

# *The Good News*

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## *"God is Good, and We will be Healed"*

*Editor: The following article was adapted from a sermon delivered on October 25 by guest preacher The Reverend John H. Finley IV.*

I serve as the Head of School of Epiphany School, a tuition-free, independent Episcopal middle school for economically-disadvantaged children in Dorchester. I founded the school twelve years ago with The Reverend Jennifer Daly, and St. Mary's has been terrifically supportive of our work. Great things are happening at Epiphany. Students are posting impressive test scores and going on to great high schools. Whole families are moving out of poverty, and St. Mary's helps make it all possible. On behalf of all of us, thank you.

My co-founder, Jennifer Daly, serves as the school's chaplain, and she works hard to make Epiphany's religious services student centered. The fifth graders are the acolytes. The sixth graders write and lead the Prayers of the People. The seventh graders read the Lessons, and the eighth graders preach. The eighth graders make great preachers because they are smart enough to understand the Gospel but still tactless enough to tell the truth.

For example, one young orator gave us a gory description of what our school would look like if we took Jesus literally and cut off our offending hands and plucked out our wayward eyes.

I have heard the most popular boy with the girls preach on the sanctity of marriage, and I will never forget the sermon I heard once on Bartimaeus. Today, we all heard the marvelous story of Bartimaeus, the blind beggar whom the crowd wanted to silence. The crowd is embarrassed by Bartimaeus as he cries out in pain, but despite that, he cries out all the more. Jesus hears him and calls him to him. Then fickle sycophants turn and say, "Courage, Bartimaeus. Go to the rabbi."

I don't think Bartimaeus needed encouragement; he was desperate. You can see his desperation in a neat little detail when he throws off his cloak. Ordinarily a cloak would be precious to a beggar but he throws his down in the urgent rush to Jesus. Jesus asks what he wants, and Bartimaeus asks respectfully, "My teacher, let me see again." In an act of characteristic grace, Jesus says simply, "Go, your faith has made you well." And, Bartimaeus is healed.

The sermon my student preached on this story was a very personal one. She recounted how as a little girl in Cape Verde she had prayed for her uncle when he was sick, but it had not worked, and he had died. She described coming to America. She told us how her father failed to find enough work to support the family, and how though she prayed hard for help, they had still lost their housing. Finally, she recounted how her father would beat her mother. She prayed they would stop fighting, but her mother finally fled taking nothing, not her clothes, not her money, not even her children. She said at that point she decided that God was just a lie that they told little kids to make them be good. At that point, she paused. No one was rustling any papers. I could feel the eyes on me.

“What would Mr. Finley think?” She just said God was a lie. But then, she continued. She said as soon as she was quiet she realized that God had loved her all along. She realized that God did not always give her what she wanted, but praying to God always changed her.

This student of mine is a remarkable young lady. After Epiphany, she went on to a private high school. When she got to college, she was finally able to tell authorities that after her mother had left her father had abused her sexually. To avoid the trial her father fled the country. Though this left her and her two brothers without a parent, it freed them from abuse. Her brothers all graduated from Epiphany and are all in college now too, but though there is a happy ending to this story, it does not diminish her sadness and pain. She still misses her mom and even her dad. It is like that for Job.

“Blameless and upright,” Job suffers horribly and loses his faith, if not in the existence of God, then at least in his trust that God punishes the unjust and rewards the just. Job knows he has done nothing wrong, and yet he loses his property, his children and his health. He responds to it all with despair, self-pity and outrage.

We have been reading Job’s story now for weeks in church, and now at the end we get a happy ending. God comes in and restores everything times two. Who doesn’t like a happy ending, but yet we are not back where we started. Job knew he had done nothing wrong. Like my student who dared to say that God was just a lie, Job dares to tell the truth of his life to his Creator. He laments. He complains. He shouts out his discontent. And then, something happens. Job suddenly encounters God in his own life. In the past, like my student, Job knew God from the instruction of others, from his family, from the wise sages, from his faith community, but now Job speaks to God and knows God firsthand.

**What is it that you would bring to your Creator today? How could you come to know God firsthand? If you are angry, if you are despairing, take that to God in prayer.**

At Epiphany, thirty percent of my students are involved with the Department of Children and Families because they have been abused and neglected. They did nothing to deserve that. While much of what we suffer from is the result of our own foolishness, there is also much we suffer from for which we are not responsible. My students did not deserve what happened to them. Neither does the cancer victim or the hurricane survivor, nor do you.

Tradition has it that David wrote today’s Psalm in the wilderness. Having escaped King Saul, David is now running for his life, but what does he say? He says to us, “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” David, as we know, is hardly a paragon of virtue, but he is held up as an exemplar because of his faith.

Like Abraham or Mary, he knows God is good, that God is with him even in the times of trouble. If you are in any trouble or fear, do not be paralyzed, do not sink down in despair and drown but call out to God. Like David, like Job, like my student, you will taste and see that God is good.

When we pray together the “Our Father,” the one prayer that Jesus taught us, we ask God to save us from temptation. In the more modern version, this is translated better as “save us from the time of trial,” but perhaps it would be even better not to say not “save us from the time of trial,” but “be with us in the time of trial.” We know that trials and tribulations are a fact of life. We know no matter how hard we try hard things will come our way through no fault of our own, but God is still with us. God is not a vending machine—insert prayer get a candy bar—God is with us, and God loves us.

So, let me close by saying that my prayer today is that all of us would have the faith of Bartimaeus and cry out to God. God is good, and we will be healed. Amen.

## *Upcoming Events*

### **Cradles to Crayons - Volunteers Needed on Saturday, November 7**

St. Mary's has volunteered its Parish Hall on Saturday, November 7, 2009, to serve as the final sorting location for all Newton donations made to the Massachusetts Cradles to Crayons organization. An hour of your time to help sort these donated items for distribution to needy children would be a welcome contribution. Come have a good time doing good!

Cradles to Crayons was formed in 2002 specifically for the homeless and needy children of Massachusetts. You may volunteer your time to help sort donations and/or bring your own new or gently used items such as: children's clothing, shoes, newborn essentials, toys, books, birthday presents(gift cards), arts and crafts supplies, backpacks and school supplies. Such donations can be placed on the stage before November 7th or brought to the Parish Hall on sorting day. In keeping with the spirit of "stewardship from a place of gratitude" (see our Children's Service description below), we are inviting all children of St. Mary's to consider bringing their friends for an hour to help sort the clothes, toys, and puzzles for needy children in the Parish Hall.

### **Children's Service on Sunday, November 8 at 10:00 a.m.**

St. Mary's is planning a Children's Service to be held on Sunday, November 8th. All children are invited to participate in the service (with adult leadership) as usher, alms bearer, acolyte, reader or junior choir member. If your child is interested and is not already scheduled to serve that day as Acolyte or Junior Choir Member that day, please contact Isabel Phillips, our Director of Religious Education. We want to include all children who may want to serve St. Mary's on this special day! Isabel's email: [reading\\_doctor@comcast.net](mailto:reading_doctor@comcast.net) and phone: (978) 852-4633 or (781) 899-2530.

The Children's Service will be a service of Holy Communion led by Margaret Schwarzer and will feature both the Junior Choir and a short homily by two of our older youth. These young people will offer their reflections on the topic of: "Stewardship from a Place of Gratitude." If you are a student in middle school or high school and would like to share your own thoughts and reflections with St. Mary's on November 8th, please let Isabel Phillips or Jeffrey Hughes know.

*There will be a short rehearsal on Saturday November 7th from 9:30 - 10:15 a.m. in preparation for the November 8th Children's Service.* All children who will be participating in the service should plan to attend (including the acolytes scheduled for Sunday Nov 8th, as well as all members of the Junior Choir). Immediately before or after this rehearsal, children of St. Mary's are encouraged to help sort clothes with other Cradles to Crayons volunteers working for the needy children of Massachusetts!

### **Evensong with Music of Taizé – Sunday, November 8 at 5:00 p.m.**

The Adult Choir will lead a meditative service of Evening Prayer in the tradition of Taizé. We will gather in the candlelit sanctuary for a quiet service of contemplation and music.

The Taizé tradition began many years ago in the ecumenical monastic community in Taize, France. Brother Roger, Taizé's founder, arrived in the French village in 1940. In the midst of World War II, he dreamed of creating a community where reconciliation was a daily reality. He began by giving shelter to refugees of the war. Brother Roger recognized that the search for reconciliation was within each individual as well as within the community. People from around the world, especially young people, come to Taizé looking for meaning in their lives as they prepare for responsibilities in their own communities.

The liturgy of the Taizé service is meant to "quiet the soul." There is repetition in the words of the music, there is time for silence and prayer. There is no sermon or celebration of the Eucharist. The service provides an opportunity to become more peaceful and centered in the midst of our busy lives. Please join us for the Evensong service on November 8, followed by a soup and bread supper in the Parish Hall. All are welcome.

### **Foods'n Fancies on Saturday, November 21 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.**

Foods'n Fancies is the only fundraiser St. Mary's has for outreach. The number of organizations which benefit from this event is extensive. Everyone's help is much needed and appreciated. That includes men and women, young and old, new members and old members.

Please help now by searching your home for furniture, jewelry, sports equipment, etc. which you no longer use and could be sold through our silent auction. If you are a creative crafts person, donations would be appreciated, e.g., handmade mittens, socks (both adults and children.) Parishioners will be asked to contribute homemade foods. Volunteers to help set up and work at Foods'n Fancies will be needed. The sign-up sheet is on the bulletin board. This is a great event at which to purchase gifts and food for the holidays, while donating to non-profits throughout the world. Have lunch and shop while your children are involved in arts and crafts activities. We hope to see everyone on the 21st.

### **Foods'n Fancies Craft Session**

Please join us in the parish hall on Tuesday, November 3rd at 7:30 p.m. to work on craft projects for the upcoming bazaar. Come join in on the fun as we work together to have another successful bazaar to raise funds for outreach. All ages welcome!

### *Prayer List*

Please remember in our prayers: Brian, Bob H., Catherine, Charlie, David, Don, Dorothy, Elizabeth, Gayle, Harriott, Henry, Jerri, Jon, Joshua, the Walter Kennedy family, Leslie, Liz, Margaret, Mary Ellen, Pat and Peter.

### *The "Ask It" Basket*

**Q:** Please define the following terms:

**A: Liturgy:** "The word *liturgy* literally means 'the work of the people.' It's an ancient text that helps us reenact the redemption drama. What we're reenacting is a compressed version of the redemption story. At the end of it, we can't help but be moved to cry out with all the angels and archangels, 'Thanks be to God!' and give our lives to the God who gave our lives to us."

**B: Eucharist:** "The word *Eucharist* means 'thanksgiving.' It's that moment in 'the work of the people' when we partake of the divine life and experience the presence of Christ..." [cit. "Chasing Francis", by The Reverend Ian Morgan Cron, page 95.]

*Editor: Tim Green*