



St. Thomas's News

Welcome to a brief update of news and topics of interest to members of the St. Thomas's faith community.

The Communications Team of St. Thomas's is happy to provide this printed update to those who may not be able to access our electronic communications channels.

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Chapter 22, Page 175 – Forward in Faith

"The place God calls you to be is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC
by Frederick Buechner

*"... and the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, **GENTLENESS**, and self-control. There is no law against such things." Galatians 5:22-23*

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"Live in the wisdom of accepted gentleness. Gentleness awakens within the security of knowing we are thoroughly and sincerely loved by someone ... Scripture suggests that the essence of the divine nature is compassion and that the heart of God is defined by gentleness."

Brennan Manning

I was delighted to learn of our Sunday Parlor Group [aka Adult Education gathering] was planning a return engagement to read and discuss **The Shack** by William P. Young. This gathering had its first encounter with this modern day spiritual story when first released in 2009. Now made into a movie, interest in returning to this story of life, faith, and struggle with each, came into being again. And seriously, with Octavia Spencer as God who wouldn't want to have a life conversation with her!

I returned to this book as well just before and during Holy Week. I was cruising along, trying to be attentive to my spirit engaged in the story, while mindful of the six worship services to organize and as many sermons to prepare, until I came to a place in the book that brought me to a dead stop. It was a section in which I had underlined AND highlighted. Here is what it was that I had read in a conversation between the pain-soaked father Mack with God in The Shack ...

"But," Mack paused. "What about your wrath? It seems to me that if you're going to pretend to be God almighty, you need to be a lot angrier?" "Do I now? I understand how disorienting all this must be for you, Mack. But the only one pretending here is you. I am what I am. I'm not trying to fit anyone's bill." ... "But if you are God, aren't

you the one spilling out great bowls of wrath and throwing people into a burning lake of fire? Honestly, don't you enjoy punishing those who disappoint you?"

At that, Papa stopped her preparations and turned toward Mack. He could see a deep sadness in her eyes. "I am not who you think I am, Mackenzie. I don't need to punish people for sin. Sin is its own punishment, devouring you from the inside. It's not my purpose to punish it; it's my joy to cure it."

"Nothing is so strong as gentleness. Nothing is so gentle as real strength." Ralph W. Sockman

Our Tuesday and Wednesday morning bible study gatherings are fairly vocal about not buying into the wrathful God mostly found in Hebrew Scriptures. I remind them, saying aloud remind myself as well, that these stories were collected, told, re-collected and written by people just like us. Just looking and listening as to how God blesses one country or culture or political view and none others. Told and collected and written by a people trying to find a way through life and faith as conquerors as well as those who were conquered. It is really easy to praise OR blame something that is somewhere out there in those times of plenty or times of want, in time of peace or times at war.

And then we have Jesus. Jesus who blesses the merciful ones and the peacekeepers. Jesus who touches the leper, the sick, and the impoverished in body and spirit and says again and again, **"Be healed, go in peace. YOUR FAITH has made you well."** Jesus who spent most of his short kingdom bearing message life out on the streets and in the

countryside where the people of God lived and had their being. Not in places of ivory palace grandeur or Temple practice and performance. Not until the end of his time which we know is REALLY **our beginning**. It is REALLY our beginning that is the Church to this day.

For me, **gentleness always begins with ourselves**. I am still guilty of being too hard on myself for what I did do or did not do. Sometimes this spills out on others, and for that I am sorry and need forgiveness. It has been the part of me that made me very sick in soul and body at one time ... **and I CHOOSE not to live this way again!** I am a work in progress, and pray forgiveness as I forgive myself and others along this way of life.

I begin my day praying the Daily Office, reading the appointed scriptures and psalms, reflecting on a variety of other meditative readings, and then into silence before journaling. As I enter this time and place called the silence of Love, I place my hand upon a picture I have carried since my first sabbatical in 2015. It is the contemporary picture of the Good Shepherd – Jesus holding close to his breast a lamb, eyes closed and a contented smile pursing his lips, while the lamb reflects this same image holding tight to Jesus. **I then sit in the silence called Love.**

As Octavia aka "God" says rightly, "It's not my purpose to punish it; it's my joy to cure it."

"I choose gentleness ... Nothing is won by force. I choose to be gentle. If I raise my voice may it be only in praise. If I clench my fist, may it be only in prayer. If I make a demand, may it be only of myself." Max Lucado

In our days filled with so many polarized views, spewing angry words and actions at one another, hate speech that claims THIS God is OUR God of might and right, and our God alone. Maybe the difference is for you and me to bear **the cloak of gentleness** into our worlds. Maybe the difference in the life of the world may just start with you and me.

Try a little gentleness ...

With gratefulness always, your servant in Christ

Fr. Paul+

Diocesan Prayer for 11th Bishop Search & Calling

In your Name, Lord Jesus, the community that is the Diocese of Delaware has been raised up and has flourished. We pray that in our day we as a Diocese may continue to be a sign of your presence in this State, a people devoted to You, and willing agents of your peace. In this time of transition as we seek a new bishop, help us to discern your will for us, to receive with joy and grace those who offer themselves to the election process, and to celebrate the episcopal ministry we have been given and that which is yet to come. Give us open and gracious hearts, patience with one another, and joy in anticipation. Lord Jesus Christ be with us in these days, as you are with us always, for You, with the Creator and the Holy Spirit, are one, Our God, now and forever. Amen.

Ways to Stay in Touch

In addition to the Google group mail list, keep in touch via St. Thomas's website at stthomasparish.org or via St. Thomas's Facebook page. To join our Facebook community, go to Facebook, search for St. Thomas's Episcopal Parish just be sure to click that you like us! The weekly Carpenter's Helper and sermons are published via all three avenues.

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