

St. James' E-pistle

December 16, 2016

Pulpit Notes

"Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven."

Brothers and Sisters:

Last Saturday, I did something I rarely do because I rarely see the usefulness in it (and possibly because I am a coward). I stood with maybe two dozen folks in silent vigil in front of Ulster Savings Bank holding a sign. Deacon Gail stood with another group at the bank in New Paltz.

What was it all about?

The Fair Housing Justice Center, a civil rights not-for-profit organization, did a two-year investigation of Ulster Savings Bank after receiving complaints of discriminatory lending practices. (Indeed, an African-American friend of mine said he had been on the receiving end of that bank's uneven mortgage practices).

The organization sent testers to branches from Long Island to Kingston. The testers, employees who pose as customers seeking a mortgage, were both black and white. Over the two-year testing period, they allege to have found repeated cases where white testers with equal or lower financial security (salary, savings, debt, credit score) were consistently given higher mortgages and more favorable rates. They were also charged lower fees. One of the branches involved was in Poughkeepsie.

Fair Housing Justice Center has filed suit against the bank in federal court over the alleged discrimination.

Because it is at the moment only an allegation - with no official finding by the court - those standing vigil at the bank were careful not to claim that the bank was guilty of discrimination. Rather, they took the opportunity to pray together publicly for an end to discriminatory practices and to stand for the fair and equal treatment of all of our country's residents.

I took part in this for a couple of reasons. First, as I mentioned, a friend of mine believed he had indeed been treated unfairly. Second, because the "redlining" practice is quite old and prevalent, and even if it were to be found that Ulster Savings Bank did nothing unethical, there is still no doubt that the practice continues - and should be confronted. Third, if Ulster is indeed found guilty of such discrimination, it is a good idea to hold up an alternative vision.



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Frankly, it would be wonderful if Ulster said something like, "We don't believe in discriminatory practices and will retrain our staff to make sure something like this never happens here. We want to be a leader in serving all of our community with equity."

I know some people will say that a civil rights organization always has an agenda - some sort of power grab. Some will always believe the bank over the person complaining about the inequity. When I read the Kingston Freeman's comment section, more than reader wrote, "Using paid actors is dishonest entrapment. You can't trust these groups." Others wrote in effect, "Well that's [the difference in treatment] because minority mortgage holders default more - it's just good business." Perhaps you will also disagree with me for standing with them.

However, this is the season of Advent - a season of signs. And when God tells King Ahaz, "Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be as deep as Sheol or high as heaven..." God is offering Ahaz a chance for something we rarely get in life. A sign. Ahaz rejected this offer, by the way, and in doing so became a sign himself of infidelity - of trusting human means over God's

Every now and then we are offered the chance to be a sign. It can either be a sign of trust in God's will for humanity - or a sign of infidelity to God. Standing there in the cold, I believe I was standing as a sign that God's will for us is to love and care for all our neighbors as ourselves.

This is what the coming Christ did, both as a sign as seen by those who read Isaiah and as a person, God incarnate, who reached out to those who hungered, thirsted, and suffered.

Grace and Peace,

Chuck+

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The News of the Church

Christmas at St. James'



Celebrate the Birth of Christ!

Christmas Eve

6:00 PM
Family Service

10:00 PM
Candlelight Service

Christmas Day

10:00 AM
Quiet Communion

(at St. James' Chapel,
10 E. Market St.)

St. James' Episcopal Church
4526 Albany Post Road
Hyde Park, NY 12538
www.stjameshydepark.org
845-229-2820

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A Child is Born: Congratulations! Congratulations to Justin and Danielle Bohlmann on the birth of their second child, Avery Joshua Bohlmann who was born Wednesday morning. Mom and baby are doing well. Welcome!

Men's Breakfast: This **Saturday** is our monthly men's breakfast! Please be there to talk and plot. **8:00 AM at Cranberry's!**

Greening of the Church: This **Saturday** is the Annual Greening of the Church! Come join us as we put up the greens that help us celebrate Christmas as beautifully as possible. It's good fun and fellowship - and it's festive! **9:00 AM in the Church!**

Music Progress: We would like to keep you up to date on what is happening with the search for a new organist/choir director. In the past week, we have begun interviewing candidates and also having them rehearse the choir. This process will be completed by December 22. After that, we will take into consideration the feedback from the search committee and the choir, and make a final decision. The canons of the Episcopal Church place the final decision in the hands of the rector, but this decision will not be made alone. We look forward to welcoming a new organist for a new year!

Pageant - Looking for One More Actor! We began rehearsals for our Epiphany Pageant, Epiphany and the Band last Sunday, and it looks like it's going to be really fun! However, we are still looking for one more actor (just a few lines). This can be youth or adult. So think about it! The Pageant will be held on **Friday, January 6 at 7:00 PM.** We also have non-speaking roles and stage crew positions. All ages are welcome and encouraged! See Fr. Chuck if you're interested!

VESTRY Nominations Open: The Nominating Committee of the St. James' Vestry is soliciting candidates for three Vestry positions and one warden position. If you are interested in being placed on the ballot at the Annual Meeting in January, please contact one of the following members of the Nominating Committee: Kurt Burkhardt, Mike Fenwick, Vince Asher, Andy Hall, Joanne Lown, or Valerie Gaulin.

Churchyard Committee: Our churchyard committee wants you. The committee oversees one of the most historic graveyards in the region, and is responsible for making sure it is kept up. It handles the sale and digging of graves as well. If you value our churchyard and want it to continue to be a source of comfort whose loved ones rest here as well as historical interest to

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those who visit, please join our committee. If you're interested, you can contact Carol Vinall at vinehall3@aol.com.

DONATE YOUR iPad! Please consider donating your old iPad - or any old tablet that can read a PDF file - to St. James'. We would like to have three or four tablets so we can download the digital bulletin onto them and let guests (or parishioners, of course) use them. This is especially helpful to those who are unfamiliar with the liturgy and all the books we use. You should erase everything on it, of course - all we need is a PDF reader and a browser (to download the information). Thanks!

Spiritual / educational websites to deepen your faith:

- Acts 8 Movement
- GrowChristians
- Episcopal Cafe (a favorite)
- The Slate Project (not affiliated with Slate magazine)
- Virtual Abbey
- Second Life Church (gives you a virtual church experience if you're into that sort of thing. Fun to look at maybe).
- Inward/Outward (daily meditations sent to your e-mail)
- "Edge of Enclosure" (weekly lectionary-based blog post)
- The Celtic Christian Tradition (via Facebook)
- Anne Lamott (via Facebook)

Jan Richardson - <http://paintedprayerbook.com> (Especially good for those grieving or interested in women's spirituality.)

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December 2016

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
11 8:00 service at Chapel 11:30 Pageant rehearsal	12	13	14	15 11:00 Bible Study 3:30 Reading Adventures 7:00 Choir	16	17 8:00 Men's Breakfast 9:00 Greening of Church
18 12:00 Christmas basket distribution 11:30 Pageant rehearsal (in church)	19	20 7:00 Vestry	21	22 11:00 Bible Study 3:00 Reading Adventures 7:00 Choir	23	24 6:00 Family Christmas Service 10:00 Candlelight Service
25 10:00 Christmas Day Service (at Chapel)	26	27	28	29 11:00 Bible Study 7:00 Choir	30	31

Every Sunday, our Eucharists are at 8:00 and 10:00 AM.

Note: **On Christmas Day, there will only be one service at 10:00 AM at the Chapel. The main services for Christmas will be Christmas Eve.**

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

- 18 Zion Church, Dobbs Ferry
- 19 St. John's in the Village, Manhattan
- 20 The Church of St. Matthew & St. Timothy, Manhattan
- 21 All Saints' Institute for Asian American Concerns Community Counseling Center
- 22 St. Mary's Church, Mohegan Lake
- 23 Choirs of the Diocese
- 24 Church of St. Nicholas-on-the-Hudson, New Hamburg

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,

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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

Please keep the following people in your prayers:

Ruth Blanding, John Bohlmann, Helen Braun, Susie Buhalis, Mariel Carter, Dee, Linkin Ewalt, Steven Foote, Heather Francese, Kathy Ganim, Robert Guariglia, Harold Hall, Dalton K., Edie Kline, Ashley Konyn, Rosemary Leuken, Joanne Lynn, Doris Mack, Gordon Mackenzie, Virginia Mackenzie, Andrew Mendelson, Charles Pardee, Grace Plass, Deborah Porach, John Robinson, Rob Robinson, Jason Rodino (serving in Afghanistan), John Ross, Richard Secor, James Sheekey, Naomi Sleight, Carl Smith, 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): Skye O'Halloran and Sylvia Erlandson

Birthdays
(this coming week): Aldona Raugalis, Christopher McGlynn, Joanne Lown, Randy Soden, Stephen Foote and Madeline Glancey

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Acolytes:	December 18: Team 3 December 25: Team 1
Altar Guild:	December 18: Team I December 25: Team II
8 a.m. Readers:	December 18: Lucille Ogden and Sue DeLorenzo December 25: Debbie Belding and Jim Smyth
10 a.m. Readers:	December 18: Russell Urban-Mead and Nancy Montero December 25: TBA
Ushers:	December 18: Nancy Montero and Anna Marie Pitcher December 25: Bill and Regina Ardini
Pledge Clerks:	December 18: Tanya Hall and Anna Marie Pitcher December 25: Andy Hall and Dean Caswell
Parish Cycle of Prayer:	December 18: Valerie and Casey Gaulin, Steve, Susan, Rebecca, Annabeth and Andrew Gausepohl, Gary and Suzanne Glancey December 25: Michael, Patty, Madeline and Emily Glancey, John and Gloria Golden and Kathy Graff
Coffee Hour Hosts:	December 18: Deirdre Mae Micker, The Urban-Meads December 25: No Coffee Hour

This Week's Lectionary

Isaiah 7:10-16

Psalm 80:1-7, 16-18

Romans 1:1-7

Matthew 1:18-25

This Week's Hymns

Processional: 74 (Blest be the King whose coming)

Sequence: 81 (Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming)

Offertory: TBD

Communion: 314 (Humbly I adore thee)

Recessional: 72 (Hark! the glad sound!)

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

Sermon Preached on
Third Sunday of Advent
(December 11, 2016)

"Sight As A Sign"

Several years ago, I read a story about a woman who had never left Manhattan in all her life. These people really exist. Anyway, this woman still had a car and was very proud of it even though all she ever did was drive up and down the long Avenues of the city. But one day, she found herself forced by circumstances to drive to New Jersey. It terrified her, going out into the wilderness of Hoboken... But she said, "You can do this."

And she did. But in her way back, she got terribly lost - this is in the days before GPS - and drove for hours trying to figure out how to get back to New York. She was in a state of panic and despair, certain she would never see her home again when lo and behold, like a miracle, she looked up and saw a big sign with an arrow that read, "New York."

So she got out of her car, fell to her knees in the middle of the road, and cried, "I'm home!"

Which is crazy, right? Because in case you missed it... It was a sign. She was still in New Jersey. But it's just a story to remind us that sometimes, we expect too much from signs.

And yet, we're always looking for signs, aren't we? How often have you looked up to the sky and cried, "Show me a sign, Lord!?" But what we're really saying is, "Make everything better." Or is that just me?

No, it's not just me because we see John the Baptist asking for a sign in today's Gospel. He's sitting in prison and wants some sign that Jesus was in fact the guy he said he was. John's beginning to worry because the messiah he had predicted should have acted by now, and yet, here's John sitting in prison while the ungodly, wicked and despotic Romans are still in power. So he sends word to Jesus - "Are you really the guy?"

Jesus' response? The blind see. The lame walk. Lepers are cleansed. The deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them. That's all the sign you need to know who I am.

This might have troubled John initially because it did not seem to involve much smiting of Romans or any righteous vengeance. It involved healing and caring for the poor. But John seemed to embrace that new vision of God's will.

What was a little more troubling was that if sight was a sign of God's messiah, why didn't ALL the blind now have their sight?

As one of God's visually challenged, I'd sure love to know that myself.

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Seriously, if sight - or hearing or walking - are signs of God's messiah, then why didn't Jesus do away with ALL blindness or deafness or physical handicaps or poverty or death itself? Why do we still have all these things in devastating numbers?

Because a sign points to something - it's not the thing itself. That sign pointing to New York was not New York itself.

What Jesus was saying was, "I'm showing you what Life can and will be like. I'm giving you a foretaste of heaven."

Otherwise, he would have healed every sick person, caused all the poor to have plenty, and raised all the dead. He didn't because that's not how this world is yet.

But he was also showing us not just what God can do but what we can do for each other...how WE could be. Showing us our way forward. WE can be the givers of sight, the healers, the bringers of good news to the poor, the bearers of justice and life.

In short, Jesus was saying, "I bring hope."

And of course, that's what this season of Advent is: a season of Hope not yet realized. A way to look forward to a world we can improve as well as a world that only God can yet imagine. In the midst of a very rough world, we hope and trust in the one who brings light and life.

But notice something about that hope. Hope in God, trust in God, brings joy. Look at The Magnificat that we read today. Mary is proclaiming the greatness of God and her role in it with praise and joy - but hardly any evidence to back it up. She is pregnant in a world where pregnancy was highly dangerous for mother and child. Where growing to adulthood was a 50/50 proposition. But she trusts God's word to her that this pregnancy will bring about God's will. And that is an occasion of joy.

So, Jesus curing the sick, raising the dead, giving sight to the blind - that's the sign that he gives to John the Baptist. It's a sign that God's work is just beginning here - but that it will be completed. Both in this world and the next. We might never see its completion here on earth - God's time frame is much longer than ours after all - but it will be done. And that is occasion of both hope and joy.

So let US be people of joy, people who let the world see Christ in us - for in doing that, we will be signs of hope.