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8:30 am -1:30 pm

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Scripture Lesson

If I speak in the tongues
of mortals and of angels, but
do not have love, I am a
noisy gong or a clanging
cymbal.

--1 Corinthians 13:1

Tidings



St. Thomas' Episcopal Church is an inclusive and worshipping Christian community that accepts the challenge of living the Gospel.

The Rector's Column

As many of you have heard by now, I am going on medical leave to take some focused time to recover from Covid completely. I'll be on short-term disability from now until sometime this summer. It's not been an easy decision to make, but I have to admit, having made the decision, an enormous weight of worry has lifted. To qualify for this leave, I'll need to step back from my role completely for the duration. I suspect that's a little jarring to hear, and if I'm honest, it's a little jarring to write.

But with that said, you know as well as I do just how capable our leaders are at St. Thomas'. The Wardens -- Hannah McClennen and Deb Barker -- are going to be at the helm, and the Vestry will be there to support them in keeping St. Thomas' going strong. Nan will keep the office running, and our Pastoral Care Team will be responding to your needs as they arise. The Rev. Canon Carrie Schofield-Broadbent in the Diocesan Office is on call to help our leaders when they need some extra guidance, and The Rev. Steve White will be available for pastoral emergencies that need a clergy presence.

In some ways, over the coming months, a lot is going to change. But in most substantive ways, St. Thomas' will keep on keeping the faith as you always have. The main

difference is, when you have a question or a concern that you would typically bring to me, instead, you'll bring that to the Wardens. Services will continue, of course, and when it's time, the leadership of the church will decide when to return to in-person offerings. Put differently, "all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well."

More than anything, I want you to know just how grateful I am to be able to take this time. It's an uncomfortable thing to admit to needing some extra help, and for me at least, even more uncomfortable to accept that help. But I have felt so much of your love and support -- and even some of your gentle urging -- nudging me in the direction of taking this time. I will miss being with y'all, but I'll be back.

In the meantime, I don't know quite what my plans will be. The first priority is getting well and the second is staying well. I wish I could say that I cannot wait to get back to work, but I'm not to that point just yet. For now, I cannot wait for the next nap!

With all the love I can muster and with an eye towards the other side of this break, I am yours in Christ.

Blessings,
Brooks+

**Sermon for the Third Sunday After the
Epiphany: *Luke 4:14-21*
The Rev. Brooks Cato**

The other day, I was watching stupid stuff on TikTok, and a video popped up with a guy talking about how intense the brain fog is that comes from Covid and lingers well after other symptoms have gone away. He said he hoped one day he'd be able to word good and brain good again. But it was one of the comments that described the phenomenon so well. It said, "brain fog is like your entire brain is covered in wet glue." It's a little gross, and maybe this is the brain fog talking, but I have yet to come up with a better way to explain it. For folks that experience brain fog regularly, I am learning something about your life I never fully understood before. It's awful, and it's frustrating. It's like my brain can't churn normally, or maybe I'm mid-sentence and the word processor just shuts down, or maybe it just takes an extra second or two -- a lifetime in brain functioning -- to even understand the words said to me.

Back in seminary, one of my professors reminded us about humility, the need to be humile and to be honest about. Avoid false humility, but also don't brag. Sure, we all nodded along. But then she clarified in a way I really didn't expect. She said humility isn't just naming what you're bad at, it's naming what you're good at, too. And knowing the difference and asking for help when you need it is how you live that out. So, in that vein, I think it's ok to say that I'm pretty confident in my use of words. I know that writing comes easier to me than to most, and most of the time, when I do write, I'm pretty happy with the output. Sometimes I know I've written a stinker, but that's bound to happen. Sometimes I need an editor more than others, but most of the time, I feel pretty good about my facility with language. Lately, then, you can imagine just how frustrating the linguistic portion of the brain fog has been for me. It's like my bodybuilding friend who got Lou Gherig's disease or some of the brilliant minds around here we've seen shift into the decay of Alzheimer's or dementia. There's an irony to it that's kinda interesting from afar and really unpleasant up close. All that to say, my confidence in my wordcraft has taken a big hit

this past month. I'm reading voraciously, but the words I produce take longer to land on the page, and I'm not as sure in their footing. I suspect this will repair in time, the wet glue will slough off and I'll be back to my ticky-typing self. But for now, at least, there's an extra serving of humility on my Covid plate.

I guess I bring all this up because I'm in awe of Jesus' confidence stepping into the synagogue in his hometown. He pops right in, unfurls the scroll of Isaiah, and says in no uncertain terms, "I'm the Messiah you've been waiting for." Then he rolls it back up, hands it to an acolyte, and says, "Did I stutter?" I mean, y'all. There's no imposter syndrome creeping through that man's brain, not in that moment. The audacity. The gall. The guts. Looking back, we can point to the moment and say Jesus was just telling the truth, being humble in the way my seminary professor talked about, naming what was true without puffed up falsehood.

Sure, but this passage we're hearing today actually leaves out a pretty important part of the story, one we're gonna hear next week. But hearing the two halves of the same story separated by seven whole, entire days might make you think they're not connected, so I want to stitch them together real quick. You see, Jesus declares in front of God and everybody that he is the Messiah as described in the scriptures. He is the one they've all been waiting for. He grew up on the mean streets of Nazareth, and all this time, it's been little ol' Jesus from two streets over that'll save the people of God. And that's where next week's reading will pick up. Jesus says, "I am the Messiah," and the crowd gets so angry that they are, quote, "filled with rage." They get out of their pews, chase him to the edge of a cliff, and try to hurl him off. It's only thanks to a disappearing miracle that he escapes their anger. See? It's a little weird that this week's story cuts off where it does. It's a neater package to wrap up where we stopped today, but it's not where the story ends, not at all.

There's a couple of things buried in all this kerfuffle that're important, though, regardless of Jesus' confidence and the people's response. For one, there's something to be said for reading a

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room. Jesus could've maybe, just maybe, eased into his proclamation a little bit? Something a little more diplomatic or that would lead his listeners through some rhetorically compelling moves to his final claim. But this Jesus is not a debate superstar.

More than all that, what Jesus says he is matters quite a lot. And in our day, after reading enough headlines and books and maddening text messages, I gotta wonder just how much his delivery mattered. Jesus says he is the Messiah - that's what being the one anointed in Isaiah means - Jesus says he is the one that is anointed, but to do what? "To bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." In other words, Jesus isn't just the Messiah, he's the Messiah sent to set right all those wrongs in his society. To approach the last people he should be seen with with compassion and justice. To see the value of people that stand before him and people he'll never meet. Given all that, it could be even with perfect delivery, he'd still enrage a crowd.

Now, it may be tempting to say he's looking at the people in front of him as opposed to the Law -- I know some Christians that would say just that -- but I think that's not quite right. I think what Jesus will do is show people how the Law is for the people, not to punish them, but to provide for their safety and well-being. What he is fighting is those places the Law has been twisted from its pure form into something nasty. Look at these other passages we get today: in Nehemiah, the reading of the Law is cause for a massive party, complete with wine and chewing the fat and setting aside take-out bags for the food cupboard. In the Psalm, the Law is like gold, it's sweeter than honey, it revives and it rejoices and it is true. Paul's letter's a beautiful bridge, citing various laws and weaving them together into the Body of Jesus himself, even the Body of Us the Believers, The Body of Christ. All useful and necessary and contributing in our own ways and missed when absent. The Jesus he speaks of, even the community of Christians, is sorta the Law Incarnate. Jesus isn't opposed to the Law in favor of people. Jesus is The Law, the People are the Law, we are the Law. Sweeter than honey,

rejoicing, and true -- if we do the work that anointed Messiah began so long ago, the work on that scroll from Isaiah, "To bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Now, I know that's a mighty big request, and it would be no matter when we'd read this. But it's especially big right now. My wet-glue-brain sure is making it tough to do much of anything, not to mention live into that embodied law. And even if I were at 100%, the restrictions of the pandemic make it tough to figure out just how to get to the people that need us. And even if there weren't a pandemic, there's countless other forces that keep us from doing this work. Thing is, no matter what the world looks like, there will always be people who need the church, who need us, who need something, anything on which to hang their hopes. Something sweeter than honey and shining with truth. No matter what the world looks like, there will be someone that needs us. But, no matter what the world looks like, there'll also be some bucket full of reasons we'll tell ourselves that could get us off the hook this time. Maybe it's a sort of spiritual brain fog, a knowledge of what we ought to be doing with a gap in our processor that keeps us from doing it.

There's a humility in all of this, though. A humility in knowing that we have something beautiful, if only the world would turn its gaze our way. A humility in the knowledge of what our little church community brings. A humility in the pride we take in serving those we are anointed to serve. That's not arrogance. That's not even confidence. That's our calling. "To bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Reminder: Sunday sermons are posted on the St. Thomas' website: StThomasHamilton.org

[[The following meeting was conducted online, via Zoom, due to conditions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.]

**St. Thomas' Episcopal Church
Vestry Minutes
November 17, 2021**

Opening Devotions

The meeting began at 7:02 p.m. Heidi Riley opened with prayer from St. Hilda.

Clerk's Report

The minutes of October 20th, taken by Anne Perring because the clerk was absent, were approved pending a few changes. Brooks Cato will send the electronic file to the clerk who will make the changes. Anne was thanked gratefully by those in attendance for her willingness to step into the role of clerk at the meeting. Moved by Deb Barker; seconded by Erin Loranty.

Treasurer's Report

Rick Geier noted that the software transition is still progressing well. He reviewed the balance sheet with the vestry, noting that the NBT checking account (\$579,201.70, as recorded on the report) is doing very well, and that even aside from the recent donation (\$79, 201), the parish checking account would be doing well. John Orr asked when there might be a decision regarding the investment of the donation. Rick explained that Budget & Finance meets once per month and that he expects to have something to present in December. Brooks Cato added that things are moving slowly because we are being measure and careful. Rick presented another key item regarding the Employee Retention Credit. The parish filed a claim for \$17, 072 but, in fact, received a check for \$17, 626 for the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th quarters of 2020. A motion was made to receive the Treasurer's Report by Deb Barker; it was seconded by Jana Laxa. The Report was received as submitted.

Rector's Report

Brooks Cato said that he was floored by the level of participation for the retreat on Sunday, the 14th. There was an attendance of around 54 at church, with 34 staying, and then 6-10 persons on Zoom. He was delighted by how the event had gone. He also wanted to put on the radar that Nan Schmitt

had become a grandmother for the 13th time.

Brooks informed the vestry that he and Becca will be away during the week following Christmas. Additionally, he has received a jury summons for November 30th for 2 days' commitment.

Wardens' Report

Hannah McClennen noted that everything seems to be going well. She was thrilled with the way the weekend retreat had worked out. People felt so positive about being involved, and she wanted to thank John Orr to whom the parish owed so much for his organization of the event. Overall, she was impressed by the upbeat energy and the way in which the event has made such a good impression on the church community.

Deb Barker thought that the Forum for the Future was so exciting and she found it interesting to hear about what all of the individual groups had come up with. She thanked John Orr and the Strategic Planning Committee. Unhappily, Deb said that she was in Florida and on Zoom for the event, but she offered her thanks to all who made it all happen.

Commission Reports

Banner:

Brooks Cato announced that Jana Laxa, Melissa Davies, and Lara Scott have completed the new banner. It has now been mounted and it is up on the western wall of the church. It fits the space beautifully and looks awesome. Thanks are also owed to Scott Lewis from the Picker Gallery for his assistance. Space is still available for at least one more banner.

Music:

Brooks Cato informed the vestry that the congregation can now sing with masks if they so wish. Canon Carrie Schofield-Broadbent brought that news with her visit on November 14th.

Rectory Leak:

Brooks Cato stated that a small leak had developed in the kitchen, but it has now been repaired by Rieben Roofing.

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Budget for 2022:

Rick Geier had distributed a preliminary draft of the 2022 budget prior to the meeting. He noted that the amounts in bold font were based on values provided by the diocese or based on information from the diocese. The 4% increase in the amount for pledge income is estimated (\$208,000 compared to \$200,000 in 2021), and will likely be adjusted as more pledges are received. All other line items remained at the 2021 budget amount. B & F will consider all line items at its December meeting once pledge income can be more confidently estimated. Rick pointed out specific areas that have been determined based on information from the diocese. These included the diocesan assessment of \$23,622 which is an 8% increase from the 2021 amount of \$21,868. The diocesan recommended cost-of-living adjustment for staff pay is 3.6%. The church property and liability insurance is increasing to \$5,935. This appears to be an increase of 18.7%. However, the diocese stated that the actual increase is 10%. The discrepancy is likely due to an underestimation in our 2021 budget as the diocese has not typically provided us with this insurance premium estimate in the past. John Orr asked about how many units pledged last year. Brooks estimated that 70 had pledged. Dan Schult wondered about the compensation packages as they showed an increase of 3.8% yet the diocesan recommended cost-of-living adjustment for staff pay is 3.6%. Rick responded that the actual increase in staff and clergy compensation shown in the draft budget of 3.8% also includes health insurance costs which are increasing by 5.6%. Jana Laxa inquired as to whether the flower budget would be raised this year. Rick responded that a call to all commissions had been sent out, asking for estimates to be put into this year's budget. Not all estimates had been received or factored in yet. As of the time of the meeting he had only heard from one group. The draft presented at the November meeting is only a starting point because pledge income is not yet known accurately. The budget draft will be more refined at the December meeting after B & F have an accurate sense of pledge income for 2022. Finally, B & F suggested that staff members should receive a bonus of \$400 at Christmas this

year rather than the budgeted bonus of \$200. Deb Barker moved that this be done; Heidi Riley seconded. The motion carried to give staff members a bonus of \$400 at Christmas.

Old Business

Strategic Plan—Next Steps: John Orr offered an overview of the meeting with commissions, which had occurred in the last month since the vestry had met (in addition to the retreat on the 14th). There will probably be no further meetings between now and the end of the year. Instead, the Strategic Planning Committee will meet again in January and they will, at that time, think again about how to move forward. For the moment, John is putting together a complete list of the ideas that emerged from the Forum on the 14th so that the SPC can consider them and prioritize them and decide how to fold them into the plan. John spoke about how energizing the Forum had been. He also noted that Canon Schofield-Broadbent would be continuing her involvement in the future.

Sign:

Brooks Cato updated the vestry on the sign, explaining that this is caught up in supply chain issues, as so many goods are at this historic moment.

Video-recording update:

Brooks Cato stated that the track line is on order. A mic has also been ordered for the parish hall, to be used for Bible study. Delivery is being held up by supply chain issues.

Paint selection bracket:

Brooks Cato informed the vestry that M&M Press, with the assistance of Becca Cato, is working to produce this. Check back in the future for an update.

Land sale:

Brooks Cato reminded the vestry that when the land was donated, the idea was that it would eventually be sold. A subcommittee will be set up with Jane Welsh to work out details of how to move ahead with this. The sale is expected to bring a profit in the range of \$60,000-\$100,000.

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Vestry Meeting Time:

Brooks Cato reported that an inquiry was made as to whether it might be a good idea to change the time of vestry meetings, perhaps to follow the Sunday service. There was no conversation, and Brooks decided that he would leave it as it is for the moment or send an email around to vestry members to get a sense of the issue.

New Business

Stewardship: Brooks Cato announced that at the time of the meeting there were 42 pledges for approximately \$131,410. This is roughly where the pledge campaign was at the same time last year.

Announcements were made and next meeting set at: December 15th.

Prayer Leader for next meeting: Deb Barker
Deb Barker moved that the meeting be ended;
Hannah McClennen seconded.

The meeting ended at 8:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Susan Cerasano, Clerk

A Prayer

Help me to find new and creative ways to serve my neighbors, even in these difficult moments.

--Sojourners

Feather on the breath of God

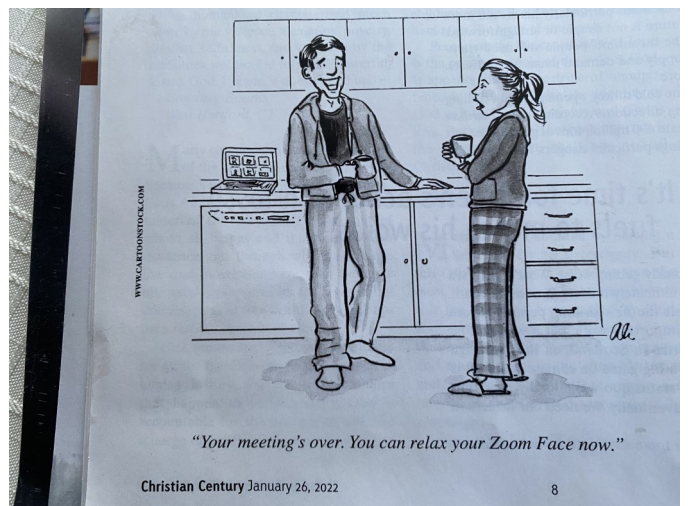
"The feather flew, not because of anything in itself but because the air bore it along."

--Hildegard of Bingen

It could have landed anywhere, swamp or forest; instead, floating on the quiet air, the tiny feather down drifted, weightless, from the open sky, into my cupped and waiting hands. Cream-colored, fragile, soft as milkweed, a wordless message from beyond, reminding me, how like the feather, we're carried on the breath of God.

--Sarah Rossiter, writer and a spiritual director in Concord, MA

On the Lighter Side





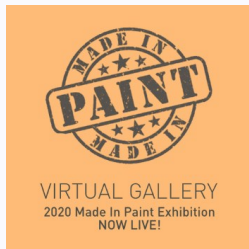
Arts at the Palace is a nonprofit community arts organization based at the Palace Theater in Hamilton, New York.

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**The Sam and Adele Golden
Foundation for the Arts**



Contact Details:
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Foundation for the Arts, Inc.
237 Bell Road, New Berlin, NY 13411
Phone: (607) 431-8765



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Ponder This

Hope just means another world might be possible, not promised, not guaranteed. Hope calls for action; action is impossible without hope.

--Rebecca Solnit,
Hope in the Dark (2004)

A Prayer

Direct me to use the time I have on this earth to embody the life of Jesus, to sustain justice and fairness.

--Sojourners

February Thanksgivings

Birthdays: Sam Owens (2/12), Sicily Catania (2/14), Mea Martineau (2/15), Emma Dudrick (2/16), Joshua Knapp (2/17), Anna-Marie Kuiper (2/19), Charlie Jerome (2/22), Adrien Catania (2/26), Vivianna Linden ((2/27).

Wedding Anniversaries: Luke & Lauren Marshall (2/23).

Baptism Anniversaries: Susan Geier (2/2), Emily Hutton Hughes (2/13), Gwyneth Davies (2/13), Scott Rivington (2/18), Jana Laxa (2/23).

Ponder This

Contemplation is not the practice of saying prayers. It is the growing, overwhelming consciousness of God within and around us, before us and beyond us. It is God embedded in our souls and at the helms of our hearts. It is the awareness of God that is, as Paul says, “praying without ceasing.”

--Joan Chittister, an American Benedictine nun, theologian, author, and speaker

Prayers of the People

Your prayers are asked for: Amanda Bastia, Phil Bisselle, John Brown, Fr. Brooks Cato, Pam Cristiano, Barbara Crysedale, Esther Davis, Teddy Engle, Joan Fales, Jerry & Roseann Fitzgerald, Emma Forbes, Kate Foss, Danny & Anne Foust, Maureen Fox, Mary Frances, Daniel Ghent, Charles Ginter, Miles Goodrich, Marlene Houck, Danielle Jones, Laura Jones, Janna Keser, Paul Keser, Beth Komaromi & Family, Harvey Jones, Anne Leimkuhler, Jeannie McCabe, Dianne & Jim McDowell, Liam Meyer, Anthony & Vincent Pacillo, Bill Pratt, Diane Rich, Nancy Rivington, Joni Resnick, June Schaupp, Sheryl Scott, Candace Schult, Mark Spearing, Keith Stage, Carol Strozyk, Noah Scarafile, Steve Scarafile, Debra Talbott, Deb Willis, Ryan Wilson, Joan & Tom Winkler, Judy, Aster, Brett, Brianna, Camila, Donnie, Cesar & Paula, Corrine, David, Frank, Jenn, Jeff, Lisa, Lois, Robin, Mary Lou, Lauren, Melissa, Mikhail, Nick & Vanessa, Paula, Pat, Robin, Sandra, Sean, Sue & Ben, Colgate Professors, Staff, and Students. The students and family of Dana Eaves.

For the departed: Kim DeVinne, Dana Eaves, Tammy Hutchinson, Mikhail Morgulis, John Richmond.

February at St. Thomas'

Regular Weekly Events

Morning Prayer on Zoom: Sundays, 9 AM.

Friendship Inn Community Meal: Mondays, 5 PM, Parish Hall, Take-outs only.

**St. Thomas' Episcopal Church
Scheduled to Serve
February 2022**

St. Thomas' Episcopal Church
12 1/2 Madison St.
Hamilton, NY 13346

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Date	Lectors	Responder	Usher	Altar Guild	Flower Guild
February 6	9 AM Martha Berry	9 AM Barbara Bowen		Linda Jenks	Jana Laxa
February 13	9 AM Emily Hutton Hughes	9 AM Amy Jerome		Wynn Egginton	Jana Laxa
February 20	9 AM Everett Egginton	9 AM Wynn Egginton		Linda Jenks	Jana Laxa
January 27	9 AM Barbara Bowen	Maureen Ghent		Emily Hutton Hughes	Jana Laxa
March 2 Ash Wednesday	9 AM Adger Williams	9 AM Debbie Barker	9 AM Edward Page	TBA	Jana Laxa



Qidings
February 2022

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