

Easter V Year B: 28/ 29 April 2018
St. James Episcopal Church, Clinton NY
The Rev. Gary Cyr, Rector

Each of us is capable of proclaiming the Good News

Acts 8:26-40
1 John 4:7-21
John 15:1-8
Psalm 22:24-30

“Whoever you are, you are human. Wherever you are, you live in the world, which is just waiting for you to notice the holiness in it. So, welcome to your own priesthood, practiced at the altar of your own life. The good news is that you have everything you need to begin.”

Barbara Brown Taylor *An Altar in the World*

Recently, on Facebook, the Episcopal Church published a meme that stated: Fr. Smith decides to turn the tables on the congregation. In the picture that accompanied the caption, there appeared twenty pulpits with a parishioner behind each one, looking a bit perplexed and nervous as Fr. Smith was depicted reclining in a pew with his arms stretched out on the back of it. It’s a satirical way of saying that every preacher has a congregation filled with its own opinions about a sermon or its delivery. Sometimes the preacher will hear those opinions, and some of them will be positive and some more negative. The point of the comic is simply to convey the challenge preachers have in putting themselves out there in proclaiming God’s word to the masses. After all, no preacher is perfect. Something the after service commentaries forget.

But there is also a truth beyond the satirical comic imagery: that each of us is capable of proclaiming the Good News. By that I am not saying that everyone is skilled in exegeses or homiletics. Rather, I am suggesting that each of us is capable to hearing and experiencing God’s Word in our lives and are capable, if we are willing, of sharing that knowledge with each other. In that sense, each of us, as Barbara says, has a priesthood where we serve at the altar of our own lives. What I believe she is saying is that we have only to open our eyes and ears to God’s presence in the lives that we live. We have only to claim our priesthood and acknowledge our

experience with the sacred in the ordinariness of daily living. But that doesn't come naturally for many. The willingness to share our spirituality is often shunned by society. We don't speak of those things openly. After all, what will our friends and neighbors think? Will we have any friends if we spoke freely about our faith? That fear is what holds us back. It's that fear that keeps us from engaging with each other in sharing our God experience with one another. But it doesn't have to be that way, for the good news is that we have everything we need to begin addressing that fear and opening our hearts to one another.

Dwelling in the Word is a phrase most of you have heard bantered around over the past few months as part of the Learning Initiative that our parish is participating in. The Initiative is simply a means for parishes to reencounter itself spiritually to see what God is doing in its midst – what the Spirit is calling the parish to be. It's a spiritual and missional exercise in determining God's activity in the community, and it starts with encountering and engaging our sacred writings, which are simply humanity's effort to explore a relationship with the Divine. To that end, we have various forms of biblical study, the simplest and often most effective for non-hermeneutically trained professionals is *Lectio Divina*: a self-guided study that lets the words of Scripture wash over you and asks questions that guide the participant into being aware of captures the imagination and what it is saying to them. Every Wednesday, a small group of us gather to do a lectionary study using the method and the Learning Initiative has also adapted this method. So today, we are going to experience a bit of that as I guide you into a moment of dwelling with God's word.

This process starts with a passage of scripture. We've already heard the Gospel, and we're going to hear it again, read by a different voice. As you listen (or follow along in the bulletin) let the words wash over you such that if a word or phrase captures your attention, hold on to it until the end of the reading. Let that word or phrase linger in your mind, even if it means not hearing the rest of the scripture reading. That word or phrase is going to be our entry point to engaging and dwelling with God's word and what the Spirit is saying to you and to each of us. So, let's begin...

[parish members participate in the "Dwelling in the Word" process]