

# A Voice in the Wilderness

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST



**MAY 2011**

A winter of discontent shows signs of slowly coming to an end, both the weather and what seems like a siege of illnesses, accidents, and operations. (How long, O Lord?) Right now we are big into mud and awaiting real summer and the return of all our snow bird friends. In the meantime, all that we have in the way of extra activities this month are the adult forum sessions being held after church services throughout the month. Fr. Spencer will be away most of the week of the 9<sup>th</sup> for the diocesan clergy conference.

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Rector: The Rev'd. Spencer Carr • [spencercarr711@gmail.com](mailto:spencercarr711@gmail.com) • (970) 887-2193

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### A Word from the Rector

By now, most of you know that just a month ago, Karla's and my lives changed dramatically in an instant, when her car hit a patch of nasty ice and went off the road. She was on her way to church on the same road she has traveled many hundreds of times, and this one time was unlucky. It was a one car accident, but she was going down a steep hill, which meant that when the car left the road it careened and bounced through fences and against boulders before it came to rest on top of a fence and facing back up the hill. We believe that she suffered as much facial damage as she did because there were several severe impacts, and the airbag would have deflated after the first one.

She has no memory of the accident or of being taken to the Granby clinic, where she was stabilized and readied to be ambulated to St. Anthony's Central Hospital in Denver. She was in intensive care for four days and released to go home two days after that. For a week at home, she was able to do practically nothing on her own, including even sitting up in bed without help. Gradually she gained enough strength to do such simple things as walking from room to room by herself, holding the phone up to her ear, dressing herself, and eating without help. Her vision is still so blurred (and doubled) that it is not safe for her to walk on her own outside the confines of the house. When, with help, she does leave the house for a doctor's appointment or a necessary errand, she is exhausted very easily. She can neither read nor watch television. I joke that it is a good thing that it takes her so long to do anything, since it helps fill up the time. About all that she can do now is listen to audio books and talk on the telephone. Since simply talking does not involve vision, she can seem almost fully normal on the phone, whereas a face to face visit is exhausting.

We know that all the comparatively minor issues (broken hand, broken nose, fractured eye socket, cuts, facial and bodily bruises and contusions), as painful and as debilitating as they are, will gradually be resolved. The long term issue is her vision which the doctors believe will

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come back, but perhaps over a time frame of many months. If it should not improve, there are surgical steps to be taken, but we have not looked into the implications of any of this.

Karla is handling this ordeal with remarkable courage and equanimity. Although she claims that patience has never been her strong suit, she seems to me to be exercising remarkable patience. Her spirits are good, and she has great support from family, friends, and neighbors, all of whom are rallying to help.

I have said that we were unlucky, but assessing ones luck is always a matter of context. Two doctors independently told us that with the kind of brain injury she suffered (a sub-arachnoid hemorrhage), we are very fortunate that she is alive. And we are also very fortunate that there are, quite clearly, no cognitive deficits at all. (My other joke is that she is still as maddeningly right as always, as one hospital doctor discovered when he awoke Karla at 10:30 at night, while she was on morphine, and disagreed with her about what medications she was on. She had him check the chart, and she was, of course, right and he was wrong.)

And where is God in all this? I think it is impossible for a person of faith not to ask this question, whether we are talking about an individual accident such as this or a wide spread disaster, such as the Japanese tsunami or the current tornadoes ravaging the South. (And we must never fall into the trap of accepting the evils that happen to others and raging against God when one befalls us.) For whatever reasons, and it is not hard to guess at some, the world God has created for us is a dangerous one. There is much out there that can go wrong, and not just because of the choices of imperfect and fallen people. I cannot agree with those who think that everything that happens is according to God's will or that everything that seems bad to us is actually good in some larger sense. God's love for Karla is such that he suffers with her, as much as he suffered when Christ was on the cross.

This accident has changed our lives, for at least a considerable time, for the worse, and I do not believe that God thinks this is a good thing. But I

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do believe that God's creative power can make good things out of the bad. And we participate in this creative power when we do all we can, through prayer, through other support, and in working toward the good. Often during this ordeal, I reminded Karla that she was surrounded and supported by a spiritual force field of prayer. This was important, and we thank you all so much for this support. We shall see, as we move forward, just what good this creative power might be able to work out of this current suffering.

Karla will not be able to drive, clearly, for several months, so we will not be seeing much of her in the mountains for quite a while. (Later, perhaps, we might see if some of you might be able to give her a ride up, if you are returning from Denver at a helpful time.) You will even be seeing a little less of me, probably, because I will be stealing a day or two here and there, when I need to be with her. One good thing, at least, that comes from episodes like this is that we are all reminded that we are, indeed, one Body, and that we need one another, and that we are there for each other.

Again, thank you all for your support during this ordeal and for all that you do to make St. John's the special place that it is. Karla and I know that we are blessed to be part of this community.

---Fr. Spencer

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

### *Making a joyful noise to the Lord*

Will be easier at St. John's from now on, with the unveiling on Easter morning of our new St. John's songbooks, which feature for the first time not just the words to our special favorite songs, but also the music. This will enable more parishioners, and especially visitors, to join in more robustly. The next time you see Kay Irvine, be sure to thank her or, better, give her a big hug of thanks for the many, many hours she donated to this project. She played the music to generate the notes from the computer, proof-read all the music, and worked with the format as well. Bravo Kay!

### *More on music*

We now have expanded our musical leadership at St. John's. J.R. Faivre is now leading the singing on Sunday mornings and will be taking the lead in teaching us new songs as they are added to our repertoire. And John Simmons will be adding his musical talents to those of Tom Papatkakis and Lisa Von der Haar in accompanying us with guitar. It is great to see so many people offering their talents to our worship experience.

### *Go figure*

One should just give up trying to understand attendance figures at St. John's, especially during Holy Week. Last year for Easter Vigil we had 6 worshipers at Cranmer Chapel; this year—with no publicity—there were twenty-nine, which is more than the twenty we had at St. John's. Then for Easter Sunday we were down from sixty-six last year to forty this year. It is not easy to find churches with a lower Easter attendance than their average Sunday attendance (fifty-four), but we manage it every few years or so. This year's numbers were influenced downward by the absence of many regulars who were away traveling or else unable to attend for health reasons. Still we had a total of eighty-nine for all Easter services. And the Lord was worshiped and glorified!

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### *Netting more nets!*

Under the moral leadership of Deacon Diane, St. John's has raised a total of \$4477 for the More than a Match project to purchase mosquito nets for distribution in Africa to fight the scourge of malaria. You can purchase a lot of mosquito nets—and save a lot of lives—with with close to \$10,000. Thanks to all who gave and, especially to Diane, for making this campaign so successful.

### *Attention Cursillo-istas*

We have just received word that the Cursillo experience will be offered in nearby Georgetown this September. If you are interested in this or would like to know more about Cursillo, please contact Fr. Spencer. Parishioners who have Cursillo backgrounds and who can answer your questions include Betty and Al Clark and Walter Wilson.

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## THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST Sermon of the Month

Sermon preached on Sunday, April 3, the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent

There is a theme running through the readings this morning—the theme of vision and light. And given my experiences of the past two weeks—two cataract surgeries and uncertain results, it is tempting to draw some connections and to preach on the theme of light, sight, vision.

But as most of you know, there have been more important things going on in Karla's and my lives this week, and so I choose to reflect briefly on the psalm appointed for this morning, the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm, everyone's favorite and certainly among the most familiar passages in all the Bible.

“The Lord is my shepherd.” The early Christians used this formula, quoting the OT psalm but using the word ‘Lord’ to refer to Jesus. For Jesus himself said “I am the Good Shepherd,” thus tying himself and his ministry to all the associations of shepherd imagery in the Bible.

“The Lord is my shepherd.” And the rest of the psalm is, in my view, a spelling out of the implications of this statement of faith. We accept Jesus as our shepherd. What does that mean?

The psalmist certainly does not mean that there will not be troubles. If the Lord revives our souls, that implies that our souls are sometimes cast down. And even though we walk the right pathways for his name sake—even though we do this, we may walk through the valley of the shadow of death. We do not escape the dangers of living a human life in this world. Nor do we escape the troubles that living among other human beings brings us—we are troubled; we may even have enemies

So not wanting does not mean being spared the rigors, challenges, or dangers of this life. The Lord is my shepherd does not imply that this shepherd will shield us from these troubles. But we still lie down in green pastures and walk beside still waters. This is still metaphor, of course. It means that we can know calmness and peace in his presence. And though

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we walk through that valley of the shadow of death, we do not fear, for we are in God's presence. We are comforted.

The metaphor continues through the fifth verse. God prepares a table before us in the presence of those who trouble us. The older translation reads "in the presence of mine enemies." This acknowledges that we live among people who trouble us, who may even be our enemies. But among this kind of human trouble, we are provided with sustenance, with the sacred. Our heads are anointed with oil, which I read as metaphor for spiritual sustenance—that we will have the holy, the sacred—that our spiritual cups runneth over.

And finally, to know the Lord as our shepherd is to know that his goodness and mercy shall follow us all our days, and we will dwell in his house for ever.

All this is ours—when we accept Jesus, the Lord, the Good Shepherd.

The Lord is my shepherd.

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## Updates from the Church Family

### Medical Report

Here goes. Karla Allen (car accident) continues to make general slow progress and to gain strength, but so far there is no improvement in her vision, which the doctors say may take months to improve. She thanks all of you for your cards, prayers, and support. Fr. Spencer is still struggling with his own far less serious vision problems in the wake of his cataract surgeries. The doctor is optimistic that there will yet be a good result for him, though. Gene Ackley underwent successful surgery on his artificial hip and is now in rehab in Aurora. Jim Cartwright sent into shoulder surgery, but the shoulder was deemed not strong enough to endure significant repair. So the surgeon simply cleaned out the joint (so to speak), and Jim is now back home. Lorie Wheeler is recovering well from the operation to fuse his ankle.

### A close call

Tom Papatkakis became the second St. John's person to total a car in the last month, when he ran off the road, apparently because of a bad reaction to medication. Seat belt and airbag both did good work, and Tom was only shaken up.

### Making it official

J.R. Faivre was incorporated into the St. John's family at the Easter morning service. Of course, J.R. has been attending here for quite some time now and has been active in support of our music program, but it was really good to make it "official." J.R., you are now one of us, and it is great to have you here!

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### *Sailing, sailing*

Well, not exactly sailing, but Ken and Joan Von der Heiden are currently taking a cruise that will take them through the Panama Canal and up the Pacific to San Francisco to visit their son. Joan managed to defeat a nasty kidney infection just in time to get doctor's clearance to take the trip. Way to go, Joan!

### *Other news*

Among our friends who have been away traveling are Don and Sally Hicks, who spent Holy Week in Worcester, Massachusetts, where son Warren is an Episcopal priest. It had to be a wonderful experience seeing him preside over all the Holy Week services. Unfortunately, upon their return they had to attend to water damage to their Broomfield home from a leaky roof.

Sally Ackley is away for several days in Wisconsin for a memorial service for her mother, who recently died at the age of 101. And newcomer Sarah Bransom is off to Ecuador with her son to visit her future daughter-in-law and family. That sounds like a wonderful trip, Sarah.

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Kaye Piper, who is trained in facilitating Spiritual Direction in a small group format is forming one or two groups. In group spiritual direction the members of the group help each other discover the direction in which God is leading them using the practices of silence, contemplative prayer, questions and listening while avoiding trying to problem solve for each other. The group commits to sharing this time together in a confidential setting. Kaye recently presented to the East Grand Clergy Association her desire for starting one or two groups. Those clergy present strongly urged her to go forward. For more information please contact Kaye Piper at 970-726-5928. There are also some informational cards located on the shelf below the mailboxes.

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SUN.	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THURS.	FRI.	SAT.
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	8 AM SEEKERS AT JAVA LAVA			6:45 PM BIBLE STUDY	3 PM CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST * 10:30 ADULT FORUM				6:45 PM BIBLE STUDY	3 PM CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST * 10:30 ADULT FORUM	8 AM SEEKERS AT JAVA LAVA			6:45 PM BIBLE STUDY	3 PM CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST * 10:30 ADULT FORUM				6:45 PM BIBLE STUDY	3 PM CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER	8 AM MEN'S BIBLE BREAKFAST * 5 PM HOLY EUCHARIST AT CRANMER CHAPEL
29	30	31				
9 AM HOLY EUCHARIST * 10:30 ADULT FORUM						

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