

THE SOWER

St. John The Evangelist Newsletter - Advent/Christmas 2020



*You are all children of the light and children of the day.
We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. (1 Thessalonians 5:5)*

“So, the first thing you do is try to find the Big Dipper. It kinda looks like a soup ladle. Right. Now, can you see the bottom of the bowl? It’s made up by those two stars? Well those two stars line up to point the way to the North Star. And that, my son, is the star you need to know if you are ever lost in the woods at night... It may not tell you where you are - but you can use it to figure out where you need to go.”

This is part of a conversation I had with Isaac this summer while sitting next to the fire in Fundy National Park. It’s the kind of conversation I looked forward to having with him ever since I found out Kimberly was pregnant.

Knowing how to find Polaris does not tend to help much when we are going through our day-to-day routines. It may be a nice bit of trivia, or simply a fond childhood memory one could share in conversation. But it is not really useful. However, in a different set of circumstances - like getting lost while hiking - knowing how to find the North Star could mean the difference between life and death.

In a typical week we can rely on many things to guide us through our various commitments and responsibilities: smart phones, radios and TV’s - just to name a few. But when life goes off the rails - the familiar tools to get us through the day may prove to be inadequate. When we are lost the details of a map may simply add to our confusion. In such circumstances knowing which general direction we need to go in may be the most we can hope for.

When St. Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica, he was writing to a people who were severely disorientated. They were a young church. They were experiencing persecution from all sides. And they were worried because they expected Jesus to return any day - and yet he delayed. As we know, such waiting can be very hard to take.

In many ways 2020 has been a year of waiting. Waiting to move from one phase to another. Waiting for an Atlantic Bubble to be created. Waiting for election results. Waiting for a vaccine. With all this waiting it is quite understandable for us to lose perspective; to get disorientated. In some ways we may feel like people who are lost in the woods at night. And what we need is not a map for there are no roads near us. We need something to orientate us so we can discern which direction we need to go in. The Thessalonians had this same need - they needed something to direct them through a very uncertain situation.

In 1 Thess. 5:9-10 Paul identifies this guiding light as the belief that our loving God has rescued us through Jesus. Our destination is life eternal with Him. This belief is not the same thing as a map app on our phones telling us what to do at each interval - however it is enough to guide us through these strange days in a way that glorifies Jesus and allows us to experience life abundant in him.

Paul goes on to say that in light of our destination we are to practice a few things to keep us moving in the right direction. First, in this dark and often confusing world - live as children of the light. Stay alert and clear headed (v.6). If our hope is in Jesus - we will find that mindless distraction will not satisfy. Second, we are called to guard our hearts and minds (v.8). We protect our hearts against despair by placing our trust in Jesus, and by actively loving, like Him. We protect our minds by placing our hope in Jesus as Lord. When Jesus is our hope, messy elections will not phase us, nor will global pandemics. As NT Wright says in *God and the Pandemic* with such hope, we will not waste time asking “Why?” - we will simply ask “What?” What can we do to help? The final thing Paul tells the church is to encourage one another. We need encouragers now so much. Those who point out the COVID blessings all around us. Those who proclaim that no matter what lies in store for us this day, this month or this year - Jesus has called us at this time, to this place, to glorify his name. Nothing changes that.

It is true that Advent is a season of waiting - but it is a fuller, more active kind of waiting than simply staying tuned in to CBC for the latest on the Pandemic. It involves self-reflection as we prayerfully consider if we are living in expectation of the King’s return. Is Jesus the guiding light in our lives in this uncertain time?

May God bless you this Advent Season and may he be the guiding light that leads you.

Yours very truly,

The Rev’d. Paul Ranson 

Services for the Advent-Christmas Season

Due to Covid restrictions changing often to keep us safe, some events may change with little warning! Sunday Worship will continue at 8:30 and 10:30 unless the restrictions require us to adjust. Please check the website, Facebook or call the church office to confirm when planning to attend.

Nov. 28: The Family Service “What’s with Advent” will not be taking place in person. Paul and Lisa will be contacting families and delivering craft packages so you can participate via You Tube. Stay tuned for details...

Nov. 29: First Sunday of Advent

Dec. 6: Second Sunday in Advent

Dec 13: Third Sunday in Advent

Dec. 15: **Blue Christmas**, with the Bishop as our special Guest
A quiet time of worship that invites the light of Jesus into our darkness.
This service is designed for people who are coping with loss.

Dec. 20: Fourth Sunday in Advent

Dec. 24: Christmas Eve
Family Service 4 pm
Service of Holy Communion 7 pm
Zoom Service at 9:30 pm

Dec. 25: Christmas Day
Service of Holy Communion 11:00 am

Dec 25: Christmas Turkey Dinner 12:00 pm. We are making every effort to offer this dinner in person. However, if necessary, we may have to offer a takeout version. We are considering all options.

Financial Update

The table below shows the status of our main revenue accounts as of the end of October. While Regular Offerings are on track, Building Fund Offerings, Fundraising, and Loose Offerings have fallen behind. It is hoped that these shortfalls can be offset by expense savings that we are seeing from fuel costs, salaries, fundraising, and a one-month credit on our diocesan assessments.

	2019 Actual	2020 Budget	2019 (Jan-Oct)	2020 (Jan-Oct)
Regular Offerings	\$ 249,235	\$ 255,000	\$ 196,519	\$ 197,536
Building Fund Offerings	\$ 53,518	\$ 50,000	\$ 37,882	\$ 28,020
Fundraising	\$ 47,150	\$ 40,000	\$ 38,109	\$ 8,101
Loose Offerings	\$ 3,613	\$ 5,000	\$ 2,659	\$ 734

Given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on worship services and the economy, our results so far are, amazingly, very close to normal. If these trends continue and we see our usual strong offering results in December, we should break even or end the year with a small surplus.



Thank you for your ongoing generosity and support.
Ben Mersereau. Treasurer



WHAT'S NEWS?

Many who will receive this newsletter have been unable to attend church in person. Here is a snapshot of what we have done, are doing, and planning to do, God and Covid willing...

Summer... Irene and Don Adams are living their retirement dream in St. Stephen but are not really retired; Irene is volunteering at the Church in St. George and Don just delivered over 75 meat pies across the Diocese. A new secretary was hired to fill Mary's absence, but hers is a big chair to fill, and her replacement is grateful for patience and guidance the Clergy and Parish members have provided. Services resumed as the Covid restraining order was modified, at first there were only a few, but numbers are increasing as we learn to adapt our new environment.

Fall ... We hosted a picnic on the lawn to kick off the fall; it was a beautiful day enjoyed by all. Paul delivered a cheque for \$1,500 to Memorial School, for Student needs, much appreciated by the school; raised in just 2 weeks, an amazing effort by our Church family. Scouts, beavers and cubs and Brownies have returned; and we even hosted the provincial election, adhering to all provincial health and required regulations of organizations and our Church operating plan.

Hats off to the Willing Wonders... After resigning to the realization there would be no apple pie fund raiser this fall, or Christmas Bazar, there was a wonderful Fall bake-off. It was amazing to watch this group put in 2 long days. They sold 110 pies and over 85 breads and rolls. More important was the time spent together again knowing they were contributing to both the church and community. They raised \$1,500, after expenses, the net profit was still over \$1,200.

Bible Studies... The Tuesday morning Ladies Bible Study, and the Wednesday morning Eucharist and Bible Study are active. The Prayer Partners group met for the first time again in November. Morning prayer on Zoom will resume on Monday November 30th.

Book Study... Nancy Stephens is leading a 5-week study on NT Wright's "God and the Pandemic". This is an incredibly helpful book on how we as Christians are to respond to COVID-19 in practical ways while working through our struggles with it. The study group is underway, but anyone wishing to read the book can contact us and we will loan you a copy.

Advent Season ... The 2020 Advent series with Bill Hockin & Friends will be online this year. This year's, "*Shopping for a Messiah: Keeping Christmas in the Time of a Pandemic*" starts Mon, Nov. 30th from 12 noon to 1 pm. Register at www.billhockin.ca.

An Advent Conspiracy at St John's... means less time and money for shopping and placing value on the things that make life truly meaningful. This Year the Vestry chose to support "*Prison Ministries*" as our focus. Stephen Hart presented a slide show to demonstrate the need to support local and international prisons. Did you know that Stephen and others visit prisons and detention facilities across the province regularly to minister to those in need of worship and assistance? Steve has also visited Kenya and has watched women in prisons struggle to feed their children as there is no help provided to them. For only \$20, we can provide a mother with enough milk for a month. Now's that is a gift you won't find at the mall. Call 458-9411 to find out how you can support this meaningful cause. We will be putting a milk carton image on our church wall for each \$20 gift but are grateful for all donations.





The Christmas Guest, by Helen Steiner Rice, from the book *Christmas Blessings* has been retold by many, and even adapted into a song done by many artists. Whether you've heard it a hundred times, or this is your first, this touching and cherished favorite is sure to warm your heart this Christmas Season."

The true inspiration for "The Christmas Guest" goes back to the Gospel According to Matthew (chapter 25, verses 34-40):

Then shall the King say to those on his right hand, Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from [the] world's foundation: for I hungered, and ye gave me to eat; I thirsted, and ye gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was ill, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came to me. Then shall the righteous answer him saying, Lord, when saw we thee hungering, and nourished thee; or thirsting, and gave thee to drink? and when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in; or naked, and clothed thee? and when saw we thee ill, or in prison, and came to thee? And the King answering shall say to them, Verily, I say to you, In as much as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it to me

It happened one day at the year's white end,
Two neighbors called on an old-time friend
And they found his shop so meager and mean,
Made merry with a thousand boughs of green,
And Conrad was sitting with face a-shine
When he suddenly stopped as he stitched a twine
And said, "Old friends, at dawn today,
When the cock was crowing the night away,
The Lord appeared in a dream to me
And said, 'I am coming your guest to be.'
So I've been busy with feet astir,
Strewing my shop with branches of fir,
The table is spread and the kettle is shined
And over the rafters the holly is twined,
And now I will wait for my Lord to appear
And listen closely so I will hear
His step as He nears my humble place,
And I open the door and look in His face."
So his friends went home and left Conrad alone,
For this was the happiest day he had known,
For, long since, his family had passed away
And Conrad has spent a sad Christmas Day.
But he knew with the Lord as his Christmas guest
This Christmas would be the dearest and best,
And he listened with only joy in his heart.
And with every sound he would rise with a start
And look for the Lord to be standing there
In answer to his earnest prayer
So he ran to the window after hearing a sound,
But all that he saw on the snow-covered ground
Was a shabby beggar whose shoes were torn
And all of his clothes were ragged and worn.
So Conrad was touched and went to the door
And he said, "Your feet must be frozen and sore,

And I have some shoes in my shop for you
And a coat that will keep you warmer, too."
So with grateful heart the man went away,
But as Conrad noticed the time of day
He wondered what made the dear Lord so late
And how much longer he'd have to wait,
When he heard a knock and ran to the door,
But it was only a stranger once more,
A bent, old crone with a shawl of black,
A bundle of kindling piled on her back.
She asked for only a place to rest,
But that was reserved for Conrad's Great Guest.
But her voice seemed to plead, "Don't send me away
Let me rest awhile on Christmas day."
So Conrad brewed her a steaming cup
And told her to sit at the table and sip.
But after she left he was filled with dismay
For he saw that the hours were passing away
And the Lord had not come as He said He would,
And Conrad felt sure he had misunderstood.
When out of the stillness he heard a cry,
"Please help me and tell me where am I."
So again he opened his friendly door
And stood disappointed as twice before,
It was only a child who had wandered away
And was lost from her family on Christmas Day.
Again Conrad's heart was heavy and sad,
But he knew he should make this little child glad,
So he called her in and wiped her tears
And quieted her childish fears.
Then he led her back to her home once more
But as he entered his own darkened door,
He knew that the Lord was not coming today
For the hours of Christmas had passed away.
So he went to his room and knelt down to pray
And he said, "Dear Lord, why did you delay?
What kept You from coming to call on me,
For I wanted so much Your face to see."
When soft in the silence a voice he heard,
"Lift up your head, for I kept My word --
Three times My shadow crossed your floor --
Three times I came to your lonely door --
For I was the beggar with bruised, cold feet,
I was the woman you gave to eat,
And I was the child on the homeless street.
Three times I knocked and three times I came in,
And each time I found the warmth of a friend.
Of all the gifts, love is the best,
And I was honored to be your **Christmas Guest.**"



May you have a blessed Advent and Christmas season. Please use Covid Caution and Stay Safe!