



Highlights of diocesan news in printable format — March 17, 2021

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## From Bishop Hughes

### You are good

*This is a transcript from a video.*

This is Bishop Hughes in the Diocese of Newark. I am an Episcopalian. I imagine that comes as no surprise to anyone who is in our diocese or to any other Episcopalian that I know. I haven't been any other denomination, I've only ever known the Episcopal Church, but I have this incredible appreciation for the numbers of people who come into our church from other denominations or other faith traditions. Because they had to make a choice, and they made a choice based on something that drew them, and so often it is this sense that God loves all people. And I think that is what I love the most about being an Episcopalian, this theology we have that God who created all, loves all that God has created.

There are two holy books for us in the Episcopal Church, one being scripture, the other being the Book of Common Prayer. And both have at their very center this knowledge that God loves all of humankind. I am known for constantly bringing us back to Genesis. Back to God bringing creation into being. And as God brought lands, waters, rivers, oceans, sky, stars, moon, plants, animals, fish – all things into being – as God created each one God said this is good. Except when it came to humankind. When God brought humankind into the world God said, "This is very good."

And in my holy imagination I have always thought that every single time a person is brought into the world, at the birth of every person on the planet, that God takes the time to say, "This is very good." Meaning that I'm very good, all of my family is very good, my sister, my brothers, my cousins, my parents and that you and all of your family are very good. That all people on the planet are created by God. And as part of God's creation they are very good. We hold that at the center.

It is also at the center of our prayer book and the place where I see that the most is in the Baptismal Covenant. That set of promises that we make that talks about the way that we believe in God but also talks very particularly about how we will love and respect those who are created by God. That we will seek to know love and serve Christ in every single person. That we'll hold up the dignity of every person and seek for justice in every person. Because we know how much God loves those people, we cannot help but love the same people that God loves, just as much. No one gets left out. Everybody is in. And all really does mean all.

It is a heartbreaker this week that the news came out from another denomination that somehow our siblings who are lesbian, gay, trans, queer – that somehow they were less worthy of the sacrament of marriage than others. I suspect that for most of them all they heard was, "You are not good enough."

I can't speak for any other denomination. I can speak for mine. I want you to know that in this church it's not just that you are welcome. In this church it's not just that you are good enough. In this church it is that God looked at you the day you were born – God looked at your gay self, your trans self, your lesbian self – God looked at your queer self, God looked at you exactly as you are, and God said, "This is good." And at this church we recognize your goodness and we are delighted that we are all part of the same denomination: looking for God, celebrating God, sharing God's love.

Another part of our baptismal promises is that when we have good news that we will go and share it. I invite you to share this good news. Let somebody know that needs to know that they are beloved by God. Do it today. You are good.

## Sermon at the Service of Remembrance & Gratitude

*This is a transcript from a video.*

In the name of the God who loves us, amen.

For those who are worried that my mask is off, we have gone through this room with a measuring tape. We have moved everybody more than 20 feet away from me so that I could preach with a mask off. No one has stood in this zone and no one will after the service, either. This is the way we worship now, these are the things that we have to keep in mind. It is part of the change that we've experienced in this time of pandemic.

I'm also aware that today is the feast day of the Right Reverend James Theodore Holly. I won't spend a lot of time talking about his life but I invite you to Google him if you don't already have the book Holy Women, Holy Men which will give the description of his life. Google him so you can learn more about him; he was the first black bishop in the Episcopal Church and for people who are the "first", there is usually a tale of perseverance, of following God's leading, of being faithful when those around you couldn't see what you could see.

That is his story and so often when we are talking about people who persevere - who are faithful following God, seeing something that others could not see - very often the readings will point us to the Hebrew scriptures and stories like Moses'.

I want to take us to Deuteronomy that we heard earlier, to those words specifically that Moses said to the Israelites. There they were, right on the cusp of stepping into a new land, a land that had been promised to them after wandering for 40 years in the desert. Here they were, about to cross over to that land and Moses said to them, "When your children ask you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances of the Lord our God, that the Lord our God has commanded you?' then you shall say to your children, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.'" When your children ask you, "What was the meaning of the decrees, the statutes, the ordinances? What was the meaning of all that stuff that God gave you?", you will say that, "We were slaves of Pharaoh and God brought us out of Egypt, out of bondage, with a mighty hand."

It is helpful to remember that, before the Israelites were slaves of Pharaoh, they were peacefully settled in Egypt. These were the spouses, the children, the cousins, the siblings, the relatives of Jacob and Joseph... Joseph who saved Egypt, who saved Egypt's leader Pharaoh from the disaster that would have happened in that country of a multi-year famine. He was the hero of Egypt, his people were welcome there, they settled in that country.

They told that story but over time, that story was forgotten by them and forgotten by the people around them and there was a new Pharaoh, a new leader in Egypt who enslaved them. And their enslavement was so drastic, so hopeless, so hard that all that they wanted, all they wanted or could cry out for was God, God's mercy -- no sense of hope, no sense of a plan but crying out for God's mercy.

And, as Moses said, it was God's mighty hand that brought them out of Egypt into freedom, out of bondage into a new life. And so that story needed to be told again and again. It's told in scripture, we read it in Exodus, it's told again in Leviticus as we read through those ordinances, through those statutes that God has given the people. It's told yet again in Numbers and then it's recounted by Moses before they move into this promised land. They had to tell that story to honor the experience; they had to tell that story to uphold the memory; they had to tell that story so that they could remember they were a transformed people, a transformed people moving into a new land.

It's the same telling of the story that we do, the magnitude, the impact of what we have been through over the last year. Two and a half million people across the planet, 536,000 in the United States, 423 that we read this morning. All of those lives lost. We have to tell that story in order to honor the experience, in order to uphold their memory, in order to recognize our transformed selves so that we can step into the next part of life that God has for us.

I'm keenly aware in this time: 423 people, 536,000 people, two and a half million people across the planet.

The people who were left behind were missing two really important moments because we had to say goodbye and from a distance, in such unusual ways. There is this moment after someone dies, at the graveyard -- that's a moment that many of these families did not have -- this moment at the graveyard when you stand there and you recognize, in a way that you have not recognized before, that when you walk away, this is permanent, you are going to leave and your loved one is not coming with you. And then there's a moment that comes directly after that ... and this is the one that probably hurt the most. It's the moment where the family and friends who are standing at the graveside also come and take the hand of the one who is grieving, put an arm around

their shoulder, walk them to the car, drive them back to the house or to the parish hall, give them a plate to eat, cry with them. And eventually gets to that place where a memory comes and laughter comes and that person who is bereaved recognizes, "I will go on and will go on because of the family and the friends and the community around me."

It's been a year where we've had to learn how to do all that in different ways, we've had to learn how to do it from a distance. And it's important that we tell the story of doing that because it has changed who we are, it has made us different people in community, it has made us different people of faith. We've learned that when we call the names of those who have died, we're telling the story. We say prayers for the family, we are telling the story. When we try to live our life in a way that honors their legacy, we are telling the story. And every time we tell the story, we live into the transformed life that God has for us.

I've been telling this story for years. In this time of pandemic, it has been a complicated story because it is a story of loss and it is also a story of blessing. In the midst of all of this tragedy, extraordinary kindness and compassion has taken place and that too is part of the story that we tell, the story of our transformation at a time when our nation couldn't seem to agree on much. One thing that we agreed on was that people should have something to eat. And we were able to unite around that: all kinds of organizations and people working in ways that they had not worked out, thinking of things that they had not thought of before, trying to make sure that everybody who was hungry had something to eat.

I know in the churches of this diocese, every single food pantry at least doubled the number of people they were serving, some tripled the number of people they were serving, some quadrupled the number of people that they were serving. It changed how we saw ourselves as people in the community, those people who were hungry became a part of our family and it was not

acceptable to us that they be hungry. That is part of the story.

A year ago, when we had to move out of our churches and worship online, it changed who we were, believed with all our hearts: the way that we were able to capture a piece of God's peace, the best way for us to sit in the presence of Jesus was to be in church. And for some people, the only way to do that was in church, in receiving communion. And we have learned in this year that God is everywhere, we can see Jesus in everything. And while we miss communion and we look forward to that time when we can gather and receive Holy Communion together again, we have also discovered that when we pray, Jesus is there. That when we read scripture, the real presence of Jesus is with us. When we lay our hands on another person and ask for God's healing, it is the love and power of Jesus Christ that comes into that prayer and brings healing.

Joan Chittister is a Roman Catholic religious (she's a Sister). She does quite a lot of writing on the spiritual life and in one of her early books (one of my favorites), *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily*, she says you can't just decide, "I'm going to have a spiritual life" or "I'm going to get a paint-by-number spiritual life". She said the way that our spiritual life deepens is we tend to every bit of our life: our work, our relationships, our exercise, our bodies, our friendships, our children, our neighbors, our troubles. We tend to every part of our life, looking for God to be in that with us. And when we're tending to our life, while we're busy looking for God, that's how we become more faithful. That's what grows our spiritual life and that's part of our story, too.

We've discovered this year: as church, we can do more things at a time, we can do more than one thing at a time. We can concentrate on being online and we can concentrate on doing the hard work around ending racism and ending white supremacy. And congregations in our diocese that had never taken that subject on before (and

assumed it was not something that they need to worry about) have rolled up our sleeves and we've done that. At the same time, we've taken care of the lonely and reached out to those who are mourning and made sure that the prayers were said online, in our homes, in person. It's important that we tell that story.

I'm keenly aware, I'm remembering that the nation of Israel, that family of Jacob and Joseph: their story got forgotten and terrible things happened to them. And the story of Israel's freedom is one that is told again and again and again in Hebrew scriptures... and in the New Testament, Jesus tells it, Paul tells it, the disciples tell it.

It's not unusual for people who are the first at something to tell it. And at this year mark of pandemic, it's important for us to tell the story because before we know it, there is going to be this headlong push to move back to what was. And if all you want out of life is what exactly was before, then maybe that works. But for many of us, we've discovered community in a way that we did not know it before. We've discovered our spiritual life in a way we did not know it before. We've discovered that we can make a difference in the world in a way we did not know it before.

So we've got to tell our story -- to ourselves and to each other, so that we honor this experience, that we uphold the memory and we take our transformed selves into the life that God is planning for us next. The time is going to come where our children and our grandchildren (and for me, my nieces and my nephews) are going to ask, "What was the meaning of that time, in 2020, when there was pandemic and protests and distrust and discord? What was God doing in that time?" And we will say to them, "We were people and a church who had gotten lost but God came and brought us out of being lost and into a new life, a new land."

Tell the story.

Amen.

# Diocesan Resources & Announcements

## Clergy ministry transitions

### Departures

- **The Rev. Thomas Murphy**, Rector, St. Paul's, Jersey City and Priest-in-Charge, Incarnation, Jersey City – May 30

## Mental & Spiritual Health Minute: A Prayer of Comfort - St. Patrick's Breastplate

*By the Rev. Dr. Debbie Brewin-Wilson, PhD,  
Episcopal Mental & Spiritual Health Crisis Ministry*

Long before it was versified and set to music for hymnals, *St. Patrick's Breastplate* was part of the Celtic Christian tradition. While we may be more familiar with it as #370 in *The Hymnal 1982*, the original piece dates from the eighth century. It is a prayer known as a *lorica*, the Latin word for “body armor,” referring back to St. Paul’s writings about putting on the armor of God. The *lorica* was to be prayed daily while giving one’s attention fully to God in order to invoke God’s protection.

The Irish name associated with St. Patrick’s Breastplate is *Fáid Fiada*, which means The Deer’s Cry. There’s quite a story associated with it, but a short version is this: King Loegaire wanted to end the spread of Christianity within his territory, so he decided to capture and kill Patrick and his men. Aware of the plot, Patrick blessed his men by praying the *lorica* before they set out on their journey. They were able to walk right past Loegaire’s men without harm because the soldiers saw only a line of stags walking nearby – but the stags were actually Patrick and his men, disguised through God’s protection.

You will find slightly different versions of St. Patrick’s Breastplate if you search, but there are certain portions common to all. A section of the

*lorica* that is similar to other ancient prayers within the Celtic Christian tradition is one that may offer you solace and the awareness of Christ’s presence with you whenever you pray it. You could also create a body prayer by using gestures to accompany each phrase:

*May Christ be with me,  
Christ before me, Christ behind me,  
Christ to my right, Christ to my left,  
Christ where I lie down, Christ where I sit,  
Christ where I stand,  
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of  
me,  
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks  
to me,  
Christ in every eye which looks on me,  
Christ in every ear which hears me.*

(Source: *King of Mysteries: Early Irish Religious Writings* by John Carey. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000, p. 134.)

May St. Patrick’s *lorica* bring you comfort, peace, and a deeper awareness of your connection with Christ.