

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

A Letter from the Rector for July 10, 2020

Dear People of St. James',

Several years ago, I officiated at the funeral of a dearly beloved member of my church community. Bill was a true patriarch of the parish family, with a striking white beard and ice blue eyes that had seen the church through clergy changes, capital campaigns, and countless celebrations and sorrows. He served at my left hand at the altar faithfully for many years, always there through challenging liturgies like Good Friday and Christmas Eve. Because Bill's death came suddenly and unexpectedly, his funeral was a particularly difficult occasion for many of us who had to say goodbyes that we were not prepared for.

At the reception following the funeral, though, something remarkable happened. As I was meeting family members who had traveled in for the funeral, I was introduced to a nephew of Bill's. I confess, I don't remember his name, or where he lived, or really any of the details that accompanied the introduction. All I can remember is losing my breath for a moment, when I immediately noticed that he had the exact same ice blue eyes as his uncle. The uncanny resemblance was shocking, as if those eyes I thought had closed forever had somehow opened again, on a face of a younger generation.

I recalled that memory this week, as I've been watching all the adaptations continue here at St. James' in our worship, in our ministries, and in our common life together. Yes, I still hear a fair amount of "the way we used to do it," but more and more, we are coming to terms with the reality that in so many major ways, we have been thrust into a very different world for the long haul. Covid-19 came suddenly and unexpectedly, and has brought with it changes to our Church that I suspect will never be undone or reversed. That truth has been painful, perhaps more so as these pandemic days have turned to weeks and, now, months. Most parishioners left St. James' Church back in March, not knowing it would be the last time they would set foot within that building for months. None of us had a chance to say goodbye, and many are feeling traumatized by the sudden loss.

But from Pastoral Care, to Christian Formation, to Worship, and so many other areas of our

life together, we have been adapting and adjusting and trying out new ways of expressing who we are, and what we believe, and what we stand for as a community of faith. God's Spirit is still very much with us. We did not leave God behind, when we left the building at 25 West Street back in March. Our spiritual gifts remain, as do our passions, talents, resources, and all our various callings. We are just now having to find new ways and new avenues to express and make the most of them all.

It is my deepest hope that even as many of us are grieving our losses of what St. James' had been not so long ago, we will remain connected, stay engaged, and keep our minds and hearts and souls open to new possibilities for our present reality, and our unknowable future. Those years ago, I was emotionally, physically, and spiritually exhausted after Bill's funeral. Still, I pushed forward and stayed connected with the family on through the reception that followed. Because I did, I saw with my own eyes a reminder of how life continues on in new generations, not severed from those that have gone before, but carrying on, as clear as Bill's unmistakable eyes.

As we experiment in the coming weeks with in-person outdoor worship, new avenues for pastoral care, and novel ideas for fellowship, I pray that, despite all the difficulties of these changes and adaptations, those who know St. James' best will still be able to see in us the marks of our Father in heaven, and will recognize "St. James' Eyes" in all that we do. God willing, those eyes will peer out from countenances we are just getting to know.

Yours in Christ,

*Fr. Dustin+*