

# 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

It's trite to say it this time of the year, but I am tired of being cold. Call me trite.

I have this little fur ball named Jamie that I have to walk twice a day and as the winter continues it just gets harder and harder to bundle up and walk her a half mile in the seriously cold weather we've had. Even the "warmer" weather of this early January is still darn cold after several blocks!

Jamie, of course, is oblivious (unless it is below zero which means she has to wear a very chic sweater—which she hates). She's low to the ground out of the wind and runs from place to place looking to connect with the "leavings" of all the other dogs that have gone before her that day. (Some refer to this phenomenon as checking her "pee-mail.") It's good to see her happy as she goes about her canine business, but the cold just creeps into my bones and all I want her to do is to hurry up! I want to get out of the cold and the wind and the gloom and get back into my warm and cozy condo.

But God is equally everywhere. Equally. Everywhere.

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So, this past week I was out walking Miss Jamie, mentally cursing the cold, and keeping my head down to not get the full force of the wind in my face. Out of my peripheral vision I saw a flash of bright red: a male cardinal was out looking for food. I looked up then to view the gorgeous cardinal and a lovely shy doe ran across the road in front of me swiftly followed by three of her best friends. And then, for just a moment, the sun broke through the clouds and lit up the snow. The ice crystals sparkled in a prismatic effect and there was color everywhere.

Jamie continued to be oblivious. She's a dog after all. But I, for just a moment, even as I was shivering, I simply had to take time be grateful to God for God's spectacular beauty. It warmed my heart even as I shivered.

God is equally—everywhere.

Praise God. Thank God. ~~Mother Debra+

**FROM THE DEACON'S BENCH**

Dick Iverson, a volunteer of over 26 years at The Gathering does the inspirational reading when he volunteers every Monday morning. This was his latest:

*A group of businessmen had to go to a convention out of town and all promised their wives they'd be home before dinner on Friday. In their rush to catch the plane home to keep their promises, they knocked over a vendor's cart of apples. All but one of the men continued on their way. The one told his friends that he would catch the next plane, so he could help clean up and asked them to tell his wife what had happened. When he got down on the floor to help the vendor, he discovered she was having a difficult time gathering up the apples... she was blind. When he had gathered together all the apples, he put the badly bruised ones aside in a basket and handed them to her, explaining what was in the basket. He gave her \$20 saying he hoped that covered her loss and went on to catch his plane. As he left, the vendor called out "Mr., are you Jesus?" Stunned the man stopped dead in his tracks and responded, "No, but perhaps His servant."*

This is really at the heart of what service to our fellow human beings means. We are acting as Jesus would. No strings attached. No choices being made to serve one and not another. Perhaps for a brief moment we are Jesus, or at least as close as we, imperfect as we are, can ever be.

Perhaps, that is what that special feeling you get when you see the warm smile of appreciation or hear someone say "Thank you; God bless you," when you have met a basic need for them.

Christian service comes down to during what Jesus did and what He would have us do in His name.

Sometimes, that service will be an act of kindness we perform on our own. Other times, it will be the actions of a group working together.

*A man had died and was at the end of his life's journey, meeting St. Peter. There were two huge doors in front of him. St. Peter showed him the door he was to enter to spend eternity. The man asked St. Peter if he could peek in through the other door first. He looked in and saw a gigantic banquet hall with every kind of food imaginable, but all he could hear was screaming and crying as everyone in the room waved their one chopstick, unable to eat. The man slammed that door and opened the one he was assigned to: he saw the same banquet hall, the same endless quantities of food, but everyone was filled with joy and feeding to the fullest. They had all linked arms with their neighbors and were feeding each other.*

That's the kind of service we offer as a team of Jesus' people at The Gathering or Red Door Clothes. With arms linked, we serve our neighbors as Jesus would have us do.

As I heard the words in the first story when the blind vendor asked "Are you Jesus?" I choked up a bit. Then I thought that none of us can reach the perfection of Jesus. And then I wondered if each of us at such a moment could be a representation of Jesus? Is that not what we strive to be? Is that not at the heart of our mission at St. James'?

Perhaps we should boldly strive to be Jesus to someone in need every day.

Deacon Ned

**A NOTE FROM YOUR SENIOR WARDEN**

My dear fellow Jamesians: as you all know Mother Debra has heard God's call to St. Christopher's, and she has said "Yes" to God. The Vestry commends her for saying, "Yes" to God in this call, which means leaving St. James', a parish that she loves. We Jamesians have been blessed with many years with Mother Debra, her ministry and her gifts. I know that we will miss her and that we are truly grateful for all that she has done for St. James' during her tenure here. We will grieve her loss.

"So what happens now?" you ask. We continue being Jamesians, continuing to welcome all people into the presence of Christ and to serve in His Name; remembering the poor, being kindly affectionate one to another and most importantly remembering Whose we are. Mother Debra's leaving is going to be a big change, but it isn't going to change who we are. We will continue loving one another, coming together for worship, ministering to the people on the Avenue, sharing in fellowship and all of the things we Jamesians do. Did I say continue loving one another?

You may have questions, and that's okay. You have a strong, loving leadership team in your Vestry and your Wardens. We are here for you. We will get through this time of change and we *will* be all right, this is my promise to you. If you are wondering what you can do to help, you can come to church and worship on a regular basis. Coming together in community to worship God will give us the spiritual strength we need to move through this time of change. God smiles on St. James' and will continue doing so.

I love St. James' and I love all of you.

God's Peace,  
Beth Taylor  
Senior Warden

**VESTRY NOTES FOR JANUARY 2010**

The meeting began with opening prayer and vestry members sharing "How might God be inviting them to change this year." December's minutes were accepted and Treasurer Loraine Garner reviewed the finances for 2009. At the moment we have, relatively, good cash flow. We continue to pray that snow plowing services will not be necessary. Our old gorgeous, fragile building continues to drain our budget.

Teresa Jackson reported that Red Door Clothes continues to see more youth being served each month. In the past month 60 children and 140 adults came through Red Door Clothes. The numbers may be higher because of the winter months.

Mother Debra informed the Vestry that she has been called to St. Christopher's. Her last Sunday at St. James' will be March 7<sup>th</sup>. Although we are deeply saddened by this news, she has prepared us well to move forward together, in community.

Linda Steiger

**REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE DUST...**

Ash Wednesday (17 February this year) is a Holy Day in the Church, and is designated as a “Fast.” The Book of Common Prayer (BCP) notes that it is a day marked by special acts of discipline and self-denial. If you are (or have been) curious about the beginning of the season of Lent and our use of ashes... read on!

In the Episcopal Church (along with most Western Catholic churches) we have begun the season of Lent on Ash Wednesday from the 6<sup>th</sup> century. With the growing focus of Lent being public penitence and reconciliation, in the 9<sup>th</sup> century the Church began the ritual of imposing ashes on penitents. That is when the name “Ash Wednesday” began to take form. The first English Prayer Book (1549) actually had a “rite” for this observance, between Morning Prayer (Matins) and the Eucharist, entitled “The First Day of Lent, commonly called Ash Wednesday.” Here in the US it was finally incorporated in the 1892 revision of the BCP. Currently we start the liturgy on page 264 in the BCP.

And we do not use just any ashes for this service. Demonstrating that the Church has been “green” (in the environmental sense) before it was fashionable, we burn the blessed palms from the previous Passion (Palm) Sunday and use those ashes for imposition.

From the earliest times of our faith we find the use of ashes as a symbol of our mortality and penitence. In Genesis 18:27 Abraham refers to himself as dust and ashes when he presumes to address God about the number of righteous men to be found in Sodom. Throughout our faith history we refer to putting on sackcloth and ashes as we mourn.

Interestingly and fittingly, the service in the Episcopal Church does not require the practice of imposing ashes on people the first day of Lent. (It is optional, and some Episcopal Churches do not offer this.) If ashes are to be used, there is a prayer for them in the service, which it is not explicitly a blessing. Then the individuals offer themselves to the minister to have the ashes imposed (rubbed) on their forehead with the words; “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” (Also take a look at Genesis 3:19, as God addresses Adam.)

I feel that offering to allow ashes to be placed on our forehead is an intensely personal decision. It is a very public action regarding a very private issue. We do not have this rite in order to make a show of ourselves to others, but as a reminder to ourselves of who we are in our relationship to God. It can be a very humbling experience, to which I invite you to spend prayer and thought before coming forward... or not. Either way, worshiping on Ash Wednesday is a “right beginning.”

May you have a holy and blessed Lent.

Deacon Terry

*For further information, please see the BCP, or Commentary on the American Prayer Book by Marion J. Hatchett.*

**LENTEN DEVOTIONS**

Lent this year begins on February 17<sup>th</sup>, which is Ash Wednesday. Our worship service that evening is at 6:30 PM. I hope that everyone in the parish will come to receive ashes and begin a Holy Lent.

On Sunday mornings we will continue to study the Gospel readings from Luke found in our lectionary (we use the Revised Common Lectionary at St. James'.) This well-attended adult education helps us to focus on what the Gospel text is really saying, alongside thinking about how we might preach it if that was ours to do. Our conversations are rich and often lively.

This year on the Wednesdays of Lent we will begin with the Holy Eucharist in the Chapel, followed by a soup and bread supper in the lounge. Following a light supper we will be studying the Lord's Prayer. We say this prayer so often, most of us have been saying it since we were children, that we often forget to actually hear what we are saying. This Lent we are going to slow the prayer down and think about what we are saying. We're going to study what we are really saying and intend to say when we pray this beloved prayer. Our Wednesday schedule will look like:

5:30 PM Holy Eucharist  
6:00 PM Light supper  
6:45 PM Lenten program  
7:45 PM Program end

As you think about Lent, I hope that many of you will choose to come to some part of our Lenten program on Wednesday. But, if not, think about something you can do that will set Lent off for you:

- \*Set aside some time each day for prayer—even if it's only five minutes.
- \*Set aside some time for prayerful reading of Holy Scripture.
- \*Set aside some time to read a spiritual book.
- \*Set aside some time to really be with your family, your spouse, your closest friend.
- \*Visit someone in a nursing home, or someone who is homebound.
- \*Do something else kind for someone.

You can also “give up” things, like chocolate, or smoking, or chewing gum, etc. Really, anything that helps you to shift your focus from yourself to God, is a good thing.

I wish for each of you a happy and holy Lent.~~Mother Debra+



## A SPECIAL LENTEN JOURNEY

The parish I grew up in had a sign just inside the narthex – “We are Easter People!” As a kid, I thought it explained a lot about why Easter was such a big deal at that church. We liked Easter, and, therefore, we had big Easter parties! When I was older, I came to appreciate this sign in a new light – we are a people who find our identity in Easter. Without Easter, there is no risen Christ. Without Easter, death on a cross is simply a horrible way to die. Without Easter, there is no redemption. And without Easter, there is no risen Lord.

Easter gains so much joy, so much gladness, so much rejoicing because of how hard the road to Easter is. The path through Lent to the trials of Holy Week ends at Easter. The road is difficult, but we take it every year because the destination is so great. We take it every year because it renews us. We take it every year because it makes us stronger. We take it every year because it deepens our faith. We embrace the hard road because it is the gateway to Jesus the Christ.

As a parish community, faced with the all of the feelings that a change of Rector means to us, this year we embark on a special Lenten journey. We embrace the hard road of change because it ends on the joy of Easter. We are now deeply aware that God’s ways are not our own. We know that God’s trumpet call continues to sound, even if the instrument that helps to bring it to our ears is different. God’s call brings us together. God’s call draws each of us to new opportunities and new challenges. God’s call sends us down the road of Lent, and to the challenges of Holy Week. We know as we start that journey that it will not be easy. We have faith that if we embrace that journey, we will be held in God’s hand. We have faith that, walking with Christ in answer to God’s call, we will once again find the joy of Easter blessings. Easter shows us, in ways that nothing else can, that love can overcome anything, and that even though we may be apart, love endures.

John Washbush

## FACES OF FORECLOSURE

Common Ground has launched a campaign against the three major banks that own a majority of foreclosed homes in the Greater Milwaukee region: US Bank, Deutsche Bank, and Wells Fargo. Basically we want to negotiate for the reasonable disposition of the properties along three lines:

- 1) Stop sales to speculators (absentee landlords, for example) and sell to responsible owners
- 2) Demolish at the banks' expense homes that are beyond reasonable repair
- 3) Contribute \$25 million per bank to a fund to rebuild neighborhoods

On January 25, 13 Jamesians joined over 300 Common Ground members at a public action where we made these demands public.

Foreclosed homes are a problem for us all. If they are sold at all, they are sold at a fraction of their value, which brings down the property values of the surrounding homes in the neighborhood. While they remain vacant, these homes often become a tax on city resources (OUR resources!), requiring police and fire services, snow plowing, inspections, and even demolition. They become a magnet for crime and drugs, making our neighborhoods unsafe.

Meanwhile, U.S. Bank, Deutsche Bank, and Wells Fargo have just reported huge earnings from the last quarter. Our limited resources have been used to clean up this mess for long enough. These banks hold the legal

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**AN INDIGENT BURIAL IN THE WINTER**



Mother Debra, Deacon Terry, Deacon Ned, Gust Olson, Marge Kiss, Alice Ruthenberg and Jill Littlefield braving the wind and cold to attest to the warmth of God’s love to those the world would call unclaimed.  
 “Alleluia, He is Risen Indeed!”

**First Coming**

God did not wait till the world was ready,  
 Till... the nations were at peace.  
 He came when the heavens were unsteady,  
 And prisoners cried for release.

God did not wait for the perfect time.  
 He came when the need was deep and great.  
 God dined with sinners in all their grime,  
 Turned water into wine. He did not wait

Till hearts were pure. In joy God came  
 To a tarnished world of sin and doubt.  
 To a world like ours of anguished shame  
 He came, and his Light would not go out.

God came to a world which did not mesh,  
 To heal its tangles, shield its scorn.  
 In the mystery of Word made Flesh  
 The Maker of the stars was born.

We cannot wait ‘til the world is sane  
 to raise our songs with joyful voice,  
 For to share our grief, to touch our pain,  
 God came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

By Madeline L’Engle

*Thanks to Jill Littlefield for sending us this.*

*(Continued from page 6)*

title to over 25% of the foreclosed properties in our region, and we are holding them accountable. Our demands are reasonable, and our outrage is justified.

To learn more about this issue, I encourage you to check out the following:

Take a Faces of Foreclosure research report from the table at the crossing in church

Visit our website: [www.commongroundwi.org](http://www.commongroundwi.org)

Visit our *brand new* website dedicated to this issue: [www.facesofforeclosurewi.org](http://www.facesofforeclosurewi.org), complete with photos some of you took during the Photo Surveys last fall!

Come to a briefing session at St. James’ to learn more and ask questions (date and time, TBA)

Dorota Pruski

**STUMP THE PRIEST**

Dear Priest,

The Milwaukee Public Museum is hosting the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit. What is their significance and relationship to the Bible?

Signed, Curious

Dear Curious,

Several other members of the parish have asked the same question. Thanks for putting it in writing.

The Dead Sea Scrolls are a collection of about 900 documents, including texts from the Hebrew Bible, discovered between 1947 and 1956 in some caves on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea.

The texts include the oldest known surviving copies of Biblical and extra-biblical manuscripts (like commentaries on the Bible). They are written in ancient Hebrew, Aramaic (the language of Jesus), and Greek. They date from 150 B.C. E.\* to 70 C. E.\*

The scrolls are divided into three groups of manuscripts: The copies of texts from the Hebrew Bible (40%), Apocryphal books (like Tobit or Sirach in our Bibles—about 30%), and then Sectarian manuscripts, like a commentary on the book of Habakkuk from the Bible (about 30%).

The significance of the scrolls relates in a large part to the field of textual criticism and how accurate the Bible has been translated over time. Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest Hebrew manuscripts of the Bible were texts dating to the 9<sup>th</sup> century C.E. The biblical manuscripts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls push that date back a whole millenium to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. E.!

In essence, what the Dead Sea Scrolls did was to make it very clear to scholars that the books of the Bible were very fluid in both language and content until the church Canon was created—which was not even finished until the fourth century. [Note: the church Canon (which means “law”) is the books of the Bible as we currently have them. It developed over centuries of time and there was not agreement about what books should be in the Bible, or what should be out.]

The exhibit at the museum will give you a greater understanding of the Bible, how it developed and the people of biblical times. It should be great. I know I’m planning on going!

\*The letters “B. C. E.” and “C. E.” stand for *before the common era* and *common era*. This is what we used to know as “B.C.” and “A.D.”

Signed, the Priest