

St. James' E-pistle

December 4, 2015

Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

This Sunday is it! Not only is it the Feast of St. Nicholas, not only is it the Second Sunday of Advent, not only is it the First Sunday of the Month, but...

It is Stewardship Sunday!

This is the day when we will celebrate our faith community and our desire and calling to be active participants in it all. This Sunday, we will hear one final parishioner talk about his life at the church. Then we will collect all the pledges in a basket and place them on the altar for blessing.

Then, as a more visual sign of our offering of ourselves, we will place cans of food onto the altar for blessing. Each family is asked to bring a can - so please do! Of course, you can bring more if you feel called. The food will go to the Hyde Park Food Pantry, so you know you'll be helping those in need.

Following the service, we will gather together in the Parish Hall for a Potluck Lunch where we'll celebrate even further our life together.

I realize part of this celebration is to recognize the 25th anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood - and I am honored! But the real joy of those 25 years has always been to be with my brothers and sisters who seek to know Christ in their own lives and to make Christ's love known in a hard, and hard-hearted world.

The best gift I could receive, then, would simply be your presence at the potluck and your dedication to be a life-long seeker, worshiper, studier, and server of God.

Grace and Peace,

Chuck+

RenewalWorks

St. James' has been asked to participate in a program of spiritual development and renewal by the Diocesan Congregational Development Committee. The program, which Bishop Dietsche encouraged at the Diocesan Convention last month, is designed to help congregations explore their spiritual health - both individually and as a congregation. This includes an online spiritual survey taken by parishioners.

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Part of its method is to develop a team of nine parishioners (and the rector) who will commit to several workshops plus opening and closing sessions. Each church's team is intended to work with teams from other churches within our Mid-Hudson Region. The commitment for the 9-member team is for six months.

Here's the catch. The opening session is January 12. I did not give the representative much hope that we could organize such a large team on such short notice. However, I trust that if it is our time to be part of this, then the team will form. Please let me know if you are willing and able to make this commitment. But I need to know within the week. Thanks! And let's see where God takes us here. -- Chuck+

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The News of the Church

Please Pray this Collect for Stewardship: Gracious God, giver of all we have and hold as stewards; grant the people of this church a deep and abiding awareness that all things come from you – our health, our incomes, our jobs, our talents and our generous impulse. Send your Holy Spirit to help us as we swim against the rising tides of materialism, envy, individualism and greed in our culture. When we are tempted to think of money as a private matter, remind us that you have asked for part of what we are given, to be returned to you as a symbol of our awareness that you give all we have. And further, help us to help each other in this grace of giving, for you are the lover of our souls and call us to nothing less than transformation in Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN

Newcomers Reception: We are always delighted to welcome new members to the congregation. Join us on **Friday, December 4**, at 7:00 PM for our next Newcomers Reception. This is a chance for new and "old" alike to get to know each other a bit and to learn what's out there in ways to grow together as the Body of Christ. If you aren't sure if you are included in this invitation...YOU ARE!

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."

Lessons and Carols: Speaking of music, why not attend a traditional Festival of Advent Lessons and Carols this **Sunday, December 6**? St. Margaret's in Staatsburg has a wonderful Lessons and Carols that regularly features many of our St. James' Choir members! It's at 4:00 PM (that's this Sunday!). If 4:00 PM is too early for you, consider going over to Vassar College for theirs on the same day but at 7:00 PM. And enjoy!

Sunday School News: On **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.

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ADVENT Program: Also on **Sunday, December 13**, Fr. Chuck and Mother Megan Sanders of St. Paul's, Pleasant Valley will conduct a session at the Taconic Retreat and Conference Center on what Advent is, how Episcopalians understand it, and how we observe this holy time. We would love to have as many members of our respective congregations as possible to attend so we can give a real Episcopal feel to things. This program is an experiment on the part of the retreat center (which is run by the Disciples of Christ), so we have no idea what sort of a crowd they might expect, but we applaud their desire to broaden their understanding of the Church as a whole, and in particular of the seasons of the church year. The program starts at 3:00 pm. Be warned, it takes about a half hour to get there from St. James'. Directions to the retreat center will follow in next week's E-pistle.

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."

- 6 St. Andrew's Church, Staten Island
- 7 St. John's Church, New City
- 8 The Church of Saint Mary the Virgin, Manhattan
- 9 St. Matthew's Church, Bedford
- 10 St. Luke's Church, Katonah
- 11 St. James' Church, North Salem
- 12 Christ Church, Tarrytown

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.

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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,

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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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.

*Pray for the repose of the soul of Elizabeth Stuebing,
mother of Jan Smyth*

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):	Melinda B. Harris, Gary Glancey, Hank Schroeder, Lori Rider-Fenwick and Bonnie Foote
Birthdays (next week):	Ross Eames, Jr., Saira Shahani, Patricia Weber, Elizabeth Hilton, Skye O'Halloran and Sylvia Erlandson
Acolytes:	December 6: Nancy Montero, Kirstin Horn and Deirdre Mae Micker December 13: Russell Urban-Mead, John Beyer and Anna Clark
Altar Guild:	December 6: Team Number III December 13: Team Number III
8 a.m. Readers:	December 6: Angela Henry and Jim Smyth December 13: Deb Belding and Lynne Koch
10 a.m. Readers:	December 6: Patty Caswell and Maggie McNamara December 13: Regina Ardini and Bobbie Wells
Ushers:	December 6: Dean Caswell and Austin Horne

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Pledge Clerks:	December 13: Bill and Regina Ardini December 6: Paul Littlefield December 13: Janet Bright and Joanne Lown
Parish Cycle of Prayer:	December 6: Mary and Elizabeth Gabel, Deacon Gail Ganter-Toback, Mary Garlo and Peter Frances December 13: Valerie, Steve and Kasey Gaulin, Susan, Rebecca, Annabeth and Andrew Gausepohl and Gary and Suzanne Glancey
Coffee Hour Hosts:	December 6: Stewardship Sunday Potluck Lunch December 13: Jodi Triola, Ross & Connie Eames and Pat Rooney

This Week's Lectionary

Malachi 3:1-4

Canticle 16

Philippians 1:3-11

Luke 3:1-6

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

Sermon Preached on
First Sunday of Advent
(November 29, 2015)

"Waiting and Watching"

I want to wish you a blessed Advent. But to start things off - and this might not seem related at first - I'm going to go out on a limb and guess that everyone here had at least one teacher who said, "Class, we're going to do an experiment in time. We are going to see just how long a minute really is."

And then they had you sit in absolute silence for an entire agonizing minute.

At the time, I suspected my teacher just wanted some peace and quiet, but to be fair, we all did appreciate that a minute can seem like an eternity when you're not busy.

But it was her follow up question that got me. She said, "Now, tell me what you heard while we were in silence." Amazingly, we realized we had heard other teachers in other classrooms, we

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heard other students, we heard the janitor sweeping in the hall, even the clock ticking. Things we just hadn't noticed before.

She concluded by saying that there's a lot going on in the world if we just stop and pay attention. I bring this up because Advent is the season of paying attention. Advent is our time of watchful, expectant waiting. That's why so many of the lessons throughout the season are about keeping alert.

As Jesus says in today's gospel, "Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap."

The day he's talking about probably has two meanings. One is actual physical destruction of Jerusalem, which they were discussing earlier in that passage. But the other meaning is the end of the age - the day when the Son of Man returns.

Nobody knows when that might be or what it might look like, but Jesus tells the disciples to be ready, to be alert. To not be weighed down by the things of this world. If they're ready, they'll know when the time comes.

Given the likelihood that each of us will have our own personal second coming before the "big one," what are we watching and waiting for? And how do we prepare?

We are watching and waiting for Christ. Because Christ has promised to be with us through it all. Because Christ has promised to be with us at all times, everywhere, in every person we meet. It's just that it's hard to see because we are weighed down by worries, television, Facebook, sports, jobs and - probably - Christmas shopping.

Our world is like a classroom: we can't hear really anything until we sit in silence. And we can't really see Christ until we sit down and pay attention.

This takes intentional practice. Every athlete, every musician, every artist knows this. There's an old saying in music: skip practice one day, and you know it. Skip two days, and the band knows it. Skip three days, and everyone knows.

Living a life of awareness takes that kind of practice.

We don't make it easy in the church. We put so much emphasis on external things that we neglect the internal. The external I'm thinking about are things like the Christmas stars and baskets, the many social justice initiatives we are involved in. The Reading Program and the garden. But also fundraising and fellowship meals.

These are all important, necessary parts of our life following Christ, but they aren't sufficient. They can make us busy and noisy. Advent is here to remind us to practice our watchfulness, our awareness - because it is only then that we can see Christ clearly enough to follow.

Fortunately, you can actually practice watching and waiting. It involves sitting still - not haphazardly whenever we can fit it, but intentionally, deliberately. It means setting aside time to sit and do nothing but focus on God. That's called prayer. It means reading scripture and the words of others who down the ages also struggle to be aware of God in this world.

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Advent is the time to re-dedicate ourselves to practice. It's kind of like when we decide to finally get back to the gym to get back in shape. Or pick up that instrument after a long break. It takes work, but if we take it in small steps - maybe just one minute of silence to start off with - we can come to the point that we don't fear the end of the age, rather, as Jesus says, we can "straighten up and raise (our) heads, because (we know our) redemption is drawing near." Amen.