

St. James' E-pistle

July 31, 2015

Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

This has been a reading week. I'm reading a book ("The Global Achievement Gap") for a committee I've been asked to join for the School District. I'm reading a manual for administrators of the new online training programs on sexual abuse awareness (required for all staff and volunteers who work with children). I'm reading (well, re-reading) biographies of Samuel Bard and John McVickar in preparation for the Graveyard Tours.

There are a lot of surprises. One is that the seven skills that the author of "Achievement Gap" lists as being essential for modern education echo with startling closeness the skills which John McVickar (our first rector and later a professor at Columbia), listed as essential to being a proper gentleman in the first half of the 19th century. These skills included reasoning, collaboration, adaptability, the ability to gather information, entrepreneurship, and curiosity.

Granted, in McVickar's day, only the richest and best connected, were educated, but they did not lack. Most spoke several languages (at the age of 13, John McVickar wrote his entrance essay to Columbia in Latin). Most studied the old philosophers, questioning their existence, the purpose of life, and what constituted right living. And of course, today, adaptability almost always means technology.

But the point is that many of the "new" goals for education are simply an updated return to the much older goals. (We won't bother with how we abandoned those old goals about a hundred years ago). In much the same way, many of our goals for life itself are simply the same old goals people have had all along.

Because - and this is one thing driven home by the biographies - despite all appearances and language, we have not changed much in the last couple hundred years.

Both Samuel Bard and John McVickar loved intensely and grieved intensely (Bard took a year off of work to care for his wife when she fell into despair after four of their children (between the ages of 9 and 2) died in a one-month period.) They loved games, jokes and good stories (McVickar was regularly asked by students to jot down a witty verse to share around).

In one real way, however, they differed from us. They practiced their faith quietly yet intensely. The descriptions of their daily family devotions - which I suspect were pretty accurate - are something rare for us. Their prayers which they often wrote down, are requests to do right, to be sustained in difficult times, to uphold others.

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I don't suggest that we are not faithful. But the way we talk about our faith is different. The way we practice it daily is different. Is it better? Worse?

I don't think we have to write down our prayers - certainly not in flowery language - but I also suspect that we would be better off in our faith, in our relationship with God, if we kept God ever at the forefront of our minds. That's what daily devotions are for - not to appease a God who needs emotional stroking but for us, so we can remind ourselves to whom we belong and who loves us.

I have this sneaking suspicion I'm doing more reading and less producing of the documents I'm supposed to be working on (like the E-pistle). But I can't say it's wasted time. Looking back to the past does give us a chance to look at ourselves. Not to say they were better than us (God knows they weren't!) but to remind ourselves that we've always been pretty much the same - we can rejoice where we have made improvements, and where we have lost the thread a bit, there's always opportunity to pick it back up.

So enjoy your summer reading this week - and if you get a chance, think about how the stories you read are just small parts of the one story that runs through all time and in all places. The story of God.

In Christ,

Chuck+

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The News of the Church

The Community Garden needs plastic bags for Friday's Food Pantry clients. A bin is in the Narthex, so please remember to bring them in on Sundays.

Also: We now offer fresh flowers with vases each Friday. If you have small vases in good condition that you would like to donate, that would be great! Please put them in a bag marked "Community Garden" in the narthex.

Rural and Migrant Ministry is looking for donations of school kits to be given to the children and youth that attend their summer camp programs. A list of what is needed is in the narthex. ***Donations will be accepted through Sunday, August 9th.***

Rebuild the Churches Fund: Bishop Dietsche has asked each parish of our Diocese to join him in contributing to the rebuilding of the seven African-American churches that burned recently. ***We will hold this special collection on Sunday, August 30th.***

Episcopal Relief and Development will be highlighted with a ***special collection honoring their 75th Anniversary celebration being held on Sunday, September 27th.***

Graveyard Tour Actors STILL Wanted! We are putting out the call for actors and have received good responses so far. Now we need more! So far, we have four definite, two probable, and a potential actor. That's half of what we need. I'd love to have more parishioners involved, so if you haven't contacted me yet and would like to act, NOW is the time! For 2015, we have seven characters: One role (Dr. Bard) is filled. Here's what we need for the rest:

- 2 Rev. John McVickar - a younger man (mid-20s, early 30s would be ideal but can go older). First rector of St. James'.
- 3 John Germond - a 40-50ish man. Ideally can play organ. Organist/choir director for 35 years.
- 4 Ellen Roosevelt - athletic woman early 20s. Winner of 3rd US Open.

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- 5 Richard Jenkins - between 40-70 man. Former slave, first sexton of St. James'.
- 6 Catherine Carl - almost any age can work (20s - 90s. She lived a long time).
Richard's daughter.
- 7 Emma Victoria Pitkin Marshal - 50-70ish woman. Poetess of Hyde Park.

We are also looking for **tour guides** - it will be a little different this year, and will have special training with Fr. Chuck. Please see Fr. Chuck if you would like to act.

Summer Youth Conference: I strongly encourage any young people (rising 6th graders to rising college Freshmen) to attend the Summer Youth Conference at Incarnation Camp Center this summer. ***The dates are August 16-22.*** More information is on a flier below. I have financial aid for anyone interested. Again, I strongly urge this!

Take Some Business Cards: We have created some Business Cards for St. James' Church, and we want you to take them. These cards have our service times and contact information for the church office, but no personal names. Carry them around with you because you never know when you might have a conversation that leads you to talk about Christ and your church. If you have a card with you, you can simply give it to them and let them know it has all the information they might want to get started exploring St. James'. When we run out, we can always get more, so please take a handful this Sunday!

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.diocesenyn.org> and click under "Beliefs and Practices."

- 2 The Church of the Crucifixion, Manhattan
- 3 The Church of the Intercession, Manhattan
- 4 St. James' Church, Manhattan
- 5 St. David's Church, The Bronx
- 6 On The Transfiguration of Our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray that we may be open to ongoing conversion by the Holy Spirit.
- 7 All Saints' Church, Staten Island
- 8 St. Philip's Church in the Highlands, Garrison

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, Jim And Sharyn Burke, Joann Clark, Michael Day, Dottie Drake, Ross Eames, Jr., Linkin Ewalt, Steven Foote, Heather Francese, Jane Gagliardoto, Jack Gordy, Robert Guariglia, Audrey DeGutz,

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, Richard Secor, James Sheeky, Naomi Sleight, Tracy, Candace Vincent, Cassidy Way, Cliff Wells and Shawn Wheeler.

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):	Nick Granados-Kramer, Cliff Wells, David Wardell, Patty Drake and Christian Schroeder
Birthdays (next week):	Mary Gabel, Ashley Cotton, Gordon Mackenzie, Jim Matranga and Suzann Kinne
Acolytes:	August 2: Amelia McNamara August 9: Jasmine Thatcher
Altar Guild:	August 2: Team Number III August 9: Team Number III
8 a.m. Readers:	August 2: Angela Henry and Jim Smyth August 9: Deb Belding and Lynne Koch
10 a.m. Readers:	August 2: Donna Beyer and Nancy Montero August 9: Wilma Tully and Andy Hall
Ushers:	August 2: Nancy Montero and Anna Marie Pitcher August 9: Andrew and Tonya Hall
Pledge Clerks:	August 2: Paul Littlefield and Deb Belding

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August 9: Janet Bright and Joanne Lown
Parish Cycle of Prayer: August 2: Pat Weber and Cliff & Bobbie Wells
August 9: Diane and Scott Wyant (and Bruce, Brett, Arthur and Grace Parent) and Brian, Joanna, Juliana & Matthew Zocchi
Coffee Hour Hosts: August 2: No Coffee Hour
August 9: No Coffee Hour

This Week's Lectionary

2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a

Psalm 51:1-13

Ephesians 4:1-16

John 6:24-35

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

Sermon Preached on
Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
(July 26, 2015)

"Force"

Last week, I mentioned that in between all the healing and teaching that Jesus did, what had been left out was the feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus walking on water. This week they backtracked to include those two scenes. But if you were really paying attention, you might have noticed that today's gospel is not from Mark's gospel - it's from John's.

Why is that?

Let's start by saying the feeding of the 5,000 is one of the few stories that's in all four gospels. And Jesus walking on water is in three of them. For some reason, only Luke doesn't have it. Usually it's John who's the odd man out.

The stories are all pretty much the same, but John's version has one significant difference. After he feeds the 5,000, he becomes aware that they want to take him by force to make him king. Basically, they want to kidnap him.

I doubt they would see it that way, may even have thought they were doing him honor - which is part of the problem. The person applying force to another rarely sees anything wrong with

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what they're doing. But Jesus did. John says that Jesus, "withdrew again to the mountain by himself." As we see later in the story, he took off without the disciples - he slipped away.

There are very few times when Jesus slips away like that in John's gospel, and each of them is when Jesus is threatened with violence. [such as when the crowds want to stone him to death for blasphemy in chapters 8 and 10].

When someone is forced, there is usually implied violence, and Jesus' reaction would seem to agree. At the very least, choice or freedom is being taken away from one by another.

Other than the guidance of a parent or guardian (you know: "I'm being forced to clean my room!"), force against another is rarely used in a positive, healthy manner. Yes, there is time for force, when one is constrained from or pushed into doing something against their will. An officer may have to arrest someone. A soldier may have to shoot.

But force is by its nature, the resort of those who disregard the desires or needs of the other. It is easily abused and often considered a first resort by those who want what they want regardless of anyone else.

We only have to look to our Old Testament reading to see this kind of force. There King David is, rich, powerful, at his ease while the soldiers go out to battle. And there is Bathsheba, naked, beautiful, so close and so powerless. He was the king. He could do whatever he wanted. And he did.

Then, when Bathsheba became pregnant, David essentially forced his general to have Uriah murdered. Force beget force.

Jesus, is a different sort of king. He had the power to do whatever he wanted but he refused to abuse it. He resisted force. He chose love, healing, conversation, storytelling. Sure, feeding 5,000 is a pretty convincing argument. Walking on water is dramatic - but it is not force. When force came into play - he slipped away.

What ways does force come into play in our lives today?

Here are three obvious ones that are in the news these days: Racism, sexual abuse, and gender identification.

Let's start with racism: There was just an article in the paper talking about northern racism. It said with all the attention on Chattanooga and Charleston, South Carolina, many of us in the north have gotten a little self-righteous. It reminded us that we in the north are in fact much more segregated than in the south. Whites and blacks tend to go to different schools more here, live in different neighborhoods. And our own history is fraught with both blatant and subtle racism.

For centuries, we in New York participated in slavery - Wall Street was the second biggest slave market in the country for many years. Even after slavery ended here, we forced people of different races into subservient roles living in substandard housing, going to substandard schools, allowing substandard jobs - arresting those of certain racial groups for crimes that would not raise an eyebrow when it involves members of the dominant, primarily European

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groups. This is nothing new and it's not limited to people of African descent. Think of the first people on this continent. Nearly every racial prejudice applies to them as well.

Number two, Sexual abuse: as a parent with two college aged sons, I'm painfully aware that one of the major and serious topics on college campuses these days is sexual abuse. Abuse against women has been going on a very long time on our campuses, whether by physical force or drugs or alcohol. Nearly a quarter of all female college students report being assaulted - but it is only now that colleges are beginning to conscientiously address it. That's not the only place where women are forced against their will, but it's a place to begin.

Number three, People of different gender identification: This is perhaps one of the hottest topics in the news and in reality shows these days, especially with all the press coverage given to Caitlyn Jenner who used to be Bruce. By this, I mean gays, lesbians, transgendered folks - I admit that there are so many, and it seems like they change so much that I can't keep up. Regardless of what anyone thinks about gender - the fact remains that those who have not fit into our cultural norm have been forced to hide their true identities, often forming sham marriages so they looked "respectable." The alternative was to risk losing jobs, being imprisoned or physically abused to the point of murder.

We could also talk about forced conversions (and most major religions have been guilty of that), forced labor, forced trade agreements (we have the world's most powerful military), forced allegiance to a government...

Sometimes, when we are forced against our will into something, we feel all our power has been taken away. That's part of the reason for using force in the first place - to take away power from the other.

And yet, we do have power. Jesus chose not to use force after feeding the 5,000 but he did not give up his power. Instead, he controlled his path by slipping away. There is a certain power nobody can take away from us even when they apply force. Even when, through force, others try to make you feel worthless.

We have power to know ourselves and to know our worth in the eyes of God. As a former parishioner of St. James' who took her share of abuse is credited with saying (yes, I mean Eleanor Roosevelt): "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." No amount of force can take away the love of God, your value as a child of God.

Nor can we take away the value of any other human being. Jesus reminds us - as Nathan reminded David - that God's love is not forced or controlled by us. God's love is given as freely to Uriah even though he was not a Jew. It is given as freely to Bathsheba even though she was "just a woman." It is given to whom God chooses, and God chooses everyone.

We cannot coerce God into loving us or refraining from loving others. Nor will God force us to love him.

And God will not force us to love others. God invites. God reasons. God loves us unrestrainedly - but God will not force your love.

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Force may on occasion be necessary - much less than we often think - but it is always inferior to God's way, to the way of invitation, reason, and above all love. Amen.

Join us for the 2014

SUMMER YOUTH CONFERENCE



Open to youth entering grades six through first year of college. For more information, email us at: NYYouthConference@yahoo.com

Summer Youth Conference is a spiritual retreat for teens in a summer camp setting. We come together for a week to worship, play, and sing. Our days consist of a theme-related morning program with discussion groups, daily services, swimming, boating, and sports.

Our evenings are full of activities like a dance, talent show, and campfire. At the end, we return home a little different than when we arrived; stronger for the love and friendship we've added to our lives. Please join us for the week, and make friendships that can last a lifetime!



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Ivoryton, CT

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