

May 17, 2020

St. Thomas's Episcopal Parish
276 S. College Ave Newark, DE
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weekly newsletter

The Carpenter's Helper

This Week..we recall the comforting words of Julian of Norwich

Hello beloved of God across the Episcopal Church in Delaware,

Late last week, Governor Carney extended his shelter-in-place order to May 31, citing the continued and pressing threats to our public health. Our current suspension of public worship in the Episcopal Church in Delaware (ECD) is hereby extended to May 31 — the Day of Pentecost — effective immediately. In the coming weeks I will share the steps being developed to guide our eventual regathering for in-person worship. I noted last week that I named a task force to take the lead in this holy work, and they have hit the ground running. So, stay tuned, for more information coming soon.

...for the full update from the Bishop, please visit Delaware.Church and read Covid-19 Response #12...

When, then, will we be able to regather in person again? The answer is: When we can do so safely, confidently, and joyfully. I would be stunned if that happens before the fall, if not later. As I noted just above, regathering will be determined by public health criteria, not a hunch or a date on the calendar. We all, in the long run, will be safer for it.

I continue to hold you all in my prayers, each day, and I am told often that many of you are keeping me in your prayers as well. This circle of prayer — spiritual offerings to God that also connect each of us — is a source of comfort and energy to me. Our spiritual work — our prayer, our worship, our words of encouragement and hope to each other — are strong fibers that connect us as the body of Christ to one another. Keep praying, my friends. It is good for you, good for me, and good for the world.

In the loving, powerful name of Jesus Christ,

+Kevin

Update from Bishop Kevin

During the COVID-19 pandemic, St. Thomas's is alive and well. We are worshiping via live streaming on YouTube (See our YouTube Channel and hit Subscribe!). The full-text bulletins for our services can be found on our website, and by email request.

We also continue to respond to the needs of the Newark Community through our collaboration with the Newark Empowerment Center and others. Those who would like to support our work may do so by going to our "Giving to St Thomas's" page.

Our prayers are with all those who are ill, all who are caring for them, and all who are striving to hear the voice of God in these challenging times. May God bless you and keep you, now and always. For more, see the Episcopal Diocese of Delaware COVID-19 site.



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The Black Plague, COVID-19, and Julian of Norwich



What do these three things have in common? Plenty! Julian was a Roman Catholic born about 1343 CE and lived during a time of upheaval. The people of Europe were full of anxiety due to the Black Plague, the Hundred Years' War, and a papal schism. They were yearning for a personal, experiential faith that spawned a growth in Christian mysticism. Not her actual name (which remains a mystery), she is known as Julian because she lived (as a recluse) at St. Julian's Church in Norwich, England. I'll let you draw your own conclusions on the parallels with our world today.

At the age of thirty she became gravely ill soon after Easter. A week later her parish priest visited her, bringing her a crucifix. "Look at it, and be strong," he said as he gave her last rites. Although she was very weak, she was able to look at the figure of Jesus on the cross, receiving insight into his suffering and love for us. Later she described how the room seemed to go dark as she felt she was about to die, but no longer felt any pain. Over the next twelve hours she saw wonderful things in her mind, as clearly as if they were real. She soon got well and wrote about her fifteen visions (shewings) in what is now called Revelation of Divine Love.

"God is our clothing, that wraps, clasps and encloses us so as to never leave us."

The Hazelnut

In one of her visions, Julian saw something very small, about the size of a hazelnut laying in the palm of her hand. "What can this be?" she asked. "It is all that is made," was the answer. Julian worried: because it is so small, might not the hazelnut – a synecdoche of all creation – disappear or be obliterated? Again came the reassuring answer: "It lasts and ever shall last because God loves it" (Julian 292). This is representative of all God has made. She offers three main points in this vision: God made it. God loveth it. God keepeth it.

Years ago I knew an Episcopal priest who was a lover of creation care. He would carry hazelnuts in his pockets and hand them out to people, reminding them that they were children of God, loved beyond measure or size. How might putting something of God's creation in your pocket to keep as a reminder be helpful to you in this day and time? When you have felt "small" as part of all God's creation? How can your "smallness" be seen as wholeness and loved?

"All manner of things shall be well."

Perhaps this is the line that Julian is most remembered. She reports Jesus telling her, "I may take all things well; I can make all things well, and I will make all things well; and you shall see for yourself that all manner of things shall be well."

When Julian was six years old, Norwich was visited by the pestilence known as the Black Death for the first time. Julian herself survived, but within a year three quarters of the population of the city was dead. It persisted for three years. The city itself came to a standstill. During our time of trial today facing COVID-19 with many of us isolated from family and friends, all ages can find some time away from the news, our screens, and devices. Find some quiet time to center yourself in the presence of God. This pandemic may very well be our "Black Plague;" we can wonder (and pray) that those among us will have visions from God that will provide us with sustenance and healing for living into the future. Like Mr. Roger's is well known to say, "Look to the helpers." Our helpers are in God too.

"God loved us before God made us; and God's love has never diminished and never shall."

written by Sharon Ely Pearson:
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For another interesting read about Julian of Norwich, check out this article:
<https://www.trinitywallstreet.org/blogs/all-shall-be-well-no-really>