

# St. James' E-pistle

## September 27, 2013

### Pulpit Notes

Brothers and Sisters:

Let me start off by saying the first Graveyard Tours were fantastic - see below for an updated article on the Tours.

But now, I want to take time for an anniversary.

You may not realize it, but this year marks a big anniversary in the life of St. James'. No, not the 202 birthday of the church, though that is wonderful.

I'm talking about the 50th anniversary of St. James' Nursery School. For one quarter of this congregation's life, we have been serving the pre-school children with loving Christian nurture, focusing on socialization skills along with basic educational goals.

The nursery school fits well in St. James' overall educational mission. You may remember that from our earliest days, we have been a church that champions education, often among those most forgotten. Our first rector ran a school for slaves and the recently freed. Our Reading Room was once Hyde Park's school (and is the oldest surviving school building in town). After that, it was Hyde Park's first free lending library. And of course, more recently, eleven years we ran a reading program at Hyde Park Elementary (and have hope to restart it at a new school).

So fifty years ago with Father Kidd and elders of the church got together with a couple of other Episcopal Churches in the area to create a school, it was in our blood. The school was intended to be a larger, more encompassing complex of schools, starting in nursery school and going through 8th grade. St. James' had the nursery school portion, and that is the only part to have survived.

But it has done more than survive. Through wise and loving leadership over the years, St. James' has brought great learning and great socialization to generations of kids. That's why families have come back again and again. That's why kids who attended St. James' grow up and bring their children.

You may not know that Isabella Connolly, mother of Meg Burkhardt, was one of the first teachers at St. James' - and one of the longest serving. Bob Connolly built a loft for the kids to play in near the beginning of the school's history - and it still stands solid as a rock, providing endless hours of fun and memories.

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One of the joys I have is occasionally greeting someone in the office who used to attend the school and just wants to have a look at the old school again. Many things have changed in the classroom over the years, but they always break into a smile as they recognize the essential elements that make this school unique. And yes, they always light up when they see the loft.

You may not think much about St. James' Nursery School, and yet it is a big part of what we as a church do. We reach out to families with the love of Christ. We don't ask them what they believe. We don't ask them to sign a confessional statement. We simply say, "This is who we are. If what we offer is what you want, welcome."

In the years I have been associated with St. James', I have watched many students come and go. My own children attended here, and that was not a given. We were not going to have them come if we did not think it was the best nursery school we could provide. It was.

The teachers have changed over the years as well. When I arrived, Carlotta Mayo was head teacher. Today our teachers are Kim Illuminate and Kathleen Craft.

But I am pleased to say that, whether Isabella, Carlotta or Kim and Kathleen, our students have been guided with care, professionalism and the love of Christ.

For my part, I get to go into each class once a week and read them bible stories. I try to make the beginnings of scripture accessible to them in an age-appropriate and fun way. Then we sing our school song (yes, we have a school song). I love this part of my week because, like a favorite uncle, I get to come in, get them wound up, and leave!

If you attended St. James' Nursery School, get in touch with me, and I'll arrange for you to have a look at the old school. If you know anybody looking for a nursery school, I'll get you contact information.

But most of all, I want you to be aware of the good work that is going on and has been going on here, yet is too often forgotten by the congregation. This school is part of you - and at this remarkable moment in its history, it deserves to be highlighted.

Have a look at the school some day. Better yet, if you know the teachers, let them know how much you appreciate it. Fifty years is a long time, but they have no doubt they'll keep on teaching.

In Christ,

Chuck+

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### **The News of the Diocese**

**The Election of a Bishop Suffragan:** On Saturday, December 7th, our Diocese will elect its next Bishop Suffragan.

Please keep all who are involved in the process in your prayers:

“Almighty God, giver of every good gift: Look graciously on your Church, and so guide the minds of all who shall choose a Bishop Suffragan for our Diocese, and all who offer themselves as candidates, that we may receive a faithful pastor, who will care for your people and equip us for our ministries; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

### **The News of the Church**

**Graveyard Tours.** Thank you to everyone who signed up to be a tour guide. We now have plenty!

What we want now is YOU. We are looking for guests to come enjoy these tremendous performances. Encourage your family and friends to be part of it!

And remind people of the Special Tour for those with Mobility Issues. That tour is on October 5 at 6:30. There will be very little walking - all of it on even ground. Instead of going to the actors, they will come to you in a special area near the outside sacristy door of the church. Don't worry if you don't know where that is - a guide will take you there.

Tickets sales are ongoing, so order yours today. Tickets are available on the website at <http://stjameshistoricgraveyardtours.com>.

**Spirit of Unity.** “Spirit of Unity” will join the Congregation on Sunday, September 29<sup>th</sup>.

**2013 Fall Concert Series.** Join us for our 2013 Fall Concert Series, select Sundays this Fall at 3:00 p.m. at the Chapel. Our 2nd concert, on October 6, will feature three friends, but individual musicians, who will bring their Greenwich Village open mic repertoire to Hyde Park. The headliner of this trio is Randy Burns, who has been part of the New York City music scene since the 1960s and has opened for the likes of Tom Paxton, Phil Ochs and many others. On October 20 we welcome “The Cupcakes”, a trio of folk musicians from the Hudson Valley.

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Finally, we will wrap up the series on November 17 with the folksy sounds of local favorites, "Betty and the Baby Boomers".

Tickets sold at the door: \$12 ADULTS, \$10 SENIORS, FREE children 12 & under.  
Complimentary Refreshments. Call the Parish Office at 845-229-2820.

**Annual Harvest Dinner.** At long last....another one of our very popular roast pork dinner will be held on Friday, November 1st at the Parish House at St. James' Episcopal Church, Hyde Park.

This dinner will be a fundraiser for the Hyde Park Community Garden. The Community Garden, now in its second full season, is on the grounds of St. James' Church. We have grown and donated thousands of pounds of fresh vegetables for the Hyde Park Food Pantry and Hillcrest House in Poughkeepsie.

In addition, the garden has expanded this year and leased out plots to 21 local residents for their own personal use and many have donated their bounty to the Pantry as well.

There still are a number of things we still need for the garden, so please mark it on your calendars to come by and have a delicious roast pork meal with potatoes and other vegetables bought from our local farmers, assorted fruit cobblers for dessert, salad, rolls and beverages all served family style.

Call the church office at (845) 229-2820 for reservations. Hope to see you there!

**P.S.** We are finished with the corn for the season in the garden, and invite anyone to cut down the stalks for their own personal decorations or for the Graveyard Tours.

***Please keep the following people in your prayers:***

Janet Arms, Ruth Blanding, John Bohlmann, Kurt Burkhardt, George Buso, Michael Day, Jane Gagliardoto, Jack Gordy, Harold Hall, Jolanda Heijenbrok, Brooke Helton, Rev. Don Hoger, Barbara Knakal, Rosemary Leuken, Andrew Mendelson, Rev. Tim Millard, Joan Oetjen, Clifford Plass, Gerald Plass, Deborah Porach, Don Renten, John Robinson, Marty Schroeder, Richard Secor, James Sheeky, Naomi Sleight, Debbie Stone, Gloria Veach, Candace Vincent, Cassidy Way and Cliff Wells.

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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:	Laurel Ardini, Bill Holland, Stephen Burkhardt, Franklin Santos and Joe Cotton
Acolytes:	September 29: Team I October 6: Team II
Altar Guild:	September 29: Team Number I October 6: Team Number II
8 a.m. Readers:	September 29: Debbie Belding and Gary Glancey October 6: Angela Henry and Jim Smyth
10 a.m. Readers:	September 29: Wilma Tully/Deirdre Mae Micker October 6: Patty Caswell/Nancy Montero
Ushers:	September 29: Saira Shahani and Pat Keeffe October 6: Nancy Montero and Anna Marie Pitcher
Pledge Clerks:	September 29: Paul Littlefield October 6: Janet Bright and Joanne Lown
Coffee Hour Hosts:	September 29: Choir and Barbara Slegel October 6: Saira Shahani

### This Week's Lectionary

Amos 6:1a, 4-7

Psalm 146

1 Timothy 6:6-19

Luke 16:19-31

Sermon Preached on  
Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
(September 22)

"Cheaters Prosper"

When I was a kid, we were admonished to be honest with a phrase you may know: Cheaters never prosper. Watching all the TV shows of the day always reinforced that message. You know: Dragnet, Hawaii 5-0, Batman. Did you know that Batman would never cross the street against

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a red light even when he was in pursuit of the bad guys? Because that would be cheating, and cheaters never prosper.

We never believed it for a minute. Of course cheaters prospered. That's why they cheated!

Seriously. Kids cheated on tests and got better grades. I knew kids who shoplifted and stole money from their parents and sold drugs in school - and got away with it. Then I got into 6th grade, and it got tough....

When we grew up, we learned that yes, there are ways people can cheat and prosper. We learned that some cheating work better than others - robbing convenience stores generally got you tiny rewards and big jail time if you got caught. Cooking the books or fixing prices, on the other hand, reaped huge rewards and - maybe - a slap on the wrist if you got caught.

There's even more subtle cheating than that. The kind that will never get you into legal trouble. Want an example? Check out your coffee can some day. What used to be a pound one day went down to twelve ounces, then eleven, then - I just looked this morning, 10-and-a-half ounces - though the price is the same. Sounds like what Amos was talking about when he spoke of making the ephah small and the shekel great. It's not illegal, but it's wrong.

And that's the point Amos is making. It's not just petty crime that God looks at. It's how we approach everything we do. Amos yelled at everyday business folks for cheating each other. Making that ephah small, fixing the scales, serving the dregs and charging premium price for it. That's what we do to each other - to our peers.

But that's not good enough for Amos. He then says, Look how you treat the poor - the ones who can't fight back. He says, "You trample on the needy and bring ruin to the poor." (remember, in those days, nobody cared about the poor because they figured, "They deserve it - obviously they're poor because they're lazy and prey on the good intentions of people who gave them scraps").

He complains that the people "buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals," meaning that they literally bought people to use as they wished - day laborers, for example - and paid them next to nothing because they were poor and deserved no better. With a full day's work, they could maybe buy enough bread to see them through till morning.

But Amos isn't done. He then condemns them for how they treat God. For being anxious to get the stupid sabbath over with so they could get back to business. If he had been around when I was a kid, he would have said, "You're like Batman waiting for the red light to change so you

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could keep chasing the criminals - only you're waiting for the annoying sabbath light to change so you can get back to chasing profits." Amos says that it's not merely the way they treat people but the very core of their hearts that's corrupted. When they care more about their profit than their relationship with God, they are headed for doom.

Amos knew that doom wouldn't necessarily come in this life - sometimes cheaters DO profit - in the short term at least. He was looking more long-term. In the judgment, in eternal life. Because when a heart sees God as an impediment to profit, when a heart sees other people as a means to an end rather than the end in and of themselves - well, that heart has rotted through, and Amos saw little hope for it. Destruction and banishment from the Kingdom of God was inevitable.

For Amos, there is one cure. Changing. He gives the people a sentence which describes what he wants of them. "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." That's what he tells them, "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

Which makes our gospel story so strange. Here you've got a dishonest manager squandering his master's wealth - presumably he's skimming off the top, but that may be beside the point. He gets fired and needs to figure out how to care for himself - so he cheats more! He calls in all his master's debtors and fixes their accounts so they owe less - ingratiating himself with them and - with any luck - getting them to take care of him once he no longer has a job.

What's odd isn't that not the master praises such crass self-interest because it's so clever - but that Jesus seems to praise it as well!

Now, Jesus couldn't be serious, right? Surely he didn't mean for us to be dishonest in order to take care of ourselves, right? That violates the spirit of Amos - not to mention everything Jesus himself has taught.

Don't worry - Jesus is NOT suggesting we see our employees and employers as tools. Jesus as always, has deep concern for the people on the fringes - the poor, the homeless, the underemployed, the petty criminals.

He is merely practicing the literary device known as sarcasm. Go ahead ...take care of yourself in this world. Just see how far that'll get you in heaven. You won't find God commending dishonest servants - or heartless bosses.

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And yet .... what if God does not condemn? What if they DO get away with it? What if God lets them in heaven in the end after all? Lets everyone in? What would that mean? That cheaters really do prosper?

Would we be angry at God for that?

I don't think I would. I suspect - and this is mere speculation - that God will know how to address the evil that we do in this life, and that in the end, we will each of us have the chance to understand how we treated others - both the poor close to us and, say, the migrant workers who grow our food or laborers in Sri Lankan sweat shops. I can't imagine it would be a pleasant process, but I suspect God will allow each of us a chance for reconciliation with each other.

Until then, however, let Amos guide us. Because his ancient admonition still holds. He summarized his call to all people to care for each other with a simple phrase: "Let Justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." If we let that be our guide, we won't have to worry about who cheats or who prospers. Amen.