

ST JAMES EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
RECTOR'S REPORT  
JANUARY 27, 2019

Dear Friends in Christ,

Another year has passed and it is hard to know even where to begin. I think of the people hearing from Nehemiah. The people who have lived in exile are home and rebuilding the city and their lives. We hear that "all the people of Israel" have gathered in the square near that Water Gate and they told the scribe and priest, Ezra, to bring the book of Moses, which the Lord had given to Israel. They gathered to hear the law, and with them also were the priests and Levites to help them hear with understanding. When he began to read all the people stood up; Ezra blessed the Lord, and all the people answer Amen, Amen. Then they bowed their heads with their faces to the ground. Ezra read the Scriptures to them from early morning until mid-day.

When they had finished reading, "Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, 'This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep.'" And they sent them on their way to feast and rejoice!

Several thoughts immediately came to my mind as I was thinking about this reading and the year that has past. First of all, it reminds me that we gather together in a place that is open to all. You see, the Water Gate was open to everyone, all peoples, including the women and the sick, the children, and outsiders. I think that is one of the things we strive for – to worship together. I also think about the fact that the people of Israel had been in exile, had been in a place where they didn't come together to worship in their holy city, and did not hear the Word of God read and interpreted to them. We are so blessed to be able to gather, to hear the Word of God, to celebrate each holy day together.

The reading from the letter to the Corinthians also struck me as we are the one body, not just us, but connected to all Episcopalians, and to all Christians throughout the world. We are baptized into the one Spirit and are given the gifts of apostles, prophets, teachers, deeds of power, gifts of healing, and the list goes on. Last night at the Italian Dinner we saw all those gifts and more. It is a joy to note the many gifts each one here has received and offers to others. Some are cooks, some set up, some clean up, some chop and slice and dice, some serve, some greet, some bring their friends and share the fellowship we have come to cherish at St James. We share these gifts not just with each other, but with the wider community, demonstrating the power of the spirit, and the abundance of God's bounty.

I am always delighted that although we are of many minds, opinions, experiences, beliefs, priorities, and needs, we work well together and share a common vision: St James Vision: God asks us to make His love visible in our lives and community. . . . let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:18)

What seemed to resonate most with me this year was the Gospel. "Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee," and as he was in his hometown he went to the synagogue and read: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has

anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Jesus rolled up the scroll, and said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." As this is the season of Epiphany it is just one more way that Jesus is manifesting as the Messiah, the Savior, although he is just beginning his ministry and they don't yet understand.

What I understand is that when I look at our Annual Meeting Report, we did a whole lot of things this year. We celebrated with our weekly Sunday worship, and the Thursday Healing Eucharist. We went to Brookdale once a month and added the Taylor Center. We joined with area churches for Lent, Baccalaureate, and Thanksgiving, and we added Worship in the Park with our neighbors and friends. We invited people to take a look at St James during the Art Show and Craft Show and the Cookie Walk. We also invited people in for Creeds and Creating where we heard the stories of our faith through story, song, dance, drama, and art. We came together and purchased an amazing number of Book of Common Prayer and new Hymnals to update our books that were falling apart and to be more welcoming. We held our first Blessing of the Animals on St Francis day and drew dogs and other animals from around the neighborhood.

What struck me most about this reading, and about St James this year is Mission. Jesus proclaims that this scripture has been fulfilled in our hearing – that he has been sent to proclaim release to captives, sight to blind, to let the oppressed go free. If you look at our Mission numbers you will see how much we have offered locally, nationally and internationally to proclaim the good news to all who are in need. Our giving in the amount of \$12,651 doesn't include the Diocesan apportionment of \$8,255. Did you know that more than 45% of what we give to the Diocese goes directly to Mission as well? More than just the cash, we have reached out not only with food to the Pantry, backpacks to school children, personal care products, Christmas gifts for children in need, sock to Vets, our donation to Vacation Bible School, heart healthy hats for newborns, but we have reached out to others with the good news. We have touched people in our community and around the world with our love, our prayers, and with tangible gifts that will make a difference in their lives. The abundance of the outpouring of our gifts speaks to the faith and generosity of this community.

I can't possibly name everything we have done this year. I know that the Annual Meeting Report doesn't even scratch the surface with everything we have done and are doing. I am amazed at the number of people every week donating their gifts to keep St James running smoothly. I would like to take just a moment to thank everyone who sets foot inside here every week. I can't list you all by name because I know I would leave some out. We have cleaners, and altar guild, and those who make sure that the bats are removed and the heat is on, that the burned out light bulbs are replaced as well as the paper products around the facility. We give thanks for those who shovel (especially last week) and those who maintain the lawn and garden beds. We have the choir, along with Tom, Carol, and Ellie. We have acolytes, and readers, and greeters, and Sunday School teachers, and those who create coffee hour. We have those who count the money, and others who deposit the money, and others who keep track of the money. We have some who pray every day. And like I said the list goes on and on. I would like to pause and thank Jim Grillo for his faithful service as our Senior Warden.

Thank you! And there are so many more who contribute so we can joyfully worship each week.

This upcoming year we continue to have big plans. Within the next few weeks we hope to have the Parish Hall repainted, thanks to a Taylor Grant and finally finding a licensed and available painter. We will continue the good work you have called us to do. Three of us will be attending the College for Congregational Development four weekends this year to continue to learn and explore best practices in the Episcopal Church. How we can continue to build and grow ourselves, and this congregation. I will take a Sabbatical to refresh and renew, and you will have the opportunity to explore new ways of leadership and pastoral care.

In closing, 2018 has been an amazing year, and I believe it could only happen because of the deep faith we share, the way we use our God-given gifts, and our willingness to learn and grow in Christ. Let us end with the Collect for the Day: let us pray, "Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*"

Respectfully submitted,

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