



Mosaic of the Journey to Bethlehem (1315-1320)  
Church of the Holy Spirit, Chora, Turkey

# THE EPISTLE

OF SAINT PAUL'S PARISH—K STREET

AN EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN THE DIOCESE OF WASHINGTON

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2020 XXXIV NUMBER 5

## Towards A Holy and Life-giving Advent

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Dear Friends:

The Advent issue of any church newsletter is usually a done deal: Advent wreaths; formation courses; quiet mornings; antiphons; lessons & carols; and the annual warning that Christmas comes at the very end of - and not during - this strange, quiet, purple season.

We will be waving no white flags. While many of our best loved rhythms and traditions cannot be simply translated, I am convinced that we need to keep a truly good Advent this year more than ever. Its themes of watching, waiting, expectancy, hope - even when facing considerable adversity - resonate in ways that will be real and meaningful to us in new and different ways. The darkness, absence, and longing of these weeks will speak a message of comfort and consolation. Rather than simply ask how we can survive "Advent in Pandemic" let's instead imagine how we might grow - our souls strengthen - our spiritual lives deepen.

My recommendation and challenge to each one of us is to participate, and to participate perhaps more deeply than ever before. One silver lining to the pandemic's disruption has been the discovery of Zoom: we can engage with formation and week-day prayer from the comfort of our own homes, without navigating traffic jams or late evenings in the office. On the walls of my gym I see these words



THE REV'D RICHARD WALL

every morning: *Our Ability is Our Availability*. It strikes me again that what is said of our physical bodies and our fitness applies equally to the health of our spiritual lives. Advent is an opportunity to begin.

Rather than figuring out how to adapt or convert usual offerings to these times we are instead considering the best possible ways to keep the season within this peculiar context: doing the very best that we can with what is available.

We hope to offer Lessons & Carols December 6th, but conceived in an entirely different way for these times, rather than scaling back what is customary.

Advent formation will take place on Wednesday evenings with Dr. Ian Boxall; Zoom will be a perfect medium to meditate on great works of art, and hear how they draw us deeper

ST. PAUL'S PARISH SEEKS TO RESTORE ALL PEOPLE TO GOD AND TO EACH OTHER, THROUGH SACRAMENTAL WORSHIP AND CHRIST-LIKE LIVING.

## THE EPISTLE

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**Editor** Katherine Britton

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into the Advent mysteries. These three Wednesday evening sessions are not to be missed; please mark the dates. (See p. 14 infra for details.)

None of us know exactly how the next few months will play out; we all hope and pray that there is soon light at the end of this tunnel. We recognize that plans may need to change and adapt; clergy have quickly grasped that "long range planning" currently indicates the next two weeks! Nearer the time I will release details of Christmas masses, and we all hope and pray to be able to gather "in-person", whilst also recognizing the value and legitimacy of virtual worship and spiritual communion. If directives and weather permit I hope to celebrate one Christmas Eve mass outside.

In or outside of pandemic Advent will always be a season of the heart. I am available by zoom or at appropriate social distance to talk as a spiritual friend, confessor, or whatever your heart may need. I wish you all a holy and life-giving Advent.

- Fr Richard



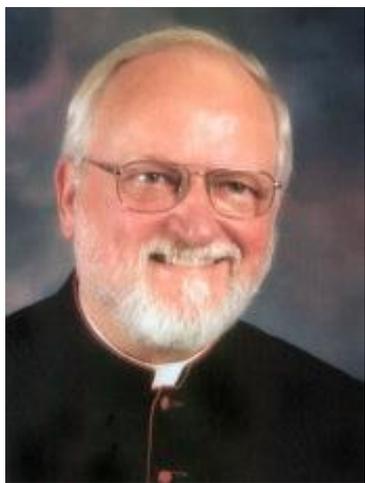
# 3rd Annual Golf Tournament: \$31K for Grate Patrol!

Glenn Marsh, Grate Patrol Scheduler

On Friday, October 9, St. Paul's Grate Patrol received an extraordinary donation of \$31,000 from Charlie Weiss and Jeff Belfield of Scaffold Resource, a construction related firm whose metal armatures can be seen on buildings and monuments throughout the city. This magnanimous grant represented proceeds from Scaffold Resource's 3rd Annual Charity Benefit Golf Tournament. Charlie is a long time (13 years!) volunteer and supporter of the Grate Patrol. He and Jeff blessed us the last two years with a similar gift.

The tournament was held at Renditions Golf Course in Davidsonville, Maryland. Each of Renditions eighteen holes is a replica of a famous hole from a championship venue, so there were plenty of challenges for the 140 people who were competing.

Most of the teams were members of the construction industry but the Grate Patrol also had a team of delivery volunteers Msgr. Paul Dudziak, Rob Jones, Ed Grant and Sue McClain.



Msgr. Paul Dudziak

Also, we are indebted to Msgr. Paul, Pastor of our neighbor, St. Stephen Martyr Parish, for his advocacy of the Grate Patrol and for sending so many volunteers our way.



Tina Mallet, Charlie Weiss, Jeff Belfield and Glenn Marsh



Katherine Britton, Treasurer

St. Paul's is enormously grateful for this incredible support for Grate Patrol from Charlie Weiss and Jeff Belfield of Scaffold Resource. The golf tournaments they organized in 2018 and 2019 fully funded Grate Patrol expenses in 2019 and 2020. This year's tournament will continue to fully fund Grate Patrol in 2021. In addition, this fund raiser will support those we serve through Grate Patrol in other ways through the winter months.

# St. Paul's Parishioners' Transformative Journey Through Dr. Ibram X. Kendi's New York Times Bestseller, "HOW TO BE AN ANTIRACIST"

Roy & Pat Byrd

St Paul's Parishioners Transformative Journey Through Dr. Ibram X. Kendi's New York Times Bestseller, "HOW TO BE AN ANTIRACIST"

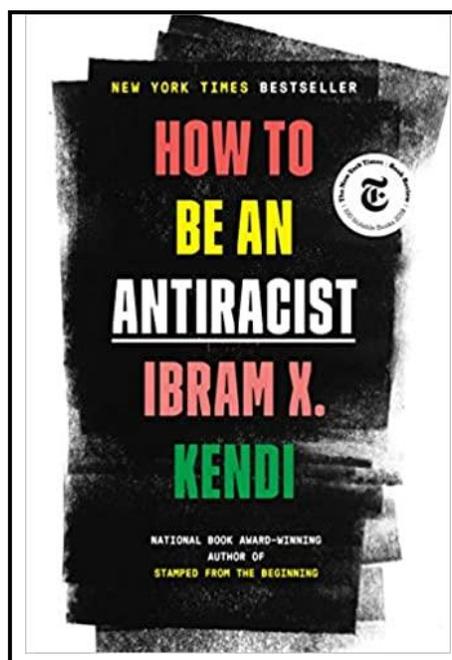
"I can't breathe," the final pleas from George Floyd as his life was being forfeited beneath the knee of a Minneapolis police officer. For eight minutes and forty-six seconds he begged for his life, all caught on video. It is almost surreal to think this horror, a vestige associated with the segregationist era of the Jim Crow South could occurred in 2020 and in an imagined progressive Northern city no less. It shocked the nation. For people of color, particularly African Americans, the video of George Floyd served as vindication for all the repudiation leveled upon them by deniers of systemic racist policing policies. America's awakening manifested itself as broad support for the Black Lives Matter movement, giving it renewed relevance. Floyd's death illuminated a truth many did not want to acknowledge, the racist scourge borne of America's original sin, slavery, was never eradicated.

The Episcopal Church was at the vanguard of the Civil Rights movement; therefore, it should come as no surprise that the Church once again leads as a voice for racial equity today. It is a call to discipleship, to make a personal commitment, including time, centered on truth, God's truth. Discipleship is a discipline and as such requires preparation. Recently a diverse group of St Paul's parishioners gathered virtually with Fr. Richard in discernment, to read and discuss Dr. Ibram Kendi's book, "*How to be an Antiracist*."

A word of caution, if you expect a

summary and review of the book you will be disappointed. If that is what you are looking for, we recommend you turn to reviews published in the Washington Post or New York Times. Our focus is about the journey.

Expectations were as varied as the participants, from curiosity to self-validation—I am not a racist—to discovery. Others sought a roadmap, the



steps to becoming an antiracist. Many expected Kendi's treatise to be theologically based irrespective of tradition. While he refers to his formative religious upbringing, he dismisses its relevancy and approaches the subject from a secular perspective. Why would the Rector select a secular treatment of racism, clearly theologians have addressed the topic? God's ability to reveal truth is not confined to his church. The Gospel is replete with examples where Jesus not only reaches out to but instructs the house of Israel through encounters with Gentiles.

Kendi, takes the reader on a journey not to lay blame or guilt, rather to

allow for honest self-reflection, beginning with himself, before offering a manageable path for individual and collective change. He defines and dissects all aspects of racism in small bite-size segments, gradually guiding the reader to acknowledge their own complicity. This was difficult, uncomfortable, hard to read.

We entered this journey thinking we were good people unaware of how perniciously racist theory is woven into aspects of our behavior, even that of good people. Dr. Robin Diangelo, another academic who has written extensively on the issue, refers to this as the good/bad binary, where well-intended, open minded, enlightened people cannot be racist because racists are mean, ignorant, bigoted and often uneducated. She explains the good/bad binary is a false dichotomy, the reality is all people hold prejudices and are affected by the forces of racism because they are embedded in our society.

Kendi gets to this point by holding up a mirror and patiently but firmly helping us to see ourselves anew through society's systemically racist lens. An example, racist microaggression, locking the car door when driving through a predominately black neighborhood, clutching your handbag a little tighter as a Blackman approaches while crossing the street. It is a difficult truth to reconcile.

Anyone diagnosed with cancer, other life threatening, or debilitating diseases can attest to the shock and denial one goes through, particularly if you feel great, and are symptom free. That is how illusive racism is, if you accept the binary and place yourself on the—not racist—or perhaps more accurately incapable of racism side, there is no more work to do. Think about it

another way, Jesus died and forgave our sins; therefore, I am good, and incapable of sinning. We do not presume a good/bad binary in our religious life; why are we prone to accept it when we confront racism?

Kendi does not approach us as a race relations messiah, he is more analogous to a prophet, a fellow traveler, to whom a truth has been revealed. He helps us recognize the systemic nature of racism in American society and ourselves; and then turns to remove the stigma of the good/bad binary, allowing us to reconcile our own racist tendencies, arming us with choices to counter and ultimately put the affliction of racism into remission—to be “Antiracists.”

The reading and discussions were a transformative experience for us, revealing our own racist propensities and the fragilities these discussions expose among all people. We began as innocent travelers, united in curiosity, and a genuine desire to address the issue of racism. Our perceived understanding and beliefs were quickly challenged, then stripped away. The journey proved unpredictable, at times uncomfortable, but in the end worthwhile and transformative. Becoming an “Antiracist” is a long and difficult path, but one worth embarking upon, as is any Christ-like endeavor.



## Studying N.T. Wright’s, “God and the Pandemic”

Katherine Wood

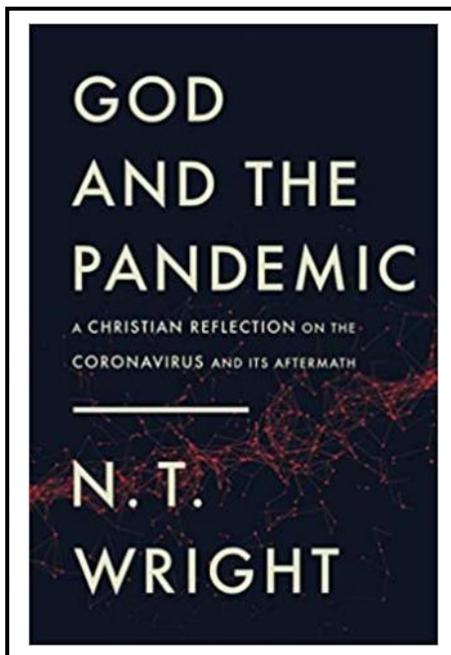
“How is the pandemic changing me?” was a question I asked myself over the summer as the Covid-19 pandemic continued nonstop. With myriad restrictions on daily activities, and nonstop news about lost loved ones, lost livelihoods, closed schools and churches, and disrupted daily routines, my outlook on life was taking on an unfamiliar pessimism. So I joined Father Richard’s Wednesday evening book discussions of N.T. Wright’s *God and the Pandemic: A Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and Its Aftermath* that began October 21.

This small, easily read volume provides ample food for thought. It explores how both the Old and New Testaments can illuminate our understanding of the pandemic, and how Christians can respond to this health crisis of epic proportions. In the Hebrew Bible, Bishop Wright calls our attention to the Book of Lamentations, several Psalms, and especially the Book of Job. These portions of Scripture convey in moving poetry and

prose the pain of ancient Israelites who lost loved ones in calamities, their petitions to God for restoration, and especially the importance of leaving the ultimate questions in God’s hands. The Book of Job makes this clear: Job complains about his suffering, he challenges the Almighty, yet in the end he can only accept what has happened and acknowledge his limited understanding of the cosmos.

In the New Testament, Bishop Wright focuses on Jesus as having inaugurated the Kingdom of God on earth. God’s rule reaches its apex in Jesus’ crucifixion, which forces us to re-think the meaning of “kingdom.” Jesus himself profoundly wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus before commanding him to rise up. Even for the Son of God, the way to new life involves many tears. In the early Church, Jesus’ followers respond to a predicted famine by making arrangements to send relief to the most vulnerable (Acts 11), a demonstration of God working *through* human beings. And when the whole creation is groaning (Romans 8), Bishop Wright says “followers of Jesus are called to be *people of prayer at the place where the world is in pain.*”

So how can we as Christians respond to the pandemic? Scripture invites us to lament and argue with God, and to weep gut-wrenching tears for our losses. It also encourages us to pray and to provide relief for others. Bishop Wright’s small book has inspired me to re-read the Book of Job, and to shift my original question from “How is the pandemic changing me?” to “How is God changing me during the pandemic?” It’s a more hopeful view.



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# Youth Formation: Wilma Rudolph and Alexander Hamilton

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Editor's note:

Sylvia Rortvedt prepared wonderful slideshow presentations for young people at St. Paul's on Wilma Rudolph and Alexander Hamilton. They are fascinating for people of all ages. If you have not had a chance to see these, please email Dylan Thayer at [dthayer@stpauls-kst.com](mailto:dthayer@stpauls-kst.com) for copies. Below, Sylvia discusses the genesis of these presentations.

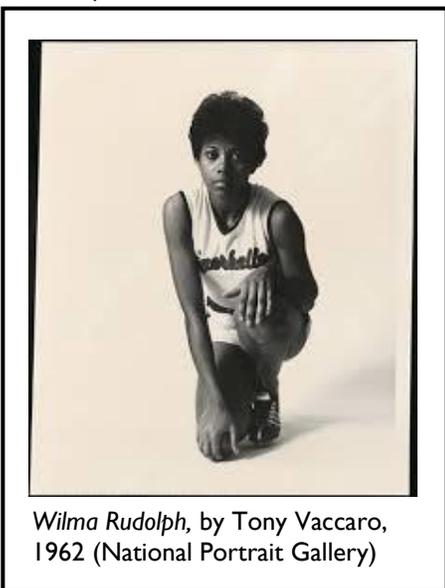
Sylvia Rortvedt

I've been a docent for several years at the National Portrait Gallery, and have sorely missed being able to give in person tours to groups since March. It has been very rewarding for me to learn more about the lives behind the portraits and their contributions to American history, politics, entertainment, social justice and much more. Michael Robinson and I have enjoyed sharing docent experiences in recent years, and he convinced me to try creating a slideshow.

Alexander Hamilton was inspired by the NPG's recent acquisition of a photograph of Lin-Manuel Miranda dressed as Hamilton.

Wilma Rudolph was inspired by several children's books that are part of the Bishop Walker School's library which I was involved in organizing.

With both presentations, I've enjoyed incorporating a little history, geography, and public health to the stories about remarkable Americans.



Wilma Rudolph, by Tony Vaccaro, 1962 (National Portrait Gallery)



Lin-Manuel Miranda as Hamilton, digitized by Mark Gulezia (NPG)

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## Blessing of the Animals even during a Pandemic

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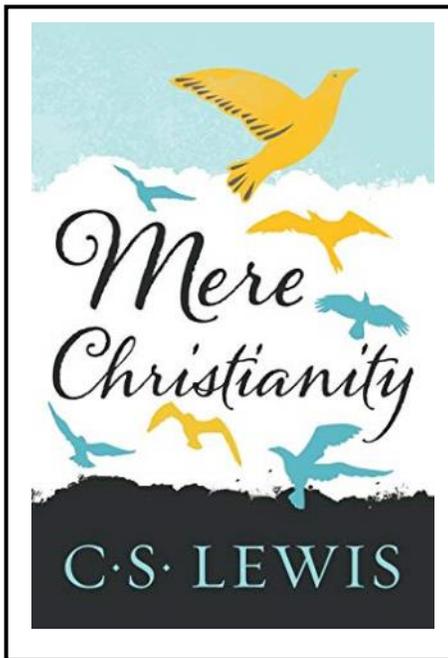
# On Matters of the Soul

Ed Loucks, Convener

In November, 1898, Clive Staples Lewis was born in Belfast, Ireland, quite an impressive name to be loaded onto a pure, tiny infant. Staples was the name of an ancestor, but Clive? Go figure. Small wonder that he preferred to be called C. S. Lewis as he matured.

He fought and was wounded in World War I, then entered Oxford as a student. He spent the rest of his life as an academic and prolific author (over 30 books), mostly at Oxford, but the last ten years at Cambridge, where he died in 1963, on the same day President Kennedy was assassinated.

During World War II, he was invited to give a series of radio talks on BBC. The topic: the essentials of the Christian faith. These talks were later anthologized in the book our group is now studying – *Mere Christianity*.



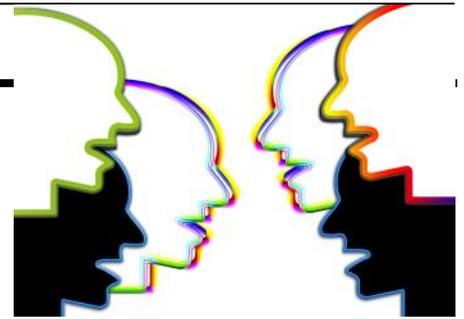
In these talks, Lewis attempted to boil down the basic beliefs of the Christian faith without the complicated entanglements it has acquired at the hands of the doctors of the church over the centuries. He also sought to

protect the essentials of the faith from the attacks of sceptics and atheists. He was an atheist himself in his younger days, but was drawn back to the faith with the guidance of his best friend and Oxford colleague, J. R. R. Tolkien. When Lewis returned to the faith, he joined the Church of England, much to the chagrin of Tolkien, who was Roman Catholic.

Among the topics Lewis covered in his talks are The Law of Human Nature, What Christians Believe, Christian Behavior and First Steps in the Doctrine of the Trinity. Our group has found his writing style to be readily accessible, with ample examples and illustrations making his points easy to grasp. We just began the book in September, so we welcome newcomers who would like to join us.

Early in the book, he puts to rest the growing number of people who dismiss Jesus as a “good man,” a “great teacher,” or even “one of the great prophets,” but not the Son of God. C. S. Lewis, in one of the most quoted paragraphs of all his works, challenges us to think on these things:

*“A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon, or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about Him being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” (p.56)*



Our group has become very comfortable with the Zoom format. Fr. Richard is sharing his Zoom account with our group on Monday evenings, right after evening prayer, which starts at 6 PM. We take over the Zoom site at 6:30 PM and hold a high energy discussion for an hour or so. We have learned that spiritual formation takes place in community. It rarely occurs in isolation. It rarely takes place in one hour on a Sunday morning.

After several weeks on Zoom, what have we to say about remote fellowship, community and formation? Some find Zoom off-putting. We all miss the hugs. But generally, the group continues to thrive. The book we are studying at the time is the teacher, and participants get engaged in challenging content. We continue to stay connected through the days between meetings by sending each other emails—poems, recommending podcasts and programs, prayer requests, updates on activities and travel. And one more thing: we all get a short daily dose of Holy Scripture—something we call the “Daily Bouquet.” This item is available to anyone who wants it. It’s free. Contact me at [ed-loucks@comcast.net](mailto:ed-loucks@comcast.net).



# Mass on the Grass, Rain or Shine: A Blessing in Pandemic

Megan Murton

Talking about "silver linings" of the pandemic can so easily sound insensitive, especially as cases and deaths continue to rise. At this point we all know that we're far from the end of this, and that we're all looking at a very difficult winter, including a very strange Christmas. Without minimizing how hard this time is, I do want to say what a bright spot Mass on the Grass has been for our family.

Mass on the Grass not only has given us an opportunity to gather and worship again with our St. Paul's fam-

ily, it actually turns out to be the ideal way to do corporate worship with a rambunctious three-year-old: Dominic digs away happily in the wood chips and messily consumes his snack while being right in the midst of the liturgy, hearing the words and watching the actions and seeing friends week by week. It's wonderful to be able to have him with us in worship without having to spend the whole service closely policing his behavior and worrying about disrupting others.

I hope we can keep doing Mass on the Grass as long as possible. As

the Brits say, "no such thing as bad weather, just inappropriate clothing!" - a can-do attitude that was on full and memorable display on November 1st when we worshipped (briefly) in the cold drizzle.

As much as I want things to be back to normal, I have to say that I can already see myself missing Mass on the Grass in the future. For us at least, it's a true silver lining - a blessing we would never have experienced without the pandemic.



## All Saints' Day Mass on the Grass: Smiles in the Rain

Nancy Work

Rain sprinkles began to fall at 9:00 a.m. as Fr. Richard Wall, undaunted by "his typical British weather," welcomed Bp. Budde to preside at an abbreviated Mass-on-the-Grass. An usher handed her an umbrella. She beamed, she glowed from behind her mask saying she would remember us St. Paulinians (babies, toddlers, all ages) gathered there "for the rest of

her days,!" and she then opened Mass.

Fr. Richard limited the readings to only the Gospel. Bp. Budde condensed her sermon into two sentences: 1. The Saints suffered. 2. We too are suffering in these hard times, but we each have inner strengths that will get us through. (The full sermon was given inside at 10:30 and appears in this Epistle at p.10). She celebrated

Mass, and then walking masked from person to person, each masked and socially distanced, on our grassy hill-ock, administered the host to each. She closed with blessings.

"A precis Mass" in all of 12 minutes. She was smiling the whole time.



# Bright Shining Faith in the Rain

Kris Brown Coleman

Last Sunday, November 1 – All Saints Day - I got in my car and started my all too familiar drive from my house down the Clara Barton Parkway and Canal Road on my way to St. Paul's. As I'm sure will resonate with all of you, this is a drive I've typically done on 'auto-pilot' on almost every Sunday morning for many years now. Of course, with the notable exception of the past eight months. It was a cloudy morning with a forecast of rain, but I was hopeful that it would hold off until after our Mass on the Grass. I was really looking forward to Bishop Mariann's annual visit with us, an opportunity to hear her messages for us and to participate in Mass with her and Father Richard.

As I proceeded down Canal Road just past the Chain Bridge it started to drizzle and continued until I arrived at St. Paul's. I donned my rain jacket (which I had luckily remembered to grab on my way out the door), put on my mask, and then entered the grassy area next to the church. I found a spot to stand for the Mass – more than six feet apart from others already there. It was lovely to see everyone albeit behind their masks and to chat at a distance with those immediately around me.

Fr. Richard and Bp. Mariann emerged from the side chapel door for the Mass and almost on cue, it started to rain steadily. In the moment, Bp. Mariann said we'd do a short version of the Mass given the weather. As the rain increased, someone brought her an umbrella. Fr Richard carried on (as a good Brit always does!) – without one and gradually got quite wet. Bp Mariann decided to give a "highlights-only" version of her sermon and promised to send her full sermon text for us to read later. And both she and

Fr. Richard did a rapid approach to administering communion, rushing from one person or pod to another, almost appearing a bit dance-like in dodging the raindrops!

As Bp. Mariann shared with us, this rainy grass Mass in the midst of these times and her annual visit with us was an occasion she - and likely all of us who were there with her - will remember for a long time. What was striking was that it emphasized a vivid moment in an extraordinary and unprecedented time and our need for perseverance and adaptation to move through it all.

Our worshipping together in the rain on All Saints Day was in a sense, a metaphor for the unique intersection of the significant challenges for us in our lives and faith journeys – coping in a devastating pandemic; navigating societal challenges including social and racial injustice and socio-economic issues exacerbated by COVID-19; and living in an extremely divided country on the eve of a presidential election. To say living in these times is not for faint-hearted is truly an understatement. It tests us and our faith, and during a time when we literally have to keep at a distance from those around us.

For me personally, it has been especially difficult from a faith standpoint, to be unable to actively offer my voice and live out my own mission in music each week as I've done for years. And I know other members of the choirs, including our choir boys and girls, feel the same way, and sad to be unable to live out our work together. We're all navigating our own challenges in different ways, but we are fortunate to be in community together at St. Paul's.

I was grateful to Bp Mariann for sharing her thoughts and wisdom, offering comforting words, and bring-

ing her bright spirit to us last Sunday. Not only did she guide us through the brief Mass, but she lingered for a few minutes afterwards at a distance to greet each of us. Her leadership, grace and example at this time is an inspiration to all of us, and it was very special for her to choose to be present with us on All Saints Day for her annual visit – in spite of the pandemic.

Muddling through in the rain for Mass on the Grass was in a way a microcosm of what we're all doing each day in 2020. But what last Sunday accentuated for me was that we are not alone, we can lean on our faith to guide us, and although at a distance, we do still have one another to help one another get through.

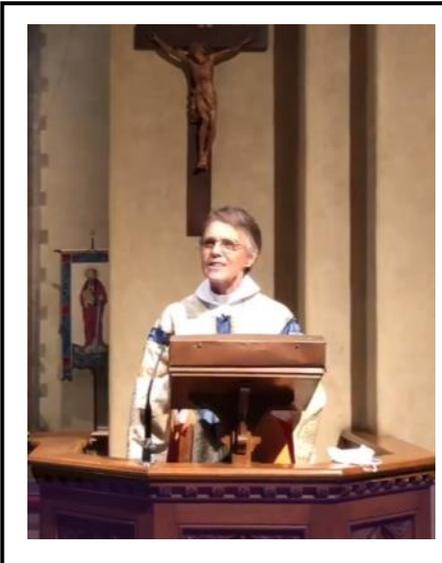


# SERMON SERIES

ALL SAINTS' DAY,  
NOVEMBER 1, 2020

AT ST. PAUL'S K STREET

The Rt. Rev. Mariann Edgar Budde,  
Bishop of Washington



Good morning friends of St. Paul's K, Street--what a gift to worship God with you!

First let me thank your good rector, Fr. Richard Wall, the staff, and your lay leaders for their steady, faithful leadership. I'm aware of the prayerful and strategic work your leaders have undertaken in the last year and I'm grateful for it, especially in a year when we've all had to adapt and respond to crisis and change.

I'd also like to acknowledge the impact of the pandemic and its repercussions on your personal lives, on top of everything else that you hold in your hearts. This hasn't been an easy time and we're all feeling the weight of it. For some, the burden has been especially heavy, and if that's been the case for you, I am sorry. I pray you can hold the image of Jesus looking into the eyes of those gathered on the mountain to hear him speak, see him look into your eyes, and hear his words of blessing for you. Blessed are *you*.

This is a sermon about blessing in hard things and hard times. On this feast of All Saints, we pause to remember the blessed ones upon whose lives and witness our faith rests. Some of the blessed ones are historical figures; others we knew personally, and from whom we received, as Scripture says, grace upon grace.

Those who stand out in our memory generally aren't the ones who had an easy life. What inspires us was their courage in the face of adversity, their perseverance in love when love was hard, or their joyful spirit when joy was hard to find. What inspires us wasn't their perfection, because they weren't perfect, but how Jesus' love shone through their imperfections, which made them all the more real.

I'd like to explore what blessing in hard things and hard times look like for us.

First let's consider the capacity,

and indeed, the spiritual practice of *seeking* blessing in the midst of hardship. This isn't pretending that things aren't hard when they are, or avoiding pain, or embracing the understandable but problematic notion that God causes bad things to happen in order to teach us a lesson. Rather, to seek and receive blessing is simply an openness on our part to take in whatever bits of goodness come our way.

So it is that someone who is dealing with illness or grief can experience the blessing of their families' love and care; and another struggling with unemployment who receives blessing in the neighbors who stop by with a fresh loaf of bread, or another feeling lonely and afraid who is moved by the blessing of a beautiful sunrise. The other day as I was sitting at my desk, I looked out the window and saw a squirrel jump from tree to tree in our backyard with the Y of a trapeze artist, and I burst out laughing. I hadn't laughed all day, and it felt so good. Who knew? Blessing in the form of a squirrel.

In hard times, these bits of goodness, kindness, and unexpected joy are our lifelines. If we're offering what doesn't seem like very much to someone else, the response can be overwhelming: *Thank you, people will say, I really needed to hear that today. Or I can't tell you how much this means to me.* Then you realize that what small offering you made was amplified by grace, that God was speaking through that person. In moments like these, we can't help but wonder: What keeps us from offering blessing to one another more often?

So let's dwell a bit longer, first to underscore the importance of seeking out and being open to such blessings, for without them, the world is a harsher place than it needs to be. It's painful to be in the company of those who can't receive such blessing, so trained

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are they in seeing only what's wrong, so wounded by life that all goodness is suspect. A spiritual practice of seeking and receiving blessing keeps our hearts soft even when times are hard.

A few years ago I spoke to the girls and young women of National Cathedral School around Thanksgiving, and I invited them to take up a 30-day experiment of gratitude. At night before they went to bed, I suggested that they write down in a notebook three things for which they were grateful about the day. I assured them that they didn't have to give thanks for things they weren't grateful for, but simply encouraged them to see if they could find three things each day. If invited, I would come back in a month to discuss what they had learned.

The 4th grade class invited me back. We talked for an hour--about what they had experienced and learned. They also wrote me letters, which I cherish. "I found that writing my 3 gratefuls helped me calm down," one wrote. "I found myself writing people on my list who were very busy right now and working really hard." "I learned that writing positive things gave me a more positive attitude." "I liked writing my gratitudes because I learned that even if you are in hard times you should try to find joy."

Equally important are efforts to offer blessing. Daily kindnesses are simply blessings by another name. Our words matter here, more than we know. The late poet/priest John O'Donohue defined this form of blessing as "words that create a circle of light drawn around a person to protect and strengthen."<sup>1</sup> The Benedictine nun, Joan Chittister goes further to say that those who bless don't take the easy path of speaking destructively about other people--even those with whom they strongly disagree. "They can be counted on to bring an open heart to a closed and clawing world.

The ecology of humankind is safe with them."<sup>2</sup>

Consider, in the midst of all that's happening now, an intentional practice of gratitude--lifting up three blessings in the course of a day for which to give thanks. But why not commit as well to the practice of offering blessing? Make an effort to affirm the people in your life, to extend yourself in kindness and generosity, to refrain from the easy critique or cynical remark and express understanding instead.

Now I'd like to speak of another form of blessing in hard things and hard times. This blessing is for when we are in the midst of something *really* hard--like a pandemic, or economic hardship, or social unrest or political polarization, or any other truly challenging circumstances that we face. For in these times, like the ones we are in now, the only way out, as they say, is through. Or maybe there is another, less difficult way out, but you choose--you feel called--to stay for the sake of someone else. It's *really* hard, but you don't look away. You don't run.

Hear again Jesus' litany of blessing: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, the pure in heart, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; blessed are the peacemakers and the persecuted.* There's nothing easy about any of these things, and the blessing isn't easy either, in the sense that it's not a bandage or a means of escape. Rather it is grace that gives us hope for a better future, a better way, and resolve to transform that hope into reality.

This is a gritty, messy blessing. And we are not perfect vessels of it. Part of what we learn is to accept the imperfection of it all, the imperfection of our lives and our ways of coping, the ups and downs of our moods and responses, and those of others. We even come to accept that we may be

the ones to see the better day for which we hope but we carry on, because the only way out is through. And for reasons we will never know, we are the ones to see this through.

I don't know about you, but this is what I feel called to now--to accept the fact that I am among those called to live through this time, and to see others through. I don't like it; I'm not always good at it; it doesn't always bring out the best in me, but here I am. I'm not going anywhere. And the blessing is and will be as we make it through.

Making it through involves continual improvisation, adaptation, and trying new things. Sometimes we succeed; often we fail, and then we try again. We mess up, and so we ask for forgiveness. We fall down, ask for strength, get back up, and keep going. This is, my dear friends, the path of life, the path of sainthood--not the sanitized version of purity, but the real one of grace shining through broken glass.

We will get through this. We will because we must. It won't always be pretty. We won't always get things right, but perfection is never what God asks or expects of us. And as the poet Marianne Moore once wrote about roses, may we remember that our thorns are the best part of us.<sup>3</sup> They are what make us real. When blessings shine through our thorns, others can see the power and the love of God. Incredibly enough, we may be their saints of blessed memory because we persevered and saw one another through.



<sup>1</sup> John O'Donohue, *To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 186.

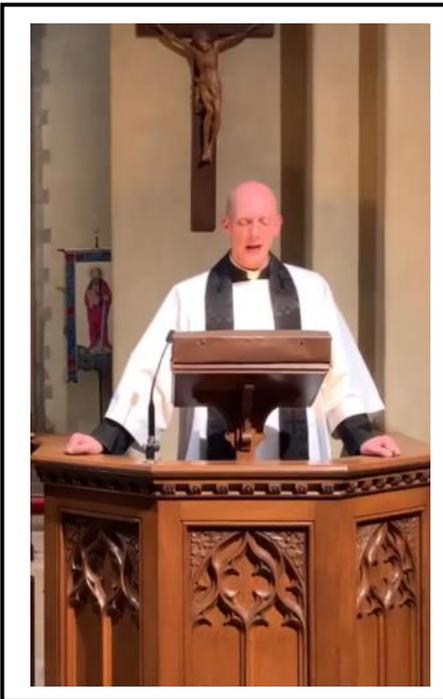
<sup>2</sup> Joan Chittister, *In Search of Belief* (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori Triumph, 1999), 24.

<sup>3</sup> Marianne Moore, "Roses Only," found on the website poets.org.

# SERMON SERIES

**ALL SOULS' DAY,  
NOVEMBER 2, 2020**

**Fr. Richard Wall  
Rector**



The infamous discernment process – seminary – ordination – curacy one, curacy two – the road is surely long, but, at least for some of us, one day we wake up and find ourselves to be a rector. So we pack our bags, move from A to B, unpack, learn names, familiarize ourselves, preach, go to very many meetings, meet the new bishop, visit local nursing homes. And then one day – and this comes to us all – we sit at our brand new desks, staring at our brand new computer screens, and wonder: well – what now?

For me, in State College, that moment came when the first semester ended. Everything I'd been told proved true: town emptied overnight, streets cleared, roads full of students and faculty heading faraway. The very full church became older and quieter; the corridors that Monday morning like ghost towns. And then the phone rang.

It was a nurse, a wonderful Italian woman I came to know and love, asking me to make haste to the maternity ward. All the way there I scrolled those new faces through my head, trying to figure who was pregnant, who might need a priest, but kept coming up blank. When I arrived she was waiting outside that ward's locked door with a box and I realized this was no parishioner in distress – Father, she said, I need you to baptize a baby.

And so I walked into one of the most tragic, intense scenes I could imagine. A young woman who clearly carried many burdens in life, heavily pregnant and in town to compete in the Special Olympics, had lost her child, whom she clutched to her chest. The nurse pulled candles, a cross, a bottle of water, a basin, a towel, a shell out of her box, turned that small hospital room into a church, and I knelt down and baptized another part of God's Creation. I remember the mother staring at me, eyes wide open, una-

ble to process quite what was happening that day. At the end I knelt with the mother and child and the nurse took a Polaroid picture.

As I drove back to my brand-new desk I figured that was just one of those moments I'd never forget. But then the phone rang again. And again. And again – and I'm sure it still does. Countless times I walked into that unit, by day and by night, now understanding what I was to do. I briefly met women facing challenges that I'd never know. Sometimes I'd have to insist that they be uncuffed; sometimes I'd help name the child; sometimes the only person mom would finally release her baby too was a priest. I don't know if any of those women had churches or even a single thought about Jesus or faith, but I did learn that when our backs are against the wall – when the worst really does happen – our souls reach for God; or when an Italian nurse offered a priest and Baptism at the most tragic of times those women kept on saying yes.

I can't imagine how many of those Polaroid pictures there must be – mother, child, myself – across Pennsylvania and beyond – undoubtedly in places where human beings suffer. The faces in those pictures must tell a hundred different stories. The images of those children, dead to the world but alive in Christ, are seared on my heart: these are surely they, like stars appearing. There could be no follow up, names were rarely given, but I was able to make calls: I fought with sheriffs, pleading for fathers to be driven from confinement to that hospital bed, if only for an hour; we paid for Greyhound tickets, for hotel rooms, whatever it might take for a relative to reach that place.

Once I asked that Italian nurse why she first called me. Oh I didn't call you, she said – I always call the Episcopalians, because you'll always

come. Nevertheless some of my colleagues admonished me: you can't baptize a dead person! You can't baptize a fetus! What about the public liturgy, the vows, the congregational promises, the Baptismal Covenant? I wondered if they might be right; what on earth would Thomas Aquinas make of all this? I asked my Bishop. Thomas Aquinas is a saint, he said! And he's sitting on your shoulder because baptizing those dead babies is doing the work of Jesus. Don't you dare stop.

This is ministry we never see on PowerPoints – or plans – or graphs – or charts – or 10 easy ways to grow your church. Those women were very rarely local - they would never appear in our pews, let alone pledge or volunteer. But in some strange way they helped this new rector come to see parish ministry at its strongest – or Episcopalian parish ministry at its strongest, and I'm grateful for the privilege of ministering to them and to the souls of their children. Our deepest vocation is to gather the People of God – to celebrate the Sacrament – and then to go and to do the work of Jesus. I love the Episcopal Church; God spare me from becoming a malcontent – but this kind of ministry is not always the standard script. I am talking about hidden discipleship; thankless discipleship; discipleship that pays no regard to an end or goal. The vocation to be that church who always comes – who always, always shows up for everyone and anyone. Einstein said it best: *Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.*

Parish ministry is the genius of Anglicanism – by that I mean looking beyond 4 walls and towards a very specific geographic area, defined by careful and ancient boundaries – and assuming spiritual stewardship – spiritual availability -- for every last

inch of that place. Parish ministry is never flat – never grey – never monochrome, but it is multi-dimensional: sometimes it means ministry to the bereaved, ministry to the dying, ministry to those souls who have already left this life.

They say that life is cheap, and maybe they are right – but not inside here. Every single life counts, every single life matters: from the biggest pledger, to some indigent soul needing their resting place, somewhere finally to call home. Sometimes death can be so epic – so big, so graphic – that we desensitize. It's easy to consider 231,000 COVID-19 deaths in this land alone and to walk away – to think of something else – to boil the kettle – something so enormous does not feel real. But, inside here, each one of those 231,000 souls matters, just as they each matter so dearly and relentlessly to God.

And that is why we are here now – if there ever was a truly Anglican feast then it is surely this, for we offer mass this evening for ALL souls, and this resonates with our DNA. Our focus is no generous benefactor or pious Anglo-Catholic – but each and every person who has left this life. And our special concern – my special concern – is for those within these bounds: do they have someone to pray for them? Do they lack resources for burial costs? Perhaps like the Son of Man they have nowhere to lay their heads: as we ponder a columbarium extension should this – could this – be part of our mission?

When a loved one dies we say we have “lost” them – “lost”, as if their soul is misplaced. But no one is out of place – and here All Souls are found. Our faith teaches us that those who die are in the hands of God, where there shall no torment touch them; in the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died – but they are at peace.

We cannot have a grand, huge requiem this evening – we can't fill our pews, can't raise a glass of sherry afterwards to those we love but see no longer. As they say: next year, we hope. But our work, our task, and the effectiveness of all that we do remain unchanged, undiluted. We gather around the altar and here we place the reality of our grief, this international tragedy, and then the ordinary, everyday sting of human pain and loss. But this altar is more than a table: it is where this world meets the next; where all those, living and departed, gather again as one to behold and give thanks to the Lamb who died yet rose and in whom we are each made new. This requiem mass – this tool of salvation – this place we occupy this evening – is a liminal place: the place where we feel and fully know each other, and where we finally find that love that shall never let anyone go.



Vespers of the Dead and reading of Parish necrology for the columbarium, All Souls' Day, November 2, 2020, St. Paul's Columbarium, preceding Solemn Requiem Mass in the Sanctuary

# Formation in Advent with Dr. Ian Boxall: “Preparing for Christ” 2020



Duccio, *The Nativity with the Prophets Isaiah & Ezekiel*, 1308-1311, National Gallery of Art/Washington, Andrew Mellon Collection

Wednesday Evenings Zoom 6:30 p.m.  
Following 6:00 p.m. Evening Prayer

Dec. 2: “The Genealogy”

Dec. 9: “The Prophets”

Dec. 23: “St Joseph”



Dr. Ian Boxall,  
Associate Professor of New Testament, Catholic  
University of America, 2013-present;  
St Stephens House, University of Oxford, Tutorial  
Fellow in New Testament, 1994-201.  
Dr. Boxall specializes in visual exegesis.

# NOVEMBER/DECEMBER ON K STREET

## UPCOMING BIRTHDAYS AT ST. PAUL'S PARISH

### November

- 7 | Henry Rector  
Calvin Morrow
- 9 | Julie Taylor
- 10 | Rosi Meza-Steel
- 11 | Jennifer Johnston
- 12 | Fr. Tony Lewis
- 14 | Justin Benn
- 17 | Sterling Darling
- 18 | Paul McKee
- 19 | Elijah Mills
- 21 | Jonathan Drake
- 25 | Ezra Winter  
Lindsay Raffetto
- 29 | Richard Morrison  
Andrew Oliver
- 30 | Eric Poweleit

### December

- 4 | Jean Groves  
Debra Loucks
- 8 | Devon Hill  
David Schnorrenberg  
John Murton  
Thomas Raffetto
- 11 | Helen Zughuib
- 13 | Douglas Purvance
- 20 | Edward Perlman
- 21 | Beverly Dame  
Robert Menzer  
David Webber
- 23 | Bibi Persaud
- 25 | Lucky Ajueyitsi
- 27 | The Rev. Dr. J. Peter Pham
- 28 | Michael Fili  
Lesley Cross
- 29 | Gabriel Benn
- 30 | Nathan Williamson
- 31 | Anne Catherine Sloss  
Virginia Eikel

HaPpY  
BiRtHdAY

### Upcoming Feast Days



**Feast of Christ the King**  
**Sunday, November 22, 2020**  
 Regular Sunday schedule

**Thanksgiving Day**  
**Thursday, November 26, 2020**  
 10 a.m. Low Mass with sermon  
 (Intent is to be both in person and virtual provided no change to instructions from the Bishop or the Mayor)

**First Sunday of Advent,**  
**November 29, 2020**

**Second Sunday of Advent,**  
**December 6, 2020**  
 Stay tuned for details of a new format for Lessons & Carols.

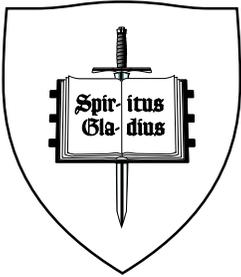
**Feast of the Immaculate Conception**  
**Tuesday, December 8, 2020**

**Third Sunday of Advent**  
**December 13, 2020**

**Fourth Sunday of Advent**  
**December 20, 2020**

**Christmas Eve**  
**Thursday, December 24, 2020**

**Christmas Day,**  
**Friday, December 25, 2020**  
 Christmas schedule will be announced in Rector's upcoming Christmas letter.



# SAINT PAUL'S PARISH

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Fra Filippo Lippi and Workshop, *The Nativity*, probably c. 1445