

October 1, 2003

Dear Ones,

I have told some of you before about one of the most profound moments I remember in my ministry. I was in a continuing education class with the Rev. Jim Adams teaching us. He asked, about 30 fellow priests and I, this question, "Tell me what you would tell someone if they asked you what is more exciting about your parish on Sunday morning than sitting out on their deck in the sun drinking a latte and reading the *New York Times*?" One reason it was such a stunning moment was the deadening silence in that room. I vowed that day that I was going to carry that question with me throughout my ministry. Now, we could get carried away with that question. We could decide that because the world really wants to be entertained, that is what we must do on Sunday. But, I think that is a rather simplistic way of dealing with this question. The reason people would find the *New York Times* and a latte more appealing is that it doesn't require pretense, or inauthenticity. It also provides them with more of a connection with community than they feel any community of faith will. And I also have to wonder if these people have actually tried churches, but found them to be an extension of our plastic world, more of the same, and so they wish to escape.

This is one reason I so love St. James'. It is an answer to that question that has haunted me so. I even had this fulfilled recently when a woman in the Adult Forum told me, as we were getting started, that the newspaper, coffee, and her nice chair had really called to her that morning, but she just couldn't miss church. She said, "It seems something marvelous happens here every Sunday, I just couldn't miss what might happen today!" That's it!

On my family's recent trip to Florida, on Sunday morning, we were sitting by the Atlantic Ocean, the sun as beautiful as ever, playing in the waves, when my son Austin asked me, "Isn't it Sunday today?" I told him it was. "Are we going to St. James' today?" When I told him we were too far away and we would be missing today, the look on his face was perhaps the saddest one I saw on the entire vacation. I know, many of you are saying; just wait until those teenage years!! And perhaps you are right, but I will sure take this while I can. And I knew how he felt. I missed it too. I thought about it a lot, not because I am your Rector, but because "something marvelous happens here every Sunday, and I just didn't want to miss it"

The Episcopal Church has certainly been on a roller coaster of sorts lately. We see ourselves in the media and we hardly recognize ourselves! So many are predicting the end of the Church. We have heard these voices before. They are voices of fear and pain. We should not ignore them. We are brothers and sisters in Christ and we should never forget it. But, the One we follow, the One we model our life after, Jesus Christ, did not come to tell us what to think, or even what specifically to do, but rather how to live. It is a way steeped in abundance. It is a way steeped in love for others, even those, and especially those, the world says we should ignore or disdain. It is a way based in trust of that which is greater than us all.

And so we come around again to our annual pledge drive. It is one of those necessities that we must go about. And, if we only think about it as the world has taught us, we may see it as an evil. However, I think it is a true blessing. Because, although it is from these funds that we pay the bills, pay the staff's salary, further our mission in the world, it is also through the giving of these funds that we discover ourselves and, more about our God, whose whole being is one of generosity.

As I have always vowed to you I will disclose what I give. I think it is important for us to take away the power money plays in our lives. As Corky Carlisle reminded us in his visit with us this week, the scripture does not say "Money is the root of all evil." Instead, it says, "The LOVE of Money is the Root of all evil." Our need to control it, hoard it, keep it a secret, shows just how much we love it. As for Marti and I, we know how incredibly rich we are, blessed in so many ways, not just in money, but most especially, and much more importantly, by a community like all of you.

So, this year, we will give at least \$15,374 of our income away. This is about 12% of our 2004 income before taxes and 15.4% after taxes. And Austin is getting another allowance raise and has allowed me to tell you that he will be giving 10% of his weekly income which comes out to 30 cents. He will be giving 30 cents each week to the church, and 30 cents each week to savings. He is starting to save quite a bit!!! Please encourage this great spiritual discipline in your children as well. It can be a great life lesson of giving back. And I hope you will pray as a family about what you can give to this wonderful and sacred mystery we call Church, and also, home.

Corky, our guest preacher this past week, so beautifully told of his experience in Kenya with the chant, "*Hamrambree*", meaning, "to pull together." To pull together. As people would bring their offerings forward, great and small, this was their cheer. This is what I love about St. James', about this faith we call Christianity. In a world where so much is there to pull us apart, we are called to pull together! Hamrambree!!, Hamrambree!!, Hamrambree!!

My family and I are so blessed to be on this journey, with all of you, in this place.

Faithfully,

The Rev. Dr. Greg Rickel
Rector