

# *The Good News*

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

*617-527-4769 Email: [office@st-marys-episcopal.org](mailto:office@st-marys-episcopal.org)*

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## *What About Stewardship in These Difficult Times?*

With the news of the stock and housing markets it feels on some days like the fall of Rome. Several people asked me at coffee hour, "How are you going to do stewardship with all this going on?" Always the intrepid marketer, I blathered about fixed incomes versus salaries and long term plans to give that don't tend to shift. But, I must say I was wondering, how does this impact stewardship this year?

This led me to thinking about how we as individuals are all doing. Don't you wonder? There is the fear of bad things to come, and then, of course, there are actual negative impacts that may be affecting some or all of us right this moment. It could be a job loss or having to leave retirement and go back into the workforce or seeing a college fund cut in half.

Upon reflection I would have answered those who ask "What about stewardship?" differently. I recommend that those of us who are lucky enough to be in fear but not yet suffering should remember that there are those this year who really won't be able to contribute as much. The fortunate will need to step up and increase, even if a small amount, as an expression of our compassion for those who really can't. These are the times when one's church is often the most important, and by contributing, you may be guaranteeing a life line for someone who really is in a difficult bind. So, remember your neighbors in the pews—think left, right, front, back. Some or many of them may have true hardship in the coming year(s). Recall your blessings and help provide generously for this wonderful community that sustains so many of us through friendships, worship and pastoral care.

—Julia de Peyster

## *A Meditation on The Holy Eucharist*

*Editor: The following article is adapted from a sermon written by The Reverend Letitia Williams Turtle, late wife of John Turtle.*

In the Holy Eucharist we commemorate a meal that took place more than 2000 years ago. It took place in an upper room of someone's home in Jerusalem. There were 13 people present. Only one of them had any public reputation, though he was not widely known and he was put to death the day after the meal as a "disturber of the peace." The other people present at that meal were young men mostly laborers—not well known. It was more of a fellowship meal with good friends consisting of the bare essentials of life, bread and wine.

We might well ask ourselves why it is that we Christians still participate together, universally, in the commemoration of that simple meal? We are told that during this meal Jesus said to his disciples to "Do this in remembrance of me." Even so, what is it that gave that plain, simple meal which is now celebrated all over the world by people from all walks of life, its appeal, its lasting quality?

First of all, the meal was very much like Jesus. It was simple, not complex. It went right to the point. Secondly, like him, it was concrete, not abstract. And, thirdly, it was plain. Jesus spoke to plain people in plain language. That plain, simple meal epitomized in brief, dramatic, direct language and action everything that he had said and done and been. The people knew that Jesus did not want to forget him. As wonderful as the human memory can be, it fades as the years go by. These people wanted something to remember him by. They found it in this simple meal.

Like Jesus, the meal was entirely surrounded by God. When it began Jesus gave thanks to God for the

The meal reminded these people of Jesus because it had to do with bread and breakage. It had to do with bread because bread is the staff of life, the very stuff of physical existence. Jesus never overlooked these necessities. But, the bread he gave his disciples was broken bread. It was neither the promise of a perfect body, nor the ideal of the Greek body without flaw or blemish. It was a body broken, scarred, marred and tortured—through which the glory of God shone forth. Bread and breakage, life and death—the things that concerned Jesus all his life.

It is interesting that in those first few years the first Christians turned to this meal. They did not remember Jesus by the last words he spoke but by the last supper he ate. That last supper condenses the meaning of life and death into comprehensible terms. Instead of discourse, Jesus gave us a simple act, one in which we can take part. And, as we take part in it again and again, we become more aware of how it condenses the meaning of life, and how it answers some of our questions.

For instance, at some time or other, many of us have asked or felt “Does anyone really care about me?” My friends care a lot for me, and my family shows me love and affection; but when you get right down to it, is there anyone who really cares whether I live or die, am happy or unhappy, make the most of my life or a mess of it? And then as we take part in this commemorative meal, we hear these words, “This is my body which is given for you.” And we take the bread in our hands, and we feel it and we remember what happened 2000 years ago. And then we know that somebody cares that much.

Many of us ask if our sins can ever really be forgiven and forgotten. No matter how sophisticated we are, or how conditioned we may be to the idea of sin as part of human nature, we don’t like our sins. We are not proud of them and we may well ask, “These mistakes that I see so clearly now, all these wrongs, these sins that seem so large and feel so overwhelming, can anything be done to offset them in the balance of life?” And then his words at his last meal come to us, “This is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.” We are assured that our sins are forgiven. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, outweighs the balance of all our sins.

Sometimes we wonder what we have in common with our neighbor. We live in an extremely social world. We are often in very close contact with people we may not particularly like, people who don’t share our point of view, political or religious. We may ask “What have I in common with my neighbor?” As we come together for the Eucharist, we find our commonality in our empty hands, the needs that are common to all of us, the empty parts of our lives, our brokenness and sufferings that can only be filled with a life outside ourselves—if there is to be any life there at all. We have that in common with our neighbor as we raise our empty hands to receive the bread.

From time to time many of us ask “Why am I here?” We sometimes feel we don’t count very much. We feel we have very little influence, in fact sometimes we feel pretty useless. We ask “What is my purpose in life?” And in the Eucharist the answer comes to us. “Do this in remembrance of me.” In our own inadequate, imperfect way, we are to follow him, to do what he did as best we can. We are to let God’s glory shine through our breakage, enabling others to pick up the pieces of their lives and live better lives because of us. Every time we participate in the Eucharist we are assured of his presence. We have the promise that Jesus Christ accepts us as we are; he binds up our wounds and sends us back into the world to do the work he has given us to do.

The meaning of life is defined by the Last Supper: the bread and the breakage. He is always with us. Amen

### *Thoughts on Humility*

*Editor: The following article is adapted from a sermon delivered by Peter on November 2, All Saints’ Day.*

Carter Heyward, who taught at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, said that humility is one of the most difficult spiritual qualities to practice and the easiest to imitate. It is easier to act humbly than to be humble. She said, “Genuine humility is a gift from God which has nothing to do with

spirit of connectedness with others, which enables us to see ourselves as God sees us; sisters and brothers each deeply valued and worthy of respect.”

Humility isn't about putting yourself down in order to get ahead. When that is the case, then the old saying is true: “Humility is the worst form of conceit.” It is of little wonder why so many today are fed up with political and religious leaders who profess humility while maintaining an attitude of arrogance.

In the All Saints' Day Gospel lesson, Jesus has little patience with those practicing a false sense of humility. You know the root of the word humility in Latin means “low” and “from the earth.” It is the same derivative from which we get the word for soil, “humus,” and it is the root of the word “human.”

Most don't want to be reminded that we are of “earth to earth, ashes to ashes, and dust to dust” and that we creep closely on the forest floor. Most do not want to be reminded from “whence we cometh and wither we goeth.” The concept that we are creatures and we have a maker sounds like a novel idea today.

Perhaps that is one reason why it can be difficult to visit a nursing home, or spend time with the sick and infirmed. Those close to their maker can be uncomfortable reminders of our own frailty and mortality. It can be easy to leave those places of earthly odors and go on our merry way. The bedridden remind us that a lot can be taken for granted in life, and they bring us down to earth. They can also humble us with their dignity and acceptance, for those who are close to God can teach us a great lesson.

Recently I visited a nursing home in Brighton where Gwen Buehrens introduced me to a lady from San Donata in Italy. Now in her 90s, she has faced a series of setbacks and losses. Stripped of the ability to accomplish many of the things she once did, she nonetheless possessed a nobility of purpose. She knew her “own true self” and lived in the immediacy of God's presence.

Her life exemplified that poem quoted last week, of taking a “walk in the autumn landscape as the leaves inside us fall to the ground.” So much in her life has slipped away and now what she is left with is of the greatest importance. She lives with the bare essentials and there is little in her life that can come between herself and her experience of God. Whenever we are laid bare of the things we cling onto, we are freed up to be our own true self.

On the Sunday after All Saints' Day, the alternate gospel lesson was Matthew's account of *The Beatitudes* which says, “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.” Saints are people who teach us something from God. A saint isn't someone who is perfect or someone who has always been good. A saint is a person who shows that “genuine humility is a gift from God.”

In the Bible, “humility” isn't about being full of shame. It isn't about personal abasement, self-abnegation, nor pitiful submission and guilty groveling. Someone who brags, “I'm just the worst person who has ever lived!” is only expressing another form of narcissism. True humility is about emptying oneself of every form of grandeur and conceit, whether it be, “I'm the nicest, meanest, richest, poorest, smartest,” or “I'm just a simple person.”

In the Bible, “humility” is the grace which is given to empty ourselves of all self-deception, freeing us up to acknowledge our Maker and Redeemer. In the New Testament the example is given by God in Christ who humbled himself as one of us, so that we may know heaven. Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 13:29).

Last week I was talking with Ed Franks about visiting the sick and infirmed. Ed Franks used to work with people with AIDS and he said that those who have been “lessened in life can teach us a great lesson.” Diminishment can teach us what true humility implies. In their incapacity they have found

the capacity to be spiritually rich. I thank God for those saints in our congregation, both past and present who have taught me something beautiful about God.

When I think about all the saints in this congregation who are too great to number and who have found rest and refreshment; when I think of those like Henry Bartzak, Don Cullison, Bob Hoffman and Bruce Mossman, who teach me the meaning of humility; when I think of you who give to the church during this season of stewardship and time of hardship; then I am reminded that “Humility is living courageously in a spirit of connectedness with others, which enables us to see ourselves as God sees us; as sisters and brothers each deeply valued and worthy of respect.” Giving requires great humility and the closer we get to the ground of life, the nearer we are to heaven. For that which gives us the greatest respect is the capacity to give.

—Peter Chase

### *Special Music Services for Thanksgiving and Advent*

#### **The West Gallery Group, Sunday, November 23 at 10:00 a.m.**

The West Gallery Quire and Instrumentalists, directed by Bruce Randall, will present music for the harvest season at the 10:00 a.m. Morning Prayer service. West Gallery music is traditional sacred music from English village churches of the 18th and early 19th centuries. As an attempt to introduce church music into rural areas, choirs were formed from the local residents. The village instrumentalists were often recruited as a means of assisting the singers. The mixed ensemble of singers and instrumentalists usually performed from a gallery at the west (rear) end of the church, so the music came to be known as West Gallery music. The style is hearty and rhythmic, sometimes called "Barnyard Baroque." The West Gallery Group practices at St. Mary's monthly on Sunday afternoons. Join us for this special Thanksgiving service!

#### **The Swedish Women's Choir, Sunday, November 30 at 10:00 a.m.**

SWEA will sing Swedish hymns and carols for the First Sunday of Advent. The group, directed by Eva DiLascio, will be joined by members of the St. Mary's Choir for a joint anthem. SWEA will also lead the congregation in singing the traditional *Hosianna* (Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!) as we begin the season of Advent.

#### **Advent Lessons and Carols, Sunday, December 14 at 10:00 a.m.**

During the annual Service of Advent Lessons and Carols, scripture readings from the Old and New Testaments recount the story of salvation from Creation to the Birth of Jesus, interspersed with hymns and carols sung by the congregation and choirs. The Adult and Junior Choirs will sing music of the season, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ.

### *Upcoming Events*

#### **Foods'n Fancies Bazaar, Saturday, November 22, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in the Parish Hall**

This is the only major fundraiser for The Women of St. Mary's to fund its outreach initiatives. Please begin searching your attics and closets for items to donate for sale at this unique event.

#### **Women of St. Mary's Christmas Party, Tuesday, December 9 at 6:00 p.m. in the Parish Hall**

Featuring carols, gift swap and Rosie's Place 2008 Holiday Toy Drive. More information to follow.

#### **Advent Mitten Tree**

In a very short time, the occasional balmy days of Indian summer will soon be just a memory, and we will begin to feel the winds blow and the temperatures plummet. This is an especially cruel and difficult time for the homeless population. As in past years, the generous parishoners of St. Mary's have filled our Advent Mitten Tree with scarves, mittens and gloves for adults and children. Our Advent Tree will appear on Sunday, November 30 and will remain in the parish hallway until after Christmas. All donations will be taken to the Homeless Clinic supported by the Massachusetts General Hospital. Please remember our friends in need.

*Editor: Tim Green*