

Enjoy the St. James Dec Journal



ST. JAMES EPISCOPAL CHURCH
A joyful, inclusive community

St. James Community Journal December 2013

Dear St. James Members and Friends,

Please enjoy reading our December edition of the St. James Community Journal. For our upcoming events please view the News and Events page or the Calendar on our website at www.stjamessf.org.

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 at stjames@stjamessf.org or (415) 751-1198 x2.

Thank you!
Rose and Erazm

Surrender to Love

By Rev. John Kirkley



A Meditation on Luke 14:25-33

This passage includes a number of what biblical scholars refer to as the "hard sayings" of Jesus: "hard" in the sense of being both harsh in tone and difficult to understand. Hate your family. Give up your possessions. Prepare to die and follow me if you want to be my disciple. This is not the kind of thing one hears at workshops on church growth strategies!

One way around these hard sayings is to treat them as if Jesus didn't really mean what he said: as if they could benefit from a better public relations consultant to make the message a little more palatable. Another approach is to retain the hard edge to the teaching, but maintain that it is an impossible ideal. It is a set-up for failure, showing us just how far we are from the kingdom of God. It is meant to demonstrate how much we need to acknowledge our faults and repent. But it is not meant to teach us about how to live our life. So, we can admit how far we fall short of this ideal, and then go about our lives.

I'd like to suggest that while this teaching isn't easy, neither is it impossible. It is hard because it cuts right to the heart of the fears that bind us and invites us to a new freedom. We are presented with a choice, and this choice is not without risk and sacrifice. What we choose will determine the shape of our life, so we do well to count the cost.

Jesus doesn't mince words because what is at stake is too important and he wants to make himself clear. The very fact of his growing popularity at this point in his ministry makes Jesus suspicious that he is probably being misunderstood. And so just when he is drawing the biggest crowds of his career, Jesus drops these hard sayings on the people like a bomb. He wants to draw a sharp distinction between following the crowd and following him; between the usual consolations people seek from religion and the self-surrender true religion demands. Let me repeat: this is not the sort of thing one hears at church growth workshops.

The usual consolations of religion are something along these lines: if you do X (sacrifice the right calf, attend mass, make confession, obey your husband, pay your tithe, obey the law) you will avoid Y (sickness, poverty, loneliness, grief, punishment, eternal damnation). This is the consolation of religion in its negative formulation – avoiding curse.

It also takes the form: if you do X then you will gain Y (health, prosperity, respect, children, happiness, eternal salvation). This is the consolation of religion in its positive formulation – securing blessing. It is all about reward and punishment. Religion becomes a way of avoiding, or at least coping, with suffering, and a way of self-fulfillment, happiness, realizing your potential. It is an offer of carrots and sticks to relieve our anxiety and boost our self-importance. The problem is that it doesn't work; at least, it doesn't work for very long.

The reason is that religion practiced in this way remains all about me. It binds us more deeply to our fears in our futile attempt to try to manage, control and manipulate God and others to feel secure. The usual consolations of religion serve to reinforce our willfulness. We continue to be driven by fear in a thousand ways.

Jesus offers us something other than the usual carrots and sticks. He invites us to relinquish self-will in self-surrender to God. Following Jesus means abandoning ourselves to God's love in the way that Jesus abandoned himself to God's love. This is a hard teaching, because falling absolutely in love and embracing the demands of love makes us feel vulnerable and overwhelmed. It means accepting that we are but a part of a larger whole that is finally mysterious. This mystery comprehends us; we do not comprehend it. Surrendering to the mystery of God means leaning back into the flow of a love that we do not and cannot control. We just don't know where it might take us.

The only way to move past our fear and follow Jesus is to entrust ourselves to mystery and surrender to love. Jesus has a very sophisticated understanding of the main forms that fear takes in our lives: fear of being ostracized, fear of economic insecurity, and fear of punishment by authority.

"Hate your family" means letting go of the need to please, manipulate, and control our intimate relationships to manage our fear of abandonment and loneliness. It means being free to go against the grain of the crowd when the demand of love may require us to sacrifice the approval and support of people we care about.

Jesus goes onto to expand this to even "hating our life" or our "soul" – being willing to let go of the sense of self we've carefully constructed, the persona that protects us. Self-surrender to God means refusing to cling to that identity if it inhibits our capacity to respond to love.

"Selling your possessions" means being willing to drop out of the rat race, indifferent to the ladder of success however it is defined. All the great saints of every tradition chose downward mobility. Why? So the fear of loss of material goods would have no power over them; so that they would be free to love.

"Taking up our cross" means being unafraid to risk the sanctions of social, political and religious authorities when our commitment to love threatens them. In all these instances, the point is not that family and friends should be shunned, or that possessions are bad, or that authority should always be resisted. The point is that if we allow them to define our identity, if we are bound to them by our fear of losing their support, then we are no longer free to follow Jesus. We are no longer able to surrender to God in love.

When Mom has to face the fact that her approval no longer determines your life because you've surrendered to a greater mystery, it may feel to her like hatred. When you are fired because you were unwilling to stay quiet about your company's unethical and even illegal practices, it may feel like you've lost everything. Defying the authority of government to spy on its citizens and punish whistle blowers may force you into exile or prison. How free do

you want to be? You do well to count the cost.

Jesus doesn't care about carrots and sticks. This is way beyond that. This is about the kind of person you wish to be and the kind of world you wish to live in. "Hate your family, sell your possessions, and prepare to die if you want to follow Jesus" is an invitation to freedom, to surrendering our small, fearful identities to realize our participation in something much bigger. When we embrace our identity as God's beloved, there is no longer anything to fear, nothing to defend, no one to appease or impress. Punishment and reward are transcended. There is, finally, just being in love for love's sake.

"If with God's help and without a presumptuous reliance on his own efforts someone comes to win this condition, he will pass over to the status of an adopted son. He will leave behind servility with its fear. He will leave aside the mercenary hope of reward, a hope which seeks a reward and not the goodness of the giver. There will be no more fear, no more desiring. Instead, there will be forever the love which never fails." (John Cassian, Conference X.9)

Women's Group Reads "Sunflower"

by **Deborah Sham and Rose Scarff**



There will be no meeting of the St. James' Women's Group in December. We will be meeting earlier than usual in **January, on the 18th**, in order not to conflict with the Vestry Retreat. Because Creative Canopy is already booked that day, we will be meeting **at Deborah Sham's house** (*Contact the church office for the address*) at the usual time, **10 a.m.** If you would like to bring something to nibble on to share, please do.

Debbie is our leader in January, and she has chosen a book for us to read and discuss. It is available at the library. We are going to discuss the book entitled: ***Sunflower: on the possibilities and limits of forgiveness*** by Simon Wiesenthal.

Here is the synopsis:

While imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp, Simon Wiesenthal was taken one day from his work detail to the bedside of a dying member of the SS. Haunted by the crimes in which he had participated, the soldier wanted to confess to—and obtain absolution from—a Jew. Faced with the choice between compassion and justice, silence and truth, Wiesenthal said nothing. But even years after the way the interview had ended, he wondered: had he done the right thing? What would you have done in his place?

Be sure to read the second half of the book, where 53 distinguished men and women respond to Wiesenthal's questions.

St. James' Women's Group is open to all women at St. James, so if you haven't joined us yet, this might be a good time to do it! See you in January!

News from the Vestry

By **Barbara Webb, Senior Warden**



Good News on Pledges! As of the date this article is published, \$169,077 has been pledged. There are still several pledges outstanding. If you have not pledged, please do so. We will be doing follow-up letters and phone calls within the next month.

Don't forget the Parish work day on Saturday, December 7. Can you spare an hour or two to help spiff up the Church for Advent? We look forward to seeing you.

Lots and lots of exciting things are coming up during Advent and beyond-

- The Rev. Canon Stefani Schotz, Canon to the Ordinary on Bishop Marc's staff, is the guest preacher on December 8.
- The Youth Group will have their annual Advent Wreath sale.
- Advent Series on the three Wednesdays in Advent.
- Candlelighting: During the 10 o'clock Eucharist, the candles will be lit as the clergy process up the aisle to symbolize going from dark to light.
- Book distribution: During the first Sunday in Advent, eight notebooks will be passed out to the congregation. Parishioners are encouraged to write what their thoughts, expectations are for Advent and the coming year. They will then pass the notebook on to another parishioner, who will write, pass on, etc. The notebooks will be collected on the fourth Sunday in Advent.
- Christmas/Epiphany Pageant on Jan 5.
- The Rev. Sheri Hostetler, Pastor of First Mennonite Church, will be the guest preacher in January, Sunday to be determined.
- At the Family Service on the first Sunday in February, the Feast of Presentation will be observed. Children and their families will be making candles.
- Mary Balmana has been appointed as a member of a task force to study the gun violence in Oakland. Many thanks to Mary for taking up this important issue. Please give her your support.

THE SPIRITED CYCLIST AND SPIRITUAL CYCLIST

*by Terry Potente, LCSW
California Counseling Institute*



Perhaps you have noticed that the number of commuting cyclists on the streets of San Francisco has grown exponentially. After a year of transitioning from a recreational cyclist to a commuter cyclist I realize there are some profound differences that actually relate to therapy and spirituality.

In the extreme, the cyclist as rider has an identity which is evident in the specialized attire that requires special shoes, gloves, socks, shirt, jacket, helmet, sunglasses. This is an outfit that is sleek and form fitting, for fast, focused, hard, long, strenuous riding. The work is intense and at times a bit grim but what an endorphin rush for the effort. Pure focus. The dark side is an attitude of self importance. Anyone or anything in the way is a hindrance to get around or avoid as quickly and smoothly as possible. Sometimes little wars erupt between driver, pedestrian or worse, tourist, and rider. All is other. On group rides slow riders may be dropped and left to their own devices. Heroes are at the front. Ok, so I was never all that serious, but that is the standard under which we lesser creatures ride and to which we compare ourselves. Impatience is a good adjective to describe encounters between factions. Impatience with others to get to one's best self.

Now that I commute regularly and have to transport various items, the experience of riding has been transformed. The first signs: smiles and casual conversation. Certainly there are intense in-a-hurry commuting riders too, but this new arena feels so much more forgiving. Much less grimacing and perfection, much more humor and range. The clothing is much more diverse and individual. Various shoes, helmets, and gear fitted to carry everything from children to groceries abound. Homemade low tech and high end mix freely. Everyone is in it together.

So what does this have to do with therapy or spirituality? Well, as a person who needs to move and to work things out physically, cycling has always been an adjunct to my personal therapy, wellness and self care. As a psychotherapist I routinely advocate exercise for most every client for most any condition or difficult situation. Walking, running, swimming, yoga all allow the brain to get unstuck and create space for new experience, thought, and for grounding. We were designed to move our large muscles, just as we were designed to experience anxiety, depression, anger, and love. That physical movement and working through emotions go together is not new news. And can I ever get serious about that.

But a radical new experience happened when I started commuting. I was stuck with a lot of my old ways of thinking: "Darn tourists, get out of the way. Ignorant cyclists, stay to the right. Thoughtless drivers, watch what you are doing with your car door. What are all you people doing out here anyway and why are you getting in my way? You are not doing it right. I am not fast enough." You get the idea. I wasn't smiling, yet. But I wanted to. And a new thought emerged: "We are all out here together on this beautiful day. Peace and ease to each of you." I would practice thinking that as I passed someone or was confronted with some obstacle. And darn if I didn't start feeling lighter and grimacing less. Some days it is a bit harder than others and I can feel my jaw is tight with silent grumbling, but much less so and with much more enjoyment of the ride, the air, the movement, the beauty of it all. And it transfers to those days of "really" riding. The outfit, intensity, and focus don't get in the way of an inner smile toward others--even tourists in the bike lane.

The evolution from somewhat grim intensity to enjoying the process in its many forms somewhat mirrors the therapeutic and spiritual journey. Yes, it is a good practice. So is flossing our teeth. But learning to enjoy the process is the real gift. As good practices go, cycling is way more enjoyable than flossing. Cycling whether on a ride or as a commute is a wonderful practice, made more awesome when smiling and wishing well to all.

Ranch Poems & Crosses



The creative juices were flowing during the Parish Retreat at the Bishop's Ranch in November. This picture shows some of the crosses made during the blacksmithing workshop.

Here are three poems written at Elizabeth Nelson's Poetry Workshop at the Parish Retreat, plus one recently submitted by Christie Higgins. Enjoy!

On a Bench at Bishop's Ranch

by Petrina Grube

A weathered wooden bench
invites me to rest.

"Sit a while.

I see the creases in your forehead.

I feel your sore throat.

Have you been working so hard?

Sit with me. Set down your thermos.

"Listen with me.

Can you hear the twittering? The cawing?

Oh! There's the laughter of the kids coming.

"Look with me.

The reeds are my closest neighbors.

Look at their frizzy curls peeling off each frond.

A bit unkempt!

The roses behind them. Bright white blooms,
tinged with pink, stretching delightedly
above their bush, to greet the sun
and anyone who walks by.

Now let your gaze stretch and expand.

Open up, like the wide hills in front of me,

the layers of horizon,

the morning haze softening the distant hills.

"Feel with me.

Feel the cool gravel, the brisk morning breeze.

Does it take you back to that bench where you sat
that crisp morning in the Marlborough Sounds?

Sorry about the hard slats pressing against your ankles.

I'm an outdoor bench; cushions are too finicky.

Feel my legs, old but strong still.

We'll support you, just sit

sit and rest your weary body a while."

All the lives I've led

By Christie Higgins

All the lives I've led

All that I have held

All the lives I've bled

God has come to meld.

All the lives I've come to know;

and there and then beheld-

They're all with me now.

Suddenly, now all spelled.

All those lives so hopeless

All the lives I've railed

Never have I Loved so hard

Than this my life so hailed.

ARRIVAL

by Bill Newmeyer

The steep road leads to the hilltop
The hilltop is warm and golden in the afternoon sun
The grass covered slope leads to the inviting pool
Buildings and live oak and pine trees are familiar old friends
People of St James complete the picture

Dreamscape

by Rose Scarff

Bright sun on whitewashed walls
flowers of every hue of scarlet and magenta
with their green vines spilling down
from windows and walls

The clear fountain by the grey stone well
gurgling merrily but unheard
over the clatter of iron shod hooves
on cobblestones and metal

A small knarly man and I
did the impossible.
The huge white horse was forced
into a small white trailer half his size.

How else to get such a large animal through such narrow streets?
Up we went, pulling and pushing the tiny trailer,
higher and higher through the narrow streets that had no end,
until I woke and knew it to be a dream.

DECEMBER CALENDAR

December 1, Sunday	Services at 8 a.m. & 10 a.m. Mindfulness Meditation after 10:00 a.m. service
December 5, Thursday	6:30 p.m. <i>Lectio Divina</i> group
December 7, Saturday	7:30 a.m. Men's Breakfast-Keeping Faith in a Competitive World 9 a.m. Parish Workday
December 8, Sunday	Service at 8 a.m. & 10 a.m. Service 9 a.m. Choir Practice St. James serves at Martin de Porres House of Hospitality 7 – 9 p.m. The Way of Christ Study Group
December 15, Sunday	Services at 8 a.m. & 10 a.m.
December 19, Thursday	6:30 p.m. <i>Lectio Divina</i> group
December 22, Sunday	Services at 8 a.m. & 10 a.m. 9 a.m. Choir Practice
December 24, Tuesday	Christmas Eve Services at 5 p.m. & 10 p.m. 9 p.m. Choir Practice
December 29, Sunday	Services at 8 a.m. & 10 a.m.
Every Tuesday	7:30 a.m. Morning Prayer & Meditation
Every Wednesday	6:30 p.m. Evening Prayer & Meditation 7:30 p.m. Buddhist Meditation in Caldwell Room
December 4, 11 & 18	7 - 8:30 p.m. Kinetic spirituality: Movement, Art & Chant as Meditation each Wednesday during Advent

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

St. James Episcopal Church

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of the month.

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