

# The Messenger

The Church of St. John in the Wilderness, Copake Falls, NY  
A Non-Network Church in the Diocese of Albany

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Holy Week and Easter 2008

## Father Walt's "In the Wilderness Musings"

As I am writing this, we have only one more Sunday in the Season of Lent. On March sixteenth we will begin the season of Passion tide (also known as "Holy Week.") by celebrating the "Sunday of the Passion" (popularly known as "Palm Sunday.") The word "passion", used today to describe romantic ardor, or else something we really throw ourselves into (like having a passion for music, art, or whatever it is we are most devoted to) is, in fact, the Latin word for suffering. During this one-week season, we trace the final sufferings of Jesus culminating in his death on the Cross.

The liturgical color for Passiontide is "blood red" or crimson, the symbolism being clear. (Some churches, noting that the color for Passiontide on the liturgical calendar, is red, put out fire-engine red vestments which is great for the festivals of the Holy Spirit, such as Pentecost, which speak of the Holy Spirit's coming as a flame, but somehow misses the point for Passiontide)

The first Sunday in Passiontide is, as I've already indicated, popularly known as "Palm Sunday," which is a good name for the first half of the liturgy that day, recalling Christ's entrance into the city of Jerusalem which will be the scene for his final days on this earth. We recall how Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem by adoring crowds, who made a kind of "red carpet" for him by spreading their garments on his way, and waved palm branches as he passed them, crying "Hosanna" (the Hebrew equivalent for our "Hooray!") Blessed is he who comes

in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest."

Why this tumultuous welcome? Because the crowds believed that this young rabbi, with his band of swarthy young disciples from the rural area of Galilee, were undoubtedly coming to begin the rebellion which would get the Roman occupying armies out of Palestine once and for all, but ended up feeling very disillusioned when Jesus failed to produce. So we begin the Liturgy this Sunday by hearing once again the "Palm Sunday Story", and then processing with palms as we sing "All glory, laud, and honor, to thee, redeemer, king."

But the celebrative tone of the liturgy at the beginning, doesn't last long, because we are reminded that the crowd's joyful "Hosannas" on this day, were replaced with their shouts of "Crucify Him, Crucify Him, His blood be on us and on our children", on Good Friday. And so the Gospel reading at this liturgy is a "Passion Narrative tracing the story of Jesus being seized in the Garden Thursday evening, and then being brought to trial, and made to endure lashings and humiliations until on Good Friday he was nailed to a cross. This is a dramatic contrast in one liturgy to be sure, and we emphasize the drama of it, by reading the story dramatically, with parishioners taking the part of people who played key roles in his judgment and death, (such as Peter, Pilate, and the High Priest,.)

The next day we will observe at St. John's during Passiontide is "Maundy

Thursday.” The word “Maundy” comes from the Latin word which means to “Hand down a law or commandment” Its root is in the Latin word for “Hand” and serves as the source for our English word “Mandate.” A mandate is a binding commandment or law, and Jesus before he was to recline with his disciples around a low table to join in a “Last Supper” with them on the night before he was to die, stripped down to a loin cloth, took a pitcher of water and a bowl and washed the feet of his disciples, (a task usually performed by the lowliest slave in a 1st century household) saying to them as he did, “A new commandment (mandate) I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you.” There are a lot of behaviors which are described as examples of love, which range from the sublime to the ridiculous. Jesus, however, in this act of lowly foot washing, demonstrated that love is best expressed in acts of loving service. Jesus tells us to love in the way that he loved. So one part of the liturgy that night will be a “foot washing” for any who would like to participate, though nobody should feel obligated to take part. If you want to, however, wear shoes and socks that you can easily slip out of. )

The Maundy Thursday liturgy will actually begin in Burke Hall at 6 P.M. where we will assemble in what has become a hallowed tradition at St. John’s for a Passover Seder Meal, led by our own Jim Hedrick who provides an air of authenticity in the fact that he is Jewish and draws upon a lifetime of gathering with his family for this Sacred Meal. Also, Edie and Jim will once again be generously supplying the ritual foods used in the Seder. We do this because the supper Jesus was joining with his disciples to observe was, in fact, a Passover Seder. After the Seder we will process to the church for a celebration of the Holy Eucharist - a sacred meal which we celebrate as a continuation of that Sacred Meal Jesus

first joined with his disciples in observing at the Last Supper.

During the Eucharist that evening, the Priest consecrates two Hosts (large communion wafers), since bread or wine is not consecrated on Good Friday, and, at the end of the Liturgy he processes to the entrance of the Church where the oblations table will be festooned with flowers and plants, symbolizing the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus withdrew with his disciples after the Last Supper, and where he was eventually seized by the Temple authorities and hauled into the judgment court.

At the conclusion of the Liturgy parishioners who wish to are invited to spend some time in quiet contemplation and prayer before that shrine, in obedience to Christ’s words to his sleepy disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Could you not watch with me one hour?” In some churches the “Watch” continues all night long.

The last event before the final blessing of the Eucharist is what is known as the Stripping of the Altar” where all ornaments are removed from the sanctuary so that the sanctuary will be stark, providing the appropriate context for the observance of Good Friday the next day.

Good Friday will be observed at 7:30 P.M. with the “Liturgy for Good Friday” from the Book of Common Prayer. (beginning on p. 276) In this Liturgy the Passion Narrative is again read dramatically with parishioners taking different parts. We then join in prayer in what is known as “The Solemn Collects” praying for human needs throughout the world, since, on Good Friday, Christ died for the whole world (In the words of Holy Scripture, “Christ did not come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.”) Then a stark, rugged cross is carried into the sanctuary, as we sing a hymn of adoration. Finally the priest goes to the

Garden of Gethsemane shrine, and takes the Host which has been consecrated the night before, symbolizing Christ's being seized in the Garden, and processes to the Altar where he breaks it in two, symbolizing Christ's body being broken on the cross, and then, after brief devotions, the congregation receives communion from the reserved sacrament

The service ends with a brief prayer (no blessing or dismissal) and the congregation leaves the church in reverent silence.

Come relive these events which lie at the heart of our identity as a Christian Community.

On Easter Day, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, there will be celebrations of the Holy Eucharist at 8:00 and 10:00 as usual. On this major festival of our Christian Faith, however, both celebrations will be Sung Eucharists with the full choir. Why not invite some friends to join you in this most joyous of Christian Festivals. Both you and they, I am confident, will be glad that you did! I will have more to say about the rich symbolism of Eastertide in the next issue of "The Messenger."

Affectionately,  
Father Walt

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Sund  
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**Palm Sunday**  
8:00 and 10:00 Eucharists

**Wednesday, March 19**  
10:00 Eucharist & Healing Service

**Thursday, March 20 - Maundy Thursday**  
6:00 Passover Seder  
7:00 Maundy Thursday Liturgy

**Friday, March 21 - Good Friday**  
7:30 Good Friday Liturgy with  
Communion

**Sunday, March 23 - Easter**  
8:00 - Sung Eucharist  
10:00 Sung Eucharist

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### Search Committee News

Through rain, sleet, and snow the work of the Search Committee for a new rector for St. John's continues this winter. We held our ninth meeting on February 26<sup>th</sup>, and our next meeting is scheduled for March 19<sup>th</sup>.

Following our last meeting a packet of material was mailed to possible candidates for rector (the list of candidates was sent to us from the National Church). The mailing contained a letter describing the details of our search process and the newly minted parish profile. This profile is in the form of a handsome and informative brochure describing our parish as well as our unique surroundings. The brochure was conceived by Mibs Zelle (the content was based in part on our recent parish self study and was produced by Elen Freeston. Charley Musselman is proceeding with the development of our website (<http://stjohnw.org>) and

Elen has volunteered to lend her expertise to the design of the website.

All of these efforts are helping to tell the story of St. John's and, we hope, present ourselves in an informative and interesting light to candidates for rector as well as newcomers to St. John's.

Lucy Eldridge, Chairperson

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### Episcopal Church Women

The Bakeless Cake Sale has been a success so far and the officers thank you all for your help and cooperation with our fund raiser.

We are working on prizes for the Country Fair Raffle. We have a bird house and an afghan. We need another prize.

Marge McClurg, President

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### BIRTH DAYS IN MARCH AND APRIL

- March 8 Margaret McClurg Miller
- 10 Carol Tschudi
- 11 Dora Van Tassel
- 18 Kathy Tureck Kay
- 20 Jessica Platt
- April 11 Beatrice Baxter
- 12 Marge McClurg
- 14 Pauline Royal
- 15 Arthur Royal
- 18 Kent Kay

### FAITHS OF OUR FATHERS

### A Book Review

Holmes, David L. (2006) *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers*. New York, Oxford University Press, 225 pp.

Since Richard Nixon resigned the presidency, Americans have come to accept what the author of this slim but fascinating book calls "partisan evangelical influence in the White House." The religious Right has worked hard to persuade the electorate that America was founded by and for Christians. They have succeeded: A presidential candidate who wants a quick trip home to Chappaqua or Phoenix needs only express a whiff of uncertainty about the divinity of Jesus.

David Holmes, who teaches religion at the College of William and Mary, shows in his survey of the Founders' religious views and practices that they were a rich mixture of orthodox Christians and skeptics. "Faith of our Fathers" is a simplistic slogan that obscures a complex reality.

Holmes begins with a colony-by-colony review of religion in pre-Revolutionary America. Although the picture is complex in detail, he identifies three main threads: Anglicanism, chiefly in Virginia and the coastal Carolinas; Congregationalism (and its descendant, Unitarianism) in New England; and Deism, whose insistence on reason, justice, pluralism, and freedom of conscience sprang from the Enlightenment and influenced Founders throughout the colonies, some of them profoundly. A fourth thread, Evangelism, arose during the first Great Awakening (1730's and 1740's) as a reaction against the spiritual aridity of Deism. Very prominent today, Evangelism was still a small voice at the time of the Revolution.

Holmes devotes whole chapters to Anglicanism and Deism, the former because many Founders, among them Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe, were raised

in and attended Virginia's Episcopal churches, and the latter because few Founders were untouched by Deism's rejection of the Christian mysteries. Patrick Henry, John Jay, Samuel Adams, and Elias Boudinot were among the few orthodox Christians.

George Washington's religious views have always inspired controversy. Holmes notes that although Washington attended Episcopal churches throughout his life, he was never confirmed, left services before communion, referred to God in Deistic terms, and did not mention Jesus in his speeches. It appears that our image of Washington praying in the snow at Valley Forge is, like Parson Weems's cherry tree, folklore. Although Washington seldom expressed his religious views, Holmes suggests that he was a deistic Christian.

Thomas Jefferson was so outspoken about religious matters that he probably could not stand for dogcatcher today. A devotee of Thomas Paine, he read French and was thus familiar with the writings of Voltaire, Rousseau, and Diderot. His contempt for what he once called Christian "abracadabra" went so far that he wrote a condensed New Testament, omitting all of the Gospel miracles, Paul's letters and Revelation. It ends with Jesus's death.

Of the northern Founders, John Adams was Unitarian, a faith that is of the lineage of Arianism and might be called "Christian Deism." Benjamin Franklin, raised a Congregationalist, turned to Deism early but was tolerant of other views. He criticized religion lightly, in the persona of Poor Richard; he admired and befriended George Whitefield, who was arguably America's first great evangelist; and he contributed money to all of Philadelphia's churches and its synagogue. It is hardly surprising that Franklin's ecumenical funeral drew 20,000 mourners!

In a chapter on the Founders' wives and

daughters, Holmes shows that most of them were more orthodox than their menfolk. One of several reasons for this is that men were exposed to Enlightenment ideas in college, a source denied to women at that time.

At the end of his book, Prof. Holmes profiles the men who have occupied the White House since Nixon's resignation: Two Episcopalians (Ford, G.H.W. Bush), two Southern Baptists (Carter, Clinton), and an erstwhile Episcopalian and latter day Methodist (G.W. Bush). Holmes finds Ronald Reagan hard to characterize. Evidently he was devout, but he and Nancy seldom attended church while they were in Washington. All of these presidents but Bush *père* have shown more or less evangelical interests, a tendency that would puzzle the Founders.

So were the Founding Fathers Christian? Clearly, they were theologically diverse. None so despised Christianity as to reject it outright, as did Thomas Paine. A few were thoroughly orthodox Christians. Most were scattered across the spectrum between Christian and Deist: certain of God's existence, almost as sure of an afterlife, but more or less skeptical of doctrines – the Incarnation, Virgin Birth, Trinity, and Resurrection -- that collided with reason.

What we call the Founders is less important in the end than their commitment to an ethic that we identify as Christian: a passion for justice, morality, and religious freedom that found its way into our Constitution and continues to light our path today.

Robert Dodd

