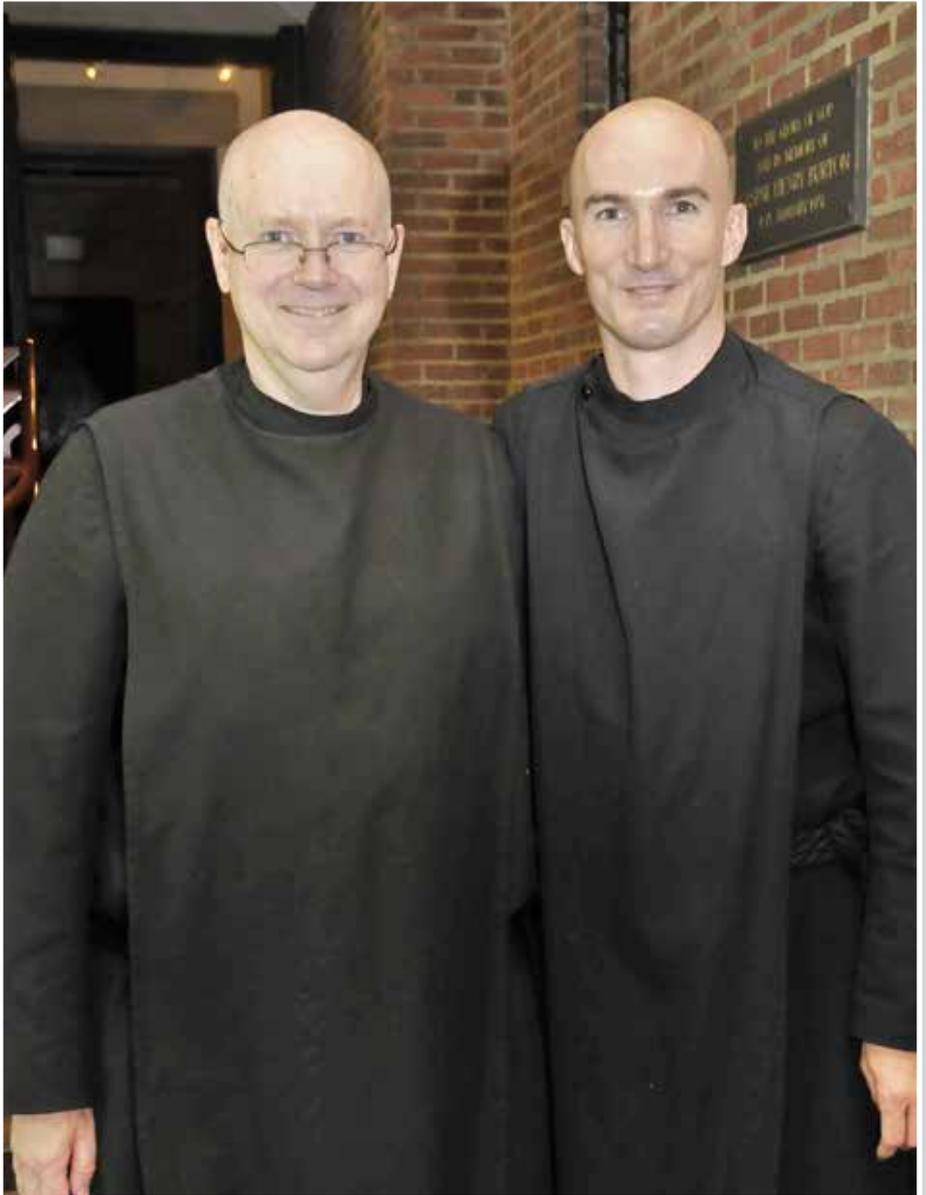


Cowley

SOCIETY OF SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST

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IN THIS ISSUE Marks of Mission, Marks of Love

In the **Monastic Wisdom for Everyday Living** insert, Br. Mark Brown examines the story of Jesus' baptism to uncover its role in helping to establish his sense of mission – and the mission to which we are all called.

Associate Professor of Christian Mission and the Director of the Center for Anglican Communion Studies at Virginia Theological Seminary, Robert Heaney, unfolds how the Anglican Marks of Mission are **Marks of Love**.

Br. Luke Ditewig suggests how the Five Marks of Mission – **tell, teach, tend, transform, treasure** – signify that Jesus' love is making its mark on us.

Two of the past year's Monastic Interns, Hannah Tadros and Tim Lawrence, reflect on what they've learned about **embracing uncertainty** and **practicing silence**.

"What price is too high for knowing You better?" Br. John Braught shares the **vocational struggles and realizations** that brought him to the Monastery.

Letter from the Superior | Letter from the FSJ | Spotlight on Community Life

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To follow the latest news from the Brothers, visit www.SSJE.org.

We would welcome hearing what you think of this issue of Cowley magazine. Visit www.SSJE.org/cowleymagazine to share comments, ask questions, or see Cowley in color!



Cover photo:

Brs. James Koester and John Braught, whose vocation story is featured in these pages.



A Letter from the Superior

James Koester, SSJE

**Dear Members of the Fellowship
of Saint John and other Friends,**

Have you ever thought you were born at the wrong time? Something about a different time period fascinates you, and you think to yourself, "I would love to have been born then." Perhaps one hundred years ago or even five hundred years ago. Maybe you want to sail with Columbus or walk the land bridge that once linked Asia with North America. Perhaps you can see yourself on the roads of first-century Palestine or being there when the Great Wall of China was built.

The period of history that fascinates me most is Anglo-Saxon England: that period of English history roughly between the end of the Roman Occupation of Britain (410) and the Norman Conquest (1066). I am fascinated by this moment not in an antiquarian sort of way, but because it holds up a mirror to us today. In it, we can see ourselves: what the Church is now and what we might become. For during that 650-year period, England – and especially the English Church – began to take the shape that we know today. In its transformation we can catch a glimpse of what it might look like to rebuild the Church's role in our world today.

One of the key people in the transformation and growth of the Anglo-Saxon Church was Dunstan (909 – 988), who was successively Abbot of Glastonbury, Bishop of Worcester, London, and finally Archbishop of Canterbury. It's thanks to Dunstan that we Brothers of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist exist today. For when Dunstan and his colleagues rebuilt the English Church following the Viking invasions of Britain in the

ninth century, they especially focused on rebuilding English monasteries.

Before the Vikings arrived, monasteries had been places of mission, worship, education, service, healing, and hospitality. From the monastic communities of the sixth and seventh centuries came some of the great missionary saints of Britain, who went out and converted Anglo-Saxon England to Christianity: Aidan, Bede, and Columba; Cuthbert, Chad, and Cedd; Hilda, Audrey, and Edith. All of this was destroyed by the Vikings in the ninth century, and it was to repair this damage that Dunstan set about. But Dunstan's reform and rebuilding was not merely some antiquarian activity. He wasn't interested in monasteries and monks for their own sakes. The purpose of his reform was the building up of the Church. He saw monasticism as a tool of evangelism.

And that is why Dunstan is so important for us today. I believe that we are beginning to experience another "age of Dunstan." No one would deny, I think, that the Church has been in decline. We have not been sacked by the Vikings, but we have been harried by forces beyond our control. The Church needs to recoup, rebuild, and renew so that, like the Anglo-Saxon Church, we can again become agents of mission, worship, education, service, healing, and hospitality.

The theme of this *Cowley* is "Marks of Mission, Marks of Love," and it looks ahead to our community's Lenten offering, which will take up

the Anglican “Marks of Mission.” First designed in the 1980s, the Marks aim to encourage and unify the Mission of the Church. We Brothers believe that monastic communities have something valuable to contribute to this conversation, for, as Dunstan demonstrates, in the monastic tradition we can discover the tools of transformation. Like the faithful and wise servant who managed his master’s household, monastic communities can remind the wider Church of her ultimate vocation. The SSJE Rule of Life explains, “Our life as a community should...be a sign to the Church to rise up to its true calling as a communion of the Holy Spirit, the Body of Christ and the company of Christ’s friends.”

We hope that the articles in this issue will inspire you to participate in the Mission to which we are all called. In these pages, Professor of Christian Mission, the Rev. Dr. Robert Heaney, writes about how Mission is the work of all of the Body of Christ: “To be marked, in baptism, by the sign of the cross is to be marked for mission.” In the theological

insert, “Beloved: Marks of Mission, Marks of Love,” Br. Mark Brown reminds us how the Marks of Mission emerge from lives first marked by Christ’s love. And Br. Luke Ditewig encourages us to reflect, especially, on what we treasure. Over the course of the next year we look forward to more dreaming and praying about the Marks of Mission with you.

In our own community we continue to be encouraged by the work of the Spirit in furthering our mission to witness to the love of God by our lives and ministry. We know that we could not live as we do, as “the company of Christ’s friends,” without all of you, our Friends, who share in this life with us. Thank you for all that you do to further the Mission of God in this world.

Faithfully,



James Koester, SSJE
Superior



Br. James Koester, SSJE's Superior, pictured with Br. Keith Nelson, who made his Profession in Initial Vows in the Monastery Chapel on Sunday, July 10th.

Letter from the FSJ Pilgrimage to the Holy Land



Scott Christian
Pictured in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Two students asked a rabbi, “Why does God command us to put the word of God *on* our hearts. Why did God not say to put God’s word *in* our hearts?” The rabbi responded, “We are commanded to place the word of God on our hearts because our hearts are closed and the word of God cannot get in. So God commands us to place the word of God *on* our hearts. And there it sits and waits for the day when our hearts will be broken. When they are broken, then the word of God will fall gently inside.” This parable was shared early on in the FSJ pilgrimage to the Holy Land by one of our leaders, and this pilgrimage indeed broke open my heart. We talk of God-moments in our lives; these were God-days.

On a single day in the Old City, we visited one of the holiest sites for each of the three Abrahamic religions, which involved passing through two security checkpoints. First we prayed at the Western (“Wailing”) Wall, divided for men and women. These stones date back to the First Century B.C.E. when King Herod the Great built a retaining wall around the Temple. For present day Jews, the Wall is the place they can worship which is closest to the Temple Mount, where tradition places Abraham, prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac. And Jews have continued to experience God’s

presence near this site for over 3,500 years! On the last day of my pilgrimage, I returned to the Wall and witnessed a beautiful scene. A group in the corner of the men’s section was celebrating a Bar Mitzvah, and at one point the men lifted a young boy in a chair and were dancing around holding him up. Then a number of women got up on chairs next to the fence separating them from the men, and they lifted little girls over this fence so that they could participate in this celebration. For me it represented the exuberant nature of the Jewish faith, as they appeared to break the rules to include the whole family. My heart breaks open.

Next we went up on Temple Mount, which the Muslims call the Haram, where centuries ago they built the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa mosque. This is the third holiest site in the Islamic faith, as it is from the rock located inside the dome where Muslims believe Mohammed ascended on his night journey and received the Five Pillars of Islam. I realize this city can’t belong to one faith; it must be shared. Why is that so difficult? Crack goes my heart.

Then after lunch in a local restaurant right off one of the narrow streets in the Old City, we visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (or “Holy Mayhem” as one guide described it). Inside are the traditionally recognized sites of Jesus’ Crucifixion and his tomb. Six different Christian groups literally compete for space, and the disagreements among the various Christian sects got so acrimonious that in 1852 they gave the key to the church to a Muslim, whose descendants have been opening the doors each morning ever since! However, seeing Christians from all corners of the globe – Korea, Ghana, Mexico – many prostrating themselves in worship, made me realize how much bigger Christianity is than I

had ever imagined, and what a powerful grip Christ's love has on so many people's lives. Two billion people worldwide proclaim their faith in Jesus Christ, and I was standing at the physical epicenter of this devotion. Paradoxically, due to the ongoing political tension and violence, the percentage of Christians who actually live in Israel is less than 2% of the population. Therefore our presence, with Jesus as the Supreme Peacemaker, is so desperately needed. It's too much to wrap my mind around. The crack in my heart opens wider.

Our final Eucharist of the pilgrimage was held in the ruins of a Byzantine church near Emmaus, where the Resurrected Jesus was revealed to the two disciples as he took, blessed, broke, and gave them bread. Having spent ten days in intimate communion with thirty-five other pilgrims, my heart was overflowing with gratitude for their fellowship. It occurred to me that God's truth is too big for a single individual either to understand it or to live it. As Eugene Peterson wrote, "Scripture knows nothing of the solitary Christian." Community, most powerfully expressed in the Holy Eucharist, is absolutely essential to our faith. As a fellow pilgrim said, "Every time I sat down for a meal, I was happy to be next to anyone and to hear their unique story and to appreciate their God-given gifts." Can you imagine a church where everybody walked in, expecting to share a pew, and eager to sit next to and

get to know a fellow parishioner? Now there's a vision of heaven on earth!

As our new Presiding Bishop Michael Curry says repeatedly, "We're Jesus people... [who are] crazy enough to love like Jesus, to give like Jesus, to forgive like Jesus, to do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with God like Jesus... and we are the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement." Now I can close my eyes and picture the places where Jesus healed and taught, was killed and resurrected. And I believe more strongly than ever that Love wins.

The pilgrimage cemented my belief that the 7.4 billion inhabitants of Earth are all God's children and my sisters and brothers in Christ. A former Anglican Bishop of Pakistan, Mano Rumlshah, "who resides and ministers in the Peshawar, a community on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, a refuge for the Taliban and one of the most hostile settings on earth," said that when he created a peace group, he didn't want to call it "interfaith," since that typically called to mind divisions - Hindus, Christians, and Muslims. Instead he called it Faith Friends - letting "faith be the magnet of our relationship." With the deepening of my own faith over these rich and meaningful days, I have a new appreciation for just how magnetic our faith can be. 🙏



"I realize this city can't belong to one faith; it must be shared. Why is that so difficult?"



Five Marks of Love

Robert Heaney

As Episcopalians we talk about five "Marks of Mission." To think of these as five marks of love seems to me to be a helpful reframing. God is love. And whatever mission is or is not, it is about the God of love. Indeed, we might say that mission is who God is and what God does. Christians think of God, in God's being, as burning "with an unchecked Flame, red hot, incendiary. God does not have Love any more than He has Knowledge or Power: He just is these things." God is love. Love without object or act (Katherine Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology* Volume 1, 489, 485).

God is love. Too often we skim over such words as a rock skitting across water thrown from a boat to a shore. We touch the truth for a passing moment. We fail to plumb the depths. If, by the power of Christ's Spirit, we could begin to experience and encounter the depths of divine love we would avoid much of the misunderstanding and malpractice that passes for mission in the Church. God is love.

God is mission. Let us begin there as the first mark of mission. To be marked for mission is to be marked by the dazzling flaming reality beyond all that passes for real - God is love. It is, of course, right to be hesitant and suspicious of "attractional" models of mission these days. However, central to the witness of the Church should remain this desire to prayerfully search the scriptures, engage the traditions,

and listen to testimony that opens hearts and minds to the singleness and uniqueness of divine love. Communities possessed by such mission will surely attract, intrigue, bemuse, and/or anger the world.

Because God is love, God *does* love. Christians think of God as the fierce and compassionate creator who is ever for us and ever for God's creation. Christians think of God as the

THE FIVE MARKS OF MISSION OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptize and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To transform unjust structures, challenge violence of every kind, and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth



“To be marked by the sign of the cross, in baptism, is to be marked for mission.”

source of all gifts. For the life God gives to the world overflows from the nature, choice, and will of God. God’s choice in creating and loving others opens up new dimensions as creatures are created by love and for love.

The boundary between the divine and the creaturely makes distinct and present the call of love as the call of God. We might say, therefore, that mission is crossing boundaries for life. It is what God does in creation, and re-creation, and it is the call of God’s Church. This boundary crossing is not simply between creator and creature; it is also between love and hate. It is the boundary crossing love of God incarnated in Jesus Christ. “God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). The boundary between the love of God and the rejection of God’s love is, quite literally, crossed in the body of Jesus. Christ is our peace.

Indeed, the Church is nothing less than the community that has met this peace in the crucified, resurrected, ascended Lord. In Christ the Church is a foretaste of God’s future (Ephesians 2), and the Church is only ever the Church to the extent that it takes part in this mission of God. It is only ever the Church to the extent that it crosses boundaries for life. To be marked by the sign of the cross, in baptism, is to be marked for mission. Just as the being of God cannot be separated from the doing of God (God *is* love; God *does* love) so the being and doing of the Church cannot be separated.

God’s mission does not depend upon the Church. On the contrary, the Church depends upon the mission of God. The Church is created by the mission (love) of God in Christ and lives only to the extent that it takes heed of this love and turns to the world in love. Mission is not, then, social program, charity, or pity. It does

not arise because of want or wealth. It is a vision of God. It is being marked by such a vision. It is the very way in which the Church exists in outward-turning love – commending, and contending for, a vision and experience of love that is divine.

It is only when one begins to appreciate that the marks of mission are themselves marked by love that one can appreciate the gift of the marks to the Church. The five marks are proclamation, formation, service, justice, and sustainability. It is because of the love of God that the first mark of mission (to proclaim the good news of the kingdom) must remain first. Proclamation of the reign of God is the Church’s first call. It is what distinguishes the Church from the world. It is what defines the rest of the marks of mission. Acts of formation, service, justice, and sustainability arise and are sustained by a vision of God’s love. They are a means for turning the Church outwards to the world and are always a declaration of the kingdom of God that has come and will come in Christ. 🌱

Questions for Reflection

1. In your own life, when have you been particularly aware that the very being of God is love?
2. What scripture passages particularly speak to you about the nature of God as love?
3. Are there images or ways of speaking about this love that have been powerful in your life? How might you share such vision with others?
4. How might beginning with “God as love” affect the priorities and practices of your faith community?
5. If the first call of the Church is proclamation, how does this change the ministry you are involved in or support?

Robert Heaney is Associate Professor of Christian Mission and Director of the Center for Anglican Communion Studies at Virginia Theological Seminary.



Our new Guesthouse Manager, Christian Etherton, succeeding Tom Marsan.



Tell, Teach, Tend, Transform, and Treasure

Luke Ditewig, SSJE

When I was about six, two collegians who were allergic to cats asked me to move a cat away from them. I tried but had difficulty, so I said: “The easiest thing would be for you to move. You could come back later and by then the cat will have moved.” The students later told my dad they could tell I was his son. People still recognize my parents in how I speak, listen, and serve. How we live communicates our community, to whom we are connected.

This year, we Brothers are praying, preaching, and teaching around the five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Church. These five points are one way to summarize who God is and what it looks like for us to be known as God’s beloved daughters and sons. They communicate that we are connected to and being converted by Christ. The five marks may be summarized: tell, teach, tend, transform, and treasure.

Tell: We’ve received good news. Repentance is a gracious invitation to change and grow. In response to such love, how can we keep from singing?

Teach: Always children of God, we keep learning how to live resurrection. We strive for selfless serving rather than scrambling for security, for forgiving rather than retaliating, and honoring rather than hating.

Tend: Flowing from our relationship with Jesus, we serve others with loving kindness in many ordinary ways. We listen deeply to each person, respecting Christ already present and at work. We stand in loving solidarity with generous intercession and prayerful action.

Transform: Everything is being renewed and restored. Paying attention to something local allows us to participate in a small part of God’s great work of transformation.

Treasure: All of creation is a gift to be cherished. We are in an ecological crisis. Let’s do something together, even with a small patch of earth at our doorstep.

Tell, teach, tend, transform, treasure: these five actions signify that Jesus’ love is making its mark on us.

God came down to us in flesh. The good news of Jesus is thoroughly personal. In the Gospel according to John, we hear Jesus praying for us, “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us” (John 17:20-26). As God and Jesus are intimately related, so Jesus asks that we may be one with him. Why? “So that the world may know that you have sent me.” God’s Mission is to restore and renew all of creation in a loving embrace. Jesus intercedes and invites our participation.

When we relate personally to God

and to others, we open ourselves to being shaped and converted by them. Facts don’t change our behavior, relationships do; both with people and all of creation. We relate and connect both to individuals and the precious world around us by spending time with them, by stopping to look, listen, and tend. There’s a Native-American saying: “Live so that a piece of earth mourns when you die.”

The fifth Mark of Mission is unique; it was added after the others. This is a sign of our Church responding to the changing needs of our world, literally. As our friend, the Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas says: “It’s important not only to save the earth itself, but also to save a way of seeing the earth as beloved, as possessing its own life and energy, as worth preserving.”

Here’s one way Bullitt-Jonas suggests to practice seeing the earth as beloved: Take a walk outdoors slowly and silently, to personally visit and encounter neighboring nature. Notice the sounds, smells, and colors. Stop when a particular place attracts you and pay closer attention to it. First notice what happens to your sense of self and your sense of God when viewing creation as an object. Then notice what happens when viewing creation personally, as an equal, possessing its life and energy. Listen, look, respect, receive. Imparting great value and worth, we “treasure” by investing in relationships, continuing to walk, reflect, wonder, and tend our neighboring creation.

What we treasure is telling. How we tend it teaches others and transforms us. The five Marks of Mission all go together, communicating our common connection to Christ, for we are marked as God’s daughters and sons, beloved brothers and sisters. How do you tend what you treasure? 🌿



Monastic Internship Program



As an adult, I haven't been blessed with the same gift of certainty I had as a child. I cannot claim many affirmative statements about God, myself, or the world. I entered the Monastery with a list of questions ranging from the subject of theodicy to the definition of love. I guess my response to the guests' repeated question should have been that I came here wanting an index of answers, one monolithic truth about who and what God is, a tremendously long, Roman-numeraled outline entitled "How to Be a Human and Do This Whole 'Life' Thing."

But better than a great big cosmic sense of "I've got this" was the invitation to get comfortable in uncertainty. And more relevant than a clearly delineated blueprint of reality were often the quiet truths couched in the negative. "Love is *not* coercive," a Brother told us interns. "Force is *not* of God," a hymn repeated. And finally, from a James Martin, SJ book we read as a group, words that now speak to me from three Post-It notes on my mirror, "You're not God. This isn't heaven. Don't be a jackass."

Besides my being sleepy, my most intense experience of my time at SSJE has been one of gratitude. In the understanding I had of faith for most of my life, calling me an unbeliever would be generous. (A generosity often extended to me by those blessed with religious certitude.) By their doing and not doing, by their words and silence, mostly by their astonishing expression of grace, the Brothers have helped heal and widen the damaged and limited awareness of God, self, and faith that I brought with me nine months ago. 🍷

– Hannah Tadros

There was a Sunday afternoon when I was a child that I sat my mother down and demanded to know about life and death, where babies come from, and where we go. When my mother had answered all my questions to my satisfaction, I announced, "I've learned a lot today," and left the room confident in my grasp of existence.

To say I've "learned a lot" from the Brothers, from the other interns and residents, from the time spent here in prayer and silence, would be a simplification of the same sort. To give in to my tendency to itemize and label each "revelation" and new awareness seems to me to be my thirty-three-year-old version of that same seven-year-old confidence: an only slightly more grown up "I've got this."

During the nine months in the Monastic Internship Program, I always found it difficult to answer the question most commonly posed by guests during Sunday talking meals: "Why are you doing this program?" I think one particularly taxing week I may have responded with, "I heard there was treasure buried under the Chapel."

Monastic Internship Program



I came to the Monastery seeking discipline and refuge. I came to navigate the love that had been offered so beautifully by the Brothers, and assimilate it into my being. I came to worship in community; to find commonality and a shared sense of grace with a small band of brothers and sisters. I came not to escape the world, but to find a new way to be a part of it.

In my time at the Monastery my spirit was hit over the head with a crowbar. I was struck by how much the experience challenged me, frustrated me, and changed me all at once. There were several components of the journey that taught me a great deal about myself, yet there is no doubt that nothing affected me quite like the practice of silence.

Although I had been on numerous monastic retreats, I had never found myself having to commit to long periods of silence, every day, for months on end. I welcomed the challenge, yet I had no idea whether I'd be able to handle it. Much to my surprise, it quickly became a source of great refuge and inner strength for me.

Within days, I found that I was far more present on a moment-to-moment basis. When I was faced with the grief of a friend, I found myself far more available to her. When I would have the opportunity to talk for extended periods of time, I'd speak more slowly and with far more honesty than I normally would in the outside world.

What I learned is that silence forced me to change because I was literally living differently. I became more confident because I was less inclined to seek out the approval of others through empty words. I also chose my words carefully when I did speak, and I spoke with far more authority.

Over time, I came to look forward to it. I looked for ways in which I could be

silent and relished the peace that silence would bring me when I was engaging in the mundane matters of life. When I was stocking a kitchen, or raking leaves, or setting a table, I often found myself actively enjoying these activities much more than I had in the past. This happened because I wasn't just being quiet, I was actively engaging in silence. Silence wasn't merely the absence of words, it was the activation of an internal intention; a desire to see the world as it really was, and to see myself as I really am. This proved to be much more difficult than it seemed on the surface, but its practice brought about repeated experiences of catharsis, revelation, grief, and joy. It protruded the walls I often placed around my spirit and in so doing gave me a renewed sense of life. It pierced apertures in my self-absorption and forced me to pay attention to my motivations. In short, it did not allow me to hide from myself. I had no choice but to allow myself to be exposed to myself; to stand in the interior of my own soul and to resist the urge to flee into the darkness.

This occurred because I was taking myself out of the comfort of my own

inner indulgences in order to face both the gifts and the horrors of my own mind. Over the months, silence became a mechanism by which I accessed a part of myself that I didn't even know was there. Silence became a means of meditating upon the world in a way that encouraged continual self-reflection, the denial of the ego, and focused discipline.

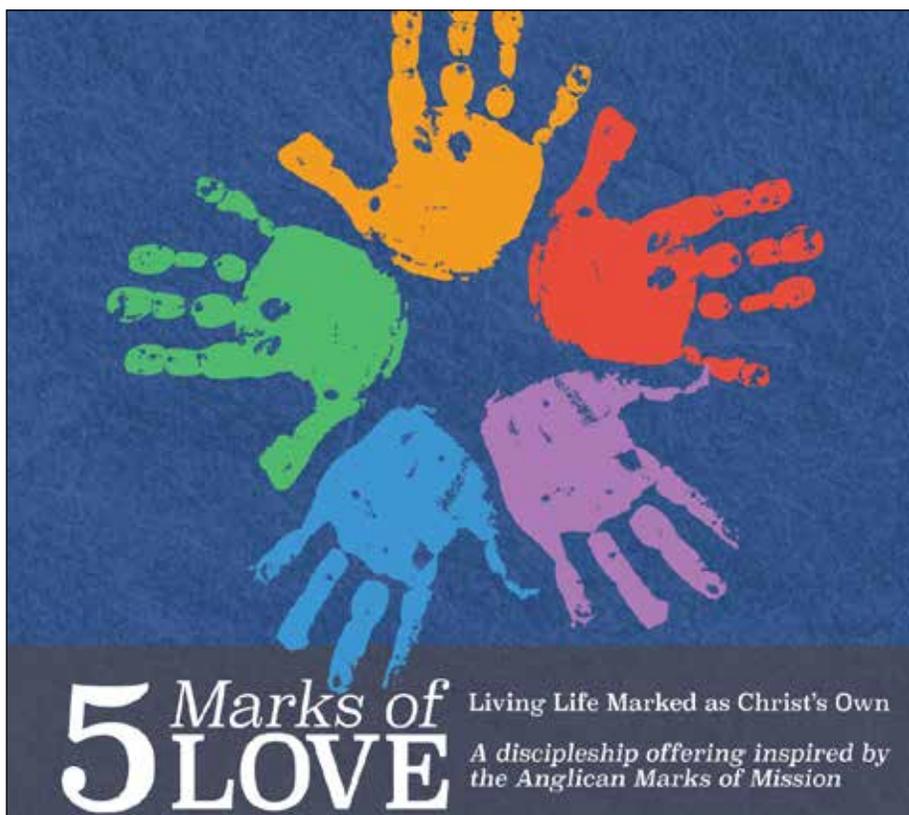
Words are powerful. Words are our friends. Words are our teachers. Yet they are also often superfluous, distracting, and insidious. They are just as often architects of destruction as purveyors of peace. Silence doesn't take away these proclivities, as our words are preceded by thoughts, which silence makes us all too aware of. But what silence does is to take us into our thoughts - around them, alongside them - and forces us to pay attention. It demands our presence;

our active, unfiltered presence. It does not allow for anything less.

Observing the Greater Silence every night took my focus away from the trivialities of life and laid my soul's eye directly onto what really mattered, both internally and in community. My inner life was caressed with grace, and my external life was opened with new possibilities. The Brothers' constant encouragement and invocation to examine my role in this world more honestly served as a source of beauty and strength that I would return to daily until I left.

In the end, I left my monastic journey with the knowledge that silence wasn't merely a practice; not simply another tool to be added to my arsenal. Instead, I came to see it as something far more powerful: a way of life. 🙏

-Tim Lawrence



SSJE's lenten series begins Sunday, February 26, 2017. Visit www.5marksoflove.org.

Retreats at the Monastery

FULL **Seekers' Retreat**
September 30-October 2, 2016
Br. Robert L'Esperance, SSJE

"Come Away and Rest a While"
A Clergy Renewal Retreat
November 15-19, 2016
Br. James Koester, SSJE

FULL **First Time in Silent Retreat**
January 20-22, 2017 & May 12-14, 2017
Br. John Braught, SSJE

The Spirituality of Recovery
February 24-26, 2017
Br. John Braught, SSJE

"Spiritual, not Religious"?
A Retreat for Young Adults (20s and 30s)
October 28-30, 2016
Br. Jim Woodrum, SSJE

"Be Not Afraid"
An Advent Retreat
December 9-11, 2016
Br. Jim Woodrum, SSJE

"Behold the Beauty of the Lord"
Praying with Icons
February 10-12, 2017
Brs. James Koester & Keith Nelson, SSJE

"By His Wounds We Are Healed"
A Lenten Retreat
March 10-12, 2017
Br. Keith Nelson, SSJE

Retreats at Emery House

The Tender Loving Mercy of God
An Advent Retreat
December 16-18, 2016
Br. Curtis Almquist, SSJE

"All My Fresh Springs are in You"
A Clergy Renewal Retreat
February 7-11, 2017
Brs. Curtis Almquist & Geoffrey Tristram, SSJE

Redemption: Making the Most of the Past, the Present, and the Future
A Lenten Retreat
March 3-5, 2017
Br. Luke Ditewig, SSJE

Deeper Into Silence
A Five-Day Immersion Retreat
June 20-25, 2017
Brs. Nicholas Bartoli & Keith Nelson, SSJE

Saturday Workshops

The Ministry of Healing
Saturday, October 15, 2016
Br. Jonathan Maury, SSJE

The Gift of Hope
Saturday, February 18, 2017
Br. Curtis Almquist, SSJE

Twelve Steps for Everyone
Saturday, March 18, 2017
Br. John Braught, SSJE

Discerning Together
Saturday, May 20, 2017
Br. David Vryhof, SSJE

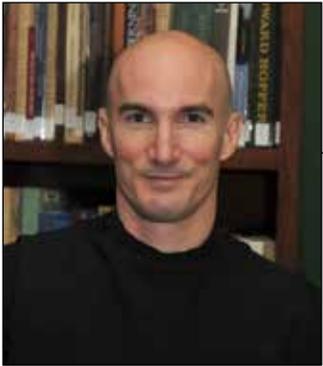
Thursday Prayer Groups

"At the Still Point of the Turning World":
Praying with T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets
A Five-Week Prayer Group
Thursdays 6:50-8:20 pm, Oct 13-Nov 10
Br. Keith Nelson, SSJE

"Into the Silent Land":
Exploring the Practice of Contemplation
A Five-Week Prayer Group
Thursdays 6:50-8:20 pm, Feb 2-March 2
Br. Nicholas Bartoli, SSJE

Both groups are limited to 10 participants with the ability to commit to all sessions.

For more information and to register for these programs, visit www.SSJE.org.



We Need God Together

A conversation about vocation with Br. John Braught

How did your journey to the Monastery begin?

I'm a cradle Episcopalian. I grew up going to church and was an acolyte, a crucifer, a torchbearer, and a server. I enjoyed the church youth group and socializing with kids my age in the fun activities they put on, but I found church boring. Like many people, I stopped going at the first opportunity. I don't think I ever made the connection between being a church-going Episcopalian and having a relationship with Jesus. Certainly it was the receiver, not the message, that was broken, but that element wasn't really communicated to me. So I left the church and became wayward (in my own way).

It wasn't until I was in my mid- to late-twenties that I started getting curious about spirituality. I often say that, at that time, Jesus was after me. It seemed like everywhere I went, I was confronted by Christians who began asking me questions. I really had a profound sense of Jesus trying to get to me. Eventually, I capitulated.

During that time, retreat became an important part of my spiritual seeking. I used to go on retreats on nearly a quarterly basis and spent many weekends in convents or monasteries. When I would see the monks or the nuns, I would always think that it seemed like a

really fine life, but not for me, because I had to work and was interested in sex and having fun. Monastic life was good for a weekend, nice for them, very attractive, but not for me.

When I returned from four years of graduate school in Belgium, studying philosophy, I felt that I had a lot of options and could do any number of different things. I'd just finished working for a little over a year as a marketing consultant for an independent organization. We did coaching with entrepreneurial types – accountants and lawyers and other consultants – people who live by their expertise but don't necessarily know how to market themselves. I didn't like the job. At the end of the day, I just didn't care if I could help somebody make another \$5,000 that month; it didn't mean anything to me. What's always been important to me is to believe in what I'm doing, to know that it is actually contributing to something.

So when I came back to the States, I began applying for all kinds of different jobs. I was working in an all-male treatment facility for drug and alcohol addiction while looking for more long-term, full-time employment. I was really thinking big, asking, "If I could do anything, what would I want to do?" I applied for a lot of jobs working for schools, having always been attracted

to institutions – particularly academic institutions. I applied for a job with the CIA and amazingly got quite a number of steps into the process, which was a surreal experience that I won't get into. But no matter what I applied for, and no matter how exciting the opportunity or how interesting the work, I always saw it all as a means to an end – an end that I never was really convinced that I wanted, namely owning a home or having a family. I think that, for most of my life, I was trying to convince myself that I should want those things and that I should do the things that would enable me to have them. Yet at the end of the day, that life never really spoke to me. So no matter what I ended up doing – no matter how good I was at it or how interesting it was or how much I was learning – it just became a means to an end that I didn't really want. My heart really wasn't in any of it.

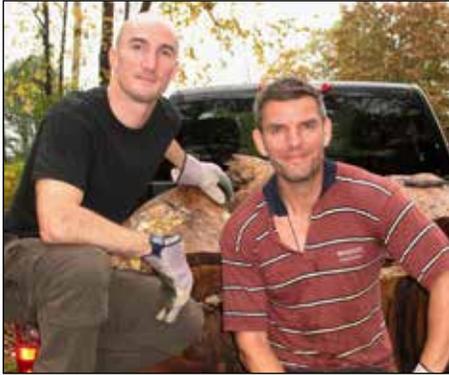
Around the same time, the idea of monasticism kept recurring to me. I went on a retreat and ran into an old friend I hadn't seen in six years. He took my picture and posted it on Facebook saying,

"You never know who you might run into at a monastery." I don't know if there was something about that, but at the same time I decided, "This year, I'm going to look into this and see what happens."

Now I didn't even know that there were Episcopal monks, despite growing up in the church. All the retreats I had been on had been at Catholic monasteries. Just out of curiosity, I went online and googled "Episcopal monks." Up came a list of the convents and monasteries in the Episcopal Church. The first one listed was SSJE. I clicked through to the site and quickly fell upon SSJE's Rule. I started reading it and felt like, "Oh my God, this is exactly what I believe about the spiritual life."

So I filled out the preliminary questionnaire; David Vryhof called me, and we set up a time for an interview on the phone over the July 4th weekend. I ended up coming to SSJE for a visit that August while the Monastery was still under renovation. I got to Emery House on Tuesday; Thursday the Brothers packed up and drove down to the Monastery to move back in; Friday I joined them for





my first visit. It certainly was an odd first exposure. There were no retreatants, so I was the first person to stay in the Guesthouse. The kitchen wasn't stocked, and there was no one to cook, so we went out to a Mexican restaurant for supper. It was bizarre. I remember there was a guy dressed in Mariachi garb, playing "I Did It My Way" by Frank Sinatra. And every time he sang that line, Jonathan would point to the Heavens and sing, "I did it His way." It was just absurd enough for me. After I had been at SSJE as a postulant for some months, Robert made the connection that I was the guy who had visited that weekend. He admitted, "All I remember thinking was, 'Oh this guy is never coming back.'"

But I loved it and felt very comfortable. I think it was good for me that I got 'up close and personal' right away. I saw the realness of everyone. The Brothers were very upfront and frank about the realities of this life, and I got to know them as people. I think it was exactly what I needed. That Sunday, we had a service in the Chapel for the first time – just me and the monks, very informal. I mean, I was still completely overwhelmed, of course. I don't think I slept the whole time I was here. I was just so over-stimulated, my mind was going a million miles a minute. But I also felt very encouraged by that first

visit. I ended up coming back three more times between August and January. Then on January 10, 2012, I arrived as a postulant.

Did you struggle at all with the decision to test your vocation?

I can recall taking a walk one night after a second shift at the treatment center – I walked to wind down because it was a rather intense job – and saying to God, "What price is too high for knowing you better?" I have a tremendous amount of gratitude for everything that God has done for me. In my own experience, as I have placed a priority on seeking God and wanting to relate to God more, my life has just taken off in extraordinary and exciting ways that I never would have come up with myself. It might sound clichéd to say that, but it's the absolute truth. So while I was struggling with the decision – especially with the question of celibacy and not being able to have a relationship – when I thought about the cost, it was not an obstacle. The question I was asking was, "Are my hesitations substantial enough to keep me from trying it?"

How about your entry into the Monastery? What surprised you?

Like a lot of the Brothers, I did not find what I was expecting here – and thank

God for that. I think I had a fairly stereotypical idea of what a monk was, from my own impressions that I had seen from the outside. I imagined a very solitary, silent life, with minimal interaction with the public and the world at large. I don't think I imagined a very fun life. The biggest surprise is how busy I am. There is time for everything, but everything has a time. That's how I experience this life: I have time to do everything, but everything has its time, so I'm always going onto the next thing before I finish one thing, which I might or might not return to later.

In the beginning, when you're a postulant getting into the stream of worship, your perception of time is so weird, very surreal. Time stands still. I would have the experience of suddenly thinking, "I haven't talked to my parents in months," though we'd talked the week prior. In the course of any given day, any given week, any given month, everything happened – and nothing happened. What happened when I was a postulant? Well, gosh, everything, and yet I have nothing to tell you about what happened.

What appeals to you about this life?

I love praying the Office everyday and inviting other people into that stream of ongoing prayer. For me, to be a part of creating a space for other people to

connect with God, with themselves, and to collect their lives – that's the greatest thing. I love being part of creating that kind of space for other people.

Having the opportunity to preach is also very meaningful to me. Because I'm a new preacher, I do quite a bit of book-work to prepare a sermon and I enjoy that work, fortunately. Seeing people for spiritual direction is also very formative. I experience God in the vulnerability and intimacy that is created in that space of coming together with somebody and sharing in our humanness. We both need God and don't have all the answers, and life is hard: my spirituality is very much about connecting with other people at that level. We need God together. None of us know what we're doing, and so we need each other to guide us through this.

You're initially professed now; was that an easy decision for you?

When I was first eligible to become initially professed, I asked for an extension. I didn't want to be professed simply because the time had come around in the calendar. I needed to allow my desire to arise spontaneously out of myself. My philosophy is, "When in doubt, do nothing." Every time God has called me to something, it's been crystal clear for me. So I took



an extension in June of 2014. Within a couple of weeks of our return to business as usual that September, after our annual Community retreat, I realized that this is what I like doing. I like my life like this. I'm engaged, I'm interested, and I'm doing meaningful work; it's everything that I want. I went to Geoffrey and said, "I want to get professed."

Since coming to that conclusion, I've had absolutely zero second-guessing of my decision. I don't know what lies beyond that. But I feel very confident and comfortable with my decision to make initial profession. I was looking for answers – but then instead the questions just disappeared. We'll see what comes next.

What would you say to someone else who was considering this life?

Don't be afraid to look. God won't drag us through any doors. In my experience, God's will is easy: it doesn't require a lot of work or twisting ourselves into pretzels. So there's no harm in looking, because if the door is open, it will be open; and

if it's closed, well, then you don't have anything to worry about.

People often ask me, "Why are you doing this, when you could do other things?" It's true that I could do other things. I have done other things, but this life speaks to more of me – intellectually, emotionally, physically. More parts of me are engaged, fired, and utilized in this life than in any other life that I can imagine. My life can go from the mundane to the profound within any given hour. Life is of a piece here: cleaning the bathroom is as important as preparing a sermon. I like that my whole life happens under one roof and that I'm not doing anything toward some other end. Everything here is just the thing that I do, and that is what I've always wanted.

It's an extraordinarily privileged life – and yet people aren't beating down the door to get in, because it's also a demanding life. If it's right, it's right – which is what all the Brothers say. I've had that experience as well. For now, it's right. 🙏



VOICES OF FRIENDS

Why SSJE? What's your answer?

Share your story at www.SSJE.org/voices, or email us at friends@ssje.org.



Given that it's a lot harder to get to Cambridge or West Newbury for retreat since we moved to Indiana in 2011, I have come to rely on the Brothers' web and email outreach a great deal. I love "Brother, Give Us a Word" and often follow the link to listen to a sermon (a more uplifting commute listen than NPR these days!). I love your special offerings in Advent and Lent; on retreat in Wisconsin a couple of weeks ago, I spent a good bit of time with this year's Lenten booklet on "Growing a Rule of Life." Some evenings, I pray Compline with you as I listen to the recording from "Guide Us Waking, Guard Us Sleeping" – another way you touch my life and heart! My husband John, rector of Saint Paul's Indy, frequently quotes SSJE in his weekly reflections to the parish, and

we share quotes and links with friends. Thank you for your ministry, which touches so many people in ways you will never know.

Our gift is not much in the grand scheme of what it takes to support your ministry. However, we recently increased our monthly gift because John and I wanted to do more in gratitude and appreciation for how you touch our lives. May God continue to bless your lives and ministries, as you bless those who come in contact with your community.

- Stephanie W. Denson

Let Living Waters Flow: Make an Annual Gift

...because we are human we thirst, just like Jesus did from the cross. And so we have no choice but to let go, to surrender, and to let living waters flow.

-Br. John Braught

The water of God's grace is abundant in our lives, and we are called to channel that grace to all whom we encounter. In that spirit and refreshed by that grace, please consider a gift to help the Brothers in their work of love.



Leave a Mark of Love: Remember SSJE in your Will

All gifts, because they come out of love, never simply stop. A bequest lasts even longer, because it is not just a now gift, it is a forever gift. After you leave this world, a bequest can continue radiating love, leaving a mark of love on others' lives. If you want to leave a mark of love behind, no institution we know of radiates love the way the Brothers do.

www.SSJE.org/support | friends@ssje.org | (617) 876-3037 ex. 55



Restoring the Lady Chapel Altarpiece

THERE IS AN APOCRYPHAL STORY about the provenance of the Lady Chapel altarpiece that our Br. Eldridge Pendleton was fond of telling: Spence Burton was having dinner at the building next door to the Monastery, 982 Memorial Drive, when he saw an altarpiece on his hosts' living room mantel. He said to the couple, "That piece does not belong in your living room; it belongs in my Chapel." And, so the story ran, a couple of days later, the piece was delivered to the Chapel. For as long as I know, this has been the story most members of our community have heard about the altarpiece.

It turns out that the more prosaic true story of its origins has been housed in Br. David Allen's memory all along. The Lady Chapel altarpiece and the altar beneath – specifically sized to hold it – were given in memory of an Anglo-Catholic priest named Andrew Chalmers-Wilson, who died in 1950. In fact, a closer examination of the Lady Altar footpace shows a dedication to Fr. Chalmers-Wilson. He had been the rector of the high Anglo-Catholic parish St. Paul's, Carroll Street, Brooklyn, for which the community assumed responsibility when Fr. Chalmers-Wilson left there in 1926. Apparently the Father was an avid collector of religious art. Some of his treasures are now housed in the MFA, but the altarpiece, thanks be to God, came to SSJE.

My own interest in the altarpiece arose from cleaning it a few times, vacuuming dust off of it. I noticed that it was obviously very dirty, with years of dust and dirt accumulation. Shortly after the Chapel reopened, we got in touch with a conservator from the Fogg Museum, to get an estimate of how many hours it would take to do a thorough cleaning of the piece, and maybe some judicious restoration. There the matter rested until Br. Eldridge's death, when we received a number of gifts in his honor. Given Eldridge's deep interest in art, we decided to use some of these gifts in his memory to restore the altarpiece.

The work that the conservators, Nancy Lloyd and Elizabeth

Leto-Fulton, have been doing has caused a remarkable transformation of the piece's figures, bringing out colors that had become completely obscured over the years. There is a green in some of the folds of the saints' garments that we never could see before. And all the colors are so much brighter since many layers of varnish and dirt have been removed. In addition to this thorough cleaning, Nancy and Liza are also doing some consolidation of flaking gilding and paint, as well as a very slight retouching of the areas that have age-darkened oil paint over them from previous retouching attempts, in order to restore the brighter flesh tones that the original medium would have given.

One rather exciting discovery they've made is that the original paint medium on the figures appears to be egg tempera, which – if it proves true – would actually push back the date on the altarpiece. Because of these colors and the presence of particular saints like San Bernardino of Siena, we now think the altarpiece may be in part a work of sixteenth-century Central Italian art, possibly from Siena. More investigations remain to be done on the provenance of the altarpiece as a whole, however, as the architectural setting for the figures stylistically appears to be nineteenth-century.

Over the course of this restoration, we Brothers have learned so much about the altarpiece that has lived in our midst. Most remarkable of all has been the chance to observe its transformation. It has been thrilling to watch it changing before our very eyes.

– Br. Robert L'Esperance

IT'S NOT OFTEN THAT WE GET TO WORK on something of this size and beauty in private practice, so it's been really a wonderful opportunity for Liza and me to treat this altarpiece. It's been very rewarding to see such a difference as we move along, uncovering the original decorative surfaces, and getting closer to how the altarpiece might once have looked.

Aside from the environmental hazards it has been exposed to over time – dirt, dust, smoke, humidity, and the powder post beetles that have tunneled through the wood – it has also been exposed to multiple cleanings and treatments, as people tried to repair previous damages. When we first looked at it, we saw all the layers that stood in the way of the appreciation of the object itself: the dirt, coatings, and darkened restoration paint. As we have removed these layers and uncovered the original surfaces, the deep glow of the gilding has been revealed. Most dramatic of all has been the cleaning of the faces: getting through the dirt and glossy coatings to see the colors that are there – the beautifully fresh paint and the red cheeks on the saints. Seeing these original surfaces come to light again has been rewarding for us.

We are so happy to come here each day. It's very peaceful, of course. But it's also been wonderful to encounter this object in the setting for which it was made: a chapel, where we hear the occasional organ music, smell the incense, and witness the life of prayer. And the Brothers have been so welcoming, so enthusiastic about this project, it has fueled our enthusiasm. It's really been just a pleasure to work on this object, because of the beauty of the artwork, the environment, and the people we've encountered.

– Nancy Lloyd



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