

The Elizabethan



The Newsletter of St. Elizabeth Episcopal Church Burien, Washington

July 2018

From Fr. John: Practicing hospitality

Hospitality is at the very deepest roots of the Episcopal way of being Christian in the world. Long before Christianity arrived in what is now Great Britain, the indigenous Celts recognized hospitality as a core value of their civilization. And when St. Gregory the Great sent Benedictine missionary St. Augustine north into England, the Rule of St. Benedict joined the Celtic expression to form a foundational combination that is still central to Anglican theology, spirituality and practice.

Celtic wisdom seeks to transcend religious constraints without obliterating religious, ethnic, clan or any other differences. Within the grace-filled practices of hospitality, tribal identities are no longer the most important defining factor of who we are. Focusing on differences can divide and make community-building strained if not impossible. We can allow that we have differences that are part of our identity and yet choose with open hearts to emphasize our kinship and whatever we may have in common. Our differences become intriguing curiosities – interesting expressions of the diversity and distinctiveness that we each embody as qualities with sacred roots in God's beloved Nature; each person bearing the likeness of God.

Individual women and men and communities trying to embody the teachings of St. Benedict aspire to live a similar grace-filled theology: to meet the Risen Christ in all the people we encounter. These encounters can be doubly graced if we are aware that we not only bring Christ to those who are our guests, but we also receive Christ in the other simultaneously. Christ is the center of every encounter. To look beyond our human differences and to see Christ primarily, is a crucial element of the Benedictine vow of *conversatio*, the monastic practice of always turning and returning to Christ in all things.

Chapter 53 of St. Benedict's Rule, On the reception of guests, insists that "All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: I was a stranger and you welcomed me." Fr. Terrence Kardong, former abbot of Assumption Abbey, once said that the word "all" is crucial to Benedict's instruction and that Benedict is really extending the internal values of the monastery to the outside world. In Benedictines communities, there are no second-class citizens. In the Rule's second chapter, Benedict says that the Abbott is to avoid all favoritism: all are called for counsel, all elect the Abbott, all have their goods in common, all are at

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peace. "Benedict extends this egalitarianism to the rest of the world," Fr. Kardong says. "All guests are to be shown the honor due to Christ."

Our human tendency is to make distinctions in our treatment of others – to have favorites, to have prejudices or to reserve our respect for those who have power, money or influence. But, while there is a more obvious place for those guests who share our faith, St. Benedict wants all guests received as Christ. He makes only one distinction: "special care and thoughtfulness should be shown in the reception of the poor and of pilgrims." Here we find what some consider to be the center of his spirituality: to look upon the arriving guest with the eyes of faith. If the kingdom of God is truly for the spiritually poor of this world, then the poor and those seeking God are to be shown special care.

Now, to be very clear, honor and respect are not the same as acquiescence and accommodation. The guests we treat with the honor and respect due to Christ may influence us, but they do not dictate our identities or our practices. Christ is always the center of every encounter. Those communities and organizations that thrive over time have a strong sense of identity and a purpose, as well as a flow of new insights and energy. Because we have boundaries and traditions, we can offer paths and guidance to those guests who choose to move closer into our community.

At some point, guests become fellow practitioners, and we need them to help with some of the household chores. And every time we welcome a new person or family into the community, God introduces new ministries, fresh approaches and divergent life experiences. The art is to keep conformity and innovation in harmony and focused on the purpose of the organization. Ours is to "restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ."

God moves us to that purpose through the ministry of every practitioner; every lay-person and every ordained person. God gathers people into a church community to form them in their faith, fill them with the Gospel and the love of God, and send them into the world outside the community as sources of God's love, peace and justice. As a manifestation of the body of Christ, the congregation at St. Elizabeth, with God's help, forms and renews God's people who carry Gospel love and encouragement into God's creation that is present already and is also still becoming God's own realm—a realm of forgiveness, reconciliation, justice and peace.

The world, this country, even the city of Burien, seem increasingly fractured. Anger and fear appear to be replacing differences of opinion. As a result, we are likely to see more people turning to the church for the first time or returning to the church after an absence, or possibly coming from other denominations that no longer feed them. Those that even consider stepping across our threshold are already responding to God's presence even at different stages of life and different phases of their spiritual quest. For St. Elizabeth, the challenge is to be prepared to

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The Gospel cycle

Our three-year Sunday lectionary cycle devotes a year to each of the three synoptic gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. We hear John's Gospel every year during Lent, Easter, Christmas and Epiphany. In Year B, we spend almost six months of Sundays with Mark.

Mark's Gospel was the first gospel to be written and it is the shortest. The word we hear over and over in Mark's transition from one scene to the next is "immediately." Immediately the first disciples leave their nets; immediately a hemorrhages stops; immediately Jesus gets into a boat. Mark's gospel even begins immediately with the baptism of Jesus and his adult ministry with no birth stories or family history.

Over the first half of Mark, Jesus repeatedly urges those he heals not to tell people who he is and at the abrupt (and likely original) end of the Gospel there are no appearances of the Risen Christ – just an empty tomb and the promise that if his followers return to Galilee, they will see Jesus there. An ending so disconcerting that over time editors added three additional, longer endings trying to resolve Mark's perplexing message.

Mark never uses abstract concepts and yet is not simple. Professor Mark Taylor calls Mark's Gospel "elemental" as it uses parables with seeds, lamps, vineyards and food. Mark talks about houses and deserted places, mud, blood and human touch. Life and death. "In Mark," Taylor says, "Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God never strays from these elemental realities."

Taylor suggests taking 45 minutes this summer to read Mark from beginning to end as a story without expectations. Mark's elemental gospel may be exactly what we need to hear to reorient our life, work and sabbath practices.

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The Elizabethan is published monthly by St. Elizabeth Episcopal Church. The deadline for articles is the fourth Friday of each month.

Articles, calendar items and ideas may be mailed or emailed to the addresses below or left in *The Elizabethan* box in the Parish Office.

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be prepared invite people and receive them as Christ while we introduce them to the Episcopal way of being Christian in the world. Explanation and translation open the doors to evolution and transformation.

In a book titled "Incorporation of New Members in the Episcopal Church," Alice Mann outlined four elements essential to the work of gathering people into a church community. They all begin with inviting, which anyone can find a way to do. "Inviting" involves any gesture that draws people toward the church and encourages them to explore St. Elizabeth.

Specifically, "inviting" includes our physical presence in Old Burien, our relationships with our neighbors and with organizations like Hospitality House, Operation Nightwatch and Neighborhood House. Even our signs and flags, and the state of our grounds and the building itself can encourage or discourage people's curiosity. "Inviting" also involves our websites, our printed materials, such as the note about children or "Praying the Eucharist" in the pews. Of course, the most effective are our personal invitations to others and word of mouth.

The next step is "greeting." Our greeters do an excellent job of being the face of this ministry as they recognize, welcome and extending appropriate and helpful hospitality to those who are our guests. The real test is in the quality of the greeting people encounter in the congregation. People feel truly greeted when the congregation meets them with a warm, but appropriate and interested welcome, clear boundaries and worship norms. One of the most important elements of greeting, believe it or not, is a functional and hospitable Coffee Hour. These can be as simple or as lavish as the host chooses or is able to provide because it is in the act of hospitality, not the size of the spread, that God builds us as a community.

The third step involves "orienting" our guests and visitors. Our ushers and greeters do a fine job at helping people find where restrooms, children's areas and coat hangers are, making sure they have a bulletin and are offered a name tag, and so forth. The rest of the congregation picks up and enhances this ministry by watching and listening. The liturgy at St. Elizabeth takes a bit of time to learn and juggling books and bulletins while you are watching for when to kneel, stand or sit can be a bit much.

Some churches try to take all the struggle out of the liturgy by either simplifying the liturgy for the sole purpose of accommodating newcomers or by trying to capture every reading, every movement and every nuance in a printed bulletin. There is no reason to abandon our liturgical practices. That's the expression of our identity that newcomers and guests tend to love most! The attraction of the AngloCatholic expression is its ancient liturgical roots thriving on the love of God who is truly present and pouring the future realm of heaven into us in the here and now.

Rather than trying to capture our liturgy on paper, which leaves most of the experience in people's individual hearts and heads, we can all practice living liturgical
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hospitality. Truly “greeting” people into the liturgy means noticing when someone is still thumbing through the hymnal while we are singing the Sanctus or some favorite hymn and simply handing them an open hymnal. A friendly smile and an offer to trade books goes a lot farther than even the most detailed printed instructions.

When someone is trying to find the Eucharistic prayer or has found it but doesn’t know that the chant notation for the Memorial Acclamation is on the bulletin, I promise that you won’t offend them if you stand beside them and guide them along. Other long-term orientation occurs with Adult Formation classes, Inquirers Gatherings or with Fr. John Fergusson’s Tuesday afternoon classes and conversations. These are among some of the ways that we can explain and transmit our way of being Christian in the world.

At each point, we are always mindful and watching for people exploring their next step. If they find themselves drawn to this parish, we can engage in various practices and ministries related to “incorporating.” These are the processes that help knit people into something with depth and hope – the congregation and the people of St. Elizabeth as a local manifestation of the Body of Christ.

“Incorporating,” that is, “bringing into the Body,” involves deeper engagement in social gatherings, such as Friday afternoon “Coffee and Conversation” or Dinners for Six, or other activity groups still being formed. For some, incorporation involves baptism or confirmation, reception or a transfer of membership. Others may be drawn to serve at the altar, sing in the choir, learn how to be an usher and so forth. And finally, they are invited to make a financial pledge to the congregation.

God is the source of all invitations to life in the faith and we are the vessels. God is the source of any transformation that comes about and we are guides and interpreters. God is the center and the source of all creation, we are practitioners of the love of God. Remembering our place in God’s work makes the practices of hospitality a beautiful arrangement if we handle them with grace and trust.

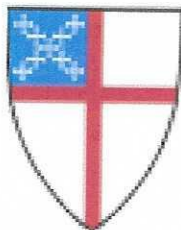


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“We do not draw people to Christ by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it.”

~ Madeleine L'Engle

Adult Formation:

Adult Formation classes return this month. Beginning on July 8th, we will start the first of three classes on Hebrew Scripture. You do not need to bring a bible or have an advance degree as these are not in-depth classes. We hope to provide a way to engage what Christians often call the “Old Testament” with some fresh eyes. Please join us at 9:00 a.m. in the St. John Room.

Our Inquirer's Gathering for July will be on the morning of July 29th for more general questions and interests about church, spirituality, scripture, liturgy, sacraments and any other aspects of the Episcopal way of being Christian in the world that you have questions about.