

March 18, 2020

“Our mission is to celebrate God’s transforming Love in Jesus, by following where Jesus’ Love is calling us to serve the community”



Ascension This Week

**More On Sharing Our Stories
— from Fr Bill Baker**

On Sunday, March 22

— All services, classes and meetings at Church of the Ascension are cancelled until May 17, 2020. We will have more information as we approach that date.

**God loves you.
No exceptions.**



The Episcopal Church Welcomes You. www.dohio.org

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I know a lot of you missed church on Sunday due to the Coronavirus. I want to reference my sermon, which you can listen to at our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/ascensionchurchsi/>. We will also post Morning Prayer there every morning at 9:30 am, while we are unable to meet with each other in person. I expect in the next few days or weeks, we will be using Facebook and other virtual media as ways of staying in touch, as well as the phone and email.

In the sermon, which was about the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s Well, I stated that Jesus knew everything about her life--her history, her past, even all her mistakes, and he still wanted to offer her the water of life! We all have a story and we need to be willing to share them with each other. Sometimes in hearing someone else’s story, we can relate to the struggle or feel less isolated in our pain. Other times hearing what others have lived through allows us to feel and show compassion towards those who are struggling or the most vulnerable among us.

With that in mind, I want to share what happened to me the last time I preached a sermon similar to the one I preached last Sunday. While I attended Seminary, I worked in a Spanish-speaking church on Saturday nights. All of the parishioners were from El Salvador. The parish had no Spanish-speaking priest, so each week I led either Evening Prayer or the priest who worked in the parish would read the Eucharist, but she was unable to preach in Spanish, so I would do it.

After I preached about the Woman at the Well and encouraged the congregation to keep sharing their stories, that night I heard so many stories. It was almost like they listened to my sermon too well! Everyone wanted to tell me about their lives. That night and in the weeks to come, I think I heard all of their stories. I want to share some of them with you.

Enrique is a deeply pious man. I am not sure when he came from El Salvador, but I am sure he came because he was fleeing gang violence. In fact, he told me that if he get deported, he is not sure what he will do. The gangs run the town he used to live in and terrorize the people who live there. The gangs even killed his brother. That is why he made the difficult choice to move to the US and raise his family here.

Enrique came here a long time ago on a tourist VISA, but he long ago overstayed that VISA. Now, he has a wife and 3 daughters and he even has a good paying job. His boss knows that he does not have a Social Security

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number and so does the US government because he submits his taxes on a government issued number for those without documented status. He works hard and pays his taxes, but because he is not documented, he is not entitled to a tax refund or any other benefits. He is grateful to God and to this country for all he has.

Wilma is a vibrant woman. She and her husband have 3 boys – 15, 10 and 5 years old. Wilma has no documented status, but she came here when she was not even 18 years old. Wilma and her husband, Juan, work very hard. Juan usually works up to 3 jobs during the summer, including mowing lawns to make extra money. He often came to services on Saturday night in the same clothes he wore to work all day, looking exhausted.

That night Wilma shared with me her entire long story about how she travelled from El Salvador to the United States, mostly on foot. She told me about the harrowing journey and how hot it was in the desert and how “the coyote”, the man she paid to bring her to the United States, warned all 15 people in their group, if they wandered off and got lost, they would die.

Because they needed to stay hidden and to avoid the heat, they travelled at night and slept during the day. She told me that you had to be careful not to step on snakes or in hole and injure yourself in the dark and she constantly heard the sound of animals that sounded closer than she was comfortable with.

When she arrived in the United States, she almost immediately went to Northern Virginia and that is where she has lived for over 20 years. She told me that when she moved here, it was a different time. Our economy has always relied on the work of those without documented status and both she and her husband were able to find work and contribute to society.

Wilma and Juan receive no welfare or other assistance from the government. They pay their own rent and for the car that they share. All three of their boys are intelligent and the oldest son, Juanito, is in all accelerated classes in school. Daryl, their second son, is a star on a traveling soccer team in Virginia—so exceptional that his family pays no fees for him to play in the league.

They are wonderful, charming family. Wilma and Juan came here without a passport or Visa, but that was during a different era. The government has always known that people like them were living here. And now they have three sons who ARE Americans. They know nothing about living in El Salvador and have never been there because their parents can't go back without risking not being able to return. Recently, they all live with a new fear, that although they have never broken a law and although they work and pay for everything, Wilma or Juan will be deported.

Their sons are anxious and worry a lot. Wilma is depressed. I remember their house used to be filled with laughter and fun, but when I talk to them now, Wilma is scared and seems overwhelmed. I pray for them all the time. Maybe what they did technically breaks the law, but I am not sure they should be deported.

The faithful people that I served with and among in Virginia shared their stories with me and shifted my heart. I do not know what the laws says or if we need to change some laws to help them, but I know that the people in that church are my brothers and sisters. I prayed with them and, more importantly, I heard their stories. Jesus wants them to have the water of life, too, just like all of us. I also think he wants all of us to help them have a good life here. Let us all continue to pray that those in power will find the way to best handle the immigration crisis in this country and that we will all learn how to love and help all of our brothers and sisters, regardless of documented status!

Blessings, Fr Bill+

Our Pledges

While I realize that all our minds are preoccupied with the uncertainty that the Coronavirus and what it means might bring, please keep in mind that in order for there to be a church for us to return when this period is over, we must continue to pay our bills. Please consider dropping your pledge in the mail to us.

Our Lenten Study Series Will Continue—but not as a Group

While we are unable to meet together for the Lenten Study Group you can go to the SSJE website (www.SSJE.org) to see the videos for each week's study, including questions for meditation and suggestions for practice. And Cindy McCloskey will be sending you an email with the study for each week, just as we covered in the past two weeks. This week coming up is Food—sadly we will be missing the delicious soup and bread, but our spiritual hunger will be fed.

Light a Candle of Hope — A call to prayer re. the Coronavirus pandemic on March 22nd, at 7pm (GMT)

A National Day of Prayer and Action has been announced by the presidents of **Churches Together in England**, re. the Coronavirus epidemic, for this Sunday March 22nd.

In an excerpt from a joint letter issued today, they wrote:

"At such a time as this, when so many are fearful and there is great uncertainty, we are reminded of our dependence on our loving Heavenly Father and the future that he holds. Therefore, at 7pm (GMT) this Sunday, light a candle in the windows of your homes as a visible symbol of the light of life, Jesus Christ, our source and hope in prayer."

Wherever you are in the world, we invite you to join with us in prayer to see an end to the Coronavirus pandemic. Let us pray for one another during this difficult time. "Cast all your cares on him, for he cares for you." 1 Peter 5:7

Save the Date: Upcoming Services, Meetings and Events:

Morning Prayer During Lent: Cindy McCloskey, who has been praying Morning Prayer in the Church every week day during Lent, will now offer **Morning Prayer every day on Facebook on our page**. If you would like to join her, please go to our Facebook page at 9:30 every morning.

The next monthly **Friendship Dinner** will most likely be on Sunday, May 17. Details will be announced as the date approaches.

The next healing service at Ascension will most likely be in May 2020. As always it will be at **5:00 pm on a Saturday**.

Thursday, March 26: Building Bridges Interfaith Seder, planned to take place at Olivet Presbyterian Church, has been cancelled. Check the Olivet Presbyterian Church website and Olivet Presbyterian Church on Facebook for more information.

Friday, March 27: Chicken and Fish Fry at Christ Church. This event has been postponed. Stay tuned and check out the Christ Church website for more information.

The Lenten Retreat Day with Fr Mark Brown scheduled for Saturday, March 28, has been cancelled. No date for a rescheduling is available at this time—but we certainly hope it will be rescheduled!



Opportunity to Help ---

While you cannot at this time pick up an envelop in the back of the church for sending a contribution for rebuilding the sanctuary ceiling at St Paul's, you can make your check payable to Ascension with a memo that it is for the group offering for the St Paul's restoration fund and send it to Ascension, or you can send your donation directly to St Paul's at: Saint Paul's Episcopal Church, Restoration Fund, 225 St. Paul's Avenue, Staten Island, Ny, 10304.

Fr Schraplau said in his letter: *"To date with insurance, diocesan property support and donations from individuals we have raised \$198,950 leaving us approximately \$122,000 to raise. Our prayer is that we can raise the remaining money needed to complete the restoration so that we can be back in our sacred worship space by Christmas. All donations, great and small, are gratefully accepted. Please help! Thank you."*

1 Kingsley Ave, Staten Island, NY 718.442.4187

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<http://www.ascensionsi.org/>