

WILDERNESS WORDS

Editors

If there is anything that you would like to have included in the Newsletter: 313-673-6519 and dmc@chem.wayne.edu or pcoleman@chem.wayne.edu

This Sunday:

Leading: Val
Preaching: Ellen
Presiding: Mary Ellen

Readings this week:

**Third Sunday After Epiphany,
 22 January, 2017**

First Reading: Isaiah 9:1-4
Psalm: Psalm 27:1, 4-9
Epistle: 1 Corinthians 1:10-18
Gospel: Matthew 4:12-23

(Click on citation to link directly to the reading.)



Reflections:

By Mary Ellen

Here are my thoughts on our year at SOTW:

First of all I'm grateful for all the love and support over this last year. This is not a year I would like to repeat, but your care has made it possible, even grace-filled. I'm so thankful to be part of a church in which I'm able to be my vulnerable self.

I am proud of you. No other church I know would function so well without its rector/vicar! When I think of all that has gone on beautifully while I've been away, I'm thrilled with how well our ministry-centered model has worked. You amazing people!

I'm proud, too of SOTW as a whole--our outreach work through Ruby's Pantry, the Good Samaritan fund; our presence in the community through our art show and rituals such as the Orlando Vigil, Art Fair prayer tree, our Post-Election Gathering. I'm proud of our wardens and Bishops Committee for their great leadership. I'm proud of our worship committee and its sterling work on liturgy and music. I'm proud of our preachers and leaders, of those who clean the church and change the linens. I'm proud of our musicians. Our stewardship campaign, our forums and small groups. Our welcome to those who come in the doors. People stepping up and using their gifts. Wow.

Areas to keep on our radar as we continue to go forward:

1. I am still processing insights from my sabbatical, as they become a part of who I am as a person and priest. Some of what I learned calls me/us to more:
 - Being in Europe brought insights into a post-Christian culture and I have had to find ways to reach out to those outside the faith.



*Inviting Mystery, Embracing
 Compassion, Encountering Christ.*

Forums: 2016 - 2017

Forums —immediately following services we grab our coffee and treats and spend an hour learning.

Jan. — Forum on the Border Patrol (*details below.*)

Feb. — Sacraments

March — Arts and social change

April — The Ten Commandments

May — Prayer.

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- In South Africa, I felt challenged about sensitivity to context, and how we can be rooted in our Episcopal identity, but also responsive to our particular community's needs. Our being aware of who we are here in Cook County, as well as part of the world-wide Anglican communion seems more important to me than ever.

2. These tied in with Michael Pipkin's visit. He listened, asked questions, and challenged us:

- He suggested that we at SOTW have an unusual awareness of "why" we exist, but that focus needs to continue. We exist for those we minister to through our outreach, but also those who would thrive from being part of our community. How do we find these folks? And how do we incorporate them into the community? (There seems to be a pattern of people who visit SOTW and rave about it, and don't come back!)

- Michael challenged us to retain our flexibility, while also (over the next five to ten years) building sustainability, both in terms of finances and leadership.

- In terms of context and agility, one of the most challenging things Michael said is that where we meet shapes us: who we are and who comes on Sundays. Will there be a time when we should meet elsewhere? Are there ways we could have more of an in-town presence during the week?

3. The other area of learning/challenge comes from our experience with our art show here in Cook County, plus my experience in South Africa of the arts not only expressing something about a particular place, but also bringing a kind of healing (not to mention necessary work and income) to a community. (Our visit from Zinzi underlined this theme.) I look forward to following up on the implications of this here in Cook County, with our new emphasis on being an arts economy.

In closing: When people ask me how our church is, I beam and say 'wonderful, wonderful...' and I mean it. MEA

Notes:

1.) **Forum, Sunday, Jan. 29th**, immediately after Church: Brandon Law, supervisor at Grand Marais Border Patrol station will present on Sunday, January 29, on the topic of the mission, purpose and work of the Border Patrol. He is very much looking forward to it and is planning to attend the worship service before the presentation..

2.) The **Art Show is ON!!**, the topic/title of the art show is "**Kindling Curiosity: Lighting the Creative Spark.**" It will open March 10th, duration is likely 2 - 3 weeks. Stay tuned!!

Shower for Sarah & Kyle. Sunday, Jan. 29th at Solbakken.

Couples shower for Sarah, Kyle and baby Reese. Sunday, January 29, after church and the forum. They need baby clothes size 9 mos. or older, board books, or a "stroller" fund. Gentleman, please bring a photo of you as an infant or toddler. Don't worry--you'll get it back. Bring a package of diapers (any size) and you'll be included in a drawing for a fabulous prize. Questions?

Ginnypadz@gmail.com or 218-877-7551 or 507-421-9584.

Please bring a dish to share. Chicken cacciatore and desert will be provided. There will be a power strip to plug in slow cookers to warm items.



Commissioning the new Bishop's Committee following the Annual Meeting last Sunday.



The small group from SOTW is going to participate in the Women's March Minnesota 2017 (on January 21) as a witnesses to live out our faith statement. Richard Rohr wrote "Liberation theology shows that spirituality and action are connected from the very beginning and can never be separated" Therefore we are going to live out our faith as often expressed in the prayers for the people that we pray each Sunday with this action.

**Homily by the Rt. Rev. Dr. Jo Bailey Wells
St John's Episcopal Church, St Paul, MN
Saturday 7th January 2017
Memorial Service for Steve Ashcroft**

This weekend is Epiphany: a moment in the Christian story which was pretty familiar to Steve. The magi, born on far distant shores (who knows, perhaps even South Africa) have been following the star for days. Perhaps they've been searching for answers for years – whoever they were, and whatever they believed, they were open, eager, wide-eyed – and they find their epiphany in what was surely a surprising place, in their encounter with a baby, Jesus. And, as it says in one of those phrases that is heavy with meaning, afterwards they return by another route – geographically, and spiritually.

Steve was open, eager, wide-eyed. He was 7 when I first met him and the rest of the Ashcroft clan. Typically his face was either pointing to the heavens, as if searching for that star (or more likely following the flight path of a rare bird), or his nose was buried in a book, hungry for story, for depth, for the other sort of wisdom. Either way among the lively rabble of children I quickly got to know at Church of the Messiah, I think of him as the disciple like Nathanael of whom Jesus said – 'here is one without guile'. I do not mean to suggest Steve was ever the paragon of virtue. He could be naughty (and I can hear him now teasing me about the way I pronounce that word). At that stage, mischief was his middle name – but his brand of mischief was very straightforward, sometimes even forgetful, and never manipulative: also usually hilarious, always honest, often accident-prone. I remember the relief of his parents when they managed to get insurance at the opticians for the replacement glasses he needed just about alternate weeks when he'd lost or broken them. He was the one to find the best spots for hide-and-go-seek – and to be so patient in hiding (probably thanks to a good book) that he could be there for hours. But I do remember one when – at some point – he realized he couldn't get out. There followed a scene that could have been from Winnie-the-Pooh with Rabbit's friends and relatives trying to pull him out of the laundry chute... Steve epitomized all that was so special about the young Ashcroft family: not least, his capacity to love, to learn and to laugh – a lot, often at himself. All of which was infectious, and a blessing to all who came into contact with the delightfully carefree, casual chaos that characterized the household in those days. It is Steve who taught me the meaning of 'kick ass.'

The wise sages of Scripture returned from Bethlehem by a different route. In his adulthood Steve's own spiritual searchings took a different route from that of his younger foundations. The texts in his rucksack were no longer biblical but there were texts and they were plentiful. Steve loved words: prose, poetry, lyrics – and I take those words as his form of prayer. And in a sense they weren't in any backpack –

I suspect that the ever-generous Steve might wish to say that his chosen path wasn't a rejection of the conventional Christian pathway but a wider embrace of all that he found to be good and true and beautiful in creation. He was so sensitive to goodness and beauty, so



discerning. Steve was determined to live well: indeed he did live well and yet with self-effacing humility. In so many ways he represents just what Jesus calls for in his disciples: which becomes a deep challenge for me, as one who claims to be a Christian, let alone an ordained one (the ilk of which Steve was surrounded – surely by far more clergy than is good for anyone!!). Perhaps for these sort of reasons Steve rejected the conventional forms of faith – the one-without-guile simply saw far too many Christians with guile! Yet I'd dare to suggest he too became a pastor. Not a religious one but a community one. A compassionate friend, a deep listener, a principled activist, a wise counselor, a passionate teacher, a loyal mentor. He lived up to what he cared about, and he inspired many to follow.

I'm describing someone who is rather Christ-like. And, like Christ, whose life was cruelly cut short.

There is no explanation for that cruelty. We rightly weep and gnash and cry out together against the injustice of this situation. Just as with Jesus, it seems that our prayers went unanswered. And the tragedy unfolded before our eyes, so painfully. I marvel to hear of the courage of those who dared to stay close to his suffering. And in the aftermath: a much-loved wife is left alone. Two parents have lost a treasured son. Two siblings have lost their beloved brother. And two beautiful children have lost their father, before they are old enough to know just how wonderful a father he was and so longed to be for them. It is right that we weep and gnash and cry out at the waste, at the loss, at the monster of cancer that overcame Steve. We do so because we love, and the deeper we love the deeper we hurt.

What might help, besides the therapy of such lament? Christ's death served a purpose. I urge that Steve's death not become purposeless. But in this case such purpose is a burden that is laid upon us.

They say it takes a village to raise a child. Here gathered today is that village. Villagers, each of you are today inheriting, adopting, being given, the charge of two children. From here on may none of you ever think you are childless. The invitation to give to Henry and Alice's education is not a simple request for finance instead of flowers. You need to hear it as an open invitation from a generous mother who longs and needs to share the gift and responsibility of raising two children. Friends, if you take that invitation seriously is it not possible that in the future Henry and Alice may say: Yes, our father died when we were tiny. It was very hard. But it meant that we grew up with a wider community of wonderful people. Dad had an incredible circle of friends, and they became our friends, even our family.

If this happened it would take the carefree casual chaos which epitomized a previous Ashcroft era to the next generation of Ashcrofts. And I'd guarantee that the blessing will not just be theirs. Blessing is never one-way: it's contagious. It will reach each of us.

I spoke of the therapy of lament. But here is the therapy of giving. And I would not be surprised if the best therapist in this whole village is not one of the youngest. If not Alice, then Henry: who will not relent in asking about Daddy. Where is he? Does he love me? What happened? Why did he die? What is death? Most of us have grown too polite to ask these questions out loud. (Indeed as the rude foreigner among you I'd dare to say most of you are far too 'Minnesota nice' as well). Friends, please don't decline to speak to Henry and Alice about their father – to speak of what happened, to share his foibles and to love as Steve loved. They will not know their father except through us – our love, our lyrics and our tears. So may they run and run. I picture them lining their way just like the rose petals lined the aisle for Steve and Anna's wedding.

And – if we can share that love and those tears – we might just begin to find a way to see that Steve's death is not in vain. Could it, might it, somehow... have the capacity to increase the blessing in his beloved household? and might it grow in us the capacity for goodness and beauty we knew in Steve? My prayer is that through the life we saw him live well, we may live the better. And in the dying we saw him face so courageously, we too – when our time comes – might die the better.

Thank God for Steve, one in whom there was no guile.