

St. James' E-pistle

Date of Sunday Service: September 24, 2017

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Bible Verse

Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel.

- Romans 14:2

Pulpit Notes

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Earlier in the week, I officiated at the funeral for a woman who did not go to church. As far as I could tell, nobody in the family went to church. For some reason, they felt they needed a minister of some sort, and they all assured me that "Mom believed in God." Though I like to think I was attentive and offered helpful words, I had to wonder why I was there.

What was the purpose of the church in a life that had been lived entirely without it? She believed in God, but it meant nothing to her life. She believed in God, but it was likely only a vague notion, sort of like you believe there are other galaxies out in space. She believed in God, but without a community in which to celebrate and struggle with what that even means.

Now, I have no interest in scolding people who do not go to church. But it is appropriate to question our own relationships with church. Why do we attend? What do we get from it? Why do we stop attending ...or, for that matter, start back up again?

While everyone has their own answers, I will say a couple of things with some authority. A) We are better off when we do go. B) We are better off when the reason for going to church is not because we feel duty bound or social pressure. It is not a place to simply punch our spiritual time card or to make sure you're seen by others.

So what do we go to church for? Here are a few things: A) We go to worship. That is to be in the presence of God in a special and intentional way. To stand with others and lift our eyes to heaven and say, "Thank you for being in my life." B) We go to be transformed. That is, to here words of challenge and grace, to talk with others about who we are and what we're called to. To learn new ways to approach God. That's not something you can do on your own. C) We go to learn how we are connected to the rest of creation, and how we can better love both the people and the world God made. That may mean becoming an activist or a volunteer of some sort. Who knows? D) We go to church to be the Body of Christ together, the recognize that we are not self-sufficient islands but interdependent children. We are more and richer together than alone. E) We go to church to remind ourselves that while life on earth is a wondrous thing, it is not our primary destiny or desire. Life is much bigger, and we need each other to never forget it.

In God's wisdom, God has blessed us with a community of faith. I don't believe for a moment that Grace is denied those who live their lives without going to church. But I do believe - adamantly - that our lives on earth are far richer, far more impactful, far more joyful when we make worship, study, fellowship, and outreach an intentional and regular part of our lives.

For what it's worth, weekly worship seems to me to be a good amount. Some people go to church daily, and I can't argue with that. We don't yet offer enough services to satisfy that hunger - maybe in time we will have daily services at times that are more convenient to people who work outside the home. If there's a groundswell of desire, we can make that happen. Some people believe that once a month is plenty, but that seems - to me - to weaken the connections we have.

And ours is - as I often say - a relationship faith. Without regular connection, relationships fade.

In the end, we come to church because we have some connection to God that we may not even understand but that draws us in. I invite you to come - to worship - to study - to ponder - to act.

That's what it's all about.

Grace and Peace,

Chuck +

Announcements

Sunday School Starts in Church:

Just a reminder that starting **this Sunday**, Sunday School will start in church. Throughout this Fall, the sermon will take after the communion (rather than right after the Gospel), and it is at that time that the Sunday school will leave for class. This allows children and teachers to get the full benefit of worship and lets acolytes go to Sunday School without missing. It also makes children's sermons possible. It should **not** lengthen your day at church. If you haven't registered yet, **It's Never Too Late!**

Youth Group:

St. James' Youth (sometimes called "Episcopal-Pals") are making plans and going places. All middle and high school students are invited to join the group. Our first monthly activity is a challenge course (at Mariapolis Luminosa) on **Sunday, September 24 at 3:00**. We'll meet at the church and leave at 2:45 pm. Bring your friends!

Oil Contract Offer:

St. James has just entered into this year's heating oil contract. Rainbow Oil is offering all members of St. James a personal contract to lock in a price of \$2.099 per gallon [until March 31, 2018](#).

If you are interested just call Rainbow Oil and request a contract be mailed to you, sign and return it.

Rainbow Oil's number is [229-9418](tel:229-9418).

Become a Graveyard Tour Sponsor:

Do you own a business or are you in a position to influence decisions at your company? If so, why not become a Graveyard Tour Sponsor? Several local businesses have done so already. What does it take to support the Tours, and what's in it for you? Glad you asked.

For as little as \$50, your business will be listed on the Graveyard Tour website all year. This site get a lot of traffic especially during the tour season. You also get your company listed on the tour programs. AND, depending on the amount of your support, your company receives at least one complimentary ticket for opening night (those who donate more than 350 receive three tickets for any night).

BUT the best part is that you will be helping your church reach and inspire the world with God's love. And that's a pretty good deal. See Fr. Chuck if you want to become a sponsor.

Reading Adventures News:

Once again, Reading Adventures, our after-school reading program for children at North Park Elementary School, will help kids with improving reading. The reading program meets once a week after school. In it, volunteers read one-on-one with children who have been recommended as likely to benefit from a little extra reading. North Park has a new principal this year, Ms. Lynnette Williams who is enthusiastic and welcoming. She had committed to encouraging as much participation as possible and smoothing our way however she can.

For this first semester, we will meet on Thursdays, starting at the end of the school day and reading for one hour. The program year will begin on **Thursday, October 19**. If you would like to volunteer as a reader, please contact Fr. Chuck or Anna Marie Pitcher.

St. James' Episcopal Church

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2017 - 2018 SUNDAY SCHOOL REGISTRATION FORM

Child's Full Name _____

Name Child Prefers to be called _____

Date of Birth _____ Grade Entering _____

Mother's Name _____

Father's Name _____

Full Address _____

(If parents live apart, please give address at which the child lives most of the time and indicate which pa address.)

Home Phone _____ Cell Phone _____

E-mail address: _____ May we send e-mail notices to you? Yes / No

Has your child attended St. James Sunday School before? Yes / No

Are you members of the church? Yes / No Has your child been baptized? Yes / No

| September 2017 | | | | | | |
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| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
| 24 3:00 PM Youth Group | 25 Office Closed | 26 | 27 10 AM Morning Prayer | 28 11 AM Bible Study | 29 | 30 Regional Council 7:00 PM Tour Dress Rehearsal |
| Sundays: Holy Eucharist Rite I is at 8:00 AM Holy Eucharist Rite II (with music) is at 10:00 AM. Sunday School and nursery are available at 10:00 AM. | | | | | | |

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 <https://www.diocesenyn.org/administration/for-clergy/liturgical-and-sacramental/diocesan-calendar-of-intercession/>

- 24 The Episcopal Church's House of Deputies
- 25 Diocesan Committee to Elect a Bishop
- 26 The Cathedral School, Manhattan
- 27 Christ Church, Bronxville
- 28 Canterbury Downtown Chaplaincy, Manhattan
- 29 The General Theological Seminary
- 30 Mid-Hudson Executive Committee

Please keep the following people in your prayers:

Ruth Blanding, John Bohlmann, Helen Braun, Mariel Carter, Dee, Linkin Ewalt, Loretta Falzarano (sister of Donna Beyer), Steven Foote, Heather Francese, Kathy Ganim, Karla Givison (Deb Belding's sister), Robert Guariglia, Harold Hall, Cath Holywell (priest in the Church of England and Indaba partner who worshiped with St. James' - undergoing heart surgery), Dalton K., Edie Kline, Ashley Konyn, Barbara Kubiak (Mother of Donna Tracy-Coffman), Rosemary Leuken, Joanne Lynn, Doris Mack, Gordon Mackenzie, Virginia Mackenzie, Andrew Mendelson, Grace Plass, Deborah Porach, John Robinson, Rob Robinson, Jason Rodino (serving in Afghanistan), Pat Rooney, John Ross, Richard Secor, Sharon Secor (recovering from heart surgery), Karen Shan, James Sheeky, Naomi Sleight, Patricia (sister of Barbara Slegel), Carl Smith, Marguerite Spratt, Janice Syedullah, Tracy, Candace Vincent, Cassidy Way, Cliff Wells and Shawn Wheeler.

Please pray for all those affected by Hurricanes Irma and Maria, those still suffering from the effects of Hurricane Harvey, and those affected by the earthquake in Mexico City.

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 all right.

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| Birthdays (this past week): | Edith Kline, Thomas I. Finnigan, Kathy Graff, Stephen Gaulin and Laurel Ardini |
| Birthdays (this coming week): | William Holland, Stephen Burkhardt, Franklin Santos and Antoinette Horne |
| Acolytes: | September 24: Team 1 October 1: Team 2 |
| Altar Guild: | September 24: Team II October 1: Team II |
| 8 a.m. Readers: | September 24: Lucille Ogden and Lynne Koch October 1: Debbie Belding and Grant Ferris |
| 10 a.m. Readers: | September 24: Wendy Urban-Mead and Andy Hall October 1: Russell Urban-Mead and Judy Douglass |
| Ushers: | September 24: Andrew and Tonya Hall October 1: Judy Douglass, Vince Asher |
| Pledge Clerks: | September 24: Andy Hall and Dean Caswell |

October 1: Joanne Lown and Janet Bright

Parish Cycle of Prayer: September 24: Bill, Regina and Laurel Ardini, Vince Asher and Joe Baldwin and Beverly Briggs

October 1: Doug and Deb Belding, David and Carol Bender and John and Donna Beyer

Coffee Hour Hosts: September 24: Brian Rance, Saira Shahani

October 1: The Choir

This Week's Lectionary

Exodus 16:2-15
Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45
Philippians 1:21-30
Matthew 20:1-16

This Week's Hymns

Processional: 551 - Rise Up Ye Saints of God
Sequence: 541 - Come Labor O
Offertory: "The Name of God"
Communion: 343 - Shepherd of Souls
Recessional: 690 Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah

Last Week's Sermon

Sermon Preached on Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost (September 17, 2017)

"Through Angry Waters"

It would be tempting - especially after the past couple of weeks - to look at today's reading in Exodus and say, "See? God gets us through the flood waters. God sees us safely through to the other side."

Tempting but wrong. Because that's not really what the story of the parting of the Red Sea is about. And it's certainly not what our gospel today is about.

I mean, maybe they *are* about getting us through water, but not the floods or torments of something like Harvey, or Irma, or Katia, or Jose. Not today's readings. They're more about getting us through the angry waters - that is the anger that surrounds and threatens to drown us every day.

Here's what I mean.

You know how in Exodus, Moses brings the people out of Egypt. But Pharaoh is furious about them getting away - especially after doing so much damage to Egypt in general and to him personally. Even though he told them to leave, he now decides he'd rather just have them dead, so he goes after them.

Now, it *is* true that God saves the Israelites through the waters of the Red Sea. But the heart of this story is Pharaoh's murderous rage. It's his anger - his blind rage - that leads him to disaster.

I would like to point out that the Israelites sing a victory song after this. You know, "the horse and the rider, God has thrown into the sea" But while it celebrates the Egyptians' defeat, it's not as much a song of anger or vengeance as one of relief and deliverance. They did not live in anger.

Today's Gospel deals even more directly with anger and its effects, and it does so in two ways.

First, there's Peter who asks Jesus how many times they should forgive a brother or sister (this translation said "member of the church" but virtually every other translation says brother, so...). Anyway, Peter thinks this is pretty generous - forgiving a brother seven times for the same thing is considered the top end of what you ought to have to put up with.

But what Peter's really saying is, "When can I get mad? When can I lose patience? When can I finally write off that jerk?"

He may have asked this question because Jesus had been talking about how to deal with a brother who sins against you - remember that from last week? Go to them in private first, then bring a witness.... But Peter's question assumes the person *has already* asked for forgiveness, and then gone and done whatever sin it was again. And again. And again.

But still, Jesus doesn't allow for the anger of impatience. God's love simply does not count the number of chances we get - or give. When forgiveness is sought, we forgive. Even seventy-seven times.

Then he goes into the parable of the servant who owes an incredible amount to the king. He begs for forgiveness and is forgiven. Then he runs into a poor guy who owes him a little money - and refuses to grant him the same leniency that the king showed him.

Why is he so angry? You might say he's displaying hypocrisy rather than anger, but the two seem closely related. After all, he grabs the guy by the throat. Blind to the mercy that's been shown to him, *he can only see the supposed injury this poor man has done to him* - and it outrages him. Perhaps he's only seen life as the things others have done to him, and so he lives - and drowns - in angry waters.

Each of these stories has at its heart a self-centered anger that drives us away from each other and from God.

Two quick examples:

On Sunday, I went to a celebration of the 250th anniversary of St. Peter's in Peekskill - the parish I first served at as a priest. While we were vesting in the sacristy, talk was all about Hurricane Irma, and someone said that, while they didn't wish harm on anyone, they kind of hoped the resort belonging to a certain politician could take a direct hit.

Bishop Dietsche became serious at this and said we make a grave mistake focusing our rage on one man, not only because it's not effective but because it risks our soul. We are not called to be people of such blind anger.

Then, Monday night, I was giving the invocation at the 9/11 ceremony in town. Afterward, no less than four people came up to talk about their experience of America today. They said that following 9/11, there had been such a unity in the country where nobody saw race or nationality or gender or sexual orientation, but now, there was such division, such mistrust, such anger toward each other. I might argue with their memory of our supposed unity, but the idea of respecting each other, of setting aside differences was important to them.

That's what they - we - long for. That is the dream of God, that we love and care for each other on earth as in heaven.

Now, this does not mean that all anger is wrong. It's natural to feel angry when someone hurts you or when you see injustice being done to someone. That's a feeling, and you don't get to control when feelings come. But you *do* control what you do with them, and you *can* choose whether or not to *live* in anger. You can choose to turn your anger into positive action or into destruction. These stories are all about making anger both their defining characteristic and a weapon against others.

Those sorts of anger are raging waters that can - and do - drown us.

Jesus offers a different way that will see us safely to the other side. Winning a brother or sister back rather than beating them in a fight. Forgiving even when you know it won't be for the last time. Letting go of past harms to explore new ways forward. And understanding just how much we ourselves have been forgiven for our own sins. In short, in a world of anger - which can drown us in hatred - Jesus calls us to love. Because when we embrace God's love as our way of life, we can trust that God really will see us safely through to the other side. Amen.

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