



The Present Moment

“You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope.”

-- Thomas Merton

One of the most crippling attitudes I adopt toward my life, or our collective lives, is whether I can understand what is happening right now. This attitude tends to appear during ordinary time, when we don't have Holy Week or Easter to prepare for, or in special cases like this past year, when I was quite sure I couldn't tell anyone with any conviction what was happening or what it meant, simply that we had a pandemic, that there were people suffering and that we had to pray for them. Recognizing these limits, it has been good to have a fixed horizon of a day or so, which is all God offers us at a time, after all. We all have had times during the last year when it was all we could do was get through the next hour or day or week (five minutes?), in one piece mentally; if you were smarter than I was, you let everything

else go and focused on the task at hand, knowing that God was in charge of these circumstances, or at least I was not (A colleague keeps reminding me that we are in sales, not management).

As the cloud over the past year begins to lift, we find ourselves in the position of having to make real decisions about our immediate future, without being able to predict all the details. For everyone's protection, Camp Faith will again be scaled down from what it was three years ago, although it will be more robust than last year. Trips will resume to Johnson's Farm, bowling will be on the agenda, games and activities will be a part of what we do. In addition to its usual financial support, All-Saints in Bayhead has already told me that they will host the counselors for a day at the beach when it is over. The dates, July 6 through July 30, reflect a camp longer than last year's, but a week shorter than what we typically would offer. It is an approach as Anglican as can be: a middle way between the abandon of past years and the restriction of the year gone by.

Following camp (and barring unforeseen and unwelcome surprises), we will then make the transition indoors with our

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ministries. By September, our hope is to have all meals served inside. It will be a help to our nursing students and guests to be in closer proximity to one another. We will also have the opportunity to reestablish real community, something I have deeply missed in a time of restrictions, of being able to sit with one another and find out about each other's lives. We will also have some decisions to make about service times and what will be best for all in a changed landscape.

I cannot say that I will miss the "abundance of caution" under which we have lived for almost fifteen months, but it has not been without its opportunities for learning. Living in the present moment is what we have done and, with God's help, can continue to do. Nor am I simply saying that each moment is full of challenge and possibility, something that all of us have heard for a long time, even if it is true. We are now dealing with this persistence of the now along with the discernment of what we want to be. It should not be anxiety-provoking but, as Merton says, approached with courage, faith and love. If we can do that right here and right now, there is nothing we should fear in the time ahead. -Fr. Mark

Welcome Jeannie!

In September, we will have a new member on the clergy staff at St. Paul's! Some of you know Jeannie Marcucci from her work at the Breakfast Club on Sunday mornings, where she has been a regular for years. After her ordination in September, she will be a vocational deacon; as deacon means "servant," her responsibility is to bring the gifts of the church into the world and the concerns of the world into the church—a daunting task indeed! Although we have not worked-out her responsibilities outside St. Paul's, she will be a familiar face on Sunday mornings: setting the altar, reading the gospel and occasional preaching. After she finishes her last placement in Glassboro, she will be joining us for worship until the bishop ordains all the new deacons. Before she joins us, I thought I would give her a chance to introduce herself.

Greetings, St. Paul's, Camden! I am delighted to be joining you as your deacon, even though we don't yet have an official date. I'm a landscape designer, sometimes calling myself "a garden evangelist," because I "plant, pray and proclaim." This phrase describes what we do in



The Good New Gardens, an agrarian ministry of the National Episcopal Church, a group in which I am a working member.

I write a weekly garden blog called, "good morning in the garden"—because all mornings in the garden are good ones. I speak and write on how faith and gardens intersect. I live and garden in Woodbury, with my small and somewhat nervous dog, Katie. I look forward to getting to know everyone and to see your faith in action at St. Paul's. Thank you so much for inviting me. See you soon!
Jeannie

Leaps of Action

In one of his most wonderful sermons, William Sloane Coffin, the late pastor of Riverside Church in NY, says:

It is terribly important to realize that the leap of faith is not so much a leap of thought as of action. For while in many matters it is first we must see, then we will act; in matters of faith it is first we must do then we will know, first we will be and then we will see. One must, in short, dare to act wholeheartedly without absolute certainty.

For those of us who live in a world where we have seen lives assume the pale numbness of statistics, our retirement accounts in jeopardy, businesses closing, construction stalled, these are courageous words indeed. On rides through the city, where I see boarded-up houses and signs announcing space for rent, I think about what these announcements mean in human terms, the suffering and the anxiety they breed. I also think of Coffin's words, that faith implies the willingness to look beyond our need for certainty about our own lives and those of others and simply to act, to find our faith in giving ourselves to situations that are not simple and where no results are guaranteed. It is in those situations that we find out what it means to be faithful; it is an attempt define faith in terms other than a private venture, to look at the future in terms of corporate discernment into the future of our community.

I have been thinking of the idea of faith when I look at the empty lot

next to the church. We have had no meaningful conversations with the Rutgers board in over a year. The only thing that has changed is the style of the fence, from chain-link to a sturdier ten-foot metal. It has made the side of the church look frail and exposed. But we are exposed, by choice, whenever we drop our guard long enough to engage the vulnerable in our community. We do so because God has placed us here and the work is as holy as the people we serve.

It is important to recognize that this model functions differently from paradigms in the corporate world, where there is intense discussion about target dates, the achievability of an overarching goal, reaching a certain sales plateau or cutting losses within a particular time frame. The work of the kingdom is fundamentally different. We cannot hope to eliminate need in communities we engage, but the work we do is no less valuable because of the sacred nature of each life we encounter. In Coffin's terms, we do and then

we will know; we act wholeheartedly because of what was given to us with a whole heart, simply because we are beloved creatures of God.

Providentially, we have the opportunity to act toward our neighbors in a way that embodies Coffin's vision. By engaging in our relationship with our neighbors in a wholehearted way, even as we begin making the transition from "grab and go" to the actual work of human contact, we will be able to aid in the alleviation of suffering for many and offer hope to those who had considered it a luxury. None of this will provide an instant solution to the problems that surround us. But if we dare to act, if we risk putting our resources where our hearts are, we are rebuilding the world, one person at a time, and rebuilding our souls in the process.

-Fr. Mark

Stewardship!

Knowing that keeping our pledges current in a time when many of us continue to feel the dangers of the pandemic, I would like to encourage everyone to keep her or his pledge current. If you cannot attend services, please send your pledge directly to St. Paul's or have your bank set up a direct payment plan. If you have questions about the latter option, please contact the wardens or Fr. Mark. Thank you!

Congratulations!

Kudos to the staff of the Honors College at Rutgers Camden, who have been awarded the Chancellor's Award for the Spirit of Civic Engagement for their work at St. Paul's during the pandemic. Like many of our partners, they have been extraordinarily faithful in their work for our guests on Sunday evenings. We look forward to their continued presence after we move the ministries inside!