

The Beacon

*In thy light shall we see light.
Psalm 36:9*

August 2020

Resting in the Certainty of God

by the Rev. Abigail Crozier Nestlehutt

I cannot remember a time when I could not swim, although I don't remember how I learned to swim. I spent many of my childhood summer days at the lake on the Wellesley College campus about a mile from our house. Sometimes my mother drove us to Crane Beach in Ipswich for a day, and twice we rented a house on Cape Cod and swam in Pleasant Bay or at Nauset Beach. No matter where we were, I loved to swim. I still love to swim.

I do remember the time when my children could not swim, but I also remember that they learned quickly, like most kids living on Maryland's eastern shore. They spent many of their childhood summer days at the community pool in walking distance from our house, sometimes my daughter and I biked to a small beach on Chesapeake Bay, and on family vacations Asa and Honor swam in Nantucket Sound or the Atlantic.

Curiously, twice since the pandemic began I have encountered "First Lesson," a poem by Philip Booth about teaching his daughter to swim. The first time I saw the poem was on March 23, before most of us had grasped how long Covid-19 would remain part of our collective lives. Michael Gerson refers to it in an opinion piece in the *Washington Post* about the unique kind of isolation and fear that we were just starting to feel. At the end of the article, he cites the closing lines of Booth's simple poem: "As you float now, where I held you/ and let go, remember when fear/cramps your heart what I told you:/ lie gently and wide to the light-year/stars, lie back, and the sea will hold you." Gerson then goes on to highlight the significance of that lesson:

This is what most religions promise in times of fear—not immediate deliverance, but the hope that suffering and failure are not final. This does not release anyone from worry and heavy responsibility. But it does promise that worry and responsibility don't need to consume us. It promises that a voice of reassurance can speak out of the silence. It promises that the stillness of a pounding heart can be replaced by the stillness of a wise trust.

In our nation's long, involuntary Lent, fear abounds. We should oppose it with all we have, for as long as we can. But when we come to the end of our strength and lie back, the universe will hold us.

I encountered this poem for the second time on July 17, around the time when Covid's profound impact began to be unavoidably clear and wearingly distressing. Writing in response to a friend's post about how to live at this unusually difficult time, the Bishop of Indiana cited "First Lesson" in its entirety, picking up on our mutual friend's suggestion that, rather than struggle against all that is happening now, we "float on this sea of uncertainty" called Covid and trust that God will not let us drown.

My children learned to swim quickly, but until they learned they were afraid. Relaxing into the water just did not seem natural to them. Like the poet's daughter, they first had to trust that I would not take my

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[“Resting in the Certainty of God,” cont. from p. 1]

hands out from underneath them, and then they had to trust that even when I did, they would not sink. They had to learn that they could keep themselves afloat.

Covid-19 is an inescapable part of our life for now. We will do what we can to keep afloat – wear masks, maintain physical distance, wash our hands, check on friends, pray for our leaders – and we will make the most of this challenge. We will find new opportunities to help those in need, to be together, and to learn in new ways. As usual, the August *Beacon* is full of information about enjoyable summer gatherings, outreach opportunities, and a preview of the upcoming program year. To keep everyone safe, all of our offerings at this time are online or outdoors, but most importantly, all of them are robust and meaningful. If you have ideas about what else we might do, please share them. If you need anything, do not hesitate to reach out to Chris and me.

As time goes on, we are getting used to a new normal that we did not seek and do not want. We have been and will be afraid, worried, angry but also grateful, prayerful, at peace. From conversations, I know that many of you are feeling particularly discouraged right now, and I understand. Please remember that you are not alone. Perhaps together we can float rather than thrash around, knowing that just when it all seems to be too much, “when we come to the end of our strength,” God will hold us.

Outdoor Eucharist

Confident that it is safe to do so, we have added more in-person worship opportunities outdoors, and invite you to join us for Holy Eucharist at 4 p.m. on Sunday or at 8 a.m. on Tuesday, weather permitting. Both will be simple, spoken services, but the Tuesday service will be a bit simpler. Diocesan rules still require sign-ups, masks, and distancing and limit the number of attendees. You can sign up via Keynotes or by calling the office (610-644-2261); everyone who registers will receive all details. The full August schedule appears on page 6.

Popcorn Theology, Pandemic Style

What’s this? Well, it’s like a book discussion, but based on a movie and held via Zoom! After watching the movie at your convenience, you then gather with others online (or via phone) to discuss the film’s spiritual, religious, moral, and ethical themes.

We have decided to give this a try on **Monday, August 10**, and will develop a series if there is interest. The first movie is *The Way*, a powerful story about family, friends, and the challenges we face, one reviewer points out, as we navigate an ever-changing, complicated world. Most of the movie takes place along Spain’s famed *Camino de Santiago*, so this story of pilgrimage will set us up perfectly up for some of this fall’s adult formation offerings.

Plan to watch *The Way* on your own, and then join the Zoom conversation at 5:30 p.m. on **Monday, August 10**. Please let Abigail know that you plan to participate (abigail@stpetersgv.org), so that she can send you the Zoom information. And don’t forget to stock up on popcorn beforehand!

Will You Usher for In-person Worship?

With the Covid-19 situation remaining so fluid and uncertain, any in-person worship plans we make must be flexible as well. Since it may be possible to worship together indoors in September, to be sure that this move happens smoothly and safely, we will need ushers trained in our new safety procedures.

If you feel comfortable returning to indoor worship in the fall and wish to serve as an usher, please contact Abigail (abigail@stpetersgv.org). Thank you.



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The Beacon is produced monthly by
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Pandemic Update

It has been almost seven months since the first cases of Covid-19 appeared in the U.S. During those months, we have all learned a lot about both the virus and ourselves, and Chris and I have also learned a lot about serving in the midst of a pandemic. We still have more to learn, but I want to share with you some of what I know so far.

The people of St. Peter's continue to be faithfully generous with their time, talent, and treasure. You have supported one another through phone calls, emails, texts, and letters. You have reached out to communities in need with non-perishable food, vegetables from your garden, and homemade cookies. You have attended Bible study, coffee and social hours, a book discussion, the men's gathering, and conversations on race via Zoom. You have worshiped via Facebook or our website on Sunday mornings and weekdays at noon. You have continued to send in your financial support. I have learned again what I already knew: St. Peter's Church in the Great Valley is a strong community of faith. Ready to love, to serve, and to welcome.

The complex, ever-changing demands created by Covid-19 have altered everyone's usual routines, including ours here at St. Peter's. Ordinarily the clergy and staff meet in May to plan the calendar for the program year ahead. Not this year, though! Instead we are now considering things in smaller increments, knowing that new information is likely to come along and require us to make adjustments. Still, we do have a plan, which is to continue to offer meaningful worship, outreach opportunities, formation, and fellowship. For now, to be as safe as possible, most of what we plan to offer takes place either virtually or outdoors.

The biggest decision ahead of us is when to move indoors. Presently we are on schedule to return to indoor worship at the start of the program year, September 13. But both any newly unfolding realities of the virus and directives from our bishop can change that plan. Nevertheless, we are committed to continuing to offer the option of worshiping from home on Sunday mornings via a beautiful streamed service on Facebook or our website. I will give you up-to-date information about changes in Keynotes. Please do not hesitate to contact me about any questions, concerns, or ideas. I miss you, I appreciate the ways in which we are connecting now, and I look forward to future opportunities to be together, virtually, outdoors, and eventually indoors. Many thanks to you all.

Conversation on Race Update

Following up on the July conversation, the three facilitators and the clergy are compiling a comprehensive summary of the ideas that arose in the parallel breakout sessions and are also creating a prioritized list of suggested actions that the people of St. Peter's might embrace, both as individuals and as a parish, to begin to eradicate the devastating effects of racism. The team will disseminate this information to the conversation participants and the whole parish.

The guiding principle for the conversations on race has been the team's belief that change happens internally when we increase our understanding of others, examine our motives, and open our hearts, and externally when we modify our habitual, often unintentional, behaviors and undertake actions that lead to a more just and peaceful world. With this principle in mind, when the action ideas are published, the team will ask all parishioners to consider what actions they wish to engage in as St. Peter's moves boldly toward fulfilling the vows made for and by each of us at baptism and confirmation.

Our Navajo Brothers and Sisters

Some of you may recall that at our social hour with Bishop Gutiérrez in May, a number of parishioners expressed concern about Covid-19's effect on the members of the Navajo Nation in his former diocese. He explained that the pandemic has hit the Navajo Nation particularly hard, in large part because it spans harsh and remote areas where many homes have no running water, and he worried that the spread of the virus could potentially wipe out large numbers of our Navajo brothers and sisters.

Needless to say, those present at the social hour asked the bishop how St. Peter's could help! Following this conversation and with input from the bishop, the outreach commission sent \$500 to the GoFundMe account of the official Navajo Nation Covid-19 Relief Fund. If you would like to learn more about this effort or to donate additional support on your own, please visit www.gofundme.com.

Vacation Bible School at Home



The weeks that remain before the school year begins give families enough time to enjoy VBS together at home using *Noticing God in Creation*, a program that offers a flexible approach to hearing Bible stories and finding God in the wonders of the natural world. Families of Sunday school children have received information about the program and also the first lesson; subsequent lessons will arrive each Friday this month.

VBS, which is open to all children entering pre-K through 5th grade in the fall, is hosting a Facebook group where all participants can post their VBS experiences. To learn more about this year's necessarily "distanced" program, or to request the first mailings to use with your own children or to share with your grandchildren, please email VBS2020@stpetersgv.org.

Backpack Tags Coming Soon

Despite the uncertainties about the opening of school this year, St. Peter's will again send our children and young people off to school and college with backpack tags and blessings! Watch for details in coming issues of Keynotes.

Fall Fest Goes Virtual!

Fall Fest returns on **Friday, September 11**, and everyone is invited. Whether you are a relative newcomer or an "old-timer," whether you are 9 or 90, we hope you and your family will join us on Zoom at 6 p.m. for this annual evening of fun and fellowship, that officially kicks off our program year.

We look forward, as always, to hearing your tales about your summer adventures in this most unusual year! Unlike past years when we asked you to bring an *hors d'oeuvre* to share, this year we will send out some special recipes before the party in the hope that you will join in the fun of virtual sharing by serving one or more of them in your home that evening. For beverages, you and your family are on your own, but we hope to hear about any creative fall fest libations you come up with.

There are two ways to let us know you will be at Fall Fest: you can either call the church office (610-644-2261) or use the "SignUp Genius" link that will be included in the official invitation you receive in Keynotes later this month. So be sure your computer, tablet, or phone is charged that evening! Please contact Paige Infortuna if you have questions (pinfortuna@msn.com or 610-608-2093). Even though we'll miss not being together in the same space, we are looking forward to coming together virtually on **Friday, September 11**. Be sure to reserve the date of this not-to-be missed event now!



June Financial Snapshot

	June 2020	Year to Date June	Year-end Projection	Budget 2020
Parishioner Contributions	\$ 29,372	\$293,899	\$567,325	\$611,305
Other Income*	50,476	110,095	165,758	135,190
Total Income	79,848	403,994	733,083	746,495
Total Expense	64,003	366,926	693,113	746,495
Surplus/ (Deficit)	15,845	37,068	39,970	0

*Interest, rentals, endowment distributions, fundraiser, PPP loan proceeds

This snapshot continues to show the unusual effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the PPP funds. Despite the loss of an exceptional amount of rental income and the need to cancel the barn dance fundraiser, the June figures lead us to project a budget surplus at year's end. But the surplus is on paper only; with projected losses in some parish income for 2021 and potential continuing expenses for the video production of Sunday services, the surplus is completely utilized. While we were fortunate to receive PPP funding, which makes it seem as if the parish received a windfall, when the treasurers and finance commission members review both this year's budget and next year's together, it is quite apparent that we will have sufficient funds to meet our needs but will not end 2020 with a surplus. —Eric Lien for the finance commission

Stewardship

Much has happened since our 2020 pledge season began—a relentless pandemic, economic chaos, and racial disparities and turmoil, to name a few. Despite these difficulties and trials, we have found comfort and solace in St. Peter’s, our spiritual home that is blessed with generous parishioners who continue to give their time, talent, and treasure to make possible the many daily miracles that define our journey together in faith and service. Parishioners have given of themselves by providing food for those whose lives have been changed by the pandemic, knitting items to comfort to those in pain, performing meaningful service music during our virtual worship, and maintaining and strengthening the connections we enjoy within our parish community.

In a few short months we will again ask you to make an annual pledge to St. Peter’s. We ask for a pledge simply because having those pledges in hand is the most reliable way for your church leaders to predict, prioritize, and plan for all the many things we are called to do. Spontaneous gifts to the church are always welcome, of course, and we greatly appreciate the generosity behind them. But if you intend to provide a gift to St. Peter’s, no matter the size or frequency, we ask you to please consider formalizing it as a pledge. By doing so, you enable us to estimate with reasonable accuracy how much we can undertake each year and what new goals we can set. Intentional pledges help us define our plans and continue our mission.

The stewardship commission is meeting regularly this summer and fall, and will provide more information before our annual stewardship campaign kicks off in October. We are grateful for the ministry of the people of St. Peter’s.



August 1

Needlework ministry
10 a.m.

August 2

Outdoor Eucharist
4 p.m.

August 10

“Popcorn Theology” (Zoom)
6 to 7 p.m.

August 16

Outdoor Eucharist
4 p.m.
Youth group meeting (Zoom)
5 p.m.

August 23

Outdoor Eucharist
4 p.m.

August 30

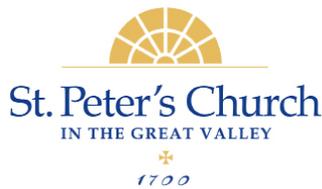
Outdoor Eucharist
4 p.m.
Youth group meeting (Zoom)
5 p.m.

See p. 6 for our weekly offerings.

- Alexander Weir for playing the violin at the summer solstice compline service;
- All who work to make the campus looking beautiful for visitors;
- 2020 high school graduates JP Infortuna, Asa Nestlehutt, and Rachel Dwyer for the sermons they gave in June and July;
- Chris Exley for organizing the July showing of *1776: The Movie*;
- Holly Hardester for her ongoing commitment to our Sunday school families;
- Mark Clark and Liam Reid for their ongoing videographic work;
- The members of the flower guild who prepare the flowers for our virtual worship;
- Shannon Mannon, Trudi Graves, and Lindsey Mosvick for facilitating the July 16th conversation about race;
- Bruce Glenny for leading the choir’s book club discussion of Robin DiAngelo’s *White Fragility*;
- All who baked 1000 sugar cookies for St. James School, and Cathy Terlescki who organized the project.
- Abigail expressed her appreciation to Chris Exley, the staff, and the wardens for making it possible for her to take a family vacation.


Thanks
from the Vestry

for All You Do



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The Rev. Abigail Crozier Nestlehutt, Rector
 The Rev. Chris Exley, Assistant Rector
 Dr. Bruce Glenny, Organist/Choirmaster
 Susan House, Parish Administrator
 Elizabeth Dwyer, Parish Secretary
 Leigh Pavoni, Preschool Director
 Gail Malcolm, Event Coordinator
 Liam Reid, Weekend Facilities Manager

*Our Mission:
 by the power of the Holy Spirit,
 to nurture people of all ages in the
 knowledge and love of God in Jesus Christ,
 and to make Him known
 in the wider community*

The deadline for the
 September Beacon
 is **August 18.**

Weekly Virtual Offerings at St. Peter's

Sunday
 10 A.M. Morning Prayer*
 Coffee hour**
 5 P.M. Youth Group**

Monday thru Thursday
 12 NOON Noonday Prayer*

Wednesday
 10 A.M. Morning Prayer & Bible Study**

Thursday
 1:15 P.M. Intercessory Prayer Group**

Friday
 8 A.M. Gathering of Men**

Daily
 7 P.M. Storytime with Abigail & Chris*

* Facebook Live or Website
 ** Zoom

To reach the staff, please call the office; if no one answers, leave a message or send an email. We are working from home as much as possible but we check for messages often. Thank you for your patience as we work from home, and please know that we love to hear from you.



Outdoor Eucharist

Sunday, August 2, 4 p.m.
 Tuesday, August 4, 8 a.m.
 Sunday, August 9, 4 p.m.
 Tuesday, August 11, 8 a.m.
 Sunday, August 16, 4 p.m.
 Tuesday, August 18, 8 a.m.
 Sunday, August 23, 4 p.m.
 Tuesday, August 25, 8 a.m.
 Sunday, August 30, 4 p.m.

Pre-registration required.
 See p. 2 for details.