



# St. Paul's Church

422 Market St.

Box 1551, Camden,  
New Jersey 08101

## A New Thing

**I am about to do a new thing;  
now it springs forth, do  
you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the  
wilderness  
and rivers in the desert.**

**Isaiah 43:19**

For those fortunate enough not to be so overwhelmed by our days that we have difficulty perceiving anything new, it has been good to have some time away in places where the pandemic has not yet left an indelible mark. Iceland, which Kelly and I visited this month, is a place where one has constant reminders of the ever-new work of God: live volcanos, glaciers thousands of years old, endless nights filled with light. For me, it was a place utterly unique, with people hardy and unique and deeply proud of this land to which they are tied in ways it is hard for us to imagine. The climate is at once

beautiful and forbidding, a place where one has the sense of the unpredictability of holiness.

We have had plenty of unpredictability over these many months and much of it has not been of the welcome kind. There is a sense that we could measure our days in the statistics, of people sick because of a health concern that has morphed into a political controversy, that we feel paralyzed, unable to act in a situation where the poor are continuing to bear the worst of the suffering. In the spirit of providing normality to our lives and the lives of our neighbors, we are bringing our ministries back into the church this fall, while taking the precautions to seat people at safe physical intervals, allowing volunteers to prepare the meals while a different set of people serve our seated guests. The routine will seem different for those who have worked and been served in

years past from our kitchen; we are, however, simply taking Isaiah at his word in the new thing that God is offering us, trying to find a middle ground between the prudence we want to cultivate and the hospitality that has been the hallmark of our ministries for decades.

We are doing this in response to Isaiah's invitation because God's work does not always happen in pristine, otherworldly environments. The places will be very familiar and, hopefully, the hospitality we will offer will be the same. The difference will be in saying implicitly that we value community as much as anything we can put on a plate. If we have been in the wilderness, I believe it is time that honor the way God is making for us. It is not risk free but, proverbially, neither is anything worth doing. We simply need good planning, faithful volunteers and the vision that says we need to heed the invitation of God to provide for our guests exactly what we would want for ourselves.



*My whole life, so far, my whole experience has been that our failure has been not to love enough...It was not that I was ever disillusioned. My conviction that there was work to be done has never wavered. Things did not to be as bad as they were. There was a possibility of change. I wanted to believe that man could right wrongs, could tilt the lance, could love and espouse the cause of his brother because, "an injury to one was an injury to all."*

Dorothy Day (1948)

## Our Whole Lives

Several weeks ago, as we were leaving for vacation, Kelly and I made a turn onto Broadway here in Camden on our way to the airport. She was the first to notice that, when we returned, we came by way of Black Lives Matter Boulevard. To my embarrassment, I had not known that the name change was in the works; I was stunned to see the sign suspended above Cooper St., a reminder not only of the time we are in but the seriousness with which the city authorities are taking this commitment to a movement that was barely a footnote to many of our lives only two years ago. Our civic lives are, by necessity, full of compromises that we would not make in our personal political views. I believe that the change was more than an announcement of where the city stood in the riven political climate we now occupy. It is, as Day said, a reminder that there is always a possibility of change, that we are able to let go of our collective cynicism and honor

those who are placing themselves on the front line in rethinking our national discourse about equity for all our citizens.

I am not naïve enough to believe that changing street names is going to effect a change in our collective thought or policy toward our neighbors. As I am constantly reminded, this county/state/nation has a great deal of ground to cover before we can think we are approaching anything like justice. But Day's genius, discouragingly absent from today's discussions, was to understand that love is not a zero-sum game, where the love we offer someone has to be subtracted somewhere else. To say that our failure has been not to love enough, to affirm that Black lives do matter, have always mattered and our failure to recognize the proposition impoverishes us all should be written on our foreheads, inscribed on our souls and indelibly written into national policy. But we cannot

legislate love; we can only show what it looks like and dare anyone to think they can offer an improvement.

Of course, I have to acknowledge that I am a white man and will always be a supporter and advocate rather than someone on the receiving end of racial injustice. But I am also an aspiring Christian and a cleric, and I know that the foundation of our tradition rests on our ability to strive for justice and peace among all peoples, respecting the dignity of every human being. It is something that we swear to at each baptism, acknowledging that it can only be accomplished through God's help. The first step toward that dignity is honesty about where we stand with regard to it. As we saw last summer and have been reminded ever since, "an injury to one is an injury to all." I am proud to be in Camden partly for that public recognition and that we have to be reminded of it daily if we want the injuries to end, if we want that dignity to be a part of all our lives.



## No Words



I am hesitant to talk about Camp Faith only because I'm inclined to talk about things I can understand: street signs, volcanos, even glaciers. Keeping in mind Barbara Brown Taylor's idea that trying to describe the Holy Spirit is, for us, like an oyster attempting to describe a ballerina (we are simply not meant to do so), I have similar feelings about Camp Faith. How do you describe an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the persons of several dozen grade schoolers who are impossible to contain, determined as they are to teach you what pure, unabated joy is like? They made scripture come alive in ways I could never replicate and I am determined to let them act out the gospel one week this year. It is like watching a combination of story time and a WWF match. They are kinetic and thoughtful, beautiful and loving. We need them.

I have a deep respect for the counselors, who not only kept the peace but had great insights and knew what to do to keep the near-pandemonium at bay. The camp leaders (Val, Dell and Elijah) were wonderful; as usual, my deepest respect goes to Mitchell, who planned the events, saw the camp through even on difficult days and was the quiet voice of authority. He also clearly enjoyed it all immensely. We are trying to find a way to include many of these young people into our corporate life this year, so please make them welcome when you see them. In the meantime, let us all rejoice that we have such a talented and energetic group among us and such gifted leaders to guide all of us.

## Pledges

This is the season when many of us are away from church on vacation, visiting friends and family. Please know that the church expenses do not stop; it would be very helpful if people could keep their pledges current. Thank you!

## Thank you!

Many thanks to Patsy Morgan, who did such great work trimming the walkway beside the church!