

St. James' E-pistle

February 28, 2014

Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

At our February Vestry meeting, one of the topics we discussed was Hospitality. There are so many things that are important in the life of the church - theology, worship, pastoral care, outreach, education. The list is endless. But hospitality should never be neglected.

In fact, I would like to use this Lent to focus a bit on hospitality, its history in the faith, what it means, and how we can be bearers of Christ's hospitality in the world.

You might think that's kind of an odd focus for Lent. A few years ago, we had a teaching series on death. Now THAT's Lenten!

But Lent at St. James' has always been a little different. While others fast, we make an effort to get together more - especially for our Lenten Breakfasts!

More importantly, hospitality is the most basic expression of God's love. It is the basis for all we do including education, pastoral care, and outreach. Hospitality is everywhere in scripture, from Leviticus ("You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.") to Hebrews ("Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.")

And yet, hospitality is one of the most difficult things to live. It requires stepping away from our own desires and focussing on the needs of others. Joyfully. The fact that this isn't easy is shown in Peter's letter when he writes, "Show hospitality to one another without grumbling."

Shrove Tuesday is just a few days away. It is a perfect opportunity to remind us that we are called to Godly hospitality - to getting out of our comfort zones and reaching out to others.

And of course, Ash Wednesday with its insistent call to "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return" is a powerful reminder that our time on this planet is limited - if we're going to learn Godly hospitality, now is the time.

During Lent, don't be surprised to hear references to our hospitality in sermons and other venues. Hospitality is, after all, what we are all about.

In Christ,

Chuck+

St. James' E-pistle

February 28, 2014

Ash Wednesday Services

Ash Wednesday Service with the imposition of Ashes will be at 6:30 AM, 10:00 AM and 7:00 PM in the church. If you or someone you know cannot get out but would like to receive ashes, please call the parish office.

St. James' E-pistle

February 28, 2014

The News of the Church

Inquirers Class Meeting: Everyone who has signed up to be in the Inquirers Class will meet in the Wilks Room at 11:30 **THIS SUNDAY, March 2**. Please be sure to be there. Guidelines for the class will be given out as well as a syllabus.

If you did not sign up but want to learn more, please come!

Buildings and Grounds Meeting Postponed: Due to work conflicts, the Buildings and Grounds meeting that was scheduled for this Sunday has been postponed. It has been re-scheduled for the following **Sunday (March 9)** at the same time.

Shrove Tuesday Approaching: The ancient tradition of Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper comes again **THIS TUESDAY, March 4 at 6:00 PM** in the Parish Hall. As always, there will be pancakes and other yummy foods for dinner and the infamous "Fr. Chuck's Pancake Decorating Fun!"



We may even have a little fun with the adults - who knows.

PS: If possible, we will distribute Lenten Meditation booklets at the dinner. So please come!

Lenten Meditations: THANK YOU to all who have offered to write meditations! Several have already come in, and I have the joy of reading them first. Without exception, they have been wonderful - heartfelt, probing, faithful. You are going to love your meditation booklets.

St. James' E-pistle

February 28, 2014

It would be most helpful if you could e-mail your meditation to me by this Friday or Saturday. It takes time to put them together.

By the way, I was recently asked if I would once again send out each day's meditation via e-mail. Of course I will. Actually, I find it a discipline that helps me remember to keep Lent each day.

Pilgrimage Deadline Approaching: The registration deadline for Spirit Walk: The Rail Trail Pilgrimage is **March 14**. This lenten pilgrimage is great for folks of all ages, assuming they're ready and able to walk about twenty miles (at a leisurely pace) over the course of two days. There will be an organizational meeting after the 10 AM service on **March 9**. We will go over the trail and what you should bring - as well as what you can expect. This is the time to ask any questions! Brochures are in the narthex.

Ushers Meeting: There will be a meeting of all ushers on **Sunday March 16** following the 10 AM service. It should be a short meeting just to check in, make sure everyone is on the same page and go over some possible (modest) changes in ushering at St. James'.

Children's Community Chorus: St. Margaret's Church in Staatsburg is inviting all children between the ages of 8 and 13 to join their free, non-denominational Children's Community Chorus. St. Margaret's received a grant to form this group which is not only a singing group but a class intent on teaching all children how to read music. The idea is for the chorus to sing at various community concerts as well as once a month during St. Margaret's worship. If you would like more information, please call Fr. Allan Ford at 914-299-3148 or leave a message at 845-889-4181.

Check out our YouTube Channel: With the hard work and help of Herb Sweet and our office manager Dyan Wapnick, we now have a YouTube Channel. What does that mean? It means that videos of church activities are available to watch anytime you want. Right now there are Fireside Chats and a video about the Community Garden on it. You can subscribe to the channel, which means that anytime a new video is posted, you'll be informed via e-mail. There are countless opportunities for sharing who we are via this channel. Thank you, Dyan and Herb!

St. James' E-pistle

February 28, 2014

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, Dalton K., 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, Cliff Wells and the teenager who left a bomb threat at FDR High School this week.

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:	Stephanie Barkoe, Regina Ardini, Charlessa Thatcher and David Foote
Acolytes:	March 2: Eden Ciferri, Rebecca Gausepohl and Chris Santos March 9: Bryanna Burkhardt, Chris Granados-Kramer and Travyn Triola
Altar Guild:	March 2: Team II March 9: Team III
8 a.m. Readers:	March 2: Angela Henry and Lucille Ogden March 9: Debbie Belding and Paul Littlefield
10 a.m. Readers:	March 2: Patty Caswell/Justin Bohlmann March 9: Regina Ardini/Sophie Ciferri
Ushers:	March 2: Dean Caswell and Austin Horne March 9: Bill and Regina Ardini
Pledge Clerks:	March 2: Deb and Doug Belding March 9: Janet Bright and Joanne Lown
Coffee Hour Hosts:	March 2: The Shahanis and Audrey Horne March 9: Lenten Breakfast

St. James' E-pistle

February 28, 2014

This Week's Lectionary

Exodus 24:12-18

Psalm 99

2 Peter 1:16-21

Matthew 17:1-9

Sermon Preached on
Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany
(February 23, 2014)

This is part two because it finishes the section we started last week which was Jesus pushing things too far. Pushing things to such ridiculous limits that it's impossible - or at least really really uncomfortable.

This week it goes on and may be even worse - but somehow possible. Here's what Jesus says...

You have heard it said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but I say, if anyone slaps you, turn the other cheek. If anyone steals your cloak, give them your shirts as well. If anyone forces you to go a mile, go two.

He says, You have heard it said you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemies, but I say to you love those who hate you. Everyone loves their family - I want you to be different.

Again, keep in mind that Jesus has said all along that he's not destroying the law but fulfilling it. And when you look at Moses today, you can maybe see that. In Exodus, he gives some more laws - or an explication of the law, let's say. He takes the ten commandments and builds on them a bit. He tells farmers (which was most people) to leave food for the poor. He says to not steal or lie, or to cheat employees out of wages or make life worse for the weak. And then he adds, don't hold a grudge. Reprove a neighbor who is going astray - that's the loving thing to do - but do so out of love, not hate. Love is the operating force.

So when Jesus speaks, he's got that background. He's got Moses. He's got the whole eye for an eye legal system which was created back in Mesopotamia before Abraham NOT as a way to get even with others but as a moderating influence. It was created to LIMIT punishment because in earlier times people would get vengeance. You put out my eye, so I'm going to kill you and your family.

Jesus essentially says, "That was okay for awhile. It was a good start. But now it's time to grow more. Now, I don't want you just to moderate your anger and your hate. I want you to

St. James' E-pistle

February 28, 2014

leave it behind and choose to live, to choose reconciliation over revenge, forgiveness over justice."

If we said last week that Jesus pushed too far with his call for cutting off the hand that causes you to sin or the murderer's penalty for someone who holds a grudge, then he's really pushing it in this section - because he's speaking to our need to NOT BE PUSHOVERS. When someone abuses you, give them more than they ask. Yeah, right. Impossible. I'm not doing THAT.

We know it's possible because people are doing it. We know that there are people exercising remarkable forgiveness, and even more - walking with those who have hated and harmed them permanently. We know there are people who are turning the evil of resentment, anger, hate into a positive.

Let me share a story one of my classmates from seminary recently made me aware of: It's the story of Mary Johnson and Oshea Israel. In 1993, Oshea Israel was a 16-year-old punk, and one night he got in a fight with Mary's only son, pulled out a gun, and shot him to death. He was arrested and sentenced to 25 years+. After 12 years, Mary felt she had carried around her grief and hatred long enough, so she decided to confront Oshea face to face in prison.

What happened, as they describe it, changed everything for them. She told stories about her dead son, and he became a real person to Oshea. He told her about his life, and he became more than a murderer to her. Over time, they became friends, and when Oshea was eventually released, Mary helped him get established. She looked on him as a son, and he sees her as a mother. They live next door to each other (yes, he takes out the trash for her). Even more amazing, Mary created a support network called Death to Life, an organization that supports mothers who've lost a child to homicide and encourages reconciliation between families of murders and victims. She and Oshea travel together to give talks anywhere - schools, prisons, civic groups. They are working to stop other young kids from making the mistake Oshea made, and they are working to help others reach toward forgiveness and away from a life of anger.

You might say Mary is beyond the normal person. But she's just one example. Many have done the same thing - because they know that anger and fear are two sides of the same coin - and that both lead to death. They know that holding a grudge, holding anger, holding resentment is holding a ticking bomb. Except that this bomb can't hurt anyone else - just you. Whether it's resentment and anger at someone who has wronged you personally or more generally (the street punks, the elite rich, the IRS - whoever your target is), holding onto that contempt will not make you more fit for the kingdom of heaven.

What will make you more fit is learning from Mary Johnson - learning how to not only forgive and reconcile but to love the one who has hurt you. Because like it or not, every single one of the people out there on this planet is God's.

St. James' E-pistle

February 28, 2014

Oh, and let's not kid ourselves. You could go that extra mile, turn the other cheek, reach out in love - and get slapped again. It won't always end like it did for Mary and Oshea. But then it's their anger and contempt, not yours. You have let go - and in doing so, you have taken one step closer to really comprehending the all-encompassing love that God has for us, one step closer to the Kingdom of God.

Amen.