



St. Paul's Church

422 Market St.

Box 1551, Camden, New Jersey 08101

The Theme is Faith

I think we could all say that the details were ironed-out as best they could be. The plans had been submitted and approved by the Task Force for Re-opening and by the bishop. Meal delivery had been organized through the Food Bank of South Jersey; we had arts and crafts, storytelling, an abundance of art projects. What the children also had were masks, six-foot distancing, restrooms cleaned every half-hour. There was no transportation to-and-from camp and no field trips, both proscribed by the state. It was not Camp Faith as anyone had remembered it. But we adults have been determined to see that it be as much fun as any they have had.

When Mitchell told me that the theme for this year's camp was to be "faith," my initial response was, of course it would be faith—that is the name of the camp. What I failed to realize was how layered the idea of faith is. We all want more faith. As disciples we want Jesus to increase our faith; we want faith even the size of a mustard seed so that we can move mountains. But the kind of faith we want and pray for is a small

matter compared with the faith that God has demonstrated toward us. God has, after all given us charge of these young lives for several hours a day, not to mention the generosity of too many people to mention: Joanne, who overheard a conversation in Michael's and offered her services as an art teacher, the people of St. Bartholomew's Cherry Hill, who have given us a disinfecting machine, as well as generous donations from several area churches, pottery-painting and Patsy Morgan's wonderful tie-dyeing class.

It is the campers themselves who have been the greatest gift. They are smaller in number but just as determined to have fun, which I am currently trying not to kill by talking about the parables of the kingdom. They know that things are very different this year. What has not changed is our determination to offer them the best program we can for these three weeks.

Along with the other (probably more appealing) activities, we are learning to pray, which I believe is right and good for the children we have. I have

been giving thanks for their presence, their attention and their willingness to engage the thornier parts of our faith. We have also been learning how to say "thank you" in all circumstances, even for situations in our lives we would not wish for. For my part, I give thanks for these wonderful and resilient young people the ones who have taken the trouble to enter the shadowy lands of the parables and use their own minds and hearts to make sense of them. I give thanks for the counselors, who have learned to shift gears on a dime and help the younger ones through the day. I have not heard one complaint about masks, about distancing, about anything that has kept me awake prior to camp. It is hard not to feel the degree of faith God has placed in us; my hope is that we can do it justice, for God's sake and for our own.

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Waiting for God

Following our discussion last Sunday about the timing of our return to the sanctuary for “in-person” worship, I will confess to several feelings. The first was pride in a parish that knew itself well enough to wait for such a move, until it felt like a safe time for everyone. I am always prepared to wait; waiting, after all, is in our DNA. We wait expectantly throughout Advent for the Incarnation of the living God. Lent is an extended time of waiting for us to prepare our hearts and souls for the death and resurrection of our Lord. Ordinary time, the season we are in now, is the only time when we are not explicitly orienting ourselves toward one of these two events on our liturgical calendar. In a sense, waiting is what we do best.

I will confess to another feeling, however. I am a sacramentally oriented Episcopalian and have been so as long as I can remember. I enjoy celebrating mass and I enjoy being with people who do the same. I miss being able to celebrate the mysteries and, in that respect, I know I am not alone among my

*My soul waits for the Lord;
More than watchmen for the morning,**

More than watchmen for the morning.

Psalm 130, v.5

colleagues. Recognizing that this change, however temporary, feels like loss for many of the clergy, Bishop Stokes has taken a pledge not to celebrate Holy Communion until we are all able to do so, and I am grateful for his empathy. It has simply meant a search for those things in my life that feel sacramental, “visible, outward signs of an inward, spiritual grace,” as our catechism has it. It turns out that there is no shortage of these sacramental events for me; in fact, they are too many to number.

Every Sunday, for instance, I am able to see numerous faces of people I love who are willing to endure the vagaries of online worship (who knew that we would ever be here?), who are willing to put up with the technology (where the rules keep changing) and all the attendant mishaps, noise and other distractions for the sake of being in community with one another. I can pray every

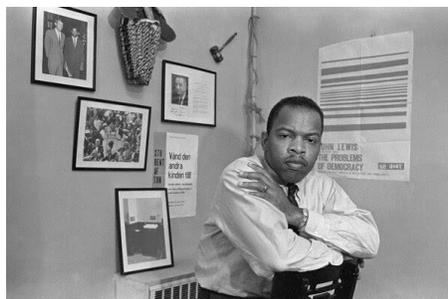
morning with real, live human beings **who get up at 7:30 just to do it**. I am able to participate in our food ministry in a way I typically cannot. And lately, I can see the faces of young people, many of whom have no church home, respond with genuine engagement to scripture, who place themselves in the stories in a way I could not at their age. All these events are deeply sacramental for me; I would defy anyone to tell me they are not deeply holy.

I will join the chorus who says that these times have been hazardous, even deadly, for too many people. The news accounts are too full of suffering needlessly politicized, even if we have learned something providential about our relationship to our neighbor. But when the psalmist says, “I wait for the Lord; my soul waits for him; in his word is my hope,” (v. 4) I know how much there is to hope for. I have seen and heard it, and to me it is good and welcome and holy.

Even after fifty years, in a time before I was born, the picture still horrifies. It is a picture of John Lewis in a scene of chaos at a voting rights march in Selma, Alabama in 1964; Lewis is on the ground, covering his head and trying to get up, while a helmeted policeman has a stick raised, ready to strike him again. Lewis bore the wounds of that day his entire life, through almost thirty-five years in Congress, until his death this weekend. He was what the early church called a martyr, someone who bore on his body the scars given for his belief, and was revered for the same. I was proud to call him my representative when I lived in Atlanta. He was tireless in his advocacy for the poor and dispossessed, was one of the thirteen original Freedom Riders, and understood the stakes for all such movements. He was conscious of the role that this new movement was playing which began several months ago. About that movement, he said, "It was very moving, very moving to see hundreds of thousands of people from all over America and around the world take to the streets — to speak up, to speak out, to get into what I call 'good trouble'" because that, he felt is what we needed. We had had enough of the other kind.

I am currently enrolled in anti-racism training, which is well organized and respectfully led.

Anti-Racism Training



The material is very well-produced, emphasizing that that white privilege is not "the shark" in the waters but "the sea" in which we all swim; the course is full of many such insights; I look forward weekly to the "in-person" sessions, which have been as good as any I have had in fifteen years of anti-racism workshops. What the classes and readings cannot reproduce for me, however, is the sense of another kind of privilege, one of having been schooled, at least second or third-hand, by someone who believed that love was an essential ingredient in dismantling that privilege. Several years ago, Lewis said, "In the religious sense, in the moral sense, you can say that in the bosom of every human being, there is a spark of the divine. So you don't have the right as a human to abuse that spark in your fellow human being... you try to appeal to the goodness of every human being and you don't give up. You never give up on anyone". It is an echo of King's, "Love is the only force capable of turning an enemy into a friend," but it also

speaks to the tenacity of Lewis, who was arrested over forty times, was always one of the first into the fire hoses, tear gas and everything that was thrown at the marchers in the early sixties. He may have been "the conscience of the Congress," but he was also the conscience of all of us who did not want to see what he did retreat into history books. He lived to see the demonstrations of the last several months, from which he said, "There is no turning back." I pray he was right.

You never give up on anyone. One of his last books was for children, a chronicle of his days as a marcher for civil rights, for which he won a National Book Award. No audience was out-of-bounds for Lewis; the stakes were simply too high. I want to believe that what he envisioned was a day when white privilege was dismantled and done with a common understanding that it was the most loving thing we could do for ourselves. He was too astute to believe that it would be easy. But if it was trouble, it would be necessary and right—or, as he would say, good trouble.

Other News

Restrooms

Immediately following the end of Camp Faith, we plan to have the work on the restrooms completed. This step has been a long time coming, and we are deeply grateful for everyone's patience. It is one of the property issues we wanted to resolve prior to our return to in-person worship, and we are grateful to Marisa Henry for her dedication and professionalism.

Vacation for Shinjoo

Shinjoo Cho, who has been our pianist throughout our on-line services, will take a break for August. We hope that we can see her in-person when we begin our "live services" after Labor Day.

Book Discussion

It's not too late to join us for a discussion of Jemar Tisby's *The Color of Compromise* on Tuesday evenings at 7. Just let Fr. Mark know and we will purchase a copy of the book for you.