

Dear Friends in Christ, as we come together this Sunday to worship God and to reflect on the year 2017, I can only give thanks for the many blessings that God continues to shower upon the people and work of St James. At times it seems as if we are not doing very much, but then I only need to sit and pray for a moment and I begin to see how incredibly vibrant St James is within these walls and within the wider community.

The Gospel writer today is Mark, and he moves swiftly from the baptism of Jesus, to the wilderness and temptations, to the calling of Jesus' first disciples, and today we hear about Jesus' first act of public ministry.

“Jesus and his disciples went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, and he cried out, “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.” But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be silent, and come out of him!” And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. “

Jesus first act of public ministry was to preach, teach, and heal within the synagogue, and by the end of the story, to preach, teach, and heal to the darkness, and in the world

I can hardly believe that it has been a year since I was called to St James full time. Since then we preach, teach, heal, within this building, and beyond these walls.

We are engaged in a lot of mission work at St James. We responded promptly and generously to the numerous severe weather disasters this year. We provided forty-six backpacks, fully stocked to local families, and gave the abundance of remaining supplies to the school to be used as needed. In addition, we helped to provide school clothes to a family that unexpectedly went from three to six children. The Giving Tree brought in more than 300 personal care items for the Pantry, and most weeks, we also supply some food and

personal care items as well. The Mission Committee selected a number of organizations throughout the year that needed our support, and we were able to generously provide funds to local, national, and international efforts.

St James participates with the local faith communities as well as the larger community. Vacation Bible School, Paul and the Underground Church served over 75 children, 25 youth and 50 adults including a number of each from St James. We also host the Community Youth Group every other month during the school year, and it is a joy to see their faces as they come together to play, to pray, to learn, and to eat. We also worship and eat together with the community Lenten worship and lunches. We participated again this year in the Earth Day gathering in the Park where we took prayer requests and handed out shopping bags. We also opened our doors for some of the other community gatherings. Over 100 people came into our church during the December cookie walk. Family game nights give us an opportunity to play together.

Our work outside these walls doesn't end with mission work and community gatherings. A group of parishioners from St James, as well as others from around the Diocese went on a Pilgrimage to the Holy Land in May this year. Each and every one took the good news with them. We reach out through social media, participating in Social Media Sunday, keeping Facebook, Instagram, and the website up to date.

At times it can seem that we are all about the food, and in some ways we are. We feed each other spiritually, as well as physically. With Memorial lunches, through weekly coffee hour, Senior Potluck lunches, Athlete's dinners, not to mention our favorites: the Italian Dinner, the Smorgasbord, and the Chicken and Biscuit dinner we nourish ourselves and our community

We also receive spiritual nourishment through the weekly routine: Monday Bible Study, bi-weekly Book Group, Lenten Education and Advent Education. We have anywhere from zero to twelve children in Sunday School every week. We have a weekly healing Eucharist on Thursday, and in August commemorate the Transfiguration and remember Hiroshima with cranes in our trees and the tolling of the bell. This year we also hosted two new events: I Love to Tell the Story

where we were gifted to have young people lead us through the stories of our faith through song and dance. In November we hosted a Vigil for all Victims of Violence.

At the same time, we put an awful lot of time and energy into the day-to-day and week-to-week maintenance of this beautiful Sanctuary and building. I would be hard pressed to name all the people who come through these walls each week, who work behind the scenes, who set up, and clean up, and spruce up, so that we don't even notice all the work. The Altar Guild, Acolytes, Readers, Ushers, helpers in the Sunday School, Coffee Hour hosts, the one who puts up hymn numbers and makes sure we are all on the same page, the one who creates the bulletin, the ones who change the flowers in the urns out front, the one who mows the lawn, those who sing, those who teach and those who preach, the one who orders wine and candles, and the ones who do the numbers, the garbage takers and the bread makers, those who organize closets and shelves, and those who change light bulbs, and the list goes on and on. Thank you. We could not do it without you.

This year, as usual a small group gathered in the spring to care for the landscaping. Other projects included renovating the Sunday School classroom. And this Rector is eternally grateful that there was a wall built in the downstairs office, which offers privacy, and a lot more warmth in the winter. Another major project we took on this year was to restore and protect our stained glass windows. If you haven't yet noticed, please do try to come in on a sunny day and you will be stunned. People now stop me in the village to tell me how they are struck by the beauty and color of our windows from the outside. This project pulled together the whole community, in prayer, in adopting windows, in creating a quilt, in raffling the quilt, in the bake sale, and thanks to the generosity of this gathering, and those outside these walls, the project was completed ahead of time, and paid in full.

This year we have been blessed by adding a number of new individuals and families to the congregation. Welcome! We also added new members to the household of God through the Sacrament of Baptism: Keylee, Kansas, Gavin, Riley, Gabby, Ethan, Nathan, Blake and on Christmas Eve and Michelle and Kitty. Sadly, we said goodbye to some old friends: Janice Tyler, Sue Dykas, and Ted Dykas. We give thanks for their lives and the ways they participated in our corporate life. And we give thanks, knowing that they are now in the presence of God.

So as we reflect on the year that has passed, my goodness! We have done a lot. More than that, we have been faithful in following the example of Christ, and living out our call as disciples. My invitation this week is to continue to spread the good news, and to believe that we *will* see thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.