

# ST. PAUL'S MESSENGER

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THURSDAY, 19 MARCH 2015

PRICELESS

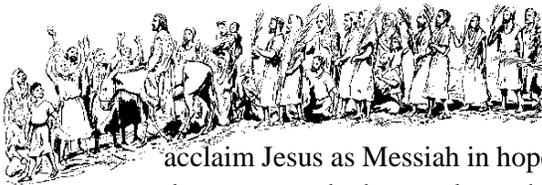
## The Vicar's Pages

### HOLY WEEK AND EASTER: AN INVITATION TO PRACTICE SEEING IN A NEW WAY

Mark, the earliest Gospel, begins with this summary of Jesus' preaching: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (1:15). "Repent" does not mean to feel sorrow and remorse, but to "put on a new mind," meaning to perceive in a new way. Jesus calls us to see the world as if God was in charge, to see with compassion and hope. This is part of what it means to "enter into eternal life." It is to see as God sees, to have the same vision of life and creation that God—the eternal One—has. Imagine how your life would be if you could see in this way!

This suggests that part of Jesus' uniqueness, part of what it means to be Son of God, is to see the world just as God sees it. Jesus could heal, cast out demons and welcome the outcast because instead of focusing on the illness, brokenness and strife in the world, He saw God's compassionate intention for creation fulfilled and all things brought to perfection in God's time.

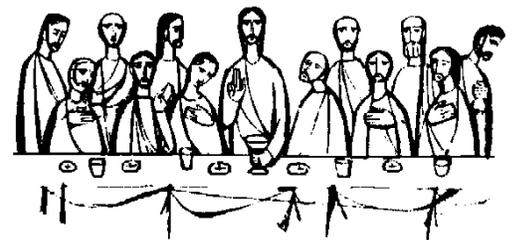
Seeing in a new way, putting on a new mind, is difficult. It might feel akin to being born again. Yet I am persuaded that the purpose of our Christian practice is to facilitate our putting on a new mind so that we can act in new ways. Discipleship is about learning to see as Jesus saw, with divine insight, so that we can act with love and compassion imitating Jesus. Clearly this involves practice. We practice through daily prayer, works of mercy and compassion, sacraments, and immersing ourselves in the stories of Scripture. The liturgies of Holy Week are an ancient practice of the Church intended to help us not just to hear Scripture, but to enter deeply into the Living Word, and experience new ways of seeing and being.



On **Palm Sunday**, we try on being part of a crowd with high hopes that God will finally step into the world to bring about an immediate answer to our prayers for peace and justice. We share the experience of those who are convinced that God must act now! We feel what it is like to publicly acclaim Jesus as Messiah in hopefulness and perhaps with a sense of danger. What is that feeling like? How do we respond when we learn that God's plan is not our plan?

As the service continues with a dramatic reading of Mark's account of Jesus' last days, we get a chance to try on each of the characters in the drama. How do I deal with power? How do I benefit from the violence and efficiency of "the System?" What is it like to be part of a crowd mentality? How do I respond to feeling powerless? How am I like those who promise allegiance but fall away in time of trial? How have I been disappointed by those I love? Meditation on this story has the power to unmask all sorts of feelings and motives in us that can be brought to Jesus in prayer for forgiveness and healing. This practice can lead us into a new way of seeing and being.

**Maundy Thursday** provides the opportunity to experience the origins of Eucharistic practice as we remember Jesus' last meal with his disciples. In the context of a Palestinian style dinner reminiscent of a Passover feast, we enter more fully into the experiences described in the readings. How will this experience shape the ways we hear and experience the Eucharistic Prayer each Sunday? What would it mean to take seriously Jesus' command that we love one another?



Following the Palestinian feast, we process to the sanctuary for the Stripping of the Altar. This is an invitation to see our beloved place of worship in a new way. How will this experience of separation from the objects which support our worship affect us? Will this help us feel our solidarity with Jesus' first followers in their experience of moving from an intimate dinner to their shock at Jesus' arrest?

On this holy night Jesus asked his disciples to stay awake and pray with him but, despite their best intentions, they failed. The Church will stay open all night as an opportunity for us to stay and pray with Jesus present in the form of bread and wine. How might seeking God in this unfamiliar way shape us?



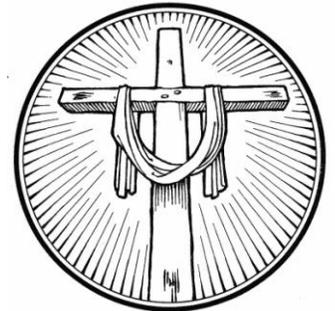
## The Vicar's Pages (Cont'd from page 1)



The night watch will end on **Good Friday** with Morning Prayer at 7:00am, and in the evening we will observe the Good Friday Liturgy with communion from the Reserved Sacrament. On this day, we hear the Passion Story from the perspective of John's Gospel and are invited to reflect on the crucified Jesus. In this reflection, can we come to see humiliation, suffering and death in a new light, realizing that in sharing them with Jesus they can be holy experiences where we find God present? (For those who cannot attend an evening service, I will be presiding at a similar service at noon at St. Peter's in Hebron.)

In the Gospel narrative, **Saturday** was a day for the disciples to grieve and to seek meaning and direction following Jesus' death. Since ancient times, it has been a time for Christians to gather in vigil to hear again the Scripture stories of God's saving deeds in times past. We, too, will gather for the creative telling of these stories in a service that brings together the ancient and the modern. It will be a time to renew our hope and our way of seeing, and to recommit ourselves to our life with Christ. What will we hear from a fresh retelling of God's saving deeds? Will this be a time of rebirth?

And what lies ahead is **Easter Sunday**, with its narration of the discovery of the empty tomb by Jesus' followers, and the change in their viewpoint from one of defeat, sorrow and grief to one of joy! With our proclamation of "Christ is Risen!" will we assert that our perspectives also have been renewed? For a moment at least, will we claim the ability to see as God sees? Will we enter into the realization that through what we have experienced our fear of death is overcome, if only briefly? Will we understand that new life always follows death for those who can see in the eternal way that God sees? Will we celebrate our ability to enter into this way of seeing?



Seeing in a new way – God's way – living in a new way – following the example of Jesus – is a hard thing. Perhaps it is the hardest thing of all. But there is no greater reward than entrance into the life of the Eternal One. Transformation, repentance, and the ability to see and live in a new way await those who seek them. I invite you to take advantage of each of the opportunities this Holy Week and practice seeing in a new way.

## ST. PAUL'S CALENDAR

Sunday, March 29	Palm Sunday Service	9:30am	Parish Hall
Tuesday, March 31	NO Bible Study		
Thursday, April 2	Palestinian Dinner/Stripping of Altar	6:30pm	Parish Hall/Church
Thursday, April 2	Church open for Prayer with Sacrament	Overnight	Enter through Parish Hall
Friday, April 3	Good Friday Morning Prayer	7:00am	Church
Friday, April 3	Good Friday Liturgy at St. Peter's	Noon	St. Peter's Hebron, CT
Friday, April 3	Good Friday Liturgy	7:00pm	Church
Saturday, April 4	Village Coffee	9-10:30am	Parish Hall
Saturday, April 4	Set-up for Vigil	10-12:00	Parish Hall
Saturday, April 4	Easter Vigil	7:30pm	Parish Hall
Sunday, April 5	Easter Sunday	9:30am	Church
Sunday, April 12	Morning Prayer with Lay Preaching	9:30am	Church

## The Vicar's Pages (Cont'd from page 1)

### Dinner Church: An Experience of Church in a New Way

On four Fridays in Lent, a group of 20 and more, aged 8-80+, gathered for Dinner Church. Billed as an experience of the "ancient future," those who participated had the experience of "being Church" in place of the more usual perspective of "going to Church." Modeled more on what the earliest followers of Jesus may have experienced than on the way the Church has developed, we had the experience in the course of two hours of creating something meaningful together in which each person's gifts and contribution mattered.

Upon arrival, each person was welcomed by the "Minister of Greeting," and was assigned to a task that matched their interests and abilities. After a prayer and reading of the guiding Scripture for the evening, the "Minister of Music" led us in song. Then some went off to prepare the meal under the direction of the "Minister of Soup" and the "Minister of Bread." Others worked with the "Minister of Set-up" to prepare a beautiful table for our meal. While this went on, the "Minister of Intercession" collected prayer concerns from all present and turned them into a prayer for later in the evening.

When dinner was ready, we gathered around the tables for an opening ritual, and for the blessing and sharing of holy bread. Then we ate delicious food! In time, we turned to our neighbors to discuss the Scripture of the evening, feeding each other with our life experiences. We closed the meal with prayers, and then it was time to work together on cleanup. Our gathering concluded with a closing circle of music, prayer, a blessing and exchange of the peace. The evenings proved to be simple, beautiful, inclusive and moving experiences.

The final session of Lenten Dinner Church is March 20. By popular demand there are plans to continue on an intermittent basis and a desire for Cookout Dinner Church when the weather warms up. Watch the bulletin and the weekly e-mails for the date of Easter Dinner Church in April.



### Bishop Laura to Visit June 7

Bishop Laura Ahrens will be with us for an official Visitation on Sunday, June 7. If you are interested in being Confirmed or Received into the Episcopal Church at that time, please speak to Fr. John.

### Yoga with Carole Moves to Larger Quarters

After almost seven years at St. Paul's, Carole has *moved* her yoga classes to a larger space at the Windham Senior Center. In 2008 when Carole originally came to us with an idea and a request to use our space, nothing similar had ever really been done here and the Vestry had no idea how it would work out. We can be proud of the Parish leadership's decision to invite her to use our facility, and St. Paul's ongoing support of her. We found the flexibility to make it work for her, for us and for the community. While we would have preferred that Carole not leave us, we are tremendously thankful to have hosted her classes, and grateful that she is going to a local place that will better accommodate her needs.

It will be interesting to see what opportunities God will send our way next in regard to the use of our Parish Hall. Let us pray that we will be able to be as generous and flexible about the use of our space in the future.

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**And now, for the rest of the news...**

## VESTRY INPUTS

**Parish Life:** There are sign up sheets in the parish hall for the Palestinian Dinner that will be on Maundy Thursday, April 2, 2015. Thanks, Beth Nelson.

**Property:** Plans for the walkway are complete, and we only wait for warm weather and thawing of the ground to start. Kyle Stearns, our contractor, estimates that once he gets started, it will take him no more than two weeks to complete the work. This means that at worst case, we will be without a walkway for only one Sunday. The pavers that have been selected will give us a smooth and level surface and will blend in well with the stone walls of the church. Thanks to the generosity of many of you as well as donations from various estates, we will be able to complete the walkway as presented to the parish. We hope to raise sufficient additional funds allowing us to also rebuild the existing brick steps with matching pavers. We have received approval for this project from the Windham Center Historical Commission and a drawing of the project is on the Garden Bulletin Board. Any questions can be directed to the Vestry, Jim Russel or George Younger.

### Mission & Outreach:

COMING -- EVENING OF MEAL PREP AT THE COVENANT SOUP KITCHEN, FRIDAY, MAY 1

Can you spare your time between 4:30 and 6:30 on May 1 to join a small crew from St. Paul's whose job it will be to prep, serve and clean up at the evening meal? We are looking for about 5 people to join in this fun, communal, important activity. We will not be supplying the food - just ourselves. Email or call Virginia Fulton at [vmfulton@earthlink.net](mailto:vmfulton@earthlink.net) or 860-428-2470 or sign up on the Mission and Outreach Bulletin Board in the Parish Hall.

LOOKING FORWARD TO SUMMER - Through an Interfaith Coalition with the goal of joining forces to make a difference to the young people of our community, we will be part of a group who will provide educational and recreation activities to children who come to the Soup Kitchen for lunch with their parents or guardians. This program is in its formative stages. Please join in now to help with the planning. Or plan to join in this summer to make the program a success. Our parish has many educators and social service providers, retired and active, and this is a place ready made for you if you have the time and interest. In fact it is a place for any of us who want to help!!! Contact people are - Carol Kraus, [veskraus@earthlink.net](mailto:veskraus@earthlink.net), Rabbi Jeremy Schwartz, [ravjeremy@templebnaisreal.org](mailto:ravjeremy@templebnaisreal.org), or Virginia Fulton, [vmfulton@earthlink.net](mailto:vmfulton@earthlink.net).

DAUGHTERS OF ABRAHAM - The book group for Christian, Jewish and Muslim women who seek to learn about our three religions and become friends with each other is in its first year. Please check out Daughters of Abraham on the web and think about joining us. For those who are involved, the group has become a highlight of learning and connection. Marion Beausoleil is our contact at [jbeau1@directv.net](mailto:jbeau1@directv.net) or 860-803-5599.

HOLY FAMILY HOME AND SHELTER - This year during Lent we have the opportunity to help one of the oldest and dearest local charities, Holy Family Home and Shelter. They are seeking monetary donations for a couple of reasons - lack of storage space for goods given and the need to have funds for things like repair, maintenance and funds for things not available at the Shelter for their families. There is a wooden house with a slot in the top for checks and cash, and you will find it on the counter in the Parish Hall. You can also mail checks directly: Holy Family Home and Shelter, 88 Jackson Street, Willimantic 06226. Thanks, as always, for your generosity.

### A NOTE FROM THE PLEDGE SECRETARY

There has been some confusion each year about what offertory envelope to use on Easter Sunday. Just a reminder – the Easter Sunday envelope is for an additional contribution you may wish to make to St. Paul's. Should you wish your offering to go towards your pledge, please place it in the first Sunday in April envelope. Please contact me if you have any questions. Thanks. Jo Anne Loughery