

Sermon for Sunday, February 1, 2015
St James Episcopal Church, St James NY
The Rev. Dr. Raewynne J. Whiteley

There are some days
when you wonder
what on earth the people who put together the lectionary
we thinking of
and there are others
when you can't help but be amazed
at how appropriate the readings are
for the day.

And today
is one of the latter days.
If you'd been looking for something
to read on the day of an annual meeting
you could hardly have chosen better
than our psalm today.

“Hallelujah!” it begins. “Praise the Lord!

An annual meeting
is a time when we look back at all God has done among us
in the last calendar year,
and look forward
to what God has in store for us.

Looking back, it seems that each verse of our psalm
invites us to give thanks
for aspects of our life together as the people of God in this place.

I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart, *
in the assembly of the upright, in the congregation.

Worship
is at the very heart of what we do.
Each Sunday
we come together to worship God,
to hear from God's word,

and to meet God in the Eucharist.
We experience Christ among us
in so many ways.

Did you know
that this year
there were about 350 proclamations of God's word in Scripture
at our services, and another 90 or so in times during Eucharistic visitors?
Did you know
that ably led by our small but faithful choir,
we have sung over 200 hymns?
Did you know
that thirteen children and two adults
assist in our worship by being lectors?

Great are the deeds of the LORD! *
they are studied by all who delight in them.

One of the consistent calls of scripture
is to know God,
and to be always ready to learn more of God's ways.

We have an incredible range of Christian formation activities here.
If you wander into the Christian formation building any Sunday morning
you will find teenagers in the basement
talking about the readings for the Easter vigil,
and coming up with new titles for them.

So far they have:

"The fruit is drugged"

"Rams burn better than boys"

and

"Peace."

If you don't recognize what those stories are, you'd better ask them!

And upstairs
there are circles of children sitting on the floor
listening and watching a story
and wondering
what it all means.

And on a Tuesday evening
 you might come into Mills Hall
 and find a mix of kids and adults
 drawing prayers,
 or back in the education wing
 adult grappling with challenges to their faith
 thanks to the provocation of books they have read.

His work is full of majesty and splendor, *
 and his righteousness endures for ever.

The works of God in creation are so obvious when you walk outside this building, aren't they?

Our cemetery is stunning, even blanketed with snow;
 so much work has been done there this year.
 And our buildings continue to speak to us of the glory of God.

He makes his marvelous works to be remembered; *
 the LORD is gracious and full of compassion.

The compassion of God
 is at the heart of what it means
 to live as Christians.

Our presence on the Stony Brook campus through Protestant Campus ministry
 changes lives.

Early in the year
 we heard a student from China speak
 about how she had discovered for the first time
 people who talked about loving others
 instead of just focusing
 on doing better for themselves.

We fed incredible numbers of people through the food pantry.
 We provided hope for people in the Diocese of Jerusalem
 through our Goof Friday offering.

He gives food to those who fear him; *
 he is ever mindful of his covenant.

Sometimes
 we get beset by worries

about how on earth
we are going to keep going
as a parish.

But God is gracious,
and God's people are generous.

This last year,
we not only made our budget, but had a surplus,
that we can use to increase the work
that God is calling us to do,
both by catching up on some things that were deferred in the past for budgetary reasons
and but doing some new things.

He has shown his people the power of his works *
in giving them the lands of the nations.

We have seen the power of God,
and the power of the work that is done in God's name.
And much of that work
is unseen.

This year, I am delighted to institute the Rector's medal for unsung service. Much of the ministry that happens in and through this parish happens behind the scenes. Alongside our committees and organizations, we have people who work hard in the background and make an enormous difference, even though the vast majority never see that work. The medal is in the form of a scallop shell, the traditional symbol of St James.

Award Rector's Medal: Donna Austin
Carol Bluni
Charlie Kreussling
Sue Krall

Also this year, I am delighted to announce the awarding of the Bishop's Medal. This medal is given for faithful service by a parishioner in this diocese, both within and beyond the parish.

Bishop's medal: Pat Westlake

There is so much to give God thanks for.
I could go on and on - but we would be here all day.

So I would like to turn it over to you.

On your tables
are some sheets of paper.
At the top of each
is our mission statement,
where God is calling us:
To grow in faith through Scripture and prayer
To build relationships in Christ
To serve one another and the world

Take some time to talk as a table
about where you have seen God at work
here at St James.
And write it down on the sheet labelled thanks.

And then take some time to think about your dreams for the parish.
What would you like for us to be doing?
What would you be willing to be part of.
And write those down on the dreams page.