

Christ Church

Good News & Notes!

Please note that all new information is in red.

Christ Church is an active, joyful, transforming, faith community that practices radical welcome. Together we feed our minds, souls, and bodies with study, worship, and hospitality. We are a growing fellowship of people who seek to love like Jesus.

Of Bones and Flesh

“Prophesy to the breath, prophesy mortal and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. (From Ezekiel 37)

I am amazed at how timely our Lenten scripture is for this extraordinary time we are now traveling. This coming Sunday, we hear from one of my favorite pieces of scripture; we will hear of the Valley of the Dry Bones.

As the winds that carry God’s breath blow through the valley in Ezekiel’s vision, giving life to this vast multitude, we are witness to the great truth that the spirit of God gives life. On this Fifth Sunday in Lent, we stand in the heart of that valley with Ezekiel. As the bones rattle and quake, we hold our breath while a deafening silence descends.

This silence marks the exact moment these brittle bones regain their ropey sinew and supple flesh. Into this silence comes the promise of new life: *“Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.”* The breath of God rides in on the four winds, breaking the silence with a deafening roar. This wind does not cease until this silent multitude has filled its lungs to overflowing with the life-giving power of God’s breath.

We are reminded of Adam and of that wondrous moment that God first blew the breath of life into humanity. In this moment, we know that God is the source of all life and without God’s life-giving spirit, we are but clay or lifeless bone and sinew. Ezekiel’s vision speaks to generation after generation of God’s power to bring life to the lifeless and restore hope to the hopeless.

As we continue to adjust to the new reality of living with the threat of the Coronavirus, Ezekiel’s vision might take on a whole new meaning. As images flow through our televisions and computer

screens of the toll this crisis is taking on our world, we might feel the tug of despair threatening our fragile tendrils of hopefulness.

In such a time as this, it is important to be reminded that God brings the breath of new life. Even in the despairing moments and distant places where abandonment, hopelessness, guilt, and loneliness abide, God is there bringing life out of death.

This is in many ways a time of diaspora and exile. We are all scattered into our various homes and pulled out of the rhythms that create a sense of normalcy. We see humans being exquisitely beautiful as well as people swept up in an undertow of greed and corruption that threatens to wash away the hope of the innocent as well as the guilty. God is in the midst of us. God is, in every moment, ready to breath hope and reconciliation into our desolation.

In difficult times, it is always important to remember that we have all conquered difficult times before, and we learned from them and have tools we can use in these current times as a result. Many of us have stood in that valley ourselves and knew that while sinew and flesh covered our bodies, there was no life left in us... Perhaps the death of a loved one or maybe the pain of a divorce and lost dreams has cast us into a dry and dusty valley...

We remember when we walked through a valley that was littered with what were only the scattered fragments of a life. And the possibility exists that there was nothing cataclysmic or devastating like this current crisis at all. After years living in the promised land of marriage, family or career, many simply open their eyes one morning to the realization that they feel as dry and dusty as dirt inside. They wake to find that the flesh and sinew that covers their bones is nothing more than an empty shell devoid of all hope for the future.

Walking through any one of these valleys with the bones of slain dreams crunching under our feet, God's question rings in our ears: "*Mortal, can these bones live?*" Like Ezekiel, we may only be able to give the question back to God unanswered: "*O Lord GOD, you know.*"

With God, the answer is always yes. Ezekiel delivers the liberating, renewing word of God, and witnesses to God's continuing activity among God's people. Then and now the life-giving breath of God blows through our valleys of desolation and despair, and we are filled once again with life anew.

The breath of God that renews and brings life out of death is not a magical panacea. The world will always know suffering; God does not promise anywhere in the Bible that we are guaranteed happiness or that God's Spirit protects us from ever standing knee-deep in a valley amid the skeletal remains of a life in ruin.

God *does* promise that always and everywhere, *especially* in the valley of despair, God is there with us. God never causes suffering, but God does suffer with us. Because this is true, we can breathe deeply of God's life-giving breath and feel the promise of renewal seeping through our desolation. God's life-giving breath saturates our despair until hope rises once again to the surface. In the end, we do not have to do anything to earn God's gift of renewal and grace. We are simply the beneficiaries of God's desire for God's children to live in joy.

During this time of social distancing, voluntary quarantine and Church-by-YouTube, God is with us; God's breath is flowing into our bodies, and we will rise and be gathered together again soon. *"Prophesy to the breath mortal and say to this breath...O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live..."*

Grace and Peace,

Stephanie+



This Sunday, March 29th is the Last Sunday in Lent...



Parish Life With CORONOVIRUS

Getting Connected

We've met a milestone with our first YouTube Holy Eucharist! Thanks to all of you who watched and helped bring us together as a parish in this time of social distancing and home quarantine. We will get back to being together in our wonderful church building, but it is so gratifying to

know that when needs must, we are doing what we need to do to continue being the Church proper! We will be sending a printable copy of the order of service for you to download as you desire, and, as requested, we are working on our on-line giving capabilities.

I am expanding our opportunities for connection this week with a Zoom Bible Study that is scheduled for this Thursday at 11. If this is successful, we hope to do this weekly until regular church and Adult Forum resumes. Next week, our hope is that we can Zoom our Wednesday worship service at its usual time of 10AM on Wednesday so keep your eyes open to that possibility.

Palm Sunday

Our Palms have arrived! Our hope is to bring you a Palm Sunday service in our YouTube format. To assist in your participation, if you are local, we will announce a time when you can come and pick up some palm fronds. They will be placed on a table outside the Parish Hall door for pick-up, and if you arrive at the same time as someone else, please either form a good socially-distanced line or remain in your vehicles until your turn. We have the palms so it is a shame to waste them! And remember, if you hold onto your palms until we are together again, Stephanie will collect them and burn them on Shrove Tuesday 2021 for our Ash Wednesday service.

Holy Week

We are hoping to bring you YouTubed Holy Week services for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday—and possibly even an Easter Vigil!

To this end, please send in your donations and memorials for the Easter lilies. We still hope our altar at the church will be festooned with these flowers for our YouTube Easter service.

Worship on Sundays

A very small group of us, with proper social distancing, will continue to film the Eucharistic liturgy with music, and we will again be sending you a link to YouTube that everyone is invited to watch beginning at 10:30 Sunday morning so we will all be watching at the same time. A bulletin is being emailed out for this Sunday. If you do not get a copy, please check your spam file and then contact the office so one can be sent.

Facebook

Facebook actually provides some of the easiest ways to gather our community electronically and we could do several things using their platform.

If you have an existing Facebook account and would like to capitalize on the possibilities there, please search “Rector Stephanie” and issue me a friend request. Also, please search “Christ Church Episcopal - Sparta NC” and ask to join the group.

I will be checking and posting information. If we gather enough people who want to participate, I will be offering multiple opportunities to “gather” including possibly Wednesday worship, and I will also be posting videos with different information and content.

ZOOM

Zoom is a visual way to gather and has possibilities for us to have our regular meetings like Vestry, Finance, or even Adult Forums and Wednesday worship.

What can we do right now?

Pray, laugh, call someone who might be lonely, ‘friend’ Rector Stephanie on Facebook, eat, tell someone “I love you.” Write a note to Julie Ottesen in Life Care Center in Banner Elk and Carolyn Duranko at Grayson Nursing and Rehab. Tell them they are not forgotten. Send in your pledge or financial gift.

The possibilities are several. Most of all, be safe, take the guidelines seriously, and expect the best of the human family right now. Yes, some people are always going to take advantage so be wary of anything that feels like a scam, but as Fred Rogers always said in difficult or frightening times, “Look for the helpers.”

So many of you are helpers, and I know it feels a bit futile right now, but you are helping most by staying home, being safe, and stopping or at least curbing the spread of this virus. People are responding in loving and compassionate ways all over the globe, and we can add to that happy number by loving one another all the way through to the other side.

Be patient as we try and learn these “new to us” technologies, and we will discover something new and wonderful together. I’ll say it again, God is good all of the time and each of you are God’s beloveds.

I do not have any idea when we will be able to gather again, but let’s measure our expectations and resolve to keep on keeping on no matter what!



Memorial / Thanksgiving Easter Lilies



Remember those you love by placing an Easter Lily in the Church for Easter. Gifts can be made “in thanksgiving for” or “in memory of”. Because of recommendations to stay at home and rather than coming by the church for a form, we ask that you **EMAIL** the office at ccepiscopal@skybest.com with the following information:

I'd like to make a contribution for a lily in memory of: _____ or in thanksgiving for: _____. Include your name and the amount of the contribution you plan to mail in. The mailing address is: Christ Episcopal Church, PO Box 1866, Sparta, NC 28675.

The **DEADLINE** to email this information to the church is **NEXT Tuesday, March 31st**. If you have any questions, please call the office at 336.372.7983.



Schedule

Sunday, March 29 – Fifth/Last Sunday in Lent

No Adult Forum

10:30 am – Holy Eucharist – pre-recorded and available on YouTube

Wednesday, April 1

10:00 am – stay tuned for how we might do this!



Please remember that the prayer lists are updated each month. If you'd like for an individual to remain on the list, please let Mary know prior to the end of the month.

Please pray for...

Intercessions: Amy Jones, Ben & Laura Davis, Brenda Weems, Carolyn Duranko, Chuck & Sally Besaw, Daniel & Frances Buckle, Father Stan McGraw & Jean McGraw, Fred Pfaender, Jonathan, Julie Ottesen, and Lorene Ramsey (John Blackwell's mother). Also, pray for all those affected by the COVID-19 epidemic

Departed:

Birthdays: Bruce Smith (March 30), Frank Hazard (March 31)

Wedding Anniversaries and Other Thanksgivings:



✓ Check out our website at www.christchurchalleghany.org

✓ "Like" us on Facebook at "Christ Church Episcopal – Sparta, NC"

✓ "Like" the "Rector Stephanie" Facebook page



Spring Photos from our backyard...



DOG AND CAT FOOD FOR SHELTER/SAVE-A-PET



In our ongoing desire to elevate and embrace God's desire that we care and nurture the created order (meaning animals and all of the elements in nature), **you are invited to bring your donations of dog and cat food for Save-a-Pet and the Animal Shelter.** Food is an ever-present and on-going demand on the Shelter's resources and anything we do can make a huge and positive impact. Thank you for your participation in this tender mercy.



Solid Rock Food Closet – Ongoing needs:



Please give as you're able. There are so many people in this county that don't know where their next meal is coming from, and the Solid Rock Food Closet helps fill the gap. Items that are

especially needed are:

- white rice, 1 lb.
- dry pintos, 1 lb.
- spaghetti, 1 lb.
- spaghetti sauce

peanut butter
canned soup (tomato, chicken)

ANY DRY/CANNED GOOD YOU WISH TO DONATE WILL BE APPRECIATED!

Personal items are also needed:

shampoo
soap (laundry, dish soap, personal soap)
toilet paper
toothpaste
etc.

PLEASE PUT YOUR DONATED ITEMS IN THE FOOD CLOSET WAGON AT THE CHURCH.



Saving Box Tops for Education coupons!



In the past, there was a small round box on the Information table labeled “Box Tops for Education” and those saved coupons were being used by the local schools. A parishioner recently brought some Box Tops for Education coupons to the office and after sending them to the local school system, Christ Church received a letter of appreciation and urging to continue saving Box Tops. Sparta Elementary is able to turn in the Box Tops coupons for money that pays for supplies and books. A number of products that we routinely purchase at the grocery store have Box Tops attached so watch for them. And now you have a choice! You can clip out the coupon and drop it in the small round box on the Information table (Mary will collect monthly and send in) OR you can look for the NEW labels that allow you to scan your receipt and direct the coupon to the school of your choosing. This is another easy way to give back to the community!



Please continue to donate your empty prescription pill bottles!



Please continue to recycle your prescription bottles with lids and with the labels pulled off. The recycling box for the bottles is on the floor between the mail slots and the Information table.

****PLEASE NOTE...these prescription pill bottles are being donated to the local veterinary office/shelter. Supplement/vitamin bottles or anything OTHER THAN prescription bottles are not able to be used.** Many thanks for your continued help! It makes a difference!!



If you have any questions regarding **anything building or grounds related**, please contact **Gary Medley** with your concern. He can be reached at 336.372.7464 or gapdweller@gmail.com.



The Food & Fellowship Person of the Month for March is: **Deb Donaldson**. She can be reached at 336.372.7573 or sld1400@aol.com.



The Vestry Person of the Month for January is: **Jann Boggs**. She can be reached at 727.641.4925 or jeepers57peepers@gmail.com.



For Urgent Prayer Requests...

...contact Gary Medley. Please be sure to get permission to share any details for the prayers. Also, if you would like to be listed as an Urgent Prayer Partner, please let Gary know.



Great thanks & peace,

Gary Medley

gapdweller@gmail.com 336.372.7464



Please continue to pray for all the staff and prisoners at River North Correctional Center, Independence, VA. They are incredibly vulnerable given their close proximity to one another. Because of COVID-19, no volunteer chaplains are allowed inside, and thus, there are no specific prayer requests.



Church Office hours are Monday-Thursday, 11:15 am to 3:45 pm, except on holidays. The office is closed on Fridays.

The *Good News & Notes* is updated/reviewed/finalized on Wednesdays, and will be emailed out on Wednesday afternoons, if possible. If you have a submission, please make sure you email it to Mary **no later than Wednesday at noon.**