

The Elizabethan



The Newsletter of St. Elizabeth Episcopal Church Burien, Washington

July 2017

From Fr. John:

Why we do what we do: What is faith? That is to say, when we use the word “faith,” what do we mean? There are, of course, individual responses and the vast majority of those fit well with the Episcopal way of being Christian in the world. Part of the reason that differences in personal definitions of faith can meet in an Episcopal setting is our denominational response to this very question: “What is faith?”

Marcus Borg was a New Testament professor, the president of the Anglican Association of Biblical Scholars and the canon theologian at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Portland, Oregon. And while I don't agree with all of Borg's theological conclusions, I am grateful for his writing.

In the second chapter of his book, *The Heart of Christianity*, Borg helpfully talks about four of the more common understandings of faith, which he gives Latin names for the primary characteristic of each: assensus, fiducia, fidelitas and visio. Let me summarize and augment these briefly with the awareness that each of these can be more subtle and varied than they are presented here.

Assensus – this is faith as “assent to” or agreement with a statement or a set of propositions. This perspective holds that faith is the acceptance that a claim or list of assertions is true. Faith from this perspective is largely about promising one's mental consent to what is presented as “correct belief.” And while that is the literal definition of the word “orthodoxy,” the Orthodox are less bound by this perspective as the only form of faith than the term might lead one to imagine. “Correct belief” understood as an agreement with a framing of scripture as literal and factual is a 17th c. reaction to the Enlightenment. But the far more ancient framing of scripture held by the Eastern Orthodox and others infuses a powerful role for mystery that takes scripture into a truth substantially larger than literally factual.

Faith that relies on agreement to a set of tenets is far more common in Western Christianity, especially after the Protestant reformation. The emergence of modern science during and after the Enlightenment led to an understanding of truth as that which can be consistently verified. The combination led to the creation of different denominations distinguished by specific sets of propositions – dogma – defined by each group. Post-Reformation Roman Catholicism adopted some of this perspective, including the 19th c. innovation of papal infallibility, but most denominations stressing this form of faith are Protestant, or consider themselves “non-denominational” or “free-church.”

(continued on page two)

(continued from page one)

Fiducia – this is faith as “trust.” Faith is understood to be a radical trust in the actions and presence of a loving God. Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard described this experience of faith as “like floating in a deep ocean.” Others might express it by saying something like “God is the one upon whom we rely, as our support and foundation and ground, as our safe place.” The opposite of this faith might be a default stance of anxiety or worry. Many theologians and other thought leaders in both Protestant and Catholic communities promote this version of faith.

Fidelitas – “Fidelity” is the defining characteristic of this form of faith. What takes priority over agreement on dogma is loyalty to our relationship with God. This expression of faith is an allegiance or commitment to God, which may include sets of practices to support keeping God central. While these are sometimes called “orthopraxy” or correct practices, they do not always carry the same insistence on intellectual consent. There are both Catholic and Protestant houses that promote these as practices that work well. Most share some priority for practicing the love of God and neighbor through attentiveness, listening through prayer and action. The opposite of this form of faith is idolatry – the making of created things or ideas into ultimate things.

Visio – Framed as a way of “seeing,” faith is understood as practices that support seeing what is and seeing the whole. This perspective recognizes that how we see the world, and God’s presence and action in it, influences how we respond. Growing into this kind of faith might involve learning to see abundance rather than scarcity. The Dutch Roman Catholic priest, Fr. Henri Nouwen suggested that there were three movements to the developing spiritual life that involve evolutions in our way of seeing our life in God’s creation: moving from loneliness to solitude; from hostility to hospitality; and from illusion to prayer.

So, what about Episcopalians? As one way of being God’s children and Christian in the world, the last three – trust, fidelity, seeing – are the predominant ways that we understand faith. You can get a sense of these priorities in the Book of Common Prayer. All three influence the last section of the Catechism, titled: “The Christian Hope.”

We are less insistent on intellectual agreement than other denominations and we are not alone in that stance, but that is not to say: “anything goes.” We do, for example, hold our scripture to be sacred. What we mean by that is not that scripture is a divine product – the words literally spoken by God – but that God uses our scripture to speak to us today to guide, inspire and enhance our relationships with God, each other and creation.

We also profess and reaffirm our faith as trust, fidelity and seeing when we pray the Creed. The word, “*credo*,” comes from the same Latin root that gives us “*cardio*,” meaning “heart,” because the Creed is something that we give our heart to, not something to which we intellectually grant our affirmation of its literal, factual truth. We say “*We believe*,” not “*I believe*.” That is, we give our heart to these, the teachings of the church, *trusting* that these teachings will help us to be *true* to the God who created and loves us, and who grants us fruitful *insights* into our life in relationship with God and each other.

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.

It's amazing how a fresh coat of paint can spruce things up! The Sunday School classroom, bathroom doors, front door, exterior cross, south and west sides of the building have all been given a couple of coats of paint. Thank you to the people who donated to the painting fund!!! We hope to be able to paint the north and east sides of the building in the near future.

Neighborhood House has moved in and started their operations. There are still a few minor renovation tasks in work, but for the most part the work is complete and new families are in the facility.

Neighborhood House will be hosting an open house on August 20, 2017 during coffee hour. Please join us down in the Neighborhood House and Sunday school class room level to learn more about the good work that our tenants are doing in the community and see the building renovations....I think you will be pleasantly surprised!!

The exterior faucets have been repaired/replaced on the west side of the building and at the front entry.

(continued on page 4)

The Elizabethan

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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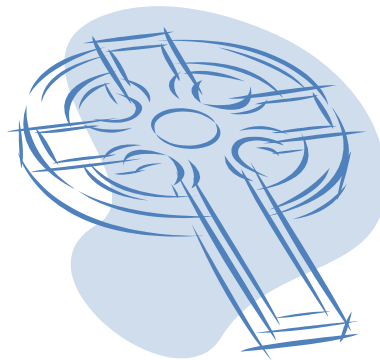
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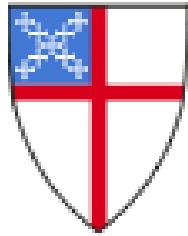
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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Work in progress – The north side building water heater (Zachariah, ambulatory, rest rooms, and nursery) needs to be replaced and we are getting bids for installation of a more cost efficient model. Also, the roof ventilation fan is not working and we are investigating how to resolve the issue.

Bob Knutson has been working with Seattle City Light to replace our broken exterior lighting with environmentally/cost friendly LED fixtures. Through a Seattle City Light energy reduction program they will pay for 80% of the lighting project costs and we will see a reduction in our electricity bill in the winter months. North-west security light has been installed....one down five to go!

Thank you Bob Carper, Marty Frisvold and Bob Knutson for clearing and replacing the sink plumbing in the men's restroom.

Thank you Wes Ingram and Paul Wentink for helping move the furniture and class room equipment back into the freshly painted nursery and Sunday school rooms.

The 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.

Carolyn Terry

Linda Knutson