

ST. AUGUSTINE'S
ANGLICAN CHURCH
LETHBRIDGE, AB



*"A Church Family in
the Heart of the City"*



Photo courtesy of Songer Architecture Inc.

THE HIPPO HERALD

JUNE 2020

FROM THE RECTOR'S CHAIR



My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

"I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Philippians 1:3-6

I love this passage from Philippians in which Paul gives us a glimpse into his prayers for a congregation whom he loves, and who love him in return. This resonates deeply with me for I am very conscious of my impending retirement. After writing columns for "The Hippo Herald" for 23 years, this will be my last "Message from the Rector"! In the midst such significant change I am made aware of the vital importance of prayer. In fact, this whole article is really a call to prayer for all of us. Therefore, I ask your prayers for Judith and me during this time, and we promise you our continued prayers for this wonderful parish.

I also ask that we all pray for our parish, our diocese and the Church throughout the world as we respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. Pray that we be vessels of Christ's peace and love both within our parish and in the wider community.

As I think of our parish's response to the present crisis, I find that I am drawn to prayers of thanksgiving. I am thankful for The Rev. Steve Bateman and Br. Jason Carroll who have been a wonderful pastoral team, calling us back to our ancient Anglican practices of prayer by daily Facebook live streams of

Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, Compline and Spiritual Eucharists. They, along with David Hignell have performed the technical “wizardry” to make possible the weekly broadcasts of our 10:00 AM Sunday Service. It has been heartening to see the number of people both within and without our congregation “tuning in” to these services of prayer and worship.

I give thanks to God for our magnificent parish staff who are serving faithfully in Children’s Ministry, Music Ministry, Verger’s Ministry and in the parish office. They have responded to the challenges and complications of this time with commitment, enthusiasm and creativity.

I also give prayers of thanksgiving for our faithful volunteers who have continued to fulfill their ministries during these unusual times. I am thankful to God for our Corporation Wardens, our Management Committee Wardens, our Parish Council, our Finance Committee, our Worship Team, our Covid-19 Response Team, our Stephen Ministry Team, and our parish phoners, just to name a few.

As we approach my retirement on June 1, one of the things for which I give thanks to God is the joy of knowing that during this time of transition, the leadership of our beloved parish is in very capable hands.

I am delighted that the Archbishop has appointed The Rev. Steve Bateman as Interim Rector. Steve is an experienced, outstanding and Godly priest and he knows our parish well.

I am also very happy that Anglican Dominican, Brother Jason Carroll, has been appointed by the Archbishop as Interim Pastoral Assistant. Br. Jason is presently serving on the diocesan staff as Ministry Developer and during this interim will serve half-time with the Diocese and half-time at St. Augustine’s.

Our parish is also in the fortunate position of having a dedicated and talented staff: deeply

committed and capable Corporation Wardens in Carol Young (Rector’s Warden), Barbara Edgecombe-Green (People’s Warden), Doug McLaughlin (Assistant Rector’s Warden) and Allan Herbig (Assistant People’s Warden); an excellent team of Management Committee Wardens; an energetic and gifted Parish Council and a representative and responsible Search Committee.

In addition to all this is the oversight and guidance of Greg Kerr-Wilson our Archbishop, Pilar Gateman our Archdeacon and the Diocesan Synod office staff who provide leadership and guidance.

I am confident our parish will be well led, well taught and well cared for throughout the coming time of transition. I thank God for providing our parish with such faithful shepherds.

Please pray for all our leaders, and particularly pray for the work of our Search Committee. Pray that God would guide them and give them the spiritual gifts of wisdom and discernment, to the glory of God and the building up of Christ’s Church.

Judith and I feel profoundly blessed to have been called to serve at St. Augustine’s. We thank you for all the support, encouragement and love you have given us over the years. We thank you, our parish family, with all our hearts. You truly are our sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus.

As I asked earlier in this message, please pray for us as we promise to continue to pray for you. We love you all.

“It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart...” Philippians 1:7

Your friend (and Rector until June 1)

James

The Rev. Canon James Robinson



Trusting in Transition

Life is full of transitions. Even the very cells in our bodies are being constantly replaced. One might think we would be used to it! But by any normal standard, the pace of the transition we are facing just now is exceptional. And constant transition seems to bring with it some unwanted travel companions: uncertainty, anxiety, and plain old weariness.

As this edition of the Hippo Herald is being compiled and distributed, we will have just completed the 12th Sunday of our 'exile.' As one clever priest has quipped, we are now in the week of the 12th Sunday in "Coronatide." None of us would have chosen this. Covid-19 is more than an inconvenience, it is a constant source of stress and uncertainty in which even the simple things like getting groceries feel weighty and consequential. We are re-learning how to do life.

What is worse, we are never quite sure what things will look like from week to week. While there is talk of "re-opening" the danger is still very real and plenty of restrictions remain in place. How are we to plan, and what are we to do with the stresses, worries and challenges of the times in which we live?

We are also facing a transition as a Parish. Our beloved Rector, James has retired after 23 years here at St. Augustine's and 34 years in the Diocese of Calgary. While we are thrilled for James and Judith, and we applaud them as they enter this new and well-earned season in their lives, still, this is yet another transition.

So how do we face transition and change? Thankfully, we are not powerless.

We can begin by reminding ourselves that we serve a God who does not change, but is the same "yesterday, today and forever." One of my favorite prayers is found in the Order for Compline in the Book of Common Prayer. For each of the 50 days of the Easter season Linda and I have used it to end each day:

*Be present, O merciful God, and protect us through the silent hours of this night, so that **we who are wearied by the changes and chances of this fleeting world, may repose upon thy eternal changelessness;** through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen. (emphasis mine)*

This simple prayer is proving most helpful in dealing with this season of unusual transition. And it has had an unanticipated effect. When I am confident that God is stable and constant, I somehow become free to notice the many things in my life for which I am thankful!

I am thankful for Linda. I am thankful for my children and grandchildren. I am thankful for a warm house. I am thankful for our parish and a group of supportive and caring friends. I am thankful for James and Judith and their ministry and ongoing influence in my life. I am thankful for meaningful work. I am thankful for our staff, and for the addition of Brother Jason Carroll who has been

seconded to us half-time by our diocesan leadership (for whom I am also thankful). I am thankful for our Wardens and Parish Council and our Finance Committee and so many others who work so hard for this Parish. It goes further... I even find myself thankful for the opportunities which come along with our current Covid-19 challenge: the opportunity to learn how to livestream services, to connect with people in new ways, to learn new and helpful technologies, to take prayer more seriously and to take pleasure in the little things, like a walk, or watching the birds on the feeder in my backyard.

I pray for all of us, that amid the challenges of constant transition, we will rest on God's unchanging faithfulness and see His good gifts all around us.

Grace and Peace,

Steve

Credence Table

COVID-19

Update

It is becoming clear that a full return to in-person gatherings at St. Augustine's will not be happening any time soon. Although the Alberta Government is now phasing in the relaunch of certain sectors, including places of worship, the Anglican Diocese of Calgary is urging continued caution with physical distance. On May 12, Archbishop Greg Kerr-Wilson issued a Letter on Transition Planning from COVID 19 Restrictions, stating that "no parish in the Diocese of Calgary will reopen physical gatherings without the Archbishop's permission. At this point we remain in the protocol of not allowing physical congregational services including weddings and funerals." The letter goes on to say that the "length of time it will take to return to regular in-person worship is to be measured in months not weeks." In the meantime, St. Augustine's will continue to provide livestream opportunities for worship and prayer and comply with all Alberta Health guidelines. A transition plan and guidelines for parishes will be forthcoming following the deliberations of a task force commissioned for this purpose. Here is a link to the full text of the Archbishop's letter:

<https://www.calgary.anglican.ca/news/the-archbishops-letter-on-transition-planning>



faith and finances

FINANCIAL UPDATE

This is a summary of the church operating fund to the end of April. Total parishioner givings are about \$12,000 less than the budget target for these four months and other income (eg. rental income) is another \$2,000 less than budget. Prior to the church closing for in-person services in mid-March, income was in line with the budget. Not surprisingly, this variance started to arise after that. Easter givings were much less than usual (\$1,800 received versus \$5,700 budget), perhaps because Easter envelopes were not distributed to parishioners as they usually are. If anyone would still like to make a special contribution for Easter, it is not too late. Just note 'Easter' on the cheque or envelope.

Most operating expenses are as anticipated compared with their respective budget targets. In total, operating expenses are about \$6,000 under the budget target for this period. Some savings result from the church being closed but these will not likely be significant because the majority of operating expenses are still occurring.

	Year to-date (April 30 2020)	Last year to-date (April 30 2019)	2020 Budget
Parishioner givings	\$ 138,727	\$ 147,812	\$ 483,750
Other income	<u>2,670</u>	<u>5,947</u>	<u>38,400</u>
Total income	<u>141,397</u>	<u>153,759</u>	<u>522,150</u>
Staffing expenses	\$ 110,141	\$ 111,093	\$ 333,300
Administration & apportionment	36,936	38,425	115,700
Facility expenses	23,078	21,101	62,300
Christian education & outreach	<u>4,103</u>	<u>2,074</u>	<u>20,850</u>
Total expenses	<u>174,258</u>	<u>172,693</u>	<u>532,150</u>
Net deficit	\$ <u>(32,861)</u>	\$ <u>(18,934)</u>	\$ <u>(10,000)</u>

You are likely aware that givings are currently being collected through pre-authorized monthly bank transfers, cheques being dropped off and mailed, and via credit card through the 'Donate Now' button on the website. If anyone has any questions or concerns about how to give while in-person church services are not being held, feel free to contact me by leaving a message at the church office or email.

As said above, total parishioner givings so far this year are under budget. It is too early to tell what portion is due to delays in givings being received and what portion might be a permanent budget variance. However, the amount that we are under budget is manageable as we have surplus operating funds from previous years in reserve. In my opinion, all things considered, St. Augustine's is in a relatively good financial position at this point.

Your support of St. Augustine's during these unprecedented times is greatly appreciated!

Submitted by: Cathy Gillespie, Treasurer

Dear Parishioners,

While living with Covid-19 continues to be a long and challenging journey, God continues to offer us hope, fellowship and new opportunities for ministry. Even though we are no longer meeting for fellowship in the 10:00 coffee hour, many parishioners are reaching out to one another through phone calls, Zoom meetings and other digital methods of communication. Attending a digital church service or meeting isn't the

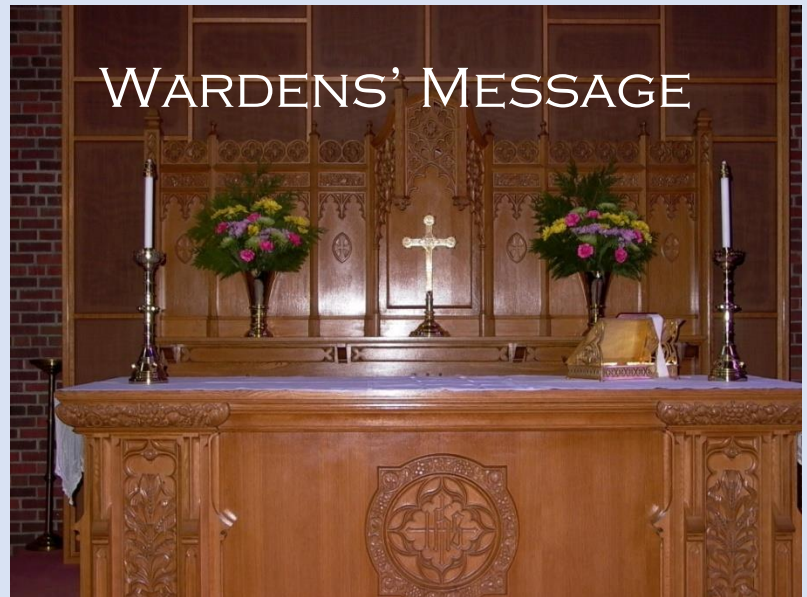
same as being with live people, but these experiences lift our spirits, warm us with community and connect us to God. We pray that you will continue to find St. Augustine's a warm and caring community—your church family in the heart of the city.

It has been an eventful few months since our Christmas letter. We wanted to share some highlights and new ministries opportunities with you.

James' Retirement: It is with very mixed emotions that we send James into the next great adventure of his life—retirement. James has faithfully served St. Augustine's for 23 years. His ministry has been a blessing to all of us as he has led us through many changes and blessings. As well, we take time to thank Judith for her faithful ministry alongside James—what a great couple! We hope that you will tune in to James' last church service, as incumbent, on Sunday, May 31 at 10:00. As well, please join the parade of cars past the Robinsons' home on Sunday, May 31 from 3:00-3:30 for a farewell wave. We are looking forward to a celebration of James' ministry sometime in the future when we are all together.

Search Committee: Starting in June, the Search Committee will be working closely with the Diocese to begin the work of finding our next incumbent. During this time of transition, Steve has graciously stepped into the role of interim priest. We have confirmation from the Diocese to appoint Brother Jason as temporary half-time Pastoral Assistant from June 1, through December 31. Please support this committee by praying regularly for discernment of God's will for our new incumbent. As well, prayers and words of encouragement for Steve and Brother Jason during this time will go a long way to making this time fruitful and invigorating for all of us.

Live Stream Church Services: It is with a very grateful heart that I tune in to our many on-line services being offered. Along with the 10:00 Sunday service, people can also connect to Morning Prayer with Brother Jason Monday through Friday. Compline is offered Monday through Friday thanks to Steve and Linda. Many people have worked creatively and passionately to provide uplifting and hopeful worship for all of us. We would especially like to thank James, Steve, Jason, David, Joanne, Mary Lee, Karen, Keith, Sarah, Brandon, Wayne, Len, Greg, Wendy and the Sunday School teachers for their willingness to garner new skills



and to be brave enough to learn while everyone is watching! These services have provided opportunities to connect with people outside of our parishioners, so we are pleased to see this as a way to open our doors to the mission field in a gentle and safe manner for those seeking God.

Every Member Visitation—by Phone: Early on our Covid journey, we had a group of people phoning to encourage people to give their email address to the church so they could receive newsletters and updates about life in the church. These phone calls were, for the most part, very warmly received and a new ministry opportunity opened up. The Covid Response Team realized that all of our parishioners would benefit from a phone call just to check in and offer support as needed. The wardens are grateful for the work of Pam and Sharon, who have organized a group of dedicated parishioners to make phone calls to members of our church. One problem we have run into is that many phone numbers are incorrect. Please take a moment to email the office (office@staug.org) if you need to update your phone number or other information. The blessings received from both the people phoning and receiving phone calls leads us to consider this as a long-term ministry once the pandemic is over.

Youth Group: Brittany and Greg are continuing to offer Monday, at 7:00, Zoom meetings for middle and high school youth groups to reconnect with their friends and continue to develop as young Christians. If you know of someone who would like to join these lively Zoom meetings, email the church to receive a Zoom invitation.

Covid Response Team: It's essential to thank the members of the Covid Response Team that was formed at the beginning of the pandemic. This team, headed by Karen, has provided the church with ways to move forward safely, to keep parishioners informed and in community as well as and offer Zoom meeting support by Jonathan and Allison.



Office Refurbishment: As I write this letter, the main office in the Parish Hall is undergoing a much needed refurbishment to improve safety and functionality. Thanks to the ladies' groups who donated money to support this refurbishment. We are all looking forward to seeing the new and improved office space. Thanks to Allan for spearheading this big project.

By-law for Re-zoning New Properties Passed: The City has recently approved the zoning of our new properties, south of the church, consolidated as 421-11 St. S., to Direct Control from a combination of Public Building and Residential-Low Density. This will allow us to proceed with better site cleanup and some basic landscaping. We are hoping these changes will lead to being able to lease the parking area, during the day, on a bulk basis. Evenings and week-ends would see the parking available to St. Augustine's parishioners. Thanks to Doug for spearheading the re-zoning of our properties.

Rental Houses: We continue to have 408-12 St. listed for sale. We recently lost one of our tenants in our duplex, so we are doing some much needed repairs on that unit. HomeTime has a renter lined up for June, so that's great news!

Donations: Thank-you to our parishioners who continue to support St. Augustine's by dropping off cheques (no cash) in the mailbox, pre-authorized payment, and Canada Helps button on the website. We extend a grateful thanks to Cathy, who continues to act as our treasurer and Karen, our envelope secretary. They are ensuring we are working to be good stewards of our financial blessings, through these challenging times.

We pray that you and your family stay healthy and continue to find the blessings in this time of Covid-19. We look forward, with great anticipation, to when we will meet again, face to face.

Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Blessings and peace,

Your wardens,

Barb: People's Warden

Allan: Assistant People's Warden

Carol: Rector's Warden

Doug: Assistant Rector's Warden



Konnected Kids

A weekly Sunday School Get
together on Zoom
Email Wendy at wendy@staug.org
to get set up -
it's painless, we promise!



MUSIC NOTES

"How *Do* We Sing the Lord's Song in this Strange Land?"

I sat down to write this submission intending to be quite serious, thinking that in these times there must be something profound I should be able to say; however, in my efforts I stumbled repeatedly. I want to be clear that this headline is simply an attention-getter. I have no intention and neither do I qualify to expound on Psalm 137. Yes, there have most certainly been tears shed by many of us since the advent of COVID-19, and we certainly have been 'exiled' from many places and activities. But that's where any reference to this scripture will end.

As Christians there are many ways we can show our love for God and one of these is offering our prayer and praise by lifting our voices in singing. I think we all have songs or hymns that we gravitate towards during times of stress or difficulty, and favorites whose words and music move us to the core. Certainly these hymns sung corporately are a vital part of our spiritual community and we have even been instructed by scripture to speak to one another in "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs". In fact, not being able to sing together is one of the strangest things to many of us about the current situation, and trying to imagine services eventually resuming without the presence of singing is a bit difficult. For many, the lack of singing truly dampens the spirit.

But among the many other pieces of advice that scripture prescribes for us, we find humor and laughter. In Proverbs 17:22 we read, "A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones." Later in the same book we read, "A glad heart makes a cheerful face, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed." And here is some encouragement from Job, "He will yet fill your mouth with laughter, and your lips with shouting." So in this vein, here is some church music humor to lift your spirits. I hope you enjoy a few chuckles as you read (or sing 6 feet apart).

- Submitted by Joanne Collier, Music Director

"Common Praise" Hymns Best Avoided During COVID-19:

"Breathe on Me, Breath of God"

"Abide with Me"

"As We Gather At Your Table"

"Blest Be the Tie That Binds"

"Come to a Wedding, Come to a Blessing"

"Draw Near and Take"

"Eat This Bread, Drink This Cup"

"Gather Us In"

"Giver of the Perfect Gift"

"Great God, Your Love Has Called Us Here"

"Here, O Lord, Your Servants Gather"

"Jesus Calls Us Here to Meet Him"

"Lion and Lamb Lying Together"

"Nearer my God, to Thee"

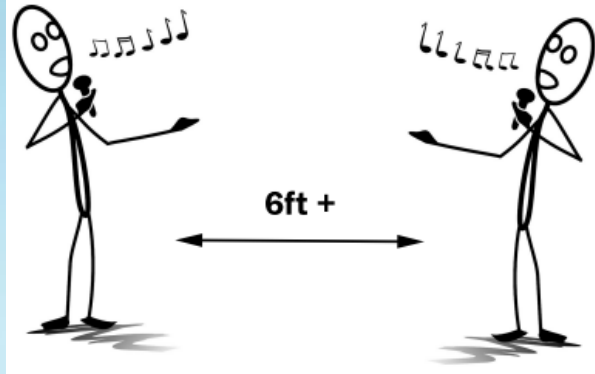
"No Crowded Eastern Street"

"O Come, Little Children"

"Precious Lord, Take My Hand"

"Will You Come and Follow Me"

COVID CAROLS



OUR GOD CAN SPAN THE DISTANCE

By Leah Krenek

Tune: "In the Bleak Midwinter"

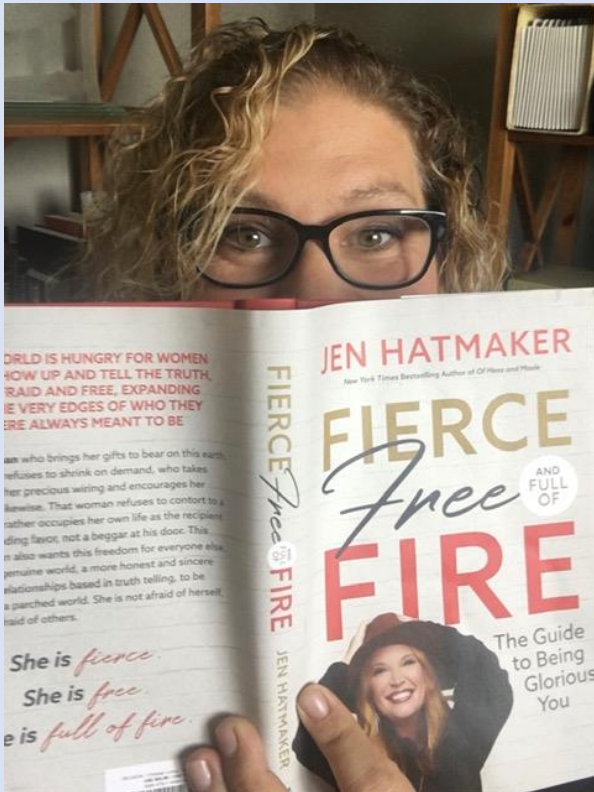
When the virus started
People panicked, scared,
Flocked in groves to grocery stores
Feeling unprepared
Hoarded toilet paper rolls-roll on roll
Instead of simply going home.
Panic took its toll.

Keep your social distance
Space that separates
Listen to insistence:
Stay within your gates.
Keep in touch in touchless ways
Facebook, Skype, or zoom
Or good, old-fashioned phone calls
Made within your room.

Our God can span the distance,
Be with us in grief,
offer us assistance
Till we find relief.
So when you feel lonely,
anxious, sad, or scared
Christ said "I'll be with you,"
Light and Love declared.

© 2020 Leah Krenek. Permission to sing during
any quarantine or social distancing situation.

Looking for a Great Summer Read?



Look no farther! The hilarious and insightful Jen Hatmaker takes readers on a journey into how they are wired and provides them with the tools to walk in that identity with freedom and courage in her latest book: *Fierce, Free and Full of Fire*.

Many women, often unconsciously, find themselves in the people pleasing trap and end up sidelined in their own lives. When what they really want is to be brave - to claim every gift, dream, quirk, and emotion inside, to stop performing and start living.

In her “having coffee with a girlfriend” writing style, author Jen Hatmaker offers women encouragement, challenge, and humor as she helps them identify what makes them tick and gain the confidence to live it out. She leads us through five self-reflective categories—who I am, what I need, what I want, what I believe, and how I connect—and helps them:

- identify the exact ways they can be inauthentic and learn instead how to be genuine at all times;

- be empowered to say yes and no without guilt;
- learn to voice both their spiritual questions and convictions; and
- opt out of drama and into healthy adult relationships.

With humor, passion, and been-there insight, Jen encourages women to living in the freedom of living the identity, convictions, and passions they’ve been given.

This is my favourite Jen Hatmaker book yet. She shares her feelings, struggles, and hopes here, and it is so good. Chapter 3 is called “I Am Strong in My Body” and really hit home for me. Jen shared advice from fellow author Hillary McBride that we speak and think about our bodies with the word “she” rather than “it” and I have adopted this. It has already started a complete mind shift for me. Showing ourselves some kindness and grace in this area is a must for girls and women of all ages and stages!

If you enjoy the Christian self-help genre, you have no doubt ran into a few fluffy but empty duds. This is certainly not one of those books. Jen Hatmaker’s *Fierce, Free and Full of Fire* is a great read with lots of depth and opens the door to much self discovery. I have reread several parts and highlighted the heck out of my (not to brag, but signed) copy. I highly recommend this book and think there is something of value in there for everyone.

Let me know if you read it and perhaps it could be the first book we discuss in a Book Club this fall!

Wendy Doherty



SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

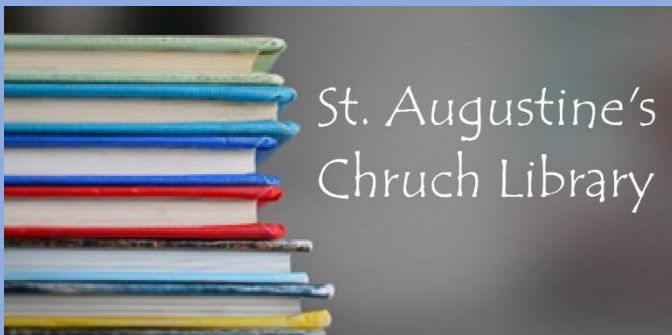


TREASURE #22

1. My name is Credo, so you will quickly perceive
that my root source is Latin from the verb 'to believe'.
For many years I served alone – now I have a mate
who is stylish and elegant while I am more ornate.
Brought from St. Mary's, when our churches became one,
both of us are needed as the congregation's grown.
Symbol you'll find here and sacred sign,
to draw attention to the sacrifice Divine.
Stylized fish, secret sign of Christianity,
three leaves in one, symbol of the Holy Trinity,
the rose with thorns, symbol of Christ's martyrdom,
its beauty and fragrance an earthly hint of Heaven.
2. Our purpose is as the place of preparation
of all that is needed for Eucharistic celebration.
Set in place you will see a silver ewer fine
and cruets filled with ordinary water and wine.
Water is the symbol of Christ's humanity.
the wine is the symbol of His Divinity.
This, co-mingled as one before Consecration.
will, with wafers, provide the Meal of Communion.
A silver Breadbox with extra consecrated Bread
in case more than expected come to be fed.
For ritual hand washing there is a Lavabo bowl
for use of the Priest, with a Lavabo towel.

3. All are set on linen cloths of purest white and attended most ably by youthful acolytes. Also, brass Offertory Plates, bearing inscriptions, to receive the gifts of the congregation. One reads, "it is more blessed to give than receive", with I.H.S., monogram of Jesus in bold relief. The other bears signs of Christ's passion and the words "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord". I hope you've enjoyed this tour of our treasures, for to point you to Christ is our humble endeavour. These symbols indeed are God's truth, not fables, and it's time to disclose that we are the

(Answer hidden elsewhere in newsletter)



"You are never too old to set another goal, or to dream a new dream."

— C.S. Lewis

The Time is Now: A Call to Uncommon Courage

by Joan Chittister (2019)

Sister Joan, a Benedictine Sister of Erie, PA, writes, "This book is about the prophet in you." It's about speaking truth, God's truth, into every situation. She asks, "Will we take up what we know is our moral and spiritual responsibility: to make the world a better place for all, to bring to life the fullness of Creation

for all? To help bring about equality, safety, security, and compassion for all?" In this 140 page insightful book Sister Joan challenges "spiritual people" to have courage and speak up in the face of injustices in our world. She looks at the biblical prophets as examples of those sent by God to cry out, without fear, without care for cost, and without end. Will you be a prophet of God, and for the Gospel, and say no to everything that is not of God?

The answer to the question of who is called to proclaim truth in a silent generation is an easy one:

we all are.

JOAN CHITTISTER





A Great Cloud of Witnesses



ST. BRENDAN THE
NAVIGATOR

474-577

Outside of Ireland and the British Isles, St. Brendan the Navigator is little known, but in Ireland he has a status close to equal to St. Patrick himself. He lived during the heyday of the spread of Christianity in Ireland and the British Isles, and worked along side the likes of St. Finian, St. Columba, St. Brigid and St. Malo. In fact, his life is better recorded and remembered than most of his contemporaries, including St. Patrick, though it is often difficult to separate the legend from the man. His epithet – “the Navigator” – was bestowed upon him because of his frequent and constant sea faring journeys to locations all over Ireland, the British Isles, Brittany, and even, possibly, to North America. Both the historical annals of Ireland, and the biographical works left by the church (which include several “Vitae” of Brendan’s life and the famous “Voyage of Brendan”), demonstrate that he was a man of great charisma and spiritual force, as well as being a devout follower of Christ and missionary Abbot.

Brendan was born around 483/484AD in the village of Tralee, in the south-west of Ireland, in what is today the region of Kerry. His parents were simple folk, farmers and fishers, though devout Christians, as the area has been converted by St. Patrick around the year 450AD. In fact, it was said that Patrick prophesied that because of their faithful response to the Gospel, that a great leader and prophet would arise from their peoples, whom the people understood to be Brendan when his character and work became known.

Brendan seems to have been set aside from birth to follow the path of a monk, as were several other of his siblings. His parents sent him to be cared for by the monastics living at nearby Kileedy, where he met and formed a lifelong friendship with St. Ita, the “mother of the Saints of Erin”, though she would have only been his elder by a decade or so (she would have been 8 or 10 yrs of age when he arrived as a baby). As he grew into adolescence he was mentored by St. Erc, another monk and saint who travelled around the British Isles preaching the Gospel. It was during these formative years, likely, that Brendan’s need to travel and share the Word of Christ was formed.

During this time, Brendan’s life was marked with both piety and the miraculous. As example of his piety, one time at about the age of 12, he was saying the Psalms while waiting for Erc, who was preaching to a crowd, and he was interrupted by a girl of about the same age, who wanted to know what he was doing. He drove her from his presence with a horse crop, and when asked why he had assaulted

the girl, he stated simply "“Indeed, it was not through anger that I drove her away, but merely to free myself from being distracted whilst engaged in sacred reading.”"

As to the miraculous, on another occasion while he and St. Erc were travelling to preach, Brendan was confronted by a fugitive fleeing from a band of brigands seeking to kill him. Brendan prayed over the young man, and the fugitive took on the appearance of a rock so that his pursuers could not see him. Another time, Brendan was met with none other than St. Brigid, who prophesied that his kinsmen were fighting in a war. When Brendan did not believe her, she touched his eyes and opened her vision to him, where upon he received a permanent gift of prophecy. As one last example, Brendan and Erc were one time out on a preaching tour and in need of food and water. When Brendan asked for something to drink, Erc said he had nothing, at which time a fawn descended to them from the hills and allowed them to milk her, and did so every day for the time they were in the region.

However, it was as Brendan grew into adulthood that he really came into his power and preaching. By his mid 20's, he was ordained as a priest, though the rules of the church said one had to be at least thirty to be ordained. He began to travel to the central parts of Ireland, as well as Iona (where he met St. Columba), and possibly even Skellig Michael, to the great monasteries and ascetics who lived there, seeking guidance and learning. He spent a number of years learning from them, including being tutored at some length by yet another Irish saint and monk, St. Jarlath.

Following this time of formation, he entered fully into a life of travel and preaching the gospel, and in particular, establishing monasteries everywhere he went. For the next *six decades*, Brendan travelled to all parts of Ireland, Wales, Scotland, England and even Brittany on the coast of France. In many of these places he founded monasteries, teaching and guiding them as a kind of missionary Abbot, and mentoring them in the practice of

asceticism, even writing his own "rule" to guide their communities. His most famous monastery at Clonfert, was said to have 3000 souls living and worshipping there, and survived until the Reformation when Henry VIII closed the monasteries.

His most famous voyage, of course, was the "Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis" (Voyage of Saint Brendan the Abbot). In this account, Brendan takes a group of monks and makes an epic journey in search of "The Isle of Paradise." On this journey, Brendan and the monks ride along the ocean currents in a traditional Irish "*currach*" (a hide covered boat) encountering unknown but populated islands, and many miraculous sights. Some of these sights include an island with sheep as big as cattle, an island with a monastery and an community of silent monks, an isolated rock in the ocean where Judas Iscariot is let out of Hell for one day a year, an island where the birds sing the Psalms and prophesy, an island that is the body of a sea monster called 'Jasconius', and finally, the Isle of Paradise itself.

While the account is most likely legendary in nature, similar to many of the epic travel allegories (e.g. Homer's *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, or Dante's *Divine Comedy*), there are some that think there is a factual basis to the journey, and that Brendan took a journey where he ended up in North America, hundreds of years before the Vikings. While there is no evidence to confirm this, in 1978 British adventurer Tim Severin proved it could be done by building his own leather-clad boat and riding the Atlantic currents from Ireland to Greenland to North America.

In any case, Brendan's legacy was that he inspired and led many of people to faith in Christ, and many thousands more to dedicate their lives to the worship of Christ as monks and nuns in the numerous monasteries he founded. Indeed, it would be difficult to overestimate his long influence on the ancient and unique tradition of Celtic Christianity. For me, though, when I read the biographies and stories of St. Brendan, you can indeed see the

man shining through in many places. Being a man of constant travel and pilgrimage, he was faced with the unknown more than most, and his trust in God is one of his most attractive qualities. You can really see his deep faith and determination, and the humble conviction of a man who is utterly convinced that God's love and compassion will never let him down. One of the best examples of this is found in his own words, known as the "Prayer of St. Brendan":

**Help me to journey beyond the familiar
and into the unknown.
Give me the faith to leave old ways
and break fresh ground with You.**

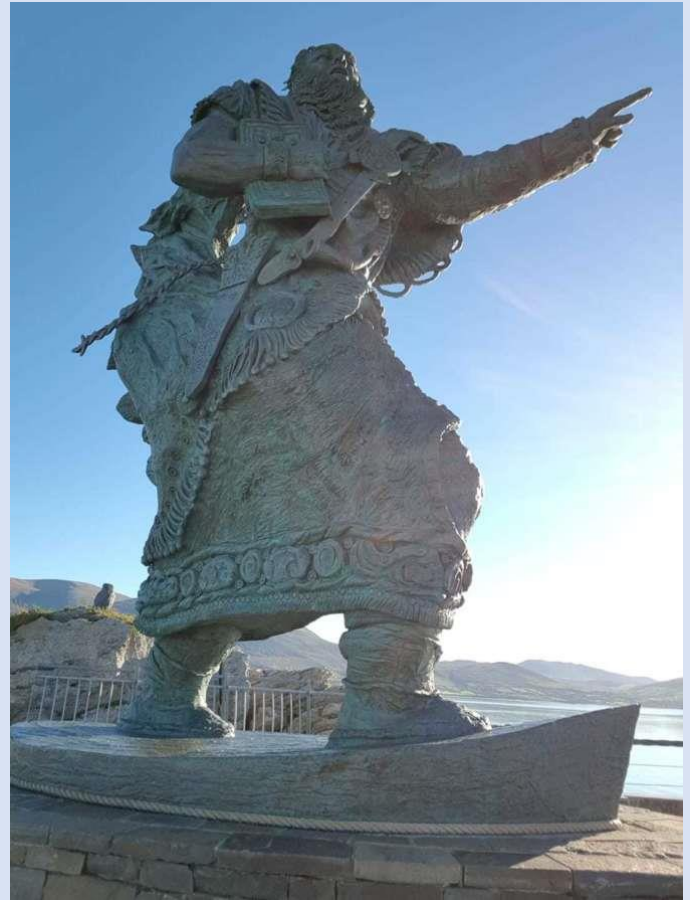
**Christ of the mysteries, I trust You
to be stronger than each storm within me.
I will trust in the darkness and know
that my times, even now, are in Your hand.
Tune my spirit to the music of heaven,
and somehow, make my obedience count for
You. Amen.**

The other element of Brendan's personality was the deep and loving relationships he formed with people. He was not just a missionary that was passing through, but as most Celts, saw himself as part of the people to whom he was bringing Christ. His friendship with St. Ita was lifelong and tender. He loved his mentors, Erc and Jarlath, with deep affection and obedience. Every house he founded looked upon him as their spiritual father. And even into his old age, he did not forget his brothers and sisters, dying in the arms of his sister, Briga, in one of the monasteries he founded. He was laid to rest in a simple grave in the monastery of Clonfert by his beloved monks.

Br. Jason

P.S. I highly recommend Frederick Buechner's novel "Brendan", for a lovely fictional telling of his tale. I would also recommend the album "Beyond These Shores" by Celtic Christian band Iona, which is inspired by the life and journeys of St. Brendan.

Statue of St. Brendan, Fenit Harbour, Kerry, Ireland



The Tomb of St. Brendan, Clonfert Monastery

