

The Spire

Newsletter of the Church of the Resurrection
A Welcoming and Inclusive Faith Community

December 2009

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Message from the Rector

Advent and the Coming of Christ

Here we are already, past Thanksgiving and heading for Christmas. When you think about it, it's odd that such a lovely holy day, the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, strikes so many with a vague sense of dread. Actually it's really rather explainable.

The secular season of Christmas, complete with Santa Claus, decorations, and lots of parties, has become terribly oppressive. Many of us feel considerable pressure to seem far cheerier than we actually feel. We're under pressure to find perfect gifts for the people we most care about. We may be planning trips to spend time with friends and family, hoping against hope that our visit will go better than the last time.

The perfect antidote to this oppression is the Christian season of Advent. With the stern warnings of our old friend John the Baptizer, we face our anxieties head on: "You brood of vipers, who warned *you* of the wrath to come!" "Even now the axe is being laid to the root of the tree..."

Themes about reflection and repentance and making the most of our time match our anxieties perfectly. The days are growing shorter, the nights longer, and winter is fast approaching. Will we have the resources to meet the challenges ahead? Advent helps us face those questions directly, without the superficial cheeriness of secular Christmas.

Advent helps us put the false demands of secular Christmas in perspective. No, we *don't* have to attend every party. No, we *don't* have to spend more than we can afford to buy gifts our friends and family may neither need nor want. No, we *don't* have to exhaust ourselves outdoing our neighbors with elaborate lighting and decorations.

The Christ Child comes simply, unobtrusively, lying in a feed box. The Christ Child is not impressed by shows of holiday spending or superficial holiday cheer. The Christ Child may begin life as an infant, but he looks at us with grown-up eyes, waiting for us to offer the only gift that matters: ourselves.

Let's both appreciate and keep this holy season.

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ADVENT DINNER



December 5

7:30 pm

Speaker—The Dynamic Cary Gray Kelly
“Advent, a Season of New Beginnings”



Silent Auction



Art Show

Please keep in your prayers:

Brandon Baker

Maurine Bracewell

Ryan & Veronica Byrnes

Irene Cole

Eleanor, Peter & Janet Dickey

Lori Edwards

Eileen Falkenborg

Amy Ford Peggy Green

Claudette Hark Lewis Heald

Harold & Stella Hurt

Warren Jennelle

Suzanne Kortus Andy LaChance

Genevieve LaRusso

Fred & Mary Moody

Betty Moubray

Dale Owens & family

Richie Paduda Natalie Richards

Julie Suplee Judie Vajda

Valverde-Rodriguez family

Barbara Weber Nicholas White

Will Williams

Names on the Prayer List are shown for one month, unless you let us know they should be retained for longer.

Pray for those currently serving in the armed services around the world:

Gavin Amy Cody Bergen

Jason Hull Robert Hull

Mark Latham

Darius Malveaux Thomas Moore

Meera & Michael Noe

Charles O'Brien Eric Wiese

We extend our sympathy to the family and friends of those who have died.

Gia Adams

Holi White

Margaret Hummer

Rest eternal grant to them, O Lord; And let light perpetual shine upon them.

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

We will hold our annual meeting immediately after the 10:00 am service on December 13, in the Parish Hall. Important topics that will be address include a review of 2009 activities, election of of 2010 vestry, thanking the retiring vestry for their service and presentation of the 2010 budget.

NETWORK
PRESCHOOL ADOPT-A-CLASSROOM
CHRISTMAS GIFTS
WILL BE COLLECTED
DECEMBER 13.

Many thanks to all who have so generously donated coats for our less fortunate neighbors in Northern Virginia. This November nearly two dozen warm, and sometimes furry, coats have been delivered. Thanks to your kindness, we are the hands of the Lord in this place.

- Elizabeth White

ALIVE! HOLIDAY FOOD DISTRIBUTION

Is earlier this month, December 12. It's not too late to donate a turkey. Be sure to indicate "Turkey for ALIVE!" in the memo line of your check.

Don't forget the mitten tree for the Carpenter's Shelter





ADVENT LESSONS & CAROLS

Beautiful Choral Music and Scripture
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2009 at 7:30 pm
Reception Following

News From Resurrection Children's Center

This is the time of year when we count our blessings. And RCC is certainly blessed to be a part of The Church of the Resurrection. The Church provides us with the kind of support that enables us to do our good work with children and their families. And it feels very good that the missions of the Preschool and the Church intertwine as we both work toward common goals in our community.


This fall we are continuing our focus on how to nurture and encourage the growth of kindness in our young children. We all want our children to be kind, but what does that mean? What expressions of kindness can we appropriately expect from young children? Just what is our role as teachers and parents? To help answer those questions, we are once again joining with the Church of the Resurrection for a special service project in the community. Our children have been collecting non-perishable food items in their classrooms to "share with others". Just before Thanksgiving, we will give what we have collected to the Church who will in turn donate it to ALIVE! The point of this collection is not to help the "poor", or "those less fortunate than us", for those are concepts that have little meaning to our young ones. Rather, our collection will be for "sharing what we have". Because sharing what we have is a kind thing to do.

I will always remember a particular day when a group of kids came to the office to get me. They pulled me down to one of the classrooms to see a gigantic castle they had made from a super-size box that had once held a super-size refrigerator headed for Goodwin House. The children were so proud as they pointed out the turrets, the drawbridge (that worked!), the moat, the windows, etc. that they had all worked on so hard. For me, though, the best part was the sign (dictated to a teacher) hanging over the front door. It read, "Resurrection Castle — Open to All!"

I, personally, am thankful to work in a place where children grow in kind and caring ways.

Kim Messinger
Director, RCC

December

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
<p>6 2 Advent 8:00 am – Holy Eucharist Rite 1 10:00 am – Holy Eucharist Rite 2 11:20 am – Forum 1:00 pm – Iglesia Nueva Vida (Nave)</p>	<p>7 7:30pm—Circle of Prayer (Library)</p>	<p>8 8:00 am – Bible Study (Parish Hall)</p>	<p>9 7:30 pm - Choir Rehearsal (Nave) 8:30 pm – AA (Parish Hall)</p>	<p>10 5:30 pm - Boy Scouts (Parish Hall)</p>	<p>11 7:30 pm – Iglesia Nueva Vida (Nave)</p>	<p>12 8:30 am ALIVE! Food Distribution</p>
<p>13 3 Advent 8:00 am – Holy Eucharist Rite 1 10:00 am – Holy Eucharist Rite 2 11:15 am – Annual Parrish Meeting 1:00 pm – Iglesia Nueva Vida (Nave) 7:30 pm—Advent Lessons & Carols</p>	<p>14 7:30pm—Circle of Prayer (Rector's Office) 7:30 pm—Vestry Meeting (Library)</p>	<p>15 8:00 am – Bible Study (Parish Hall)</p>	<p>16 7:30 pm - Choir Rehearsal (Nave) 8:30 pm – AA (Parish Hall)</p>	<p>17 5:30 pm - Boy Scouts (Parish Hall) 7:30 pm—Ministry of Healing (Library)</p>	<p>18 7:30 pm – Iglesia Nueva Vida (Nave)</p>	<p>19</p>
<p>20 4 Advent 8:00 am – Holy Eucharist Rite 1 10:00 am – Children's Christmas Pageant & Holy Eucharist Rite 2 11:20 am – Forum 1:00 pm – Iglesia Nueva Vida (Nave)</p>	<p>21 7:30pm—Circle of Prayer (Library)</p>	<p>22 8:00 am – Bible Study (Parish Hall)</p>	<p>23 7:30 pm - Choir Rehearsal (Nave) 8:30 pm – AA (Parish Hall)</p>	<p>24 Christmas Eve 5:00 pm—Blessing of the Creche & Holy Eucharist Rite 2 9:00 pm – Festival Holy Eucharist Rite 2</p>	<p>25 Christmas Day Office Closed 11:00 am—Carols & Holy Eucharist Rite 2</p>	<p>26</p> 
<p>27 Christmas 1 8:00 am – Holy Eucharist Rite 1, with healing 10:00 am – Holy Eucharist Rite 2, with healing 11:20 am – Forum 1:00 pm – Iglesia Nueva Vida (Nave)</p>	<p>28 7:30pm—Circle of Prayer (Library)</p>	<p>29 8:00 am – Bible Study (Parish Hall)</p>	<p>30 7:30 pm - Choir Rehearsal (Nave) 8:30 pm – AA (Parish Hall)</p>	<p>31 5:30 pm - Boy Scouts (Parish Hall)</p>	<p>1 7:30 pm – Iglesia Nueva Vida (Nave)</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>3 Christmas 2 8:00 am – Holy Eucharist Rite 1 10:00 am – Holy Eucharist Rite 2 11:20 am – Forum 1:00 pm – Iglesia Nueva Vida (Nave)</p>	<p>4 7:30pm—Circle of Prayer (Library)</p>	<p>5 8:00 am – Bible Study (Parish Hall)</p>	<p>6 7:30 pm - Choir Rehearsal (Nave) 8:30 pm – AA (Parish Hall)</p>	<p>7 5:30 pm - Boy Scouts (Parish Hall)</p>	<p>8 Vestry Planning Convergence 7:30 pm – Iglesia Nueva Vida (Nave)</p>	<p>9 Vestry Planning Conference</p>

November Birthdays

If we have not listed your birthday, please contact the parish office, and we will add it to our records.

12/01 Stephen White
 12/04 Carter White
 12/05 Lynn DeMeester
 12/05 Timothy Barnett
 12/09 Kevin Broderick
 12/11 Bosom Maduakor
 12/11 Valerie Ann Pekich
 12/12 Caroline Butler
 12/13 Ray Bessette
 12/13 Betsy White
 12/16 Ellen Turner
 12/17 Dawn Hinson
 12/17 Noble Maduakor
 12/18 Norvell Jones
 12/19 Belinda Ashitey
 12/19 Bernice Ashitey
 12/20 Nicholas Caffo
 12/21 Christina Caffo
 12/25 Pria Chang
 12/25 Sofia Caffo
 12/28 Kendall Vicks
 12/30 Gay Colyer
 12/31 Frank Harding
 12/31 Mary Bartis

2009 Vital Statistics

2009 Budget \$268,579

Income

Budget: (Jan.-Oct.) \$223,815
 Actual: (Jan.-Oct.) \$210,348
 Over/Under Budget: (13,467)

Expenses

Expenses: (Jan.-Oct.) \$223,151
 Collections (Jan.-Oct.) \$210,348
 Difference: (12,803)

“Thank you” to each of you for your generosity and continual support in helping to meet our budget for 2008.

Attendance

November 8 98
 November 15 100
 November 22 103
 November 29 93

Church of the Resurrection

Betsy Faga, *Register*
 Frances Williamson, *Treasurer*

Vestry 2009

Larry Dye, *Senior Warden*
 Kat Turner, *Associate Senior Warden*
 Terry Kester, *Junior Warden*
 Judy Isaacs *Associate Junior Warden*
 Bob Barnett
 Jacki Bracewell
 Kenneth Gay
 Kathy Graham
 Lawrence Huskin
 Michelle McBride
 Kathy Parnell
 Susan Weber



Upcoming Sunday Services

December 6, 2009	December 13, 2009	December 20, 2009	December 27, 2009	January 3, 2010
2 Advent	3 Advent	4 Advent	1 Christmas	2 Christmas
8:00 am Holy Eucharist, Rite 1	8:00 am Holy Eucharist, Rite 1	8:00 am Holy Eucharist, Rite 1	8:00 am Holy Eucharist, Rite 1	8:00 am Holy Eucharist, Rite 1
10:00 am Holy Eucharist, Rite 2	10:00 am Holy Eucharist, Rite 2	10:00 am Holy Eucharist, Rite 2	10:00 am Holy Eucharist, Rite 2	10:00 am Holy Eucharist, Rite 2
Readings:	Readings:	Readings:	Readings:	Readings:
Malachi 3:1-4	Zephaniah 3:14-20	Micha 5:2-5a	Isaiah 61:10-62:3	Jeremiah 31:7-14
Canticle 4	Canticle 9	Canticle 3	Psalms 147	Psalms 84
Philippians 1:3-11	Philippians 4:4-7	Hebrews 10:5-10	Galatians 3:23-25; 4:4-7	Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-19a
Luke 3:1-6	Luke 3:7-18	Luke 1:39-45	John 1:1-18	Matthew 2:1-12
<i>Anne Ritchie preaching</i>	<i>Chase Danford preaching</i>	<i>Anne Ritchie preaching</i>	<i>Carol Sing preaching</i>	<i>Anne Ritchie preaching</i>

THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF JERUSALEM

Dear Church of the Resurrection:
 Sadly this is a farewell letter I am writing today. As of December 20th 2009 I will be stepping down as Interim Church School Coordinator. These three years have just flown by. I have met and worked with great people that are dedicated to the enrichment of our children's knowledge and well being in Christ. It has been a joy that I will never forget. I have watched the children grow each and every Sunday with some graduating out of Church school to those newborns just entering the nursery. I have been truly blessed to work with amazing and dedicated teachers and those who also help in supporting the teachers. Thank you for a wonderful experience; I feel truly blessed. I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a happy and joyous New Year!
 With much love and thanks,
 Letieri R. Schnor

St. George's College, Jerusalem--where our Rector Anne Ritchie, our fellow parishioner Ruth Sugeno, and I attended the wonderful course "The Palestine of Jesus" in May 2008--is flourishing, as far as having full courses for this year and much of 2010, but is in serious economic straits. This is largely because of the current exchange rate between the US dollar and the Israeli shekel. Also, the rising cost of groceries and all living expenses is a factor. The college has had to lay off three wonderful employees.

I cannot imagine this wonderful College--with its varied programs all year long--being forced into closing by the Israeli economy. They are not yet in that position, and I pray will never be!

I'm suggesting that if you give to the Diocese of Jerusalem this month you designate your gift: "for St. George's College."

Barbara Bishop

SERVER SCHEDULE

December 6, 2009 2 Advent	December 13, 2009 3 Advent	December 20, 2009 4 Advent	December 27, 2009 1 Christmas	January 3, 2010 2 Christmas
Readers Larry Huskin(8) Chase Danford Karl Boughan Lea Fowlie	Readers Beth Wiggers (8) Bea Taylor Barbara Bishop Kate Donnell	Readers Barb Eversman Gladys Moniba Nora Gafton	Readers Larry Huskin (8) Bob Barnett Ed Robertson Marian Stevens	Readers Beth Wiggers (8) Terry Kester Lou Zarfas Viranga Panangala
Chalice Bearers Chase Danford Karl Boughan Terry Kester Barb Eversman	Chalice Bearers Chase Danford Bea Taylor Larry Dye Susan Weber	Chalice Bearers Susan Weber Barb Eversman Tom Bracewell Jacki Bracewell	Chalice Bearers Bob Barnett Marian Stevens Karl Boughan Mary Johnson	Chalice Bearers Terry Kester Beth Wiggers Larry Dye Bea Taylor
Acolytes Logan Grady Nichole McBride George Bangura	Acolytes Stephen Merfie Noble Merife Anna-Blessing	Acolytes Logan Grady Nichole McBride George Bangura	Acolytes Stephen Merfie Noble Merife Anna-Blessing Merife	Acolytes Logan Grady Nichole McBride George Bangura
Ushers Milford & Letitia John-Williams Bob Naismith Tom Etter	Ushers Bob & Edna Noe Frances Williamson Carl Hull	Ushers Judy Schramm Kat Turner Jere Cummins Maureen Bryant	Ushers Lissa Reeves Jere Cummins Terry & Jan Kester	Ushers Milford & Letitia John-Williams Bob Naismith Tom Etter
Altar Guild Peggy Green Bea Taylor	Altar Guild Mary Johnson Jacki Bracewell	Altar Guild Lori Thurgood Orian Falkenberg Judy Isaacs	Altar Guild Mary Johnson Marian Stevens	Altar Guild Peggy Green Mary Johnson
Building Supervisor Will & Cheryl McBeth	Building Supervisor Kevin Broderick	Building Supervisor Gail Collins	Building Supervisor David Ewing	Building Supervisor Jay Madden
Tellers Barbara Langford Carl Hull Bob Noe	Tellers Kan Kester Gay Colyer	Tellers Bob Barnett Richard Green Bob Barnett Betsy Raymond	Tellers Dennis Jones Susie Jones Stella Byers	Tellers Elizabeth White Nan Pendergrass Tom Etter

SERMONS

GIVING AND TRUSTING

A sermon by the Reverend Dr. Anne Gavin Ritchie on November 8, 2009, the 23rd Sunday after Pentecost, based on I Kings 17:8-16 and St. Mark 12:38-44.

Today is the official Ingathering of Pledges of financial support to the Church of the Resurrection. It is only our giving, yours and mine, that keeps the doors open, the heat or cooling and lights turned on... for the larger purpose of supporting all our ministries and mission. For those of you new to the Episcopal Church, you need to know that the Diocese does not support the local parish. We, the local parish, support our Diocese and the national Episcopal Church.

The framers of our liturgical cycle of readings are very aware that fall is the time most parishes are conducting financial pledge campaigns. I suspect it is no accident that Scriptural passages about giving always appear around this time. But self-serving *interpretation* of these passages make me boiling mad. Let's review the passages in question.

The wonderful passage from I Kings recalls Elijah's stay with a non-Israelite widow who happens to come from the same region as Jezebel. There has been a long, grueling famine and she is at the end of her rope. She has already planned to make one last meal for her and her son and then give up. The great prophet Elijah arrives, asking to share their meal. She agrees to this rather presumptuous request and miraculously, the jar of meal and the jar of oil never empty out.

The passage from Mark's Gospel has similarities and yet is different. Here there is no wise prophet leading the widow from fear to trust. Here are only exploiting scribes, all too willing to "advise" widows and keep hefty commissions for themselves.

Scribes were men who trained in both the Scriptures and legal matters. They were allied with the chief priests and elders who opposed the ministry of Jesus. Jesus is quick to point out the religious hypocrisy of those who think themselves better than everyone else and take material advantage of people they should be serving.

At the temple, the noise made as coins were thrown into a large metal receptacle would call attention to the amount being donated, and more importantly, call attention to the donor. The widow, who put in just two copper pennies, the smallest coins in circulation, would make no almost no noise at all, as if her gift didn't count. As if she didn't exist.

Now here comes the typical – and I would say perverse – interpretation. So the moral of the stories is...

give everything you have. Give *more* than you have. Here are two quotations I find incredibly offensive, ironically from two people I otherwise admire.

Mother Teresa says, "If you give what you do not need, it is not giving." C.S. Lewis says, "I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare."

Are we supposed to give to the church or any other organization when that giving prevents us from paying our mortgage or rent? Should our children go without clothes and shoes for us to have the satisfaction of feeling generous to outside organizations? Should we older folks, who have diminished retirement accounts to worry about, give to the Church or anyone else by stripping our necessary resources? I say, unequivocally, NO!

In this era of job instability and home foreclosures, I feel it is irresponsible for *anyone* to tell you to give until it hurts. It *already* hurts. I am absolutely opposed, whether in the name of the Church or any other organization, to those telling people to disregard the basic needs of their families or themselves.

But my outrage at the misinterpretation doesn't put me at odds with the meaning of the Scriptures. I don't think that's what today's readings are telling us at all. Let's look again at these stories.

The widow from Zarephath had no reason to trust this prophet. He wasn't from her region; he probably spoke with a strange accent. But she was ready to give up anyway. Why not share with him her last bit of meal and oil? She did, and amazing things began to happen – things she could not have imagined.

Jesus's unnamed widow lived in Jerusalem. A widow then had no right of inheritance. Upon her husband's death, she would have to cast herself upon the mercy of some male relative: her father, if he were still living; a brother or a cousin. Even so, *this* widow throws into the temple treasury, as Jesus says, "all that she has."

I simply do not believe Jesus is recommending that we give our last dollar, to lose our homes and our ability to give to anyone else, and throw ourselves into dependency on others. Self-destructive behavior is *never* the point of the Gospel.

I *do* think the point of both these stories is the *wisdom* of being generous. The graciousness of refusing to be defined by our losses, our not being defined by what we don't have. I think both these stories elevate the *dignity* of every human being. We are *not* what we *have*... we are *who* we are as beloved children of God.

That's the point of these two parables of people giving without expecting anything in return.

Oseola McCarty died at the age of 91. She was an African-American woman from Mississippi, who earned a living by washing and ironing other people's clothes. She had no education past the sixth grade. She didn't have a car. Only in her eighties, at the urging of bank

personnel, did she buy a window air conditioner for her home. McCarty's arthritis forced her to retire at the age of 86.

However, it turned out that all along her long career, Miss McCarty scrimped and saved. After her death, her will awarded \$150,000 to the University of Southern Mississippi for scholarships to African Americans. Hearing of her gift, multi-billionaire Ted Turner gave a billion dollars. He said, "If that woman can give away everything she has, then I can give a billion."

What is important in her story are not the amount Oseola gave, but how she described her giving. She said, "I want to help somebody's child go to college. I just want it to go to someone who will appreciate it and learn. I can't do everything, but I can do something to help somebody. I wish I could do more. But what I can do I will do."

What can be more true to the Gospel? All of us have limited resources. We don't have much discretionary money, or, for that matter, much discretionary time. Demands that we should "give until it hurts" are unhelpful at best and destructive at worst.

If we want to see signs of giving generously and responsibly, we need look no further than our beautiful giving tree in the parish hallway. Each pledge is represented as a hand/leaf, ("we are the hands of the Lord"). Each leaf is part of the tree, connected to the whole tree and all the other leaves. Anonymous givers are unnamed, but just as celebrated as green leaves on the tree.

All of our leaves represent commitment to ministries within our church, like our Parish Caregivers, our music program, those who set our altar table, and outreach to our neighbors beyond these parish walls. Last Saturday, the ALIVE! food distribution program, (which we can support because we keep the heat and lights on in this building), provided food for over 200 families – that means about 800 people.

For those of you have pledged your financial support in these uncertain times, thank you. You have demonstrated your trust that even in uncertain times, giving is important to you. So have you who may not pledge money, but commit your time and talent. Meanwhile, our pledging tree grows more verdant and beautiful.

No words are more instructive about giving than what Miss Oseola McCarty has to say:

"I can't do everything, but I can do something to help somebody. I wish I could do more. But what I *can* do I *will* do." So may it be for us.

Living and Dying as People of Hope

Chase Danford

Sermon for November 15, the 24th Sunday after Pentecost, Proper 28; Readings: Psalm 16; Daniel 12:1-3; Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25; Mark 13:1-8

If you're like me, today's gospel reading is a little hard to take. Perhaps saying, "Praise to you, Lord Christ" was a bit difficult after hearing all of this apocalyptic imagery, like thanking God for bitter cough medicine that you have to force down your throat. It's a little scary, after all. Earthquakes, war, famine. But then, there's a lot of scary stuff in the Bible, so perhaps what makes it so hard is that Jesus says later in the chapter that this generation shall not pass away until these events have happened. What do we make of apocalyptic stories when throughout the 2,000 years of Christian history, the end of the world has been seen as eminent, and yet it never happens? Some will say that we just have to wait a little longer and we'll see that it's coming after all. In the meantime, I think there is wisdom to be found in apocalyptic stories that is not necessarily tied to the authors' intentions or the church's traditional interpretations regarding the end of the world and the breaking in of God's eternal realm on earth. After all, whether the end of the world comes today, tomorrow, 100 years from now, or perhaps never as some believe, we all experience apocalypse in our lives.

The story today begins at a rather odd place, if you think about it. This is the third chapter in Mark that Jesus and his followers have been in Jerusalem, and two chapters have passed since Jesus threw the money-changers out of the temple. Yet, the disciples only now express their awe at the Temple. "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" It reminds of my first trip to New York City, which was only two months ago. I knew what it would be like to be surrounded by concrete—I have, after all, spent much time in several of the nation's other large cities. But I was still just a little taken aback when I arrived in Manhattan. My best friend's office is in midtown, and I had noticed that the really massive skyscraper a few blocks away looked awfully familiar. I said to him, "You know that building over there?" He said, "You mean the Empire State Building?" I replied, "Yeah, that's what I was about to ask." I was pleased to see this landmark up close and personal, but then I had another thought. There was one landmark in New York that I would never see. "What large stones and what large buildings!" I imagine that might have been close to the reaction of many upon see-

ing the World Trade Center for the first time, before the 9/11 terrorist attack brought the towers down. Who would have thought something like that could happen, before it actually did? Jesus probably would have. "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down." In saying those words, Jesus might have been predicting the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, but I think his words also speak to ever-present realities of the human condition. Everything falls down, everything crumbles, everything dies.

This gospel reading speaks of wars, natural disaster, and famine. The death and destruction these wreak are terrible. Some are avoidable and some are not. Wars are within the control of humans. Famine, in today's world of abundance, is now largely a matter of human injustice and inefficiency—not being able to get the food to the right people, without oppressive structures getting in the way. Natural disasters, though, we can't control. Some call them a natural evil, but not in the sense that they are forces of some satanic power. They're also not acts of God, a phrase that really grates on my nerves. They are just part of the planet's life cycle. Some of them are exacerbated by human activity, but some are not. We can't stop all natural disasters. And, unless—or perhaps until—we build the perfect society, the beloved community, we can't really stop all of the human-caused or influenced disasters and injustices either. That doesn't mean we should be fatalistic. We should strive for the good. But, in the face of death and destruction, how do we continue to live our lives? Sometimes all we have is hope. For, just as death and destruction surely come, new life and new creation also surely come. Our gospel reading today concludes with an ambiguous statement: "This is but the beginning of the birth pangs." Birth pangs? Wars, earthquakes, and famine are birth pangs? How can this be? The traditional answer is that the apocalypse ushers in the reign of God on earth, and there is great joy and hope in the anticipation of that ultimate breaking in of God's power that will redeem the whole creation. But I want to explore more immediate possibilities for our lives in the meantime.

I commend to you a book called *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, by Rabbi Harold Kushner. Kushner saw his son suffer a terrible illness for years and eventually die before adolescence. The book is his attempt at an answer to the question of human suffering, the question of a grieving father. In it, Kushner said something that stuck with me. If no one died, the world would become stagnant. Eventually people would stop having children because there wouldn't be room for them. Death is a natural function of all life. Without it, there would be no new life. It doesn't make death any easier, but this promise of new life can give us hope if

we let it.

But we so often do not want to embrace our hope. Too often, we instead wallow in our darkest impulses. Grief at death and destruction is natural, so that's not what I am talking about. I'm speaking about fear, depression, hate, anger, bitterness. Looking back at 9/11, we had a time of mourning and national goodwill and unity. Did we embrace that hope and use that goodwill to a greater purpose, or did we embrace vengeance, anger, and reciprocal destruction? I'm not saying the war in Afghanistan wasn't a just war. I think it was. We had a responsibility to end the reign of terror that Al-Qaeda was perpetrating with the assistance of the Taliban. But I am suggesting that perhaps we entered into the conflict with the wrong mindset. There was an attitude of vengeance rather than justice on the part of many. In moving from national unity and goodwill to national vengeance, were we led astray, just as the gospel speaks of those who will say they have the solution, saying "I am he?" They claim to come in the name of God, but they do not and these would-be messiahs lead people astray. As a warning that might seem strange from someone studying to become a priest, don't be too quick to trust anyone who claims to have knowledge of God's plans. Just as the Crusaders of the Middle Ages claimed to have God on their side, those after 9/11 and those even today who call for an American, or a Christian, crusade against the Islamic world, claim to have God on their side. But they would lead us astray.

Let us beware of ever claiming that God is on our side. Instead, let us be on the side of God. And God's side is one of love and hope. When we see death and destruction, let us act from the knowledge that good does come of the bad, and that it often happens through the emotional tenderness people feel after a personal loss or a large-scale tragedy. In such times, we have a tendency to want to huddle together and seek comfort from one another. If only we stayed there. But we also have a tendency to want to lash out, blame, and hurt. When wrongs are committed, they must be punished, but let us seek true justice—setting things right—wanting to make sure more wrongs are not committed, not because we want revenge. The Christian story gives us strength to persevere, to turn from our dark impulses and look for hope because ours is a story of hope when everything seemed to fall apart. Jesus was crucified, his closest followers denied ever knowing him, and all seemed to be lost. But then Easter came. Jesus was resurrected, given new life. And like Jesus we too can seek to build new life out of death and destruction. As today's reading from Hebrews says, "Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering...And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds." In the wake of war, let us as a nation seek a lasting peace by

strengthening our campaign the hearts and minds of the world by truly being a beacon of hope, bringing light to others through collaborative efforts to solve global problems. So that no more famines happen, let us seek to prevent hunger by working for more sustainable agricultural practices and more just economic systems.

We are people of hope, living and dying among the skyscrapers and the ruins. May our encounter with the Risen Christ in the bread and wine here at this table, and inside each and every one of us, the Body of Christ, give us wisdom to turn away from those who would lead us astray and give us strength to live as people of hope.

POWER TO LOVE

A sermon preached by the Reverend Dr. Anne Gavin Ritchie on November 22, 2009, the Last Sunday after Pentecost, the Feast of Christ the King, based on St. John 8:33-37.

Today is the Feast of Christ the King. With all the language about kings, kingship and kingdoms it's clear that the central issue is *power*. Power ... how we define it, how we use it, how we *live* it. Two visions of power are presented, and they couldn't be more different. *Knowing* the distinction marks the difference between spiritual life and spiritual death.

Sometimes I wish we could hear more of the inner thoughts and feelings of the people in the Bible. So forgive me a bit of imaginary license, as I attempt to provide some of their inner life. Let's hear first from Pontius Pilate, reluctant governor of Judea.

"What's *with* this guy from Nazareth? What's all the fuss about? I don't get these Jews! Here they are, complaining about one of their own. They can't even get their *own* act together; how do they expect *me* to rule them?"

"Why was I sent here? The Roman Empire is huge, and here I am in this backwater. Must be some kind of punishment. I'd better keep the peace, or Jupiter knows, I'll be sent to someplace even *more* wretched.

"This fellow talks in riddles. Here I ask him a simple question which deserves a simple answer, yes or no. I ask, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' then he starts talking about kingdoms not from this world, and if he was *another* kind of king, his followers would fight for him; but because he's *not* that kind of king, they aren't. What's *that* supposed to mean? I know what it means: his followers are cowards. Or they aren't loyal enough to fight anyway. Is *this* supposed to intimidate me?"

"Well, it doesn't and *he* doesn't either. I know my guards have 'softened him up,' as we say, but he doesn't look anything like the great kings of Israel. They're always talking about their great King David.

From what I've heard, *David* knew how to deal with enemies, and he didn't mind using a sword or spear to get his point across.

"But *this* one... he just stands there, bleeding from the bruises my troops have inflicted, talking in riddles. What's this thing about 'truth'? He's about to be sentenced to death on a cross – I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy... but wait, now that I think about it, I *have* inflicted that on all my enemies! But you know what I mean. He's about to be sentenced to death and all he can talk about is truth. What *is* truth?"

Now, with deepest respect and love, this is how I imagine Jesus thinking and praying:

"Father, my heart goes out to Pontius Pilate. He thinks *he's* in charge; he wants to be in control of the universe. But I know, Father, that he is not. *No one* on earth is.

"But oh, how I wish I were! Father, if *I* were in control of the universe, this is what I'd do. First, there would be no poverty. There would be no greed. Everyone would have enough. Then there would be no hatred. Our brothers and sisters from Rome and *our* people would find some way to live in peace, perhaps even learn from one another.

Pontius keeps asking if I'm a king. Yes I am, but I'm not the kind of king he can recognize. I'm here to bring the whole world into a new sense of dignity and power. But this is a *different* kind of power. *My* kind of power doesn't put some people up and others down. *My* kind of power doesn't depend on whole groups of people being ignored, disparaged or hated.

"My kind of power – which I know comes from you -- lifts *everyone* up. *Our* power gives everyone a positive, life-affirming voice. *Our* power makes everyone on earth your beloved children and my beloved sisters and brothers. *Our* power invites the whole world into love.

Just let me ask you, Father... "Why is it when I speak, Pontius cannot hear me?"

More than two thousand years have passed, and still we cannot hear Him. We keep mistaking brutal force for the kind of power that builds up and empowers. We want our way during that critical meeting at work, when what we say and what we *don't* say can and *will* be used against us. We buy into the false assumption that winning at the expense of others makes us stronger. We forget Jesus' warning in the garden of Gethsemane: "Those who live by the sword, *die* by the sword."

We try to shape and even to control our children when they're growing up; when they reach adulthood, we still try to influence their career choices and behavior. Sometimes we're right to push, often we manage only to inflict confusion and hurt.



Christmas Decorations

Providing flowers and greens for the Christmas services is a wonderful way to enhance our celebration of this holy season and to remember a loved one or give thanks for the life of someone special.

You may provide these Christmas decorations for a suggested donation of \$30.00 - \$35.00. The names received by the parish office by December 20th will be printed in the orders of service for the Christmas Eve and Christmas Day Holy Eucharists.

Given by: _____

In loving memory of: _____

In thanksgiving for: _____

Yesterday many of us were here to mourn the death of Gia Adams and to celebrate her life. In her short lifetime Gia found ways to use her power to create positive change.

Gia loved children. She had a special affinity for children who suffer disadvantage or neglect. When she taught at a school for minority children in Arizona, Gia was told that the reason their school didn't have air conditioning was because black children had "thick skins" and didn't need cool air! She went to the school board over and over again. She would not take their "no" for a final answer. Why am I not surprised that her school and her children got their air conditioning?!

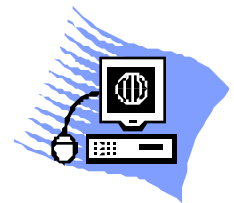
Gia's use of power for positive change in this and many other situations is remarkably consistent with Jesus. Jesus was not content with the status quo. Jesus claimed special affinity with the poor and disadvantaged. Most important of all, Jesus never takes our "no!" for an answer. He still stands at the door and knocks, patiently waiting for us to let him in.

Apparently Pilate never understood this other form of power; power as a force for love. Pilate put his

trust in brute force, coercive force, the kind that never lasts.

Others, like our Gia, put their trust in serving others. They put the power, the *force* of love to the best possible use, in sometimes unexpected places and surprising situations. They have learned that there is no security, there *is* no peace, when anyone is left to suffer.

People like our Gia, know the answer to Pilate's question. What is truth? What is the deepest reality? The only power in heaven or on earth that can last is *love*.



All sermons are available
on our web-site.:

www.welcometoresurrection.org/sermons/



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Resurrection Christmas 2009 Schedule

Advent 3, December 13

7:30 pm Advent Lessons and Carols

Christmas Eve, December 24

5:00 pm Blessing of the Crèche and Holy Eucharist Rite II

9:00 pm Choral/Organ Concert with String Quartet and
Festival Holy Eucharist Rite II

Christmas Day, December 25

11:00 am Carols and Holy Eucharist Rite II