

# St. James' E-pistle

## December 11, 2015

### **Pulpit Notes**

Brothers and Sisters:

In the midst of our Advent Season - a season of expectation, of watchfulness, of the coming Christ ... in the midst of all that, we see a world in fear and hate.

Maybe we always have, because since I was a child growing up in the Vietnam era, people have been fretting that the world is falling apart. The situations change, the people change, but the fear, anger, and mistrust remain consistent.

The current era makes us afraid of Muslim terrorists. Or perhaps just Muslims in general. Despite the fact that Muslims have lived peacefully (well, as peacefully as anyone) in what is now the USA since 1528, despite the fact that they have served in the US military in every single war - including the American Revolution, despite the fact that they are our neighbors who simply want what everyone wants, we are afraid.

But fear is not of the gospel. To look at our neighbors with fear or hatred is not of Christ. If that's what we see in our neighbor, we will never see the coming Christ. And we will miss him.

So, what do we do? The Right Reverend Dan Edwards, Bishop of Nevada, recently wrote a lengthy pastoral letter on the subject. While cherry picking quotes is dangerous, he wrote something we all need to hear, and I believe its ramifications go well beyond terrorism:

"The best thing we can do to counter terrorism is to infuse our society with faith, hope, and love we need to spread some gospel right now". ...

If we grew the Christian faith and then practiced it – by practicing it I mean precisely this spiritual discipline of openhearted gracious relationship – that would change the world. We would not all suddenly fall into each other's arms in a love fest. But the society would not be nearly so highly conductive of the energies of fear and hatred."

We could expand this to say that the best way to counter a self-serving, self-centered, fear-based society is to infuse it with faith, hope, and love. We DO need to spread some gospel now.

Our own Fr. Masud ibn Syedullah wrote an open letter to the clergy of our diocese in his capacity as Chair of the Episcopal-Muslim Relations Committee of the Diocese. He recommended three courses of action to clergy in response to much of the hate speech directed at the Muslim community. With his permission, I share highlights of that as a way that all Christians can "spread some gospel right now."

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1. He suggested we reach out in to imams in nearby mosques "to cultivate a positive and trust-based relationship." This can include many things such as inviting an imam to address the congregation - but the important thing is sharing God's love and trust with neighbors. As parishioners, you could encourage and facilitate such contacts.
2. In preaching this Advent Season, he suggested emphasizing the Advent theme of the Coming Christ, to "call our people to understand themselves to be agents of the Prince of Peace (non-violent agents) seeking to build bridges of trust, understanding, and cooperation."
3. In action, Fr. Masud reminded us that there are rallies, forums, and other venues for countering hate speech. As I say, this goes beyond the current era's fears, though supporting our Muslim brothers and sisters - all children of God - is vital. It goes to the heart of who we are as followers of Christ.

So, in this Season of Advent, I invite you to look with anticipation to our coming Salvation, the Hope of the World - God Incarnate. I invite you to spread some gospel right now. I invite you to cultivate positive and trust-based relationships with those whom you're told to fear. I invite you to remember that YOU are an agent of the Prince of Peace. And I invite you to live out this agency in the world with your actions as well as your words.

Pretty heavy stuff, especially as we light our Advent candles, open our Advent calendar windows and do some serious Christmas shopping. But that's what this season is all about - getting ready for when Christ comes - because he's going to hit the ground running, and we are going to want to keep up.

Grace and Peace,

Chuck+

### **A Word On Stewardship**

I feel the need to write a second letter to express my deep gratitude to the Stewardship Committee (Patty Glancey, Janice Syedullah, and Charlotte DeGross) and Wardens Wilma Tully and Meg Burkhardt for the remarkable work they put in during the Stewardship Season. The celebration of my 25th Anniversary of ordination to the priesthood was special, and the ingathering gave us a visible sign that God is at work in our hearts.

This is all the more impressive when we consider that their work is not done. They signed on not just for a season but for the year, to create an ongoing conversation about stewardship in our lives.

The first step for them will be to follow up with those who have not yet returned their pledge cards. If you HAVE turned in your pledge, **Thank You!**

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If you have NOT turned in your pledge yet, I urge you to do so as soon as possible. Your pledge is your "thank you" to God. It is a major way in which you participate in the Kingdom of God here on earth. It is how you help make sure that the work started here thrives in our time.

If you have NEVER pledged before, please consider changing that pattern. Pledging is a vital part our life together. It expresses commitment not only to God but to your brothers and sisters.

At the moment, we have received about half the pledges we hope to receive. (I haven't been given the exact numbers, but something like that). An exact accounting is on its way. What we want is 100% pledging. The amount is not as important as the participation. So, if you feel the work we do here benefits you, if you feel it serves the Kingdom of God and the mission of the Gospel, please make your pledge.

Oh, and if you have sympathy for our Stewardship Committee and our Treasurer, make it soon!

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### **The News of the Church**

**Christmas Stars:** Thank you everyone for taking a Christmas Star or two! Please bring your unwrapped gift with Star attached to the Wilks room no later than **Friday, December 18**. Wrapping paper or Christmas bags appreciated.

**Cookie Sale:** Our Annual Cookie, candy and ornament sale takes place this **Saturday, December 12** from 10am-2pm. **Come early to get your pick of cookies!** We have over 30 Christmas centerpieces this year. Don't forget to purchase from our assortment of homemade candy. The community garden will have special logo gifts for sale. Thank you for supporting Outreach. See you there!

**Joanne Lown**

**Make Music For Christmas!** A note from our Choir Director: "If you are interested in joining the music program for our Christmas Eve services, please see Mary Grosskopf after church or call her at 266-0400."

**Sunday School News:** **THIS Sunday December 13**, the Sunday School will be holding a "Donation" Sale during coffee hour. The proceeds from this sale will go towards the purchase of a grave marker for our beloved Sunday School Teacher- Jackie Jennings. Jackie was a "Lifetime" Sunday School teacher. We miss her and hope we can raise enough money to provide this for her and her family. So please plan on visiting our little donation table in the parish hall after church on the 13th.

**Pledge Clerks Needed!** We need your help! We need 2 pledge clerks and need them now.

More specifically, we need a partner for two of our clerks who (due to circumstances beyond their control) are currently working alone. Our bylaws require 2 clerks do the counting each week, so we can't let them be alone like this.

One of those clerks, Paul Littlefield, counts money once a month. The other, Joanne Lown, is looking for a partner just for the fifth Sunday of the month (there are only 4 of those in the year).

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What exactly does a pledge clerk do? They count money brought in over the week, determine what account to needs to go into, input it into the computer, and then deposit it in the bank. For a more complete description of the pledge clerk job, and training, please see either Paul or Joanne. Or both!

**ADVENT Program:** Also this **Sunday December 13**, Fr. Chuck and Mother Megan Sanders of St. Paul's, Pleasant Valley will conduct a program titled: "Advent: The Episcopal Way." It takes place at the Taconic Retreat and Conference Center. PLEASE JOIN US! We would love to have as many Episcopalians as possible to attend so we can give a real Episcopal feel to things. The program starts at 3:00 pm. The Taconic Center is on Route 199 in Red Hook, right at the intersection of 199 and the Taconic State Parkway.

**Men's Breakfast:** The Men of the Parish will meet Cranberry's on **Saturday, December 19** at 8:00 am for breakfast and discussion. Remember that the January breakfast is on January 23 and will be at the parish hall kitchen for a clean-up day.

**Fr. Allan Ford's 50th:** St. Margaret's Episcopal Church in Staatsburg would like to invite you to a celebration of Fr. Ford's 50th Anniversary of Ordination to the Priesthood. The special Eucharist will be on **Sunday, December 20** at 4:00 PM.

**Pageant Sign-Up Time:** Now is the time to sign up to be in our Epiphany Pageant. Epiphany this year is on Wednesday, so we'll probably have the pageant on **Friday, January 8**. However, this is subject to change. Cast Members will get to choose as a group between two types of pageant - traditional or radio show (like we did last year). We've had calls for both. You will find a sign-up sheet this Sunday! But feel free to e-mail Fr. Chuck, too.

### **The News of the Diocese**

**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.diocesen.org> and click under "Beliefs and Practices."

- 13 St. John the Evangelist, Barrytown
- 14 Holy Trinity Church, Pawling
- 15 The Church of the Good Shepherd, Newburgh
- 16 The Church of the Holy Cross, Kingston
- 17 Grace Church, Monroe

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- 18 The Chaplaincy at Vassar College  
19 The Diocesan Clergy Critical Needs Committee

### **Praying For Peace Everywhere:**

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

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,

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May this be your will  
And let us say Amen.

*Sheikha Ibtisam Mahameed and Rabba Tamar Elad-Appelbaum*  
*English Translation Amichai Lau-Lavie*

**Please keep the following people in your prayers:**

Ruth Blanding, John Bohlmann, Susie Buhalis, Mariel Carter, Joann Clark, Michael Day, Dottie Drake, Ross Eames, Jr., Linkin Ewalt, Steven Foote, Heather Francese, Jack Gordy, Robert Guariglia, Harold Hall, Dalton K., Edie Kline, Barbara Knakal, Ashley Konyn, Rosemary Leuken, Joanne Lynn, Doris Mack, Gordon Mackenzie, Virginia Mackenzie, Andrew Mendelson, Rev. Tim Millard, Charles Pardee (husband of Sally), Clifford Plass, Gerald Plass, Grace Plass, Linda Plass, Deborah Porach, John Robinson, John Ross, Richard Secor, James Sheeky, Naomi Sleight, Marguerite Spratt, Janice Syedullah, Tracy, Candace Vincent, Cassidy Way, 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):

Ross Eames, Jr., Saira Shahani, Patricia Weber, Elizabeth Hilton,  
Skye O'Halloran and Sylvia Erlandson

Birthdays  
(next week):

Aldona Raugalis, Christopher McGlynn, Joanne Lown and Randy  
Soden

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Acolytes:	December 13: Russell Urban-Mead, John Beyer and Anna Clark December 20: Bryanna Burkhardt, Amelia McNamara and Braeden Hall
Altar Guild:	December 13: Team Number III December 20: TBA
8 a.m. Readers:	December 13: Deb Belding and Lynne Koch December 20: Angela Henry and Lucille Ogden
10 a.m. Readers:	December 13: Regina Ardini and Bobbie Wells December 20: Russell Urban-Mead and Justin Bohlmann
Ushers:	December 13: Bill and Regina Ardini December 20: Saira Shahani and Pat Keefe
Pledge Clerks:	December 13: Janet Bright and Joanne Lown December 20: Tanya Hall and Anna Marie Pitcher
Parish Cycle of Prayer:	December 13: Valerie, Steve and Kasey Gaulin, Susan, Rebecca, Annabeth and Andrew Gausepohl and Gary and Suzanne Glancey December 20: Michael, Patty, Madeline and Emily Glancey, John and Gloria Golden and Kathy Graff
Coffee Hour Hosts:	December 13: Jodi Triola, Ross & Connie Eames and Pat Rooney December 20: Saira Shahani

### **This Week's Lectionary**

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Canticle 9

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 3:7-18

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

Sermon Preached on  
Second Sunday of Advent  
(December 6, 2015)

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### "Flat Earth"

When you think of the words, "Flat Earth," you often think of people who deny science. That's not what we're talking about.

But Luke uses Flat Earth imagery in today's Gospel, and his version is kind of ugly, too. No mountains or valleys. If you've ever had to drive across Kansas, you get the idea. All that's missing are the tumbleweeds. Not very unappealing. Granted, for them, a flatter earth sounded pretty nice because travel back in those days was slow, arduous and dangerous. So the image of a flat earth resonates with his audience - the get that it makes getting where you're going better, of breaking down walls that separated, of making it easier to live. So is John talking about really leveling mountains (as we actually do these days), or something else?

In "The World Is Flat" by Thomas Friedman, he suggests that technology is making the world "flat" in the sense that things are becoming available to the "little guy" that were just a dream before. A singer can go onto You Tube and make money without a label. A writer can directly publish online and make more my than if they went through publisher - and with a much higher likelihood of actually getting it read. People get the news more instantly from people who are not reporters but just folks on the street.

That kind of flatness is closer to what John had in mind. Not the destruction of the earth leaving it looking like a strip mine but the removal of barriers to God. John is smoothing the way to God, making it so that it is not just a few privileged folks who access to God but everyone. The path for you and me is clear.

That's what we celebrate this holy season - breaking down of barriers between us and God, and between each other. Because in John's view, the two are inseparable. You can't pave a path for God without paving a pathway to each other. Without one, you don't get the other. Or, as Jesus says, the greatest commandment is actually two: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength; and love your neighbor as yourself.

Today is our in gathering Sunday. In a way, it is celebrating that flat earth - because your pledge is flat. Not that it hasn't grown - I don't know & don't care. It's flat because every pledge is given with the same love, the same intention to thank God for our blessings and to be a blessing to God's work through St. James'. Each pledge, regardless of amount, is making the path toward Christ smoother, preparing the way. Each is received with joy and awe. So, flat earth. Understood through the eyes of God, it is a blessing we can all get behind. Amen