

ST. DUNSTAN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, ELLSWORTH

TID BITS FROM THE TABLE ~ JANUARY 26, 2024

Dear ones,

Well, the white board I mentioned last week in TidBits has been filled, wiped clean and restocked more times than I care to admit this past week! But the house looks good inside and out, we feel refreshed, and we've even (gasp) made a really good start on our taxes (full disclosure...we then give them to A's uncle whose accounting firm in Chicago also does the Cubs' taxes!). Arthur's sniffles early in the week amounted to nothing in particular for any of us and we are grateful indeed.

We had a friend stop by today to visit the nonprofit gallery we run from our carriage house (gallery's called The Parsonage); she brought a friend who turned out to be a colleague of mine I hadn't yet met. We were chatting over tea inside our house and the conversation turned to how we Rosens had come to move to Maine, plus how I was finding my position as your priest-in-charge.

I enthusiastically chirped--I happily broadcast this to anyone who will listen--about the exceedingly high level I've got of what some might term 'job satisfaction;' about my wonderful parishioners and how loving, fascinating and generous they are, and their fluency with respect to their own tradition and theology. I could see my colleague's joy for us spring up in her eyes.

I am so looking forward to this Sunday, and our Annual Meeting. As you know, you can join in person or via Zoom; the Annual Meeting will be immediately after our Sunday service. For those who join in person, our potluck will follow (my first Annual Meeting potluck with you; yay!).

We have so much to celebrate. Also, we've many dear members to recognize; I'm thinking specifically of the time, devotion and talents of our outgoing members of Vestry AND of our outgoing Senior Warden. I'm also thinking of those who've graciously offered to stand for Deputy Senior Warden, Senior Warden, Junior Warden, Treasurer, and Assistant Treasurer. so, too, those who are volunteering to continue serving on Vestry, and our church family who serve on each of our Teams including Liturgy Team and Safety Team, plus members who quietly sort out any issue that arises, among still others. I'm thinking also of the dear souls I so enjoy visiting at their homes, and of all our church family I so enjoy seeing and visiting with every Sunday.

See as many of you as can be this Sunday, in person and on Zoom!

With love,
Carolyn+



ANNUAL MEETING: Our Annual Meeting will take place right after our service in the sanctuary on **JANUARY 28, 2024**. We will Zoom for those who are unable to join us in person. After the meeting we are planning to have a Pot Luck brunch and/or lunch. A sign up sheet will be available after our services this month but, if you missed the sheet feel free to bring what you want or better yet just come. **Booklets will be available at the meeting and can be sent to you through email or picked up at your convenience during office hours.**

The Zoom link for the meeting is the same one as for our service. The meeting will start about 10-15 minutes after the conclusion of our service.

This week we are **Green** according to CDC for our county.



Even with the wind down of **COVID 19**, we know that it will be with us for some time to come. The CDC is now resuming coding the occurrences of COVID. We will keep you informed.

We at St. Dunstan's we will continue to follow CDC data and the practices in our Diocesan parishes. Our vestry has voted to not require masks. If you wish to wear one, masks will be available. Of course, if you are feeling unwell, we ask that you rest and join us on Zoom. Our hope is that you will stay well and will join us for our worship services each Sunday.



Happy Birthday to Nancy Shipman and Carol Mason! Enjoy!

Update your Directory Information

Please update or confirm your contact details for our parish directory. Contact our church office--stdunstansellsworth@gmail.com--with your title(s), postal address, email address(es) and best phone number(s).



American Red Cross

National Blood Shortage

Please schedule your next blood donation at redcrossblood.org

Faith in Maine:

This is a podcast produced by our Episcopal Diocese with various members of the clergy giving their thoughts and prayers. The podcast changes each week. Feel free to call and listen. You can call **207-223-6402** at any time. They last approximately 4-5 minutes.

FAITH IN MAINE

GOD AT WORK IN OUR COMMUNITIES

A PODCAST OF THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MAINE



1.14.24 Homily – Tom Hancock

Let the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Our selected readings today give us several different views of faith and belief... the nature of God, and of our relationship and responsibilities to God.

Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17

The Psalm tells us, in several ways, that God made me and knows me in every part, but I can never know or fully understand all of God's thoughts and works.

Samuel 3:1-10(11-20)

Along this same line, Our Old Testament reading suggests that we don't always know that it is God speaking to us. He sometimes has to call to us repeatedly before we hear, or know it is him. And we are charged with acting on his words or requests, however uncomfortable or painful they may be.

This would have been especially difficult for young Samuel, delivering harsh news to his elder, a priest – telling Eli that his whole house is to be punished for the sins of his sons, which Eli had tried – unsuccessfully – to stop.

Gospel - John 1:43-51

And in our Gospel reading, Nathanael's telling line: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" How many of us have had this dismissive reaction to someone or someplace – or perhaps heard it said about a place that is seen as impoverished, disreputable, or a backwater...perhaps even our own hometown?

When Jesus tells Nathanael he knows him because he saw him earlier under the fig tree, Nathanael says, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these."

Here is Jesus using another of his minor miracles to prove his divinity, and then once again chastising the listener for only now being convinced of that divinity.

This raises a question I often confront: Do you believe without requiring demonstrations of God's power, in some form? Does your faith in the divine require seeing miracles, or at least believing in miracles? And further, how do we even define – or understand – the divine?

I apologize in advance for the fact that these questions were also a theme in my Homily last March – but it is something that is often on my mind and in my heart. Besides, that was so long ago nobody probably remembers!

So, my two big questions:

- First, Is it necessary to believe in God to be a good person and do good works? Is it enough to do the good works?
- And second, If you believe in God, in some form, is it necessary to believe literally in miracles and the supernatural elements of God - a specific theological interpretation of the divine - in order to be a 'good' christian?

Elsewhere in the Gospel of John (4:48), Jesus chastises the Galileans (and perhaps others) saying 'Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.' In contrast, the Samaritans had only needed to hear his words to believe (John 4:42) – though this was after the Samaritan woman at the well had already told them of Jesus' miraculous knowledge of her whole life.

And of course later, John (20:29) also has Jesus telling all the Doubting Thomases – like me! – "blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

It comes down to one's comfort level with Uncertainty: to be willing and able to live with the unknown – unknowable – unprovable, with or without demonstrable proof in the form of miracles. To accept and believe on faith. Fundamentalists (of all faiths) require a single, simple, unarguable explanation or interpretation, and woe betide those who question them.

I won't even get started on fundamentalist, megachurch (or minichurch) leaders who call themselves and their churches "Christian," but by their words and actions do not appear to qualify as Jesus followers. And who claim to have the only correct interpretation of liturgical texts. OK, just real briefly - Let's name names – are the millionaire megachurch Pastors like Joel Osteen doing the same work of Christ as small local parishes? What of churches and denominations that seem overtaken by misogyny, homo/transphobia, racism, idolatry...tolerance of sexual abuse? Maybe the problems are in the institutions and their leaders, not in the faith of the members.

Personally, that is what led or pushed me away from the Roman Catholicism of my youth. I was a diligent CCD student and altar boy (no altar girls, of course), but when, as a freshly confirmed, callow youth of 12 or 13 I started participating in adult Bible study sessions, there was little or no acceptance of questioning the 'official' interpretation of all the biblical text, religious practices or sacraments – particularly from a smart aleck kid. Everything from the details of transubstantiation v. consubstantiation in the Eucharist to the role of women in the church – and since several nuns who taught at our local parochial school participated in the bible study group, this latter was an especially sensitive subject. And the broader role of the Church in the modern world –

this being the tumultuous late 60's - was of course a bit of a minefield, too. The impact of the recent Vatican II changes, such as they were, hadn't perhaps fully filtered down to all the small town churches. Then, undergraduate life as a philosophy student took me in all different directions regarding faith and the divine, and the nature of existence. But somehow, this and other experiences - including, most importantly, the impact of participating in Jaci's faith journey - lead me to a new faith - and a Church - that was more open to all who were willing to come gather and pray together, whatever questions they had about accepted doctrine.

Some of you may be familiar with the so-called **Jefferson Bible**. Thomas Jefferson compiled 2 manuscripts about Jesus - One, *The Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth*, was completed in 1804 - however, no copies survive. The other, *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, commonly referred to as the *Jefferson Bible*, was completed in 1820; copies exist, though it was never published. This document was created by cutting and pasting with a razor and glue sections from the New Testament, to extract what he understood as the doctrine of Jesus. Jefferson's condensed composition excludes all miracles by Jesus and most mentions of the supernatural, including sections of the four gospels that contain the Resurrection and most other miracles, and passages that portray Jesus as divine. Jefferson's goal was to strip away not just the divinity, but the interpretations and additions by later writers, the impact of philosophical, theological, institutional and political disputes, to get to the true lessons of the life and teachings of Jesus. As Jefferson stated in a letter:

There will be found remaining the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered to man. I have performed this operation for my own use, by cutting verse by verse out of the printed book, and arranging the matter which is evidently his, and which is as easily distinguishable as diamonds in a dunghill.

As one historian notes: "If a moral lesson was embedded in a miracle, the lesson survived in Jeffersonian scripture, but the miracle did not... Jefferson managed to maintain Jesus' role as a great moral teacher, not as a shaman or faith healer."

THEMES

Role of the church/duty of a Christian

So what is the significance of acting on these moral principles out of a belief that we are serving Jesus, rather than serving our fellow humanity for secular reasons? And how far are we to take our efforts act on these moral principles?

When one feeds the poor or otherwise helps those in some need (on our own or though the Church and its programs),

they are considered a good Christian, maybe even saintly - even though they are just doing the least that should be expected of one. Many of our churches - here and around the world - are heavily involved in helping those in need through meal programs, food banks, and other social services and community support efforts- indeed, it is seen as a basic, important and even expected role for churches. However, if one starts examining, critiquing and perhaps attempting to change or improve the system the economic and political systems that have created the poverty or other social ills one is trying to relieve on a micro level - if we attempt to do that work on a macro level - we are called liberal do-gooders, socialists or worse. And if one does so in express service of their faith and church, then they are improperly involving the Church (or their faith) in the political process - risking at the very least tax exempt status - or worse, credibility as a faith. I trust that our own Bishop Brown's participation with other faith leaders in the Gun Safety Day of Action in Augusta last week, does not raise any of these problems.

In a recent NYT Opinion piece, the Anglican rector of the parish of Haworth, near Doncaster, England is quoted as asking "Instead of pulling people out of the river, what if we could go upstream and find out why they are falling in?"

Jesus says to render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and to God that which is God's. But who is responsible for alleviating the suffering of the poor, the victims of Caesar's system - private religious or secular organizations, or Caesar himself, in the form of the State? Or both? What duty to we have - religious or otherwise - to try to see that the State serves the people in the way Jesus has directed us?

Is it enough that people do 'good' acts (as defined by our faith), without reference to the motivation of those people, whether it is faith, humanism, basic decency or selflessness?

When contemplating these various threads of my thinking, I ask myself whether my motivation, or those of others who perform "good deeds", matters. For myself, it is enough to know that my faith - including the difficult questions underlying my belief in a divine Jesus - fuels my actions.

Like Nathaniel, Jesus is asking me, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." I remain open to seeing all these greater things.

AMEN

Diocesan Cycle of Prayer: We pray for St. Peter, Rockland, and St. Columba, Boothbay Harbor. We pray especially for the wardens and vestries of our congregations.

We Pray Especially For: Kathy O'Connell, Robbie Johnston, Jesse Pierce, Eve Mitchell, Skip Stevens, Larmie Knuesli, Tony Rowan, Sally Rowan, and Dorothy Sweeney.

If you would like to add someone to the prayer list or continue a name on the list, please let us know at stdunstansellsworth@gmail.com or leave a message at the church (667-5495). Prayer requests will remain for three weeks unless notified that the request needs to remain for more.

It is important to us that the list is up-to-date and accurate.
To everyone, please stay well and safe. Blessings to you all.

Almighty and merciful God, we ask in our prayers that the conflict in Ukraine and the others around the world can be resolved peacefully. Bless the people that have been affected by the unrest and grant them peace and justice. We also ask for the people in our own country that have been impacted by the hurricanes, violence and loss of loved ones as they grieve, pick up their lives. Grant them strength, comfort, and healing. All this we ask with the power of your love to all through Jesus Christ our Lord.

~ UPCOMING WORSHIP / EVENTS SCHEDULE ~

At this time the Sunday services will be both in church following safe practices and via Zoom. Compline is every Thursday at 7:00p.m via Zoom

The sanctuary is open for quiet reflection and prayer on Mondays from 1 to 3.

Access to the sanctuary is available through the lower level parking lot doors of the church during this time.

January 28 ~ Holy Eucharist, 9:30 am, Annual Meeting after the service

February 4 ~ Holy Eucharist, 9:30 am

February 11 ~ Morning Prayer, 9:30 am. Dianne as Officiant and Homilist

February 18 ~ Holy Eucharist, 9:30 am

February 25 ~ Holy Eucharist, 9:30 am

March 3 ~ Holy Eucharist, 9:30 am

Let us always remember that we are living on the traditional homelands of the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot peoples and of the Wabanaki confederacy of Maine. We recognize the native peoples throughout this land.

Prayer For Peace

Oh Great Spirit who dwells in the sky,
lead us to the path of peace and understanding,
let all of us live together as brothers and sisters.
Our lives are so short here, walking upon Mother Earth's surface,
let our eyes be opened to all the blessings you have given us.
Please hear our prayers, Oh Great Spirit.
- Native American Prayer

Family News



We would love to hear about **your news** and for **what you are thankful**
for during this year. Submit your news to

stdunstansellsworth@gmail.com



Priest - Rev. Dr. Carolyn Rosen
Deacon - Rev. Tracy Shaffer
Senior Warden - Dianne Kelley
Deputy Warden – Tom Hancock
Junior Warden - McKim Peterson

www.saintdunstansellsworth.org

You can contact us by leaving a message by telephone or email:

Phone: 667-5495 Email: stdunstansellsworth@gmail.com

Fred Beyer and Muffet Stewart: stdunstanstreasurer@gmail.com

Rain is in the church office Tuesday, Thursday & Friday, 8 – 9 am