

The Elizabethan



The Newsletter of St. Elizabeth Episcopal Church Burien, Washington

May 2017

From Fr. John:

Why we do what we do: Icons

You may have noticed the stylized religious images (called icons) hanging in the sanctuary, nave and elsewhere. Frequently, there is also an icon on the table in the narthex that changes depending on the readings for the Mass or the liturgical season. If icons have not been a part of your church experience, they may seem to be just unsophisticated, primitive expressions of religious art. Or they may seem to be distorted or flat and lifeless. Some church-folk object to the use of icons as idol-worship while for others they are simply something of a mystery.

With a little education, however, you may come to appreciate them as windows into the realm of God's Heaven and as doors into your own interior where the light of Christ abides. In the religious world, which is not quite the same as the cyberworld, the word "icon" refers to a holy image, not a computer program or file. The word comes from the Greek word *eikon* that means "image." St. Paul used this same word in his letter to the Colossians to say that Jesus Christ was the image of the invisible God.

The respect and reverence given to icons is ancient, going back to the 3rd c., and survived formidable challenges in the 8th and 9th c. when a series of emperors decided that the reverence or veneration given to icons was idolatry. They sought to destroy icons to eliminate the practice of icon-gazing from the church. But distinguished theologians such as John of Damascus argued that we can say that icons are holy because God is imminent in creation. To affirm the goodness of God's creation, the argument went, some objects and people are transfigured and sanctified by the Divine Presence. And so the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787 determined that the use of icons is supported by the incarnation, in which the Word of God united to created human nature and thus to matter in general. The Council also taught that the honor given to an icon passes to that which it represents.

Religious icons took artistic root in the mosaic and fresco tradition of early Byzantine art, and reached full flower as the Orthodox embraced iconography into the life and worship of the church. Icon use and creation flourished between the 15th and 19th centuries. During the 16th c., the Protestant Reformation ignited a new wave of iconoclasm, especially in the churches of the Puritan, Presbyterian, and Reformed traditions.

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In the mid-17th c, England's Puritan Commonwealth thoughtlessly defaced or destroyed a great deal of ancient Christian art that had been left in place during the 16th c. Anglican Reformation. However, from the late 1800s to the present, Anglo Catholic churches have returned crucifixes, icons and statues of saints to their places of worship, including many Episcopalian churches in the States like St. Elizabeth. Those churches appear to be growing while what we used to call "low" churches seem to be struggling for new membership.

For those who venerate them, an icon is much more than a religious picture, which anyone can paint. Icons are said to be "written" not painted because they are non-verbal visual expressions of prayer rather than an interpretation of what the subject might have looked like. Traditionally, a monk or nun is granted permission or is commissioned to write an icon. Those who create them follow ancient rules and conventions, even a visual "grammar" of sorts.

For example, icons often portray holy people with a halo, but only Jesus may have a cross inscribed on his halo. You will often see Greek or Russian letters in Jesus' halo that represent the first letters in the words "The One who Is." In an Orthodox icon featuring Jesus Christ, if Jesus is carrying a scroll, the event portrayed took place before the resurrection. Events that scripture places after the ascension show Christ holding a book.

In this way, icons function much like stained glass windows in the Western church to convey the stories of scripture to largely illiterate congregations. And like stained glass windows, they are not worshipped. The goal is to render a sacred truth for use in focusing prayer and attention on the holy person or event portrayed for devotional practices that bring us closer to God.

Traditional icons are usually painted on a wood panel in egg tempera. Icon writers use gold to present the light of Christ shining through the person depicted. Red is the color of passion, love, life and life-giving energy, and consequently, red symbolizes the resurrection. White symbolizes the heavenly realm and God's divine light. Dark blue indicates the infinite sky and is another symbol of everlasting life, but it is also the color of Mary, the "God-bearer," who combines in herself both the terrestrial and celestial.

Referring to the practice of icon-gazing, Anglican priest Fr. John Bagley once said: "When noise and movement are increasingly dominant in our world – and often our churches as well – I believe it important that we should cherish those things that bring silence and stillness into our lives." And so, now that you have a little teaching, I invite you to spend some time contemplating some of the icons in our sanctuary and elsewhere around the church. Let them shepherd you into the realm of the Holy Spirit, where you may encounter the transforming power of divine grace.

Hospitality at St. Elizabeth in the spring of 2017.

Challenges are all around with our rainy weather and church remodeling. In our welcoming church we continue to grow and overcome during the changes in these times. During this beautiful Easter season, hospitality continues in the St. John room after the wonderful worship services. Many people have contributed with delicious and creative offerings. During our 76th year of continuing worship, visitors are enjoying connecting with us after the services.

MANY THANKS to all who bring the treats, make coffee and set up despite our kitchen in disarray. Our continued hospitality is made EASIER in several ways: Ryan Davis preparing the BEST coffee (hopefully with help now coming from others); every Sunday we can thank Bunny Frisvold for offering the choice of not so sweet cheese and crackers; clean up is EASY when you bring your contributions on a plate and take home that which has not been consumed; volunteers are making efforts to simplify our treat offerings.

If you haven't been one of our Sunday morning servers lately, make a plan and sign up on the bulletin board. Happy people will applaud your kind contribution.

Sandy Stonhouse

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The Elizabethan is published monthly by St. Elizabeth Episcopal Church. The deadline for articles is the fourth Friday of each month.

Articles, calendar items and ideas may be mailed or emailed to the addresses below or left in *The Elizabethan* box in the Parish Office.

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This Old House of God....Building Update

The Parish Hall and kitchen continue to be posted on the Multiple Listing Service (MLS) commercial leasing site. If you know anyone that is interested in leasing the space, please have them contact Tony Hettler.

A second leaky toilet in the women's bathroom has been replaced.

The parish hall closet flooring is being sealed and then replaced with carpet tiles. Thanks to Spectra Flooring for donating the materials. St. Elizabeth will be responsible for the installation costs.

The Neighborhood House renovation work is coming to closure. The estimated date for completion of the work is May 16th (although there may be a few pick-up items!) The last step before they occupy the space is certification from various state and governmental agencies. So hopefully we will see Neighborhood house folks at St. Elizabeth in the near future!

Spring is popping out all over! Thanks to Carolyn Terry with help from Paul Wentink and Wes Ingrum for their efforts in cleaning up the landscape and new plantings!

Plans for long-term maintenance of the building and grounds need to be addressed. If you have a desire to share your talents, please contact Carolyn Terry.

Linda Knutson





Cathedral Day - Saturday May 13, 10am – 3pm

Come one, come all to Saint Mark's Cathedral in Seattle. Join the grand procession for a special service of diocesan confirmations. Immediately afterwards, sign the Living Stones limestone slabs that will cover the cathedral's walls. Stay for tours, fun new games, food trucks and more.

Please register today (it's free!) at <https://cathedral-day-2017.eventbrite.com>

Hospitality is one of the ways we show Christ to our community, but how do we decide to whom we offer hospitality. (Another version of "Who is my neighbor?") I'd like to suggest that we don't limit our vision to "just" people. Our flooding situation has created a new opportunity for us to landscape. Sadly, we lost some valuable and treasured plants but we also lost old overgrown plants that were blocking our sewers and overhead wires, and that were offering hospitality to rats.

Now we are faced with the new Seattle challenge, finding plants that like wet cold feet in the winter and very dry summer conditions. This challenge allows us to offer hospitality to fellow creatures like birds and pollinators. Some of the best plants for challenging conditions are native species which also support our native wildlife. We will be using the old "trowel and error" method of discovering what survives. In the process I hope we can create what a priest friend of mine calls "holy curb appeal" and thus signal our hospitality to the people who pass by. There will be colored envelopes in the pews for several Sundays in May for donations for the plants and mulch and other supplies we need to do this. Perhaps in lieu of Memorial Day flowers you would like to make a donation in remembrance of family and friends. Next month I'll have a list of the many people who have helped with the labor and the donations which include our lovely Easter decorations.

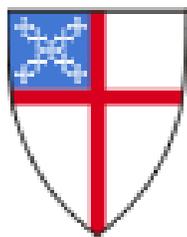
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