

# A Voice in the Wilderness

*the newsletter of*

## THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST



### SEPTEMBER 2007

Signs of fall are in the air. The air is occasionally a bit nippy, especially in the mornings, kids are back in school, and we are beginning to see the changeover from our summer to our winter congregation. And if the past is any guide, it seems likely we will have a winter ahead of us as well!

We look forward to a busy September. On Sunday the 2<sup>nd</sup>, we welcome Professor Doug Burger for the second of his two presentations on C. S. Lewis' story, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. On Sunday the 9<sup>th</sup>, we celebrate our third annual End of Summer Ice Cream Social with games for kids of all ages after the church service. Our fall music night will be held at the home of Jim and Jeanie Kemp at 6PM Friday night the 14<sup>th</sup>, at which time the Kemps' new home will receive a proper blessing.

Also in need of blessing are our favorite animals, and in an attempt to hold an outdoor service for this blessing, we are transferring St. Francis' Feast Day to Sunday the 16<sup>th</sup>. Pray for good weather for Holy Eucharist and the blessing of the animals on the back lawn. And on Sunday the 30<sup>th</sup>, we will have a discussion of financial stewardship at St. John's at an all parish meeting following the service. Please try to attend so that your voice may be heard.

Finally, Fr. Spencer will be on vacation from the 17<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup>, for his annual Boys' Golf Week. Pray to the Patron of Lost Causes for Spencer's golf game.

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## A Word from the Rector

This month I want to turn this page over to our national church. What is reproduced below is a slightly edited (for space) version of an ad taken by the church in the New York Times last May on the 400th anniversary of the first Anglican service held in the New World at Jamestown Colony. It is fine statement of who we are as Anglican Christians; and it also serves as a testament of my own beliefs and, I think of most of us here at St. John's.

Somewhere near you, there's a blue-and-white sign bearing the familiar slogan: The Episcopal Church Welcomes You. It represents some 7,400 congregations that trace their beginnings in North America to a small but hopeful group of English Christians who arrived May 14, 1607, at a place they called Jamestown—the first permanent English settlement in the New World.

You may know us as Washington's monumental National Cathedral, site of historic services and ceremonies, or the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, still unfinished, but already the largest cathedral in the world.

But the Episcopal Church is also Boston's Old North Church, famous for Paul Revere's revolution-spurring "midnight ride." And Philadelphia's Christ Church, home parish of 15 signers of the Declaration of Independence. It's also Trinity Parish on Wall Street in New York, formed in 1698, and St. Paul's Chapel just down the street, frequented by George Washington and the spiritual healing center of Ground Zero since 9/11.

It is also Epiphany Church in Los Angeles, where Cesar Chavez rallied the United Farmworkers. And Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Cumberland, Maryland, a major stop on the Underground Railroad for enslaved Afro-Americans. And St. John's Church in Greenwich Village, a meeting place for gay and lesbian action following the 1969 Stonewall uprising. It's a parish in Iowa, A campus ministry in Georgia. A mission in Deinetah—the Navajo Reservation. A cathedral in Utah. A house church in Vermont.

Wherever you find us, you'll find the Book of Common Prayer and a Christian faith that honors and engages the Bible, the tradition of the Church, and God-given human reason.

You'll find people with many points of view—Christians who are progressive, moderate, and conservative—yet who value the diversity of their faith community.

That's a heritage drawn from our deep roots in nearly 2,000 years of English Christianity, and shared by a world-wide Anglican Communion that unites nearly 80 million people in 164 countries through prayer and ministries committed to caring for "the least of these," as Jesus commanded, by reducing poverty, disease, and oppression.

Episcopalians struggle with the same issues that trouble all people of faith: how to interpret an ancient faith for today...how to maintain the integrity of tradition while reaching out to a hurting world...how to disagree and yet love and respect one another.

Occasionally those struggles make the news. People find they can no longer walk with us on their journey, and may be called to a different spiritual home. Some later make their way back, and find they are welcomed with open arms. *(continued, next page)*

Despite the headlines, the Episcopal Church keeps moving forward in mission—in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia, as well as congregations in many other countries of the world. We are committed to a transformed world, as Jesus taught: a world of justice, peace, wholeness, and holy living.

We've grown a lot in 400 years, since that 1607 worship service from the Book of Common Prayer was held in Jamestown—inside and out. Come see for yourself. Come and visit...come and explore...come and grow. The Episcopal Church welcomes you.

## Notes about Ministries

### Long live Aslan!

We are having a Narnia season at St. John's. On Saturday, August 25, we had a showing of C. S. Lewis' *Narnia Chronicles: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in the parish hall, with discussions of the story with Professor Doug Burger at Adult Ed following the next two Sunday services. This has been a really good time for all involved.

### Music, music, music

Thanks to our Presbyterian friends at the Church of the Eternal Hills, we have a piano in the parish hall again, for the first time in quite a while. They made the piano a gift to us, and we had a piano moving "party" on Sunday the 26<sup>th</sup>. Special thanks to Jerry Woods for the use of his truck and trailer, as well as to all those others who gave of their time and their sweat.

### Prayers on the waters

We just completed another season of Compline-on-the-Lake this year, with three dates of splendid weather. Kevin Cox, of the Grand Lake Marina, once again provided the boats free of charge. Thank you, Kevin!

### A mission to Europe

Cyndi Karnoscak recently returned from a trip to several European countries as part of a fact-finding trip about how Crosslinkministries, her own mission organization might be usefully combined with another organization. She reports that she is encouraged by the trip. When you see Cyndi, ask about her work there.

### Keeping up

If you have not noticed, the minutes of the most recent vestry meeting are now being posted on the bulletin board in the communications center outside the kitchen doors. Stop by and check out what your vestry is up to. Also, the latest issue of the Colorado Episcopalian is also available by the mail boxes.

### Everybody's favorite ministry!

Every year people get to hear what Fr. Spencer thinks about stewardship and pledging to St. John's (and this year won't be any different!), but there hasn't been a forum for you to offer your own ideas and feedback about St. John's programs. Until now. This year, following the Sunday service on September 30, we will hold an all parish meeting to exchange ideas about our shared obligation to support St. John's and about how we might manage a pledge drive most effectively. Please join us.

# Updates from the Church Family

## Heavens to Betsy!

Betsy Fowler writes to report that she and Larry, well established now in Mankato, Minnesota, are looking forward to their 55th wedding anniversary. They will celebrate with a world cruise. Their life in Minnesota revolves around family, and they play a lot of duplicate bridge. Betsy sends love to all her St. John's friends, and that, Betsy, is certainly reciprocated.

## We'll always have Marseilles

As these words are written, Al and Betty Clark are traveling in Europe. The highlight of the trip will be visiting with son Dan and his family in Marseilles. Dan and Nancy work as missionaries among the Muslim population of southern France and Northern Africa. Not an easy ministry, to say the least. St. John's supports this ministry and prays weekly for their work.

## Seeing things "eye to eye"

A first in Fr. Spencer's ministry occurred last month when two St. John's parishioners had the identical surgery in the same surgery center on the same morning within 20 minutes of each other. Al "Red" Jarrell and Jim Cartwright both underwent cataract surgery at the Denver West Surgery Center the morning of August 13. Fr. Spencer really appreciates their working it out this way to make pastoral attention easier and encourages other parishioners to do the same! Red is doing well, but we regret that Jim has experienced some complications. He was briefly hospitalized at Kremmling, but is now recuperating at home. Meanwhile, David Moen has been recovering so well his vision is nearly 100% of normal. Another success story from the prayer list!

## More medical updates

Pauline Friend reports from Porter Hospital that she continues to improve, but oh, ever so slowly. She gets down occasionally, but is heartened that she is going in the right direction. Keep up the spirits and keep up the good work, Pauline. Ted Parker is doing so well with his new knee that he was recently kicked off the prayer list (with his permission, of course).

## Moving on

Gary and Helen Christy report that they have sold their mountain get-away place. We regret that we will be seeing less of them in the future. But do come back for the occasional visit!

## Count those candles!

Joe Wetherill will celebrate his 90th birthday this month with a reunion party of family friends in Grand Lake on September 21st. Joe joined us for Compline on the Lake last month, which was a real treat.

## St. John's, feeder to the denominations

On the heels of reporting last month on Jerry Sadler's ordination as Deacon in the Roman Catholic Church, Karen Hronek called to report that she and Peter are joining a Lutheran congregation near their home in Green Valley, Arizona. All Christians are, as we say in our weekly prayers, "co-workers in Christ," so Karen and Peter go with our love and our blessings. (Fr. Spencer is almost certain that God hears the prayers of Lutherans probably as well as those of Episcopalians.)

## Sermon of the Month

*Sermon preached on Sunday, August 19*

“I have come to bring fire to the earth; do you think that I have come to bring peace? No, I tell you, but rather division.”

And I want to respond, “Well, yes, Lord, we did sort of think that you have come to bring peace. That is why we call you Prince of Peace, the Good Shepherd, the King of Love, Comforter, and so many other similar names. We did think you have come to bring peace.”

What are we as Christians to make of passages like this? Do they undercut the fundamental Gospel message of peace, love, comfort, and hope?

Well, for one thing, I think that we need to begin by accepting that our Christian life is not always so uplifting, not always so nicey-nicey, as some would have it. Yes, when we know Christ, our lives are reborn and we know a joy previously unknown. But human life is complicated and not unalloyed. It is a failure of nerve and of honesty, to pretend that our lives cease having struggle once we are in Jesus. One sees this in the preaching of some churches known as “happy churches.” And I saw this recently in a teaching of Psalms, when I used a modern poet’s translation of many of the psalms. But the psalms he translated were carefully chosen. He included only the “nice” ones—psalms of praise, of comfort, trust. He completely disregarded all those many psalms that express anger, frustration, despair, vengeance. As if these elements played no part in our real lives.

Living the Gospel is always a mix of joy and struggle. This is nicely caught by two well-known passages from Matthew. One the one hand, Jesus taught that “his yoke is easy and his burden light.” On the other hand, Jesus also teaches that “the gate is narrow and the way is hard” that leads to eternal life. Well, which is it, Lord? Is this Christian path easy or hard? It is both, and, if we are honest, we experience this truth in our Christian lives as well.

We must live with the complicated, messy truth—that we know both joy and struggle.

These two teachings from Matthew remind me of a story I read when I was a child. Two children had an aunt who was always quoting proverbs to them to get them to do things, and they decided to counter with other proverbs with the opposite message. So when she would cite “Many hands make light work,” they might respond with “Too many cooks spoil the broth.” When she said “Look before you leap,” they might respond, “He who hesitates is lost.”

What do we make of these dueling proverbs? It is not that one side is right and the other wrong, it is that one needs to exercise judgment as to which is appropriate in a given case. Are you moving a piano? Many hands make light work. Are you painting a picture? Too many cooks spoil the broth. Are you planning your retirement? Look before you leap. Are you deciding whether to spray your trees? He who hesitates is lost.

We live with the messiness that there is no one simple and easy answer. And so, is the yoke easy or is the way hard? Both, at different times and in different circumstances.

So we live with the messiness. Jesus’ coming brings both peace and fire. He is the Prince of Peace, and in him we know peace. But he also knew that anyone following him would also know struggle, if only because of the response of the world. Jesus knew that the powers of the world would reject him and his message and that he would know fire and suffering as a result. And he knew that those faithful to him would be rejected by those clinging to the values of the world. Because the world is a fallen world, they would know struggle as well.

But all of us know another kind of conflict. It is not the conflict between followers of Jesus and those rejecting the Gospel. It is between those with one vision of what it is to follow Jesus and those with

another conflicting vision. This is a division that is afflicting our Episcopal Church today.

We know that Jesus does not welcome these divisions; he prayed that all his followers would be one, even as He and the Father are one. But surely he knew that our human differences and our human failings would lead us to different understandings of what it is to be faithful to Him. So, his teaching was about peace, but – because we and not just the world are fallen – it naturally led to divisions.

This is to say nothing about which side in our churchly debates might be correct. I imagine that both sides have something of the truth and other things really screwed up. We know that Jesus wants us to be “as one,” but our different visions of faithfulness are driving us apart. It is tragic, yes. But, historically, it is not surprising. It has happened time and again in the history of the church. Visions of faithfulness diverge, and we have divisions. Division should of course be only the last resort. It should come, if it must, only after deep and careful listening to one another. It should come, if it must, only after every attempt to understand how the other is trying to be faithful. It should come, if it must, only after every attempt to find a way to live together with the differences. Differences do not have to lead to divisions; they do so only if we decide to let them.

But, collectively, we have decided to let these differences lead to divisions. And our response must be to recognize the messiness of human life. Are we in the fire or are we at peace. Both. We are living through the fire of divisive times, but our response is to hold fast to the peace that Jesus brings. We accept that we are fallen beings and we respond as Christians, at their best, always have: with grace, peace, faithfulness. For Jesus did come to bring peace.

