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The Messenger

St. John's United Church of Christ



Message from the Pastor

My friends,

I'll share with you in a moment the title of this painting and the name of the artist. First, I want to ask you to study it closely, to consider the thoughts and feelings that it may generate for you.

The season of Epiphany follows the twelve days of Christmas on our Christian calendar. For the Western expression of our faith, the Epiphany of Christ occurs when the Magi visit him as an infant. Eastern Christians celebrate Christ's Epiphany at his baptism in the River Jordan. Different traditions based on different understandings of the ancient wisdom.

There are many and varied traditions observed by the different forms and denominations of the Christian church, but I want you to return to your impressions of the painting above. The artist was George Frederic Watts, who is quoted as having said "I paint ideas, not things." The idea of this painting, expressed in its title, is "Hope".

Watts painted three more versions of the first, each different from the previous. Perhaps in this way his imagination mirrors the inspiration of our own understandings of the Divine and its expression in creation. I've said nothing about my own feelings about this painting because not unlike the various traditions of Christianity, they are many and varied. I dare say that the thoughts and feelings generated by this article are as many as there are readers. And yet, we come together as a community of faith.

So then, in this season of Epiphany, let us consider the very Christian experience of revelation, which is the meaning of the word. And let us gather to bear witness to one another of what has been offered to us in the person of Christ, God-with-us.

Many blessings...

Pastor Tom



In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” (Matthew 2:1-2)



Choose your Epiphany word or phrase, for your reflection throughout the year; write it in the star above, cut it out, and place it in a space where you will see it each day.

Suggested resource – Psalm 72:1-14

From the Church Council President

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid: for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord." Mark 2:10-11

Happy Advent! In these four weeks leading up to Christmas, we have the opportunity for preparation and anticipation, celebration and the need to exercise patience. We prepare, in various ways, to celebrate the birth of Jesus, and I encourage you to see the notices elsewhere in this "Messenger" for upcoming events at St. John's. In addition to our Sunday worship services, which include the lighting of the Advent candles, these include the Christmas Cabaret on December 11th and 12th; the Fellowship Lunch on December 16th; the Christmas Tea after worship on December 19th; the Christmas Eve service at 9 PM on December 24th and a Christmas Day communion service at 10 AM which will be conducted by Redeemer Anglican Church in the St. John's sanctuary.

Amidst all the preparations of special meals, the anticipation of getting together with friends and families, and the exchange of cards and gifts, I hope that we will all find some time to be still and listen for the voice of God. During Advent we are really preparing for events on two dates. The first is December 25th, when we celebrate Christ's birth. The second one is the second, post-resurrection coming of Christ, when all who believe in him will be raised to new life. Our waiting for the first advent, Christmas, prepares us to wait for the second one, a bit like a dress rehearsal. That date is, of course, unknown. As Jesus is quoted, "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. (Mark 13:32-36). So we must be patient, but we must also be ready.

Perhaps during Advent this is also a good time to reflect on what we hope and expect for St. John's in the future, and also plan to be prepared to consider the unexpected. The ancient people of Israel were expecting a Messiah who would be a mighty king, a warrior who would lead them in battle to overthrow their Roman oppressors. Instead, they got (and many rejected) the spiritual leader of a religious movement that would come to influence, if not militarily conquer, the then-known world, but not in the way they expected. I believe that St. John's has an important mission to fulfill as part of God's plan, and a bright future if we can discern and perform that mission. Let us be open to where God and the Holy Spirit lead us, both personally and as a church.

With wishes for a happy Advent, and a very Merry and Blessed Christmas,

Jeff

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January Devotional

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands.2 Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Psalm 100

In 1987, Susanna Clark and Richard Leigh composed “Come from the Heart”, which included the following lyrics:

“You’ve got to sing like you don’t need the money
Love like you’ll never get hurt
You’ve got to dance like nobody’s watchin’
It’s gotta come from the heart if you want it to work.”

They were reminding us of the rich history of making a joyful noise in the world, a history that includes King David.

King David lived sometime around 1035 BCE. No one knows for certain. He was a rogue, he was outlandish, he did things to solidify Israel’s position in the now Middle East that we might consider breaking the rules. But repeating what biblical scholars have said for generations – he was “highly favored” by GOD. AND, he had the temerity to dance in front of the Ark of the Covenant as it was being brought to the temple.

In 2 Samuel 6:14-22, we read that David “danced before the Lord with all his might.... So David and all the people of Israel brought up the Ark of the Lord with shouts of joy and blowing of rams’ horns.” When he was criticized for being shameless in his dance he retorted “Yes, and I am willing to look even more foolish than this, even to be humiliated in my own eyes!”

Are we willing to try something new for which we might be criticized for being foolish before the community? Are we willing to show our joy and love for the way Jesus taught us to live? Have we lost our joy of abandoning the “rules” and dancing out on faith into a community so in need of the joy and love of GOD?

I think the past few years have endeavored to take our joy and strength. We hear messages of fear everywhere we turn. But GOD's message is to dance with joy, to make a joyful noise in whatever way we can when we bring GOD's light into this ever-darkening world. The message from the Bible is clear. More than 365 times the scriptures say "don't be afraid."

In this new year let us go out dancing with joy, bearing GOD's light into the community without fear of reprisal.

As Lee Ann Womack sings:

I hope you never lose your sense of wonder,
You get your fill to eat but always keep that hunger,
May you never take one single breath for granted,
God forbid love ever leave you empty handed,
I hope you still feel small when you stand beside the ocean,
Whenever one door closes I hope one more opens,
Promise me that you'll give faith a fighting chance,
And when you get the choice to sit it out or dance.

I hope you dance.

Let's dance, my friends, let's dance.

Dreama Terrill

January Mission of the Month: Side by Side

Side by Side is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing a safe place in Virginia where LGBTQ+ youth (aged 11-20) "can define themselves, belong and flourish", with "LGBTQ+" referring to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning people. Side by Side was founded in 1991 under the name Richmond Organization for Sexual Minority Youth (ROSMY) and was rebranded in 2016 with the help of the VCU Brandcenter.

Side by Side is "Youth Centered", seeking to meet all LGBTQ youth where they are through several Strategic Priorities:

- Facilitating Support Groups for youth;
- Providing Mental Health Counseling;
- Offering Training for Schools, Faith communities and Parents of LGBTQ+ youth;
- Providing College Scholarships to LGBTQ youth;
- Maintaining the Youth Advisory Board, YEL, "Youth Engaged in Leadership"; and
- Building Partnerships to support youth in the LGBTQ+ community.

Additionally, Side by Side has made a public commitment to the "flourishing Black LGBTQ+ youth in our community".

Side by Side continues to show its dedication to all LGBTQ+ Youth of Virginia, and we ask you to support this worthwhile organization as the St. John's Mission of the Month.



January Announcements

Guest Preacher: Rev. Jamie Lynn Haskins

Rev. Jamie Lynn Haskins serves as the Chaplain for Spiritual Life at the University of Richmond and is an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). She is excited to begin the process of seeking ordained ministerial partnership with the United Church of Christ in the coming months. Jamie Lynn completed her graduate studies at Vanderbilt Divinity School in Nashville, Tennessee where she graduated with a Master of Divinity degree in 2009. Prior to her arrival at the University of Richmond, Jamie Lynn served as the Chaplain at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri and as the Minister of Faith Formation and Social Justice at University Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Seattle, WA. She lives in the Church Hill neighborhood of Richmond with her partner and giant, fluffy dog.

Guest Preacher: Rev. Lauren Cogswell Ramseur

Rev. Lauren Cogswell Ramseur is the co-Pastor of the Voices of Jubilee at Bon Air Juvenile Correction Center, a ministry of the Presbyterian Church (USA), whose members seek to accompany incarcerated youth through worship, singing, community building and pastoral care. She previously served as the Pastor at Lynnhaven Colony Congregational church (UCC) in Virginia Beach, and as Covenant Pastor at Bon Air Presbyterian Church. Rev. Ramseur received her B.A. degree from James Madison University and her Master of Divinity degree from Emory University.

Wednesday Night Bible Study Fellowship — Study of Genesis

We have resumed our study of the Book of Genesis, on Zoom.

All are welcome to join other members of our blessed community to study the Word. Major themes, involving a fresh look at some very familiar Bible stories, include creation and creationism, the rebellion of humankind and the Flood, and how the experiences of Abraham, Esau, Jacob and Joseph speak to Christians seeking to live responsibly in our world today.

If you have any questions about the study, or would like to register, please contact one of our co-facilitators, Rev. Tom Gerstenlauer, at (413) 378-0828 or revtgerst@gmail.com, or Scott Siefert at (804) 350-0826, or sesiefert@gmail.com. It's not too late to join this study!

Pastoral Care

Our Interim Pastor, The Rev. Tom Gerstenlauer, is available to provide spiritual support and pastoral care to our congregation. He can be reached at revtgerst@gmail.com or (413) 378-0828.

January Announcements

Guest Preacher: Rev. Marvin M. Silver

Rev. Marvin M. Silver serves as Associate Conference Minister for Justice & Witness Ministries with the Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ (UCC). The Conference includes 167 local churches across the Mid-Atlantic region, covering NJ, DE, MD, DC and parts of VA and WV.

Serving the Eastern Region of DC, MD (stretching north to Gaithersburg and east to the Eastern Shore), and VA (south to Richmond and Chesterfield), Rev. Silver works to maintain a climate of pastoral care through guidance and support of clergy, local churches and peer-to-peer pastoral support networks. And he organizes and mobilizes the expertise and leadership of professional networks for church development and congregational vitality in keeping with the Conference "New Visions" ministry.

In response to local churches facing uncertain futures and questions of legacy, Rev. Silver has developed the Nehemiah Pilot Project in partnership with Church Building & Loan Fund to provide a transformative experience and process of living into and fulfilling the Gospel ministry and mission in new ways that meet the growing needs and challenges that God's people and the world are facing today.

In addition, he serves as the primary CAC Ministry Team member for Justice & Witness Ministries. More than just responding to social injustices, Rev. Silver is transforming the Conference's paradigm and approach to the work of justice by building a new justice movement based on a vision, mission and set of core principles that defines and unites local churches, clergy and justice leaders into a powerful, effective, and faithful organizing network. As the architect of the Conference's new Justice & Witness Action Network, he collaboratively organizes and leads strategic campaigns to advance a justice agenda regionally and nationally.

His ministry vision, "*Transforming lives and communities.*"

January Announcements

Interim Ministry Plan

Our Interim Pastor, The Rev. Tom Gerstenlauer, has been working with us to prepare St. John's for the next phase of our ministry. In furtherance of this effort, several congregation-wide meetings, both in-person and by Zoom, are planned in early 2022. One of these will be on January 23rd, when Rev. Marvin Silver, the UCC Central Atlantic Conference Associate Minister, will be our Guest Preacher and will lead a forum after worship to discuss ministry options for St. John's. Please watch the weekly e-Blast for more information, and feel free to contact any Church Council member — David and Marcie Agee, Betsy Bighinatti, David Craig, Kathy Freise, Jeff Jacobs, Daniel Martin, Lynn Snyder, Dreama Terrill or Terri Weaver — if you have any questions or comments.

Covid Update

In light of the increasing numbers of Covid infections, St. John's has suspended in-person Sunday worship for at least the month of January, and has returned to worship by Zoom alone. The Church Council will continue to monitor public health metrics and guidance and will consider a return to in-person worship when conditions improve. Please watch for further announcements in the weekly e-Blast.

January 2021 Calendar

Sunday, January 2nd, 10 a.m.- Worship in person and by Zoom, with communion

Wednesday, January 5th, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, January 6th, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee meeting by Zoom

Sunday, January 9th, 10 a.m.- Worship by Zoom, 10 AM, Rev. Jamie Lynn Haskins, Guest Preacher

Monday, January 10th, 7 p.m. – Church Council

Wednesday, January 12th, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, January 13th, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee meeting by Zoom

Sunday, January 16th, 10 a.m.- Worship by Zoom with Rev. Lauren Cogswell Ramseur, Guest Preacher; Missions & Outreach Committee meeting after worship service (by Zoom)

Wednesday, January 19th, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, January 20th, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee meeting by Zoom

Sunday, January 23rd, 10 a.m.- , Rev. Marvin Silver, Guest Preacher, with Forum on Transitional Ministry after worship service (by Zoom)

Wednesday, January 27th, 7 p.m. - Bible Study by Zoom

Thursday, January 27th, 9 a.m. - Renovations Committee meeting by Zoom

Sunday, January 30th, 10 a.m.- Worship by Zoom

January Birthdays

January 3 - Rick Pearman

January 3 - Marcie Agee

January 6 - Frieda Walsh

January 8 - Kathy Freise

January 9 - Georgianne Stinnette

January 14 - Hank Allen

January 20 - Fritz Will, IV

January 23 - Vicky Lyle

January 25 - Joachim Altenkirch

January 25 - Charlotte Quick

January 26 - Bruce Miller



St. John's United Church of Christ

St. John's United Church of Christ is a diverse community forming a united congregation, seeking to grow our faith, share it with others, and serve God's people wherever the need is present. We are living God's love and all are invited!!!

An Open and Affirming Congregation

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