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The Parish Paper

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The Second Sunday after Easter

04/10/05

DELUGE AND DELIGHT

Two and a half inches of rain, the most ever for an Easter Day in Savannah, did not dampen our resolve. I have never been prouder of our parish than on this Easter when the inclement weather could have easily kept us away from church, but did not.

Many of you remarked how dreary it was outside but how glorious inside. The church was adorned with beauty, from the flowers which covered the arch, to the flowers that made their way elegantly up the pulpit, to those that covered the baptismal font, to the garden on the retable. The scent of the lilies outlining the chancel filled the church.

Along with the beauty of God's good earth came the celestial melodies of the choir. We should all be grateful for the gifts of labor and talent that the choir shares with us. Singing three services, beginning at 8am, and then through 9:30, until we came to 11:30 and the magnificent Choral Eucharist, the choir glorified God and filled our hearts with the joy of heaven. Our thanks go to Mr. Taylor for his musical leadership and to every member of the choir not only for Easter Day but also for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Evensong for Easter Eve and Confirmation.

I should not forget to thank those two organizations without which our church could not function at its present level, the Episcopal Churchwomen and the Men of St. John's. The women provided a marvelous reception for a large class of confirmands and their families on Easter Eve. And the men of St. John's continued with their sumptuous breakfast for the choir in the Parish House which comes after the 9:30 service and before the final Eucharist.

I should not neglect to thank the Guild of Acolytes as well. These young men perform their duties in the sanctuary with precision. What they do lends much to the liturgy being executed decently and in order. Fr. Dunbar and Mr. Carter Hubbard see to it that the acolytes are well trained.

Along with the acolytes are the men who administer the chalice at Holy Communion. They do this with reverence and dignity. I hear tell that one of them was called upon to serve very early on Easter morning and that his wife answered the phone with a lovely rendition of "Here comes Peter Cottontail."

And I especially want to praise Fr. Dunbar for his steady and consistent

help in the round of our services, which he always does with good cheer - and a file of notes! All of which is in addition to his fine teaching and sermons that instruct us all.

This Easter Day was made particularly wonderful by the effort of those who came, in the most torrential rainstorm, to worship and rejoice in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. But there is also something wonderful about the rain as well. If we look carefully at our Lord's teaching, we find that he considered rain to be a sign and image of grace. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke of

God's grace in this way, "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, he sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). Based on this, Shakespeare likens mercy to the "gentle rain" from heaven. Though ours was not a gentle rain, the image of grace follows still.

With rain as a sign and image of grace, I cannot help but think that, as we gathered to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, God's mercy was falling abundantly. While most of us who came on Easter attend church often, some came who do not attend often. The levels and degrees of faith are not always reflected in these habits though they sometimes are. We are not to judge. It is better to inspire and to encourage.

We can be sure of this. Our Lord's property is always to have mercy, and his grace is given abundantly, just as the rain fell on Easter Day. The victory over sin and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead are the events of new life, life more powerful, more merciful, and more loving, than we can imagine. Easter Day we saw a deluge of grace fall upon our souls - upon all the different levels of faith. It was the actual presence of God making us his own. The rain was a sign and image of this, a deluge but a great delight. And so, for this Easter Day, and for all his many mercies, God's holy name be blessed and praised now and forever.

CHURCH MANNERS

Every so often it is a good idea to remember what our manners ought to be in church. If we remember some of these things we will be better prepared to worship.

1. Hospitality. St. Johns' is a friendly parish, but sometimes we forget to reach out to those who are new or whom we see only every once in a while. Remember, the little things go a long way when it comes to making someone feel welcome. Try to recall the names of those who are new. If you forget the name, just say so, and then try again. Calling someone's name means everything. And then talk to that person after church at the coffee hour where you can invite them to the various activities in the church. Be hospitable, don't be a St. John's grouchy!

2. Reverence. The attitude of worship begins before you walk in the door of the church. If you prepare to praise God, to hear his word, to collect yourself, to pray for those who need your prayers, to confess your sins, to resolve to live a new life, if you intend to do these things, you will come into church with your heart ready to kneel before the

Lord and Creator of all to whom worship is due from all. Silence, or being as quiet as possible, is truly golden. Be reverent; don't be a St. John's talky!

3. Dress. We should remember that as we praise God and offer him the best of our hearts, our outward appearance should also reflect the dignity and integrity of our highest ceremonial, which is the worship of Almighty God, our Lord and our King. At the daily office, we come as we are. For any other service we dress for worship. Dress appropriately; don't be a St. John's slouchy!

The Rev'd. Dr. Michael L. Carreker

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