

E-Portion – February 2008

Ash Wednesday

Holy Eucharist with Imposition of Ashes

Wednesday, February 6th
7:00 a.m., 4:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

From the Rector

I began the first full week of the New Year performing my civic duty by arriving at the Worcester County Courthouse on Monday, January 7 at 7:45 a.m. for jury duty. I was, admittedly, a little grumpy about this, especially since Monday is my “Saturday” —a day off that I treasure and eagerly anticipate. But I had already postponed once before. So I found myself in the Jury Pool Room, surrounded by a sea of humanity (and with no diving board or cue stick in sight).

Slowly, however, my attitude began to change. Each and every officer of the court who spoke with us began by acknowledging the inconvenience to all of us. But even as they sympathized with our plight, they thanked us for performing this important obligation which assures the right of a trial by one’s peers, a plank that one could argue is absolutely essential to the rule of law. Moreover, I began to realize that I needed to practice what I so often preach to others: “live in the moment,” “be where you are,” “consider the lilies of the field.” We were stuck inside, and even though a January thaw had come early to New England, there were no literal lilies to consider. I began to realize, however, that since I wasn’t going anywhere it didn’t make sense to try to be somewhere other than where I was: it was *this* moment I needed to tend to. And perhaps on this day after the Feast of the Epiphany it was not even a stretch to say that God’s presence might be made known in this time and place, if I only had eyes to see and ears to hear.

When I was a high school senior I wrote my career paper on the law. After graduation, I went off to college thinking that the road that lay before me was to become a trial lawyer. While my life took some twists and turns from that plan, I have always considered the practice of the law as my “road not taken.” And while I have long since learned from real trial lawyers that it is not as glamorous in real life as it is on television, here I was: in real life, in a real courthouse, in real time. So I figured I should attend to that. It was at just about that very moment that my number got called and I found myself moved to a courtroom and being asked a series of questions that ultimately led me to seat number eight in the jury box for a criminal case.

I have been thinking about this recent experience in connection with Walter Brueggemann’s important work, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*. In this, his *magnus opus*, Brueggemann offers the metaphor of a courtroom and compares Holy Scripture to the evidence that is presented in a court of law. The reader of Holy Scripture, he suggests, is something like a juror trying to piece together a credible narrative, a story that makes sense based on the testimony that is presented. He writes:

The proper setting of testimony is a court of law, in which various and diverse witnesses are called to ‘tell what happened,’ to give their version of what is true. In any trial situation the evidence given by witnesses is a mixed matter of memory, reconstruction, imagination, and wish. The court must then determine, with no other data except testimony, which version is reality. (p. 120)

He goes on to say that while real events happened and real witnesses saw those events, all that a court of law has is the evidence (the testimony) of those witnesses: the court “has no access to the ‘actual event’ besides the testimony.” (p. 121)

Brueggemann’s metaphor is enormously helpful because it allows us to hear each of the various Old Testament witnesses in her or his own voice. This is maddening to the philosophers and systematic theologians who prefer one linear narrative. It can be maddening for ordinary people as well, especially those of us who have been so strongly influenced by Enlightenment ways of “knowing.” We expect to discover a straight-line narrative of historically verifiable truths, and when we realize that the Bible is not captive to our lack of imagination, it is tempting either to dismiss the whole or

to try to smooth out the rough edges. But if Brueggemann's metaphor is an apt one (and I think it is) then it suggests that our work as interpreters of Scripture is to sift through the varied "transcripts" that the tradition has passed along to us in order to get at the truth.

Brueggemann talks about a core testimony of Israel, but he also considers what he calls "Israel's counter-testimony." Israel is not afraid to hear the cross-examination of Job, for example, or of Qoheleth. Brueggemann also notes that the Bible points beyond itself. In claiming that we humans are created in the image of God, for example, we are invited to explore our own lives for evidence as well. When the writer of Proverbs says, "consider the ant," we are pointed to the natural world—to creation itself—as another resource to consider. These witnesses are also given an opportunity to offer testimony that must be heard and considered in the quest for the truth.

When we move from the Old Testament to the New to consider the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, and then especially his death and resurrection, the metaphor continues to be a helpful one. In fact it is quite freeing to consider Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as four *witnesses*, and perhaps herein lies a way beyond the various quests for the historical Jesus that often lead us no where. (Robin Griffith-Jones' thoughtful book on the gospels, *The Four Witnesses: The Rebel, the Rabbi, the Chronicler and the Mystic*, makes this metaphor explicit.) When the undergraduates I teach first begin to notice that the four gospel accounts simply do not agree on all of the essentials, it can initially lead to a crisis of sorts. But as they begin to discover this as a gift rather than a shortcoming, all kinds of light bulbs begin to go on. They begin to realize that the four witnesses tell the story differently because they *see* things from different perspectives. While they very well may bear witness to "what happened" (or more accurately they bear witness to the reality about which the eyewitnesses told them), as twenty-first century Christians we simply do not have access to those historical events. We cannot go back to Jesus entering into Jerusalem amid cries of "hosanna" or to the upper room where he breaks the bread and washes feet, or to the place of the skull, or to the empty tomb.

Some on the far left and the far right disparage this truth: if we cannot ascertain what really *happened* then how are we to believe? What are we to believe? But what we do have are the words of these four credible witnesses, who received their testimony from those who saw the events unfold. Someone told them, and they are now telling us.

When the judge gave his final instructions to the jury on which I served, he told us that it was our work to determine the facts in this case and then to weigh the evidence carefully. It was our job to decide how much importance to give to the testimony of each witness based on our own common sense and life experience. Here, too is sage counsel for anyone who looking to read Holy Scripture within the community of faith. We trust the witnesses, but we test their accounts not by negating our own experience and common sense but by *drawing* upon them. We are part of a community that gathers together to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest this Word of God, and by the grace of God what we encounter in that deliberative process are no longer words on a page but the Word-made-flesh: Jesus of Nazareth.

While the journey of faith may well begin in a jury box, it doesn't end there. We try to make sense of the testimony we have been given, filtering it through our own life experience. There will always be questions, and never absolute certainty. It helps, though, to have a group of a dozen or so people with whom we can sit and eat as we discuss the evidence. But the journey doesn't end there. We are then sent into the world to ourselves become witnesses who offer further testimony to what we have seen and heard. It is in this fashion, I think, that the good news continues to unfold.

Peace,
Rich

Annual Meeting ~ Leadership Appointments

On Sunday, January 20th, the Annual Meeting of St. Francis Episcopal Church was held. We would like say welcome to Laura Caswell as our new Junior Warden and to Bryan Diehl, PJ Mann and Dianne Thibeault as our new vestry members.

We would also like to say thank you to those who have completed their vestry terms this past year. To Meaghan Dunn, Kathy Halloran and Craig Stanovich, to Robin Carlo, who has retired from the office of Senior Warden, and to Jane Howell, who has retired from the office of Assistant Treasurer.

Your 2008 Officers and Vestry are:

Senior Warden: Chris Berglund Junior Warden: Laura Caswell
Clerk: Dawn Rooke
Treasurer: Sandy Kimball

Vestry: Bryan Diehl, MaryAnn DiPinto, Peter Glanville, Chuck Manero, PJ Mann, Patrice Mavricos, Cynthia McIntyre, Doug Rayworth, Dianne Thibeault

Other positions...

Bookkeeper: Virginia Brink
Delegates to Diocesan Convention: Peter Caswell, Dawn Rooke and David Simmons
Memorial Garden Committee: JoAnne Crystoff, Kathleen O'Connor, Jenn Stanovich

Committee Chairpersons.....

Finance Committee: David Simmons
Mission/Outreach: Jim Bourque
Newcomers: Kathy Diehl and Linda Letourneau
Personnel: Patrice Mavricos and Mary Jane Anderson
Property: Bryan Diehl
Stewardship: Laura Caswell

Lenten Schedule

The Parables of Jesus

Tuesdays at 7:00 p.m., with the Rector

February 12 ~ The Vineyard Owner and His Workers: Matthew 20:1-16
February 19 ~ The Talents: Matthew 25:14-30
February 26 ~ The Mustard Seed: Mark 4:30-32
March 4 ~ The Great Banquet: Luke 14:15-24
March 11 ~ The Compassionate Samaritan: Luke 10:25-37

Lenten Soup Suppers

Wednesday, February 13, 20, 27 &
March 5, 12

6:00 p. m. – Soup Supper

Please see the sign up sheet in the narthex. If you would be willing to provide soup for one of the evenings please see the sign up sheet for that as well.

Holy Eucharist

Every Wednesday in Lent at 7:00 p.m.

Fridays in Lent

8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

The Way of the Cross (Stations)

The church will be open for personal prayers each Friday in Lent. Stop in at the church and, using a prayer booklet, pray the *Way of the Cross*.

Lenten Quiet Day

Saturday, March 8th

9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

at St. Clare House

Meditations will be led by the Rector followed by lunch. Please sign up sheet in the narthex.

Youth Confirmation Class

February Confirmation classes are Sunday, February 3rd and Sunday, February 24th at 11:30 a.m. in the Library.

Also, please plan to attend one of the Ash Wednesday services on February 6th with your mentor.

Adult Catechumen Class begins on Wednesday, February 6th at 7:30 p.m. in the narthex.

The schedule will be as follows:

Wednesday, February 6

7:30 p.m. **Ash Wednesday Service** (in the church)

Topic: **Prayer and Worship in the Episcopal Church**

Please note that because the Ash Wed Service begins later and goes later this session will be somewhat abbreviated.

Wednesday, February 20

7:00 p.m. Holy Eucharist (in the church)

7:30 p.m. Topic: **Sacramental Theology: Baptism & Eucharist**

Wednesday, February 27

7:00 p.m. Holy Eucharist (in the church)

7:30 p.m. Topic: **Opening the Bible**

Wednesday, March 5

7:00 p.m. Holy Eucharist (in the church)

7:30 p.m. Topic: **Who's In Charge? Vestries, Priest and Bishops- A Discussion About Authority and Polity in The Episcopal Church**

Eucharist Instruction

Purpose: Recognizing that at Baptism, parents promise to “see that the child you present is brought up in the Christian faith and life,” (BCP p. 302) we want to provide resources and opportunities which support parents as they teach their children about the gift and mystery of Holy Communion and its connections with our daily lives.

- ✦ This program will begin on March 9th with an informational meeting for children and parents after the 10:00AM service. Children should bring their Bibles.
- ✦ The curriculum, “Visible Signs ~ Spiritual Grace” will be used. This is primarily a home program designed for children ages 8-10. The program is appropriate for children who have not yet received communion as well as for those who have received but who are ready for more formal instruction.
- ✦ Three additional meetings will be held. The purpose and proposed dates of these meetings will be as follows:
 - Sunday, April 6th: Children will meet with Susan Bastardo during regularly scheduled Church School time to review lessons on Baptism and begin the lessons on the Eucharist.
 - Saturday AM, April 26th: Parents will meet with Rev. Jill to talk about the Eucharist for children, and children will meet with Susan to review lessons on “The Word of God” and introduce lessons on “The Holy Communion.”
 - Saturday May 17th: Children and their parents will meet with Rev. Jill to learn more about receiving Christ in the Eucharist and to bake altar bread. This lesson includes an opportunity to see the altar area up close and learn the name, function and purpose of many sacred items.
- ✦ The children will be honored during the Sunday, 10:00 AM service on May 18th and will receive Holy Communion with their families.

A sign-up sheet will be available in the Narthex during the month of February.

Here's What's Happening in Church School!

Epiphany: January 6 – February 3 – We focused on the disciples and discipleship. We sang songs to help remember the names of the 12 Apostles and did many “fisherman” crafts. Students in 3rd to 6th grade did Bible studies that helped them to think about the things they might leave behind to follow Jesus or a gift (talent, ability) that they might use to help others learn about Jesus.

Lent: February 10 – March 9: During the season of Lent, we will be learning about Nicodemus and what it means to be “born from above.” We will learn that it is okay to ask questions of God and bring your concerns to God. The younger children will be reading a beautiful story called, “You Are Special” by Max Lucado. All classes will use various activities such as baking and puppet shows to learn about Nicodemus’ nighttime visit with Jesus. (“Nic at Nite!”). We will focus on learning John 3:16 and understanding that “God so loved the world.”

SOLES FOR SOULS—Rite 13 Service Project

The Rite 13 group is a Bible group for kids in 6th and 7th grade. For our Lenten Service project we would like to collect old shoes to help an organization called Soles for Souls. Soles for Souls collects old shoes and gives them to people who don't have shoes. Boots, Flats, Soccer cleats, and sneakers will all do. The shoes can be used or new but should be in an ok shape. We are also collecting money donations for mailing all the shoes. There is a box in Fellowship Hall for your shoes. We will be collecting shoes from Ash Wednesday through Easter. Thanks for your help!

Youth Group It's a new year and new stuff is happening with Youth Ministry.

First, please check out: <http://www.holdenma.com/stfrancis/youth.htm>. We now have the schedule, along with any other info you might need for youth group. I prefer to keep in touch via email, so if you're not receiving my emails, please email me at lchurchill@mac.com so you'll be on the list.

February will be a very busy month for us, so check out the website and see why Feb. 3, 5, and 22-23 should be on your calendar!

Peace,
Lori

Souper Bowl of Caring

Our teens will be ready to greet you with soup pots as you leave the service on February 3rd. This national organization encourages youth groups to collect \$1 (or more) from parishioners as they leave services during the weekend of Super Bowl. All collections are donated locally – and the Souper Bowl organization tallies results of donations nationwide. You can check them out at www.souperbowl.org. This is a long standing tradition for the Youth Group and we thank you in advance for your support.

Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper & Eucharist

The Youth Group will provide a Pancake Supper beginning at 5:30 – 7:00 p.m. followed by Eucharist at 7:00 p.m. Adults \$6, children \$4 – Proceeds will be donated to charity. Please see the sign up sheet in the narthex.

30 Hour Famine and Youth Led Services

The Youth Groups will be participating in a nationwide 30 hour famine on February 22/23, sponsored by World Vision. They will spend the day and overnight at the church, and participate in leading worship at the 3 services that weekend. Please support them by sponsoring a youth. Speak to one of the youth group members or to Lori Churchill.

Mission Matters

As it happens, I met with Rich the morning that I write this; we discussed as we often do, our wonder at the tremendous generosity of this parish. If you did not get a chance to read the annual report, take a moment to do it, and review the number of organizations here and across the world that benefit from your good work. Just this week we sent checks for more than \$1,000 each to Abby's House and the Family Health Clinic from your Christmas collection. Today, we received a thank you

note from Heifer International for your \$5,000 donation from the Living Gift Market; I think 2007 is the sixth year in a row that you have earned an Ark Award.

We are waiting for Fundacion Cristosal to complete its plans for the initial \$12,000 you have contributed to their project in El Salvador; then the funds will begin to be disbursed as they need them. Our support of *Hasta la Cosecha (Until the Harvest)*, a program aimed at developing a sustainable farming community can make a huge difference for families in three El Salvadoran communities. It is so difficult for us *Norte Americanos* to step out of our fast-paced lives and walk along a little way with our brothers and sisters. We have found a way to do that.

No one is suggesting that we hurt our arms by patting ourselves on the back. Still, it is good to stop some times to reflect on what we do together and take some strength from knowing that what we do together can be very good.

Jim Bourque, Mission Team Chair
508-829-9275
jbourque66@verizon.net

EfM OPEN HOUSE-SUNDAY
MARCH 2nd 4-6:30

The Education for Ministry (EfM) class will have openings for four new students in the fall. EfM is a program of theological education-at-a-distance of the School of Theology of the University of the South. Students sign up one year at a time for this four-year program, and it is not necessary to commit to all four years. It covers the basics of a theological education in the Old and New Testaments, church history, liturgy, and theology. The class meets weekly from September to May. The program grants a certificate at the completion of the four years and 18 Continuing Education Units for each year's work.

The St. Francis EfM group will be holding an open house for those who are interested in learning more about the program on Sunday, March 2nd from 4-6:30. If you'd like to attend, or would like more information about the program, contact Robin Carlo at rcarlo5@mac.com or 508-829-0363.

Save the date:

Saturday, March 29th at 5:00 p.m.
for our Parish Celebration of Fr. Rich's 10 years with us!

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism
will be celebrated at the Easter Vigil,
Saturday, March 22,
and, if necessary, on Sunday, March 30 as well.

Please speak to Rich or call the church office if you are interested in Baptism.