

St. James' E-pistle

April 25, 2014

Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

Alleluia, what a glorious Easter, bat and all! Actually, the appearance of a bat at our 8:00 AM service on Easter morning seems to have been a good sign. Later that day, a parishioner told me that in Native American symbology, bats represent rebirth and new possibilities. Could anything be more appropriate for Easter? Now, onto more serious matters.

Did you hear the one about the church gardener? She came up to the rector and said, "Father, we have a bad infestation of weeds."

"That's terrible!" said the priest. "What should we do?"

The gardener bowed her head and said, "Let us spray."

Yes, it is once again Bright Sunday, the day we celebrate the marvelous joke God played on Satan, letting everyone believe death had the ultimate victory before showing just how wrong that was!

We celebrate this with jokes, both practical and oral. Last year, I ended up with a sign on the back of my chasuble. Fortunately, it just said, "Jesus is my bro!"

Tell your jokes this Sunday. If you want to stand up and tell it to the entire congregation, let me know - there's no reason for only the clergy to have all the fun. If you just want to e-mail it to me, that's good, too.

If you think up a practical joke, just remember to be kind and safe! *For example, at one church the deacon put a sign above every hand dryer in all the bathrooms (it was a bit bigger than St. James'). The sign read: Push button for a brief sample of the rector's sermon. Boy, am I glad we don't have hand dryers!*

Use your imagination, have fun, and if you have no jokes to contribute, just come and enjoy! What good is comedy without an audience?

But most especially, remember that God's humor is the kind that never hurts - it lifts us up, just as he raised Christ from the grave. We laugh because in the end, death has no sting, no victory - life overcomes.

In Christ,

Chuck+

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The News of the Church

Mite Box Collection: Don't forget to bring in your Mite Box (or whatever) this Sunday to support our cooperation in the Habitat for Humanity build in Poughkeepsie! I'll bring mine!

Outreach: The next Outreach meeting will be on Wednesday, April 30th at 7:00 PM in the Wilks Room.

Sunday School Hosts Coffee Hour: The Sunday School will be hosting the coffee hour this Sunday, April 27. We are asking that all Sunday School children bring in a food item to contribute for coffee hour. Nothing elaborate, a package of cookies, brownies or cupcakes. Any treat will be appreciated! Thank-you so much!

An Invitation: Please join Brian Rance and Melinda Harris at their home on Saturday, May 3rd from 5-8 p.m. for a joyous celebration of friendship and fellowship at St. James'. The Invitation is below.

Gluten Free Communion: For those who have gluten allergies, St. James' now has Gluten Free communion hosts. Simply let me know either before the service or at the time of communion, and I'll be sure to give you one.

Next Week's Inquirers Class: Due to a diocesan function, next week's Inquirer's Class has been cancelled. Our next session will be April 30, starting at 7:30 PM. The topic will be, "What is the Episcopal Church?"

Anglican Rosary Workshop: Three parishioners have approached me about having a little class or workshop on making and praying the Anglican Rosary. Please contact me if you are interested, and we'll set one up!

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.

YOU ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO ATTEND
A CELEBRATION OF FRIENDSHIP
AND FELLOWSHIP
FOR MEMBERS OF ST. JAMES' PARISH
AT THE HOME OF
BRIAN RANCE AND MELINDA HARRIS (AND WILLIAM)

WHERE: 9 MARSHALL ROAD
(CORNER OF MARSHALL AND NETHERWOOD ROADS (CR-41))

WHEN: 5-8 P.M. ON SATURDAY, MAY 3RD

BEVERAGES (INCLUDING WINE, BEER AND SODA)
AND A LIGHT MEAL WILL BE SERVED

PLEASE RSVP BY E-MAIL TO
BRIAN.RANCE@FRESHFIELDS.COM
OR BY TELEPHONE TO
212 360 1854

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Please keep the following people in your prayers:

Ruth Blanding, John Bohlmann, Kathleen Craft, Michael Day, Jane Gagliardoto, Kasey Gaulin, John Golden, 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, Grace 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:	Zachary Whitman, Floraine Knauss, Rachel Ogden and Hope Jennings
Acolytes:	April 27: Mike Minter, Nancy Montero and Skye O'Halloran May 4: Eden Ciferri, Rebecca Gausepohl and Chris Santos
Altar Guild:	April 27: Team II May 4: Team II
8 a.m. Readers:	April 27: Angela Henry and Paul Littlefield May 4: Debbie Belding and Grant Ferris
10 a.m. Readers:	April 27: Patty Caswell/Sophie Ciferri May 4: Wilma Tully/Nancy Montero
Ushers:	April 27: Donna and John Beyer May 4: Dean Caswell and Austin Horne
Pledge Clerks:	April 27: Paul Littlefield and Dean Caswell May 4: Janet Bright and Joanne Lown
Coffee Hour Hosts:	April 27: St. James' Sunday School May 4: TBD

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This Week's Lectionary

Acts 2:14a,22-32

Psalm 16

1 Peter 1:3-9

John 20:19-31

Sermon Preached on
Easter Day
(April 20, 2014)

"What Made You A Christian?"

Happy Easter! I'm glad you're here, especially our visitors. But before we get too comfortable, maybe I should ask you: Why are you here?

That didn't come out right, so let me back up.

Last Tuesday was Holy Tuesday, and each year on that day, the clergy of the diocese all go down to the cathedral for a service in which we renew our ordination vows. It's wonderful.

During his sermon at the service, Bishop Dietsche told us that one of the questions he gets more than any other - and it's one all of us could relate to - was, "what made you become a priest?" Or "Why did you become a priest?"

We all knew what he was talking about - and when it said, "It's one of the hardest questions to answer," we understood. Most of the time, it's not just one thing that makes you decide to jump in. It's a life-long process.

I remember the first time I talked to my rector about the possibility of becoming a priest. First thing he said was, "Why would you want to become part of something so disreputable?" But then he smiled and said, "Come to think of it, you'd fit right in."

But I wonder if that question - What made you become a priest - is the most important. In fact, I'm positive it's not. A far more important question is: What made you become a Christian? Which is what I mean by, Why are you here?

I realize that some of you are probably here because you were dragged here by your parents or grandparents. That's okay. Because if that's the case, this is your lucky day! You get to learn at least what made them become Christians. And maybe you'll learn what makes you a Christian.

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You see, Easter is our faith's defining holy day. Without Easter, there is no Christianity. It is what defines us. If you didn't know that, then let me tell you a little about what happened and who we are.

We Christians believe that God created the earth - and wonderfully through billions of years of cosmic activity combined with hundreds of millions of years of evolving development. Eventually, we believe, God created us, specifically so we can be in relationship.

The problem is, like young children, we don't always relate well - in fact, we began to see God as too big, too mighty, too scary. In short, we started to be afraid of God. When bad things happened, we blamed God. Even if we thought we deserved punishment because we were bad, we believed in the end that God was the terrifying emperor who was hurting us.

So we feared God, but we didn't love God.

After awhile, God wondered, "How do I get across to these folks how much I love them?"
What can I do to get through to them?

So he became one of us. Fully human, fully one of us from going through childbirth to getting in trouble with his parents, to learning in school to becoming a man who laughed, and cried, and became frustrated with his students and became very afraid.

Jesus taught us that God's love for us is so intense that there is nothing - nothing - that any of us can do to separate us from the love of God. You can't do it. You can't make God stop loving you. Period.

Think of the story of the prodigal son. Remember that? There's a dad with two sons. One is obedient, but the younger one is a jerk. He demands his portion of the inheritance (a huge insult to his father), then goes off and blows the money on dissolute living. In the end, he has nothing, so he decides to go back home. He figures maybe he can at least get a job with his father. Anything would be better than what he had. But when he gets within sight of the house, his dad sees him and rushes out to hug and kiss his child - before the kid even gets out a single word! That's how much this doting father loves us.

And still, we were afraid. So God through Jesus did what any parent would do to save their child from death - death in this case being separation from God. He died for us. Because any parent would give up themselves in order to save their child.

Jesus essentially showed us that God would whatever it takes to demonstrate the extent of his love for us.

If that were it, however, then we still wouldn't have Easter. You still wouldn't be a Christian. None of us would be. Yes, he showed us great love - that God loves us so much that he would lay down life itself for us. But lots of people offer up their lives to spare others.

It was what happened after Jesus died for us that is important. He rose again.

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In the dark of night, when others slept, in the most intimate manner possible, Jesus' eyes opened again, and he rose. Why should he? To show to us that life overcomes death. To show us that God's love brings life, not death. To let us know that death is only a passage way to new and bigger life. To help us understand that God is, and that what Christ taught us before the crucifixion is true.

But even that does not make you a Christian. Christ's dying and rising again makes us beloved children of God but not necessarily Christians. What makes us Christians is embracing that love of God shown in Christ. Seeing him and saying, "I want in."

So what made you a Christian?

Well, that's not really a fair question, is it? Because that presumes that you are in fact a Christian. I don't want to assume anything.

So the better question is, knowing what you know now, are you a Christian? That's a question only you can answer. Amen.

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