

St. James' E-pistle

February 14, 2014

Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

Does it sound like a broke record if I say once again, "Be careful out there!?" And of course, check in on each other. As I write this, the snow is falling at a good clip, and by the end of the day, we should expect one of the biggest snow dumps of the year.

Don't get me wrong, I love this kind of weather. I've been out walking around the church grounds three times so far, partly checking on the buildings, partly getting to the office and partly just taking in the grandeur of God's creation. If you have a chance to simply stand out in it for a moment, take it - even this late in the season, it is beautiful.

Nevertheless, this has been a hard winter. At first it seemed to come in waves - frigid temperatures and snow followed by spring-like thaws. I counted no fewer than three cycles of snow/thaw in one month. As you know, it then became consistently cold and snowy - and boy is it snowy!

For many, this means higher heating bills, plowing/shoveling bills, being stranded, not getting to the store, accidents and more. Look in on your neighbors - be kind where and when you can.

Those increased bills have hit the church too, especially plowing and heating. Add to that reduced attendance, and you see how hard it is. If you haven't been able to attend due to the weather and have fallen behind in your pledge, would you consider mailing it in?

The good news is, Spring is that much closer. In just over a month, we will officially say goodbye to the snow and ice and blowing winds, and welcome in their place green grass, leaves, and flowers. What once seemed like a dead, barren landscape will once again feel alive. Get ready!

It may not be a coincidence that preparing for Spring coincides loosely with the church's Season of Lent. It, too, is a season of preparation, a season of barrenness and death but, like winter, a death that holds the promise of new life.

So if winter feels too much like a time of penance to you, remember that it's that darkness, that self-examination, that time of challenge that ultimately leads to life. But also remember that there is plenty of life even amid the snow. There is plenty of joy even in Lent. One of the things I love most about Lent is our Lenten Breakfasts, not because of the food (superb though it be), but because of how our parish family gathers together - life in the midst of death.

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So look out your window at the mountain of snow and remember, Spring is coming.

In the meantime, I think I'll go make a snow angel.

In Christ,

Chuck+

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The News of the Diocese

Holy Trinity Cathedral - Port-au-Prince, Haiti to be Rebuilt: Are you aware that the Episcopal Diocese of Haiti is part of our international Episcopal Church? A church that extends beyond our own country's geographic borders to the Caribbean to Micronesia in the Pacific and to countries in Europe. The Diocese of Haiti is part of our own Province II of which the Diocese of New York is also a part.

Four years ago on January 12, 2010 a devastating earthquake struck Haiti. There were hundreds of thousands of God's beloved children killed, hundreds of thousands of God's beloved children seriously injured and more than a million of God's beloved children left homeless. Since the earthquake, Haiti is slowly, very slowly beginning to rebuild with the support of Episcopalians and the world-wide community responding to the various needs that arise.

One of many, many buildings destroyed by the earthquake was Holy Trinity Cathedral in Port-au-Prince and the many affiliated Episcopal institutions in the Cathedral complex. The Cathedral, the heart of the Episcopal Church in Haiti, has not just been a beacon of hope for Episcopalians in Haiti but for all Haitians.

The rebuilding of the Cathedral has become a priority for the Haitian people, not only for being a central place of worship, but also for being a prominent center for the performing and visual arts.

The Episcopal Diocese of Haiti and the Episcopal Church have selected Kerns Group Architects of Arlington, VA as the architect for the new cathedral.

The new cathedral has been designed to meet international earthquake resistant standards; it will be self-sufficient in generating its own electricity, it will provide its own purified water in addition to supplying its own telecommunications.

As a result of extensive conversations, the new cathedral will "1. Respect and celebrate the characteristics of the Episcopal Church in Haiti, the Haitian people and their culture; 2. Provide a beacon of hope for the Haitian people; 3. Be a prominent landmark of God's abiding presence with the Haitian people and the Church's commitment to serve them; 4. Respect the memory of the previous Cathedral; 5. Be lean and smart, a model for future buildings; 6. Be inspiring, humble and hospitable; 7. Allow for flexibility and 8. Be a safe haven and self-sufficient."

At our meeting in January, the Outreach Committee decided to support the rebuilding of Holy Trinity Cathedral by providing the opportunity for each of us to consider making a donation. This is in response to a request by our Presiding Bishop. Bishop Jefferts Schori has asked that

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each of us please consider being part of the rebuilding of the Cathedral by making a donation. Although the original request was for January 12, the 4th anniversary of the earthquake, the Outreach Committee decided to set aside February 9th and **February 16th**.

There will be special bulletin inserts and envelopes provided on two Sundays - Sunday, February 9th and Sunday, February 16th. If you wish to write a check, please make it payable to St. James' Church with "Haiti Cathedral" in the memo line.

Together, our collective blessings will be join with others to help rebuild and to provide hope to our Haitian brothers and sisters. Thank you for your consideration.

Deacon Gail on behalf of the Outreach Committee

The News of the Church

Fireside Chats: The next Fireside Chat is Thursday, February 6, at 7:00 pm. The title is, "FDR and the Post Office: A discussion of Roosevelt's passion for stamp collecting and its significance in saving his life". The presenter is Anthony Musso, local journalist and author. A reception will follow.

Lenten Meditations: It's time to get your favorite dates for the Lenten Meditations! Sign up this week to write one or two meditations to share with your brothers and sisters in Christ. It can be brief, long, poetry, opinion - or visual art. Whatever helps you reflect on the holiness of Lent and what Christ means to you. Scripture readings are provided each day which you may choose to use for inspiration.

Notice of Inquirers classes: Bishop Dietsche will visit St. James' on December 14, 2014. He will confirm, receive and reaffirm the faith of all who seek it. To be confirmed or received into the Episcopal Church, you need to participate in the Inquirer's Series of classes. If you have not already done so, please see Fr. Chuck about registering for the classes. You have to be at least 13 to participate, and anyone under 16 must come to Fr. Chuck personally (their parents cannot speak for them) to discuss why they want to be confirmed.

Shrove Tuesday Approaching: Get your decorating hats on! In just one month, we will celebrate Shrove Tuesday with the annual "Pancake Decorating Fun." Kids of all ages are invited to feast first, then pull out the candies, icing and all sorts of artistic goodies to turn

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ordinary pancakes into works of art. As always, the dinner will start at 6:00 PM on Shrove Tuesday itself which this year is March 4. Be there!

Please keep the following people in your prayers:

Ruth Blanding, John Bohlmann, Kathleen Craft, Michael Day, Jane Gagliardoto, Kasey Gaulin, Jack Gordy, Andy Hall, Harold Hall, Brooke Helton, Rev. Don Hoger, Barbara Knakal, Rosemary Leuken, Andrew Mendelson, Rev. Tim Millard, Clifford Plass, Gerald Plass, Deborah Porach, John Robinson, John Schroeder, Marty Schroeder, Richard Secor, James Sheeky, Naomi Sleight, Debbie Stone, Gloria Veach, Candace Vincent, Cassidy Way and Cliff Wells.

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:	Andrew Gausepohl, Kim Illuminate, Doris Mack, Paul O'Halloran, Cathi Tegtmeier and Billy Fenwick
Acolytes:	February 16: Gage Minter, Jasmine Thatcher and Charlie Urban-Mead February 23: Mike Minter, Nancy Montero, Skye O'Halloran and Monica Rizzo
Altar Guild:	February 16: Team I February 23: Team II
8 a.m. Readers:	February 16: Angela Henry and Lynne Koch February 23: Debbie Belding and Jim Smyth
10 a.m. Readers:	February 16: Russell Urban-Mead/Judy Douglass February 23: Donna Beyer/Deirdre Mae Micker
Ushers:	February 16: Judy Douglass and Vince Asher February 23: Donna and John Beyer
Pledge Clerks:	February 16: Tanya Hall and Anna Marie Pitcher February 23: Paul Littlefield and Dean Caswell
Coffee Hour Hosts:	February 16: Dierdre Mae Micker and The Gausepohls February 23: The O'Halloran Family

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This Week's Lectionary

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Psalm 119:1-8

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Matthew 5:21-37

Sermon Preached on
Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany
(February 9, 2014)

"Shine"

Chemistry was never one of my strengths in school - in fact, one of my smartest moves was to recognize this and simply not take chemistry. A decision I still don't regret.

However, my oldest siblings were science geeks, so I was constantly surrounded by their chemistry books and, occasionally, their unauthorized experiments. I was also subjected to their eye-rolling whenever one of us said something scientifically absurd.

So when we were in church one day and heard today's gospel, my brother puffed himself up and hissed, "Salt can't lose its saltiness! It's an element-it'll always taste like salt."

And he's right. If taken as written, Jesus would have had a poor chemistry grade.

But it's the careless reader who fails to look beyond the obvious - especially when reading a translation of something thousands of years old from an entirely different part of the world. In other words, context.

The Morton's salt you see on your table is not exactly what Jesus is talking about. Theirs came mostly from mines around the Dead Sea and was normally filled with impurities. When dry, it was salty, but when it got wet, the sodium chloride often washed away leaving a substance that looked like salt but had no real salt in it. Again, I'm no chemist, but the experts say this can still be demonstrated today.

Now that we've established that Jesus' salt possibly COULD lose its saltiness, what does it have to do with anything? What does it have to do with God, the disciples - or light for that matter? And what does it have to do with the shining in my sermon title?

Again, a little context helps.

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Jesus is talking to his disciples about what their role in the world is. Whenever he does this, he tends to use terms or examples that are common to folks of his day. He talks about herding sheep and planting wheat.

Today, he uses two examples - Salt AND light. People were used to thinking of salt and light together.

Biblical scholar Eduard Schwiezer says that it was a common Jewish expression to call the laws "salt and light," meaning that they illuminate and preserve the people.

So, Jesus when uses salt and light he's talking about the disciples and their role in upholding the Law.

Only instead of just saying that the Law is salt and light, now he says THEY are salt and light. YOU are salt and light. YOU are the living Law.

But how can that be? How can they - we - be the law?

By illuminating and preserving.

Let's go back to salt for a moment. What was it used for back then? Flavor to be sure but more importantly as a preservative. It literally kept people alive. It allowed foods to be kept in an era before refrigeration or canning. It was used in fertilizer. And it was used to heal certain injuries. They knew that they needed it to live.

So, if it lost its saltiness, it was useless - worse than useless because people would use it thinking they were getting this life-giving element when it was junk.

To be salt means to bring life - to feed the hungry, seek justice for the oppressed, healing to the sick.

The same is true with light. In our times of light pollution, it's hard to imagine how important light was back then. But nighttime in those days could be very, very dark. And dangerous. Without a light, you were literally lost. Even in your own house, you would be blind without some form of light.

Imagine being in an unfamiliar place without any light. People were literally guided home by a single light.

To be light, then, meant to show the way. By extension, it meant to give knowledge and wisdom. Jesus tells his disciples that they are to give the life and the wisdom of the law to the world.

The law he speaks of, of course, is God's love.

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That brings us to the "how." By letting your light shine. I tried to think of a word for being salty, but that didn't sound right, so for the moment let's just talk about shining.

Jesus had specific ideas about how to shine.

To shine means to use the gifts you have to God's glory. Whether they are talents like singing or some other art form, or material like money, or physical or personality based like incredible patience or charisma - or just time. Use your gifts to shine for God.

If you have it at your disposal, Jesus is saying here that you are to use it to God's glory.

How do we know if it's to God's glory? Not by looking over our shoulder to see if God is watching (or giving us a pat on the back). Isaiah notes that the Israelites complained to God that they did all these sacrifices to him, and he wasn't even looking. "Why do we fast, but you do not see?" To which Isaiah replies, this is not what God cares about. God cares about how we treat each other - not because it looks good but because the people are God's children. And you, he says, "Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day, and oppress all your workers."

He told them how to shine: "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free... Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house?"

A good gage for whether you are shining is this: are others attracted to God by what you do? Not attracted to you, but attracted to God.

Of course, no matter what you do, it will repel some, so the next question is, "Is it consistent with Jesus?" Are you healing or harming? Are serving justice or subverting it?

You can check this by reading the gospels over and over till they become a part of you.

To be light and salt means to embody the law - love God above all and love your neighbor as yourself. Do it with every resource at your disposal. Do it unreservedly. Because salt was meant to preserve, and light was meant to shine. Amen.#