

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ”, wrote Paul to the Galatians (6:2). In this way, “the whole body [is] joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Ephesians 4:16).

Every part of the body of Christ stands connected with every other part. No one stands alone. As our brother Peter Benson points out in his article—Simon of Cyrene—is that there has been a portion of the body that has often been ostracized and ignored by the other parts. *Every* follower of Jesus—every single one, however they are broken—is related to every other follower of Jesus. No exceptions.

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Are we obeying one of Christ Jesus’ primary com-

mands to his disciples to love one another (John 15:12)? Are we remembering the principle that “as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40)?

Good food for thought.



Simon of Cyrene By Peter Benson

Our scripture today comes from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 23, verses 24–27:

So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will.

And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him

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(ESV).

We’ve dropped in on the Passion of Jesus Christ, entering in on the scene where he staggers under the weight of the burden he carries to Golgotha, a trail of blood and flesh

marking the way from which he came. Already weakened by scourging, Jesus had an approximately 650 yard uphill trek to the place of his crucifixion. With a crossbeam on his back weighing between 80 and 110 pounds, the *Via Dolorosa*—“the walk of suffering”—must have seemed like an eternity. In fact, Jesus is unable to make it without the help of another: Simon of Cyrene.

Mere days before these events, Jesus foretold what would happen in Luke 9.

And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

Curiously, he then said the following words:

“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

The man who healed the sick, commanded demons, and raised the dead not only foresaw his death but charged any who would follow him to bear their own crosses, and to bear them daily. And yet, this same man stumbled under the weight of his cross and afflictions, requiring Simon, a fellow Jew visiting Jerusalem for Passover, to carry the gory crossbeam upon his own shoulders so that Jesus could make it the rest of the way to the mount of crucifixion. Simon helped carry the burden that was too great for Jesus.

My question for you today, St. John’s, revolves around how you are caring for struggling individuals in

your midst. Like Simon, we should be carrying the crosses of others.

Specifically, I want to ask how we are caring for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer people, including those in our churches who are trying to live out the historical teachings of the church in a culture that does not value celibacy, and in a Church that no longer promotes it.

In order to give some perspective to the issue, let me provide some statistics.

According to one study, 20–40% of homeless youth identify as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender), while LGBT individuals make up only 3–5 percent of the overall population [Ray].

Based upon a survey of over 1,700 individuals (“the largest scientific study ever done with faith and the LGBT community”), Andrew Marin reports some surprising findings in his new book “Us Versus Us”. According to the study, 86% of LGBTs were raised in a faith community from the ages of 0–18, 54% of LGBTs leave their religious communities after the age of 18 (double that of the general population), 76% of LGBTs are open to returning to their religious community and its practices (compared to 9% of the general population), 36% of LGBTs continue their faith practices after the age of 18, and 80% of LGBTs regularly pray regardless of religious identification or affiliation. Lastly (and this is a telling statistic for those who hold to the “choice” narrative of sexuality), “at least once in their life, 96 percent of [the] study’s participants prayed that God would make them straight” (113).

According to a recent Huffington Post article¹: “Gay people are now, depending on the study, between 2 and 10 times more likely than straight people to take their own lives.² We’re twice as likely to have a major depressive episode³ ... In a survey of care-providers at HIV clinics, one respondent told researchers: ‘It’s not a question of them not knowing how to save their lives. It’s a question of them knowing if their lives are worth saving.’”⁴

It goes on to say that, “relatively small stressors ... have an outsized effect [on the closeted person]—not because they’re directly traumatic, but because we start to expect them. ‘No one has to call you queer for you to adjust your behavior to avoid being called that.’ Put another way, “being in the closet is like having someone punch you lightly on the arm, over and over. At first, it’s annoying. After a while, it’s infuriating. Eventually, it’s all you can think about.”

A September 2014 *Rolling Stone* article claimed that, while life is generally improving for LGBT youth in America, it is getting worse for those who belong to religious families, as religious beliefs can compel some parents to kick (or “edge”) their children out of their homes after they come out to them, which LGBT youth are doing at an increasingly young (and thus economically dependent) age (Morris).

Consider my friend, Jacob, who hasn’t come out to his Christian

mother even though he is almost 40, because he’s worried she can’t handle it and will never speak to him again.

Or another friend of mine, whose Christian father hung up on her when she told him she was bisexual, initially refusing any communication with her.

Consider my friend James who was raised by his grandparents after both of his parents passed away. Two days after his grandfather died his grandmother kicked him out of the house because he was gay. He lived on friends’ couches for months.

For many LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer) people, to grow up in the church is to experience deep shame, confusion, alienation, and frustration. Their crosses may look like loneliness, financial instability, doubt, bitterness, sexual and emotional frustration, and a sense of not belonging, among other things.

As Eve Tushnet, a celibate Catholic lesbian writes:

“If you are gay in this country, you are more likely to be alienated from your parents and traumatized by your upbringing if you were raised Christian. The more Christians you were surrounded by—the more “Christian” your community was or is—the more likely you are to experience shame and alienation from God.

This is common knowledge among gay Christians. But it should shock us; it should shock all Christians.”

We at St. John’s generally know where we stand theologically on issues of same-sex attraction and

highline.huffingtonpost.com/articles/en/gay-loneliness
www.academia.edu/28181008/

Preventing Suicide Among Gay and Bisexual Men New Research and Perspectives
www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/339041/MSM_Initial_Findings_GW2014194.pdf

www.afc.01.thirdwaveweb.com/resources/legacy/pdf/2009/boot_camp_BMSM.pdf

marriage: We look to Scripture, the testimony of the saints, and the history of the church to inform us on these matters. Do we, though, look to them for guidance on how to *live* in light of this theology? Too often we view our LGBT brothers and sisters with suspicion or hold them at arm's length because we just don't know what to do with them, leaving them alone to carry the sometimes staggering weight of a cross that even Christ stumbled under.

Like Simon, we can do more than the crowd that simply lamented and mourned.

One of the reasons for the early church's rapid growth was that it offered an alternative to the stratifications and expectations of society: women were no longer economically or socially dependent upon marriage, people from all socio-economic backgrounds and family situations were welcome, and radical self-giving and unity was promoted. As author and pastor Ed Shaw notes, "The New Testament follows [Jesus'] lead by consistently using family language to describe both what the church is, and how it should function ... One of the most radical changes between Testaments seems to be that the biological family matters much less than it used to ... the stress is now on growing the church rather than your own biological family."

The early church was a community based on sacrificial love, mutual care, and the sharing of resources, and its members viewed one another as brothers and sisters. There were expectations that the members of the church would refrain from sin and give their lives to the

purposes of God, but there was no particular script for how that had to look for any individual believer, even though the early church had numerous examples of unmarried members. Over the centuries there developed entire communities of people who were committed to service of the Lord through celibacy (in monasteries and convents).

Compare that to the Church we most often find in America today: bound by cultural models of the nuclear family (mom, dad, 2.5 kids, and a dog), we are separated by picket fences into our neat, individualized worlds. This new family model promotes a hetero-normativity that has squeezed out previous models of family and fraternity, leading to the fracturing of the church body, an unhealthy and unfulfilling preoccupation with romantic relationships, and a lack of diversity.

For instance, the relationship of a "significant other" is becoming, for an increasing number of people, their only real source of intimacy. Between 1985 and 2004 people were increasingly likely to discuss "meaningful matters" with their spouses, but every other relationship category *decreased* in frequency—in fact, those who confided solely in a spouse doubled, while the number of those who had *no one at all* to confide in tripled. As scholar James Brownson notes, "the escalating divorce rate in most modern cultures suggests that modern expectations of intimacy and complementarity may not always be easy to fulfill."

In a world where marriage was not the default or assumed future, where spiritual and physical forms of

intimacy could be experienced in non-sexual relationships (such as new forms of friendship), and where people could live into alternative, established roles within a community of believers that spoke of family as a spiritual reality, not a physical uncertainty, I think celibacy would not look like such a death sentence.

But I want to consider this today not just because of what gay people need or stand to gain. Like Simon, we all benefit from this cross that is carried.

In carrying their crosses, gay people in our churches model Christ for us and challenge us to pick up our own crosses daily. As Matt Jones, another celibate Christian, observes:

“Gay/SSA (same-sex attracted) Christians frequently feel stuck and isolated between a broader society that increasingly stigmatizes and misunderstands our religious convictions and a church that is often disinterested in or openly hostile to our existence. The church is our family, and yet we have to fight so hard not to be held at arm’s length.

And this is the thing, right? People have tried to “solve” the “problem” of gay people without first befriending and becoming family with us. And I think it’s because...straight people know that if they ask the right questions about sexuality, they will be called into action, forced [to] change their lives in substantive ways. So instead of a good question, like “What would it take for celibacy (or the traditional sexual ethic) to be experienced as abundant and good?” it’s been easier for people in positions of power to simply place the whole burden on the shoulders of sexual minorities themselves.”

But it is not just gay people who are called to pick up their crosses—Jesus called *everyone* who is to follow him to pick up their cross. In this way, the struggles of our Chris-

tian same-sex attracted brothers and sisters serve as a valuable challenge and reminder to examine how we are denying ourselves for Christ.

It is not that we are called to some sort of self-flagellation as Christians and must seek out ways that we can suffer; rather, it is that to be like Christ is to deny our wills and submit ourselves to God. You don’t have to search around for a cross to carry—by being a Christian you will naturally encounter them. Perhaps your cross is situational: you struggle to believe God loves you in the midst of long-term pain or illness; you battle fear because of financial instability, or bitterness due to mistreatment at the hands of someone else. Perhaps your cross is the clinging temptation of gluttony, greed, laziness, or vanity. Perhaps it is raising a family, being a faithful spouse, honoring God at work or with your sexuality, or simply choosing to keep living despite crippling depression or despair or loneliness.

There is power in struggling together. The Gospel is made manifest through the lives of believers. What perspective do you think Christ’s suffering brought to Simon’s own trials? Assuming he understood the reason for Christ’s death and the resurrection that would come afterward, we can expect that Simon found great encouragement in the perseverance of Christ. May we not only be challenged by our gay brothers and sisters, but also encouraged by their faithfulness and perseverance, and equipped by their unique insight, wisdom, and perspective, by the subjugation of their freedom to the will of God.

Likewise, we are reminded that our hope is not in the fragile institution of marriage or the nuclear family. Rather, we look now to the church for community and instruction, and we look ahead to the cosmic hope that we have in God through Jesus Christ, who has made us brothers and sisters in his family, sharing with us the inheritance of his good works.

What might it look like for us to be challenged and encouraged in these ways to be a community where LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) people felt especially loved, cared for, and wanted? For starters, that could look like not raising children under the assumption that marriage is their end goal, but rather love of God and neighbor. It might look like homes consisting of non-blood relatives: “aunts” and “uncles” and god-mothers and god-fathers. It might mean re-evaluating a church structure that is built around an assumption that members fit within a nuclear family. It might mean new ministries, new priorities, and new ways of communicating. It might mean re-valuing and re-imagining the role of spiritual friendship. It may mean reforming our understanding of what it means to be a man or a woman. It may mean listening more and talking less. It may mean speaking up when before you wouldn’t.

Whatever it may look like in our individual and corporate lives, it will most certainly entail dying to ourselves daily. But, following in the footsteps of our Savior, we can be sure it will most certainly lead to resurrection and new life.

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Opening Day Remarks

April 23, 2017

By Joe Phillips, Architect

I am honored to be with you to celebrate this exciting and meaningful day.

As an architect I spend much of my time studying and discussing the form, function, aesthetics, beauty, and delight of built structures. As we were working through the process of designing your worship space, two other words constantly came to the forefront. These words are purpose and glory. What is God's purpose for us and this space, and how can we be sure that every decision we make will glorify Him?

I know that I frequently question what God's will is for me. I am one of those people who would like to be "hit on the head with a 2 x 4" by God so that it is perfectly clear what His Will is for me. However, it seems to me that most times God does not do this. He is more subtle and only nudges us in the way He would like us to go. One of the ways He does this is to put us in contact with others that help us on our journey and help us to discern His will. Working with the groups and individuals at Saint John's through this design and initial renovation process was one of those times where we walked side by side to discern & glorify God's will.

Also, we cannot forget that God is always with us to guide us on the right path. We must remember that without God the physical Church Building is only an edifice made of sticks and stones. While we all appreciate well designed spaces and

buildings, He and His teachings are the true, foundation, rock, cornerstone of the Church. It is important to remember that God and His teachings do not require and cannot be contained by a physical building.

We have only begun this journey in shaping this "new" worship space for the Saint John's family. There are many more decisions to be made and tasks to accomplish. My prayer is that as we continue on this as the family of God, we walk humbly, recognize and feel his presence, discern his will, and that all of our actions, both spiritual and physical, will be to His glory. Amen.

Joe

By Alice Medleycott

Mark asked me to tell you something about my parents, Clyde and Mary Medleycott, who dedicated this property to the glory of God over 30 years ago. During that time this sanctuary was conceived and built, its foundations laid on top of the prayers of God's people.

My parents were among the most humble, gracious, generous people I have ever known although these qualities were expressed in exactly opposite ways by each: Dad outgoing and bold, Mom quiet and demure. Both of them full of the Holy Spirit and gratitude to Jesus Christ for saving them, reconciling them to God the Father and giving them eternal life in the Holy Spirit.

When this property was set apart for God's use I believe a root of righteousness was planted here, and as Proverbs 12:3 reads,

“A man shall not be established by wickedness, but the root of the righteous shall not be moved.” (KJV)

What is said here of a man is true of a church, too, of St. John’s Anglican, a church born out of a stand for righteousness and against wickedness. It is entirely fitting and miraculous that St. John’s Anglican Church would open its doors today and find its permanent home in this place, on this property, where that righteous root has grown undisturbed for decades.

My father has been in heaven for 24 years and my mother for 5 years. I love to read their Bibles to see what verses they underlined. In that way they point me to God’s wisdom and, though they are part of the great cloud of witnesses and I’m here, there is a sweet sharing of the living Word that is timeless and boundless.

Today I leave you with one of the passages underlined in my father’s Bible, shared by my parents with me and now by me with my church family:

“And now just as you trusted Christ to save you, trust him for each day’s problems; live in vital union with him. Let your roots grow down into him and draw up nourishment from him. See that you go on growing in the Lord, and become strong and vigorous in the truth you were taught. Let your lives overflow with joy and thanksgiving for all he has done. “(TLB)

Amen

Alice

Installation of Our New Sign Thursday, May 11th

You can find more pictures on our website www.toknowchrist.org under *Outreach, See the Progress.*



Baker Library Book Brief By Ken Cook

The Bible tells us that “there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). For many of us, the leisure time we manage to embrace during Summer often includes the privilege of reading a few books of our choosing. Perhaps, with that in mind, it is high time to drop by St. John’s library in our delightful new setting in order to discover what you may want to peruse sometime in the next few months. It will come as no surprise to most of you that two new books are being added to our library. You might want to read one of them.



First, a fifth volume from the “Christian Biographies for Young Readers” will soon show up on our

shelves. We have been adding these slender and colorful hardbacks to the collection for a couple of years now. This series aimed at children and young teenagers includes biographies of the lives of some of the most influential thinkers in the history of the Church. As a matter of full disclosure, I confess that I have enjoyed reading each of these accurate and winsome 64 page introductions. If any other adults read them, your secret is safe with me! Thus far, the influential lives and thought of Athanasius (ca. 296-373), Augustine (345-430), Anselm (ca. 1033-1109) and Luther (1483-1546) - in this 500th anniversary year of the Reformation - have been chronicled for us by their author, Simonetta Carr. The new addition is a comparable volume on *John Calvin* (1509-1564).

Simonetta Carr was born in Italy. She has worked as a journalist in many different cultures. As well, she is a former elementary school teacher, and has home-schooled her eight children for many years. She has written a total of 11 volumes for this popular series. They have all been produced in consultation with representative scholars.

Like the previous books, *John Calvin* is replete with a map, a timeline, illustrations and compelling photography. The life of Calvin, intended by his father to be a lawyer, converted to Christ as Lord as a result of reading the Scripture, Martin Luther and others, and pastor and theologian in Geneva is laid out with more than passing personal detail. His theology and influence on Reformation leaders in the Church of Eng-

land would prove to be significant after the rise of Queen Mary Tudor as many Protestant exiles fled to Geneva prior to the accession of Queen Elizabeth I in 1558.

Second, a thoughtful and thought-provoking consideration of *Ecclesiastes* will soon become available as well. You may well say, "What?!" Apart from the quotation which opens this article, most of us have surely spent at least *some* energy avoiding the rest of Solomon's purported wisdom. I am pretty confident of this assertion, having twice attempted to offer a Bible study of *Ecclesiastes* over the span of four decades. If you can overcome your sense of dread and impending depression, it might be a very good thing - and a very good read - to look for *Recovering Eden: The Gospel According to Ecclesiastes* by Zack Eswine. This volume reflects upon and applies the text and message of the twelve chapters of *Ecclesiastes* as Eswine mines insights from theologians past and present (Augustine and J.I. Packer), poets (Frost, George Herbert and Wallace Stevens), a songwriter (John Denver), a playwright (Oscar Wilde), novelists (John Bunyan and J.R.R. Tolkien) and other commentators on the human condition. Here is rich, if unexpected, wisdom concerning gainful living, pleasure and joy, obscurity and hatred, death and knowing the times, "life lived under the sun" and leadership, and God's purpose for the individual and the people of God. Like the publication mentioned above, *Recovering Eden* is part of an excellent series, "The Gospel According to the Old Testament". Zack Eswine

(Ph.D., Regent University) was born the year I graduated from high school; he is a pastor at Riverside Church in the St. Louis suburbs, has taught at Covenant Seminary and is the author of a number of books on pastoral ministry and Christian living. This is the best book I have ever seen on the meaning of life with and before God as portrayed in Ecclesiastes (and at 230 pages, it is shorter than most Summer-reading novels).

Ken

Altar Memorial Opportunities

Now that St. Johns has arrived at our permanent home, there are many service and worship items that are needed. Gifts may be given in Thanksgiving, for Special Occasions or in Honor or Memory of a loved one!

Some items needed are Altar Vases, Pulpit hangings, a Chapel Altar Cloth, Kneelers, and Chapel Cross.

Please contact Deb Freisheim or Lillian Thompson for more information and additional suggestions.

Ascension Day

@2017 Linda Barrett

They came young and old
the stooped over aged men
tall and straight young lads
hoary browed and hair of gold
All 500 gathered including women
to see their risen Lord again

Peter, John, and Mark and the eleven
disciples minus the hanged other
stood at the mountain's craggy brow
Jesus' beloved followers plus His Mother
waiting for His orders to carry out now
Yet, their Lord rose into His Father's Heaven

He stood there at the mountain's bottom
Shining bright as that treasured incident when
Jesus took up the other three to see Him revealed
As His Father's only begotten, beloved son
Peter asked Him would he see Him again
Jesus only replied he would return in this way
To restore what was out of order on another Ascension Day



The Bulletin Board

Altar Flowers given to the honor and glory of God
during the month of
April 2017

Sunday April 23	In memory of Howard Cossabone and George & Erna Kamm
Sunday April 30	In honor of River Oberly



Upcoming Events

Sunday, June 4th	Annual Parish Picnic
Saturday, June 10th @ 5pm	Joy in June Fundraiser for Logan Hope
Saturday, July 15th @ 7:30pm	Outdoor Family Movie Night
Saturday, August 12th @ 4pm	Sunnyside Band Playing Blue Grass Music and Pulled Pork Dinner
Saturday, September 23rd	Silent Auction Night with Jazz Piano

More details will follow. Please remember to check our website calendar and What's the Buzz.