

St. James' E-pistle

March 21, 2014

Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

Happy Spring! Although there is still snow on the ground, the sun is shining as I write this, and I can walk outside with just a sweater. That is a joy!

The second half of this month has brought many other occasions of joy. The Lenten Breakfasts have been wonderful so far with large, enthusiastic crowds. Attendance at church has been quite nice, too (although we are not number counters, there is truth in the adage, "the more the merrier.") There's a certain positive energy in a full church.

We've begin the Inquirers Series, started bible study back up and are preparing for a pilgrimage. We've been reading daily Lenten meditations by your fellow parishioners, and barely a day goes by when someone doesn't send me an e-mail to say how much someone else's meditation meant to them.

Of course, we don't want to put on too happy a face - it is Lent after all. But even then, the Lenten discipline of fasting - or the Friday discipline for fasting for those who practice it - is about happiness, or at least a deeper joy. These practices strip away all the distractions that sometimes numb our minds and souls. They pare life down to the truly essential: breathe in, breathe out.

And it's in those most basic elements that we find ourselves.

I confess that I do feel deprived of that certain word that begins with "A," but other than that, this Lent feels peaceful and contented.

May life be just that for each of you - not only in Lent but as we prepare for the celebration of resurrection in Christ. Today and always.

In Christ,

Chuck+

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The News of the Church

Bridge Builders: I would like to have a group of young people participate this Summer in the Bridge Builders camp, which is sort of like Towel Camp (which we last participated in in 2011), only this is local. It is a camp for youth grades 6-12. Campers stay at the Taconic Retreat and Conference Center. Dates are August 3-8, and the cost is a reasonable \$250. For more information, you can check out their website: www.hvbridgebuilders.org. The registration deadline is March 31, so please consider registering soon!

Pilgrimage Coming Fast! Please keep in your prayers the pilgrims who will walk the Rail Trail on March 29-30. We will not only do this as a Lenten discipline but also as a holy experiment. If you have not registered to walk and think you might want to after all, please call Fr. Chuck as soon as possible. Registration is \$50.

Pledge Statement Sign-Up: In past years, we sent out quarterly statements to help pledgers keep track of their pledges. A few years ago, we stopped this practice and sent only an end-of-year statement. However, some parishioners have asked if they could once again receive quarterly statements, and the Vestry has agreed. Beginning this Sunday, we will have a sign-up sheet for those who would like to receive quarterly statements. Only those who sign up will receive statements, which will be placed in the Narthex on Sundays.

Rebuilding Together: Rebuilding Together Dutchess County (formerly known and Christmas in April) is looking for people who could use their services. They repair/make safe homes of the elderly, disabled and financially distressed. If you need that kind of help or know someone who does, please contact them at (845) 454-7310. Their website is located at: www.rebuildingtogetherdutchess.org

Editor Wanted: We are looking for an editor for the monthly printed version of the parish news. This is a compilation of the pertinent news from the weekly E-pistle that is then mailed to parishioners who do not have access to e-mail. Diane Webb had done the job until she moved to Syracuse. Dyan Wapnick, our secretary, has been filling in since then, but that's not part of her job. She will, however, show you what the job entails and help you get started. Please call the parish office to volunteer.

Inquirers Classes Begin: This week's first Inquirers Class went very well. We discussed what Spirituality is and how it affects our lives. We will not meet next Wednesday (March 26) but will pick back up on Wednesday, April 2 - 7:30 PM in the Wilks Room. The second session's topic: "What is Christianity?"

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Bible Study Now at 11:00 AM: The Thursday Bible Study has made a move to 11:00 AM! If you would like to join us, please do! We'll be in the Wilks Room. If Thursdays at 11 don't work for you, please see Fr. Chuck, and we'll organize something that does work.

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.

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, The Right Reverend E. Don Taylor, 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:	Rebekah Rider, Aric Tegtmeier and Chuck Kramer
Acolytes:	March 23: Mike Minter, Nancy Montero and Skye O'Halloran March 30: Eden Ciferri, Rebecca Gausepohl and Chris Santos
Altar Guild:	March 23: Team I March 30: Team I
8 a.m. Readers:	March 23: Debbie Belding and Lucille Ogden March 30: Angela Henry and Sue DeLorenzo
10 a.m. Readers:	March 23: Patty Caswell/Nancy Montero March 30: Donna Beyer/Judy Douglass
Ushers:	March 23: Nancy Montero and Anna Marie Pitcher March 30: Kathie Champion and Mary Gabel

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Pledge Clerks: March 23: Paul Littlefield and Dean Caswell
March 30: Paul Littlefield
Coffee Hour Hosts: March 23: Lenten Breakfast
March 30: Lenten Breakfast

This Week's Lectionary

Exodus 17:1-7

Psalm 95

Romans 5:1-11

John 4:5-42

Sermon Preached on
Second Sunday in Lent
(March 16, 2014)

"The Chicken or the Egg"

It appears one of the great brain teasers of the age has been solved. I am, of course, talking about the ago-old question: Which came first, the Chicken or the Egg. For the answer, let us go to science - as explained by some guy on "How Things Work.":

"Chickens evolved from non-chickens through small changes caused by the mixing of male and female DNA or by mutations to the DNA that produced the zygote. These changes and mutations only have an effect at the point where a new zygote is created. That is, two non-chickens mated and the DNA in their new zygote contained the mutation(s) that produced the first true chicken. That one zygote cell divided to produce the first true chicken.

Prior to that first true chicken zygote, there were only non-chickens. The zygote cell is the only place where DNA mutations could produce a new animal, and the zygote cell is housed in the chicken's egg. So, the egg must have come first."

So we can now officially assert that the egg came first. Don't you feel smarter?

But what if the answer was never really the point of the question in the first place? What if the point was to suggest that some things are unknowable. Or that some things are so intertwined, they are for all practical purposes impossible to separate? Or that it just doesn't which came first because both are so inter-connected that one cannot exist without the other.

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That's the case in our scripture today. Things are so closely related that trying to tease out a proper order is kind of pointless.

All you have to do is look at Abram - who would eventually become Abraham. Now Paul, in today's epistle, says that Abraham had faith first, and it was counted as righteousness - and only after that did he act.

Paul may be right, although we should note that when God talked to Abram, it was in Haran. Abram had already left his homeland of Ur years before. As far as we can tell, the only thing he left behind in Haran was his father. And as far as we know, his father might have died by this time.

Still, Paul's point is that Abram had to believe before he could follow, and that it was the believing - the faith - that counted, not the actual moving away. On the other hand, you could argue that if Abram had not followed through by actually leaving Haran, his faith would have been useless, just empty words.

We have this discussion all the time in the church: what's more important, faith or action? Let me just go back to the chicken and the egg. If you're asking which came first, we might be able to pin it down, but if you're asking which is more important, then there is not answer: One does not exist without the other.

That is, faith without action is not faith. Action without faith is pointless. Faith is meant to be lived, not thought about.

That may give us some insight into why Jesus became one of us. At the end of that perplexing conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, Jesus summarizes what he needs Nicodemus to understand by saying:

"For God so love the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

This is a bit like Abraham's faith and his actually moving away from Canaan. God's love for us may exist - but without action, who cares? Jesus coming to be with us, to become one of us, is God putting his words into action. God's love for us may have come first, but without the action... what would it mean to us?

It seems to me that we struggle with this all the time in our faith journeys? Which comes first: Our spiritual development or our action in the world? The answer is YES. Without a deep abiding relationship with God as Christ showed us, any action we take is empty. On the other hand being pious and going to church and praying alone - without reaching out to others in actual service - is just words, equally empty. Faith and action need each other.

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At the beginning of the year, I mentioned to you that I wanted to spend some time this Lent to focus on Hospitality. One reason for this is because it is a small example of living out our faith. Hospitality is so small a thing but so vital.

It is simply reaching out to the person next to you and saying "Welcome." Not just "Welcome" however, but "join us." Hospitality is knowing that each person is your brother or sister in Christ - and then treating them like it. See someone you don't know? Introduce yourself. As a visitor in many churches, I can tell you it is more uncomfortable to stand around while everyone ignores you than to have strangers come up and introduce themselves. I'm not saying you have to become best friends, but real hospitality is more than just shaking hands at the Peace.

You may say this is a small thing, but small things are hugely important. We are a relational faith. We love because God loves us. But God's love for us took action, and our love for others needs action as well.

So yes, the egg came before the chicken, and it's reasonable to assume Abram's faith came before his move from Haran to Canaan. And I'm pretty sure God's love for us came before Christ was sent to be one of us.

But without the chicken, the egg would be kind of pointless.

Which came first is not the important question. The real question is, can one exist without the other? And the answer is, No.

Amen.