

# THE LION

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## *Message from the Rector*

*“I was glad when they said unto me,  
Let us go into the house of the Lord.”*

**Psalm 122:1**

I heard a wonderful sermon recently. A young priest was telling his congregation why it is important for us – Christians – to be faithful in attending our weekly gathering for worship. First and foremost, obviously, it is to worship. Regardless of how good (or bad) the sermons are, regardless of how well (or poor) the music is, regardless of anything else that we might think is important, our primary task in gathering is to worship. “Praise ye the Lord,” the Psalmist says; “Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord” (cf. Ps 150). We, along with everything else in creation, were created to give praise and thanksgiving to our Creator, and at least one day per week we are called to do it *together* (cf. Hb 10:25).

The second reason that we come to church is to have our faith strengthened so that we might hold fast to it in the face of a world that is actively, whether we realize it or not, hostile to it. We need to hear the Gospel of our Lord preached at least every week so that our faith is not ripped from us by all the competing claims around us. And if we don’t believe that is possible to have our faith ripped from us, just think about how the end of someone’s spiritual life generally begins: it begins when we become lax about attending the community of the church and worshipping *together*.

And finally we gather to support one another. And the illustration that the preacher used was striking. He talked of a redwood forest: about how the trees can grow to over three hundred feet in height, and yet they have a very shallow root system. So what is it that keeps them from toppling over in even the slightest breeze? While they might have a shallow root system, it is nevertheless an incredibly extensive root system with the roots of each tree interlocking with the roots of the trees around it; and because of that, even in the strongest of winds, all of the trees rely on one another to stand firm.

That illustration reminds me of another preacher who, in nineteenth century London, went to visit a parishioner whose church attendance was spotty at best. As the two sat in the man’s house before a fireplace, the man told his pastor that he really didn’t feel like he needed to come to church to be a good Christian. He could worship his Lord anywhere, the services and music weren’t too inspiring, all of the people were hypocrites, etc., etc. In other words, it was the very same litany of excuses that every parish priest hears.

As the man spoke, the pastor kept his silence but used the fireplace poker to tease a burning ember from the fire and pull it out by itself onto the hearth. Within a few minutes the ember began to cool until eventually its fire was out completely, even though the rest of the coals in the fire continued to burn. Turning to the man, the pastor said nothing but he made his point: just like redwoods need one another for support, so every coal needs the others to continue to burn.

And so it is with our faith. We need to be with one another for support. We need to come together at least on a weekly basis so that we will have a network of like-minded brothers and sisters in the faith who can help to support us in the face of whatever storms life throws against us. I have spoken about it before, and it continues to be true: just as community keeps the redwoods from falling, and the coals of a fire burning hot, so a close-knit Christian community – with everyone participating – keeps us solidly grounded in the Body of Christ, which is his Church.

*Message from the Rector – continued*

But here's the rub: many of us, unfortunately, couldn't care less. And that isn't just an issue here at St Mark's: that is something that seems to be borne out in many Christian congregations, especially in places like the United States where Christianity has become more of a personal philosophy of life than it is a living faith to be lived and practiced day in and day out, both personally and *together*.

"How can you say that, Fr. Mike? I'm a member of this church. And I even give money." Ok, I'll buy that. And so will most of the ministers I've spoken to.

But what are we supposed to think when we don't see some of our own members between Easter and Christmas, in spite of the fact that it isn't illness keeping them away? And I mean *real* illness, not the "I just have a hard time getting out of bed in the morning" type of illness that keeps many people away. What are we supposed to think?

What are we supposed to think when we see some of our own members out and about, but rarely in the pews on Sunday morning? What are we supposed to think when we're told that someone is too ill to come to church, but in the next breath this same person tells us how wonderful the play was yesterday? Or how great dinner at the Ocean Grill was last night? What are we supposed to think?

And all too often, these are the very same people for whom a solidly supported faith becomes a problem at best, or is completely lost at worst, when "life" begins to happen. Now, I'll grant you, that isn't always the case, but all too often it is: when the storms of life begin to blow, the question is often asked, "Where is God?"

"Well," I often want to ask, "when and where did you leave him behind?"

The solution, of course, is simple: we need to develop our roots. We need to stay in the fire so that our flame of faith will not grow cold. We need to continue to be an integral, active, *and present* member of our church in order to both hold fast to our faith and support one another when we need it the most. That is exactly what it means to be a part of the Body of Christ.

Now if you are still with me, let me make this challenge to all of us. The new Church year is upon us, bringing the Advent season, when we anticipate the coming of Christ, the Christmas season, when we celebrate his birth, and the Epiphany season, when we commemorate his manifestation to the Gentiles. By the way, those Wise Men may have traveled the better part of a year to arrive in Bethlehem to see and worship the child Jesus. I wonder why it is asking too much for some of us to travel fifteen or twenty minutes to worship Him for an hour or so on Sunday morning. That's just something else to ponder.

Anyway, back to my challenge. It's a new year. Why not commit to developing those roots, which like the root system of a redwood forest, will help keep the storms of life from toppling our faith when life's winds blow? Certainly prayer, Bible reading/study, and Christian acts of charity are an integral part of that, but so is our continual worship with the community of faith. Let us all make a New Year's resolution to become more active in the worship life of our church. Each of us depends on it because each of us depends on one another for support. May our New Year's resolution be to truly become an integral – and worshipping – part of the Body of Christ. May we all be "glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." Amen.

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## ***Roof Construction – Complete (almost)!***

Thanks be to God, our re-roofing project is a little ahead of schedule, which means that it should be completed before Christmas! "Thank You" to everyone who contributed towards, what one of our members calls, "our beautiful 'forever' roof." Thanks, too, to The Hill Group for overseeing the project, and to MB Enterprises for not only installing what is an aesthetically beautiful roof, but for also chasing down the several "ghost leaks" that we have had over the years, and for keeping the site safe and clean during construction. A natural slate roof is what the church was originally designed for, and with its installation all of the major architectural touches are now complete. Once again, we thank each and every one of you very, very much.

## ***St. Mark's ReMarkable Treasures Sale***

This year's treasures sale will happen on Saturday, January 26, and we need the help of all our parishioners. We need all of your wonderful treasures that are clean and sale-able, i.e., if you wouldn't buy it, please don't bring it. We have a reputation for having "good stuff" and want to build upon that. We are proud of our church and our parishioners.

We need volunteers to:

1. Pick up donations from people who cannot get them to the church on the donation day (Thursday, January 24).
2. Set up tables and move chairs in the parish hall on Sunday, January 20, after the 10:00 a.m. service. Four of our wonderful men would be perfect for this task.
3. Work at the church Wednesday, January 23, to receive and sort donations from 10:00 – 11:30 a.m.
4. Work at the church Thursday, January 24, to receive and sort donations from 8:00 a.m. until noon.
5. Work at the church Friday, January 25, to price items beginning at 8:00 a.m. We need people who are good at pricing boutique clothing, jewelry, collectible china and glassware, toys, housewares, etc.
6. Work at the church Saturday, January 26, for the sale, beginning at 6:30 a.m. (the sale is from 8:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m.). For this we need at least one person in the kitchen, four people to conduct church tours, four men for security and lifting, two or three people for the jewelry table, and two or three people just to mill around.
7. Don't forget: there are refreshments (wine and cheese) after all the hard work on Saturday.

So mark your calendars, start stashing those goodies for us, bring them to St. Mark's on Wednesday, January 23 (10:00 – 11:30 a.m.), or Thursday, January 24, (8:00 to noon), sign up for one of our volunteer tasks, and come to the sale. We need the participation of everyone in order for this to be a continued success. And *please*, no drop-offs before January 23.

Ann Dozetos and Priscilla Reilly  
Co-Chairs

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## ***Annual Men's Outing***

Fellows, it's that time of year again. The legendary St. Mark's Men's Outing will once again be held at the Wayward Hunt Camp in Fellsmere on Saturday, February 9, from 10:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. We have shortened the length this year as many want to leave shortly after lunch; but it is such a long way from the camp to the gate that it becomes logistically difficult to shuttle people back and forth. That being said, please make plans to be at the gate on the south side of CR 512, 3/4-mile west of the CR 512/I-95 interchange, no earlier than 9:30 a.m. and no later than 10:00 a.m. The gate will not be open before then, and once it's closed it will not reopen until 1:00 p.m., so please make plans to be with us for the entire time.

If you attend, I can promise that you won't be sorry. Once again we have a range set up for pistols, rimfire rifles and pistols (*no centerfire rifles, please*), clay pigeons over the lake, card tables, and more food and drinks than anyone could want. You may even see a few of our diocesan clergy milling around.

More information will be available as we get closer to the date, but please mark it on your calendars. And don't forget: your children, grandchildren, and friends are always more than welcome.

*With the completion of the re-roofing project we are resuming our scheduled Holy Day Eucharists*

## ***Upcoming Holy Days***

### December/January/February/March Holy Days

December 21 (noon) – Feast of St Thomas the Apostle  
December 24 (11:30 p.m.) – Carols and Midnight Mass (*with incense*)  
December 25 (10:00 a.m.) – Christmas Day  
December 26 (noon) – Feast of St Stephen, Deacon and Martyr  
December 27 (noon) – Feast of St John, Apostle and Evangelist  
December 28 (noon) – Feast of the Holy Innocents  
January 1 (10:00 a.m.) – Feast of the Circumcision of Our Lord  
January 25 (noon) – Feast of the Conversion of St Paul  
February 2 (10:00 a.m.) – Feast of the Purification of St Mary the Virgin  
February 24 (noon) – Feast of St Matthias the Apostle (transferred)  
March 6 (noon and 6:00 p.m.) – Ash Wednesday  
March 25 (noon) – Feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

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## **St. Mark's Anglican Church**

**Rev. Canon Michael L. Ward, SSA**  
**Rector**

**Rev. Randall S. Russell**  
**Curate**

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