

Rector's Annual Report 2020
St. James Episcopal Church
January 26, 2020

This morning our first reading from the prophet Isaiah says, “the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light”. These words were directed to a people far away from home; Israelites who had been exiled to a foreign land as a result of war. Jesus uses that same quote in our Gospel, except he says “the people who sat in darkness”. Was he speaking of the people who were sitting in front of him as he spoke that day? Were they people who had hard lives and heard terrible news—people who were dominated by powers beyond their control; were they burdened by sickness, disaster and hopelessness? Maybe.

And then in my lighter moments I think that the people who sat in darkness referred to us; in our parish hall for the last many years. The people who sat in darkness in the parish hall got doors with windows on one end and picture windows at the other end and now we can see a great light! Maybe it's a little bit of both...

I think in many ways that hints at a lot of what happened at St. James last year. Repairing the buildings. There was the ongoing rectory project—repairing the damage from the flooding last spring and assuring it would not happen again—so far so good. There were projects that had long been put off—I don't exactly know why—I'm just the kind of person that finds tangible, hands-on projects to be very fulfilling. After all, it's much easier to see the repairs in buildings than it is to see the transformation needed in our souls! And of course, there are also projects that are yet to be completed. Some of those include the repair of the stained-glass window that was vandalized last year. I am happy to report that insurance has approved our claim and we are in line to have it repaired as well as getting a good price to refurbish the two windows to its right and left. But that is a year-long project for the stained glass company, so we can celebrate the results in 2021.

I want to also make known that we have received a \$25,000 contribution from a parishioner to continue the repairs and remodeling in the parish hall and the kitchen. I will be appointing a committee to handle that work—I know some here have had an interest in doing this for a while, long before I came here—so if you are interested, please contact me by email or phone. (You know if you tell me things on Sundays I sometimes lose them in the busyness of my brain.)

But a church is so much more than its building, even though the building is the outward expression of what is going on inside—a sacrament with a little “s” if you will. And there was certainly a lot going on here last year. We had our usual events of Advent Fridays, Summer in the Rector’s Garden (this year complete with the unveiling of the new patio and drainage system), Lent Dinner church, and St. James’ Day Eucharist part of our series of Intergenerational Worship experiences (and this year an encounter with the sprinkler system in the park as well!)

We also had some new initiatives including installing an AED (Automated External Defibrillator) and had a session to train parishioners to use it in case of a cardiac emergency in the building. We are hosting various groups, and they increase every day such as the Palouse Choral Society, the Tapestry singing group, the Kenyan fellowship, trainings for people learning to be in-home caregivers, trainings and meetings sponsored by the Community Child Care Center.

Please read the annual report where you will see numbers for the backpack feeding program for kids at the CCCC, and you will hear later about some projects that were started last year that are still in the works.

A church is more than a building and it’s also more than the things that it does; it is a visible sign of God, the body of Christ in this world. We accomplish that through our liturgy each Sunday, our prayers of Evensong in Advent, our individual and corporate works of mercy feeding the hungry, visiting and bringing communion to the sick and burying the dead. And I hope that in our prayer and worship you experience some of the divine, in addition to experiencing God through fellowship and hospitality. Our finances are good, our relationships are authentic, we are a place where people can be themselves, and, I hope, express themselves. And of course, we study; what else would a place so close to so many educational institutions do? This year we studied Richard Rohr and his book about Christology, the parables with theologian Amy Jill Levine and each week we study the bible as the readings for the upcoming Sunday. I learned that one of the best things you can do for your spiritual life is to read the bible—every day. Not read books about the bible but read the actual bible. A challenge for you...

I would like to thank the leaders of the various ministries at St. James including our Deacons—Ted and Dianne

Altar Guild--Linda Adams

Choir and music director-- Elena Panchenko

Eucharistic Visitors—Pete Haggart

Backpack Program—Jane Seilken

Justice and Compassion Committee—Mary Flores, who are providing our meal this morning

Scheduling of our ministers in Eucharist and coffee hour—Jim Reece

Annual Giving campaign—Jim Reece and Charlie Hammerich

Church School coordinator and teacher—Cheryl Starkey

United Thank Offering coordinator—Catherine Ritchie (she gathers the adult forum, the church women and lunch bunch too)

Dean Ritchie who leads discussions in adult forum and the lectionary study

Dave Hutton who has done a thousand little tasks that are rarely seen, everything from making the water fountain finally work to making doors open and close correctly

Our Vestry and Wardens I will thank later

And last but not least—Gia, the best clergy spouse ever! -you have no idea the many things she does behind the scenes and sometimes in front as well.

Of course, I live in fear that I have missed someone...and if I have let me know and forgive me.

And thanks to everyone here who makes St. James the special place it is. And I mean it. I thank God every day for bringing me here and leading us together in our journeys.

As some of you know, I was just at a workshop entitled “Rooted in Jesus” put on by the Episcopal church and its many organizations like The Episcopal Church Foundation, Forma, Church Pension Group, Forward Movement, every one of our Seminaries, and on and on... Let me just say that it is a dangerous thing to send me to a workshop and get me all fired up for God’s work in the world before the annual meeting! That is because I see so clearly all that we have left to do. Or maybe saying “to do” is the wrong way to say it—we have so much growth and transformation left ahead of us, so many possibilities to love God and our neighbors here on the Palouse.

And loving God and our neighbors, something we have been doing for 128 years at St. James will be, I hope, kicked up a notch this year, starting at our brunch. We will have some discussion among ourselves that will hopefully help each of us get to know each other better as well as helping our leadership get a bit of a taste of the mind, heart and soul of the parish.

I am proposing that this year we pay more attention to going deeper in our life together, going deeper in our prayer life and our life as disciples of Jesus. Now I'm not saying we are going off to a monastery and I know that many of us lead busy lives, but going deeper does not mean going busier. As a matter of fact, it means paying attention to what is really important and letting go of what no longer feeds us, in a spiritual sense. So today as we pray together I invite you to notice what happens inside you during Eucharist—thoughts, feelings, wonderings, longings. Together we will explore what we as a community are called to do for Jesus. What makes us different from a service organization, what feeds us so that we can continue to bring Christ's body into the world in our very selves, continue to be a light in the dark places of our world—and make no mistake about it, there are many dark places where the light needs to shine right here on the Palouse, right now.

You will notice there is a prayer that we have repeated at the end of the prayers of the people the last few weeks. The bishop has asked us to pray this prayer all year asking God to lead us and show us where new communities are being called to be formed.

My prayer is that each one of us will come to a clearer understanding of what we are being called to do for Jesus—maybe it is just what we are doing now, maybe it is something else, but if we let the Spirit lead us we will not be disappointed.

Let us pray, shine in our darkness O God, open the windows in our souls that we may know and feel the warmth of your love, lead us to the fulfilling of your purpose for ourselves and for our parish and our world. Amen.