

St. James' E-pistle

August 5, 2016

Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

The first order of business for me today is to give a HUUUGE thanks to all those who helped with the Vacation Bible School this past weekend. The Cave - that was a piece of brilliance.

Although I will surely miss someone - and I apologize in advance for my poor memory, let me thank the following folks in particular:

Bev O'Halloran, Tanya Hall, Brian Rance, Melinda Harris, Jodi Triola, Taylor Triola, Travyn Triola, Joann Clark, Joanne Lown, Patty and Michael Glancey.

And most of all, a debt of gratitude to Valerie Gaulin who pressed ahead when I had doubts, and who made a VBS that drew in some who are not familiar with the church or who have been away for a while. It did everything a VBS should do: The kids had fun. They got to spit watermelon seeds. They sang songs. They learned some wonderful bible stories. They made crafts that will remind them of us.

They got to dig for diamonds and gold!

Oh, and did I mention the water?

The importance of something as "simple" as VBS can never be underestimated. This is the vehicle through which many come to know the church - and its endless love for them. This is the vehicle through which many come to understand just how much God loves them.

It is, of course, never simple. It's a phenomenal amount of work, and I was fortunate enough to be able to watch this team at work, creating a magical cave that transported us all to a different world.

And then, on Sunday, they had the marvelous idea of hosting a coffee hour for everyone - IN THE CAVE! It was a party, I tell you.

There was a couple - Episcopalians - visiting from Baltimore. They were amazed because their parish, too, had done a Cave-themed VBS, so they were only too eager to come and see. It did not disappoint. You could just see them taking it all in, asking questions, and taking notes. Especially, they loved the idea of doing the entire VBS over one weekend.

So, not only did we have a great weekend with the kids, but we brought inspiration to others who likewise are trying to make God's love tangible for our youngest members.

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I can tell you that the volunteers were pretty exhausted by the end of the weekend. And rightly so. It is a lot of very hard work. That's why we have been talking about planning next year's VBS early - as in starting this month (well, it's an ideal).

So, let me just throw this out there: As wonderful and important as it is, this ministry requires work. It requires people. As soon as we come up with a date for the first planning meeting, I would like to invite you - yes you - to be part of it. With enough people, with enough time and energy and - above all - faith, we can have bigger, better, more impactful VBS each year.

Our message, our story, is so important to the spiritual health of the world ... who wouldn't want a piece of that?

Grace and Peace,

Chuck+



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The News of the Church

Cathedral Field Trip: You are invited to a tour of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, **Saturday, August 20**. Everyone needs to know their cathedral, and this magnificent building is ours. See the cathedral as few do. We are opening this trip up to **everyone** - especially children and youth of the parish (and their friends).

There are two tour options: the VERTICAL TOUR and the HIGHLIGHT TOUR. Here are descriptions from the cathedral website of each tour:

Highlights Tour

Explore the many highlights of the Cathedral's history, architecture, and artwork, from the Great Bronze Doors to the seven Chapels of the Tongues. Learn about the daily services, events, and programs that welcome and inspire visitors from around the world. This hour-long tour is offered Mondays, 11 am and 2 pm; Tuesdays-Saturdays, **11 am and 1 pm**; and select Sundays, 1 pm. Tickets are \$12 per person; \$10 per student/senior. It is not necessary to make advance reservations for this tour.

Vertical Tour

On this adventurous, "behind-the-scenes" tour, climb more than 124 feet through spiral staircases to the top of the world's largest cathedral. Learn stories through stained glass windows and sculpture and study the grand architecture of the Cathedral while standing on a buttress. The tour culminates on the roof with a sweeping view of Manhattan. This hour-long tour is offered Wednesdays at 12 pm; Fridays at 12 pm; and Saturdays at **12 pm and 2 pm**. Tickets are \$20 per person; \$18 per student/senior.

To make reservations, please click [here](#), or call (866) 811-4111.

Parish Picnic: It's been a long time since we've had a good old fashioned Parish Picnic, but one is in the works now! Mark your calendars for **Sunday, August 28**. More details to come, but start practicing your grilling!

Sunday School! It's time to start thinking "Back to School" already. And to put you in the mood, here are two important Sunday School dates.

September 11- Open House/Registration

September 18- First Day of classes

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Acolyte Festival: Save the date - **Saturday, October 22** - for the Diocesan Youth Acolyte Festival! It's a full day of mostly meeting other youth, learning a few tricks of the trade, and in general having a great time. We're looking for all youth and a few adults to make the trip

Rural and Migrant Ministry

NEEDS YOUR HELP!

This summer, Rural and Migrant Ministry is celebrating 27 years of providing a week of fun and opportunities for you ages 8-17 at RMM's Overnight Camp. In addition to all the various activities being offered at the camp site, the campers will be guests of the National Park Service. They will be given a special tour of the Roosevelt Estate and have lunch on the grounds. At the end of camp week, each camper is given a basic school supply kit. Please consider making a donation of a school supply kit. The list of needed items is set forth below and also can be found on the table in the narthex. You may also consider a cash donation towards the purchase of these school supplies. Checks should be made payable to St. James' Church; memo line - Rural and Migrant Ministry. Donations will be collected through **Sunday, August 14th**. On behalf of our Outreach Committee and more importantly, on behalf of the campers -THANK YOU!

School Kits for Elementary School Students

- 4 composition notebooks (NO spiral notebooks)
- 4 sturdy 2 pocket folders
- 1 package of notebook paper
- 1 box of primary colored Crayola washable markers
- 1 24-count box of Crayola crayons
- 1 soft pencil envelope/case that includes:
 - 1 package (12) #2 pencils (preferably Ticonderoga brand)
 - 1 eraser
 - 1 pencil sharpener
 - 1 non-flexible plain ruler
 - 3 - 6 quality ball point pens
 - 2 glue sticks
 - 1 pair of school scissors (reversible, if possible, for lefties)
- Added bonus - 1 small package of construction paper would be welcome

Alternative Kits for 7th - 12th Grade Students

- 6 spiral notebooks
- 6 - 8 sturdy 2 pocket folders

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2 packages of notebook paper
1 soft pencil envelope/case
1 large package (12/24) of #2 pencils (preferably Ticonderoga brand)
1 eraser
1 pencil sharpener
1 package (12) good quality ball point pens
2 yellow highlighters
1 ruler

Remember Your Pledge this Summer: Each summer we send out a reminder to keep the church in your sights during those long hot days. This is true not only for attendance and prayers but for pledging. Thanks!

Join the Churchyard Committee! Our churchyard committee wants you. The committee oversees one of the most historic graveyards in the region, and is responsible for making sure it is kept up. It handles the sale and digging of graves as well. If you value our churchyard and want it to continue to be a source of comfort whose loved ones rest here as well as historical interest to those who visit, please join our committee. If you're interested, you can contact Carol Vinall at vinehall3@aol.com.

Episcopal Election Toolkit Available: It is the official position of the Episcopal Church to encourage all eligible members to vote in every election. We see it not only as part of our civic duty but as part of our collective life of faith. If we are not engaged in the community, then we are withdrawn - which is not the example our Lord showed.

To encourage enthusiastic and informed participation in the election process, the Episcopal Church has published an Election "Toolkit" with information such as what representatives are up for election, who your officials are, and what the issues of the day are. It includes the Episcopal Church's official position on several issues, which may be helpful in your deliberations.

The most important thing in the church's eyes, however, is that we all go out and vote! Here's a link to the "Toolkit":

<http://advocacy.episcopalchurch.org/episcopal/EpiscopaliansVote>

Spiritual / educational websites to deepen your faith:

- Acts 8 Movement
- GrowChristians

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- Episcopal Cafe (a favorite)
- The Slate Project (not affiliated with Slate magazine)
- Virtual Abbey
- Second Life Church (gives you a virtual church experience if you're into that sort of thing. Fun to look at maybe).
- Inward/Outward (daily meditations sent to your e-mail)

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."

August

- 7 Diocesan Investment Trust
- 8 Bard College
- 9 Grace Church School, Manhattan
- 10 Delaware Catskill Episcopal Ministry: St. Andrew's Church, South Fallsburg
- 11 St. Simon's Church, Staten Island
- 12 Church Periodical Club
- 13 Diocesan Leadership Development Commission

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.

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

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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*

Please keep the following people in your prayers:

Ruth Blanding, John Bohlmann, Helen Braun, Susie Buhalis, Mariel Carter, Joann Clark, Michael Day, Dee, Dottie Drake, Ross Eames, Jr., Linkin Ewalt, Steven Foote, Heather Francese, Jack Gordy, Robert Guariglia, Harold Hall, Dalton K., Edie Kline, Ashley Konyn, Rosemary Leuken, Paul Littlefield, Joanne Lynn, Doris Mack, Gordon Mackenzie, Virginia Mackenzie, Andrew Mendelson, Rev. Tim Millard, Fred Montero, Charles Pardee (husband of Sally), Clifford Plass, Grace Plass, Linda Plass, Deborah Porach, John Robinson, Rob Robinson (brother of Mary Gabel), John Ross, Richard Secor, James Sheeky, Naomi Sleight, Ann Smith, Marguerite Spratt, Janice Syedullah, Tracy, Candace Vincent, Cassidy Way, Cliff Wells and Shawn Wheeler.

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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):	Christian Schroder
Birthdays (this coming week):	G. Angela Henry, Vince Asher, Amelia McNamara and Shirley Ferris
Acolytes:	August 7: Jasmine Thatcher August 14: Braeden Hall
Altar Guild:	August 7: Team Number I August 14: Team Number I
8 a.m. Readers:	August 7: Debbie Belding and Jim Smyth August 14: Lucille Ogden and Thomas Finnigan
10 a.m. Readers:	August 7: Wilma Tully and Andy Hall August 14: Russell Urban-Mead and Judy Douglass
Ushers:	August 7: Andrew and Tanya Hall August 14: Judy Douglass and Vince Asher
Pledge Clerks:	August 7: Joanne Lown and Janet Bright August 14: Doug Belding and Judy Douglass
Parish Cycle of Prayer:	August 7: Pat Weber, Cliff and Bobbie Wells August 14: Diane and Scott Wyant; Bruce, Breet, Arthur and Grace Parent
Coffee Hour Hosts:	August 7: No Coffee Hour August 14: No Coffee Hour

This Week's Lectionary

Genesis 15:1-6

Psalm 33:12-22

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Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Luke 12:32-40

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

Sermon Preached on
Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
(July 31, 2016)

"Campfire of the Vanities"

You may be familiar with a movie called *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. It's an 80s movie about Wall Street greed.

The original name came from a fifteenth century Italian priest who literally made bonfires of all things he felt were vain pursuits. Things that led to idleness, self-absorption, drunkenness, greed, and so on. They burned make-up, mirrors, games, musical instrument, artwork, books.... It comes perilously close to the image of book burnings in the 1930s, especially since a lot of what this guy burned was taken forcibly.

But excess and perversion of an idea does not mean that there isn't something positive in the seed of that idea. You see, the idea was to eliminate from one's life all the things that were separating us from God. The big problem is that a lot of the time - and our scriptures point to this today - the biggest obstacle between us and God is us. Or at least our self-absorption.

Here's what I mean:

If we look at Ecclesiastes, we see a man who has it all. He has money, he has power, he has talent, he has education and women and admirers. He has checked off three lifetimes worth of bucket lists and still finds no joy in life.

Why? In the end, he comes to the sad conclusion that it is because he has been a self-absorbed jerk. Everything has been about him. His money. His power. His knowledge. His experiences. He must conclude that his focus has been on what the world could do for him, and it leaves him empty.

Jesus tells a similar story from a different angle. It starts out when someone in the crowd asks Jesus to intervene in a conflict around an inheritance. It's basically, "I didn't get my fair share!" Sadly, at the death of parents, grief often quickly turns into fighting over who gets what. This

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may be why for years my parents had a bumper sticker that read, "I'm spending my children's inheritance."

And so Jesus tells a story about a rich man who thinks he's got it all - and his response to having it all is to make plans to get more. He has no need for more other than he feels he needs more. His focus is on nothing but himself and his drive to accumulate.

None of these stories is about wealth per se. They're not about things. These stories are about self-absorption. They are stories of what happens when our focus turns away from "How do we relate with each other?" To "What's in it for me?" The man in Jesus' story didn't care about the grain itself other than having more made him feel more important. Those kids who were arguing about the inheritance probably didn't even need what they inherited - but they were certain they were going to get their fair share. Solomon - the assumed author of Ecclesiastes - only looked to his own satisfaction.

The thing is, the "What's in it for me?" mentality leads to death. The "It's all about me" mentality leads to death. The, "I'm the one that counts" mentality leads to a dead soul.

I mean look - none of these self-absorbed fools were happy. Solomon? Nope. The siblings? They were at each other's throats. The rich farmer? Constantly worried about increasing production - till he discovers too late that it was a wasted effort.

We all die. And someone else will inherit and make their own mistakes with whatever we left behind. In the end, we lose control, we discover we are merely dust, we learn that it is not all about us.

So, if all is vanity, what's the point? Jesus gives the answer: being rich toward God. I wish this passage would come at stewardship time so everyone would get nervous and double their pledges. But in reality, richness toward God isn't so much about money - it's about focus. It's about letting go of the things that drag you away from God.

What we could all use is a way to let go of those things that make us so self-absorbed, to release that inheritance or the need for power or the thrill seeking or the compulsion to accumulate. What we could use is a sort of bonfire of the vanities.

Or maybe not quite. Remembering that the bonfire was forced on others, we don't need to go there. But perhaps we can have our own - metaphorical - campfire of the vanities. I'm not suggesting that you literally burn your stuff. But maybe we can build that cozy mental campfire and use it as a place where we can hold all things up with a critical eye and ask: does this have an unhealthy hold on me. Does this separate me from others? Does this lay a bigger claim on my attention than God?

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It could be very freeing to place in your own metaphorical fire (and I reiterate, metaphorical) those things that make you self-absorbed and that drag you away from what really matters.

But before you can examine your life, you have to be willing to build the fire. Let that be our question today. Am I willing to build that fire? It might be the thing that saves my life. Amen.