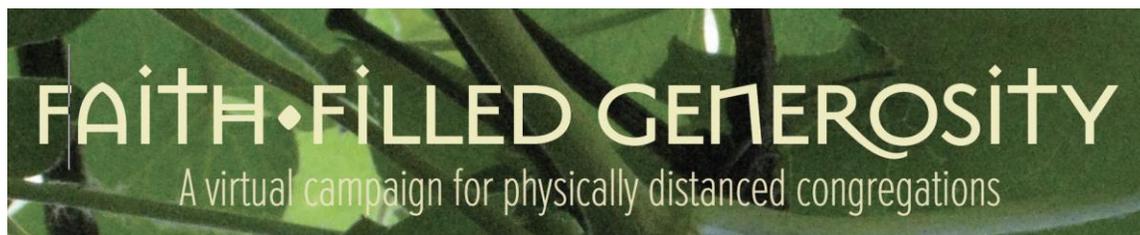


St. James' E-pistle: **SPECIAL EDITION**

A Letter from the Rector for September 18, 2020



Dear People of St. James',

Late in the spring, I ventured out to our local garden suppliers for a few of the herbs and vegetables that I grow each year in pots on my porch. In addition to essentials like cilantro, parsley, and thyme, I always get a couple varieties of hot peppers for the curries I'm partial to. I found one serrano plant that I was looking for, but the only really hot pepper I could find, the "Carolina Reaper," came in a three-pack, far more than I would need. So, I potted up two of those, and planted the other in the ground next to the patio at the Rectory and wished the little guy "Good Luck."

We are now at the time of harvest of that crop. As I suspected, the pepper I planted in the ground didn't last long. It was never really able to take hold in that soil, as least not with enough vigor to compete with the other grasses that grew up around it. But the other two, which were planted in potting soil, watered daily, fertilized regularly, and moved around throughout the summer for maximum sun exposure, they absolutely prospered. And as you can see in the photo below, I now have **way** more Carolina Reapers that I know what to do with, so I will have no shortage of spicy hot sauce to get through the chill of whatever winter holds for us.



And as I am beginning to pick that abundant peck of peppers, with Covid-19 era gloves and mask and goggles on, it seems to me this harvest might be just the message I need from God for today. When I planted those peppers, we were in a time of great uncertainty, caution, and fear. But even as our lives remained constrained, these plants flourished. Throughout a spring and summer filled with loss, deprivation, sadness, and isolation, God was working together with my gardening efforts to give growth bit by bit, every single day, right before my eyes.

But sadly for the extra plant that was left to fend for itself in the dirt, it just wasn't going to be able to make it without a gardener's hand. The lesson for me? Perhaps that God works *with* the gardener to produce the harvest. That is, the gardener can't necessarily expect to plant the seed, then just rely on God to take it from there till harvest time! Instead, another cycle of that partnership is complete today, and it is time to harvest and enjoy those wonders of God, little gifts wrapped in jackets of red that, in this case, bear far more potency than they appear (After all, each of those Carolina Reapers is said to be as hot as 440 jalapeños! Never doubt God's wondrous power to pack a punch in a small, unassuming package!)

As a Church, we here at St. James' are entering into a time of harvest as well. Our Capital Campaign has officially wrapped up, and now our Stewardship Campaign is about to begin. We have already made our commitments to sustaining and expanding the potential of our Buildings and Grounds for ministry years and years into the future. In the weeks to come, we will be considering the gifts that have come our way this year, and making our plan to share and pass along a portion of that bounty to support God's continuing work in our lives, our parish, our community and our world.

True, 2020 has been a year of great loss for so many of us. Some of us have lost jobs, some have lost time, others have lost loved ones far too soon. That grief is still very much present with us, and will be here well into the future. As much as we might prefer to turn the corner and put this year behind us, grieving just doesn't work that way.

But even as we make our way forward with our grief, we also see signs all around us that God is with us still, and active in our midst. God is with us in our grief, and at the same time sharing God's abundance in packages both large and small, if we have eyes to see that generosity. We have lost much as a parish this year, but God has not abandoned us. We will be a church changed forever by the challenges of 2020, but our scriptures show us how God has rebuilt lives and kingdoms from the rubble of destruction and catastrophe before. So, as we begin to examine our lives, our gifts, and our relationships with God and one another in our faith community through the coming weeks, I pray that God will help us to open our eyes, even though they have been wincing from pain for so very long, to perceive God's abundance face to face, and then respond together with a generosity of our own.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Dustin+