



ST. JAMES EPISCOPAL CHURCH
A joyful, inclusive community

St. James Community Journal March 2013

Dear St. James Members and Friends,

Here is the March edition of the St. James Community Journal. Please bear with us as we try out this new way to share our journal articles and essays with you. For upcoming events please view our [News and Events](#) page or visit our [calendar](#).

If you have comments about this month's Journal or items (especially pictures!) that you'd like to contribute for the next journal please contact [Rose Scarff](#). For more information about St. James please contact [Erazm Pochron](#) in the church office.

Thank you!
Rose and Erazm

Take off the Masks

By Rev. John Kirkley



I had occasion yesterday to reconnect by phone with a friend, a Zen Buddhist priest, whom I hadn't seen in a while. We were making plans to meet together in person. I told her that Thursday would be the earliest I could meet, because I needed to get through Mardi Gras and Ash Wednesday first. She replied without missing a beat, "Oh, we have that in Buddhism too: sukha and dukkha, but I like pancakes and ashes better!"

Sukha and dukkha are roughly translated as "happiness" and "suffering." I wonder, "Which is the pancakes and which is the ashes?" It would seem that festive Mardi Gras parties represent happiness far more readily than the penitential spirit of our Ash Wednesday observance. In fact, most people just skip the latter altogether. It's a real downer: too much focus on sin and suffering.

But maybe pancakes and ashes, Mardi Gras and Ash Wednesday, aren't so much opposites as they are mutually illuminating correlates. Mardi Gras is about illusion – putting on masks and pretending to be someone other than ourselves. Part of the act is pretending that the excesses we engage in during the party provide lasting happiness. The mask we wear covers our dissatisfaction with a veneer of conviviality. On Mardi Gras, we put on a literal mask to represent the figurative mask we wear the other 364 days of the year, the image we project of fulfillment when, in truth, we all too often feel pretty empty inside; an emptiness that no amount of pancakes, or champagne, or

money, or social status, or career success can alleviate.

Ash Wednesday, on the other hand, is about taking off the mask: the mask of sukha (happiness) that obscures the reality of dukkha (suffering). Jesus picks up on this in his contrast between hypocrites who practice piety to be seen by others – those who want to appear to do good, rather than actually practice justice – and those who practice justice in response to the reward lavished on them by the Father who sees in secret – those who do good no matter what others may think.

The word "hypocrite" at its root means actor, and actors in Jesus' time wore masks. Jesus is inviting us to take off the mask, to stop pretending to be someone we are not, to stop pretending to be satisfied with the reward provided by being seen by others as having it all together. Take off the mask, and entrust yourself to the Father who already sees what others have missed – good, bad, and ugly – and who still lavishes the treasure of his boundless love on us if we are willing to receive it and, having received it, cannot help but share it.

Jesus warns us about the masks we wear, because he knows how easy it is for us to fool ourselves about ourselves, so convinced by the roles we play to entertain, impress, and manipulate others that we lose touch with our real selves and our heart's deepest longing. He warns us, because he knows that in losing touch with reality in this way we readily become complicit in the lies others tell us to soothe our conscience, saying our prayers and saluting the flag even as we oppress our workers and quarrel and fight and strike with a wicked fist (or predator drone). He warns us, because he knows how often we maintain a faux happiness by refusing to acknowledge the truth of suffering – our own and that of others.

Genuine happiness – the treasure that neither moth nor rust can consume and thieves can't steal – begins by taking off the mask, by accepting the truth about ourselves and our world, by letting go of our need to fit in and look good and not make any waves. It is then that we can accept how dissatisfied we are and acknowledge our hunger and thirst for the reward that only God can give.

On Ash Wednesday we are invited to take off the mask and stand naked before our Creator in all our brokenness, and need, and desire, and discover that we are loved just as we are. The Father/Mother who sees us in secret, the self we hide from everyone else, loves us nevertheless, and desires an intimate relationship with us just as we are. This is the reward, the eternal treasure: an intimate, loving relationship with God.

When we take off the mask before God in this way, we can then begin the work of justice in response to the love we now know to be the most real thing in the world, the only treasure that really satisfies our deepest longing. This love burns away all that is false. It is in the ashes of this love that we discover true happiness.

Some years ago, Mother Teresa was being interviewed by a reporter. At the end of the session, the reporter mentioned to her how much he admired her passion for the poor. Mother Teresa replied, "I don't have a passion for the poor. I have a passion for Jesus. He has a passion for the poor, so I serve the poor."

This is what it means to practice authentic piety, to practice justice, and not simply to be seen by others, to maintain a facade. Mother Teresa reveals a humble, even brutal, honesty. It ain't easy or fun serving the poor. It doesn't reflect her gifts or even her interests, necessarily. Her ministry is a response to her love of Jesus, her desire to allow that love to direct her actions.

In fact, I would suggest that Mother Teresa was able to serve as she did because she realized it wasn't about her at all. It was about what Jesus desired to do with and through her. She took off the mask, fell in love, and let God do the rest: regardless of the cost, no matter how others perceived her.

Taking off the mask is hard, even painful. I'd rather stay at the party and eat pancakes. But the ashes that signify our finitude and our failures also open the way to truth and freedom. They serve to get us in touch with the reality of suffering and the love that heals us. These ashes are the remains of the masks consumed by the fire of God's love. What remains is an unsurpassable treasure: the knowledge that we are God's beloved, and that we can act on that knowledge in ways that will heal the world.

Winter Recital

Saturday, March 2nd at 7:30 p.m.



If you enjoyed the music of Ed Wilcox's "Wire Choir" during the Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper, you won't want to miss this ---

The San Francisco Suzuki Education students will hold a recital on **Saturday, March 2 at 7:30 p.m.** in the nave of St. James.

Music includes St. Saens' Havanaise, St. Saens' Concerto in B Minor, Meditation from Thais Beethoven Romance in F and Zigeunerweisen. The recital is free and open to the public.

Talent Education will soon offer art classes and lessons taught by world class artist Jung Eun Lee. Contact [Ed Wilcox](#) for more information at 415-412-6723.

Pie Sunday Parish Meeting

**Get Your Green On ...
For Pie Sunday and St. Patrick's Day,
March 17th, 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.**



It's time again to bake the pies and prepare the pie charts! Pie Sunday is our annual event to report on ministry priorities identified by the vestry and review parish finances. The priorities identified for this year are worship & music, adding new members, and cultivating resources (money & people) needed for the church's mission. We will focus in particular on the first priority with table conversations about music in worship. Please join us for this important time of reflection on our common life, find out about the state of Saint James financials and enjoy a variety of sweet and savory pies (not to mention good fellowship)!

All talented and generous pie bakers or buyers who plan to bring their favorite pies, please contact [Mary Balmana](#) or [Elia Pochron](#) and let them know what kind of pie you plan to bring. Or sign up on the sheet available in the church hall.

FROM THE JUNIOR WARDEN'S TOOLBOX

by Tom Matthews



Just a reminder: the next parish workday is **March 23rd from 9 am to 1 pm**—feel free to come for as long or as short as is convenient for you. We will have coffee and snacks in the morning and then Ann has promised a light lunch at the end of the work day.

We maintain a list of things which need attention around the parish—and there is something for everyone, no matter what your skills! And this is a great way to get to know your fellow parishioners better while working together on tasks large and small. There is a sign up list (including any particular expertise you might have!) on the bulletin board by the women's rest rooms in The Undercroft -- and this also has the projects we will be undertaking on work day.

If you would like to make a donation of materials, that would be most welcome as well (for, of course, a tax deductible donation). Just let me know what materials you can donate so I can plan accordingly.

Feel free to contact me/see me to add to the list or let me know what might need attention around the parish and I will see it gets added to the list. You can think of me as year round Santa. I'm keeping the list and checking it twice—and I will know what is naughty and nice in terms of things that need doing around the parish!

Mark your calendar: other workdays this year are **September 14th and December 7th**.

Cheers! Tom

Feelings

by Elaine Chan-Scherer, LCSW
California Counseling Institute



I am writing this article close to Lunar New Year, Year of the Water Snake. It is supposed to be a year filled with connections, transformation, and discerning what choices need to be made. To me, it sounds like a recipe for a lot of emotional turmoil. So I thought I would share with you my thoughts on dealing with emotions.

Many of you know of Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor, the neuroscientist who had a massive stroke in the left hemisphere of her brain. She gave a very popular TED talk, and wrote a book, *My Stroke of Insight*. In her book, she talks about how any emotion needs 90 seconds to be triggered, to cause a response, and then to be flushed out of our bloodstream. This means that when you are angry the physiological response occurs, and after 90 seconds the automatic response is over. After 90 seconds you CHOOSE to let that emotion continue. Some of us allow the emotion to continue for decades, for a lifetime. But the automatic response is actually physiologically over in 90 seconds. According to Dr. Taylor, we choose to hang on to our feelings of misery!

I found this information to be fascinating. I first learned about it when a friend shared about her father who had had a stroke. He told his friends that if he cried, they should just let him cry and it would be over in 90 seconds. And sure enough, it worked. I know so many people, myself included, who hold back feelings, instead of allowing them to flow for 90 seconds. If you allow

those feelings to be fully felt, it is easier to release them. After the 90 seconds, if you choose to hang onto the feeling, then you are in the past instead of in the present.

Okay, so here is my recipe for dealing with those unwelcome, difficult feelings:

1. Stay present. This is especially important if you have had trauma in the past and something in the present is triggering a feeling that is amplified because of the past.
2. Allow your feeling to flow through you. Tell yourself that it will last 90 seconds.
3. Try to think of your feeling as energy, without assigning a positive or negative judgment (e.g. anger can be powerful, hot, buzzing, activating, electrical energy; anxiety can be quick, spinning, multi-faceted, heightened, freezing energy)
4. Observe the energy in your body. This is different from obsessing. Gently notice the sensations in your body – Where is it tight? Where is it hot? Where is it cold? Where is there no feeling? Does it twist? Does it slide? What color might it be? Notice how the sensations change in intensity.

When we grasp onto a feeling and try to keep it there (such as joy or outrage), or wrestle with it to try to get rid of it (such as sadness or embarrassment), we are stuck. We are most alive when we can experience our feelings and then allow them to dissipate. So fully feel your joy, or fully feel your sadness, or fully feel your embarrassment for 90 seconds. Then notice how it dissipates. Notice how after 90 seconds, you are feeling something new. Clinging to one feeling is static; it dampens our ability to fully experience the present.

Birdwings, by 13th century Persian poet Rumi gives us beautiful imagery and lovely guidance for the flexibility we can cultivate in processing feelings:

“Your grief for what you've lost lifts a mirror up to where you're bravely working. Expecting the worst, you look, and instead, here's the joyful face you've been wanting to see. Your hand opens and closes and opens and closes. If it were always a fist or always stretched open, you would be paralyzed. Your deepest presence is in every small contracting and expanding, the two as beautifully balanced and coordinated as birdwings.”

From the Editor: Lenten Practice

by Rose Scarff



One of my day jobs is as Parish Administrator at Church of Our Saviour in Mill Valley. We send out a weekly email newsletter and I often have to write the announcements when given a sketchy blurb from the ministry leader. Recently I was asked by the person in charge of the United Thank Offering (UTO) campaign to put in something to the effect that folks should take a Blue Box home during Lent and fill it up with coins for the Ingathering later this Spring.

Since the point of UTO's Blue Boxes is to put a coin in whenever you are feeling thankful, or to sit the box in a prominent place in your home or office to remind you to be thankful, that sounds like a practice to me. So, since it was the beginning of Lent when I was asked to do this, how about making being thankful a Lenten practice?

Although we aren't doing UTO here at St. James and there is no proliferation of Blue Boxes around, I challenge you to set up some other form of reminding yourself to be thankful during Lent. It could be a pretty bowl or other small container that you put coins in, or beads, or small stones, or whatever you have handy each time you are feeling thankful. Let the container remind you to be thankful even when you aren't particularly feeling that way. Even in the midst of the worst day it is possible to find your grateful heart if you just stop long enough to clear your mind of its worries and say a prayer of thankfulness for your many blessings.

And in the spirit of UTO, if you do put coins in your container, when it is full, how about bringing them in and donating them to Mothers Helping Mothers, or put them toward your gift on the Episcopal Charities tree or just give them to St. James for their ministries at large. Making a thank offering helps us practice gratitude, but then we can take it a step further by using those funds to help others. If singing is praying twice, then a thank offering is giving twice. Isn't that a better Lenten Practice than giving up chocolate?

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St. James Episcopal Church
4620 California St. San Francisco, CA 94118
www.stjamesf.org (415) 751-1198 stjames@stjamesf.org



MARCH CALENDAR

March 2, Saturday	7:30 p.m. San Francisco Suzuki Student Recital
March 3, Sunday	Mindfulness Meditation after 10:00 a.m. service 11:30 a.m. Training for Counters 5:30 p.m. St. James Chili Cookoff
March 6, Wednesday	7 p.m. Embracing a Life of Meaning: Kathleen Norris on Discovering What Matters – Part III
March 7, Thursday	6:30 p.m. <i>Lectio Divina</i> group
March 9, Saturday	7:30 a.m. Men's Breakfast
March 10, Sunday	St. James serves at Martin de Porres House of Hospitality
March 13, Wednesday	7 p.m. Embracing a Life of Meaning: Kathleen Norris on Discovering What Matters – Part IV
March 20, Wednesday	7 p.m. Embracing a Life of Meaning: Kathleen Norris on Discovering What Matters – Part V
March 21, Thursday	6:30 p.m. <i>Lectio Divina</i> group
March 23, Saturday	9 a.m. – 1 p.m. – Parish Work Day
March 24, Sunday	Palm Sunday Services at 8 a.m. & 10 a.m. 11:30 a.m. Training for Ushers, Bidders and Readers
March 27, Wednesday	7 p.m. Tenebrae Service
March 28, Thursday	7 p.m. Maundy Thursday Service, Agape meal and footwashing
March 29, Friday	Good Friday services at Noon & 7 p.m.
March 30, Saturday	Holy Saturday – Liturgy of the Word at 9 a.m. & The Great Vigil of Easter with baptisms at 7 p.m.
March 31, Sunday	Easter Sunday Services at 8 a.m. & 10 a.m. (with Easter Egg Hunt)

The St. James Community Journal is a monthly publication on behalf of:

St. James Episcopal Church

The Reverend John Kirkley, Rector
4620 California Street
San Francisco, CA 94118
415.751.1198
stjames@stjamesf.org
www.stjamesf.org

Community Learning Center

at St. James
4620 California Street
San Francisco, CA 94118
415.751.1199
clc@stjamesf.org
www.clcstjames.org

We welcome your articles
on or before the 15th
of the month.

Please send submissions
to Rose Scarff at
Rose.Scarff@gmail.com

St. James Preschool

Roger Setterfield, Head of School
4620 California Street
San Francisco, CA 94118
415.752.8258
rsetterfield@stjamesf.org
www.stjamespreschools.org

The California Counseling Institute

Elaine Chan-Scherer, Executive Dir.
Meg Bloomfield, Managing Dir.
4614 California Street
San Francisco, CA 94118
415.752.1702
ccpsyche@earthlink.net
<http://californiacounseling.org>

Editor:

Rose Scarff

Production:

Rose Scarff
and Erazm Pochron,
Andrew Hom *in spiritu*