



The Sower – February 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Lent is here. Lent is a season of penitence, it is a season of preparation, it is a season when we contemplate the cost of Jesus' love. The cost not only of the cross, but of all the sacrifices he made to live with us in the mess that we are in. We know little of Jesus' childhood and early life but at the age of 30 his public ministry was launched not with fireworks and grand processions nor shows of power and might, but with forty days of fasting alone in the desert undergoing the sufferings of temptation by the devil. It is hard to fathom the lengths to which Jesus's love drove him. The hardships he endured for us. (I pray that as you read the former sentence you did not feel guilt or shame, but a sense of just how precious you are in God's sight).

For some of us this Lent may feel more... *Lenty* (?)... than other Lents. Why is that? Many of us are feeling the desolation of the desert. The desolation of life with COVID. We are a year into this now and many of us are weary from it. Even with the promise of vaccinations, we know that we have months yet to endure before restrictions will be lifted. So, what can we do while in the desert of COVID? How can our faith sustain us in this wilderness?

I was reminded these last few weeks that there was more in the desert than suffering and temptation. There is simplicity and solitude. Christian solitude is not about being absolutely alone. Solitude is stepping back from our relations and our obligations in order to come away with our Father. To simply be attentive to his presence. Many people fear such time as it gives them space to think, and to wrestle with some of their personal demons. But solitude - desert solitude - is where good work can happen when we accept the invitation of the Lord to simply come away and to abide in God's presence. (Please read John 15:1-17)

The point of observing Lent is not to find God in our efforts of deprivation. (Giving up anything from sweets to Facebook). The point is to limit the distractions in our life, to recognize and turn away from our dependencies in order to engage more fully with the sustaining and hope-giving presence of God. It is to recognize that we are all children of God and a fundamental need we all have is to claim that identity above and beyond any other identities that we claim for ourselves or those that are thrust on us by the world. Above all things - you are beloved of God.

At some point last year, the Rev'd Jon Lownds shared a more accurate translation of James 1:2-3. The NIV translates the passage like this: *"² Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance."* Jon taught us that a better translation is this: "Let joy lead you, brothers and sisters whenever you face trials of many kinds." Let joy lead you. Joy is not the emotion of happiness - it is so much greater than that. Joy is the hope-filled expectation that something good is coming. In the discipline of Lent we can get discouraged and frustrated with ourselves. When confronted with our own weaknesses we are reminded to be led by joy to remember Easter. We may not be able to deal with our brokenness, but Jesus did on the cross and he invites us into the new life of the resurrection. Jesus is our way, and we are invited to walk with him as his presence and love transform us more into his likeness.

This Lent I want to encourage us all to take time to abide with Jesus in simple solitude. Not the desolation of loneliness, but to invite Jesus to fill your alone times, your homes, with the communion of his presence. Our ultimate hope is not in vaccines, though they point to hope. Our ultimate hope is in Jesus - in what he has accomplished and what he promises to fulfill.

You continue to be in my daily prayers. Please keep me and my family and all of our brothers and sisters in yours. May you have a blessed and holy Lent.

Yours,

Paul

What you won't find in this Newsletter...

As we all know, many of our routine services, activities and plans have been postponed or cancelled. This includes in-person Sunday School, prayer groups, willing wonders fund raisers and some committee group meetings. We have tried to go virtual as much as possible. Please keep praying for the leaders of New Brunswick, our front-line medical professionals and all essential workers. It would be so wonderful for the Atlantic bubble to resume in the time for Summer.

A few things that did happen...

- Nancy Stephens led a book Study - God and the Pandemic
- We collected and donated coats for the Salvation Army
- We donated the mittens, (made by our Church ladies) from last year and newly dropped off ones this year (Ruth LeBarron) and donated them to local schools and the Go-Go day care who distributed them to needy families
- We had a Blue Christmas service with the Bishop in attendance
- Led by the Lawrence's, we safely hosted the annual Christmas dinner for 25 (in person & take out)
- Raised over \$2,200 for Prison Christian Ministries as our Advent Conspiracy

What we learned...

- Patience, Endurance and how to differentiate between what we can do in person and what we can do virtually ... Zoom Zoom...



- **How to smile and sing while wearing a mask**



A riddle for you...

Who am I?

25 points – Jesus gave me the name Cephas. Who Am I?

20 points – I did not want Jesus to wash my feet. Who am I?

15 Points – I had a brother named Andrew. Who am I?

10 Points – I tried to walk to Jesus on water. Who am I?

5 Points – Jesus told me I would deny him 3 times... And I did.

Who am I??

Eva's Story

On February 11, we had an opportunity to participate in a Zoom meeting with Bishop Edwards entitled, *Being the Diocese in a Pandemic*. I appreciated our bishop's personal sharing about his growing conviction that our emphasis as Christians has to be on the love of God. This affirmed my own belief that people need to know that God loves them, especially in times of uncertainty.

For years I have felt strongly that the Church should be proclaiming "Good News". When I first became a Christian, the message seemed to be more like, "Become a Christian or else!" In my faith journey I have come to realize the simplest message is the most profound: "God is Love".

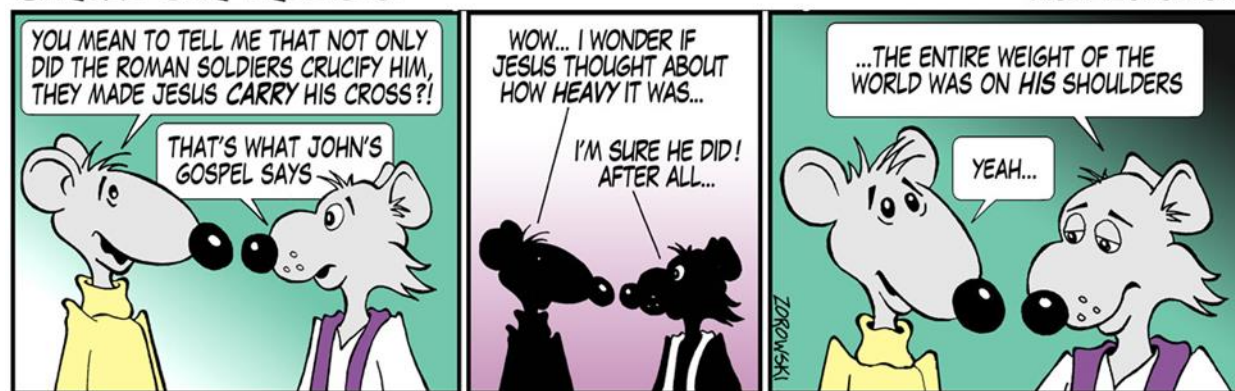
There are too many people who do not know this essential truth. I have felt an urgency to broadcast this more and more over the years. When asked by our rector, Paul, and John Galbraith, to consider the vocational diaconate, I was at first reluctant, because I had just retired and was looking forward to having time off. However, I also recognized that I never tire of learning new things and knew that I could use some training in pastoral care ministry. Even though we have been isolated and unable to meet in person, I have been taking a Supervised Practice of Ministry course for the last few months. There are four of us involved, as well as our instructor, Ken Neilson. We are reading four textbooks, preparing written reflections, and meeting regularly with our parish priests for feedback and supervision. Even though we meet via Zoom, I feel that we have been bonding as a group. I would prefer to come together in person, but we are making the most of our limitations. I have learned a lot, that's for sure, not just about ministry, but about myself. One of the purposes of a course like this is to increase self-awareness. I sometimes "kicked at the pricks", but am thankful now, for the work I had to do. I've known for years that it's often in writing things down, (e.g. journaling, letter writing) that revelations come. Also, when taking such a course one has an opportunity to hear other peoples' stories, and that is always a learning experience.

I am grateful to our diocese, notably Shawn Branch, Nancy Stephens' Mission Outreach Team, and the Bishop for continuing to offer and facilitate workshops, retreats, and prayer meetings despite the lockdown. Technology is not as intimidating as it was a year ago. Those of us who have participated have acquired new communication skills and are growing because of it. God redeems everything, and this is just one example of that.

As James put it: "My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing." (James 1:3&4)

One of the blessings of Covid is that we learn to reach outside our "bubble"; to listen and learn from God. Eva graciously shared her story as it demonstrates our need and desire to keep God in our life during a pandemic. It is interesting that by coincidence Paul's letter to us and Eva's story focus on the same passage from James!





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And so...

Now we find ourselves in Lent, and thinking about Easter Services. These have not been finalized yet; if we are fortunate enough to be in "Yellow", we will consider "in-person" Easter Sunday services. Details will be posted in bulletins and on our website and our sign board.

Meanwhile... here are some seasonal dates to keep as a reference.

Lent and Easter at a Glance....

February 17 th	ASH WEDNESDAY
February 21 st	First Sunday in Lent
February 28 th	Second Sunday in Lent
March 7 th	Third Sunday in Lent
March 14 th	Fourth Sunday in Lent
March 21 st	Fifth Sunday in Lent
March 28 th	Sunday of Passion - Palm Sunday
March 28 th - April 3 rd	Holy Week
April 1 st	Maundy Thursday
April 2 nd	Good Friday
April 3 rd	Easter Vigil
April 4 th	EASTER SUNDAY





Until Further Notice:

St John's Services

In person- we will continue our Holy Eucharist in person on **Sundays at 8:30 am.**

Zoom Services

- **Sunday Worship** - A Morning Prayer Service Will Be Held on Zoom on Sunday at 10:30 Am. Sunday school will be led by several parents under the direction of Lisa Stewart, at 10 am, just prior to the prayer service; a virtual coffee hour follows the service
- **Meeting ID # 892 3263 6002 Passcode: 106303**
Dial by your location: 1-647-558-0588 Canada

Weekdays - 8 am Morning Prayer - ordered form of prayer with Holy Scripture readings and common prayers from common Worship Daily Prayer.

Meeting ID # 853 74939 475 passcode: 219570

- **Wednesdays - 10 am Weekly Bible Study** based on Revised Common Lectionary. Readings for upcoming Sunday. Reading lessons before meeting to be able to participate. (follow next week's readings in the bulletin for correct readings)
Meeting ID # 831 0267 5926 Passcode: 358255
or call 1-587-328-1099
- **Tuesdays – 3 to 4 pm Prayer Group-** an informal time to gather and pray as the Spirit leads for our world, for the church and those in need
- **Meeting ID # 870 7094 5761 Passcode: 022864**

**** Our prayer chain is active. If you, or someone you know, needs our support, please call Eva at 262-3328 or contact the Church office, 458-9411 or sjechurch75@gmail.com**

May God bless and keep you through this Lent and Easter Season!

Church Mice

Karl Zorowski

How to help fight the Coronavirus:

1. Regularly wash your hands.
2. Faithfully fold them in prayer.
3. Repeat vigorously.

