

“UP AGAIN OLD HEART!”

A SERMON PREACHED AT SAINT JOHN’S PARISH, MAY 28, 2006

THE REV. FRED FENTON*

**Fred is a parishioner, and a “regular” guest preacher at Saint John’s. We were delighted to hear and enjoy his fine message last Sunday! jf+*

Texts appointed for the Sunday after the Ascension

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over the course of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. ‘This’, he said, ‘is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’ So when they had come together, they asked him, ‘Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He replied, ‘It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.’ Acts 1:1-11

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. Ephesians 1:15-23

Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went out and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it. After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them. Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it. Mark 16:9-15, 19-20

Good morning. Isn’t this a beautiful day? Remember all the rain we had last Sunday? During my years in parish ministry, people would sometimes ask if I would do something to keep rain from spoiling an upcoming event. I usually replied: “I wish I could help you with the weather. However, I’m not in management, I’m in sales.”

Acting in the latter capacity, I invite you on this last Sunday of Easter to think with me about how we can bring the spirit of Easter, its triumphant joy, into our lives as Christians.

During the time his people in South Africa suffered under the evil system of apartheid, Desmond Tutu, the Anglican archbishop, was asked how he could maintain hope. Giving one of his merry laughs, he said: “The government has already lost!” The Archbishop was not referring to the political or military situation in South Africa. He was thinking of the Cross and the Empty Tomb.

How can you and I have that same Easter joy in the face of adversity?

I think today’s lesson from Acts contains an important clue. On Easter Day, and for a short period following, the followers of Jesus had mystical, beautiful, haunting, and wonderful experiences of the Risen Lord—experiences that convinced them God had raised Jesus from the dead. In the midst of rejoicing, they remained uncertain about the future. Some thought Jesus would return during their lifetime. Others thought God would now restore the kingdom to Israel.

After some years of thinking and praying about this, the Early Church came to a conclusion. In the first chapter of Acts, verses 7 and 8, the Risen Lord is made to say:

“It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

In other words, we are not to spend our time worrying about when the Lord will come again. We are to make ourselves witnesses to the unconditional love and forgiveness shown on the Cross, and work for the spread of God’s reign of peace and justice in the world. I believe it is in doing this that we discover our true joy, the joy of God’s Easter people in the world.

Hymn 174, one of our Easter hymns, contains these words:

“Easter triumph, Easter joy,
these alone do sin destroy.
From sin’s power do thou set free
souls newborn, O Lord, in thee.”

What is sin but self-absorption--putting ourselves and our needs at the center of our lives. Sin’s power is broken when we look beyond ourselves, when we see the needs of others, and reach out to them.

In his essay on Experience, Ralph Waldo Emerson says we don’t long remember the events of our everyday lives; but when we are alone with our thoughts, we see truths we will take with us into future worlds. Emerson ends by saying “Never mind the ridicule, never mind the defeat: up again, old heart!”

That, for me, is the spirit of Easter. Why should we give in to fear and anxiety? God has triumphed in the Cross and the Empty Tomb. We can move forward with confidence. We are called to be witnesses to God’s unconditional love and forgiveness and to work for the spread of God’s reign of peace and justice in the world. “Never mind the ridicule, never mind the defeat: up again, old heart!”

Bishop Gordon, Third Bishop of Alaska, enjoyed making pastoral visits. However, he was afraid of the dogs kept by many of his people. Once, when visiting an Eskimo family in an igloo, he was relieved to find the pet dog welcoming toward him. When everyone sat down to eat, this dog suddenly began growling and biting at the Bishop’s boots. “Don’t worry about the dog,” said his host. “You are eating out of his dish.”

“Never mind the ridicule, never mind the defeat: up again old heart!”

Mary Eunice Oliver, a lifelong Episcopalian and a dear friend of ours, was for many years a liberal activist in the San Diego area. When a group of Japanese Buddhist monks came to take part in the first leg of a cross-country peace march, the organizers asked Mary Eunice to house the head monk and a Japanese-American couple serving as his interpreters in her home in Pacific Beach.

On the day of the march, the monks gathered at the top of Mount Soledad for opening ceremonies. The media were present. Highlight of the event was to be the release of some white doves, which would soar into the blue sky as a symbol of peace.

It was raining that day—something unusual in San Diego—and when the doves were released, instead of soaring into the sky, they hopped on the ground and scurried under TV vans to escape the rain. The ruin of their plans did not seem to disturb the monks. They giggled and laughed.

“Never mind the ridicule, never mind the defeat: up again, old heart!”

The march began outside the 11th Naval District Headquarters. Mary Eunice, veteran of many civil rights marches, decided to walk at least part of the way with the monk who had been a guest in her home. However, he had brought a small drum, which he used to set a fast pace for his monks. Soon, Mary Eunice fell back to the rear of the column.

At this point, her new friend danced out from the head of the march and, looking back, held up his drum to her. Mary Eunice took the cross from her neck and held it up in reply.

That is how we make our witness as Christians. We march with brothers and sisters of good will toward the goal of peace and justice for all, holding up the symbol of our salvation, the Cross of unconditional love and forgiveness. In this way we bring the spirit of Easter into our lives. We discover our joy.

Mary Eunice is still at it. She is 84 years old now, and lives in Homer, Alaska. A few weeks ago, with snow and ice on the ground, Mary Eunice attended an ecumenical peace meeting in Homer. Leaving her walker behind, she planned to lean on the arm of a woman friend. The path to the building where the gathering was held was so narrow her friend had to walk behind her, giving support as best she could.

After the meeting, it was dark and the path was slippery. A man offered to walk in front of Mary Eunice. She held on to his waist. Her friend came behind, holding on to Mary Eunice. Mary Eunice told me later that if they had been seen stumbling along that path no one would have thought the three of them had been at a peace event.

“Never mind the ridicule, never mind the defeat: up again, old heart!”

A young woman with the light of heaven on her face and a smile that would warm any heart worked as my office administrator in Santa Monica. She also headed the liturgical dance group in Southern California and danced at some of our liturgies.

I never will forget the Sunday morning she danced the people’s offerings--the bread and wine and water, and the money gifts--to the altar. She moved with such grace and beauty we were helped to see the solemn importance of the offertory as the first move in the dance that is the Mass.

Once, we were having a small group Bible study. The subject was the parable of the Prodigal Son. This young woman surprised us by saying: “That’s my story! I am the prodigal.” She went on to say that raised in a good, Christian home, she had gone through a period of rebellion and “acted out” in ways that were injurious to her health, including the use of hard drugs. Deathly ill, and sick of it all, she returned to her parents’ home unannounced. She had no idea what their reaction would be.

The parents gave her steadfast love and support. They had the family doctor examine her. He told them, privately, that he was not sure her life could be saved. The young woman told us that if she had met with rejection when she dragged herself home, she would not have survived. Her family’s unconditional love and forgiveness made the difference.

“It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

“Easter triumph, Easter joy,
these alone do sin destroy.
From sin’s power do thou set free
souls newborn, O Lord, in thee.”

“Never mind the ridicule, never mind the defeat: up again, old heart!”

All of us are sinners. All have missed the mark. As Christians we are not to stand in judgment on others but to love them unconditionally as we have been loved, to forgive them as we have been forgiven, and to work with them for the spread of God’s reign of peace and justice in the world. Only then will we have the joy of Easter in our hearts.

Amen.

PARISH WEEKLY PRAYER LIST

Please enter or re-enter any special prayers of petition, intercession or thanksgiving in the PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE intercessory book on the lectern near the double doors of the sanctuary. The intercessor will include them in Sunday worship; they will also be remembered in parish daily prayers throughout the week by those leading daily Prayer services. (More weekday volunteers needed once per month; inquire with the Rector.) Requests normally remain on the prayer list one or two weeks in most categories unless notified otherwise.

FOR THOSE WHO ARE ILL AND/OR RECOVERING [(name) = parish members with request]: *Week of May 28th:* Mary Spellman (Spellman's), *Week of May 21st:* Kristy (Kathy Rosen), Betty McCauley (McCauley family), *Week of May 14th:* Charlene Bayles, Patrick Sheehy (John & Germaine Bennison), Clement (Naomi Chamberlain), Evelyn Murray, Janice Walsh, Dave Brauer (Jackie Waterson), Tom Tuohey (Tuohey's), Karly (Samantha Tuohey), *Week of May 7th:* Beth Ferrnte, Anne Mahler, *Week of April 30th:* Wendy Conte, Nancy Spellman, *Week of April 23rd:* Kathie Alcorn (Cyndie Harris), Gini Doty (Doty), Mark, Kathleen (Jackie Waterson), *Week of April 16th:* Jill Evans, Kim Toler, Aunt Barbara (Lori & Jack Ray), Annie & Cody Peterson *Week of April 9th:* Harry Bowers (John Bennison).. *And for all families, friends and all who care for them or abide with them.*

FOR THOSE IN LONG-TERM NEED & CARE, ESPECIALLY: Ruth Ann Yates (Ernie & Mary), Rachel Bridges, Eli, Sherri Tennant (Michelle Smith), George (Barbara Fogerson), Ruth Ann Nolan (Jack & Lori Ray), Jim Cole, Katelyn Grubich (Nathan & Rhiana), Rachel Bridges, Joseph (Suzanne Howard), Chris Bancroft (Carole Mason), David and family, Diane Mahler (Dick & Beryl), Patrice Zettner (Suzanne Howard), JoAnne Parsonage, Richard Braun, Alpha Litz (Charlene & Kristin Bayles), Eric Batchelder, Tom, Don (Tuohey's), Clint Ingram & Nancy Grainger (Belluomini family), Kyle McWhirter & Doris Lambert (Lori & Jack Ray), Marjorie (Barbara Fogerson), Betty Barnes, Rose Cunningham (Shirley Adams), Cecily, Benny Hidalgo, James Piccolo (Sherrie Hidalgo), June Taylor, Lee Grimm, Nina, John Bloom, Marylye Johnson, Jean Kifer (Grimm family), Art Waterson, Deen Parrish & Jill Beddecarre (Tamara Steiner), Flo Roberts, Suzanne Widmar, Kathy Carr, Virginia Longacre (Marianne Crosby). *And for all families, friends and all who care for them or abide with them.*

FOR THE TERMINALLY ILL OR DYING, ESPECIALLY: Nancy Liechty (Susan & Phil Coulston), Duane Pinkerton, Pat Rogers (Lori & Jack Ray), Baylor (Michelle Smith). **FOR THOSE SERVING IN THE ARMED FORCES:** Randy Vincent, Josh Hallmark (Limrite's), Mike Ferriera, Kenneth Hougey (Cindy Molander), Matt Rossoni (Rossoni's), Eric Doty, Malin Johnson, Travis Schweizer (Whitehurst); and all others known and unknown to us, their families, and all who suffer and grieve as a result of armed conflict.

FOR OTHER CONCERNS, CARE & SUPPORT: Ray, Dona, Craig & Fiana Roberts (Tom & Flo Roberts), Barbara Johnson (Bev Price), Joe, Dan, Nickolas Durso (John & Germaine Bennison), Gloria (Naomi Chamberlain), Sarah

Mahler-Newton, Justin, Melissa & David Mason (school concerns, Suzanne Howard), Rosslyn, Colette, Nick, Shon & Edric, Nancy Dinsmore (safe travel / returning to Holy Land), Roseanne (Karen), Foster family (Suzanne Howard), James Fester, Rose Bloom (Grimm family), Andrew (Jackie Waterson), JD Howard (Howard family). *So fill our hearts, O Lord, with your abiding care and love.*

FOR THE HUMAN FAMILY, and all who minister with compassion to the needs of body, mind and spirit. For the relief of pandemic diseases. For all who suffer from natural disaster. For all who suffer from violence, terrorism, and armed conflict. For the safety of humanitarian relief workers. For the eradication of hatred, racism intolerance or injustice in our nation; and ethnic conflicts around the world. For the good earth God has given us, and for the wisdom and will to conserve it. For our enemies. For peacemakers and peacekeepers in the family of nations. For peace in our world. For peace in our lives.

WE REMEMBER & GIVE THANKS FOR OUR SHARED MINISTRY WITH THE DIOCESE OF CALIFORNIA, AND ALL MINISTRIES IN THIS PARISH: For the perpetual renewal and transformation of the vision and mission of our own parish, its growth and nurture, building upon the sure foundation of our Lord, Jesus Christ. For a faithful Pentecost season

IN ANTICIPATION of the birth of a child to all families known to us, including: Christina Caughlan & spouse, Danna & Ted Coleman (June '06 - Grimm's), Lou & Tanya Dwyer (Aug '06 - Carole Mason), Rebecca & Will Campbell (9/06), Jennifer & Rick H. (9/06 - Suzanne Howard), Michelle & Jimmy Campbell (10/06), Ruth & Jesse (11/06 - Case Family).

Confirm their joy & anticipation, O Lord, by a lively sense of your presence with them.

IN ANTICIPATION of the marriage of: Dan Jordan & Casey Cabarrus.

Look upon this man and woman who seek your blessing that they may honor and keep the promises and vows they make.

FOR THOSE TO BAPTIZED June 4th: Claire Riley Chislett.

Let us pray for these persons who are to receive the sacrament of new birth.

FOR THOSE YOUTH CONSIDERING CONFIRMATION June 10th: Nick Murelli, Megan Rosen, Eric Jordan, William Howard, and Josh Case.

Let us pray for these persons who will renew and confirm their baptismal vows.

FOR THOSE CELEBRATING BIRTHDAYS: including:

June 5 - John Capraro, Nathan Limpus
June 7 - J.D. Howard
June 10 - Ann Ferrante, Gene Molander

Grant that they may grow in faith, wisdom and grace, all their days.

AND FOR THOSE CELEBRATING ANNIVERSARIES: including:

June 4 - Steve & Carol Jordan
June 6 - Dwayne & Maria Ferriera
June 8 - Lee & Wanda Grimm

Give them wisdom, devotion, forbearance, support, joy & affection, in their life together.

If we miss your birthday or anniversary, check with the church office to be sure we have a Member Data Information Form on file for you!

Notice to our parish friends and members: For your privacy, certain portions of our parish website containing personal contact information, etc. is now password-protected for parish members only. To get your password and full access to our site, contact the church by email: info@saintjohnsparish.org.

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L A B E L



Wear something RED! for Pentecost this Sunday!



NEWSWEEK

A NEWSLETTER OF SAINT JOHN'S PARISH, SUNDAY JUNE 4, 2006

NEWS & NOTES

Last minute reminder!

"Beat the Summer Heat"
1/2-Work Day property pruning and clean up is set for **tomorrow, Saturday, June 3rd, 8 AM - 11 AM.** Please come pitch in and help for an hour or two. Hot coffee and donuts at 8!



This Sunday afternoon: Canto Bello Handbell "Spring Ring" - including *Heartsong*, the Bay Area Women's Ensemble set for Sunday afternoon, June 4th, 3:00 PM, Clayton Valley Presbyterian Church. Gourmet dessert reception! Free will donation will support fundraising tour to benefit Isubilo Orphanage in Zambia.

Election Day Coffee Hosts are needed. Can you help next week? June 6th there'll be three voting precincts in the parish hall, with parish members serving as clerks in our adopt-a-poll fundraising project. We like to serve complimentary coffee to our neighbors/visitors who stream through throughout the day. If you're available for a shift, just to offer a cup and a "Hello," please notify the church office, and you'll be contacted with details. Thank you!

Summer Monthly Book Club for June: Join us for a fun-filled dinner and discussion. June 25th, 6-9 PM, hosted by Germaine. Selection for this month is *The Year of Magical Thinking*, a memoir by Joan Didion, her attempt to make sense of the weeks and months that followed the personal tragedies that "cut loose her ideas about marriage, children, death, illness...about life itself." Contact Jane Rossoni.

Last call for graduates!

Are you having an important "graduation" in your life (High School, college, special course of study or other significant "passage")? We want to acknowledge and inform the parish of your achievement! Call or email the church to add your name to a list to be published in *next week's edition* of NEWSWEEK!



Parish Youth, Sophie Rossoni, seeks sponsors for the AIDS Walk in San Francisco on July 16th. "This is a very important issue to me so I have set an ambitious fundraising goal. I want to do as much as I can to make a difference in the lives of men, women, and children affected by HIV and AIDS. Will you please consider sponsoring me? I will be at church on Sunday, and you can sign up to help then or contact me through the church directory and I can tell you how to donate online! Thank you, in advance, for your help. *Sophie Rossoni*"



"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (John 20:19-23)

PENTECOST CELEBRATION THIS SUNDAY!

Pentecost celebrates the outpouring of the Spirit of God upon us, the living body of Christ, the Church. It is the third most important day in the Church Year, right behind the incarnation of God at Christmas and the resurrection of Christ at Easter.

In the account recorded in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles (chapter 2) the Spirit alights upon the first followers of the Christ, and their tongues are loosed to utter the good news of the gospel in intelligible ways to those who once were alien to the living Word of God.

The gift of God's Spirit is always and ultimately the gift of God's creative life-giving, and life-renewing presence. Words like forgiveness, new life, love, peace are all words of this Spirit.

Yet among the scripture texts appointed for this day, the Jesus of John's gospel says these puzzling lines, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." What, on earth, does that mean? Sunday's preacher will wrestle with and share his thoughts, as well as the thoughts of others with a sermon entitled, "Catch & Release."

We'll enjoy welcoming a new member into the body of Christ through the sacrament of baptism at the ten o'clock service. We'll celebrate the gifts of the Spirit of God upon us all! Wear red, the color for Pentecost!

Pledge Report for May holding the line!

Pledging households will find their monthly statement of giving through Sunday, May 28th, enclosed with this newsletter. As always, please review it and report any discrepancies to the church office. Altogether, here's where we stand at this point:

| | |
|---|------------------|
| Budgeted / anticipated pledge receipts: | \$ 67,454 |
| Actual pledge receipts: | \$ <u>67,311</u> |
| Shortfall/Difference | \$ 142 - |

A generosity of spirit continues at Saint John's, reflected in many ways, including our regular pledge commitments of financial support for our parish ministry. We urge any individual member households who may have slipped behind to catch up, as you are able. We thank all for sharing and giving "a portion of all we have received." As we head into our slower, summer months, be sure to make your offerings on a regular basis; or even ahead of time if you'll be away!! Thank you!

Forward in Faith ...

THE FEAST OF PENTECOST



June 4, 2006

8:00 AM - Holy Eucharist Rite I
9:00 AM - Confirmation Class
10:00 AM - Holy Eucharist Rite II,

Celebrant & Preacher
The Rev. John Wm. Bennison
The Sermon: "Catch & Release"

Music at 10 o'clock worship
Kim Patterson

Lections for The Day of Pentecost - Year B:

Acts 2:1-11 / Psalm 104:25-37

1 Corinthians 12:4-13 / John 20:19-23

To read in preparation for our worship together.