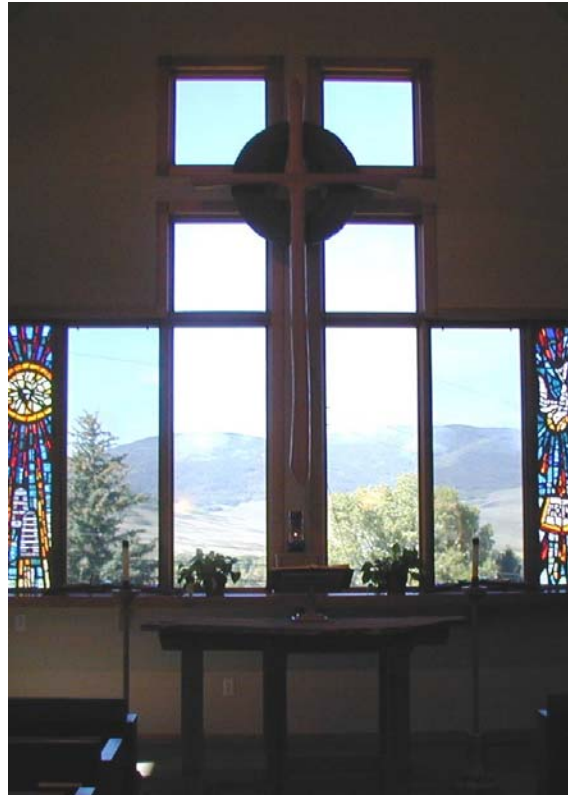


A Voice in the Wilderness

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST



JANUARY 2009

Early fears of insufficient snow at the ski resorts turn out to be totally unwarranted. The snow is welcome, but the wind and the lack of sun are not. It looks like we are facing a winter much like last year's. Brrrrrrrr. But at St. John's our hearts remain warm as we prepare for the new year. .

On the 6th we observe the Feast of the Epiphany beginning at 5:30PM with a light meal and followed by worship with Eucharist and the taking down of all the Christmas decorations.

For the week of the 12th—18th, Fr. Spencer will be away on silent retreat.

Beginning on the 16th, the centering prayer group will resume weekly meetings on Fridays at 3PM.

On Saturday the 24th, St. John's is offering a Safeguarding God's Children workshop, beginning with coffee and donuts at 8:30AM and lasting until 1PM. This is required for all those who work with children at St. John's.

And, for an early heads-up, our Annual Meeting will be following church on Sunday the 25th. .

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A Word from the Rector

So much of Christian life is about relationship. We may get distracted by questions of doctrine or liturgy or finances, or whatever. But what underlies our Christian community is the depth and quality of our relationships, both with God and with other. This is why Jesus teaches that all the Law comes down to two commandments: to love God and to love one another.

Let's talk a little about what it is to love one another. I remember a "Peanuts" sweatshirt some years ago which trumpeted the message: "I love humanity; it's people I can't stand." I take this to be poking fun at people whose love for others remains at the abstract level. Sometimes it's easier to love "humanity" as an abstraction rather than real flesh and blood individual persons. Individual people, after all, have flaws. They (we!) can be quite annoying and difficult to like. So we get around this "messiness" by focusing on an abstract sense of people, thus bypassing all the traits of real people that make them difficult to like.

But sometimes it is the other way around. For some people, it is harder to like human beings in general, and easier to feel affection for the individual that happens to be right in front of us. Sometimes we need the reality of a face, a set of emotions, perhaps a vulnerability or an idealism—whatever—that gives that person individuality and a reality that we can love.

So which is it? Does getting to know people better make it easier or harder to come to love them?. This may vary according to both the lover and the beloved. But for me, I have to admit, I fall into the second camp. I sometimes despair of humanity—at our pettiness, selfishness, self-absorption, etc. Knowing a person better is a way for me to come to love them more. And it is certainly a way to build on relationship.

All this is by way of introducing a new "Time with the rector program" here at St. John's. At my annual performance review, your vestry urged me to begin a systematic program of visits to all members of St. John's to increase the access of laity to their priest, to enable me to come to know parishioners better and so be better able to minister to them, and in general to strengthen relationships at St. John's. I think this is a splendid idea, and I am happy indeed to follow this advice.

I do not propose to call all of you directly; some of you may not feel the need for more time together (Enough is enough, thank you!), and I do not wish to put anyone on the spot. But over the next several months I will send each member a message of some sort, inviting you to be in touch with me to arrange a time to get together. This might be a home visit (for coffee or whatever), an appointment at the church, a meal out together,

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or a walk in the woods. It might be a talk about what's going on in our lives, about any aspect of St. John's or of the Episcopal Church, or about the Broncos or the Rockies. It most definitely will not involve any sort of agenda on my part, other than simply to have time to get to know each other better.

And if for any reason, this is not something that you wish or can make time for, it will be perfectly all right either to tell me that or simply not to respond to the invitation, if that is easier for you.

But I will tell you that I do enjoy opportunities like this for spending time in conversation one-on-one (or two or three). So I hope that many of you will want to take part in this "Time with the rector" program. And I trust that the result will indeed be that understanding, trust, love, and relationship (among real, flesh and blood, flawed, people!) will be strengthened.

God's blessings on you for the new year.

Fr. Spencer+

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Notes about Ministries

Check it out . . .

If you haven't done so, be sure to drop by to see all the upgrades made to Cranmer Chapel in the last few months. There are new carpeting and lights in the chapel itself and the two back rooms, new floor covering, lighting, and faucet in the kitchen, new chairs, and a new furnace. Like, wow. The furnace was donated to the church, and Kirk Lietzke donated his time and expertise to install it, which was a wonderful gift. Thank you, Kirk. Next spring, a new retaining wall goes in to protect the foundation from further deterioration. By the way, we still have one of the old padded pews that has not found a new home yet. If you could use it in a garage or entryway, please call Jim Magill as soon as possible at 726-5423. Jim, with the help of wife Beth, is doing a wonderful job as new sexton of the chapel. Thank you, Jim and Beth.

The sound of music at the chapel

The other remarkable breakthrough at Cranmer Chapel is the introduction of music to the services. This is made possible through the personal donation of time and talent of Joe Rooyackers, who has recently joined St. John's. Joe is a wonderful musician and is making it his ministry to offer guitar accompaniment and singing at the Saturday evening services there. Thank you, Joe! This is the first time music has been offered on a regular basis since Chap Cranmer's retirement. It is also the case that attendance at the chapel has been up significantly in the last couple of months. Coincidence? I think not!

Speaking of attendance

For the first time in Fr. Spencer's tenure here, attendance at Cranmer Chapel was larger than the same service held at St. John's. This happened on Christmas Eve, when we had 51 at the chapel for Lessons and Carols (a record attendance) and 45 at St. John's. The past few years we have averaged in the 30s at the chapel and over 70 at St. John's. The low number in Granby may be attributed to a number of parishioners traveling and also, perhaps, to a mix-up at the newspaper that omitted our ad the week of the service.

Helping out in a pinch

We are still looking out for pinch-hitters in Fr. Spencer's absence during his three months sabbatical after Easter. In particular, we will need someone to take on the editing of this newsletter for the months of May, June, and July, and also people to help in the production of the weekly bulletins. Please call Fr. Spencer if you wish to inquire about what either of these ministries would involve.

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The bottom line

We have officially closed this year's pledge drive. We received 40 pledges for a total of \$110,060. We have fallen short of last year's total of \$116,000, which means that vestry will have some difficult decisions to make in drawing up the 2009 budget. It is always disappointing to have a backward step in financial stewardship, but in light of the economy and of losses due to people moving away, we—actually *you*—did better than early forecasts would have suggested. Thanks to all of you who stepped up to help reduce the expected shortfall. And if you have not yet pledged and want to help with next year's budget, we will stretch a point and accept late pledges!

CALLING ALL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

During your high school years you are required to perform community service hours in order to graduate. If you are interested in participating in meaningful projects where you can use your God-given skills while putting your faith into action please contact Deacon Diane after Sunday services and let her know of your interest.

MOUNTAIN FAMILY CENTER

2009 is here and a brand new year is a great time to start eating healthier by saying 'good-bye' to salty junk food and sugary soda pop. January's food pantry needs are canned fruit and fruit juice.

Sermon of the Month

Sermon preached Sunday, December 14th.

So what's it all about? Remember the question was asked of the Michael Caine character in the movie *Alfie*. As we move through the season of Advent and ever closer to Christmas, what's it all about?

We have John the Baptist's good example in the Gospel of John. John understood that he was not the light, but only a witness to it. John said, rightly, that he was not worthy to stoop to untie the straps of Jesus' sandals. The obvious answer, and it is correct so far as it goes, is that this is all about Jesus. As we near Christmas we let the attention move away from ourselves and on to him. This is the season for Jesus. But there is a Gospel paradox hidden in this truth.

The psalm selected for this Advent Sunday is at first glance a puzzling choice. The psalmist refers to God's restoring the fortunes of Zion. And that in doing this, the Lord has done great things "for us." It is natural for us to read "restoring fortunes" as being about material things, but apparently the Hebrew is very opaque here, and that a better translation might well be "a restoration of an earlier (and healthier) relationship between God and the people." It is about restoring a right relationship between us and God. And if this is right, then of course, it *is* a Gospel psalm and quite appropriate for the Christmas season. God's great work is about this relationship—it is the work of salvation. And if it is about a relationship, it is also very much about

us. The Lord has done great things for *us*. It is the work of salvation which God has undertaken for us, and so we very much a part of this story. Our response to God, our willingness to be in this relationship, is also an essential part of the story and of the season.

Our response is important, but it still must be John's response. John makes the same point in a different way. He says that he must decrease so that Christ may increase. What John may not fully understand, for it is only in Jesus' later teaching that we find it clearly expressed—what John may not see is that in this "decrease" we truly find ourselves and we become more than we ever could on our own. And that it is when we try to increase, that we become smaller and smaller.

This reminds me of Brother Lawrence's insight, the monk whom we studied in adult education last week. He went into the monastery with a deep conviction of his own sinfulness and unworthiness. He wanted to make Christ absolutely central by renouncing all pleasures and all satisfaction in his own life. And he concluded, "Lord, you have outwitted me!" For while disregarding himself and centering Christ, he discovered only the greatest personal joy.

It is the classic Gospel paradox. In following John's example and putting Christ first, we become so much more than we could ever have become by focusing on ourselves. And in focusing on ourselves, making it about us, we do nothing but grow smaller.

So of course Christmas is about us and our response to the light. And of course John is also right that we focus on the light and not on ourselves. The secret is that in doing this, we become the light—and we never shine brighter.

Updates from the Church Family

Mother Mary Catherine

By the grace of God and the consent of the Church, The Right Rev. Robert J. O'Neill will ordain Mary Catherine Volland to the sacred order of priests in Christ's one, holy, catholic Church on Saturday, January 10, 2009 at 10:00AM at St. John's Episcopal Cathedral. Bravo Catherine! We are all invited to be part of this wonderful event.

Be sure to introduce yourselves to . . .

Gary and Kaye Piper, who have been attending St. John's the last month and have announced their intention to join us. They have lived in Winter Park full time for about a year. Gary has his own business as a consultant in communications for the Defense Department; Kaye is a retired nurse, with a strong interest (and considerable education) in spirituality. They appreciate the warmth of their welcome here, and we appreciate the gifts they will bring to us.

Signs of health

With Gary and Kaye's decision, we now have added eleven new members in the past calendar year, quite a remarkable showing for a congregation of our size. We can all take great heart that so many people are finding St. John's a welcoming place, yes, but more importantly a place where they can worship God in a healthy and faithful way.

Keepin' on keepin' up

Vicki and the Rev. Wilton Bunch have been in touch. They are still in Birmingham, Alabama, but Wilton has moved from the seminary there and is now teaching undergraduate ethics courses at Samford University, with a religion and science course coming up next year. Vicki has also moved from teaching high school math to introducing a new course, from scratch, on healthcare careers. They say they miss the mountains and St. John's, but they are really thriving at sea level. They sound very happy. They can be contacted at VMDWHB@aol.com.

And Dick and Nina Stasser are retired and living in Centennial. Nina's so-called retirement includes working with several small parishes to develop Mission Partnerships and also working as an "honorary associate" with responsibilities for preaching and celebrating twice a month at St. Gabriel the Archangel, Cherry Hills. She and Dick love taking advantage of Denver's cultural life and work out regularly. And they love being able to see their grandkids regularly. They look forward to Nina's next opportunity to supply at St. John's, as do all those at St. John's who remember Nina. And they send their blessings to all.

Thank you, thank you!

Fr. Spencer wishes to thank all of those who donated to the "appreciation gift," the check that was presented to him during coffee hour of the first Sunday after Christmas. It was very generous of all of you, and I am grateful. I have decided to use it to establish a "sabbatical fund," so that it will be used to support travel and/or education during my upcoming sabbatical.

January 2009 calendar page

Sundays:

9AM Holy Eucharist, every week
10:30AM Vestry Meeting on the 11th

Tuesdays

5:30 Feast of the Epiphany: meal/service/undecorated

Wednesdays

7:30PM Growth and Development meeting

Thursdays

2PM Bible Study on the 8th, 22nd, 29th

Fridays

2PM Bible Study on the 2nd

8AM Worship Committee meeting on the 30th

Saturdays

8AM Men's Bible Breakfast every week

8:30AM Safeguarding God's Children workshop on the 24th

5PM Holy Eucharist/Cranmer Chapel 3rd, 10th, 24th, 31st.

5PM Evening Prayer/Cranmer Chapel on the 17th

****From the 12th to the 18th: Fr. Spencer out of office all week**