



The St. James' Pilgrim

News for the Journey . . .

April 2018

St. James' Episcopal Church 11815 Seven Locks Road, Potomac, MD 20854-3340 www.stjamespotomac.org



Message from the Rev. James S. Isaacs The Easter Message: "Too Important to be Taken Seriously"

When I was a youth, I read an article about the "Clown Care Unit" of the Big Apple Circus that visits terminally ill children in New York City area hospitals. One of the clowns being interviewed, as I remember it, was asked how he could be so playful and joyful in those hospital rooms. He replied (with what I later found out was a paraphrase of a quote from Oscar Wilde), "Some things in life are too important to be taken seriously."

I am a person who can sometimes err on the side of serious. For quite a while, I have been working on my sense of humor (and there are people who have remarked that it is coming along). The above quote has often prompted me to wonder if I am being too serious about certain things. The more important things are, we can tell ourselves, the more serious we should be about them. As a priest, who often dwells in the realm of important things, conventional wisdom dictates that a serious demeanor would be constantly appropriate.

Rev. Meredith's signature joyful warmth has helped model for me another way of doing priestly ministry. Last year, at a staff meeting, she remarked that she knew a priest who celebrated "Bright Sunday" on the Second Sunday of Easter when she would tell jokes as a part of her sermon. Because I was assigned the Second Sunday of Easter in the preaching rota last year, Rev. Meredith left it up to me if I wanted to try something like that. Newton immediately said something to the effect that I wouldn't be able to pull off something like that. With a remark like that, I felt inspired to take on the challenge and solicited from the congregation jokes leading up to the Second Sunday of Easter to inaugurate our first "Humor Sunday" at St. James'.

Since last year, I have spent a considerable amount of time receiving feedback and reflecting on

what we did for our first "Humor Sunday." In the congregation, many people responded very positively. It quickly became our website's most viewed sermon. And a Sunday that often is called "Low Sunday" because church attendance typically dips on the Sunday after Easter Sunday was well attended. But some (not all) of my clergy colleagues balked at the idea, partially because they thought it seemed irreverent or not Christ-centered enough.

I think that one of the great things about "Humor Sunday" is that it embodies joyfulness in a way that didactically talking about joy during a sermon wouldn't. The experience of joy is very appropriate in a season focused on the Resurrection. I am coming to believe even more deeply that the Easter message is one of the things in life that is too important to be taken seriously. Humorless and somber Easter services may be missing the message. If some things in life are too important to be taken seriously, does that apply to the most important thing: the Resurrection?

So, we will try another "Humor Sunday" this year on April 8, 2018. I will try to faithfully practice humor in the sermon that will also be focused on the Resurrection; the working title of the sermon is, "Sometimes You Just Have to Laugh." This year, there will also be other parts of the service that will attempt to embody humor to evoke an experience of joy befitting the season's message. And this year, you will be invited to tell your jokes to others around you during the peace rather than submitting them to the preacher.

It is a joy to serve Christ with you all here at St. James'. I'm anticipating more of that joy on the Second Sunday of Easter; I hope you'll invite your neighbors and friends to have fun with us as we celebrate the Resurrection.

*In Christ,
James*

Reflection from our Youth Director, Rachele Donnelly

“Dear God, I need your help.”

At some point in our lives, many of us can attest to feeling overwhelmed. The demands of school, work, family, friends, and more, add up like food piled on your plate at Thanksgiving. Still the responsibilities don't end with relationships and work; there are bills, errands, and activities. If this sounds all too familiar, you may equally feel overpowered by a seemingly impossible list of to do's. When writing articles for the *Pilgrim*, I like to write from wherever I am at that point in my life. In fact, if my current life were a word-of-the-day calendar, today's word would be “swamped.” If my words resonate to the extent that you feel anxious, keep reading; trust me.

Though the youth group runs from September through June, the schedule really starts picking up in the spring. Our two biggest fundraisers, the Palm Sunday Brunch and our youth auction both take place during this period. As the weather warms, our group helps lay mulch at the church and takes part in other fun outdoor activities. In short, the portion of the pie that the youth group represents in my life grows substantially. That's not a complaint though. As you've probably heard me say before, guiding our kids is both a privilege and an honor.

On a recent Sunday, nine youth sat around tables in the parish hall meeting room. The tweens and teens were having fun making displays for our annual Peep Diorama contest. While working on their projects and taste-testing the neon-colored marshmallows, I turned on an animated, much shorter version of *The Ten Commandments* movie. I can't begin to describe my level of shock when I noticed the majority of the kids were more into the film than the sugary project at hand. What happened next stopped me in my tracks.

“Hail is ice, right?!” the sixth-grade boy stated. I confirmed he was right. “So how could it turn to fire when it hit the ground, but stay ice?” he asked. As you are probably aware, this question was asked following the scene in the movie. What caused me to be momentarily speechless was this. Our kids are smart. I know this may seem biased,

but the kids in our parish are incredibly bright and accomplished. They take AP classes, speak several languages, travel abroad, and have family members who are scientists and doctors. Though they were raised going to Sunday school classes and attending church, they also valued science and reason. I understand this. It makes sense to me, which is why the words I spoke in answer to our youth resulted in a thoughtful period of discernment for all. Here is what I said: “It doesn't make sense, does it? Reasonably speaking, if fire melts ice, it is impossible for hail to catch fire, yet maintain its physical structure. Here's the thing though: it doesn't have to make sense because with God ALL things are possible!”

The conversation described above has come back to me several times this week. As I worked tirelessly to balance my time between youth group, my full-time job, spending time with family, organizing a memorial service for a friend, and all the other responsibilities, I felt like I was tackling an uphill, impossible battle, and frankly, I was exhausted. I thought about my answer to that sweet sixth grader with God, ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE. I prayed. I spoke to God. Though he already knew what I was going through and how I felt, I needed to ask for help and trust that He had a plan. He did. First it started to snow and my company closed at noon. My exhaustion was restored with a nap. The time off allowed me to get more stuff around the house done. Other stresses were alleviated by an unexpected tax return, which afforded me the opportunity to pay off some bills and a much-needed girls' weekend. My stresses were diminished. My soul was restored. My body was rested. My heart was filled with love. I still have a lot on my plate, but I now remember to pause and ask God for help.



Rachele

First Quarterly “State of the Parish Address”

The congregation met during coffee hour on March 18 for its first quarterly “State of the Parish Address.” Rev. Meredith welcomed everyone and explained that the goals of these meetings include:

- informing everyone as to the happenings at St. James’;
- keeping everyone abreast of our financial status;
- sharing news about our latest activities;
- and answering any questions from the congregation.

These meetings will also be a place to reflect on where God has been working in the previous few months, and what we may anticipate in the months to follow.

After reflecting on the events of the last few months, Rev. Meredith introduced the Vestry. She reminded everyone of the role of these parish leaders, and encouraged people to share with them any ideas or questions they may have about the life of St. James’.

Rev. Meredith then announced Joyce Nohowel’s appointment to the vestry. Joyce was inadvertently left off the ballot at the Annual Meeting in November, as it was believed she had another year left in her term. Upon discovering the error, with Joyce’s agreement, the rector appointed her, which the rector has the discretion to do, according to our By-Laws.

The Treasurer’s report was then read by the rector. It was reported that we closed 2017 with a \$44,000 budget deficit. Considering that the projected deficit was \$95,000, this was good news. The vestry is committed to reducing the deficit over a three-year period, and the 2018 budget reflects that commitment. Expenses in 2018 are projected to be \$839,000 with a projected income of \$789,000, leaving us with a \$50,000 deficit. The rector reflected that we are on a positive trajectory. The Treasurer’s report concluded, “If we are able to remain on this

trajectory, we should be able to move out of deficit territory and feel more confidence that we can rise to whatever new opportunities that the Holy Spirit sends our way.”

Our Assistant Rector James Isaacs next reflected on our discernment process. We are halfway through the period of discernment. Listening groups have been having conversations with parishioners about noticing what God is up to. If any have not had the opportunity to speak with a member of a listening group, they are encouraged to do so. Listening Group members were then identified.

Senior Warden Barry Thompson updated the community on the status of our security plans. They continue to be a work in progress. Committee members have met with a representative of the police department and have identified areas on the property where repairs need to be made in order to ensure our safety. It was re-confirmed that our security is not to be a means to keep people out, but to make sure we are prepared in these challenging times.

Rev. Meredith concluded by reminding everyone of all that lies ahead in the next few months. This includes: Holy Week, Easter, Humor Sunday, continued discernment, Youth Sunday, Teacher Appreciation Sunday, Confirmation, Youth Group brunch and auction in preparation for Work Camp, four baptisms, the rummage sale, Girls’ Night Out, Men’s Breakfasts, Lunch and Learn gatherings, continued outreach opportunities, music, and worship—and more! (For details see the church calendar.)

As there were no questions, the meeting was closed with a reminder to have photos taken for an updated photo directory, as well as a request that we wear nametags. Rev. Meredith ended with a prayer for God’s continued blessings upon our parish.

The next “State of the Parish Address” will be held in June.

Rev. Meredith

The WomanKind 2018 Conference

by Ann Wixon

On February 23 and 24, nine members of our community attended the WomanKind 2018 Conference at St. James's Episcopal Church in Richmond, VA, with Rev. Meredith: Joyce Graf, Kirsten Hall, Lindsey Harris, Sarah Allen Hnatov, Emily Roegner, Robin Roegner, Cheryl Stafford, Jo Ann Thompson, and Ann Wixon.

The theme was "Lift Up Your Hearts: The Transformative Power of Word and Table."

While I didn't know what to expect, or, rather, because I was expecting the soft custard experience of a group of women having loads of Kumbaya moments, I was completely thrown off balance by the words of the keynote speakers, the workshops, and the Holy Eucharist and Healing Service.

No, this was definitely not my version of a Kumbaya experience where you have a terrific time singing along (although singing was infused throughout the event revealing its power to open hearts), hug each other as if you'll always be best friends, and head home having not been changed at all.

It was, it turned out, a true Kumbaya gathering. For Kumbaya means "Come by Here," and represents strength and power in togetherness.

This was a gathering of powerful women who had long been practicing discernment and had moved from questioning to thought to guidance to action. Their words woke me up. Their words made me uncomfortable. Sometimes angry. But those words stuck with me. I didn't drive home thinking about dinner. I drove home thinking about all I had seen, heard and experienced, and wondering what I was to learn from this experience. I waited quietly, and a truth or two I'd grown up with and held on to for years got revealed as something whose power I should, perhaps, question. And there it happened. Transformation bestowing the gift of strength, power and the freedom to think, see, and do in a different way.

Rev. Meredith's reflection: Having been to a WomanKind conference in the past, I knew our weekend would be deep and thought-provoking. I was also counting on it being community-building. We have an incredible parish, and the more I can encourage dialogue, engagement, and spiritual exploration within our community, the closer we will grow to God and to one another. Through WomanKind, Mission Accomplished!

Lindsey Harris' reflection: There was a moment during Emily Scott's workshop (The Discomforting Table: The Power of Table Practice to Nurture Justice Making) when I felt strange. My head was buzzing, my heart was racing, my fingers were tingling and I felt short of breath. At first, I worried I was having a bad reaction to the sandwich I'd eaten for lunch. And then I was preoccupied thinking what a scene I would make (and how much I'd frighten my mother) if I passed out at the back of the room. But I took a few moments to breathe and it slowly dawned on me that I wasn't having a health crisis—I was having a soul awakening. I'd listened to Emily Scott's incredible story of action—repeatedly, she shared the things that she and her congregation did to form a community, to invite others to participate, and to have an immediate and long-reaching impact in the community around them. They weren't unique or mystical ideas—they were just good ideas that had dedication and motivation behind them, which turned ideas into action. No committee meetings. No subcommittees. No paralyzing processes or red tape. She listened and observed and saw the need and tried to fill it. She didn't talk about it—she just did it, whatever it was at the time. And it worked. I needed to hear this message, quite desperately, as it turned out.

Cheryl Stafford's reflection: My takeaway is that we must have the difficult, awkward conversations on race. Yes, we will make mistakes and say things that hurt others, but we need to own them, apologize and keep talking. If we don't, the conversation stops. It can't stop.

continued on next page

Womankind 2018 Conference 2018, continued

JoAnn Thompson's reflection: "The opportunity to worship and sing with several hundred other women, along with hearing thoughtful and provocative talks from the speakers, led to what was my main takeaway. That takeaway was the late night discussing our interpretations and opinions over snacks. Our considerable range of outlooks and "messages heard" were at times surprising, always thought-provoking, yet calm, with considerable real listening to each other. Given all that, and our 45-year age range, it was a meaningful step on my (our) spiritual journey. Unforgettable."

The keynote speakers were **The Reverend Dr. Neichelle R. Guidry**, the Liaison to Worship and Arts Ministries in the Office of the Senior Pastor at Trinity United Church of Christ on the South side of Chicago and creator of www.shepreaches.com, and **Sara Miles**, founder and director of The Food

Pantry and Director of Ministry at St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco.

The workshops included: Martha Bourlakas (Maw's Homemade Applesauce, or What Our Meal Memories Teach Us About the Authentic Hospitality of Jesus Christ), Dana Corsello (The Body, the Blood, the Intimacy: What it Really Means to Get Real with Jesus), Elaine Ellis Thomas and Brenda Brown-Grooms (Hate Has No Home Here: Proclaiming God's Word in the Public Sphere), Ana Hernandez (Listening Around the Table: Skills for Healthy Community Life), Phoebe Roaf (The Heart of the Matter: Examining Jeremiah's Understanding of God's Justice and Judgment), Martha Pollins and Danita Rountree Green (Coming to the Table: Having the Clumsy, Courageous Conversation on Race), and Emily Scott (The Discomforting Table: The Power of Table Practice to Nurture Justice Making).

Thank You for Your Lenten Reflections

Dear friends,

As Lent nears its end, I feel moved to thank all who shared Lenten reflections with us this year. Each day when I opened my email, I was moved and delighted by what was written. Others were, too. One parishioner wrote,

"We've had them in other years, these reflections during Lent. Somehow, this year the fact that 30 different people wrote one has had a particularly strong impact on me. Each is a bit different from the others, as one would expect. The variety of observations and interpretations abound. I have been touched by what they bring forth within me: questions, peace, sadness, joy, curiosity, companionship, wonder, and so forth. One never knows if what is submitted will be understood or misunderstood, but we trust in our fellow Christians at St. James' to search for God's messages on our shared journey. It's a risk, though a pretty small one, to write a reflection. As I wrote one this year, I realized that we all grow—closer to each other, and more importantly closer to our Lord—little step by little step. Thank you to all who wrote, and to all who read and considered them."

God is at work in and around St. James'. Thanks be to God.

Rev. Meredith



Our New Seminarian

St. James' has mentored many seminarians in the past and we have the opportunity to do so again. In September we will welcome **Mary Margaret Winn**.

Mary Margaret, age 26, is a Masters of Divinity student at Virginia Theological Seminary. She grew up in Atlanta, Georgia and attended Sewanee: The University of the South for her undergraduate studies. After graduation in 2013, Mary Margaret moved to Memphis, TN where she worked as the Director of Youth Ministries at Grace-St. Luke's Episcopal Church for four years.

She started at VTS in August 2017 and is thrilled to be coming to St. James' in the fall. Mary Margaret is looking forward to walking with and learning from parishioners about how God is working in their lives, and is also excited about engaging ecumenical partners and neighbors in the community. When she has free time, Mary Margaret loves to hike, play trivia with friends, and snuggle with her cat.

Part of our commitment to Mary Margaret is to offer support and guidance through a Seminarian Lay Committee, to be comprised of St. James' parishioners. The committee is lay-led and will meet with Mary Margaret about once a month. If you are interested in serving on Mary Margaret's Lay Committee, please contact Rev. Meredith at rector@stjamespotomac.org. Thank you for welcoming her to the St. James' community!

Go get WHAT? Where? Why?

By Jo Ann Thompson



Let's say that you are sitting in church or in the parish hall and there is a disturbance ahead of you. Suddenly someone yells, "Get the AED." You look around, thinking, "The *what?*" Let's change that scenario...

An automated external defibrillator (AED), when utilized quickly in an apparent cardiac arrest situation, increases dramatically the person's chances of survival. We have them. You can at least go get the device and bring it to whoever requests it. Many people are needlessly frightened at the thought of using one. The devices are basically foolproof. They "think" (analyze) and TELL you what to do or not do. But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

First, someone needs to simply go get it, perhaps handing it off to someone else more familiar with emergencies. That person may have started CPR, so that's where YOUR help comes in.

OK, you'll go get it. Where are they? How many does St. James' have? There are four; two in the church and two in the parish hall building:

1. In the church narthex (entrance), there is one on the wall just left of the door leading out toward the parish hall.
2. In the undercroft, on the wall in the corner formed by the kitchen wall and the Sunday school supply/sound system closet.
3. In the parish hall, on the wall across from the women's restroom and the water fountain, next to the thermostat. That's in the short hallway as you head toward the kitchen.
4. In the lobby of the St. James' Children's School (lower level of the parish hall).

To see a four-minute demonstration of our AED, check out the YouTube clip below. One caveat: the chest compressions demonstrated don't pass muster. You cannot demonstrate adequate chest compressions on a living model not in need of them. Try an American Heart Association or American Red Cross clip for that. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkv2BrgLKa4>

Lincoln in the Bardo Book Club, Tuesday, April 22

This first novel penned by George Saunders is a book like none other. Taking place in one night in February, 1862, Willie Lincoln, much-beloved son of the President and Mrs. Lincoln, has succumbed to his illness, from which some expected him to recover. He has been entombed in a Georgetown cemetery.

Many actual newspaper quotes are interwoven with the author's imagined scenarios, becoming part of this very unique book. "Bardo" is a Tibetan term for a transitional state somewhere between death and one's eventual afterlife location. What does eleven-year old Willie think as he observes all this? Why can't his father hear him talking to him? What forces are at work? Familial love is explored. Who/what will gain Willie's soul? This reader easily calls this the most unusual and unique book she has read—ever. Filled with characters both real and imagined, with actions and words sure to provoke discussion, it should be an interesting evening!

To join in the group-led discussion, come to the parish hall library, 6:45 p.m., Sunday, April 22. The group usually winds up about 8:15 or 8:30. All are welcome, first-timers especially. And if you've wondered: yes, it's coed, with quite a range of opinions. One more time: all are welcome.

Jo Ann Thompson

Lunch and Learn: Tuesday, May 1

The undercroft is the location for this group, usually numbering about 25, who start gathering at 11:30. Lunch is available at noon for only \$10.00 per person. All one has to do to make a reservation is contact Sarah Padgett. Sarah's ability to arrange tasty lunches every month and yet stay within this very reasonable charge is unsurpassed. If you've not come to one of these, please consider attending. Neighbors, family, other friends are welcome. It's a casual group, friendly, and ready to welcome YOU.

At the time of this writing, the program for the May meeting is not finalized. Please check the Sunday bulletins for updates. The steering committee with responsibilities for these monthly first Tuesday get-togethers is comprised of the aforementioned Sarah Padgett and Lois Van Nevel, Len Whistler, and Jo Ann Thompson. Each of these would like to send an enthusiastic "Thank You" to all the folks who help in little and big ways with setting up, and especially cleaning up. That helps us vacate the room in time for the rental group coming in the next hour.

Do you have an idea for one of next year's programs? It might be your job or hobby, or someone you know with an interesting story. Our group is interested in hearing about it so, please contact one of the steering committee members with your suggestion. And thank you.

Youth Sunday & Silent Auction, May 6

The Youth Silent Auction will take place on Sunday, May 6. The special day known as Youth Sunday will feature a musical performance and sermon presented by our youth. We will also honor our graduating high school seniors.

Donations of goods and/or gift cards are greatly appreciated and are tax-deductible. All money raised at our silent auction goes toward our mission trip to Chattanooga, Tennessee.





Youth Confirmation

Saturday, May 12, 10:00 a.m.
Washington National Cathedral

Scenes from Palm Sunday Brunch, March 25 and Youth Group Peeps Diorama Party



St. James' Calendar of Events

- April 15, Sunday:** Acolyte training after the 10:30 service
- Friday, April 20:** Girls' Night Out, St. James' undercroft, 7:00-11:00 p.m.
- April 22, Sunday:** Rummage Sale setup begins; Book Club 6:45 p.m.
- April 24, Tuesday:** Submissions deadline for May 3 issue of *The Pilgrim*.
- April 27-28:** Spring Rummage Sale at St. James'!
- May 1, Tuesday:** Lunch & Learn, 11:30 a.m.
- May 2, Wednesday:** Visit to Manor Care Nursing Home, 10:30 a.m.
- May 6, Sunday:** Youth Sunday; Youth Silent Auction 11:45 a.m.
- May 12, Saturday:** Youth Confirmation, Washington National Cathedral, 10:00 a.m.
- May 16, Wednesday:** Visit to Potomac Valley Nursing Home, 10:30 a.m.
- May 27, Sunday:** Book Club discussion, 6:45 p.m.



Girls Just Wanna Have Fun (at church)!

Back by popular demand!

Who: Women of St. James' (age 21+)

What: Friday Fun Night

Where: Undercroft (church lower level)

When: Friday, April 20, 7:00-11:00 p.m.

Ladies—We are long overdue for a girls' night out! So let's do it again!

Join us on Friday, April 20 at 7:00 p.m. for a no muss, no fuss kind of evening. We'll hang out, we'll talk, we'll play games, we'll eat, we'll drink, and we'll party the night away.

Come as you are—straight from work, in jeans or in pajamas. Anything goes when Girls Just Wanna Have Fun (at church)! Please bring your favorite beverage and/or snack to share. Have a favorite game or activity? Feel free to bring that, too!

RSVPs appreciated but not required to: welcome@stjamespotomac.org.

We hope to see you there!

News from St. James' Children's School

Classroom Spotlight: The Pre-Kindergarten Room

By Sonia Schwartz

Teaching young children to love others is a big part of what happens in the Pre-Kindergarten class at St. James' Children's School. Each month, we have the children focus on a service project that helps them show love the way God wants us to.

During October, we collected buckets full of cleaning supplies to help hurricane victims in Florida and Puerto Rico to restore their homes. In November, the class collected food for the Manna Food Bank. In December, following a discussion about helping, we got busy right away helping at our own school. Our class decorated the garden with lights and decorations to have our school look festive for Christmas. For January's project, the children participated in a warm clothing drive for the homeless around DC.



In February, we did not forget the animals that God put on this earth for us to love. The children collected towels and blankets and donated them to the Montgomery County Humane Society to help the pets in their care. Last month, during our science unit, we made bird feeders to hang in all the trees in the playground so that the birds coming back to build nests and find food would have provisions.

What a great journey we have been on so far in the Pre-K class. Not only have the children learned to serve our school, our community, and the world, they have also learned that the reason we serve others is because God loves everyone and wants us to show His love.

ST. JAMES' EPISCOPAL CHURCH



WHEN?

**Friday and Saturday
April 27-28, 2018**

DOORS OPEN at 9:00 a.m.

**Proceeds support St. James' missions,
community outreach & parish programs.**

WHY?

What? Estate sale items, furniture, tools, kitchen & household items, collectibles, jewelry, books, children's toys & games, sporting goods, gently-used clothing, baby items ... **AND MORE. PLEASE HOLD YOUR DONATIONS** until April 22-24.

Where?

St. James' Parish Hall

11815 Seven Locks Road, Potomac, MD 20854

- Between Tuckerman Lane & Montrose Road -