I reminded myself that my faith was strong when things were going well for me - was I to think God is any different now that pain had touched me?

Of course, sometimes doubt in faith has nothing to do with tragedy. Sometimes it is a long, slow process of questioning, praying, studying...and coming up dry. In fact, one of the books I remember from seminary was Thomas Green's "When The Well Runs Dry." He says that those who feel the "driest" spiritually, who feel nothing despite serious prayer are, in fact, in good shape. That time of doubt and emptiness is a healthy sign of maturing in God, growing closer despite appearances. He also argues that one reason we think it is endless dryness is because we think in terms of just this life rather than eternally.

Though I sometimes overuse school analogies, think about some school experiences in which students hate to go, they don't understand, they face difficulties...but in the end, school gives

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them what they need to get along in life. It seems endless, but after the student graduates, he or she understands its importance for a long and productive life. Such is the case for our doubt - it may not feel good at the time and may feel downright horrific, but in the grand scheme of eternal life, it is a small blip in a long and joyful eternity.

I don't know how each of the candidates would respond to such a question. They only get two minutes, so it couldn't be too deep. But maybe you can think about for yourself. What have been your moments of doubt? How did they resolve - or is that an ongoing process for you?

Doubt is part of the process of faith. Be patient with it; we've got time.

In Christ,

Chuck+

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The News of the Diocese

Election of a Bishop: December 7 will be the day that we elect a suffragan bishop for the diocese. You can meet the candidates at one of several "Walkabouts" throughout the diocese. The first Walkabout is at Trinity Church, Fishkill on Tuesday, November 12 at 1 PM. There is another that evening The Church of St. James the Less, Scarsdale.

Most of the other meetings are in or near New York City - if you want a list of them, please contact Fr. Chuck. However, on November 13 at 7:00 PM, the Walkabout at Trinity Wall Street, Manhattan will be live streamed, so you can watch and participate (via Twitter, Facebook or e-mail) through your computer.

For more information on the election process, please visit www.suffraganny.org where all updates will be posted.

Almighty God, giver of every good gift: Look graciously on your Church, and so guide the minds of those who shall choose a bishop suffragan for this Diocese, that we may receive a faithful pastor, who will care for your people and equip us for our ministries; through Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Bless the candidates: Kim, Mauricio, Kathleen, Allen, Susan and Patrick as they continue to discern your call. *Amen.*

Habitat for Humanity - Home Dedication rescheduled: Originally scheduled for November 1st, the Habitat Build celebration had to be postponed because of high wind warnings and threatening heavy rains in the early morning. This special celebration will definitely be held (rain or shine!) on Thursday, November 21st at 5:30 pm at 133 Thompson Street in the City of Poughkeepsie.

We will be joining Elizabeth Burgos and her family as they thank the Habitat for Humanity of Dutchess County community for all who worked so hard to help them reach their goal.

As a requirement for becoming a Habitat homeowner, the family completed over 400 sweat equity hours working on their home and the homes of others. In addition, this Habitat Build represents thousands of hours of volunteer commitment and corporate sponsorships.

Please consider joining Elizabeth and her family as they are given the keys to their new home.

As we give thanks for this Habitat Build, we have the opportunity to reflect upon how we as a faith community can get involved in the next Habitat Build.

Peace,

Deacon Gail

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The News of the Church

Community Thanksgiving Service: The annual Community Thanksgiving Service takes place year at Hyde Park United Methodist Church on Wednesday November 27th, at 7:00 pm. This service includes many of Hyde Park's churches and is a great ecumenical way to thank God for our many blessings.

Typhoon Relief: If you would like to help the victims of Typhoon Haiyan, please consider a donation to Episcopal Relief and Development. You can either send a check to:

Episcopal Relief and Development
P.O. Box 7058
Merrifield, VA 22116-7058

Or you can give online at:

<https://www.episcopalrelief.org/what-you-can-do/donate-now/individual-donation>

Orange Seeds: I am in a campus service-oriented group at Syracuse University called Orange Seeds. We are working on a project with Habitat for Humanity dealing with homelessness and the poor quality of homes in the Syracuse City area. We are raising funding for our project. On Sunday, November 24, I will be in church and will ask for your help. It would be a great help if you could donate a little bit.

Thanks,

Nicholas Granados-Kramer

Ingathering: Many thanks to those who have already turned in their pledge cards! Your giving of yourself is what makes this church able to do its ministry! If you have not had a chance yet to turn in your pledge card, please do so at your earliest convenience. There is no set amount of giving in the church, but this is everyone's ministry, and we encourage you to make it your ministry by sharing in its responsibility.

Inquirers Classes: Every other Fall, the bishop comes to St. James' for confirmations, receptions and reaffirmations of faith. Our next visit will be in either November or December

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2014. Now is the time to start thinking about being confirmed or received into the Episcopal Church. Classes take quite a lot of time and commitment, so consider well if you want to put in the work required.

You must be at least 13 at the beginning of classes, and anyone under 16 has to come to me personally to explain why they feel called to confirmation.

Advent Retreat: . Looking for a way to connect with the gentle power of Advent in the midst of shopping madness, you might want to give yourself this gift:

JOY IS AT HAND! A Day of Advent Preparation.

A quiet day led by Fr. Masud ibn Syedullah, it offers three meditations to help you prepare with joy for the coming of our Lord.

The Quiet Day is on Saturday, December 21 from 10 AM - 2 PM. Cost is \$20, but if you want to go and need some help affording it, Fr. Chuck will be happy to help.

Fall Concert Series Sunday Nov. 17 at the Chapel at 3:00: Betty and the Baby Boomers. The name seemed like a good idea twenty years ago when Betty Boomer, Jean Valla McAvoy, Paul Rubeo, and Steve Stanne began performing together—a play on Betty's name and the fact that all four are children of the baby boom generation. The name is now known to folk music fans from the mountains of Connemara in Ireland to the Catskills overlooking the Hudson Valley. In addition to original songs from Jean, the Boomers (now including bass player Robert Bard) draw on sources including traditional folk, contemporary artists like Bruce Cockburn and Dougie MacClean, and classic "folksingers" like Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and Phil Ochs.

Please keep the following people in your prayers:

Janet Arms, Ruth Blanding, John Bohlmann, Kurt Burkhardt, Michael Day, Jane Gagliardoto, Kasey Gaulin, Jack Gordy, Harold Hall, Jolanda Heijenbrok, Brooke Helton, Rev. Don Hoger, Barbara Knakal, Rosemary Leuken, Andrew Mendelson, Rev. Tim Millard, Nancy Nucci, 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.

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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:	Katherine Urban-Mead
Acolytes:	November 17: Team IV November 24: Team I
Altar Guild:	November 17: Team Number II November 24: Team Number II
8 a.m. Readers:	November 17: Angela Henry and Gary Glancey November 24: Debbie Belding and Jim Smyth
10 a.m. Readers:	November 17: Wilma Tully/Deidre Mae Micker November 24: Regina Ardini/Bobbie Wells
Ushers:	November 17: Dean Caswell and Austin Horne November 24: Bill and Regina Ardini
Pledge Clerks:	November 17: Tanya Hall and Anna Marie Pitcher November 24: Paul Littlefield and Dean Caswell
Coffee Hour Hosts:	November 17: Deidre Micker and the Gausepohls November 24: Audrey Horne

This Week's Lectionary

Malachi 4:1-2a

Psalm 98

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Luke 21:5-19

Sermon Preached on
Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
(November 10)

"God of the Living"

I was sorry to miss last week's final performance of the Graveyard Tours, but I'm happy to report that God gave me an opportunity yesterday to speak about them to several people at the diocesan convention.

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At one point we were put in small groups to discuss different issues, and our group got to thinking about how churches can look at things we're already doing in a new way. Someone asked me for an example of this at St. James', and I mentioned the graveyard tours. I said we started them out as a celebration of our history - telling the stories of parishioners who had died long ago. But as we went along, we realized that in telling their stories, they were telling their faith, and that their faith continued to live. These people in our churchyard were doing very subtle evangelism, not only talking about God's blessings, but witnessing to the fact that our God is a God of the living, not the dead.

This fit in beautifully with Bishop Dietsche's address to the congregation in which he reminded us that our God is a God of the living not the merely surviving. He didn't use those exact words, but in his address he told us that we, the church, are here to live, to witness to the love of Christ, not to merely maintain a holding pattern.

Which is what Jesus was saying in different words in today's Gospel. He's confronted by the Sadducees, a sect within Judaism that did not believe in life after death. To prove how ridiculous life after death was, they come up with a convoluted story about a woman who marries seven brothers, all of whom die childless. Their point was that there can't be life after death because, well, whose wife would she be?

Their problem is that they are bound by small human laws, small human customs and small human traditions - such as, women are property. They can't imagine leaving this life without them. Jesus tells them that their image of God is too small. That they want a God who obeys their rules.

Life, he says, is far bigger. All who die live a new, bigger life in the Kingdom of God. To God, all of us are alive, HIS children, unique and beloved.

It is always important for us to remember that we are children of the God who promises life eternal. And if we are to live eternally, we do well not merely survive while we're on earth. The funny thing about Bishop Dietsche's address is that he also touched upon our other important theme for today's worship. Stewardship.

In the continuity of our church's life, with one generation passing the torch to the next, with us receiving the torch from our parents and eventually passing it on to our children, we are stewards of a sacred trust. The trust is not merely of buildings and grounds. We know here at St. James' - perhaps better than most - that buildings can be replaced. Far more importantly, we are stewards of our faith, our mission given by God to preach the Good News, to proclaim Jesus Christ, to bear witness to the fact that our God does not condemn but holds all His children in his arms of love.

Bishop Dietsche said that we are responsible for this trust not only in our words but in our giving. Yes, he talked money - after all, he had to present a budget to convention, and that means explaining what the diocese does with its money, and where it comes from. WE are the diocese, and the money comes from us. He was blunt about it. He said it is WE who have the responsibility to pay for our ministry here.

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That's why we have this Ingathering Sunday each year - why we have pledge cards and Stewardship letters. It is not so we can just keep the doors open, as important as that is. It is so we can pick up the torch of the Gospel, the Good News of God's endless love for us, and pass it to the next generation so that they can live; so that they will not merely survive in a cold hard world but live in hope.

There is a reason why we ask everyone to give of themselves during the Stewardship campaign. It is because this mission, this great calling, belongs to everyone. If God has ever touched you, it is yours. If your trust is in life eternal, it is yours. If you believe that you are loved, then this sacred trust is yours, and you and I are to take responsibility for it.

Jesus tells us that our God is the God of the living - not the dead, not the merely surviving. Over the past few years, I've come to appreciate that this is exactly what we've been saying in our graveyard tours - maybe unwittingly at first, but with increasing clarity.

Our challenge is to take this witness out of the graveyard and into the world. Ours is the God of the living, and we embrace that life. We embrace the sacred trust. We embrace the responsibility placed in our hands. We embrace the stewardship that became ours when we first said, "I believe."

This is nothing new. It wasn't new for Jesus. This message is eternal - as old as the prophets ... and as old as Job who said, "I know that my Redeemer lives... and at the last, I shall see God." Amen.