



St. Paul's
Church
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Becoming Beloved Community

As has become clear to many of us over these last months, the toll taken on black and brown communities by the pandemic has been significantly greater than that borne by the white population. It has been apparent for some time to those who have volunteered in our food program, but the media is rife with stories of black people who have suffered economically, even denied attention to basic health care. Homeless people are likely to be victims of high blood pressure and untreated diabetes, conditions already endemic to people of color and many are unaware of these conditions, for which testing is the first step toward treatment.

As a small step toward alleviating these inequities, St. Paul's applied for and received a grant for a project from the national church that would include the Rutgers Nursing School, offering clinical hours for nursing students while addressing some of the most pressing health concerns of a badly underserved population. The program responsible for the grants, Becoming Beloved Community, came into being under

Presiding Bishop Curry's leadership, seeking to examine systemic racism in overt and subtle forms. During the pandemic, as the fissures in economic stability and access to health care became impossible to ignore, the national church began offering grants to organizations and parishes who were witnessing the most egregious examples of this systemic racism. St. Paul's received a grant for \$6000, which was generously matched by funds from the vestry, making it possible to begin converting one of the upstairs rooms (the old nursery, for those who have been here awhile) into a medical clinic. Transforming the room will begin this fall, with a projected start date for the new term for the nursing school in January.

Initially, we will be offering diagnoses of the most common conditions mentioned above; these people will then be referred to the clinic at Cooper Medical Center, who will be able to offer treatment for the conditions. The clinic will be in operation during the time of our food programs, with the possibility

of expanding those hours as the clinic becomes more established. Eventually, graduate students looking to complete their physician's assistant degrees may use the space for more complicated testing. All these possibilities are contingent, of course, on the progress of the pandemic and the assessment of need by Rutgers. For now, we are grateful to have begun this relationship, especially as a climate of uncertainty hovers over all universities.

One of the goals of St Paul's, as is true for any parish, is to develop relationships within the community, especially ones that work toward prolonged mutual benefit among entities. As the picture for fall classes at the rest of the university, especially among the Honors College, becomes clearer, we hope to solidify those relationships. For now, it is a gift to know that we can offer our guests not just food but a more holistic approach to their well-being, one that we would want for any of our neighbors.

Stewardship

Page 2

Books

Page 3

Let Her Alone

³ While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper,^[a] as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. ⁴ But some were there who said to one another in anger, "Why was the ointment wasted in this way? ⁵ For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii,^[b] and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her. ⁶ But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. ⁷ For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me.

Mark 14: 3-7

In my view, one of the "Anglican Afflictions" that we face even in healthy times is a deep misunderstanding about stewardship. It is famously difficult to recruit people to do the work of raising the funds to address the fixed costs we face: salaries, utilities and other basic expenses to keep the church functioning. We are notably shy about this topic because we are, by and large, people who believe that the financial affairs of others are their own responsibility. No one wants to be left in the position of having to cajole others about money. Leaving aside the point that stewardship is also about the time we offer the church and the talent we offer in its nurture, the reticence is understandable.

What this perspective lacks, I believe, is that the act of stewardship is about our spiritual lives before it is about anything else. It expresses the hope on which we all rely, hope that we are working to bear witness to the coming of the kingdom in which we can see the flourishing of all human beings. It is also about the pure, unadulterated love that we bear for this God in the flesh, who shows up at the most unexpected times and offers us an opportunity so see each of us as God's children. It is also about the faith we bear, faith not only in our wonderful parish community but in a God who promises that all will be well, even in an atmosphere of sickness and conflict. Stewardship is first about our

souls. It has always been this way, from the beginning of our designation as the stewards of creation.

Let them alone. I often hear this voice when I begin thinking about stewardship. Our parish, however, has been in existence 190 years, and its longevity is not an accident. We are standing on the shoulders of many who have come before us. We have a responsibility to them and to ourselves to continue this tradition, one that begins in our souls and radiates outward to the world we serve in God's name. Please consider how you might respond to the gifts of St. Paul's and return your pledge card. Thank you!

Books

Caste: The Origin of our Discontents

Isabel Wilkerson

Wilkerson, whose reporting for the New York Times won a Pulitzer Prize and whose previous book, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, earned a National Book Critics Circle Award, has published an account of systemic racism that is highly readable, laced with the immediacy of personal experience, and devastatingly insightful in its examination of how the caste system has been perpetuated in our country. Taking as its point of departure the assertion that "race" in America can and should be compared to caste systems, notably in India and in Nazi Germany, she explores how caste, a fixed hierarchy determining privilege, access to employment and social mobility undermines the myth of a society based on merit. "Race, in the United States, is the visible agent of the unseen force of caste. Caste is the bones, race the skin," she says. Viewed through the lens of caste, stigmatization of people of color has required that there be a system in which a particular group must occupy the bottom rung, a position that African Americans have occupied since 1619.

Although it does not offer suggestions about a path away from thinking in patterns of hierarchy, *Caste* is brutal and insightful in its assessment of the deep-rootedness of our obsession with race and its ongoing costs within our own society.

The Color of Compromise

Jemar Tisby

As the book several of us have been discussing at St. Paul's over the last several months, *The Color of Compromise* is an unflinching look at the response of the greater church to the struggles of racism, from the colonial period through the Civil War, Jim Crow and the civil rights struggles of the 1950's and 60's, to the place it occupies in our current consciousness. Although it was written prior to the killing of George Floyd this summer and the ensuing unrest and fierce debate about addressing the struggles about racism, Tisby is unflinching in calling out the church as a participant in the cycles of oppression.

In Tisby's narrative, missed opportunities abound, but he does suggest several ways forward, beginning with the relational ("Join a sport, club or activity with people who are different.") to the lessons we can learn from the black church, offering "courageous Christianity" as an alternative to the fear that too often animates our discussions on race.

Announcements

Pledges

Please remember to return your pledge cards by November 8. We want to have as accurate a number as we can to formulate a budget for 2021. Thank you!

All Saints Day— November 1

Please let Fr. Mark know of names to be included on our list of all the faithful departed so we can honor them all.