

St. James' E-pistle

December 26, 2014

Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

I hope your Christmas was a true blessing to you whether you were traveling or hosting or simply celebrating at home. As we all know, the holidays can be a difficult time of year, and often hard things happen right at the time when society says we're supposed to be happy.

But as we reflect on the birth of Christ, we should note that there was a lot of ugliness going on all around that remarkable event. If the various accounts are to be believed, there was forced travel under difficult conditions, crowded inns, and even massacre. From the very beginning, we are shown that the fact of God doing a new thing does not mean the world becomes easier or friendlier.

But God acts anyway.

It may not always be easy to appreciate that divine action, that new thing, when we're in the middle of crisis or pain. We do not always have the capacity to look much beyond our own difficulty.

I believe God gets that, too. In response, God sits with us through these times, not desperately pretending everything is all right but simply being with us. In the end, when life stabilizes again, we'll be able to know God is still there - has never left. And in time, we'll be able to once again see that new thing at work.

As we celebrate these 12 days of Christmas and make our way toward Epiphany - in which God's Son is revealed to the world - let us hold each other in prayer. If you know someone going through a tough time, pray for them. Visit them if it's helpful. Cook a meal and bring it over. By doing so, you'll be embodying God's presence for the one who's going through a rough time.

It is Christmas - and it's a time of hope and joy. Indeed, Christ gives me that hope of life beyond the desperate struggles of this world - but Christmas is also the down-and-dirty reality of incarnation. Life is hard, and it's good to remember that God really does know what it's like.

God is with us, indeed.

May you be the presence of God for someone this holy season so that they - and the world - will know that God is here.

In Christ,

Chuck+

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

December

- 28 On the feast day for The Holy Innocents we pray especially for children at risk or in any kind of danger.
- 29 Children's Ministries of the Diocese
- 30 The Property Support Committee of the Diocese
- 31 All young adults in the diocese and those who work in young adult ministries

January

- 1 On The Holy Name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray for increased faithfulness in the new year.
- 2 St. Paul's Church, Tivoli

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

Pledge Reminder: Please remember to make your pledge if you have not already. If you lost your pledge card or never got one, FEAR NOT! You can get one from the parish office or by asking Fr. Chuck or one of the Vestry members.

Pageant Rehearsals: The cast and crew of the Epiphany Pageant, "A Desert Home Companion" will meet this Sunday, December 28, for a brief organizational meeting. To make it easier for cast members of both services to attend, this meeting will be at 9:30 AM. Please try to be there if at all possible. We will set up a rehearsal schedule and go over any changes. We'll also try to make sure that everyone has a script (and the same one!).

Pageant Date Change: Please note the date change for our Epiphany Pageant, "A Desert Home Companion." We have moved the pageant from Friday, January 2 to Friday, January 9 - still at 7:00 PM.

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Announcement of Annual Meeting: The Annual Meeting of St. James' Church will be held Sunday, January 25, 2015. The meeting will begin with a joint Eucharist at 9:00 AM. Voting will start at the beginning of the service and continue through to the start of the business portion of the meeting. According to New York state law and church canon, you must be at least 18 and a contributing member of record in order to be eligible to vote. At this meeting, we will elect new Vestry members and bestow the St. James' Medal.

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, Heather Francese, Jane Gagliardoto, 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, Deacon Vivian Seipp (mother of Jodi Triola and Valerie Gaulin), Naomi Sleight, Debbie Stone, Tracy, Gloria Veach, Candace Vincent, Cassidy Way, Bobbie Wells, Cliff Wells and Shawn Wheeler.

Please pray for the repose of the soul of Jay Curlin

[Schedules are not printed this week while information is being updated.]

This Week's Lectionary

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Psalm 147 or 147:13-21

Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7

John 1:1-18

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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 Fourth Sunday of Advent (December 21, 2014)

"Perplexed to Prophetic"

There are two old Bing Crosby songs I've loved since maybe forever. One is "Mele Kalikimaka," the Hawaiian Christmas song. The other is, "Christmas in Killarney," the Irish Christmas song. I bring this up because we were recently at a Christmas party where we all sang "Christmas in Killarney." (Couldn't get them to do Mele Kalikimaka). Anyway, they changed one line in the song. The original goes, "And Father John, before he's gone, will bless the house and all." They changed it to "And Father Chuck, before he's gone..."

It was funny - but after awhile, I couldn't help wondering how I would have felt if I'd heard that change years ago, when I was just a kid. If suddenly the words were not as expected, and if they seemed to single me out - as if there were some message, how would I have felt? Perplexed comes to mind. I think I would have assumed I heard wrong or was going crazy.

That's about the best I can come to imagining how Mary felt when she got the news from the angel Gabriel. Perplexed.

Shocked, stunned, and terrified could work, too, I bet.

The important thing for the moment, though, is how Mary felt.

Here's why. All during Advent, we have been talking about what WE need to do to prepare ourselves. Keep awake, watch, make straight the paths of The Lord. Prepare, prepare, prepare! It's been focused on our action.

But today, it's all about what GOD is going to do in our lives. When we keep talking about what we do, we forget that the main actor here is God. We forget that the only reason we're here is because God calls us here. We forget that we come to church to be changed, challenged, inspired, transformed even - by God.

Mary is our reminder.

She's minding her own business, a young woman - a girl, really - inconspicuous, uneducated, neither powerful nor desperately poor. Just a girl who doesn't stand out in any particular way. She would have remained this unknown middle eastern girl, too, except that God did a tremendous thing through her. God said, "I have work for you. It's not an easy assignment, and it will cost you heavily. But it will also change the world. Will you accept?"

Mary gets it. This is not HER doing a great thing. It is God acting.

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This is perplexing and frightening. In a way, she's being asked to give up control of her life - or at least a significant part of it - and trust the God will do what is needed.

The only control she really has is to say yes or no.

She says yes. "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

And it could have stopped there - Mary a mere vessel, a container for the Son of God, empty once her task was done. That's certainly how women were viewed in the days of the gospels - vessels and workers to take care of men.

But God did not merely use her. God transformed her, and it did not take long. Shortly after she becomes pregnant, she takes a trip to her cousin Elizabeth who is also pregnant. And Mary makes one of the most profound prophetic statements in the scriptures:

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior; *
He has mercy on those who fear him *
in every generation.
He has shown the strength of his arm, *
he has scattered the proud in their conceit.
He has cast down the mighty from their thrones, *
and has lifted up the lowly.
He has filled the hungry with good things, *
and the rich he has sent away empty.

These are not the words of a passive vessel. These are fighting words, and Mary is announcing the fight of the world's ways versus God's.

Mary has gone from perplexed to prophetic in one chapter of Luke's gospel. From unassuming and passive to bold and inspiring. She has done so because she knows that it is God who has not only given her the work but empowered her to do it.

That is what Advent reminds us of. We are indeed meant to prepare for Christ during this season - but we are preparing for him to then work in us, to transform us, to change and empower us as he changed and empowered Mary.

God knows there's a lot of work left in the world. The proud still stand together in their conceit. The mighty still sit on their thrones - both literal and figurative thrones. The lowly are still cast down, the hungry still long for food. The rich are still here, and they are not empty.

We live in a world where children are killed daily, where the relationship between our police and communities is broken almost to the point of open warfare, where the number of starving and homeless is in the billions. The challenges of our generation are not so different from Mary's generation - or any that has come around since. Nobody is asked to take them all on, but God does ask each one of us to face the world as it is and to take up our role, whatever that may be. Not passively but boldly, with power.

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And if you don't feel bold or powerful, that's fine. Neither did Mary. Neither do any of us. We don't have to. We only have to let God in to transform us - and we too can go from perplexed to ... well, who knows? When it comes to God, anything's possible. Amen.

All
Welcome!

Free
Admission!

A

Desert



Home



Companion

An Epiphany Pageant
Radio Variety Show

January 9, 2015 - 7:00 PM

St. James' Episcopal Church

4525 Albany Post Rd
Hyde Park, NY