

A Voice in the Wilderness

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST



FEBRUARY 2011

It is, depending upon which bank temperature sign you wish to believe, either -34 or -40 degrees in Grand County on the second day of February. And, no it is not the temperature that accounts for this issue of our newsletter being late; it is that we have been waiting for the Annual Meeting so we could report on that. We have, unusually, no special events scheduled for February, perhaps because everyone wants to stay inside. See the calendar page for regular scheduled events and meetings. Also please see the rector's page for important information about this coming year.

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A Word from the Rector

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

At last week's annual meeting, in addition to reviewing the past year's work, I shared with that gathering that after more than nine years of service, it is time to be looking toward the end of my tenure here and to be anticipating the calling of a new priest.

Some of you know that Karla and I have put our home in Silver Creek up for sale. (You just can't do that without people noticing.) This is something we have to do, because homes can take a very long time to sell these days, and until it is sold, we have no flexibility at all; I could *never* set a date for departure.

Karla and I have now moved into our eventual retirement home in Anthem Ranch in Broomfield, and our next goal must be to sell our mountain home and to finally be in one house on the Front Range. And at just this time, I have been offered a half-time position at nearby St. Mary Magdalene Church in Boulder, a position that will open up after Easter. I do not know whether we will be able to sell our mountain home in time to accept that offer (which may be kept on the table somewhat longer) or not. If we are so lucky, I will be giving notice at that time. But in any case, both my departure and Karla's full retirement will depend upon the sale of the house.

I regret very much that I could not make this announcement without visiting so much uncertainty about the time frame for my leaving, but there are just too many factors that have to fall into place to make this work. Still, I expect to be leaving my post sometime in the coming year.

I can hardly express the mixed feelings I have. Moving into our retirement home; seeing Karla fully retired; anticipating a possible new position that allows me to continue a priestly ministry, a ministry emphasizing just those aspects that I most enjoy and that I am better at. All this is to the good. But I will miss St. John's collectively and every single

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one of you individually, and I will miss the achievements and good times that we have shared together. I will repeat what I told you last year. You were a healthy and faithful church when I came here, and I am really pleased to be able to say that I haven't screwed it up in my time here!

But perhaps this is all premature. When I was explaining all this to Gary Piper, he said "Well, selling your house ought to keep you here for a few years!" And he may be right. So this is not a time for "good-byes" yet; only a time to get clarity and honesty about what our mutual situations are, what the possibilities are, and to prepare for those possibilities as wisely and as faithfully as we can. The bishop and the diocesan office are well informed about all of this, of course, and Canon Lou Blanchard will come to visit with vestry about transitioning to new leadership this spring, likely in March.

I cannot close without saying that it has been and continues to be a great privilege to serve with you. I know from hearing the stories of my fellow priests of the diocese that it cannot be taken for granted that when a problem arises, or when I need help with something, people can be counted on to step forward. It cannot be taken for granted that, almost literally, every single person in the parish will be involved in ministry and the support of the parish. It cannot be taken for granted that when a priest wants to try something new, people will say, however dubiously, "Sure, let's give it a try." And it certainly cannot be taken for granted that parishioners will care enough to offer thoughtful and valuable suggestions for virtually every aspect of the church's life. You have been that kind of a parish and, while it may not be something to be taken for granted, it has been something that I *have* been able to count on. Thank you!

God bless you each and every one.

Fr. Spencer

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THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST Notes about Ministries

In case you missed it

For the first time the vestry (and other lay leaders) produced a booklet of reports for the annual meetings, documenting the various activities, projects, and progress made in our ministries here in the past year. Let Fr. Spencer know if you missed the meeting and would like a copy of the report.

Changing of the guard

At that meeting, Fr. Spencer gave special thanks to Walter Wilson and to Loretta McLaughlin as they go off vestry after three years' service. Loretta has helped Fr. Spencer oversee the worship program, and Walter has served the last two years as Senior Warden. Both have been faithful and effective members. We are all grateful to them. They will be replaced by Brad Orr (appointed new Senior Warden by Fr. Spencer) and by Gary Piper, who was elected to vestry by acclamation. Great thanks to both Brad and Gary for agreeing to serve in what will likely be a crucial year in moving ahead at St. John's.

No one left standing

Also at the Annual Meeting, during our time of shared appreciations, Fr. Spencer asked if everyone who had *not* contributed to *some* ministry at St. John's in the past year would please stand; there was no shock at all when not a soul stood up. And there was no one who *should* have stood up. Every single person in attendance had at least one active ministry. So there was a general appreciation from all of us to all of us—and gratitude for belonging to a church in which everyone pitches in. And yet another measure of commitment and participation is seen in the fact that out of the 40 persons in attendance for the service, all but two stayed for the meeting. There are not many churches who can say that!

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Sermon of the Month

Sermon preached on 1 Epiphany, January 9th.

Consider the beautiful passage from Isaiah that we have just heard. God says, “Here is my servant, whom I have chosen.” Think of this as step one. God chooses his servant. The servant must respond by accepting God’s role for him. Call this step two. Third, God says that he delights in his servant and places his Spirit upon him. Call this step three. And then there is the follow through—the obedience of the servant. Call this step four.

Now there is some disagreement over how this passage is to be interpreted, in particular over just who or what the servant is. Who is this servant chosen by God and in whom God delights? Probably, originally it referred to Israel. Israel is the servant of God, and it is Israel who suffers. But then it came to be understood to refer to Jesus. C. S. Lewis has a wonderful chapter on the Psalms in which he speaks of different levels of meaning. At one level it is about Israel. At another it is about Christ. And, I would say, at yet another level it is about you (and me).

For what is truly important about this reading is the *pattern*—the four steps. It is this pattern—which reflects deep spiritual truth—that enables the same passage to be about, and to speak powerfully, to different situations. God’s call; our response; his delight; our obedience. We see essentially the same pattern in the account of Jesus’ baptism. “This is my son.” The call. The baptism is Jesus’ acceptance. “With whom I am well pleased,” reflects God’s delight. And of course Jesus went on to prove extraordinarily obedient—to the point even of death, death upon a cross.

What strikes me in looking at this pattern is that God’s delight follows the acceptance of the call and precedes the actual obedience to it. Jesus has

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not done anything yet; he is at the very beginning of his ministry of obedience. God is delighted in him just in the acceptance of the call.

We can forget this. That God is delighted in us just in our response to his call. I remember reading, many years ago, something to the effect that other people's opinions of us are not going up and down like a thermometer measuring the temperature. Their opinion of us is not constantly being revised depending upon whether we have just done or said something clever or neat or whether we have failed to do so. People's opinions of us are more stable than that. This was an important insight for me, for it made me less self-conscious, less worried about whether I was coming across in a favorable way or not. It was liberating.

God's delight in us is like this. It is not something that fluctuates depending upon whether we have just done something really well or not. To deny this would be to deny grace. It would be to make God's acceptance of us depend upon the quality of our works. No, God loves you; God is delighted in you at Step Two—simply your acceptance of his call, not with the actual success in carrying it out.

Of course, this is not to deny that actual obedience is important. It matters how faithfully we live into our calling. But it does not affect God's love, God's acceptance, God's delight.

So the four step pattern is as much about you and me as it is about the Suffering Servant or about Jesus. God has called each of us. The symbol of our response is our baptism and the covenant we make in that baptism. (And if you were baptized as an infant, it is the commitment we make to accept that covenant when we come to the age of consent.) And in making that commitment, God responds with delight and with the gift of the Spirit. That love and that delight are there for us to embrace and to lift us up. Never think that his love and delight are variable depending upon how well we do.

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I have said that the symbol of our acceptance of God's call is our Baptismal Covenant. So rather than saying the Nicene Creed as we usually do, I am going to ask you instead to turn to page 304 of the Prayer Book and to renew your Baptismal Covenant. But in so doing, remember that we do this as a response to God's call. That is Step One.

[The people renew their Baptismal Covenant.]

That is Step Two. We have responded by accepting the Call. We are one with the Servant of Isaiah and with Jesus at his baptism.

And I hope you are able to accept and even to feel Step Three: God's delight and joy and love in the fact that you have accepted that call. You will always have that in your Christian walk. Don't forget it. Grasp it. Do whatever you need to do to keep before you that you are loved by God and that he delights in you.

Remember that even when, unlike Jesus, you fail to live fully into obedience. You are fully human, like Jesus, but you are also not divine like he is. You will fail. It will not mean that God's delight in you is going down. God's attitude toward you is not like a thermometer. It is like a thermostat set at love and delight, maintaining that same constant level.

You are God's beloved, in whom he is well-pleased.

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THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST Updates from the Church Family

And in just one week!

Here Fr. Spencer goes away for a week's retreat and returns to find everything has gone to hell, figuratively of course. First Jim Cartwright was hospitalized with a broken leg, and when Fr. Spencer went to visit him, he discovers J.R. Faivre there too, with a nasty bone infection. Both Jim and J.R. are home now, getting good care and gradually improving. Do keep them both in your prayers. And then Jan Sears, our substitute pianist and "extended family," fell and cracked some vertebrae. She, too, is recovering well.

Coming attractions

And if all that weren't enough, Gene Ackley (hip replacement) and Lorie Wheeler (fused ankle) have surgeries upcoming. And to think both these operations come on the heels of their beloved Wisconsin Badgers losing in the Rose Bowl. A difficult year, so far. (But perhaps the Packers will make it all much better?) Lorie's doctor says he'll be able to play golf by late summer, which is really good news, since Lorie has always wanted to be able to play golf! (Just kidding, Lorie.)

Sojourning

Betty Cranmer is back from several weeks in Glenwood Springs with daughter Susan and husband John. While there she had another successful visit with her oncologist. Still cancer-free! Really good to have you back with us, Betty.

And so this doesn't sound just like a medical report . . .

David and Fran Moen, our friends from Washington State, had their yearly visit to Grand County, staying at Snow Mountain Ranch with family. It was great to visit with them again.

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In full retreat

Fr. Spencer was on retreat at Sacred Heart Jesuit Retreat House for the week of January 10th. A full five days of solitude, prayer, Mass with the good Fathers there, walks around the grounds, and hours and hours of reading. What could be better? He claims he even picked up a few things for future sermons and teachings, and he returned feeling much refreshed.

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From To Bless the Space Between Us by John O'Donohue

Blessed be the longing that brought you here
And quickens your soul with wonder.

May you have the courage to listen to the voice of
desire
That disturbs you when you have settled for some-
thing safe.

May you have the wisdom to enter generously into
your own unease
To discover the new direction your longing wants
you to take.

May the forms of your belonging-in love, creativity,
and friendship-
Be equal to the grandeur and the call of your soul.

May the one you long for long for you.

May your dreams gradually reveal the destination of
your desire.

May a secret Providence guide your thought and
nurture your feeling.

May your mind inhabit your life with the sureness
with which your body inhabits the world.

May your heart never be haunted by ghost-
structures of old damage.

May you come to accept your longing as divine
urgency.

May you know the urgency with which God longs
for you.

*****Contributed by Kaye Piper*****

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SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
		1	2	3	4	5
				6:45 PM BIBLE STUDY		8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST				6:45 PM BIBLE STUDY	3 PM CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST				6:45 PM BIBLE STUDY	3 PM CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 10 AM WORSHIP COMMITTEE MTG. * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST				6:45 PM BIBLE STUDY	3 PM CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
27	28					
9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST						

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