

The Good News

St. Mary's Church, Newton Lower Falls, MA 02462

617-527-4769 Email: office@st-marys-episcopal.org

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A Fall Reunion

As we reunite to begin the fall season of worship, hopefully energized by a summer respite, it is fitting to reflect on our Sunday Biblical readings, which depict God in ways that make many people uncomfortable. The idea of a God who needs to be corrected and reprimanded for being too harsh seems absurd. In our reading from Genesis, we have Moses preaching a sermon to God about being less militant and judgmental and more accepting and gentle. Then we are told, "God changed his mind about the disaster that he had planned to bring on his people" and decided to be more accommodating. By the time we have Luke's gospel, it would seem that Moses' sermon still worked and we move from a God who seeks vengeance to one who will seek us out no matter how far we have strayed. The analogy Jesus makes of the shepherd seeking the lost sheep depicts a God who will go to any end in showing charity and kindness.

The 15th chapter of Luke contains three memorable parables which illustrate the joy of God in recovering what has been lost: the missing lamb, the misplaced coin and the prodigal son.

These stories of happiness are metaphors for a God who takes delight in finding us. The shepherd brings the lamb back on his shoulders inviting friends and neighbors to a celebration. The woman wants to throw a party for her friends and neighbors after recovering a missing coin. The grateful father hosts a banquet and festivities celebrating the return of the son who was lost.

These accounts express an almost embarrassing elation, the over-the-top exhilaration God has for those who were missing and have now returned home. The idea that God loves each and every one of us individually is a lot to handle. The idea of a God who is distant can be more comfortable than one who is deeply concerned over our whereabouts. It is enough that there is a God—but to have a God who cherishes each one of us, that is too much!

The only analogy I could come up with is the exuberant display our pets have for us when we return home. After being away for even a short time, I am met at the door by the unrestrained and unruly enthusiasm of our dogs. They dance in circles, wag their tails and leap with joy. This display of emotion suggests an unfathomable devotion that sometimes I find embarrassing. I am reminded of the bumper-sticker prayer: "Lord make me as good a person as my dog thinks I am."

These parables illustrate a sense of undeserved attention. And this is what humility is:

<p>Humility is not about personal unworthiness in the face of self, which leads to narcissism. Humility is about unworthiness in the face of a God who wants and desires us, and by so doing, leads us to adoration and worship.</p>

In these accounts, Jesus is met by religious leaders who grumble, "Why would this fellow welcome sinners and eat with them?" Why should God care for the unworthy?

These parables illustrate many points; one being that if you are stuck on yourself you are going to have a hard time pulling away to find God. According to Luke's gospel, we are prized by a God who will go to any extent to seek us out in spite of everything.

The *Bible* is filled by accounts of a God who wants us, no matter what. The good news of these parables is that everyone is deemed important, no matter how far they have strayed or how insignificant they feel.

And this lavish attention on God's part was not only hard for the scribes and Pharisees to digest. Religious types today still have a hard time believing God welcomes all who have strayed with open arms. It is interesting to note that the Greek word *amartia* translates into the English word sin. It is the same word used in archery for missing the mark, being off target, falling short of the goal, or being out of bounds. The *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* says the Biblical notion of sin is highly individualized. We experience a personal alienation from God. It's about missing the point and missing God. In some of the gospel accounts, Jesus' attitude towards sinners is not what people have come to expect. A sinner is not one who is ritually impure and undeserving, a leper or tax collector. Jesus welcomes those who have strayed and wandered like a shepherd who cares for his sheep.

Jesus does not share an attitude towards sin that is legalistic and moralistic. He cautions against finger pointing and overturns the tables of those who sell sacrificial offerings for atonement. He is against the taboo vocabulary of exclusion that views people as impure and worthless. For him there are no outcasts. So many of our prayers and collects reflect this viewpoint of a God who welcomes us back—like a son or daughter coming home from college.

We are unable to please God without being with God. To *atone* means to be *at one*. We are here because we have been welcomed at the table of fellowship—received, as God's own—to rejoice and celebrate together at the beginning of the fall season, this reunion in love and praise.

—Peter Chase

The "Ask-It" Basket:

Q: Why do we have a blessing of the animals each fall?

A: When we bless something we are giving thanks for the gift. When we say grace before a meal we are giving thanks for what we are about to consume. When we say a blessing we are not imbuing something with a mystical power, but rather we are recognizing in thanksgiving that which has blessed our lives. Many of us have been blessed by the companionship of our pets. Our cats and dogs have given us something special to celebrate, and **on Sunday, October 7, we will have an opportunity to recognize these gifts after church with Bishop Gayle Harris.** This annual event is held in many churches on the Sunday closest to October 4th, the day St. Francis of Assisi is remembered for his appreciation for all of God's creations. **So bring your friends, all creatures great and small, to church at 11:30 a.m. for this festive occasion and share with us the joy they have given you.** On that day we will rejoice in the words of Francis:

Most High, omnipotent, good Lord,
To thee be ceaseless praise outpoured,
And blessing without measure,
Let creatures all give thanks to thee,
And serve in great humility.

Acts of Faith and Unsung Heroes

Kudos to our New Website Designer

We are extremely grateful to Paul Pyzowski who single-handedly redesigned and updated the church's website. Not only did he save the church a substantial amount of money, he produced a warm and engaging site that should create a great and lasting first impression for St. Mary's. Please visit the **website at: www.st-marys-episcopal.org.**

“Crayons for Kids”

Abbi Golledge is a remarkable young lady. Last year when her father was named country director of the Peace Corps in Ghana, she might have opted to stay and complete her high school years in the states. Instead, Abbi embraced change and the opportunity of living in West Africa.

There is a long tradition of public service in the Golledge family. Abbi’s father Bob has had a distinguished career focused on environmental issues and her grandfather served as pastor of the Old North Church. As grandmother Gail Jessup proudly points out, Abbi is following in her father’s footsteps. Upon learning that Ghana school children do not have many of the materials that we take for granted—even crayons, pencils, and paper—she initiated a program to collect donations in the U.S., which can be mailed through the Peace Corps postal system. As Abbi wrote at the inception of the program last year, “What better way is there to get to know the children of my new home than collecting crayons and other materials and delivering them to their schools?” **Please support this important cause and place your donations in the designated box in the parish hall.** Gail is about to make her first visit to Ghana and would love to carry your donations with her.

“Been There; Done That”

It has become a cliché. At one time or another, most of us have uttered the phrase, “Been there; done that,” perhaps with an air of superiority. In doing so, we have rejected an idea or dismissed a proposed action. But what if we quickly followed our statement with one of the following observations: “and I am glad I did;” “as have generations before me;” or “and I will continue to do so.” The phrase takes on new meaning and relevance.

Let’s apply the declaration, “I’ve been there, done that and I’m glad I did,” to service as an acolyte at St. Mary’s. When I reflect on my years as an acolyte, I am reminded of the unique experience I gained, the gratification for which lasts today. My family of origin was a troubled one and we moved frequently. One constant in my life was the Episcopal Church. The faces and some of the rituals changed, but I now realize that the church was a safe place, a sanctuary, in an otherwise difficult life. And through my involvement as an acolyte, I was able to establish my own identity and a personal relationship with the church and a God of my understanding.

Acolyte service provides a wonderful opportunity to practice one’s faith at a time in your life when you are growing in so many other ways. Our goal is to make your experience as rich, meaningful and rewarding as possible, so you shall come to know St. Mary’s as the welcoming, safe place that it is. Beginning with students in grade 2, we invite you to consider serving as an acolyte.

“I’ve been there, done that, as have generations before me.” The ministry of acolytes predates the formation of the Anglican Church in 1531, when Henry VIII split the English Church from the Church of Rome. The term acolyte comes from the Greek word *akoluthos*, which means “attendant” or “follower;” the original purpose of acolytes was to prepare young men for the priesthood. Today’s acolytes are stepping into roles heaped with tradition. But the success of acolyte programs is dependent on their continuing relevance. For example, programs were expanded to include girls and young women, as females were welcomed into the priesthood. *Our goal is to make the program at St. Mary’s as relevant to your daily life as possible.*

The declaration, “Been there, done that, and will continue to do so,” befits our senior-level acolytes and all parents, to whom we are very indebted. Seniors are mentors to our younger acolytes. Parents schedule and chauffeur their acolyte children. *Without your ongoing support, our program cannot excel. We want to tailor our program to minimize disruption to your lives. Please share your suggestions.* This year we have a wonderful team of new and returning acolytes. And I am thrilled to welcome Elisabeth Rippey as my partner. Let’s build the best program ever! Thank you.

—Tim Green

Ex Gratia

Editor: Diane (Mrs. Deval) Patrick was the keynote speaker at a recent fundraising dinner for Epiphany School. The following is excerpted from her speech:

I received an email the other day from a friend of mine, forwarding an email from Roger Harris, head of the Boston Renaissance School, an urban charter school in Boston that made me think of Epiphany. I don't know if this is Dr. Harris's story, or someone else's, but it is worth repeating.

Dr. Harris talks about people at a dinner party, sitting around the table discussing life. One of the guests made some reference to teaching, suggesting that it was not much of a profession. He repeated that horrid saying: "Those who can, do; those who can't, teach." And then, to prove his point, he turned to Bonnie, one of the dinner guests, and said: "Bonnie, you're a teacher. Be honest. What do you make?"

Bonnie, without skipping a beat, said: "Do you really want to know what I make?"

- I make a student who worked hard for his C+ feel like he was just awarded a Congressional Medal of Honor.*
- I make kids sit through 40 minutes of class time, when they usually can't sit for five minutes without an IPOD, or game cube.*

You want to know what I make?

- I make kids wonder.*
- I make kids question.*
- I make them criticize.*
- I make them apologize, and mean it.*
- I make them have respect and take responsibility for their actions.*
- I teach them to write and then I make them write.*
- I make them read, read, and read some more.*
- I make them show all their work in math.*
- I make my classroom a place where all students feel safe.*
- I make my students understand that, if they use the gifts they were given, work hard, and follow their hearts, they can succeed in life."*

Bonnie then paused one last time, and said: "When people try to judge me by what I make I can hold my head up high because—you want to know what I make? I make a difference. Now, tell me, what do you make?"

Upcoming Events

Church Women United board meeting, Friday, October 5 at 10:00 a.m.; Spiritual Life Day, Friday, October 26 at 10:00 a.m.

CWU is a racially, culturally and theologically inclusive Christian women's movement, celebrating unity in diversity and working for world peace and justice. Our group sponsors three community-wide celebrations each year. In addition to Spiritual Life Day which St. Mary's is hosting, CWU will be conducting the World Day of Prayer on February 22 at Christ United Methodist Church and May Friendship Day on May 15 at St. John the Evangelist Church. We intend that CWU be more inclusive, and we welcome new members, new denominations and new ideas. Please join us for our first board meeting October 5th at St. Mary's. Any questions please call, Elisabeth Comer at 781-772-2220

**Please note our new email addresses: St. Mary's: office@st-marvs-episcopal.org
Peter Chase: peter@st-marvs-episcopal.org**