

# A Voice in the Wilderness

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST



## JUNE 2011

Not to whine, but surely, surely, the warm days of summer *must* be just around the corner. The weather person owes us some, as this current mud season is extended week by week, with rain and snow hitting every other day or so. Surely June will see the fine weather we have come to expect, and we will have a marvelous day for our annual “Mass on the Grass!”

St. John’s will be participating in the annual East Grand High School Baccalaureate on Friday the **3<sup>rd</sup>** at 7PM at the high school auditorium.

Sunday the **12<sup>th</sup>** is the Feast of the Pentecost; plan to wear a lot of red to this Sunday’s service.

On Sunday the **26<sup>th</sup>** we observe the Feast Day of St. John the Baptist at Polhemus Park in Granby. Service time is 9:30AM, with a barbecue brunch to follow.

And an early heads-up that we present our annual Celebration of God and Country on Sunday evening **July 3<sup>rd</sup>** at 7PM. Invite your friends!

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### A Word from the Rector

At last month's annual Clergy Conference Bishop O'Neill reported on the state of the diocese, mentioning several important positive developments, as well as some of the challenges facing us. Among the good news was the continuing success of a couple of recent church starts. Another was the acquisition of an as yet unnamed Conference and Camping facility near Woodland Park. Perhaps one of the most positive aspects was the growing sense of community and support among the clergy of the diocese.

Among the challenges facing us is the continuing financial strain on the diocese. No other diocese of comparable size has so small a staff trying to hold things together as Colorado's. The strain on the diocesan staff is showing, and everyone agrees that the current situation is unsustainable. The bishop asked us all to try to think imaginatively of ways to address this problem.

As a result of my own thinking about this, whether it counts as imaginative or not, I asked vestry at our May meeting if they would agree to increase our giving to the diocese in the following way. Currently we do what the diocese asks all parishes and missions to do: we tithe to the diocese on our plate and pledge income. That is to say, all donations to St. John's that are put in the collection plate or that come to us through pledges from our annual financial stewardship drive, are tithed to the diocese. (We also give 5% to the Northwest Mission Region, which supports mission and parish work in our region.) But we also receive, fairly consistently, extra income of perhaps \$10,000 to \$15,000 per year. This extra income comes primarily from special gifts, bequests, and investment income. At my request, vestry voted unanimously to begin pledging 10% to the diocese on all our income, whether plate or pledge or from some other sources. (Note that this does not apply to money given to St. John's for specific outreach purposes; money given to St. John's for Haiti, for example, goes entirely to Haiti.)

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This amount of money will not turn around the financial picture at the diocese, but it does send a strong statement that St. John's is one church that will go beyond what is expected to demonstrate and to live into its support for the larger church.

There may be some who would question this decision, some who might not fully appreciate the difference between an *Episcopal* Church, rooted in the life of the diocese, and a more *Congregational* church, based more in its own concerns. There is not room here to fully spell out and defend the wider church commitments of our Episcopal heritage, but I will at least gesture in this direction.

For we are not rugged, go-it-alone, individualist Christians. We belong to a diocese, to a national church, to an international communion, and to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Each of these levels brings both commitments and opportunities. Each deepens our understanding of church. To look just at our core values, our ability to *Care for Others* is dramatically increased by our connection to and support of, to name just two examples, the Colorado Haiti Project and Episcopal Relief and Development. We are better able to *Worship with Quality* by virtue of standing in the tradition of the apostles, by having inherited so much of our service from this tradition. And we are stronger in our *Inquiry into Truth and Meaning* for being in our Anglican tradition, with all its resources and values. We can *Celebrate all of Life* more deeply when we do so in the context of the holidays and shared values or the wider church. And, finally, we can *Share the Joy of this Life with Others* through the missionary work of the national church as well as the church expansion done at the diocesan level.

And, theologically, when we participate and rejoice in the wider church, we live into Christ's prayer that all who follow him might be one with him and the father. We are connected as branches to the one Vine. We participate as members of the one Body.

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All of this means that our Christian life and witness at St. John's is deeper, richer, and broader than it could possibly be, were we to see ourselves as Congregational. And whatever enriches our Christian life is well worth our continued support.

Grace and Peace to you all.

Fr. Spencer+

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

### *Windows on the world*

At long last the new windows and frames have been installed at Cranmer Chapel. They will be more convenient to open and close and also be far more energy efficient than the old ones. Those windows which do not open were not replaced. The workers were unable to put them in before this month because of all the snow blocking access to the cabin windows.

### *A host of guests*

The number of non-profit groups of various kinds who use St. John's for meetings and other activities has grown by one. A large quilting group now meets in our parish hall (and very much appreciate the improved lighting!) on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday evening of each month. They join the Grand Chorale, Cellobration, Mountain Family Center, Heart of the Mountain Hospice, Habitat for Humanity, two different counseling groups, and a Parkinson support group as regular users of our facilities. And come July we will have a Bike and Build team use the church for an overnight stay, as they cross the country to raise money for affordable housing.

### *Looking ahead*

At the first vestry meeting of the year Canon Lou Blanchard from the bishop's office met with vestry and other interested members to discuss the procedures and the options for moving into our transition to a new rector. She handed out a number of materials outlining the process. If you have any questions about the way forward, please address Senior Warden Brad Orr or any other member of vestry (Amy Zacek-Smith, Kathe Morck, Beth Collins, Tom Papatkakis, or Gary Piper).

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## Chapel notes

Fr. Spencer had a welcome surprise at a recent Saturday evening Cranmer Chapel Eucharist. We were visited by a couple named Garrett who were visiting the chapel because they and their two young children had actually lived in the cabin for two years just before its owners, Vic and Mary Jane Vestman, donated the building to the church. The Garretts had a wonderful time revisiting their old home, and they were delighted that not only was it still standing but was actually being used and was such a service to the community.

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

Sermon preached Sunday, May 8, the Third Sunday of Easter

Happy Easter! Or perhaps Happy Eastertide! I greet you this way in order to remind us all that Easter is not a day, but rather a season. We are, liturgically, in a continuing season of celebration. Easter is a season, just as Lent is a season. In fact, these two seasons are separated at a hinge, if you will—that hinge being Good Friday and the Day of Resurrection. Lent is the season during which we prepare for Good Friday/Resurrection and Eastertide is the season during which we contemplate our response to the Good Friday/Resurrection.

How do we respond to Easter? Yes, of course we respond with joy. But what after that? What do we do? In the biggest picture—the broadest view—we respond as the disciples did after Pentecost. We create a church. The Christian church was born at Pentecost in response to the resurrection event, and we participate in that by building or, if you will, by continuing to build—to extend, to strengthen—this church. Simply by joining St. John’s and by contributing time, talent, and treasure to it, we continue the story begun at Pentecost, the church building story we hear in the readings from Acts throughout Easter.

But what about the smaller picture? How do you and how do I respond to Easter? The Gospels present us with several vignettes dramatizing ways of responding. Last week we heard the Doubting Thomas story as one response. It was about Thomas getting past his first response, his doubt, his refusal to accept the resurrection story. He said that he would never believe unless he were presented with absolute proof. [Actually, I don’t believe Thomas. I think he would have come to belief even without that proof. At one time in my life—for much of it actually, I would have said that I would not believe in Jesus without scientific evidence or proof. But I did come to that belief and without that kind of proof. Doubting Thomas; doubting Spencer. He received what he needed to come to belief, and so did I. It wasn’t the confrontation with the physical Jesus; it was the

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confrontation with other experiences that—to make a long story short—led me to belief as the best way to make sense of those experiences. But most of us now, probably, do not identify with Thomas’ skepticism. We are committed to Christ, and we do not feel the need for any tangible “proof.”]

But this morning we meet another doubter, Doubting Cleopas. Cleopas and his companion have heard that Jesus lives, but they doubt. And Cleopas, like Thomas, is confronted with the physical Jesus, but does not believe. He does not believe because he does not recognize Jesus.

What is this about? I do not know why Cleopas couldn’t recognize Jesus on the road, and I do not think it is important to know this. For there is a greater truth here. It is in the breaking of the bread that Cleopas sees Jesus. We do not see Jesus physically at all, but we too know him in the breaking of the bread. But if we cannot identify fully with Thomas’ skepticism, we should readily identify with Cleopas’.

Cleopas saw Jesus but did not recognize him as Jesus. The challenge for us, I suggest, for our Easter response is to recognize Jesus when we are confronted by him. For when we do not recognize Jesus in our experience, we are functional skeptics, even when we say we believe. Doubting Cleopas, indeed. If Cleopas is a doubter, then we are all doubters at times. Doubting Spencer; Doubting . . . . Whoever. When we don’t see Jesus we are doubting skeptics.

This happens to us all the time, doesn’t it? I will answer for me, and I invite all of you to answer for yourselves. Whenever I look out on this congregation and do not recognize us as the Body of Christ, I see Jesus without recognizing him. When I view this sacred body as merely another collection of people, as only a human institution with all the warts, challenges, problems of any human institution—when I slip into viewing this congregation in this way, then I am looking at Jesus and failing to see him. I am with Cleopas in his doubt.

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Whenever I read scripture and do not recognize it as The Word. Whenever I treat it as if it were a human document only, as history, poetry, literature, or entertainment only. When I do this, I am looking at Jesus and failing to recognize him. I am like Cleopas.

And when I participate in the sacrament of the Eucharist and do not recognize it as the presence of Christ among us. Whenever I see it as only a ritual, a beautiful enactment of our faith that makes me feel good—when I do this, I am looking at Jesus and failing to recognize him. Like Cleopas.

And whenever I look on a stranger or any human being in need and do not see Jesus in that person. Whenever I see only that person and my own needs or his/her needs—when I do this I am looking at Jesus and not recognizing him. Like Cleopas.

Scripture comes alive for us when we recognize ourselves in it, and I think we need to understand that we may occasionally be like Thomas in demanding more certainty, of wanting to walk by sight and not by faith. But we are like Cleopas far more often, in our failure to see Jesus present to us.

We sing “The disciples knew the Lord Jesus in the breaking of the bread.” We know Jesus in the same way, but we also know Jesus in our gathering here as church; in the scriptures; and in the face of those in need—and in other ways as well. So our challenge in Eastertide is the same as that facing the first disciples—to recognize Jesus among us, to be alive, to be awake, to know and to feel Jesus living and present in the world to us.

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## Updates from the Church Family

### Taking leave

We said goodbye to Deacon Diane with a special prayer/blessing at the last Sunday in May. We will all miss her during her “sabbatical” to take care of family concerns. Good luck Diane, and we look forward to welcoming you back in the fall. Note: there is no truth to the rumor that Fr. Spencer is seeking a raise in salary, now that he has to read his own Gospel and set his own table every Sunday.

Dear Friends,

I will be taking a leave of absence from diaconal duties at St. John’s as of June 1, 2011, in order to tend to family responsibilities. At this time I intend to return sometime in the fall.

May you know that while I am away I will hold you near in my thoughts and prayers.

Blessings,

Deacon Diane

### Taking a toll

It is not just St. John’s that is seeing its members fall to illness and injury. Two weeks ago our bishop Robert O’Neill suffered a fractured hip in a bicycling accident. Bishop Rob, an avid cyclist, is rehabbing well, though the timing of his return to the office is uncertain.

Meantime, Betty Clark has been suffering from the after effects of a fall during her and Al’s recent visit to Idaho Falls. There are no broken bones, thankfully, and she is beginning to get around more easily. Please keep both Rob and Betty in your prayers.

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On the more positive side, Gene Ackley is now back home and up and around. And Karla Allen continues to gain strength after her accident (see last month's newsletter), and we continue to pray hopefully that her vision will be returning to normal soon.

### *The Eyes have it:*

George Edwards has gotten through the second of two cataract operations. Both went very well, and George is well pleased with the results. Fr. Spencer is still experiencing some problems with his cataracts, mostly with an exaggerated sensitivity to light.

### *The family that rafts together . . .*

Bill, Kathe, Makenna, and Neils Morck have just returned from the vacation of a lifetime—three weeks rafting down the Colorado River and through the Grand Canyon. What a great trip that must have been!

### *When it rains . . .*

It would certainly be nice to be able to get through a week without news of yet another illness, injury, or surgery, but we have just received word that Terry McFee has undergone surgery to repair a torn meniscus in her knee. The operation was a success, but do keep Terry in your prayers for rapid and efficient healing.

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From Open the Door A Journey to the True Self, Joyce Rupp

Prayer

Treasure of My Heart,  
you have placed within me  
what I need to be a person of great love.  
I have the ability to close any doors  
that keep me from finding this inner treasure.  
Help me step inside my heart each day  
and to let go of what keeps me from you.  
I open the door of my heart to you.  
I open the door.

Submitted by Kaye Piper

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## June 2011

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

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9:30 AM "MASS ON THE GRASS"				6:45 PM BIBLE STUDY		

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