

# A Voice in the Wilderness

## THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST



### SEPTEMBER 2010

There's no denying the painful truth; fall is in the air. Watch your plants don't freeze over night. Get your rounds of golf in before it's too late. Make sure your winter clothes are ready. Still, we hope for fair weather for several outdoor activities coming up. But we start with:

Saturday at 8:30AM on the 4<sup>th</sup>, a Safeguarding God's Children workshop will be offered at Trinity Episcopal Church in Kremmling for all those wishing to be eligible to work with children.

On Saturday the 11<sup>th</sup> there will be a Green Team meeting in the St. John's meeting room at 10:30AM.

Sunday the 12<sup>th</sup> we observe the Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi (tr.) with an outdoor service (we hope!) featuring the blessing of the animals.

Saturday the 18<sup>th</sup> is a workday at Cranmer Chapel, beginning at 9AM.

On Sunday the 19<sup>th</sup> we welcome the Rev. Lou Blanchard, canon missionary for congregational development, who will preach and conduct an adult forum session on the church's mission.

And Fr. Spencer will be out of the office on vacation the week of the 20<sup>th</sup>—26<sup>th</sup>, playing golf and having fun.

And, finally, an early heads-up for our semi-annual highway pickup day set for Saturday, October 2. We will meet at St. John's at 9:30AM.

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### A Word from the Rector

Some folks worry about attendance and membership in the Episcopal Church, and I suppose there are reasons for concern. But sometimes I think that, you know, it's remarkable that we do as well as we do. For we are certainly a counter-cultural church. Of course the Gospel is always, when preached honestly, counter to the culture around us in lots of ways, and we know that the world rewards very different values than those preached by Jesus.

But more than just the content of the Gospel message, there is so much in how we in the Episcopal Church worship and embody the Gospel that is counter-cultural. Think about it. We are a church that is rooted in tradition in a culture that is anti-tradition. We practice a formal liturgical in a culture that is radically informal and suspicious of ritual forms. We embrace mystery in a culture that demands easy and definite answers. And we are a well-branded institution in a culture that is suspicious, even hostile, to institutions.

The bias against institutions is strong. When is the last time you read a book or saw a movie that lifted up any institution (with the possible exception of the military)? No, our culture glorifies the individual, especially the individual who struggles against the impersonal and (paradoxically) simultaneously evil institution. The person who works faithfully within an institution, upholding its values with integrity is boring and, worse, weak, unimaginative, and without integrity.

But many institutions embody important and worthwhile values and ideals. Certainly the institutions of law, medicine, business, education, all are necessary to our society and need to be upheld. But they can all be abused as well, when the people within them fail to honor the institutions' values and besmirch and undermine them. One author compared Barry Bonds and Cal Ripken as members of the institution of baseball. One used (and abused) the institution to glorify himself; the other respected the game and honored it by the way he played, respecting his opponents, never calling attention to himself, and playing by the rules.

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And of course one of the reasons institutions are under so much attack is that each one has too many Barry Bonds' and not enough Cal Ripkens. And this is true of the church (the universal church, I mean), which has had far too many clergy and even lay leaders who have used the church to advance themselves rather than to dedicate themselves to furthering the church and its values.

But all these institutions, and especially the church, have too much important going for them to let us give them up easily. We need increased respect for institutions and for those persons who live within them, support them, and advance their work. For there are things that only institutions can do, things beyond the work of any individuals.

For us in the church, just consider how much more feeble our spiritual lives would be without the support of the church community. The prayer life of the church connects us and supports us in so many ways. It links us with each other, but also to those in other churches around the world. When I visit a parishioner in a hospital room, I often point out that when I am present there, in clergy garb, I do not come alone. Every member of the church is there with me. That room is crowded with St. John's folks. And when we say the Nicene Creed each Sunday, we are connecting to the church throughout the world today and throughout time. And when Paul Casey comes representing the Colorado Haiti Project, and leaves with our prayers and our donations, we are with him when he returns to do mission in Haiti. It is true that we, among others, make it possible for him and his team to do save lives, feed people, educate children. But his doing it also makes it possible for us to be there as well.

Saying this is to just touch the tip of the iceberg. There are so many other ways in which belonging to St. John's and being active here enables us to live the Gospel in so many ways, impossible for us as individuals. There is no reason for us to be shy or embarrassed about participating in "institutional" religion. It is just one more way in which we witness against the culture around us and for the life of the Gospel.

--Fr. Spencer

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### Notes about Ministries

September Newsletter—Ministries Page

#### *The Heart of Texas*

Many thanks to Lee and Shirley Siems, who treated us to the movie of this title last month for Adult Forum. It was a heartwarming story of forgiveness in the face of tragedy. If you missed it, the Siems' have donated a copy of the DVD for the St. John's library downstairs beneath the sanctuary.

#### *And speaking of*

The library. There have been several donations of very good books lately including *Soul Brothers* by Richard Rohr (reflections on men in the Bible), *The Good Book*, by Peter Gomes (a lively and engaging introduction to the Bible), and *The Cloister Walk*, a memoir by the poet Kathleen Norris about her spiritual search for God as a Protestant woman in a Catholic monastery. If you haven't checked out the offerings lately, wander downstairs after services some Sunday to check things out. All borrowing from the library is on the honor system.

#### *And speaking of*

"Thanks," thanks so much to all of you who responded so generously with donations to the rector's discretionary fund. It is now very healthy indeed, and Fr. Spencer can look forward to the winter season with its needs with confidence.

#### *A plea for the Pakistanis*

So far there is an enormous gap between our nation's response to the disaster in Haiti and our current response to the horrific flooding in Pakistan. But a

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human being in suffering is a human being in suffering, no matter where and no matter who. Bishop O'Neal has issued an appeal for help for Pakistan. As usual Episcopal Relief and Development is on the ground in Pakistan doing what it can, but it needs our support. Please bring to church this Sunday (or mail in) a check made out to St. John's (memo line: ERD—Pakistan) for whatever you can spare at this time. Thank you!

### *Tea for . . . .how many?*

Through friends of hers in California, Judy Hardardt is able to make available for purchase through St. John's of beautiful decorative tea towels, a rich red in color with hand embroidered Episcopal shield and the words "St. John's" underneath. These are truly substantial and lovely towels, and they are available for \$10 through St. John's. Orders received by the end of September will be delivered in time for Christmas.

### *Ministry thank yous*

To Don Hicks and to Mike Hulley for producing the annual audit of St. John's books. Don has led this effort for several years now, and Mike is picking up the torch—and will be looking for an assistant for next year. . . . To Walter Wilson, for his yeoman's efforts to follow through on previous Audit Committee recommendations and to make St. John's compliant. . . . And to Marilyn Orr, for completely redoing, revising, and updating our Birthday and Anniversary lists for our newsletter. So many people do so many different things, often behind the scenes, to make St. John's as good a church as it is. For all you do, this "thanks" is for you.

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## Sermon of the Month

My beloved had a vineyard.” That is to say, God had a vineyard that he planted, tended, and protected. The vineyard, of course, is Israel. Israel understood itself to belong to God. And Isaiah and other prophets often used this image to refer to Israel. It’s a very nice image. Because it makes clear that Israel belongs to God, that Israel owes its existence to God, and that God has a right to expect certain things of Israel. Israel owes God the fruit that he expects from it.

And what is Isaiah’s message? God planted, tended, and protected his vineyard so that it would yield good grapes. But instead it yielded wild grapes, that is, grapes unsuited for wine or for eating. Sour, unpalatable grapes. This is a parable of course, and Isaiah spells out just what it means. God expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry—a cry of despair from the oppressed. And so God is angry and resolves to allow the vineyard to go to seed.

Israel liked the image of itself as God’s vineyard, God as its protector, but it didn’t always like the responsibility that came with it. It didn’t always want to produce the good grapes—the justice and the righteousness that God demanded. Consider the psalm. The psalmist sings of God’s brining a vine out of Egypt; God planted and prepared the ground; and it took root and thrived. But things have gone bad. Its walls are broken and the vineyard is raided by passersby. And the psalmist doesn’t understand why this is happening; he pleads with God to see how Israel suffers and to preserve what God has planted. But there is no hint of why this might be happening.

Isaiah could tell him. It is happening because Israel, the vineyard, is not producing the fruit of justice and righteousness. In Isaiah, the model is one of punishment. Israel is unfaithful by denying justice and righteousness, and so God intervenes to punish it. But there is another model as well, a model that may ring more true with some of us. If we drink too much alcohol one

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night, we wake up in the morning with a hangover. Is the hangover a punishment that God has sent us? Or is it simply the natural consequences of irresponsible behavior? Or we have a repair job that we do hurriedly, and the object repaired soon breaks again. Is that a punishment or simply the natural consequences of bad behavior? We know that faithful behavior that honors people and principles of hard work and excellence yields good fruit and good lives. And we know that unfaithfulness in these things yields bad fruit and lives of suffering. And this is quite apart from God's needing to intervene with any sort of punishment.

So we can look at Israel's plight and suggest that perhaps the ill befalling that society is less about God's punishment, and more about reaping the consequences of being a society that is unjust and that tolerates the suffering, the cries, of those who are oppressed and put down.

Of course **we** are also God's vineyard. Whether we are talking about our own individual lives, our families, our church, our community or our nation, we belong to God. We are planted, tended, protected, by God, and it is expected that we will yield good fruit, in particular justice and righteousness. I do not want to suggest that anything unfortunate that befalls us is necessarily our own fault. Clearly the righteous do suffer along with the unrighteous. But Isaiah's parable should speak to us. In our homes, in our churches and communities, and in our nation, we owe God what he asks: justice and righteousness, according to Isaiah. When another prophet, Micah, is making the same point, he asks, "What does the Lord require of you, but that you do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God." Lives led this way will not be trouble free, but they will thrive. Nations that honor these ideals will have setbacks, but they will thrive. And to the extent that we do not honor them, to the extent that we produce bad fruit, we will be an unhealthy society with injustice producing divisions and anger and other social ills. To the extent that we honor wealth and accumulation and

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power and allow those without these resources to suffer, we are producing bad fruit, and our society will be broken and we will suffer.

Let me cite one of my favorite statistics, my favorite not in the sense of liking it, but in the sense of finding it useful to cite. Recently over a 6-8 year

period, the Labor Department reported that income to working people, people on salaries, had increased by 16 billion dollars. Well, is this good or not? When I read this figure, I had no idea how to interpret it. And then I read on. Sixteen billion dollars is less than half the amount paid out in bonuses in one year by the top eight Wall Street investment banks. Think about this for a moment and then ponder whether we are, as God's vineyard, producing good grapes or wild.

And the God that I see, that I think I see, is not so much angry and punishing, as he is sorrowful that his vineyard is suffering the consequences of producing bad fruit.

My beloved had a vineyard. And he expects good grapes. He expects justice and righteousness.

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### Updates from the Church Family

#### *Red alert!*

Red Jarrell, while recuperating from knee replacement surgery, fell while at home and is, at publication deadline, still recovering at Kremmling Memorial Hospital. He is doing well, however, and we expect him home soon. Please keep him and Dorothy in your prayers.

#### *Remembering Mama*

Thanks so much to all of you for your prayers for Fr. Spencer and his family. He and his brother Richard spent a week with Mother last month and were successful in making arrangements that will help keep her safer, including in-home help, a distress or “fall” button system, and the sale of her car. These were all important steps, and all the family is very much relieved about the future.

#### *Oh, my aching . . . .*

Deacon Sally reports that Eleanor Holley has undergone recent back surgery and is delighted with the results—immediate relief from the pain. This is a good thing, Eleanor, and we are all happy for you. Besides which, we miss you! Glad you are doing so well.

#### *That college spirit*

Our bumper crop of high school graduates, Makenna Morck and Tyler Orr, are all off to college now and getting immersed in their classes, Makenna at CU and Tyler at Colorado School of Mines. We are proud of you both, and we sure look forward to seeing you over vacations. Now if CU ever plays Mines in football, we won't know who to root for!

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### *Out of the woods*

Jerry Woods reports that son Martin and his wife Betty Jean have moved from Pagosa Springs to Salida, where they have opened a new business. Jerry may well be moving there himself, but that hasn't been decided yet. Oh, the business? Medical marijuana. Fancy that!

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September 2010

SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
			1	2	3	4
				6:45 PM EVENING PRAYER & BIBLE STUDY		8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
9 AM HOLY EUCARIST				6:45 PM EVENING PRAYER & BIBLE STUDY	3 PM CENTERING PRAYER GROUP	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 10:30 AM GREEN TEAM MEETING * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
9 AM HOLY EUCARIST * ST. FRANCIS SERVICE				6:45 PM EVENING PRAYER & BIBLE STUDY	3 PM CENTERING PRAYER GROUP	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 9 AM CRANMER CHAPEL WORK DAY * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
REV. LOU BLANCHARD VISITS	FR. SPENCER ON VACATION			6:45 PM EVENING PRAYER & BIBLE STUDY	3 PM CENTERING PRAYER GROUP	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
26	27	27	29	30		
9 AM HOLY EUCARIST				6:45 PM EVENING PRAYER & BIBLE STUDY		

The Episcopal Church of St. John the Baptist

Granby, Colorado

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