

A Voice in the Wilderness

Newsletter of the Church of St John in the Wilderness, Copake Falls NY

March 2019

Thoughts from the Wilderness

[Slightly edited sermon from January 22, 2017]

[Isaiah 9:1-4](#)

[Psalms 27:1, 5-13](#)

[I Corinthians 1:10-18](#)

[Matthew 4: 12-23](#)

Social and economic justice have been central priorities of the Episcopal Church for many decades. And that makes sense as social and economic justice are primary biblical priorities and thus central to any reasonable understanding of Christianity.

For example, the Episcopal Church's office of Government Relations (*from 1/22/17 bulletin insert*), "advocates to protect the human rights and safety of refugees and migrants... advocates on issues that protect the natural resources that sustain all life on earth; calls for policies that mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and supports communities impacted by climate change; addresses food insecurity [in-service of] those most in need; supports legislation and policies that aim to prevent domestic and gender-based violence, that protect the human rights of LGBT persons, and that build peace in, for example, Sudan and South Sudan."

These are not arbitrary priorities. These are humane and Christian priorities. Standing up for and protecting vulnerable people as well as standing up for and protecting our vulnerable planet – God's creation – are fundamental to our mission and call as Christians and as a church. And it's great that our church as well as many from other religions or no religion are standing up for and protecting vulnerable people *and* our vulnerable planet!

In today's readings it's apparent that we need God's grace, God's power and the hope and love that come from God – to be aware of God's priorities and then to act on God's priorities.

It's easy to get off track, and none of us are perfect. I read that the Corinthian church Paul was writing to may have been about our size, not a large church. And yet they had divisions. For one thing they were tempted to have a cult of personality and divide into camps around their favorite Christian leader – saying, *I belong to Paul or I belong to Apollos*.

But, then as now we are called to put God first, not any human leader. Investing inordinate power in any human being is not simply wrong, it brings division. And when the human being is not a good leader, that's even worse. From a Christian perspective, a good leader is humble and points to God, not to him or herself.

As today's Psalm says, *the LORD is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?* Yes God is our light and our salvation, -- though it's true we are called to be lights ourselves -- but God is the source of our light!

Bad leadership leads to oppression, violence and war. As in today's first reading where God's people were brutalized and taken over by various empires -- the Assyrian and later the Babylonian empires. And this passage is quoted in today's gospel as in Jesus' time God's people were under the thumb of another Empire -- the Roman Empire.

The good news in Isaiah and in the gospel is that God indeed is light and salvation: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light!... The yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken!" God always brings hope for positive change -- even in the darkest times!

We are called to put God first not any human being. We are called to put God first not America first; certainly not bellicose jingoism like, *"From this day forward, it's going to be only America first, America first."*

No, as Bob Dylan sang, *It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, But you're gonna have to serve somebody. You may be a business man or some high degree thief. They may call you Doctor or they may call you Chief. But you're gonna have to serve somebody.*

God loves everyone -- not just Americans! When we put God first by taking God seriously, by praying, by taking God's values seriously -- then we are empowered to serve God; then we are empowered to see the truth -- the truth that we are called to build bridges, not walls, the truth that we are called to care not only for those who agree with us or look like us, but we are called to care for all of God's children -- especially the vulnerable, like refugees and immigrants.

The eight richest men in the world own as much wealth as the poorer half of the rest of the world -- according to Oxfam -- this level of inequity and the suffering for millions that results is simply wrong.

It's important to be aware of reality. God helps us to do so. And God also helps us to channel our anger at injustice positively so that we don't add to the trouble but rather become part of the solution.

*In peace,
John+*

Flight: Birds of the Hudson Valley

Flight: Birds of the Hudson Valley, an exhibition of photographs by Heather Kitchen and Stephen Schumacher, will be held from March 2 -- May 6, 2019 in Burke Hall Gallery at the church. The images by the two local nature

photographers display the abundant and varied bird habitats of the Hudson Valley. Contact Lucy Eldridge for open hours which are by appointment or come to the exhibition during coffee hour.



Eagle, Hillsdale, NY, photo by Heather Kitchen



Wood Duck, Pleasant Valley, NY, photo by Stephen Schumacher

From the Desk of the Senior Warden

2019 promises to be a good year, with the Church in a sound financial state, a newly painted Rectory, a smooth transition to a new bookkeeper & treasurer, a Capital Campaign to be launched this Spring and the July Soirée preparations already afoot.

I hope to continue Karen Flynn's nimble stewardship of last year. I am blessed with the assistance of Junior Warden Wendy Langlois and an excellent group of vestry members — all women and local residents.

I invite parish members to feel welcome to approach the Vestry with suggestions, comment or problems. This is a communal effort and I love this interaction.

In fellowship, Marjorie Hoog

Soiree goes "Into the Wilderness"

This year our Summer Soirée will head "Into the Wilderness." We'll be exploring the church grounds beyond the graveyard to be developed under the church's long term capital plan -- places to connect to the natural environment that surrounds us here in Copake Falls. Planning is now underway and more details will be following soon.

The Soirée is the major fundraising event of the year. Everyone in the parish can help by buying a ticket or participating as a volunteer. Also, we've found in past years that our silent auction -- especially lodging and dining -- are major parts of our fundraising success. We're looking for houses and apartments that can be offered as summer or winter getaways in the silent auction. Gift certificates for restaurants are also very popular. Please contact Marjorie Hoog if you have good ideas to offer.

There's lots of work to do as we get ready to go Into the Wilderness in July.

Church Calendar for March and April 2019

March 2, Saturday, 5PM, Exhibition Opening. *Flight: Birds of the Hudson Valley*, photographs by Stephen Schumacher and Heather Kitchen. March 2 – May 6

March 6, Ash Wednesday, 10AM and 7:30PM

March 10, Episcopal Relief and Development Sunday

March 13, Wednesday, 6:30PM, Lenten Soup and Bread Supper and Worship.

April 14, Sunday, Palm Sunday

April 18, Thursday, Maundy Thursday. Seder Meal, 6PM. Eucharist,

7:30PM

April 19, Friday, Good Friday, 10AM and 7:30PM services.

April 20, Saturday, Easter Egg Hunt, 11AM

April 21, Sunday, Easter, 8AM and 10AM services.

April 22, Monday, Earth Day

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Newsletter of the Church of St. John in the Wilderness (Episcopal)

Copake Falls, New York 12517

The Rev. John Thompson, Rector

Marjorie Hoog (1/20) Warden

Wendy Langlois (1/21) Warden

Vestry

Susan Massarella (1/20)

Zita Kobos (1/20)

Elen Freeston (1/21)

Peggy Anderson (1/22)

Lucy Eldridge (1/22)

Jane Peck (1/22)

Richard Peck, Clerk of the Vestry (1/21)

Karen Flynn, Treasurer Liaison

Eucharists

Sunday, 8:00 AM (spoken)

Sunday, 10:00 AM (choral)

stjohnw.org

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