

St. James' E-pistle

November 21, 2014

Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

Thanksgiving is coming fast! Whether you gather with family or spend the time in private reflection, it is the one holiday observed not only by all Americans but by nearly every religious community within the country.

In our church, we recognize Thanksgiving as a religious observance, not merely a national holiday. Why?

Because it is in our nature to give thanks to God. Granted, the observance of an official Thanksgiving Holiday has always been fraught with political overtones - one party using it to claim God loves us best or to manipulate citizens into certain behavior - but that does nothing to negate our need to give thanks to God for our blessings. There is a reason why the Eucharistic prayer we say each Sunday is called, "The Great Thanksgiving."

So, giving thanks is important to our faith. But so is taking a break from the grind so we can spend time with significant others, so is pausing from striving so we can focus on the relationships that make life worth living. Thanksgiving has become a national Sabbath, one the church embraces.

Unfortunately, a segment of our society has seen it as a means to an end - and that end is money. Even in the "good old days," it was seen as the unofficial start to the shopping season. Think "Miracle on 34th Street." The end of the Thanksgiving Day Parade always includes Santa Clause riding in to kick off the real meaning of the season. At least we waited till the next day.

But in recent years, that line dividing Gratitude from Avarice has been blurred. A couple of years ago, a store started its Black Friday sale at midnight. Then it was 10:00 pm on Thanksgiving. Then 6:00 pm. Now stores are starting their sales practically as the parade ends.

This is harmful not only to the spirit and purpose of the day - to give thanks with loved ones - but it is harmful to our society and its members individually. While executives of large companies enjoy wonderful meals with their loved ones, their employees who either are given no choice or feel they have no choice because they are so desperately poor, are working.

I know what it's like to work on holidays, and I grew up with a dad who worked swing shift in a factory that was physically impossible to shut down for holidays. I also get the need for hospitals, firefighters, police and such to be on the clock. But retail is not essential to the

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safety of the country. It is only there to make money. And while there is a mood in the country that there are too few good-paying jobs, those in charge of corporations are enjoying record profits. They don't need the money.

This is why the Diocese of New York passed a resolution at its convention encouraging all Episcopalians to refrain from shopping on Thanksgiving. Use the day to give thanks, not succumb to covetousness. If you are able (without endangering your job or others), choose not to work. Support those who wish to be with their families on this one day in our nation where we pause to offer gratitude, not avarice. Frankly, they need the break.

Oh, and while there is no official word from the church about Black Friday, I'd give that one a "miss" as well. If you want a less stress-filled holiday shopping experience, come to this weekend's Nursery School Craft Fair and Cookie Sale or to the December 13 Candy/Ornament Sale benefiting St. James' Outreach. Or, you can always purchase gifts through Episcopal Relief and Development - gifts which benefit communities in need. Learn more at: <https://www.episcopalrelief.org/what-you-can-do/gifts-for-life>.

In Christ,

Chuck+

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The News of the Diocese

INDABA Guests Need Beds: Now that we have an Indaba Team, we need hosts for one Sunday. We do not yet know which weekend we will be hosting guests from New York City and Region II, but we know it will either be in January, May or September. You do not have to be on the Indaba team to host someone - in fact, there are more guests than Indaba team members, so it is essential to have parishioners put folks up. Please contact me (Fr. Chuck) if you think you might be able! Thanks!

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.diocesenyo.org> and click under "Beliefs and Practices."

November

- 23 San Pablo Church, Manhattan
- 24 The Chaplaincy at the United States Military Academy, West Point
- 25 On the feast day for James Otis Sargent Huntington we pray for all who seek to follow a Rule of Life.
- 26 St. Hilda's and St. Hugh's School, Manhattan
- 27 The Diocesan Ecclesiastical Trial Court
- 28 All single persons in the diocese and those who work in singles ministries
- 29 The Mid-Hudson Executive Committee

ALSO STILL PRAYING FOR ISRAEL AND GAZA:

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*

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Donate to the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem: There is an ongoing appeal for donations to the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem and its Al Ahib Hospital in Gaza. Even after a month, even after the ceasefires, the situation in Gaza is desperate, and the hospital continues to see more patients than it can handle. The hospital is still very low on supplies and fuel to keep the lights on (and medical devices running).

If you would like to support the good and holy work of the Diocese of Jerusalem and its hospital, please send donations to:

American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem
25 Old King's Highway No., Suite 13
Darien, CT 06820

Or online at www.afedj.org

Also, Episcopal Relief and Development is gathering funds for the hospital. Donate online at: www.episcopalrelief.org or mail to Episcopal Relief and Development, PO Box 7058, Merrifield, VA 22116-7058 (memo line: Middle East Fund)

The News of the Church

Secretary and Sexton Away: This week and next, Dyan Wapnick and Richard Secor are both away on vacation. They will return in the first week of December. Because we depend on them so much, you may find things less "together" than usual. We could use volunteers to cover phones in the office, for example, especially as we approach Advent. We could also use volunteers to do a little cleaning here and there (some have already stepped forward). Thanks for your understanding and your help!

Nursery School Craft Fair/Cookie Sale: On November 22, St. James' Nursery School will host its annual Fall Craft Fair/Cookie Sale. Doors open at 9:00 a.m. and close at 3:00 p.m. All proceeds go toward the operation of the nursery school including scholarships for those in financial stress.

St. James' Nursery School is celebrating its 51st year of operation this year and has touched the lives of more than a thousand children. Many of them, now adults, have come back to visit and share fond memories of the school. Many of them have brought their own children and now grandchildren back to the school!

And in the "you ought to know" category, the town has implemented a free universal pre-kindergarten program. We were afraid this would draw students away from St. James' since

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we charge tuition and are not full day. Indeed, two children did try the free pre-K program, but both of them returned to St. James' because the quality and the care are unrivaled.

Christmas Stars are Back! Many of you wait all year for the Stars to show up on the wall of the church. This Sunday, they make their return to St. James', so come get your stars and shop for Christmas presents for kids who are in real need. You'll have the fun of shopping (if you're into that sort of thing) and know that you're really helping someone at the same time.

Epiphany Pageant Date Set. Actors Still Wanted! The Epiphany Pageant is set for Friday, January 2 at 7:00 PM. We chose this date because it is the weekend before Epiphany, and because school is still on break that day.

We had a great response in our call for Pageant actors last week, but we want more. We especially are looking for younger actors, so kids, step right up!

THANKSGIVING SERVICE: The annual community Thanksgiving Service, held each Wednesday before Thanksgiving, will not be held this year. Too many churches were unable to participate.

HOWEVER, the United Methodist Church felt they would like to offer their church for a Thanksgiving Service on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. They wanted to make sure everyone in town was invited. The service, as in the past, is at 7:00 pm.

Have You Pledged? If you have not had a chance to pledge yet, take heart! You can pledge any time through the year. I promise, we won't turn it away. And as you consider what you gave, consider how it is a reflection of what God has done in your life. As we say each Sunday at the 8:00 a.m. Eucharist, "All things come from thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee."



Adult Acolytes Wanted: Without wanting to sound alarmist, we are in the midst of an acolyte predicament. We don't have many. With graduations, crazy schedules and moves, we are down to six acolytes, one of whom has a broken arm and can't serve at the moment. That does not mean we have to go without acolytes. Adults can step forward, too! We already have one adult acolyte currently serving, and others have served in the past. Perhaps YOU can consider becoming an acolyte! It's fun, gets you close to the action, and allows you to serve

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God in a new way. All you need to do is contact Fr. Chuck. Hope to see you robed up and ready to serve soon.

Please keep the following people in your prayers:

Ruth Blanding, John Bohlmann, Susie Buhalis, Jim and Sharyn Burke, Ashley Coyne, Kathleen Craft, Michael Day, Steven Foote, Jane Gagliardoto, John Golden, Jack Gordy, Robert Guariglia, Harold Hall, Liz Handman, Brooke Helton, Rev. Don Hoger, Dalton K., Barbara Knakal, Rosemary Leuken, Doris Mack, Andrew Mendelson, Rev. Tim Millard, Clifford Plass, Gerald Plass, Grace Plass, Linda Plass, Deborah Porach, John Robinson, Pat Rooney, John Schroeder, Richard Secor, James Sheeky, Naomi Slight, Debbie Stone, Gloria Veach, Candace Vincent, Cassidy Way, Bobbie Wells, Cliff Wells and Shawn Wheeler.

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):	Janet Bright, Dean Caswell, Audrey Horne and Kathie Champion
Birthdays (next week):	Susan Gausepohl, Drew Seils, Evan Weaver, Brian O'Leary, Sr., Kurt Burkhardt, Samuel Ruder, Richard Secor, Bev O'Halloran and Andrea Tegtmeyer
Acolytes:	November 23: Jasmine Thatcher, Charlie Urban-Mead and Jaylen Thatcher November 30: Nancy Montero and Chris Santos
Altar Guild:	November 23: Team II November 30: Team II
8 a.m. Readers:	November 23: Debbie Belding and Jim Smyth November 30: Angela Henry and Grant Ferris
10 a.m. Readers:	November 23: Russell Urban-Mead/Judy Douglass November 30: Patty Caswell/Justin Bohlmann
Ushers:	November 23: Saira Shahani and Pat Keefe

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	November 30: Kathie Champion and Mary Gabel
Pledge Clerks:	November 23: Paul Littlefield and Dean Caswell
	November 30: Paul Littlefield
Parish Cycle of Prayer:	November 23: Cathy, Kerry and Brian Flynn and Bonnie and David Foote
	November 30: Mary and Elizabeth Gabel, Gail Ganter-Toback, Mary Jo Garlo and Peter Frances
Coffee Hour Hosts:	November 23: Outreach
	November 30: The Choir

This Week's Lectionary

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

Psalm 100

Ephesians 1:15-23

Matthew 25:31-46

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

Sermon Preached on
Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost
(November 16, 2014)

"Those Who Have"

Today's Gospel passage has always bothered me, especially that line: "For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away."

What bothers me the most is when I watch those charlatans on religious TV quote this passage to prove that the rich deserve to be rich, and the poor deserve to be made poorer or exploited. If you're rich, you get whatever belongs to the poor, and they get nothing.

I call them charlatans - these preachers of the gospel of prosperity - because they twist scripture to their own ends. And that is easy to do because Jesus is always challenging; he always tells us things in a way that makes us wrestle with it. This is no exception.

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But notice what this parable does NOT say. It does not say, "To all those who are rich, more will be given; but from those who are poor, even more will be taken away."

This is crucial because in this parable, the three who are given the talents to work with are slaves. They own next to nothing. What they have is responsibility.

This parable is about being a steward - that is taking care of something that is not yours for someone who is not you.

But it does touch upon a very real human tendency which I think in scientific terms is known as the snowball effect. The snowball effect states that the more there is of something, the more there will be of it, and it is likely to grow faster and faster. So, the more money you have, the easier it is to grow money and an increasing rate. The same is true for fame and power and skill - the more you have, the faster it grows. That's one reason so many celebrities end up in the news for bad behavior - they've been taught from the start that bad press is better than no press. Just think of the phrase, "nothing succeeds like success.

Of course, the same is true with negative things. The poorer you are, the more likely it is that you will sink into even deeper poverty. The weaker you are, the weaker you are likely to become - whether physically or culturally. And if you've ever had a bad stretch, where one thing goes wrong that leads to another and another till it seems like your whole life is caught up in a giant snowball headed for a cliff.

That's one reason the diocesan convention this weekend passed a resolution to begin the work of creating a Diocese of New York Credit Union. You may think, "Wait! Why are we getting into banking?" But what we are doing is making the benefits of banks available to those who can't afford it. You may not realize it, but if you're poor, even if you're employed, it's very hard to get a bank account. So what do you do with pay checks? You go to a check cashing store which charges exorbitant rates. What do you do if you need a loan - either to get a car you need for work or even to start a business? You can't afford to get one - and if you do, you often are charged rates that keep you in debt for the rest of your life. The poorer you are, the poorer you become. The Church - which is filled with savvy business people - knows how to do this without the profit motive, giving them a chance that the rest of the world won't.

I should mention that the snowball effect isn't just physical. People who are positive, tend to become more so over. People who are brave tend to become braver with practice. People who are helpful or giving tend to help more and give more and more and more.

Conversely, the more depressed you are, the more depressed you are likely to become. The more you are angry, the angrier you will be more of the time. The more afraid you are, the more everything paralyzes you with fear. And so on.

This snowball touches most of us in some way, and when Jesus said, "To all those who have, even more will be given," he was saying something the disciples could understand.

But again, what Jesus is talking about is responsibility. He's talking about using what God has given into your charge for God. It's not what you get for yourself that counts in Jesus' calculus.

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If any of these slaves had skimmed some off the top, would the master have praised them or tossed them in jail?

It's important to note here that Jesus in this passage is only speaking to his disciples who have willingly aligned themselves with him, and have chosen to call him Master. This parable is only one part of a larger "class session" in which Jesus also says that slaves who exploit and abuse each other face worse punishment than simply being cast into darkness.

So, what exactly is Jesus saying? He is telling his disciples that they have a job, and that job is to preach the kingdom of heaven, the reconciliation between God and humanity.

Jesus knows they won't be very good at it, but that doesn't matter. A stumbling effort is all it takes to get the ball rolling. The more they share the kingdom of God with those they encounter, the easier it will be. The more they grow in their own relationship with God, the easier and richer that will be, too.

But if they never start, that good news will never be shared.

In the parable, it is fear of the master that paralyzes this slave and makes him hide the talent. You get the impression that Jesus is equating that fear with just an excuse for not trying, and at least with his disciples, Jesus has little patience with that kind of fear. Failure is no problem for him - only not trying.

So what does that teach us about God? That if we don't try we will be cast into outer darkness? That's not really a lot more appealing than saying the rich deserve to get richer and the poor to get poorer.

No. What Jesus is saying, is that we are all - all those who claim to follow Christ, that is - given a piece of the kingdom of God to share. Our faith is relational, so it is not meant to be kept for ourselves. I've said this before - Christianity is not a private faith. Trying to keep God's love private is like digging a hole and burying it.

It will not grow in you or in others. The more you keep it to yourself, the more it will be utterly unknown to those you meet - having no effect on transforming the world to a place of justice and peace. The more you keep Christ's love to yourself, the more it will shrink until it dies within you.

And without that love, that divine light, I predict, life will feel very much like the outer darkness. Jesus is preaching to those who have the light of Christ in their hearts. He says like a fire, it can go out. But if you share it, even a tiny bit, it will grow and grow. And it will be enough. Amen.