

THE EPISTLE

THE MISSION OF ST. JAMES' EPISCOPAL CHURCH, A CENTRAL CITY CHURCH,
IS TO WELCOME ALL PEOPLE INTO THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST AND TO SERVE IN HIS NAME

THE RECTOR'S RAMBLINGS

Beth is completely in love with a boy named Luke. This is not as interesting as it sounds since Luke is a Boxer puppy. Some of you met him at the blessing of the animals in October. Luke is a beautiful boy who has already wormed his furry little self into Beth and Kris's life. They play with him, buy him doggy treats, take him to training (which is essential for all puppies—trust me on this). They love him and he loves them right back. It's a match made in heaven.

But someday, he will break their hearts. That's the deal. You get these little fur balls and while they are still small enough to hold in your hands you know that someday they are going to break your heart. And still you love them. Love is costly and yet, worth it all.

We move now into the season of Advent, that time when we breathlessly anticipate the coming into the world of a Child. Jesus. Our Savior. See, we know the rest of the story. Even as our hearts expand with the joy of Christmas and the wonderful stories of the baby Jesus, we know that this Child, the Savior of the world, will die in order to fulfill His destiny—which is us. There is a cross, shadowy perhaps, but still visible in the sky alongside that famous star over the manger in Bethlehem. We sing Gloria in Excelsis at Christmas knowing that our hearts will break on Good Friday. And still, we sing.

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<i>The Rector's Ramblings</i>	1	I've lost three beloved animals in my adult life. Maggie, Racquet and Katie. I loved each one of them fiercely from the time they were tiny little three pound balls of fur until their deaths. I knew when I got them that, in the usual course of things, I would outlive them. I knew when I held them for the first time that alongside the joy of them in my life I would get to experience the exquisite pain of losing a beloved companion animal. And still, I held them, loved them and gave them my heart.
<i>Deaconspeak</i>	2	It's like that with Jesus. Every year we start anew with the freshness of Advent, anticipating the joy of Christmas. Each year we prepare our hearts so that they can be open to capacity to welcome the Child into our lives. And yet, and yet, right around the corner is Ash Wednesday and our Lenten journey. But it does not stop us from celebrating Christmas, or loving Jesus—even though we know He is going to break our hearts, and then re-make them.
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son not to open our hearts to their fullest extent and love God and people and even little puppies like Luke. It'll hurt. The measure of our pain someday is the measure of our love. But it's worth it for the love. It's worth it for the Love.

Ask Beth and Kris. Ask me. I cried my eyes out with Racquet and then along came Katie and I fell in love again. I think I may now be done with puppies in my life, but there may be a rescue dog somewhere in my future. Because it is worth it for the love. It's worth it for the Love.

A blessed Advent to each of you as you prepare your hearts for Love to come into your world.

My love, Mother Debra+

DEACONSPEAK

“Why did the turkey cross the road?”

At the November vestry meeting we had the check-in question, “How might God be inviting you to change at this time?” Since I knew I was going to be able to attend the meeting, I had thought & prayed about this, but had no response. That is, until I was rushing on that Wednesday afternoon to go downtown to the meeting. As I was driving along County Line Road, I noted that a large, dark bird was walking across the road a short distance ahead of me. Unlike me, this turkey was assuredly not making haste.

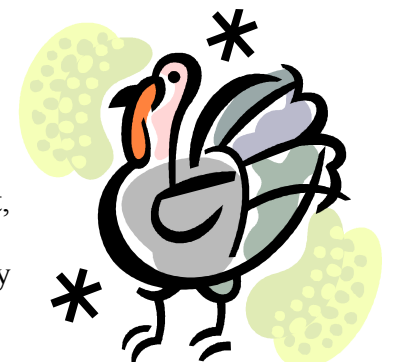
So I had to slow down, and then stop completely, to allow the turkey to cross. (Fortunately there was no other traffic.) I looked to the side of the road from where the turkey was coming, and saw a rafter of turkeys (sometimes called a gang) who had absolutely no indication of following their comrade. As I looked to where *my* turkey seemed to be going on the other side, there were no other turkeys. In essence, this turkey seemed to be crossing the road just for me. To slow down. To stop.

As I eventually continued my journey downtown, I believed I understood how God might be inviting me to change at this time. (After all, if God could talk to Balaam through a jackass, sending me a message via a turkey is not out of the question!) Currently in my life I find myself hurrying to do this and hustling to go there. And as we are now in the rush and bustle of the “holiday season” the pace of life seems to switch gears into overdrive. So I am trying to slow down and stop – to take the time I need to maintain perspectives in my life. It is when I do not spend time with Jesus that life seems to split at the seams.

Whether or not you feel yourself busier than usual at this time of the year, perhaps you need a turkey to cross the road in front of you. To make you slow down... to stop. It will help you keep perspective on the important things in your life.

Your servant in Christ,

dcn terry



COMMON GROUND HEARING ON FORECLOSED HOMES

On November 19th, 2009, Susan and I joined Beth Taylor, Sam Zainer, Mother Debra and hundreds of other Milwaukeeans at a major Common Ground meeting. The purpose was clearly stated: To listen to testimony regarding foreclosed homes in Southeastern Wisconsin.

Bank-owned foreclosed houses have a double-edged impact on us and our communities. Firstly, they lower property values in our neighborhoods, impacting the lives of caring citizens. With this blight, the banks are acting like absent landlords – letting the property become an eyesore to the point where taxpayers end up paying for lawn care and snow removal.

Secondly, they attract squatters and criminals, decreasing our safety in our cities and towns. Many of the boarded up homes become dens for drug dealers, drug users, and gang members. While these foreclosed homes tend to be concentrated in urban areas, the problem is evident in all of the suburbs.

Amongst others, Wells Fargo, US Bank, and Deutsche Bank own the majority of the homes in our region. All of these banks were sub-prime lenders that affected the housing market and the economy in recent years, and all of these banks received billions of dollars of government TARP money to bail them out.

The Thursday night meeting focused on the scope and cause of the problem, getting testimony from a num-

ber of different community leaders, pastors, realtors, and bankers. The panel of Common Ground members asked questions of these individuals, learning first-hand how foreclosed homes impact on our communities. St. James' parishioners and other organizations took time to caucus regarding how we might address this issue.

Common Ground will issue a white paper on our findings, and we will be working to have meetings between representatives from the banks and the communities. The goal is to raise awareness of the crisis conditions and to move towards responsible disposition of the foreclosed properties. An aggressive campaign will start on January 21st, 2010.

Common Ground is a regional organization of churches (including St. James'), non-profits, small businesses, and schools from southeastern Wisconsin. We organize together because we are more powerful and able to affect change collectively. If you are interested in learning more and strengthening our community, please contact a member of St. James' core team: Kris Ochocki, Beth Taylor, Linda Steiger, Robert Wilson, and Dorota Pruski. Also, check out www.commongroundwi.org or the Sunday bulletin for upcoming Common Ground events!

Robert Wilson

DID YOU KNOW?

- ** This month 17 Jamesians helped Red Door Clothes by donating, sorting, setting up shop, and distributing clothes;
- ** Red Door Clothes distributed clothes to 138 adults and 65 children (Nov. 7) and 171 adults and 55 children (Nov. 21);
- ** This month 7 Jamesians distributed sundries at The Gathering to almost 200 people;
- ** Jeans and sundries were generously donated by diocesan friends at the Diocesan Convention, Nov. 13-14;
- ** This month we prayed at the burial for Steven, and were joined by his co-workers;
- ** The Stewardship response as of Nov. 30 was a generous 31 persons... there's still time to make your pledge!
- ** St. James' Sunday School has two groups along side the Nursery: Middle Primary and Upper Primary, and 11 Jamesians are serving as teachers for the children (see October *Epistle* for their pictures, beautifully taken by Jill Littlefield).

VESTRY NOTES FOR NOVEMBER 2009

The Vestry meeting for November was held on Wednesday, November 18th. The meeting started with the check in question: "How might God be inviting you to change at this time?" In one way or another most vestry members expressed a feeling of learning patience. The Treasurer's report showed a small surplus for the month! A draft of the budget for 2010 is being worked on by the finance committee. We are all praying for less snow this year to lessen the burden of the snowplowing expense. Details for Game Night II and the All Parish meeting were finalized. Updates were given for the sundries programs, Stewardship ingathering, Common Ground, Red Door Clothes, and the issues surrounding the development of our building. The vestry continued with their study from the book, *Congregational Leadership In Anxious Times*.

Your vestry always works hard, studies, and is lively in their discussions. There seems to be a direct correlation between the seriousness of business discussed, remaining on time, remaining on topic and what happens by the time we get to miscellaneous... the usual focus can turn on a dime with a well placed "snarky" (ask a vestry member) leading to good natured fun and laughter. Vestry members are human after all.

Linda Steiger

SCARED TO HOPEFUL TO CONFIRMED

It was a late August day in Madison, WI and for me no ordinary day. I had been feeling terrible about signing a lease with no job and time was marching on. I needed hope in the worst way. I had bought a Bible a few months back in hopes of renewing my relationship with God. Instead of reading the Bible, I thought God would come to me. Meanwhile, I had become obsessive, paranoid, and indecisive with all my money from an inheritance withered away.

However, that late August day I figured I would start over again and decided to open the Bible. I began reading Genesis. The prayer of Abraham for the people of Sodom touched me when I read it and I too fell on my face. I flat felt that I had let God down going my own way. I needed more than just this book or my own apartment, but needed to find people that desired the same thing as me.

I was hesitant about attending church because I felt I would not be accepted. I didn't know much of the Bible, didn't like church as a kid, but I had begun to wonder about God. I wanted a place that would give me a second chance and believed in the power of healing and mercy that I had glazed over in the gospels. It was my first trip on a metro bus in Milwaukee and I got off about 6 blocks too early for my destination. I needed a marker and this big building stood out to me and it was St. James'.

St. James' has proved me wrong. It has provided me a place to hear the gospels, learn the Bible's themes and minister to others who were once like me. I want to be at this place because we put aside our differences and become one body of Christ. My lease is being paid up slowly, but I view it as no cost because of the day that the spirit of Jesus allowed me to "Start Over!" I now feel humbled, included and cared for when I walk into this church. I pray we can make more people feel as rich and blessed as I do right now.

Sam Zainer

FROM THE DEACON'S BENCH

“I been thinkin’”

I been thinkin’ ‘bout that baby Jesus;

I been thinkin’ ‘bout Mary, chosen by God to give birth to that baby, Jesus;

I been thinkin’ ‘bout Mary dealing with the social consequences being unwed at that moment;

I been thinkin’ ‘bout Mary’s absolute loyalty and love for God;

I been thinkin’ ‘bout Joseph, the man who was to wed Mary and wonder how he felt when he learned about Mary;

I been thinkin’ ‘bout Joseph’s loyalty and love for God and for Mary;

I been thinkin’ ‘bout that long journey to Bethlehem and the pain Mary must’ve endured;

I been thinkin’ ‘bout Joseph on that journey and the caring love he had for Mary to see her safely to Bethlehem;

I been thinkin’ ‘bout Mary giving birth to Jesus in a cave-like stable;

I been thinkin’ bout Joseph, how the earthly father and the role he would play in raising this baby Jesus to manhood;

I been thinkin’ ‘bout the angels singing, announcing the birth;

I been thinkin’ ‘bout the shepherds and their fear and bewilderment at all that was happening;

I been thinkin’ ‘bout the shepherds and what they saw and what they felt when they saw the baby Jesus;

I been thinkin’ ‘bout the humbleness of that birth and lookin’ at what arose from that night and how it would later affect all humankind;

And now, today, I been thinkin’ ‘bout God’s wondrous gift to us of His Son. How this gift changed the world we are a part of, for ever.

I been thinkin’ ‘bout all of the things that came to humankind from this baby turned man called Jesus. His love. His miracles. His teachings that gave us a way of life with God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit at our sides and all ‘round us.

I been thinkin’ ‘bout how we could feel and show the kind of love that Mary and Joseph had for God and Jesus to do what they did, in our world today;

I been thinkin’ ‘bout feelin’ the same fear and wonder that the shepherds felt;

I been thinkin’ ‘bout how wonderful it would be, as we prepare for and celebrate the birth of Jesus, if we could all return to the humble beginning, puttin’ aside the glitter, and instead explode our love upon the world will all the gusto of the angels singin’ to the shepherds that night so all would know our love of Jesus born so long ago, but livin’ still in our hearts and in the world.

Be thinkin’ ‘bout that, OK?

Deacon Ned

WANT TO HELP?

I will be bell ringing for the Salvation Army
 Tuesday, December 22nd – 12 noon to 3pm
 Brookfield Square- Inside-Near Sears
 Come any time-It’s fun!
 Please join me....Jill Littlefield



CREDIT REPORT AND SCORES

Have you been thinking of checking your credit reports and scores? Now is the time to be doing so. The three credit reporting companies: Transunion, Experian, and Equifax are being more cooperative right now in removing negative items or outdated information from your reports. The experts believe it may be related to a class action lawsuit that all three are involved in which will be resolved in early 2010.

The best place to receive your credit reports for free is annualcreditreport.com. You will have to pay to receive your credit scores. You do not need to buy your scores to make changes. Just start by getting your reports and checking the information listed by each company. Each company does it a little differently which causes your scores to be different. You can dispute any information, it is your right. When negative or wrong information is deleted, your credit scores go up. Why is this important? The higher your credit scores the better interest rates you receive on your loans, etc.

No one knows what the future holds, but with the changes banks and credit card companies are making it is important to know how their decisions are impacting your credit scores. In addition, more and more companies are selling credit scores that are worthless. You want the same scores the lenders use. You want your FICO scores (stands for Fair Isaac Credit Organization).

Annual Credit Reports and FICO websites have several tutorials about credit and credit repair. Improve your credit right now. If you know you have low scores, start disputing items now. Your scores will improve. Need help? Check out a credit repair organization. One I would recommend is Allen Michael at AllenMichael.com.

Linda Steiger

P. S. Monitoring your reports is also a step in preventing identification theft.

A VISIT TO ST. NICK

Who is St. Nick? As a child, I was often confused by stories that my compatriots in elementary school would tell of a jolly fellow who visited houses on the chill night of December 5th. Who was this elusive gift-giver of Greater Milwaukee?

My friends regaled me on the playground with lavish stories of sweets and toys and treasures. Danny informed me that if he was good all year, St. Nick filled his shoes with oranges, chocolate, and small toys. Kathy down the block was not so lucky. According to my sources, she was naughty and received sticks and coal in the socks she hung by the fireplace.

Once home, my parents' attempt at

consolation was, "We don't celebrate St. Nick in our family." I was certain that my sister was to blame – what had she done to offend him so much that he wouldn't reward my year-long goodness?

St. Nick never did seem to get the publicity of the wondrous Santa Claus. There were only a few familiar Christmas songs and poems. "Down through the chimney with good St. Nick," I sang along with Gene Autry. Hmmm! I was deprived the joy of having St. Nick come down our chimney.

Older now, the metamorphosis of St. Nick from a real person to a Coca-Cola-drinking icon is a cultural phenomenon. The real St.

Nicholas was a young man who gave up his rich inheritance to aid the sick. Living in southern Turkey in the third century, he dedicated his life to God and soon became bishop.

He was renowned for his generosity, his love for children, and his concern for sailors. After his death on December 6th 363 CE, fantastic legends began to spread of his kindness. These evolved into the traditions of Father Christmas, Sinterklaas, and Santa Claus.

While backpacking in Turkey last summer, Susan and I made a point of stopping in the small Mediterra-

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STUMP THE PRIEST

Dear priest,

You have said in church recently, and I've heard it before, that Advent is a time of preparation for Christmas. How do you do that? How can I? Signed, Wanting

Dear Wanting,

Well, I am just guessing that what you are wanting is a holy Christmas. That starts with a holy time of Advent preparation. How we prepare for the coming of the Lord into our lives (which is what we celebrate with Christmas) is different for everyone. But there are some constants: worship, prayer, Holy Scripture and service.

Personally, I do several things during Advent that help get my heart ready for Christmas. Advent is a time when I normally make one of my two yearly retreats. I am truly blessed that our vestry, wanting me to be a woman of prayer, gives me the time to pray deeply in retreat. I take one of those retreats during Advent to slow down, listen to God's voice and get my heart ready for Christmas in the midst of the secular pre-Christmas run up. It is a silent retreat for me because my usual world is so very noisy.

If you can make some sort of retreat during Advent I would recommend it. If you would like some suggestions about how and where you might do that, come and talk to me.

On a daily basis I read the beginning chapters of Luke, Matthew and John. Each one of them sheds a different light on the Christmas story. I take my time with them during the four weeks of Advent, savoring what each of them have to tell me about Emmanuel, God-with-us. I read them and pray for the gift of discernment to see how God is coming to me at this time in my life.

There are many service opportunities during Advent. Here at St. James', of course, there are the Red Door Clothes, Sundries, Indigent Burials and, of course, the Gathering meal program to look at in terms of service.

Most importantly, I think, Advent is a time when you should be in Sunday worship. Each week builds on the last to the climax of the fourth Sunday of Advent followed by Christmas.

So, find some time to read the Holy Scriptures. Read the beginning of the Gospel of Luke if nothing else. Find some time to pray—however you choose to pray. Find some way to be of service during this Advent time. And try and be in church each Sunday of Advent. If you make a good Advent preparation, you will see the Child at Christmas in ways you may not have seen Him before.

A blessed Advent to you, the Priest

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nean town of Demre. There we visited the austere Church of St. Nicholas. In the sweltering sunshine, we wandered through the restored basilica with its Byzantine frescoes and mosaic floors, reflecting on wonderful life of a good Christian man.

While I never had a childhood visit FROM St. Nicholas, ala Clement C. Moore's poem, I did have a chance to walk where he lived his life of generosity and love.

"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-night!"

Robert Wilson

In a religion that was born in a barn, an
open door goes without saying.

Please join us in the worship and fellowship of Jesus Christ.
The door is always open.

The Warmth Tree will be up throughout Advent

Christmas Holy Eucharist Services
Christmas Eve
Thursday, December 24
8:00 PM
with Fellowship afterwards in the Lounge

Christmas Day
Friday, December 25
10:30 AM

