



Saint John's Spirit

St. John's Episcopal Church • Crawfordsville, Indiana
The Rev. Todd Kleffman, Rector (765) 362-2331

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www.stjohnscville.org

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Rector's Article:

Mike Scime's Sermon written for February 13, 2011

Scripture: Sirach 15:15-20, Psalm 119:1-8, 1 Corinthians 3:1-9, Matthew 5:21-37

When Todd and I first started attending St. Alban's, I was excited to have found a community of faith where I felt welcomed, a place where I was looked upon not as different but as a fellow child of God. Everywhere else in life, at school, at work, at other churches, and even in my own family, I had to project a false self for fear of being rejected. In the Episcopal Church I had finally found a place that accepted me as a member of the body of Christ.

At the time, several friends of mine thought that since there was no place for them in church that meant that God didn't have a place for them either. Filled with the joy of having found a loving faith community, I began inviting them to St. Alban's. Within six months, ten of them were coming regularly and a couple had inquired about baptism. Now there was a very sweet and reserved woman that I'll call Mary, who looked like she could have been my grandmother's sister. She and her husband had been members at St. Alban's for over 30 years. One day at coffee hour, Mary came over to me and with a trembling voice softly told me that she didn't like all the new people coming to church...that they were too different and she didn't want her church to get that kind of reputation. And then she walked away.

Wow – I didn't know what to say. I was surprised for sure. I was hurt. And the more I dwelled on what she had said to me, the more attacked I felt. How dare she! This wasn't her church, it was God's church. The hurt quickly turned to self-righteous anger. I began avoiding Mary while at the same time I started telling others—who I knew would agree with me—the nasty things she had said. Yes, I must admit that I became what our bishop often has referred to as a murmurer.

As a couple of weeks went by, I found that my joy about St. Alban's vanished. Worship just wasn't the same. I didn't even want to go to church and when I did, I felt like I was just going through the motions.

Then, as Grace would have it, Sue Reid our priest decided to conduct an instructed Eucharist. We do them here at St. John's from time to time. They give the priest a chance to explain the why's behind some of the traditions and rituals of the liturgy. We got to the Passing of the Peace between the Service of the Word and the Eucharist, and Sue referenced today's reading from Matthew: —So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother and sister, and then come and offer your gift.¶ It was then that I learned the Peace was not just an opportunity to be friendly to the person next to us but was more deeply intended to remind us about how to live in community.

Jesus tells us that going through the motions should not be the point of worship. Instead he asks us to examine our hearts and to think about the barriers that exist between us and our brothers and sisters. If we are holding onto a hurt or a grudge that is separating us from one another, then our hearts cannot be completely open to the life, love and forgiveness that God offers each of us at the altar. Please understand I'm not saying that God's offer of life, love, and forgiveness is somehow absent or that it is dependent on the condition of our heart. On the contrary, God's grace is always available to us. What I am saying is that when our hearts are filled with hurts and anger, then it is difficult, if not impossible, for us to receive the gifts of grace that God wants us to have and enjoy.

Jesus was always trying to show the religious leaders of his day that by focusing on adhering to the letter of the law and following all the rules, they were missing the real point. For Jesus, it was all about relationships. Later in

Matthew's gospel, Jesus commands us to love God with all our heart, all our mind and all our soul and to love neighbor as our self. He adds that on these two commandments hang all of the law and the prophets. To Jesus, relationships with God and relationships with each other are more important than going through the motions. Jesus shows us a different way. Instead of trying to focus on outward appearances like getting each step in the performance of a sacrifice just right, Jesus asks us to focus on each other first. Then with right relationships in place, the gathered community can be open to receive the gifts God offers each of us through the performance of those sacrifices.

St. Paul picks up on this theme in his letter to the Corinthians. There was much conflict in the church at Corinth. Some of it was centered on which apostle had baptized a given member, and it appears that there was a struggle within that church based on which leader was the best, or closest to God, or whatnot. St. Paul writes that as long as there is jealousy and quarreling within that church, then that community is behaving according to human inclinations. In other words, they are focusing on earthly things and missing the point that they, as a Christian community, are adopted children of God and equal members of the body of Christ. A Christian community should work to overcome earthly or human-made differences. The jealousy and quarreling over temporal matters were getting in the way of the church's ability to work together as servants—to claim the 4 identity that God would have for them as God's field and God's building. By holding onto their disagreements too tightly, they were not able to fully be the Church.

As I sat there during the instructed Eucharist, it occurred to me that my inability to restore a sense of relationship with Mary was keeping me from experiencing the sense of community that had made me so joyful about St. Alban's in the first place. I also understood how talking about it with anyone besides Mary was not healing at all but counter-productive to the community God was calling us all to be.

I intentionally did not go to the communion rail that day. Instead I stayed at my place, kneeling, and asked God to help me let the negativity go. As I became willing to let go of my hurts and my anger over the offense that had been done to me and began to think instead about Mary, God gave me an insight into what might have made her say those things to me in the first place. It occurred to me that Mary loved the community of faith gathered at St. Alban's as much as I did—probably even more as she had invested so much of herself in that community for over 30 years. Maybe she was just afraid that all of the new people would change that community into something she no longer recognized or worse, a place where she no longer felt welcome or needed. Whatever the reason, we would never understand each other without taking the risk of talking about it.

By taking the focus off of me and putting it on Mary, I was able to see God was offering an opportunity to begin a process of healing for us both. Through the course of several conversations, Mary and I began to understand what this particular Episcopal Church meant to the other. As it turned out, what Mary had said to me at that coffee hour wasn't about me or my friends at all. It was about Mary's fear that somehow all of the new members would change St. Alban's so much that she would not have a place at the 5 table any longer. It also was apparent that my reaction to Mary's words wasn't about Mary but instead was about my own fears of again not being safe or welcome in a community of faith. Both of our fears were about losing the relationships that we valued so much, yet both of our reactions were destructive to those very relationships we claimed to need.

The truth is that Mary and I never completely agreed on what direction St. Alban's should take, whether we should remain a small group of very connected loving and giving people or whether we should grow to include any and all who wanted to join. For us, healing did not mean agreement. For us, healing meant accepting our differences and being able to say that Mary and I love each other. She is my true sister and I am her true brother. Mary and her husband still attend St. Alban's and work side-by-side in ministry with many of the friends I had invited to join. Despite our fears, they all still have a place at the table.

The process of healing took time, but it had to begin with a choice on the part of both Mary and me. We had to choose to take the focus off of our very human fears and realize that as adopted children of God, we were called to a higher standard. For me, this meant setting aside my own hurts and fears and opening my heart to really hear and listen to Mary. It also meant that I had to choose to risk sharing very personal feelings, some of which I was ashamed of, for the sake of relationship.

I think Sirach sums it up best: —To act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. God has placed before you fire and water; stretch out your hand for whichever you choose. Before each person are life and death, and whichever one chooses will be given.¶ Jesus calls us to choose life and shows us that this choice is only possible when 6 We place love of God and love of neighbor first in our hearts, minds, and souls. May the Peace of Christ be with each of you today and always. Amen.

Mike and I would like to thank everyone for your, prayers, cards, visits, and time spent getting things ready for Mike to come home. Mike will be home on Thursday March 3rd.

Thank You Everyone!!!

Attention all women of St. John's and their guests. SAVE THE DATE!!!

When: 5 March 2011, 11:30 am

Where: Christ Church Cathedral in Indianapolis

What: ECW Luncheon; cost - \$10.00; childcare available @ no cost

Speakers: Hilary Cooke and Susanne McConville

Topic: West Meets East: Spirituality, Yoga, Centering Prayer

Brochures with registration forms will be available January 2011. More questions? Contact Lisa Matucheski (317-293-9324, jmatuche@sbcglobal.net) or Charlene Watson (765-474-9101, cel.watson@comcast.net). Also check the Indianapolis Diocese website for more information – www.indydio.org – and look under the Episcopal Church Women's icon. Remember - **SAVE THE DATE!!**

Announcements:

Parish Life



The annual SHROVE TUESDAY PANCAKE SUPPER will take place on March 8, 2011. Details will be announced via the March newsletter, the Google group and Sunday morning announcements, but we wanted to make sure you set the date aside on your calendars. If you are willing to help with cooking, serving or setup/cleanup, please let Nancy Bennett know at 361-2988 or njbennett@purdue.edu

Bowling for YSB



St. John's has challenged the other five downtown churches to raise funds for the Youth Service Bureau Bowling for Kids campaign. Bowling Day will be on April 16th, and Father Todd has reserved two lanes for the time from 10 AM – Noon. We will need 8 bowlers of all ages. Please sign up on the sheet on the bulletin board if you would like to be on our team. Teens are included. The church that builds up the most points through donations and scores will win a trophy. St. John's won the challenge with Wabash Ave. Presbyterian last year, so even though the challenge is greater, we want to make it two in a row! There will be opportunities for you to donate to the Bowl-a-thon from now until the day the money is turned in on the 16th.

YOUTH GROUP HAPPENINGS

Wow! We had a wonderful time at the PNO on February 18th. Our Teddy Bear Tea was attended by a triceratops, and lovely, cuddly little ones. Thanks to all who assisted and attended.

Tuesday, March 8 is Shrove Tuesday and the Youth have opted to be table busters at the Pancake Dinner and Extravaganza. It was announced at services this morning that we are looking for a few good entertainers, so polish up your routine and let Mrs. Bennett know that you would like to perform. Saturday, March 19 is a work day for Youth Group to decorate and create yummy treats for the first day of spring on Sunday March 20. Elaine will call all of you for time, place, etc. so be waiting for that call. Coming up during Spring Break--LOCK IN! More info will be in the pipeline soon.

Elevator Usage

If you need to use the elevator in Whitlock hall and are unsure of how to use the elevator please see me.... It is recommended that you use the elevator with someone else in the building (not using the elevator) or travel in the elevator with a working cell phone... Jim Suren

Alter Flowers Sign Up



The Altar Flower sign-up chart was circulated at the Annual Meeting on January 16 so members could choose a Sunday during 2011 to donate altar flowers. If you were unable to attend that meeting and would like to donate flowers, please sign-up on the Altar Flower chart posted outside of Whitlock Hall. There are several Sundays still available during the year. You will be called, as a reminder, the week before your sign-up date. Thank you.

Betty Culley, Altar Guild Chair

Calendar

Ongoing Events

Wednesday 30-Minute Eucharist from 6pm-6:30pm

Thursday Choir Practice 7pm

The next Newsletter submissions are due by Wednesday evening, 6:00 p.m March 23rd

St. John's Episcopal Church

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Return Service Requested

Dated Material — please deliver by—March 23rd