
THE
EPISCOPAL
CHURCH
welcomes you



St. John's Spirit

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August, 2017

We are committed to God, to our church, and to each other as a family in Christ, providing and cherishing spiritual growth and living our faith in the community.

It Isn't Personal -Debie Thomas; <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/the-eighth-day/current-column> (July 12) 2017

Note from Rev. Jan: I offer this article to you as something worth thinking about. It is not intended in any way to take away from how you experience and relate to God. I hope it will help each of us, as Episcopalians, remember that there is more than one way to experience and relate to God- and that whatever way you experience or relate to God is acceptable and valuable and welcome at St. John's.

It was five o'clock on a Saturday morning, and I must have been the only person awake in my college dorm. That's exactly how I wanted it as I slipped past my roommates, tiptoed down to the common room in my pajamas and slippers, and chose a comfortable spot to kneel down on the faded carpet. In my hand was a pamphlet I'd picked up the night before at a conference hosted by one of the Christian groups on campus. It was entitled "God's Love Language," and it contained — I can't believe I'm confessing this — step by step instructions on "how to receive the gift of tongues."

The theme of the conference had been "Developing Intimacy with God." The guest speaker was a proponent of charismatic gifts — tongues in particular — and her primary claim was that God wants all Christians to enjoy ecstatic, unmediated spiritual experiences of his presence. "Our Creator desires an unfiltered, one-on-one relationship with each of his children," she told the fifty or so of us who had gathered in the college chapel that early spring night. "He wants to commune with you in a profoundly *personal* way. The only obstacle to developing intimacy with God is your reluctance to claim what is yours."

As if to prove her point even as she made it, the speaker paused several times during her talk to close her eyes, tremble, sway, and utter soft, enraptured phrases in a language only she could understand. God, it seemed, broke through to her quite regularly, communicating with such loving urgency that her mind and body could barely contain the experience.

After the talk, she offered an altar call for anyone interested in receiving one of God's "love languages" for themselves. A few of my fellow students went forward, but I — too self-conscious and skeptical to risk a public display — did not. Only as I was leaving the chapel did envy get the better of me. Grabbing a pamphlet from the stack by the door, and tamping down whatever God-hunger had compelled me to attend the event in the first place, I fled.

But there I was on my knees at the crack of dawn the next morning, earnestly hoping to "claim what was my own." Ready-beyond-ready to "commune personally" with God.

I don't remember now the detailed instructions the pamphlet outlined. Something about confessing my sins and welcoming God's presence into the room. Something about opening my mouth and allowing the "holy syllables" of God's love language to emerge. Something about long streams of vowels and consonants.

I do remember that I followed the instructions with great earnestness, my hands shaking with fear and anticipation. But despite my efforts, I didn't speak in tongues that morning. Or the morning after, or the morning after that. Or, in fact, ever. For maybe a week I tried every morning, and cried hard each time the experiment failed. Not so much because I cared about charismatic expression specifically, but because I desperately wanted that elusive, essential thing I had been primed from early childhood to consider the living heartbeat of Christianity: a "personal relationship with God."

When I was growing up, having an intimate personal relationship with the divine was the number one metaphor the Christians I knew used to describe their faith. The metaphor was everywhere in our Sunday morning music, which often sounded more like romantic ballads than worship songs. It was ubiquitous in sermons, and in the favorite spiritual expressions of my fellow churchgoers: "*Christianity is a relationship, not a religion.*" "*Jesus is my best friend.*" "*God and I laugh together, cry together, do life together*" "*It's a two-people-in-the-same-room kind of experience.*" "*I can feel his arms around me.*" "*He walks with me and talks with me and tells me I am his own.*"

So saturated was my religious upbringing in this language of "personal relationship," I assumed for years that the language comes straight from the Bible. It doesn't. Nowhere in Scripture are we called to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus or with God. Nor, in fact, are we instructed to invite Jesus into our hearts as our personal Savior. I'm not saying that these expressions are wrong, or that they don't hold value and meaning for many people. But I am wondering if contemporary Christianity's emphasis on personal experience has more to do with our secular context — our therapeutic culture, our fascination with self-expression and personal narrative, our unhealthy dependence on quick fixes and easy highs — than it does with the Bible or with Christian tradition. Yes, it is absolutely true that the God of Scripture is relational — he loves, he cares, he saves. But it is just as true that the God of Scripture is mysterious, transcendent, and wholly Other. Even the most well-intentioned attempts to domesticate him must fail in the end.

Given my own story, I'm also beginning to wonder if the language of personal relationship might do more harm than good when it is universalized. I can't speak for others, but I have spent many years now feeling spiritually deficient and fraudulent because I *don't* have a personal relationship with God. I've certainly hungered for one for as long as I can remember. But to claim that I experience any kind of intimacy with God that is truly *personal* — that is comparable to the kinds of emotional, physical, and social intimacy I share with other human beings — would be a lie. God doesn't "walk with me and talk with me and tell me I am his own." I don't "feel" his arms around me. We don't laugh and cry together. Jesus is not my best friend.

I have no idea why the metaphor of personal relationship hasn't worked for me. Who knows what complicated mixture of nature, nurture, personality, and history go into the ways we each find and commune with God? I'm not for one moment denying the experiences of Christians who do claim to share deep intimacy with their Creator. I'm just finally being honest enough to admit that I don't, and to consider whether it's time to let this long-held expectation go. Maybe it's time to decide that I'm *not* deficient or fraudulent, and to trust that there are many ways of relating to

God — communal, sacramental, intellectual, incarnational — that have little to do with personal intimacy or emotional catharsis. Maybe it's time to accept the hunger itself — the aching hunger for God I've known since childhood — as itself a kind of holy intimacy, a promise of a union still to come. After all, what is faith but the living out of a hope that is not yet realized? To yearn for what is still beyond my grasp, to reach out with my imagination towards something distant, elusive, and Beyond — isn't this the essence of faith?

And if it is, won't my love and compassion for a broken, hungry world grow deeper if I acknowledge my own hunger? Won't I become God's hands and feet more readily if I confess his Absent Presence in my own life?

During his last days on earth, Jesus spent a lot of time talking about absence. "You will look for me, but you will not find me, and where I am, you cannot come." After his resurrection, he allowed "doubting" Thomas to see and touch his scarred body, but commended more highly those who trust in God *without* the benefit of personal experience: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Despite everything I've just written, it still feels scandalous to admit that I don't have a personal relationship with God. I hope someday it won't sting so much to tell this truth. But I hope even more fiercely that I will learn to give voice to what I *do* have — hunger, yearning, and a limping but dogged faith that lives in the shadow of an irresistible, searing absence. Maybe these are holy syllables of another kind. Maybe these are the first words of *my* love language with God.

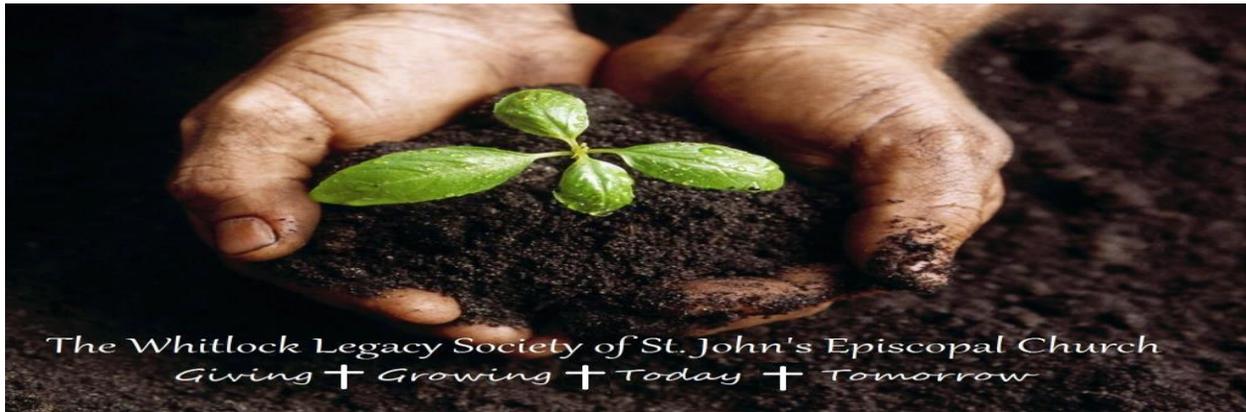
Join us on **Sunday, August 13th** when Sam Vaught will preach at both services and then at 9:15a share with us his last year as a member of the Episcopal Service Corps/St. Hilda's House, New Haven, CT. Sam will be leaving shortly thereafter to begin his first year at Berkeley Divinity School (part of Yale Divinity School). Sam is a Postulant for Holy Orders.

Berkeley
The Episcopal Seminary at **YALE**



Repairs and cleaning of our stained glass windows will occur at the end of July and into August (providing nothing interrupts the schedule!). Our windows add great beauty to our building and enhance our worship. The windows are more than 100 years old and have never been cleaned! It's high time that we undertake this work to ensure they will continue to be a major part of our historic building.

The estimated cost of the entire project is about \$26,000. If you would like to contribute to this project, please write a check made payable to St. John's with "Stained Glass Windows" in the memo line. That will ensure that your gift is applied to this project. Thank you!



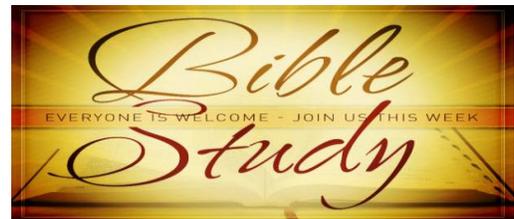
The Planned Giving Ministry Team usually calls to your attention the various materials St. John's has made available for estate planning. This month, we want to direct you to the Episcopal Church Foundation's ("ECF") guidance for preparing a letter to your family as part of your overall estate planning. Preparing such a letter may seem like an onerous task but giving it time to develop, as you consider how you wish to distribute your estate, will leave your family with more than the reading of a will. A family letter allows you to share your heart and show appreciation and gratitude for family members. If you'd like to see suggestions from ECF, please contact Sam Hildebrand, Chair.



Food, Fun & Fellowship Groups!

Ed and Sue Fain hosted their dinner group at Raccoon Lake on July 1, 2017. We were blessed with beautiful weather which included a cookout followed by fireworks on Raccoon Lake. We missed part of our group due to their travel plans, but knew they were with us in spirit.

During the summer while our regular Christian Formation programs are on vacation, we invite you to join us on **Wednesday afternoons at 4pm in Whitlock Hall** for Bible Study. Come, read and discuss the Word of God. All are welcome- no prior experience is needed. Just an interest and a willingness to deepen your faith!



Wednesday mornings at 7:30a, a group of us meet for ½ hour of centering (silent) prayer, a reading of Scripture and hearing how God speaks to us that day. We finish by 8:15a. It's amazing how well your day goes after a short 30 minutes in prayer. Won't you try it?

Savoring the Sacred Pauses -- A retreat of practices for the rhythm of our days and a rule for our lives At the Episcopal Women's Ministries Fall Retreat **September 29– October 1, 2017** at the Waycross conference Center with the Right Reverend Jennifer Baskerville Burrows, 11th Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Indianapolis as retreat leader. *Please see*



the bulletin board in Whitlock Hall for more details.

Financial statements are posted on the bulletin board as it is available (usually about mid-month for the prior month and once the bank and investment statements are available and the Vestry has met and accepted the monthly financials).



June 2017 Year to date: Total Revenues of \$85,495.21
Total Expenses of \$76,355.58 Net Income of \$9,139.63

Thank you to everyone who pledges and/or gives financially. Your monetary gifts enable us to be the “Episcopal Branch of the Jesus Movement” as Presiding Bishop Michael Curry is fond of saying.



A **special thank** you goes to those who donated food and/or time during this year’s **summer lunch project**. During the third week in July we were able to feed 45 children for three days. Twenty-two parishioners were involved with this project. The Outreach Committee appreciates your support. -Cindy Smith



FUNKY 5k!

JOIN US FOR A FUN RUN/WALK FOR ALL AGES!

AUGUST 19 | MILLIGAN PARK | 8:15A REGISTRATION

**Wear a costume.
WIN A PRIZE!**

Youth
as resources

Giving. Serving. Leading.

Pre-Registration form available at the Youth Service Bureau . 209 E Pike St. Cville



Won't you please help out? We need hosts for our coffee hour after the 10:30a service. A few of you regularly sign up but there are many more

who could.... Please see the bulletin board in the hallway and find a Sunday when you might provide cookies or treats to go with our coffee.

Church Directory UPDATE



"Time to update the photo directory" ... if you do not have your picture on the photo board outside Whitlock or need to update yours, please find Kitty Haffner at church so she can take your picture. If you have a

favorite picture you would rather have posted, just drop it off in Kitty's mailbox outside the office (lower level).



Mark your calendars! **Saturday, September 9th** beginning at **4p.m.**, join us at Alan and Barbara Brookie White's Yountsville Mill for another afternoon of music, food and fellowship. If you are a musician, we'd love to have you play or sing for us! Contact Kitty Haffner, please!



Rev. Jan is available by cell phone (765-225-8554) or email (janet.oller@gmail.com). Office hours are by appointment. Check the calendar posted on the office door for the most current schedule. She generally does not read or respond to emails or voice messages on her days off or her Sabbath.



Date	Lector	LEMS	Cruc/Acolyte	Greeters	Altar Guild	LEVs	Flowers	Counters	Coffee Hr.
8/6 8	Randy	Randy	Teresa						
10:30	Nancy B	Jeff & Kim R	John C/ na	Sheila & Meegan	Jerilyn & Terry	Elaine & Randy	Sam & Susie H	Alan & Tom	
8/13 8	Adrienne	Adrienne	Kitty						
10:30	Barb E	Randy & Meribeth		Dan & John	CJ & Cyndy	Elaine & Randy	Ellen	Ed & John	
8/20 8	Dan B	Dan B	Teresa						
10:30	Helen H	Marc & Adrienne	Steve/ CJ	Fains	Carole & Jo	Shirley & Jeff	Jane	Nancy & Jim	
8/27 8	Mark	Meribeth	Cyndy						
10:30	Rees	Dan & Jeff	Sam & Peggy	Sam S & Debbie S	Betty & Meegan	Shirley & Jeff	Scott O	Susan & Wayne	

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
AUGUST		1	2 7:30a-Centering Prayer (WH) 11:30a-Flower Lovers (WH) 4p-Bible Study 6:30p-Oller (WH)	3 Rector Sabbath 6p-YSB (WH)	4 6p:Oller (WH)	5 10:30-Oller @ COM/Waycross
6 8 & 10:30a-HE 11:35 Gratitude Comm (Library)	7 Noon: League (WH)	8 7:15a-YSB (WH)	9 7:30a-Centering Prayer (WH) 4p-Bible Study 6:30p-Oller (WH)	10 Rector Sabbath	11 Oller Day Off	12 Swearingen (WH)
13 8 & 10:30a-HE	14 Oller Vacation 7p-Bennett (Library)	15 Oller Vacation	16 7:30a-Centering Prayer (WH) 4p-Bible Study Oller Vacation	17 6p YSB (WH) Rector Sabbath	18 Oller Day Off	19 YSB "Funky 5K @ Milligan Park 11a-LWV/Bennett/WH
20 8 & 10:30a-HE (NO Vestry)	21	22 Oller: Vacation	23 7:30a-Centering Prayer (WH) 4p-Bible Study Oller: Vacation	24 Rector Sabbath	25 Oller Day Off	26 8:30a-Divorce Recovery Workshop (Lib) 2:30p-Kay Francis (WH)
27 8 & 10:30a-HE (Debra Kissinger serves at St. John's; Rev. Jan at Good Samaritan, Brownsburg)	28 5p-Women's Legacy (WH)	29 4p-Outreach (WH)	30 7:30a-Centering Prayer (WH) 4p-Bible Study	31 Rector Sabbath 6p-YSB (WH)		Rev. Jan can be reached by cell phone: 765-225-8554 or email: janet.oller@gmail.com She usually does not read or respond to emails on her Sabbath or Day Off.