

# A Voice in the Wilderness ...

The newsletter of  
The Episcopal Church of St. John the Baptist

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## August 2007

It is hard to believe that we are past the half-way mark of the summer of 2007, but that's what the calendar tells us. We have had some lovely weather lately, especially when compared to the high temperatures recorded along the Front Range. We look for more of the same in August as we move toward a month that includes the following highlights.

Our third and final Compline on the Lake will be held Sunday evening at 5PM on the **19<sup>th</sup>**. Join us at the Grand Lake Marina for cruising, praying, and breaking bread together afterward.

We welcome two powerful Christian teachers to St. John's in August. On the Sundays of the **12<sup>th</sup>** and the **19<sup>th</sup>**, Nicholas Lee (Professor of Russian at the University of Colorado) will present on the use of icons in prayer and differences and similarities between Russian Orthodox spirituality and Anglican spirituality. And on the Sundays of the **26<sup>th</sup>** and **September 2<sup>nd</sup>** Doug Burger (Professor of English Literature, also at CU) will present a two part presentation on C. S. Lewis and the Narnia Chronicles.

In preparation for the Narnia study, St. John's will present the recent movie *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* Saturday evening, **August 25<sup>th</sup>** in the Parish Hall. The movie will be preceded by a light dinner beginning at 6PM.

## *A Word from the Rector*

So, there I was, minding my own business at my desk when the phone rings. A voice on the line asks, “Does your church have a lawyer?” Cleverly, I stammer for a moment, before answering that, yes, we have a couple of parishioners who practice law. “Well, I’d like to meet with you and a lawyer for your church!” Well, replied I, is there any particular reason why you believe that our church might be in need of a lawyer? The voice relaxed a bit. “I represent my parents’ trust, and there is a modest bequest for St. John’s that I would like to discuss with you.” Oh, well, that’s different, says I.

Two days later I am meeting with David Dunlap—son of Grace and George Dunlap, former summer residents of Rand and summer members of St. John’s—and Stan Cazier, Attorney at Law and member of the parish. After a brief discussion, Mr. Dunlap pushes a check across the table toward me, and I manage to resist coughing or choking as it registers on me that the check is made out to St. John’s in the amount of \$145,000. Only a Texan, I note to Mr. Dunlap, would call a gift of \$145,000 “a modest bequest.”

Of course this is just the beginning of the story. In discussing this gift with our treasurer and vestry, it became clear that, as wonderful as the gift is, it is not going to change our lives here. Invested at current rates, the total amount might yield a yearly income of \$7,000 or so. Nice, but nothing that would dramatically change our fiscal situation. It is clear that the worst outcome would be if we were to seize on the gift as occasion to become complacent about financial stewardship in the parish. It is no reason not to continue to aggressively pursue generous giving in the parish

It dawns on us that we have a number of choices to make and that it is important that we make them wisely and prayerfully, that we be good stewards of this generous gift. The first result of our informal discussions is the conviction that we want to share this with others. We will treat the gift as plate, meaning that 10% will be donated to the diocese, 5% to the Northwestern Region, and 5% to our Outreach Program. We have invited the Colorado Foundation to meet with us to help us sort through our options for the rest of the amount. We do not want to see the money just “disappear” into a surplus that we dip into now and then as needed. We want the gift to make a difference in our ministries and/or in the strengthening of St. John’s into the future.

One final point grows out of our first reactions to this gift. Grace and George Dunlap made a generous gift to St. John’s (and to several other non-profit charitable organizations). But they were also taking care of their own futures when they established the trust that, upon their deaths, distributed their funds as they had directed. This is a powerful example for other Episcopalians to follow. St. John’s will posthumously induct Grace and George into our chapter of the Legacy Society, and we hope that their fine example will encourage—will inspire—others to explore ways in which caring for their own futures can also work to benefit the church we all love and want to support.

So, thank you George and Grace (and David)—for your generosity and faithfulness, and for setting an example that may lead to more such gifts—to greater ministries and to a stronger Episcopal Church.

† Fr. Spencer

## *Notes about Ministries*

### **Stop the presses!**

Of course the biggest news of the month is the splendid gift to St. John's of \$145,000 from the estate of George and Grace Dunlap. See Fr. Spencer's message for details of this story.

### **A little learning is a wonderful thing!**

We welcome two expert and talented teachers to St. John's in August. Professor Nicholas Lee (Professor of Russian at CU-Boulder) will lead two Adult Ed sessions after services on the 12th and the 19th, comparing Orthodox and Anglican spiritualities. And then Professor Doug Burger (Professor of English, also at CU-Boulder) will lead two sessions on C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* on August 26th and September 2nd. Be sure to make room in your schedules for these great opportunities.

### **What dog days of summer?**

We have just completed a busy month of activities. In the last two weeks, we have celebrated a night at the Rockies games, Complines on the Lake, Loaves and Fishes Sunday, and our 3rd Annual Anglican High Tea at Cranmer Chapel. Great thanks to in-coming parishioners Dan and Diane Bielski for the baseball tickets, to all of you for supporting Loaves and Fishes Sunday with lots of donations for our local food banks, and, especially to Betty Cranmer and Ken and Joan Von der Heiden, for their work on yet another successful "high tea." Our final Complines on the Lake will be on August 19th.

### **St. John's at the movies**

Saturday evening, August 25, we will prepare for Doug Burger's teaching on *Narnia* with a showing of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* in our parish hall. The movie will follow dinner, which will be served at 6PM, courtesy of the members of the Thursday afternoon Bible Study.

### **A new librarian? Book it!**

Many thanks to Eleanor Holley for agreeing to serve as librarian of our St. John's library. There is an expansion of the library in our near future, as the Art, Architecture, and Landscape Committee is seeking new shelving to accommodate recent donations. Eleanor, you will have your hands full!

## *Updates from the Church Family*

### **St. John's salutes an old friend and a new Roman deacon**

Many of you will remember Jerry and Ann Sadler who attended St. John's for several years before moving to Pagosa Springs. We are all excited about Jerry's ordination to the diaconate of the Roman Catholic Church on Friday, August 3, at the Catholic Cathedral in Pueblo. Fr. Spencer will represent St. John's at the service. If you would like to contribute to a gift for Jerry, please send \$1, and no more than that, to the church office. Congratulations both to Jerry and to the Roman Catholic Church, which is getting a fine deacon!

### **Just limping along**

Ted Parker is recovering very well from knee replacement surgery, and it was good to see him back in church. Keep up the good work, Ted. Also back, but still limping, is Cyndi Karnescak, who tore a calf muscle while evading an aggressive dog. A quick recovery is especially important for her, because she has a mission trip to Hungary coming up this month. Do keep Ted and Cyndi in your prayers.

### **A reMorckable family update**

Pauline Friend is back in at Porter Hospital recovering from her recent surgery. The good news is that after a couple of tough weeks, Pauline is back on the road to recovery. Be sure to pray for her as well. In the meantime, daughter Kathe Morck and family have completed their wonderful work on St. John's' back lawn with the installation of an attractive bench. We now have a wonderful spot for quiet time there. Be sure to take advantage of it on your next visit to church. Thanks so much, Kathe, Makenna, and Bill.

### **Odds and ends**

It was good to run into George and Gerrie Edwards at the Winter Park Art Fair, showing George's photography. And Compline on the Lake for July was graced by the presence of Joe Wetherill. Our only representatives at the Episcopalian Sunday at the Opera were Ken and Joan Von der Heiden. Thanks for showing the flag!

### **Priestly visiting in reverse**

On the heels of their visit to the Rev. Kelsey and Debbie Hogue last month in Scott's Bluff, Don and Sally Hicks spent a week recently in Worcester, Massachusetts, visiting their son and daughter-in-law, the Rev. Warren and Mary Hicks. They brought back the good news that both these new ministries are off to a really good start.

## *Sermon of the Month*

*Sermon preached by Fr. Spencer on Sunday, July 15 [The Parable of the Good Samaritan]*

OK, so the lawyer understands that he is supposed to love his neighbor as himself. But, as lawyers do, he wants more precision. Or perhaps even a loophole in the Law. Just exactly who does this law include, he wonders? Who is my neighbor, and who is not? Is this understood geographically, those who live near to me? Is it understood physically, those who look like me? Or socially and culturally, those who live and think like me? He wants some criterion to know just whom he is to love as himself and whom he does not need to love.

And notice how Jesus responds. He does not say “This person is and this person is not your neighbor.” He does not even say “Everyone is your neighbor,” although many people take this to be the import of the parable. He entirely rejects external criteria for whom is to be loved, and instead moves inward, into the heart; he answers the question not by saying who is and who is not to be considered your neighbor, but rather by showing what counts as neighborly behavior.

You see, it is part of our human nature to seek external criteria for what we are to do. Sometimes this is a principle. One paradigm of understanding an obligation is to have a general moral principle, apply it to a relevant situation—and presto! We have an obligation. We know what we are to do. The philosopher Immanuel Kant believed that this was the paradigm of morality—that we do what principle requires, whether we want to or not and regardless of what is in our hearts.

Jesus has a new idea. The impulse to love our neighbor does not spring from external criteria that a person might or might not satisfy. This impulse flows from within, spontaneously, naturally, from the heart. And so, of course, since it comes from within, it does flow to everyone regardless of their status or characteristics. Jesus is teaching us, I believe, that it is, fundamentally, un-Christian to pick and choose whom we will show love to based upon any external criteria.

This teaching of Jesus is not entirely new. It is not unconnected with the Old Testament tradition about morality that we see in the reading from Deuteronomy. There we read that the commandment, the word, is not too far away; it is not too hard for you. It is very near to you; it is in your heart.

What we are obligated to do by rule or principle can be very hard. It can require that we do what we do not want to do. What comes from our heart, however, is easy and natural. It flows out of who we are, out of what we naturally want to do. The Christian ideal is not rooted in law or general principles of morality; it is not about following rules or fulfilling obligations. It is about having a heart that just naturally responds in love, like the Samaritan did. The Samaritan, apparently, did not decide that he was required to stop to help the beaten man. He was not fulfilling any moral requirement. He saw and he responded, because that was in his heart. It was, I presume, “easy.” It was in his mouth and in his heart.

But what if our heart is not in this place, as, for sure, it is sometimes not. None of us—except perhaps for the saints, are in this place all the time. How do we cultivate this heart? How do we internalize this neighborliness, this love, so that we are not law- or rule-oriented? It is a matter of formation. How is this heart formed? The same way one gets to Carnegie Hall.

Remember the old joke? A man stops to ask for directions, “How do I get to Carnegie Hall?” And the smart-aleck New Yorker responds, “Practice, practice, practice!”

Christian formation—forming the heart for neighborly love—requires practice. This is why our life together here, reading the Bible, sharing Eucharist, praying regularly, singing hymns, hearing sermons (!), sharing stories, practicing charity—all of what we call Christian practice—is about forming such a heart. The more we engage in this practice, the closer—the more internalized—is this word. The less we are driven by external moral demands, and the more we become like the Samaritan of the parable.

So the question is not: who is my neighbor? Or who qualifies for Christian love? These are the wrong questions. Rather ask, “Am I a neighbor?” Or, in the language of Deuteronomy, is the word very near to me? Is it in my heart? Is it easy, because it flows freely from my heart?

✠ Fr. Spencer