

Dear Companions on the Way...

I hope you are still having a blessed Christmas and are remembering to celebrate it as a 12-day season and not just for single day (or for that matter, that you pledge to keep Christmas in your heart every day of the year, as did the awakened and enlightened Ebenezer Scrooge).

One of the images of the season that came to me during Advent was the power of a phrase in the proper preface for Advent. The proper preface is a sentence that is included in the first part of the Eucharistic Prayer that changes depending on the liturgical season we are in. They are found on pages 377–382 in the Book of Common Prayer. In Advent the priest recites or sings, "... that when he shall come again in power and great triumph to judge the world, we may **without shame or fear** rejoice to behold his appearing. ...". The phrase "without shame or fear" is taking deep root in my consciousness as a key to understanding what our life in Christ is all about and what our mission as the church should include.

What does it mean to await God's appearing without shame or fear? For we who are Christian, the meaning would include the sense that in Christ, God has taken away our guilt, our shame, our estrangement from God, our sin. In my prayers, I often ask to see myself or to see others or to see a situation in the same way God sees. I have never found that prayer to be answered with a sense of judgment or alienation. Rather, in the deep recesses of my heart, God is always, always drawing us in, loving us, accepting us and calling us by name. God never turns away from us, rejects us or abandons us.

But also, what does it mean for a community that proclaims the good news of God in Christ to renounce shame and fear? I believe that we cannot be a community that traffics in shame and fear, and that may be one of the more radical, counter-cultural postures we can take. Churches have long been accused (perhaps rightly) of generating shame and fear. Churches have threatened people with hell, excommunication or the softer threats that "God wouldn't like it if ..." or "a good Christian would never ...".

More and more, I am convinced that our deepest struggles come from the games and power plays that are built on shame and fear. Many people who end up going into psychotherapy discover that defects in their personalities or mental functioning are due to having a "shame-based personality." I am one of those people. We get ourselves into trouble by trying to satisfy an inner judge who seems to never be satisfied; or to avoid a condemnation that seems as

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permanent as if it were etched in stone. I know some attend church in part to appease what is believed to be a capricious or wrathful God, or avoid some impending or inevitable doom meted out by the hand of God.

Trying to satisfy that judge or avoid that doom may lead people to do noble, generous, self-sacrificing deeds that benefit the church, but shame and fear still are the engine that drives the behaviors. I'd like to think that a healthy church is one that proclaims a God who abandoned wrath and condemnation with the rainbow after the flood that Noah rode out. Instead, we manifest a God who has come, as a baby in Bethlehem, to reveal God's infinite and unconditional love.

I'm trying to be more aware when shame and fear bubble up in me and I'm trying to be more conscious of how St. Mark's and the institution of the church unwittingly (or overtly) winks at language and behavior that is grounded in shame and fear – and brings it to light where it can be transformed. For instance, when someone says "I'm sorry," there

may be a legitimate regret being expressed; and then it is my opportunity and delight to offer an expression of release such as "all is well" or "don't give it a thought." But it may be that apologies are made for events or circumstances beyond one's control, like the weather or the call of a higher priority, and they make a person feel trapped. Once in a while, those apologies come with an edge: "I'm sorry BUT ...". It may not be in my power to release someone from shame or fear in those instances, but perhaps I can bring some light to the situation.

Shame and fear grow in the dark, but light causes them to shrink, and in the light of Christ, they disappear. So let us keep Christmas in our hearts every day of the year, but bringing the shame and fear that infect us into the light of Christ's presence and love. And let us – with gentleness and sensitivity – shine some light on one another when shame and fear trap them. And maybe we'll put over the door a "no shame and fear zone" sign to remind us all.

Shalom,



Andrew

Calendar of Upcoming Events

January 5 Burning of the Greens in Mancos

January 18 Ministry Reports for Annual Report due to Cheryl in the office

January 22 Gemma Kavanagh's Recital

January 31 One service at 9:00 followed by potluck and annual meeting

February 12 . . . James Jon Bader Cello Recital

February 14 . . . Newcomers' Luncheon

February 17 . . . Ash Wednesday Blood Drive

Burning of the Greens

The Burning of the Greens: A Mancos community event sponsored by St. Paul's Episcopal Church will be on January 5 at 300 North Willow in Mancos (the vacant lot between the red building and the Summit Marble Company). Bring Christmas trees and greens with no decorations to the lot anytime after January 1. Please put them in the marked off area. Trees should be delivered no later than noon on January 5.

The Epiphany fire will be lit to represent the light of Christ in the world. After a brief service led by Father Bob Seney, hot chocolate and cookies will be served. All are welcome to what is hoped to become an annual Mancos tradition. A free-will offering will be taken to benefit the Mancos Fire Department, who will be in attendance.

Gemma Kavanagh Recital January 22



The next recital in the St. Mark's recital series is coming up! Reserve your tickets now for soprano Gemma Kavanagh, who will be performing with violinist Kasia Sokol

and C. Scott Hagler on Friday, January 22 at 7:00 p.m. Purchase your tickets online at www.DurangoRecitals.com or from the church office.

The third recital on the series is February 12; James Jon Bader will present a cello recital.

St. Mark's Annual Meeting and Potluck

On Sunday, January 31, we'll have one service only at 9:00 a.m. followed by a potluck brunch and our annual Parish meeting. There will be a sign-up in the Parish Hall for potluck dishes and for volunteers to help set up and clean up.

The business at hand for the annual meeting will include elections for new vestry members. Nominations will also be accepted from the floor during the meeting.

A special guest will be present at our annual meeting and worship service to help focus our attention on our mission to make Christ known. She is Lelanda Lee from Longmont, Colorado. "She is well known to me because she served as the first alternate lay deputy to General Convention last year and she also serves on the Standing Committee of the Diocese where she worked with Sam Burns for several years," notes Father Andrew. "Last summer, she was also elected to serve on the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church and she will bring a wealth of experience, insight and connection to the bigger church to us in Durango. She will preach at our joint worship service and lead us in some exercises at the meeting to help us see ourselves and our mission more clearly."

All who lead a ministry at St. Mark's are asked to please prepare a brief report to be distributed to the congregation, and get it to Cheryl by Monday, January 18, preferably by e-mail: CherylB@StMarksDurango.com.

Newcomers' Luncheon Scheduled

February 14 following the 10:30 service, there will be a luncheon for folks who are new to St. Mark's Church. If you would like to learn more about the church and its ministries or you missed the last newcomers' luncheon in April, we would like to see you there, so please mark your calendars! An RSVP is required so we know how much food to prepare. E-mail CherylB@StMarksDurango.com or call the office at 247-1129.

Ash Wednesday Blood Drive February 17

Watch the Outreach information board in the Parish Hall for the sign-up sheets toward the end of January. The blood drive will begin at 11:00 a.m. and end at 2:00 p.m. on February 17. The St. Mark's Outreach Committee sponsors the blood drive three times a year, and the Ash Wednesday Drive is one of the most successful. If you are not sure you can give blood, contact the United Blood Services with any questions you may have regarding your ability to give blood.

New in the Library

Mars Hill Audio Journal – St. Mark's subscribes to this journal (on CD) and the latest issues are now available. The Mars Hill Journal "endeavors to encourage sensibilities and habits of thoughtful cultural engagement. Each program is 90 minutes, consisting of ten- to fifteen-minute interviews with a variety of guests on a broad array of topics." Our copies are located in the adult education room in the basement and all are catalogued, so you can look for a subject of particular interest.

Countering Pharaoh's Production-Consumption Society Today, by Walter Brueggemann (DVD) – If you missed the adult formation classes featuring this DVD, it is now available in the library.

Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads, by Gil Bailie – Winner of the 1996 Pax Christi USA Book Award, Sojourners has this to say about Bailie's work: "(This book is for) anyone concerned about the rise of violence and social disintegration in our culture, and who wants to understand what is really happening." Bailie quotes extensively from Rene Girard (an anthropological philosopher often referenced by Richard Rohr). You might remember Kip's sermon and his reference to Girard's ideas on mimetic desire and the scapegoat mechanism.

Take and Read, Spiritual Reading: An Annotated List, by Eugene Peterson – Peterson has put together a broad list of books he recommends for "those determined to cultivate a God-aware life." Chapter headings include: Basics, Classics, Psalms, Prayer, Novelists, Poets, Mysteries, North American Spirituality, History, and many more. This book is available for short-term check out.

Everyday Justice: The Global Impact of our Daily Choices, by Julie Clawson – for more information, ask Charlie Pepiton, who read the book and recommends it for a Parish Read.

The Orthodox Heretic and Other Impossible Tales, by Peter Rollins – This is a collection of unusual parables, one of which Carol Tookey used in a sermon in December.

The Journey of the Magi

By T.S. Eliot

'A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For the journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.'
And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away,
 and wanting their liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out,
 and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-mill
 beating the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away
 in the meadow.
Then we came to a tavern with
 vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins,
But there was no information, and so we continued
And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory
All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt.
 I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death,
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

About the Flowers on the Altar

Have you ever wondered about the process for donating flowers for the altar? In the Parish Hall Communications Center there is a large poster-sized flower donation sign-up chart. Sign your name by an available date on the flower chart, and include a phone number where you can be reached if we have questions about what you would like the bulletin announcement to say. We will place the announcement in the bulletin on the Sunday that you donate, representing a thanksgiving you have, an event you want to recognize (like a birthday or anniversary) or special people you want to remember.

The altar guild has a standing order for the Sunday altar flowers, so you don't actually have to go buy or arrange the flowers; that task is done for us by the florist. Any time before the date you selected, send a check to St. Mark's for \$50 and mark the memo of your check with "Altar Flowers for..." and the date you chose. If you have any questions about this process, please talk to Cheryl, 247-1129, or Charon Wimp.