

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

A Letter from the Rector for June 26, 2020

Dear People of St. James',

This week, as we have begun seeing Covid-19 infections surge in many parts of our country, the expression that seems to be passing through my mind more and more frequently is, "No excuses!" For those of us who have the luxury and the resources to make choices for ourselves and enjoy a fair number of liberties, we must choose to behave wisely, carefully, and considerately, not just for our *own* well-being, but for *all*. No excuses! Or, to borrow from the dark humor of a popular admonition circulating these days: "Think wearing a mask is too uncomfortable? Try a ventilator." I say again, no excuses. Here in Danbury, we've experienced firsthand the chaos and destruction that a pandemic wreaks when it sweeps through a community. We know, too, how simple behavioral changes like observing physical distancing and wearing masks can effectively keep the contagion at bay. I have already prayed through a mask over the coffins of two members of St. James' Church who perished from Covid-19, joined only by a few immediate family members who were allowed to come say their stunned goodbyes. I hope never to do that again. We know that preventing more such loss in our congregation is in our hands, if we all are careful and wise and considerate of how our behaviors and choices might affect others. And so, as weary as we all are from these months of isolation, the urgent advice of epidemiologists and medical professionals is clear: "Remain vigilant. Stop the spread. No excuses."

As our nation is now openly, painfully and, yes, belatedly coming to terms with the systemic racism and white supremacy not just of our past but of our present, that same familiar expression captures the sentiment of many of the conversations and changes in our midst: "No excuses." We seem to have moved beyond having to debate whether monuments to those who fought and killed in the interest of preserving systems of slavery should stand proudly in our public spaces as heroes of our lasting values. "There's no excuse for that," voices cry. As a Church, we know this deeply to be true from our own history. Yes, it is true that Jesus chose Judas as one of the twelve disciples, and yes, Judas surely healed and helped many during his discipleship. Nevertheless, we do not display statues of Judas in our sacred spaces. He is an essential part of our story that we will never forget, and we all share in his betrayal of Jesus when we, too, stray from the teachings of our Lord. We would not be who we are as followers of the risen Christ, without the choices that Judas made. But we do not place him up on a pedestal, lest we misrepresent who stands at the center of our faith—Jesus Christ. No excuses.

As a parish community, we are all now struggling with the discomforts of "no excuses" in our present challenging time. As individuals and as a congregation, again and again that refrain is repeating in our ears like an uncompromising fitness trainer or physical therapist: "Don't stop! Don't give up! No excuses!" I can't count the number of times I have heard parishioners say to me lately, "I was resisting learning how to do this or trying out that, because I could still manage by staying the same. But now, things are different,

and I had to push through and, at x years old, do something new.” Those words always strike me as the most wonderful and hopeful response to “no excuses” I’ve been hearing. I suspect that most of us here at St. James’ have more resources and options for changing and adapting than any of us would have thought, prior to a pandemic coming along and changing everything without asking for our consent! In fact, it has been my observation that those with the fewest resources turn out to be the most flexible, the most adaptable of us all, and it is frequently those of us who are more comfortable who turn out to be the most resistant to change from how we think things should be. Looking back to the beginning of the year, I marvel at the way many aspects of my future ministry with St. James that I thought would be important and essential, have completely turned to dust and been swept away by these winds of change. But in that bare, wind-swept space, I cannot deny that fresh ground has been cleared within me for new possibilities, new spiritual growth that I would have never allowed to take root, if I had not had to make that decision to loosen my grip on the reins, scrap the plans, start over, and keep moving forward. “No excuses!”

This weekend, St. James’ is marking the completion of our Joining Jesus Capital campaign. Our Campaign Committee has tried to give every member and affiliate of St. James’ a way to say “I’m in” for this long-term investment in our ministry in Danbury and beyond. Pledges of all sorts are welcomed and essential to the campaign. Some of those pledges are of financial contributions. Others are spiritual support, as a commitment of prayer. All are needed for this project to get moving and then stay on track to help St. James’ make the necessary adaptations and changes we need to be a vibrant Episcopal community of faith in 2020 and beyond. Nothing should hold anyone back from feeling they can contribute and participate. So, in the most positive sense, there are “No excuses!” If you haven’t seen them already, you can download a copy of our campaign brochure [here](#), and pledge card [here](#). Our progress will be announced this Sunday, June 28th, and we will have Committee members present during our Zoom Coffee Hour at 10am for Q&A time.

Truly, it seems in so many ways that the Kingdom of God has come knocking our door in the midst of this dark night. We are showing our love for another, by wearing our masks. We are displaying our consideration for one another, by minding our monuments. And we are welcoming the stranger, by listening for the quiet tap of longing all around us, and then opening new doors. As our Lord has taught us, Christ himself is present there in the stranger. The question that is ours to answer is, "Will he find himself among us here at St. James'?"

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Dustin+