

SAINT JAMES' EPISCOPAL CHURCH
RECTOR'S REPORT
JANUARY 29, 2017

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Welcome to the 189th Annual Meeting of Saint James Episcopal Church in Hammondsport, New York. This year seems different from every other year I have experienced. It seems that we live in very troubled times. You don't have to look far to see the division, the mistrust, the lack of values, and the decline of Christianity in the United States.

I don't know about you, but I'm sick to death of hearing about politics. Of speculating about who is in and who is out; who is right and who is wrong. We seem to be an unhappy nation, and it seems we have lost our way and are looking for guidance. What I know is that for people of faith, for nations of faith, that is not so unusual. Today the reading from Micah takes place in the heavenly courtroom. God has a case against his people, and He has called them out to answer for themselves. God has called them to remember who they are, and to remember who God is and the covenant he has made with his people. You see, they seem to have lost their way, again, and God, again, is calling them back.

The people, more confused than ever plead like little children, "What is it you want from us, God?" "What is it you expect?" "What would make it all better?" Three times they make an offer to God, "Do you want burnt offerings, maybe of year old calves?" No? Okay, "Would you be pleased with thousands of rams? Or maybe tens of thousands of rivers of oil?" Is that not enough? Do you require more? "Shall I give you my firstborn to pay for my sin of my soul?" God, what is it you want?

Micah answers on behalf of the God of justice; the God of compassion and mercy: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and walk humbly with your God." Simple, right? But in our hearts we know that if it were that simple we would have done it already. We would be loving God, caring for the poor, the orphan, the widow, the needy, and those in prison. We would welcome the alien in our land. We would live out the Commandments without a second thought. But that's just not us. Not the human race. Not Christians, doing their best to live a faithful life.

And so Jesus came to offer us another lesson for living. And if that is not enough, today we have the Beatitudes. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Jesus was standing on the mountaintop, reminding us of Moses with the Ten Commandments. Gathered around him were the twelve, echoing the twelve tribes of Israel. The people from the neighboring villages also came to hear the message. Jesus speaks beyond the simplicity of giving a set of rules, and gets to the heart of the matter.

How do we recognize who is blessed by God? A few weeks ago I spoke of success versus faithfulness. We tend to think those who work hard will be blessed; those who are rich, are blessed. Jesus, as usual turns that idea on its head. It is not the rich and powerful, the beautiful, the young who are blessed. Jesus speaks to the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are meek, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. They are the blessed. They will inherit the kingdom of heaven.

God calls those we might not see as valuable to be the ones He is blessing, the ones he treats with compassion and mercy and love. And, my friends, I think that is the lesson we strive to learn and live at St James. This year, like most years we stand in unity and love with families as we greet new Christians into the household of God. This year we welcomed Kendyll Anderson, Calvin McCabe, Ani Edmister, Cadence Young, and Lydia Brundage. At the same

time we enfold and nurture those who are mourning, saying goodbye to Marion Kingham, Mardo Doherty, Edward Tyler, and Colette Eaton. We were blessed to have four of our couples get married this year: Matthew and Katie Heath, Mark and Abigail Mendes, Colin and Audrey Henry, and James and Lisa Nichiporuk.

In 2016 we experienced several changes in our programs with children and youth. Lin Bretherton, our faithful Sunday School teacher of more than ten years made the difficult decision to retire, and we give thanks to the many years she taught our children the foundation of their faith. With the help of a team, we explored Sunday School Curriculums that would fit our needs, and selected Seasons of the Spirit, which is lectionary based, meaning the kids hear the same stories downstairs as what we hear upstairs. We gratefully welcomed Gladys Palmer as our new Sunday School teacher.

This summer several of St. James' adults and youth participated in the Vacation Bible School. For the second year we collected the materials and distributed backpacks from St. James for our children and youth. The Hammondsport Youth Group is in its third year and this year the group alternates between the Methodist Church and St James. We are always striving to find new ways to reach out to the children and youth of this community. We also started reaching out this year to the Seniors in our community with a monthly Pot Luck lunch.

The dinners this year were a booming success, and it is always a pleasure to see the regulars come year after year. We tried something new this year with the Giving Tree, offering personal care products to the Loaves and Fishes food pantry, as well as adopting a couple of local families and helping them to provide a Merry Christmas for their children. As usual we also flooded the VA with socks for the Veterans. With the help of the Apple Pie sales, and generous donations, the Mission Committee responded to local, national, and international needs.

We at St James are so much more than just Sunday morning worship. We can feel the Holy Spirit among us as we pray with and anoint each other. We study God's word every week, and strive to learn more through the books we read together. We have experienced the blessings and desire to share them with each other.

I wish to take a moment to give thanks to all who serve on Sunday mornings, and I'm grateful to see new members, new readers, new teachers, new ushers, and new members of the Altar Guild. I thank those who served on the Vestry and as Wardens over the past year, and especially those who have served their time and will now enjoy a break. Thank you to the Acolytes, and musicians, and to those who prepare the delicious coffee hour each week. Thank you to the seemingly hundreds who come to create dinners, Lenten lunches, and receptions.

When we come together, in prayer, to share a meal, to celebrate new life and the lives we mourn, we experience the blessings at St James. We experience what Jesus is talking about on the Mount of Beatitudes. We catch a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven here on earth, and rejoice that God is not yet done creating His vision within us.

What would it be like if we could remember God's blessings amid our brokenness, amid the brokenness of the world? I ask you, what if St James could shine the light of Christ just a little more brightly into the darkened world? *Amen.*

Yours in Christ,

The Very Rev. Lynne Sharp
Epiphany 4 2017