

St. James' E-pistle

November 22, 2013

Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

In the past few weeks we have started (or re-started) a bible study and a book group. The bible study is going through the Gospel according to Matthew, and we just finished the third chapter today.

Our book group, as you've already heard, is reading "A Prayer for Owen Meany" by John Irving. Some of the members of the group haven't read the book yet, but after one session, it has become clear that those who have not finished it yet can still get quite a lot out of it. And even if they never read the book, they'll know the story pretty well.

What do these two have in common? Reading.

We are a bookish denomination. When people say we are people of the book, they probably don't mean the Book of Common Prayer, but the fact remains that we worship with a book. We read, learn, and inwardly digest the Word of God. We study theology and the stories of the church.

Why are we so into our books? Because, I would hazard to guess, when God spoke, everything came into being. We are created on a word. Because Elijah knew God in a still small voice. Because Jesus himself, according to John, is the Word. Everything about us is oriented to the words that give life meaning.

A funny thing, though. Often, people have told me that our worship is boring because we just read our prayers from a book. We aren't even making our own prayers, they say, so it's not really authentic worship.

I wonder.

If you've ever read a powerful piece of writing - you know, the kind where you put the book or the newspaper or magazine or tablet down and simply stare off into space thinking about what you just experienced - you know that it is not cold, lifeless words. Lovers read poetry to each other for a reason - because it is the opposite of cold and lifeless.

While it's true that there is plenty of room in God's heart and mind for unscripted, spontaneous prayers, it is equally true that God can hear the skipping heart of someone who just read Isaiah's timeless words: "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."

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It's true that approaching God in silence is wonderful as well. I look forward to the Advent Quiet Day and the Lenten walking pilgrimage - they will be wonderful opportunities for silence in the midst of people. But even in those silent retreats, there is time for spiritual reading

I mention this because I want to encourage you to use the upcoming season of Advent for some reading. Read the prayers of the people. Read the prayers at the back of the BCP, read a book on spirituality or, heck, read from the bible. You can even come to a book group or a bible study where we read together. There is life in those words.

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.

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.

The News of the Church

Community Thanksgiving Service: Please join your fellow Christians of Hyde Park as we give thanks together in the Annual Community Thanksgiving Service on Wednesday, November 27 at 7:00 PM. This year, the service is at the Hyde Park United Methodist Church. It's a great opportunity to meet their new pastor, Rev. Kregg Gabor, and welcome him to Hyde Park. Hope to see you there!

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>

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 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.

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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.

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

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:	Janet Bright, Dean Caswell, Audrey Horne and Kathie Champion
Acolytes:	November 24: Team I December 1: Team II
Altar Guild:	November 24: Team Number II December 1: Team Number III
8 a.m. Readers:	November 24: Debbie Belding and Jim Smyth December 1: Angela Henry and Lynne Koch
10 a.m. Readers:	November 24: Regina Ardini/Bobbie Wells December 1: Patty Caswell/Nancy Montero
Ushers:	November 24: Bill and Regina Ardini December 1: Nancy Montero and Anna Marie Pitcher
Pledge Clerks:	November 24: Paul Littlefield and Dean Caswell December 1: Janet Bright and Joanne Lown
Coffee Hour Hosts:	November 24: Audrey Horne December 1: Choir and Barbara Slegel

This Week's Lectionary

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Psalm 46

Colossians 1:11-20

Luke 23:33-43

Sermon Preached on
Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
(November 17)

"In or Out"

I once had a cat. It was evil. Aside from attacking everything in sight especially me, especially when I walked into the apartment. On top of that, it had this other annoying habit. It waited until I sat down to read a paper or book and then let me know it wanted to go outside by whacking at me or the door with its paws. If I ignored him, he meowed louder till the landlord

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complained. Then once I let it out, it would wait till I had settled back down, then meow loudly to come back inside. More than once, I said to the cat, "In or out." It smirked at me when I said that.

Sometimes parents deal with that, too. In the summer the kids run outside with a slam of the screen door. Then, SLAM, they come back in. The SLAM, they go back out. SLAM - in. SLAM - out until you, the parent, scream, "In our out - pick one."

It's good when you can pick to be in, isn't it? And that applies to more than just being inside the house. That phrase, being "in" or being "out" means several things. For example, when you say someone is "in" it can also mean that they are part of the accepted group, they've made it either socially, politically or economically.

Which means that those who are "out" are those who have been rejected for any number of reasons. I'm sure you can think of any number of groups or individuals who are "out" in your book.

If you're having trouble thinking about it, let's just look at Malachi for a moment because he is happy to provide an example of who is definitely "out." *See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the **arrogant and all evildoers** will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you **who revere my name** the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings.*

Or Paul in the epistle. The idle who won't work according to the tradition he taught them - have nothing to do with them. They're out. Simple.

See? The arrogant, lazy, and evildoers are out. They will burn. Now, tell me, who are the arrogant and evildoers? That's tricky, isn't it? Who determines if someone is arrogant - and I mean beyond people who jump around at football games shouting "We're number 1." Who gets to determine who's an evildoer? In hockey, there's a trick players sometimes play - you harass someone, foul them behind the backs of the refs, until finally they strike back. It's very often the retaliatory foul that gets caught, while the original offender gets off scot free. Which one did something wrong?

The trick is, of course, nobody ever thinks of themselves as an evildoer or as arrogant. Ever hear a politician accept a victory without mentioning that they are humbled? We all think we are the good guys. Whether its corporations, criminals, invading armies - we are good guys. And yes, a lot of them revere the name of the Lord.

So, if we are all "in" - who's "out"?

Throughout history, each of us picks those who are out. You may remember back in the early 70's, there was a teacher who wanted to teach her students about racism, so she divided her

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class up by eye color. She said hard things about the blue-eyed kids - wouldn't let them use new crayons, made them sit at one end, didn't let them play with the other kids at recess. She showed them that racism is arbitrary and all about power rather than worth.

Just a couple of days ago, I saw that she is still at it today, but mostly with college students. In one exercise, a college student quit in the middle. She said, "I'm not going to do this anymore. I'm leaving. I don't have to put up with this anymore."

This now quite old teacher said, "That's just the point. You can leave and pretend this never happened. A person of color can't. They have to live with being treated differently day in and day out for all their life."

Last night, we saw "The Miracle Worker" at FDR, and there too was a more personal example of someone being "out." Helen Keller, as much as her family loved her, was "out" for them. She was completely other, not really part of the family. It wasn't anything they wanted, and in time they learned how to communicate with her, but at that point, she was "out."

Racism, sexism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Islamism, anti-anything ... that's just a random way of picking who's in and who's out. We do this so we feel more powerful rather than because those groups are "evildoers." It's odd, in fact, that when Malachi says that those who revere the name of the Lord are acceptable, many of us tend to think that means, "those who revere the name of the Lord the way *I* revere the name of the Lord."

When someone told me recently that Muslims were bloodthirsty, I pointed to that 16-year-old girl, Malala, who was shot for standing up for women's rights. She said, in response, that she neither feared death nor the Taliban, but wanted to bring light to all - not through retaliation but through education and persistent love. She seems to be following Christ better than a lot of Christians...

Nobody in *this* congregation, would think so little of God's love, of course. We get it. We love and accept and embrace *everybody* as a beloved child of God. But *them* - those hypocrites - well....

Seriously, we are called to embrace all. Period. We know this.

And yet, the terms "In" and "Out" are pertinent to us. True, we don't determine who is beloved of God. We don't determine who's in or out of the Kingdom of God. But we do determine one thing. Am *I* in or out? Remember the Gospel?

In today's gospel, Jesus is walking with the disciples, and one of them notices how great the temple is. Jesus says it will all be destroyed, and they freak out. When? Jesus says to not worry about the end - you'll have plenty of opportunities for suffering well before that.

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And this is where he points out to them what it will truly cost to be one of his followers. He says in return for being a disciple, they will be arrested, turned against, reviled, even killed. They will be rejected by society.

In essence, he is giving them a choice. Follow me and accept being "out" as far as society is concerned. But you are also choosing to be "in" on this grand adventure. Being a Christian was not always the socially acceptable thing to do as it has been in European society. And actually, following Christ is still not really the "in" thing - we have had to choose over history to buck society, to seek justice for all God's children.

We did so in the abolition movement, the civil rights movement, the women's movement, the anti-homophobia movement and so on. We choose to follow Christ when we oppose unjust war or obscene consumerism.

These are not always popular, and frankly, sometimes we get cast out of society, at least a little. But then, so did Jesus. So did St. James' for whom this congregation is named. At baptism, we choose life eternal over chasing the hollow promises of this world. We choose to be in the kingdom of God, not worried about who else is there nor what we are giving up. The thing is, we have to choose every day. Not who's in with us and who's out, but "Do I follow Christ or the world?" Am I in with Christ - or out?