

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

A Letter from the Rector for September 4, 2020

Dear People of St. James',

This week, I climbed back into the saddle at St. James', after a time away for rest and vacation in August. My deepest thanks go out to your wardens, parish leaders, and the army of volunteers who together managed the affairs of our church while I was away. August did not pass without incident: pastoral concerns arose, office equipment broke down, and a few technical glitches worked their way into our online worship offerings. But I could not be more pleased and prouder of the way that St. James' rose to the occasion time after time and met those challenges head on, responding and adapting and learning every step of the way. I'm truly grateful beyond measure!

Today, a new month and a new season in the life of our church is upon us. September is traditionally the time when Episcopal congregations start up a new "program year." Sunday School registrations begin, Christian Formation activities take shape, and the work of service and planning for the vitality of the church starts up in earnest. This is 2020, however, and there is nothing at all "traditional" about this year! It is also my first fall with St. James', which means every passing week, every month, every holiday is a first for me with you all. And so, I've been feeling a certain tension growing lately, between our familiar patterns and customs, and the novelty that the current pandemic has pushed into every aspect of life. We in the church often take a great comfort in the cozy familiarity of "the way we've always done things before." We feel reassured when a new worship season begins, and we pull out the appointed vestments in the proper seasonal color, just as we have for years and years. We feel competent starting a new Stewardship Campaign or Sunday School program, knowing that "we've been here before," we know how to do this. But this time around, the ground of familiarity and tradition seems to be cracking up beneath our feet, and the foundation of all those solid, concrete patterns and customs and ways of doing things as a church has grown precarious. This year, whole church seasons have come and gone, without the familiar changes of color in our worship spaces. Opportunities for annual fellowship celebrations like the Parish Picnic have passed us by, and the traditional September kickoff when we re-gather in earnest is not happening this time around.

All of those changes in 2020 may feel grievous to us. In so many aspects of our lives, we now

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appreciate so much that we had taken for granted before. We realize how we miss comforts we never imagined being taken away from us. We struggle with complicated feelings of sadness and anger and exhaustion that weigh down up us, as pandemic weeks have turned to months. But I think it is also undeniably true that these seismic changes are shaking up new possibilities for us. Speaking for myself, I know I have been growing technological skills for ministry over the past several months that were never remotely on my radar in the years B.C. (“before Covid-19”)! And now, as we are starting off a new September, we all together are confronting a dazzling (and daunting!) array of opportunities for new growth and new possibilities for our church community. I hope we will all be able to hold lightly in our hands “the way we’ve always done things before,” letting go of patterns that do not serve us well in our current day, and leaving room in our grip to take hold of new tools and opportunities and resources.

It is true, we are in the midst of a disconcerting and disorienting time as a Church. After all, observing our core Sacraments is now, for the moment, not a safe option for us as a community. So, where does that leave us? We are feeling vulnerable and intimidated, as if we’ve become detached from the solid ground beneath our feet and are now floating in the air. And perhaps that’s quite true. But perhaps that vulnerable space is *precisely* where our venerable institution needs to be right now. As we have seen in the recent storms that battered our communities this summer, those sudden winds sent many mighty and ancient trees crashing down to the ground, because they were unable to bend to their extraordinary circumstances. They were just too fixed in one place to survive. The nimble birds of the sky, however, weathered the storms much better. They were able to lift themselves into those very winds and fly off to safety and prosperity in a new place. They may have lost their nest in the storm, but they wasted no time building again, and adapting to the where they are now, to their new home.

My hope and prayer today is that in this present time, when we may be feeling that we as a church are now floating in the air without the familiar solid ground beneath our feet, that we may take advantage of these circumstances, and not fight stubbornly against them. Lifted into mid-air by with winds of change as we seem to be, may the breath of the Holy Spirit carry us as she will, farther and faster that we could ever have imagined before. May we find safety and thrive in that new place we land, under the shadow of her wings. And may the ground beneath our re-planted Church be a fertile field, waiting the seeds of the Gospel that we will sow. So,

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even as the pandemic storm rages on... Let the winds of the Spirit blow, I say! [Veni Sancte Spiritus!](#)

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Dustin+