

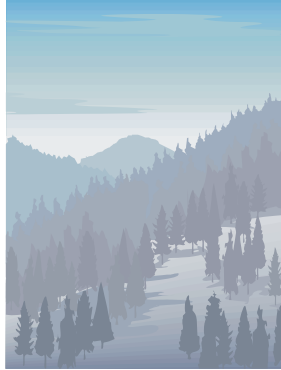


St. Mark's Epistle

April 2008

View from the Mountain...

I have a lovely little book that I found in a library discard book sale. This book, smaller in size than a post card, was buried in a box filled with books on etiquette, how to fold napkins, and everything you need to know about throwing a great party. I was looking for some "how to" books and Emily Post seemed of more practical value to me, but there was something about this gem of a book that wouldn't let me hide it again in the clutter of the box. The book, titled *The Cloud of Unknowing*, is a devotional classic of early English mystical writing composed between 1345 and 1386 by an anonymous author. Written for someone seeking to enter a life of contemplation, the author describes God as dwelling in a cloud of darkness and the movement of a person into the darkness that hides God. The author says that in order to see and find God, one must pierce the darkness with "with a sharp dart of longing love." Although not a guide for how to live a conventional life, this is a book that opens a way toward truly living a practical life: a life centered in God.



The author writes in one section of the book about the "contemplatives and the actives," as a meditation on the gospel story of Mary and Martha of Bethany (Luke 10:38-42). Given the nature of this book, the contemplative lifestyle is favored by this writer. What I find interesting is that the author invites the reader to attend to the contemplation of God in all aspects of life, and that there is nothing higher in this life than a life centered in prayer in the midst of one's activities.

There's a song that was once popular (sung by Peggy Lee) called, "Is that all there is?" That's a question we ask when we lose our center and we no longer remember what it is to be in deep conversation with God. I think the story of Mary and Martha helps us to refocus, so that we're mindful of that which is most important - our relationship with God. It's not a condemnation of an active lifestyle, just a statement that we can miss out on the **good** part of life by our failure to attend to the presence of God in our midst.

In our last Vestry meeting, the parish leadership reflected on the recent training event for Wardens and parish leaders. More than one person told of how the workshop on **Centering Prayer** seemed to answer a very basic need for finding balance between the contemplative and the active. There was a consensus that we'd like to intentionally form a group at St. Mark's that would gather on a regular basis to practice Centering Prayer. For me this is answered prayer, I have longed for members of this parish to express such a desire but I've not made push toward implementing such a group until now. I know that for such a group to be successful in a parish our size, it has to be organic to the group; that is, surface from among the membership rather than as a program instituted by the official parish leader, without prior expressed interest. It took going to a diocesan training event, experiencing something new in a different setting for folks to articulate a need and means by which to respond to their own desire to pierce *the darkness with a sharp dart of longing love*; that is, further develop a Christ-centered life.

~Ellen+

(See the description of Centering Prayer that follows this article & stay tuned for more information as we gather more energy around the practice of Centering Prayer.)

Centering Prayer...

Centering Prayer is a method of prayer which prepares us to receive the gift of God's presence, traditionally called contemplative prayer. It consists of opening our minds and hearts - our whole being - to God by connecting to our interior silence.

Centering Prayer facilitates the movement from more active modes of prayer - verbal, mental or affective prayer - into a receptive prayer of resting in God. It emphasizes prayer as a personal relationship with God. At the same time, it is a discipline to foster and serve this relationship by a regular, daily practice of prayer. It is Trinitarian in its source, Christ-centered in its focus, and ecclesial in its effects; that is, it builds communities of faith.

Centering Prayer, that is, Christian contemplative prayer, is drawn from ancient prayer practices of the Christian contemplative heritage, notably the Fathers and Mothers of the Desert of the early church, *Lectio Divina*, (praying the scriptures), *The Cloud of Unknowing*, St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila. It was distilled into a simple method of prayer in the 1970's by three Trappist monks, Fr. William Meninger, Fr. Basil Pennington and Abbot Thomas Keating at the Trappist Abbey, St. Joseph's Abbey, in Spencer, Massachusetts.

Web-Resources: www.centeringprayer.com;
www.the_centering.org; www.kyrie.com

Episcopal Resources in the Berkshires: The Servant Leadership Training Center of the Berkshires' Core Curriculum as well as seasonal "Quiet-Day Retreats."
Spring Quiet Day Retreat, 26 April, 10 am - 1 pm at St. Helena's Chapel, 245 New Lenox Rd, Lenox MA. The retreat will be based on art, scripture, silence & walking. The Reverend Hannah Anderson will be the retreat leader. Suggested donation: \$10. Refreshments will be offered. Make your reservation by calling 413-637-1483.

Each Week in our Parish...

Sunday, 9 am: Worship with Holy Eucharist
Children's Faith Formation
10:30 am: Youth Catechism Class (following the coffee fellowship on alternating Sundays)
Monday, 2 pm: Knit 'n Stitch Prayer Ministry*
Wednesday, 9:30 am: Morning Worship at the Millhouses in Adams
6:30 pm Wednesday, Lectionary Bible Study**
*in the Parish House

Vestry Hi-Lites...

In our last Vestry meeting, the parish leadership reflected on the recent training event for Wardens and parish leaders. More than one person told of how the workshop on Centering Prayer seemed to answer a very basic need for finding balance between the contemplative and the active. There was a consensus that we'd like to intentionally form a group at St. Mark's that would gather on a regular basis to practice Centering Prayer.

St. Mark's is co-sponsoring a Hospitality/Visitors Workshop w/St. John's in North Adams on March 29th. Fred Nicholaev, our Senior Warden, is working with the Senior Warden from St. John's on organizing a Pot Luck event with other parishes in the area to discuss possible ideas for mutual ministry. More will be coming on this idea at a later date.

Our Adult Lectionary Study is now meeting on Wednesday evenings at 6:30 pm in the Parish House.

We decided to form a memorial campaign to honor Fr. Arthur Parker by raising money to purchase new altar linens for St. Mark's. Something he had always wanted to do while he was our Rector. Karen DeOrdio is chairing this effort with help from Nancy Main and Brian Johnson. More info will be forthcoming later in the month.

We are still waiting for bids on building the handicap ramp...Frank Palano, Jr. Warden, will follow up on this effort. New door handles have been installed on both restrooms in the parish house.

We have a lot of events coming up...please see the list that follows and mark your calendars now!

~Karen DeOrdio, Clerk

Up-Coming Events...

Saturday, April 12, 10 am: Liturgical Assistants Training/Refresher Course: If you are interested in becoming a Lay Eucharistic Minister (LEM) and/or Acolyte, please speak with Pastor Ellen before the training event. Children and youth, 12 yrs. & older are especially invited to become acolytes. Adults, 18 +, will learn the duties of being a Server/Crucifer/Chalice Bearer as well as be expected to participate in the Lay Reading ministry of the parish. **All current LEMs and Acolytes are expected to attend. Inquirers are invited to observe and check out what being a liturgical assistant requires and to see if this is something you'd like to give your time and attention to as a ministry in the parish.**

Saturday, April 19: Support St. Mark's Marchers Relay for Life Team:

On this day, from 1-3 pm, there will be a Tupperware Fundraiser. The Relay for Life will be held Friday-Saturday, May 30-31, beginning at 6 pm, at Noel Field in North Adams. Our goal is to raise \$1,000 toward helping to find a cure for breast cancer. Sign up to walk and/or make a financial pledge of support for those who make the walk.

Contact Person: Carol Tetlow, at 743-0787 or by e-mail at: crt0524@yahoo.com

Sunday, April 20: Earth Day Recognition at St. Mark's: Dinner and a Movie 5 pm: Featuring Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth." We will begin with a film for our younger members while we share a covered dish supper, followed by the feature film. Invite your friends and family to join you at this event.

Tuesday, April 22-May 13: Three Simple Rules Workshop

Beginning Tuesday, April 22 and running on subsequent Tuesday at 6:30 pm through May 13. This workshop provides an uncomplicated approach to understanding finances in an effort to help participant ease financial difficulties in their lives and bring about greater stewardship of their God-given resources. *The Three Simple Rules Workshop is open to all members of the parish and the community! More details will be coming at a later date.*

Contact Person: JoAnn Gagne, 743-7277 or via e-mail at: jgagne5858@aol.com

Saturday, May 3, 10 am: Altar Guild Training and Refresher Course: If you are interested in possibly becoming a member of the Altar Guild, please speak with Chris Emerson (743-3874) or Pastor Ellen. Inquirers are invited to observe and check out what being an altar guild member requires to see if this is something you'd like to give your time and attention to as a ministry in the parish.

Saturday, May 3, 10 am: Lay Reader Training/Refresher Course: If you are interested in becoming a Lay Reader, please speak with Pastor Ellen prior to the training event. **All LEMs are expected to have this training as well as those who only serve as Lay Readers.** Inquirers are invited to observe

and check out what being a Lay Reader requires and to see if this is something you'd like to give your time and attention to as a ministry in the parish.

Sunday, May 9, Annual Parish Breakfast:

This year the Annual Breakfast falls on Pentecost, which is also Mother's Day. The breakfast will follow our 9 am service. If you are interested in helping with the food preparation for this event, please call Frank Palano at 743-0363 or by e-mail:

fpalano@roadrunner.com.

Saturday, June 7, St. Mark's "Spring into Summer Festival:" On this day we will host a celebration of spring and coming summer season. As a fund raiser for the parish, we will feature a sale of plants; baked breads, cakes, pies & pastries; a "Chance Auction" (otherwise known as a Chinese auction); quilt raffle; arts & crafts; food & drink; and activities for children. We will soon be asking for volunteers to help set up/clean up, in addition to making donations of time and talent - so, be looking for the sign-up sheet or contact Pastor Ellen to volunteer. If you will be thinning out your plants this spring and would like to donate "pass-along plants," please contact Emma Morin at 743-5613.

Saturday, June 19: St. Mark's Annual Parish Picnic Mark your calendar now, details will be coming along at a later date!

Newsletter Submission Deadline: Please remember that the deadline for submitting items for the newsletter is the **15th OF THE MONTH!** Hardcopy can be left in the Newsletter Mailbox in the parish office; snail mail to Karen DeOrdio, 14 Bradford St, North Adams MA 01247, or e-mail to both of the following: k.j.deordio@mcla.edu AND stmarksadams@verizon.net.

If you'd like to have a copy of the monthly newsletter sent by mail to your home, please inform the parish office (743-0947); otherwise, you can pick up a copy at church or view it on the St. Mark's webpage: www.stmarksadams.com

St. Mark's Episcopal Church
PO Box 191 39 Commercial St.
Adams MA 01220
The Rev. R. Ellen White, Priest-in-Charge

Servant Leadership Training Center of the Berkshires

Servant Leadership I: Foundations for Growth and Transformation

Tuesdays: Beg. April 1st, 2008; 9:30 - 11:30am, St. Stephen's, Episcopal Church

Tuesdays: Beg. April 1st, 2008: 6:30 - 8:30pm, Christ Church/Trinity Lutheran, Sheffield

Wednesday's: Beg. April 2nd, 2008; 6:30-8:30am, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

Saturday's: April 5th, 26th and May 3rd, 9:00-3:30pm, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

Intensive Introduction to Servant Leadership I. We will complete at least 3 classes session.

Servant leadership is a paradoxical term which illuminates the true nature of genuine leadership at every level of life (workplace, community, family, church and world) and also brings us to the very heart of Christian discipleship, the way of Jesus. Servant leadership, as a radical redefinition of power and the nature of leadership, offers a compelling model for contemporary Christian living and a spiritual path that connects faith with daily life. In this course, we explore central themes of servant leadership-communion, community, compassion, call, money and power-and their interrelatedness, providing a context for spiritual practice and introduction to other Core classes.

Suggested Donation \$25.00