

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

A Letter from the Rector for March 27, 2020

Dear People of St. James',

"What a month this week has been!" That's one of the expressions I have heard recently in several Zoom meetings, and one that I deeply relate to. Life is changing by the ~~day~~, ~~hour~~, minute lately, and I for one am definitely finding myself struggling to keep up with all the change. And so, it has become very helpful to me to collect my thoughts at the end of each week, and look to the days immediately ahead of us at St. James'. I hope you can join me for a moment of "pause," wherever you are, whenever you are reading these words, and set aside for now all the concerns about what has been done and left undone.

It has become clear to me, as the pastor and priest of St. James', that the safest place for all of our members to be is *at home*, as much as possible. Of course, that means that we are now in a time of exile from our public gathering space, our beloved church building. But as I'm sure you've heard said many times before, **"The Church is not a building. The Church is a People."** And so, I would encourage you, in these days and weeks spent away from our sanctuary at 25 West Street, that you try to think of ways to set apart spaces or times in your own homes to capture a bit of that "sacred place" that you may now be longing for. Whether you are joining us for our video worship on Sunday mornings, or gathering for our daily prayer offerings on Zoom, or setting time apart on your own for Bible study, meditation, or spiritual practices, do whatever works for you to make those inner, spiritual experiences sacred to your outward senses. Light a candle, perhaps, or put on a change of clothes appropriate for the occasion. Gather the household together, as you would for church-going, or maybe even put on a dab of your "Sunday morning" perfume, if that is your custom. But whatever you choose to do, remember that God is just as much present with you now, wherever you are, as God is there in your favorite pew. We may just need a little extra effort and creativity now to help tune ourselves in to God's wavelength, since in these days we are physically apart from one another and from our parish family home.

This Sunday morning, you will note that once again our worship has changed a bit. In the interest of keeping our worship leaders safe at home, we will not have a live, streamed broadcast of Morning Prayer. Instead, we will have a pre-recorded Morning Prayer service at 9am through our Facebook page, with all the familiar elements woven together by the wonders of modern technology and software. As before, a bulletin for the service is ready for download [here](#). I thank all those leaders who have contributed elements to this new experiment in online worship, and hope that on Sunday, you will hear a Word that God has in store just for you.

I also have important news to share about Holy Week, which is now fast approaching. **At this point, our plan will be to offer a service of Morning Prayer for Palm Sunday.** We also will be offering services of prayer online throughout the first days of Holy Week. These will be announced on Facebook and posted to St. James' online calendar on our website. **New this year will be an offering of three online worship services for**

The Holy Triduum, created by The Episcopal Church in Connecticut for all of our parishes to join in together. Stay tuned for more information as plans for diocese-wide liturgies for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday come together.

As you have seen in your communications, we are wrapping up our list of memorials for Easter flower sponsorships, to be recorded in the Book of Remembrance. Please note that whenever we are permitted to safely return to our worship space once again, I intend for that Sunday to be a day of great joy and celebration for our church. Because every Sunday of the year is a “little Easter” anniversary of our Lord’s Resurrection, I hope we will pull out all the stops and make that a grand celebration of our congregation’s return to corporate life together once again!

As we are now putting special effort into maintaining, strengthening, deepening, and broadening the relationships among the membership of St. James’ in these trying days, I have a special request of my own. **I am hoping that all our members will be sure to send in your birthdays and anniversaries to the parish office via email or phone call.** Our members are the greatest treasure of St. James’s Church, and I would like to celebrate along with each member on your special days. *(And, yes, you are certainly welcome to submit just the month and date of your birthday, if you would prefer to keep the year shrouded in mystery!)* Birthdays and anniversaries can then be included in our Prayers of the People, to help us all celebrate and give thanks to God for each member’s presence among us.

I would also like to take this opportunity to refresh the Prayers of the People listings for Intercessions and Thanksgivings. If there are any names or situations that you would like the parish as a whole to hold in our daily prayers, please forward those to the parish office. And if there are any intercessions or thanksgivings that you have requested that can be removed or updated, please indicate those as well. I would like our Prayer List to be as dynamic and up to date as possible, especially in these days where so much is changing so quickly.

And finally, I do have one personal prayer request to make of the parish. On Thursday, April 2nd, from noon to 2:30pm, I will be Zooming in to my defense of my doctoral thesis from Virginia Theological Seminary. For those who are curious, my thesis topic is “Managing Contagious Anxiety in the Congregation: A Leadership Development Workshop.” It’s a document I’ve been working towards for about five years now, but who could have guessed that it would be so eerily relevant to our present days! I thank you for your prayers and tranquil, non-anxious thoughts Thursday afternoon!

Each week lately, I’ve been sitting down to pen a note to the congregation. And each week, it seems that by the time I have covered just the basics, I have gone on and on and on! Clerical verbosity aside, I hope that it is a good sign, that even in times like these, there is still so much to report and share in this vibrant congregation of ours. As much as I do hope this pandemic will subside and become a memory as soon as possible, I am still somehow grateful that I am starting this new call with a church that is openly showing just what it is made of. And what St. James’ is made of appears to me deeply faithful, determinedly connected, and charged by a spirit that can only be called “Holy.” So, thankfully, I remain,

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Dustin+