



# ***THE BEACON***

*THE NEWSLETTER OF ST. STEPHEN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH*

**April, 2009**

## ***Father Bill's Message***

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### **Every Sunday**

8:00a Holy Eucharist  
9:15a Church School  
9:30a Service w/ Eucharist  
and music

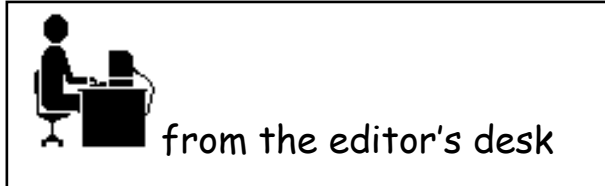
To what extent do you attend church because you feel you should attend or need to attend out of a sense of duty, rather than because you enjoy attending or get a great deal out of the experience? I and my clergy friends across all denominations are hearing things like, "Church worship is not enjoyable enough to compete with weekend leisure time activities, like spending time with the children, mowing the lawn, or catching up on sleep. To put it simply, worship is not as fulfilling as family activities." In this day and age, we're also hearing, "When I'm worrying about whether I'll have a job tomorrow or if I can pay this month's mortgage and still have money enough to put food on the table, church is so far down on my list of priorities that it has been irrelevant to my life." Still others, echoing youth, state that church is "boring", and they point to unexciting prayers, long hymns sung too slowly, too frequent communion, and sermons that urge people to "follow Christ" (which they've been hearing since they were in kindergarten). This translates to those sitting in the pews as "be nice to others". Do they really need church to learn that basic lesson? What people are not finding in worship are uniquely Christian answers to life's questions. Thus, the church is not meaningful in the lives of many people today.

Maybe we need to start with ourselves and have me ask a question like, "What do you like and not like about our worship; what would you like to see?" We can then direct these questions in turn to our "drop-outs", i.e., those parishioners who didn't leave in anger, but simply drifted away. We might even consider asking neighborhood residents what they would like to see in a church and why they haven't considered attending ours? We have to start somewhere and this is as good a place as any. Feel free to give me your written answers to the

above questions, and I promise to present them to our church leaders.

Thank you,

*Fr. Bill*



Two things I'd like to share with you this month. The first is from John Fischer's "Daily Fish Tank" which I get daily in my e-mail. This one, titled "Love>Fear," seems appropriate for the stressful times we are facing.

### **Love>Fear**

by John Fischer

If you remember your algebra, you will remember that the symbols ( $\gt$ ) mean greater than/lesser than... So love>fear is saying that love is greater than fear. This is, in fact, a bumper sticker one of our readers sent me. It's an abbreviated version of 1 John 4:18, "Perfect love casts out fear."

Another one of our readers is correct in explaining how we have gotten here, where fear and hatred seem to predominate.

"Largely we've been sold a bill of goods in the past 25 years by evangelical leaders who have mistakenly taught us that Christianity is about protecting a way of life—a Christian nation, a civil/social morality. For many years now, Christians have been drawing lines, putting sinners on one side and themselves on the other, and saying, 'Be afraid of those people over there. They are out to get you. They will ruin your country, your lifestyle, your government... you

name it.'

"What is tragic about this is how it reduces Christianity to politics, economics, social and lifestyle issues, and everything outside of this is threatening to those who believe this way. Those affected by this thinking end up too afraid to love, they are so threatened by the world around them. They define their Christian lives around the framework they've built to protect them from the pains, sorrows, and realities of real life. They have no idea how real grace can work in their lives."

It really comes down to a choice between love and fear. And I think sometimes we actually prefer fear. Fear means we don't have to be responsible. We are victims and there are people to blame for our predicament. But love means I [we] enter into whatever is producing the fear and work it out. Love is taking responsibility instead of blaming. Love is almost always about being vulnerable, outside our comfort zones.

So remember, love>fear. It's harder, but then again, who said it would be easy?

The second thing is an observation that occurred to me this past Sunday, Sharyn and I had some friends coming up from Cape Cod to visit us and some friends of long standing. We invited them all to come to our house for lunch. We gathered together, chatted, and renewed a lot of old memories. (We are all of an age where there were lots of these.) Anyway, I was out in the kitchen making coffee and listening to the chatter and laughter that was going on at the table. And I thought, "What a wonderful thing that we can get together like this and resume friendships that seemed fresh even though

they were many years old.”

We chatted well into the afternoon. Eventually the conversation got around to church, specifically the Episcopal church. And the talk got around to membership, finances, and the future of the Episcopal church. Each of the churches we represented was in the same situation: membership was down and finances were hurting. We discussed various solutions – making the church more attractive to non-churched people while keeping those aspects that make the Episcopal church unique – ways to run the church more efficiently, maybe by going to a part-time priest was one. Each had its pros and cons and ultimately we agreed that the problem was huge but not insurmountable. We didn’t solve anything, but we did realize that each of us needed to do what we could to keep bringing the word of God to all people.

We had a wonderful afternoon ending with the familiar “We should do this more often,” that frequently ends such visits. But I’m sure we all agreed that god had blessed us with some refreshing time together. His hand was over all of us and we were grateful.

A Happy Easter to all!

*frp*

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### **Prayerful Notes**

At a recent meeting of our Bible Study, Diane mentioned a wonderful new book that she was reading, called *The Shack*. While it sounded interesting, I was already in the process of reading two other books, so I didn't think much about it.

At the next meeting however, she really stunned me, when she arrived with a stack of books. She had bought copies for each one of us. "Whoa!" Now she really had my attention. For her to go out and buy all those books, I figured it must be worth a read!

That evening I started to read it and could

not put it down! While it is a work of fiction, it offers up some powerful spiritual insights and possibilities. It deals with the workings of personal relationships and the recognition that each relationship between two persons is absolutely unique. The author states and clearly shows through the feelings of the main character, the importance of forgiveness in our journey of faith.

I think anyone, myself included, who has ever struggled with unforgiveness towards another person, has come to the realization that we are never really free until we forgive. In the Lord's prayer we are called to forgive those who trespass or sin against us.

In the book, the author reminds us that we are all God's children and God wants to redeem each one of us. It is his belief that our forgiveness of the other person is directly connected to God's redemption of them.


As I read this book, I had a greater awareness of how interconnected we all really are. It also offered up a lot of possible answers to so many of the "whys," that we have about our earthly journey. We cannot know the mind of God. Many of our questions will remain unanswered in this life. In faith, we are called to trust in God, who sees the big picture, while we see such a small part.

I was reminded of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13: 12 “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror, then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.”

In one section of the book, the main character is given a rare opportunity to see the world as God sees it, with all its wonder and beauty. In reality, we cannot do that. We can however, through spending time with God in prayer each day, improve our "Godly Vision" and see with greater clarity the wonders of His world around us.

Looking for a good read? I highly recommend this thought provoking book. Happy Easter everyone!

Blessings Always, *Phyl Endicott*



## Congratulations!

The following people were confirmed, received, reaffirmed their baptismal vows, or were welcomed from other Anglican Provinces:

**CONFIRMED:** *Nathaniel Askew, Katherine Barrette, Anthony Catalozzi, Rosanna Giorlandino, James Holland, Noah McMillan, Danielle Scharen, Logan Scharen, and Olivia Urso.*

**Received:** *Christopher Brumby, Kimberli Norton, Christine Scheffel, Amanda Veith, Leslie Ward, and David "Andy" Wick.*

**Reaffirmed:** *David Brumby*

**Welcomed from other Anglican Provinces:** *Peter Kite, Yvette Kite, Charles "Tim" Moss, Elizabeth Moss, and Gale McKenzie*

## Scarcity or abundance?

Most of the Men in this church family know that I have a great affinity for the writings of Walter Brueggemann, an eminent teacher of the Old Testament and a follower of the New. Some years ago he wrote a piece that you can still find online "The Liturgy of Abundance, The Myth of Scarcity" and I thought I would excerpt a piece of that for you here:

" In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul directs a stewardship campaign for the early church and presents Jesus as the new economist. Though Jesus

was rich, Paul says, "yet for your sakes he became poor, that by his poverty you might become rich." We say it takes money to make money. Paul says it takes poverty to produce abundance. Jesus gave himself to enrich others, and we should do the same. Our abundance and the poverty of others need to be brought into a new balance. Paul ends his stewardship letter by quoting Exodus 16: "And the one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little." The citation is from the story of the manna that transformed the wilderness into abundance.

It is, of course, easier to talk about these things than to live them. Many people both inside and outside of the church haven't a clue that Jesus is talking about the economy. We haven't taught them that he is. But we must begin to do so now, no matter how economically compromised we may feel. Our world absolutely requires this news. It has nothing to do with being Republicans or Democrats, liberals or conservatives, socialists or capitalists. It is much more elemental: the creation is infused with the Creator's generosity, and we can find practices, procedures and institutions that allow that generosity to work. Like the rich young man in Mark 10, we all have many possessions. Sharing our abundance may, as Jesus says, be impossible for mortals, but nothing is impossible for God. None of us knows what risks God's spirit may empower us to take. Our faith, ministry and hope at the turn of the millennium are that the Creator will empower us to trust his generosity, so that bread may abound."

The more I see of the current economic troubles which beset all of us globally and particularly in our New England towns and villages, the more I remember this piece of wisdom from Brueggemann. When there seems no end in sight, whether it's us or a neighbor who loses a job, or have the mortgage foreclosed, when we can no longer afford the commute to work or suffer any of the other outrages of our current times we instinctively pull in our horns and shut down. That says we think so little of Jesus' sacrifice and God's generosity that we dismiss the endless possibilities placed before us.

I'm writing this on the first day of Spring. Palm Sunday is around the corner. Join me in celebrating our role as people of the Resurrection. Indeed bread does abound!

*Tim*

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### **St. Stephen's Want Ad**

We would like to reconstitute the Stewardship Committee that existed in past years. Its purpose, under the leadership of stewardship vestry member Bob Jarvis, would be to communicate with the parish on a year round basis about all aspects of stewardship. We believe that not only are we God's stewards of our treasure, time and talents, but also of all aspects of God's creation, including the very earth itself. The Committee will meet several times a year to develop ways of accomplishing its purpose and work with the year's EMC Chair and members of the parish vestry. We invite you to become a part of this effort by contacting either Bob Jarvis (Tel: 508-366-1979; email: [prizmar@aol.com](mailto:prizmar@aol.com)) or Fr. Bill (Tel: 508-366-4134; email: [Frbilmrtn@verizon.net](mailto:Frbilmrtn@verizon.net)).

We need you; come and join us!



## Bulletin Board

**The next Vestry Meeting** will be held on Monday, April 20, at 7:00pm. All vestry meetings are open to the entire parish. Parishioners wishing to include items on the agenda are asked to contact one of the wardens or the rector no later than two (2) weeks before the meeting. Vestry meeting agendas and minutes will be regularly posted on the bulletin board between Fay Hall and the narthex.

### **Schedule for Holy Week:**

**Palm Sunday, April 5.** Services at 8:00 and 9:30 am. Parishioners at 9:30 will assemble in the church parking lot.

**Maundy Thursday, April 9.** Service at 7:30pm with washing of feet and stripping of the altar. Women: if you intend to have your feet washed, please do not wear stockings or pantyhose.

**Good Friday, April 10.** Ecumenical service at 1:00pm at the First United Methodist Church.

**7:00pm** Good Friday service. Candles, darkness, and ancient prayers. A service for all your senses, come bring your families and experience Good Friday.

**Holy Saturday Easter Vigil, April 11** at **7:30pm**. Kindling of the New Fire, Lighting of the Paschal Candle, Recalling God's Saving Events, and Celebrating the Paschal Eucharist.

**Easter Day, April 12.** Services at 8:00am and 9:30am followed by an

Easter Egg Hunt and the “resurrecting” of the Alleluia banner.

**Jim Boyer Annual Cleanup Day** will be held on **Saturday, April 18** from **9:00am to whenever**. Rain date is Saturday April 25. Bring suitable tools if you have them; some will be available at the church.

**Easter Memorial and Flower Envelopes:** It would be MOST helpful if you are planning either of these memorials to send them in as soon as possible. This will help relieve the pressure on the Holy Week bulletins.

**Women of Faith:** The group is always eager to welcome new members. There will be morning and evening sessions; the evening group meets at 7:15pm on Tuesdays at the home of *Jean McPherson*, 7 Irving St, Westborough (508-366-2022). The morning group meets on Wednesdays at 9:00am at the home of *Phyl Endicott*, 15 Oak St. Westborough (508-366-9227). Meetings last about 2 hours and coffee and a snack is served. The dates of March meetings are: **Tuesday, April 21, 7:15 pm** at *Jean McPherson's* home; **Wednesday, April 22 at 9:00am** at *Phyl Endicott's* home; **Tuesday, May 5, at 7:15** (*Jean McPherson*); **Wednesday, May 6 at 9:00am** (*Phyl Endicott*).

**New Webmaster:** Due to demands from work and increased travel, *Dave Trussler* has relinquished his role as Webmaster. We are please to announce that parishioner *Karen Catalozzi* has agreed to take over this role. Thanks, *Karen*.

**Christian Camping Opportunities:** With the closing of Camp Bement, other dioceses have offered the opportunity for youth in Western Massachusetts to attend their camp and conference centers. **Camp Washington** is a picturesque center for outdoor ministries offered by the Diocese of Connecticut. Contact the camp at

<http://www.campwashington.org>. **Barbara C. Harris Camp** is the ministry of the Diocese of Massachusetts. Contact the camp at

<http://www.bchcenter.org/camp/index.htm>. The Diocese of Rhode Island offers **The Episcopal Conference Center (EFC)** located on Echo Lake in Pascoag. For more information contact the camp at 401-568-4055 or e-mail at [eccregistrar@verizon.net](mailto:eccregistrar@verizon.net). See the St. Stephen's bulletin for more information.

The annual **Community Choir Concert** for the benefit of the Assabet Pastoral Counseling Center on **Sunday, April 26**, at **3:00pm** at the Evangelical Congregational Church. For more information. See *Cam Sowa*. Come support our choir.

**Organ recital** by *Josh Lawton*, Sunday, April 5 at 3:00pm. *Josh* is the son of former rector *Jack Lawton* and his wife *Nancy*. A free-will offering will be taken.

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## GOOD FRIDAY SPECIAL

For the most part, church people are happy people. In the spring, our attentions turn to Easter. Easter, along with Christmas, is our big time of year. We buy new clothes and lots of chocolate and spend days coloring eggs. Easter is the celebration of life and new birth.

But can we truly celebrate the resurrection of our Savior if we don't fully remember his death? Good Friday, too depressing you say?

Where is the darkness? If Easter is the light, then isn't there darkness connected to it?

If Easter makes you want to sing and jump for joy and celebrate, then Good Friday should make you want to weep.

Join us Friday April 10th at 7pm for a moving Good Friday service. Candles, darkness, and ancient prayers. A service for all your senses, come bring your families and experience Good Friday.