

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

A Letter from the Rector for July 17, 2020

Dear People of St. James',

One of the first questions often asked by visitors to our denomination's churches is, "What's the difference between "Episcopal" and "Anglican"? It's a good question, because depending on the country, the denomination goes by different names. There's an equally good reason for the difference. Originally, at the time of the English Reformation, an official "Church of England" came into being as a reformed expression of the "one, holy, catholic and Apostolic Church" of our ancient creeds. Then, over the centuries, as the empire of Britain expanded, so too did the domain of the Church of England, or "Anglicanism." That means that, in the original colonies of our present land, we called ourselves "Anglicans" just like our fellow church-goers in Canterbury and York did.

Then came an event that changed everything. In the American Revolution, the colonies politically broke apart from the British kingdom and became The United States of America. Of course, this traumatic and violent parting left Anglicans in America in an unenviable situation. Our spiritual bonds were tightly connected with England. In fact, in their ordination vows, all the Anglican clergy of the colonies had promised allegiance to the British crown. Painful choices of enormous consequence had to be made. Many of the clergymen (yes, only men at the time) fled to Canada, in order to honor their original vows. For those that chose to remain, profound change would be absolutely necessary. So, our leaders gathered in our first General Convention to work through how we could honor our faith and our traditions, while fully embracing our new reality as citizens of a new country. One of those changes was to remove the reference to England from our name, emphasizing instead our oversight by Bishops, rather than a king. Hence, we now call ourselves "Episcopalians," rather than "Anglicans" to this day.

I've been reminded of that aspect of our history this week, as we make our way through yet another period of traumatic change in our church. The global coronavirus pandemic has pierced the heart of so many of our most ancient and treasured practices, and much of our identity as one Body. As we did during times of political revolution, we Episcopalians are now facing changes affecting the pillars of our faith and sense of community. Perhaps most challenging of all, we are coming to realize that many things will never go back to the way they once were. Granted, some of those changes bear no silver lining, but some, I believe, are necessary, and have been waiting a long time for circumstance to require us to adapt and move forward.

As painful as the revolutionary parting was, I do believe good, and holy, and necessary progress has been made in the Episcopal church over the centuries. Yes, we acknowledge and value our connection to the larger Anglican Communion, but we know that we are no longer members of The Church of England. We are close relatives, but a different immediate family. For example, just this week, the news broke that the Archbishops of Canterbury and York will no longer lay on hands in the consecration services of any new bishops in the Church of England. The reason? Because the tension between those who disagree with the ordination of women and those who do is so great in the Church of England, that the most influential authorities in that Church are stepping out of the consecration act altogether. Such a situation in here in our Episcopal Church is almost unthinkable. But it's another example of how we Episcopalians have walked our way, as faithfully as we can, growing and adapting ever since those tumultuous days of the birth of our nation.

Such tumultuous days are again upon us at St. James' Church. We are not fleeing from the challenge, however. But we are having to strip away many of our habits and expectations, holding unto the core of our beliefs and our gifts, and inviting God's guidance into new ways of putting our faith into action. Holy change and holy adaptation are happening in our midst. For example, our Eucharistic Visitors are in the process of finding new ways to be spiritual companions to those they previously visited in person with home communion. Our Healing Ministers are discussing ways to offer healing prayer remotely. Our Hospitality Committee is reaching out to newcomers and visitors, not to our building, but to our Facebook page and Youtube page, and they will be gathering parishioners together for three upcoming Zoom/telephone events.

Yes, life is changing dramatically and, I believe, irreversibly all around us and within us these days. But when we remember our history, we recall that this is not the first time we have had to let go of much, in order to behold and treasure all that we have received. Or, in the words of one of my very favorite hymns from our LEVAS hymnal, "On Christ, the Solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand."

In the weeks and months to come, we may find ourselves continuing to stumble forward, battered by the torrential gales of a global pandemic and pelted by political hailstones. But I say, let our stumbling be a reminder that ***we are still moving forward***, despite it all. And though the winds of change may whip about us, let us take courage and not lose sight of the firm foundation that lies beneath our feet, wherever our path may lead together!

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Dustin+