

THE TAU CROSS

Light at the End of the COVID Tunnel

In the biblical book of First Kings, the prophet Elijah announces to the king that there will be a drought in the land lasting three years. The loss of rain has dire consequences and places great stress upon the people. In the midst of suffering, there are pockets of hope. Elijah is fed bread and meat by ravens. And it is Elijah who miraculously provides for a widow and her son for many days from a handful of meal and a small jar of oil.

For almost a year now, we have experienced a modern trial with as far-reaching consequences as a drought. We have struggled with the disruption of normal activities and social isolation, the whole economy has been unsettled, and life is anything but normal. As a community of faith, we have done our best to provide for the spiritual health of our congregation while adhering to the best advice of medical experts to keep parishioners safe from COVID-19 exposure.

As the national vaccination program progresses and infection rates begin to fall, we can see a light at the end of the COVID-19 tunnel. As of this writing, 20% of the U.S.

population has received at least a first dose of a vaccine, and the number of daily new infections has dropped to about 70,000. The trend is encouraging but still requires caution regarding regathering plans. The emergence of new, more contagious virus variants also prompts new reasons for concern.

Given the complexity of factors that pertain to a safe regathering of church, our Vestry has formed a committee charged with collecting information from our county, diocese, the CDC, and local medical experts. Their goal is to identify a set of parameters that, once met, will give us the green light to assemble for worship and fellowship. As much as we would like to be able to congregate for a large Easter celebration, right now that seems beyond what will be possible while to ensure the safety of all participants.

In anticipation of not being able to gather by Easter Sunday, our staff is exploring creative ways to build a sense of community. For Palm Sunday, as we did with the

Christmas Pageant, we will record parishioners speaking different parts in the traditional reading of the passion. The edited video will be incorporated into the Sunday service. Look for upcoming details about signing up to secure a speaking part in the passion. For our younger parishioners and their families, we will plan a socially distanced Easter egg hunt. Details will follow.



Fr. Eric Hinds

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While our predictions for the timeline of reopening have been thwarted several times, it seems that we might be able to initiate outdoor services perhaps as early as late April or May. The feast of Pentecost occurs this year on Sunday, May 23rd. Our bishop is scheduled to visit three weeks later, on Sunday, June 13th. We hope and pray that we will congregate in person before summer. We have all been on a long journey together and I know that we all yearn for the opportunity to safely gather again. I pray that day will come sooner rather than later!

Blessings,

Living in Our Bubble

A year into this pandemic, we have seen many folks adjust skillfully to the fragile balance of creating routine and building normality with life happening in flux. Made in the image of God, human beings have a great capacity for imagination and adaptation. One of the adjustments came in our ability to selectively create “social bubbles” or “pods” for live face-to-face interaction. While these circles of trust remain limited for the health of our family, friends, and the wider community, they can offer a taste of lifegiving connection in this season of isolation. My personal bubble includes my parents, close friends, and our Church worship team, and they help me stay lucid. We laugh and lament



Fr. Jay Watan

together. As a precaution, I test for COVID-19 weekly and maintain social distancing. I am grateful for my small bubble. Yet bubbles can also leave us insulated in the isolation. If we have a choice, why not choose folks we share more in common with or avoid the ones we have fundamental differences with? It is hard not to notice the widening polarization within our public discourse since the pandemic. Bubbles can create echo chambers with our sealed enclosures. Who is listening for our common ground when our rhythm and harmony can feel many miles apart? Travel has always been a wonderful way to open up an awareness and to honor our

great diversity. Such exposure can help us examine our values and cultural narratives. Most of all, travel invites us to pay attention and listen for stories of holy people and places that are sacred to others. Perhaps it can transform hearts. On my last road trip to Los Angeles before the pandemic, my children and I had the opportunity to listen to a Jewish Holocaust survivor who joined the U.S. Army after his liberation from a Nazi concentration camp. We heard African American artists name the reality of systemic racism and share their passion for inspiring generations to live into their full spirit. Local Filipino-American educators from L.A.’s Historic Filipinotown described how the discovery of their connection to history felt like finding long-lost relatives. In taking even a moment to listen, we honor the humanity of



others. Listening may be the hardest thing now in our bubbles.

When our people are not heard, inevitably things blow up. Life in a bubble is temporary. Like anything made of soap and water, there is a surface tension holding the delicate structure together.

Eventually bubbles pop! Perhaps we have been living in bubbles long before this pandemic. As we dive deeper into this season of Lent, I hear the passage from Mark 1:12 that says, “And the Spirit immediately drove Jesus out into the wilderness,” reminding us that Jesus was not exactly invited into that wilderness. In Mark’s short Gospel account, Jesus may have been hesitant about going beyond his circle. But we know that the Spirit moved him beyond his bubble to that place of expansion. In this season of listening for God, we understand that bubbles may encircle and encourage, or they may blow apart and burst, but we notice also how they grow and find connections.

Listen for the Love and Keep the Faith, my friends!

-Fr. Jay

Back Row Versus Front Row

As we enter the third week of Lent, I hope that you have had some time for quiet reflection. Getting quiet time in this noisy, busy world can



Deacon Lauren McCombs

be difficult, but I encourage you to do so. I find reading to be a time when I can slow down the noise around me and inside my brain.

I recently read a book, *Dignity: Seeking Respect in Back Row America* by Chris Arnade.

The author is a photographer and journalist who looks at the divide between those who are in the “front row” and those who are relegated through entrenched social structures to sit in the “back row.” He abandoned his high paying

front row job on Wall Street and traveled from Alabama to Maine, Nevada to California, and many places in between. When arriving in a town, he would typically go to McDonald’s where he would watch the interactions of the locals. Slowly, he would enter into their “back row” world through coffee and conversations.

The book offers an opportunity to understand “back row” America, and why the people who experience it are so loyal to their communities even as they are literally falling down around



The front row



The back row

them. The stories of drug addiction, abuse, and hardship are difficult to read, but the author's honesty and insight help us to understand people's commitment to their families, their community, and God.

I wonder what your particular commitment is during this season of Lent? Is it a time for reconciliation with a family member or a friend, or to pray for forgiveness of your sins and mistakes through quiet prayer, or to see and recognize those who are sitting in the "back row" and offer them help and encouragement? I invite you to explore the many possibilities for forgiveness and reconciliation that God is offering you this Lent.

As it says in Psalm 32:

Happy are they whose sins are forgiven,
and whose sin is put away!
Happy are they to whom the LORD imputes no guilt,
and in whose spirit there is no guile!
While I held my tongue, my bones withered away,
because my groaning all day long.
For your hand was heavy on me day and night;
moisture was dried up as in the heat of the summer.
Then I will acknowledge my sin to you,
And did not conceal my guilt.
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD."
Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.
Therefore all the faithful will make their prayers to you in time of trouble;
when the great waters overflow, they shall not reach them.
You are my hiding-place; you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance.
"I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go;
I will guide you with my eye upon you.
Do not be like horse or mule, which have no understanding;
who must be fitted with bit and bridle, or else they will not stay near you."
Great are the tribulations of the wicked;
but mercy embraces those who trust in the LORD.
Be glad, you righteous, and rejoice in the LORD;
shout for joy, all who are true of heart.
While I held my tongue, my bones withered away,
because of my groaning all day long.

Many blessings to you and yours this Lenten Season.

*Peace and love,
Deacon Lauren*

Easter Week Virtual Services

March 28 – April 4

Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter services will proceed by video. More details will be announced shortly!

Prayers of the People

During the Prayers of the People portion of the Sunday Service, we ask for God's redemptive presence in the church, the world, our community, and individual lives. If you would like to add a name to be read during the Prayers of the People at an upcoming Sunday Service, please contact the church office at office@episcopalstmatthew.org or 650-342-1481.

Need Continues for Second Harvest Food Bank

As the COVID-19 crisis continues, the Food Bank is seeing substantial increases in need as community members are furloughed, losing hourly wages, and forced to deplete savings while still providing for their families. If you are able to provide financial support, donations can be made online here:

<https://give.shfb.org/donatenow>



Contributions and Pledges to St. Matthew's

Your generous support helps St. Matthew fulfill its mission: to live God's love, to share the Gospel, and to grow spiritually. Thank you for continuing your giving during these times. Contributions and pledges can be mailed to the church or made online at:

<https://episcopalstmatthew.org/giving/donatenow/>

You Shop, Amazon Gives amazon smile

If you haven't already, please consider designating St. Matthew's as the beneficiary of your Amazon orders. Amazon donates 0.5% of the price of your eligible AmazonSmile purchases to the charitable organization of your choice. AmazonSmile is the same Amazon you are familiar with--the same products, prices, and service. To learn more, go to [AboutAmazonSmile](#). AmazonSmile is now available in the mobile app! Go to Settings in the app to link to your Smile account.

Morning Prayer and Children's Chapel Premieres on YouTube



Morning Prayer premieres on Facebook Live, YouTube, and our website at 9:30 am Mondays through Fridays.

Children's Chapel videos premieres on on Facebook Live, YouTube, and our website at 9:45 am on most Sundays.

ECSM's YouTube Channel is at: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCu3LEb_tMIjL6DNKcZDIzQ

The Episcopal Church of St. Matthew is
a family called by Christ . . .

to Live God's Love,
to Share the Gospel,
to Grow Spiritually.

Come Celebrate with Us!

Sunday Services Livestreamed on Facebook
at 10:00 am

The Rev. Dr. Eric Kimball Hinds, Rector
The Rev. Jay Sapaen Watan, Associate Rector
The Rev. Lauren P. McCombs, Deacon
The Rev. Amber Stancliffe Evans, School Chaplain

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The Tau Cross is the monthly newsletter of the Episcopal Church of St. Matthew. We welcome submissions that have a connection to the parish. Inclusion is at the discretion of the staff and may be edited for space or clarity. The deadline for articles is the 15th of the month and may be sent by email to Beth von Emster at beth.vonemster@gmail.com. Entries should follow these guidelines: Include title of event or article; 200 word maximum description including when, where, cost and contact information as applicable. Avoid abbreviations and other "insider" lingo. Further guidelines and tips available upon request.

Upcoming Events

Monday-Friday Morning Prayer Video
9:30 am FB/YouTube Premiere

Sundays Children's Chapel
9:30 am Zoom

Sundays Sunday Service
10:00 am FB Livestream

Sundays Coffee Hour
11:00 am Zoom

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