



THE EASTER VIGIL SERVICE, PHOTO BY MICHAEL HUDSON

THE FRAGILITY, STRENGTH AND ABUNDANCE OF CREATION

Dear Friends,

“Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains.” James 5:7

Be patient as the farmer waits patiently for the harvest. When I think of harvest, I think of being 13 again. My father grew up on a farm northeast of Montreal just beyond the little village of Rawdon in Quebec. The humble homestead had been passed from one generation to the next beginning sometime in the early 1800’s. While the fertile land in Ireland was known to be in the highlands, the same is not necessarily the case in Canada. Our Irish ancestors bypassed the rich soil of the St. Lawrence basin to claim a plot of land in the hill country. We know the area best as the Canadian Shield. There they cleared the land, planted crops and raised four generations of our family. Given the poor soil, it would take patience, hard work and much faith to bring the harvest in each year.

While most farmers were using bailers to reap the crop, the Asbils were using older technology. A horse drawn rake pulled the drying hay into long rows. A 1950s Massey-Ferguson Tractor pulled the trailer, which pulled the hay loader over top of the long rows. The loader was a most ferocious looking contraption that

pulled the loose hay up a slide with long forks that looked like giant toothbrushes. As the loader moved, so did the forks. The faster the loader moved the faster the hay would come to the top. From a very early age we were invited to participate in the harvest and given the menial task of gleaning the field for fallen pieces of hay. What we most longed to do was to take our place on the trailer and work with my Uncle Elmer.

Elmer was, in my mind, the strongest man in the world. He would stand at the mouth of the loader and shift the loose hay with a pitchfork the same way a defensive line backer could move an offensive line to get to the ball. He would pass massive piles of hay forward to the front of the wagon to his awaiting assistant. I remember the day when I was invited to move from gleaning the fields to joining my uncle on the wagon. I can still remember trying to keep up with the bounty as it was being passed to me. It felt like we were going 100 miles an hour. The hay just kept coming. At times, I was chest deep in fodder trying desperately to prove, at age 13, that I could keep up. Before long, the rails of the wagon disappeared as the stack of hay grew tall. There was nothing more satisfying than sitting on the top of the full load as it was being drawn back to the barn.

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THE SEASON IN REVIEW



SERVICE TO OTHERS AN INTERVIEW WITH SARAH MCDONALD

“It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

MATTHEW 20: 26-28

Q: Sarah, please tell us a little about yourself and your connection with St. James

A: I am a retired High School Principal who in 2007 was chosen as one of 32 of Canada’s Outstanding Principals. Prior to becoming a principal, I worked as a teacher of Mathematics as well as the Multicultural Consultant for the Durham District School Board. My volunteer work began in 1980 when I became the co-founder of the Pickering Carib Canadian Cultural Association. I have served on a number of boards including an appointment in Parliament to the Durham Regional Police Services Board where I served for a period of six plus years and during this time became the Vice-Chair of the Board. For over 36 years, I have served in various roles in

many professional and civic organizations. My high school students and teachers recognized me with a stamp designed in my honour for Black History Month 2007 and they registered it with Canada Post.

My community volunteer work especially in the area of housing has earned me the recognition of a Non-Profit Housing complex located at 1467 Whites Road, Pickering named in my honour “Sarah McDonald’s Place.” It is very satisfying to see 63 families with a place to live.

In 2006 my husband Vincent and I relocated to downtown Toronto and shortly after started attending St. James Cathedral. I became involved and currently serve on the St. James Cathedral Outreach Committee and as a Steward. I was appointed to and served on St. James Cathedral Council, as chair of the Three Churches Refugee Committee, as President of the Board of Mary Lambert Swale Non-Profit Homes,



as a member of the Social Justice Housing Sub-committee of the Diocese and as a member of the St. James Parish Selection Committee to recommend a new Dean.

Q: What exactly is Diocesan Synod and what is your role as Honorary Secretary?

A: On September 17, 2016 there will be an Electoral Synod when three Suffragan Bishops (also called Area Bishops) will be elected. My involvement in this process, working with others for others and the good of all, is a rejuvenating and inspiring feeling. The election of bishops for the Anglican Diocese of Toronto is an open process; any number of candidates can be nominated. As I am also a member of the Nominations Committee, it is my role to work with other committee members to provide the opportunities for Synod members to become well informed about the candidates as they discern who they will elect as the three Bishops. Twelve candidates have been nominated, each by at least 10 members of Synod. They have all fulfilled the requirements for nomination and are eligible for election. We thank them for their commitment of service. Each Candidate has provided a CV (posted on line), and a video message where they have responded to three questions and individually they have



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DIOCESAN CONFIRMATION (APR 10); THE FUNERAL OF FORMER MAYOR ROB FORD (MAR 30); DEAN ANDREW AND MARY ASBIL MARCH AT THE PRIDE PARADE (JUL 3); GATHERING OF CATHEDRAL CANONS (JUN 9); ROYAL SCHOOL OF NEEDLEWORK LECTURE (MAY 27); FIRST NATIONS NEEDLEWORK EXHIBIT (MAY 27); FAREWELL FOR CEMETERY MANAGER ROBERT TURVEY AND MRS. LORRAINE TURVEY, SEEN WITH DEAN ASBIL. (JUN 10); ORDINATION OF DEACONS WITH THE REV'D LEIGH KERN, ASSISTANT CURATE (MAY 1). PHOTOS BY MICHAEL HUDSON

A BUSY SUMMER: REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP UPDATE

Press deadlines being what they are, I am writing this update at the end of August. It's been a busy summer for the sponsorship committee.

Kambiz, the first of the refugees we are sponsoring, arrived on July 14 from Iran via Turkey. With the generous help of cathedral parishioners, we have been able to find both temporary and long-term housing – a key part of our sponsorship commitment. And then there have been the many, many other aspects of settlement: meetings with a Woodgreen settlement worker, obtaining OHIP, setting up phone and banking, registering for English as a Second Language classes, accessing medical and dental care, orientation to the TTC, etc. This work requires Farsi interpreters. On some occasions, the interpretation has been provided by members of a family the Cathedral sponsored in 1989 – a moving example of the benefits of refugee sponsorship to both the refugees being sponsored and Canadian society. Refugee sponsorship also requires flexibility and a willingness to step in on short notice, which committee members have done with skill and good grace.

On the slowdown in the processing of Syrian refugees, Ian McBride of AURA reports that the federal government is quietly getting through the backlog, but certainly not at the speed of 2015– early 2016. In the meantime, sponsorship groups like ours have sponsored single adults and families from other countries while waiting to be matched with a Syrian family.

Finally, while the sponsorship committee will continue to support Kambiz until next July, we are looking ahead to our next sponsorships – of a Syrian family, and another family after that. Our expenses have been higher than anticipated in two categories – hiring professional interpreters and moving and storing furniture and household items. Therefore, we need to continue to fundraise in preparation for the upcoming sponsorships.

The sponsorship committee is deeply grateful for the generous financial support, practical assistance, and wise counsel of cathedral parishioners. With God's grace, let us continue to welcome the stranger together.

*- The Reverend Canon Kate Merriman,
Chair of the Cathedral-Community
Refugee Response Committee*

answered the question as to why they felt the calling to become a Suffragan Bishop (also posted on line). They have attended four Town Hall meetings held on June 22, 25 and 28, when they answered questions from attendees who had an opportunity for direct conversation with each candidate. Each of these initiatives was designed to highlight the many skills and gifts of the candidates and their preparedness to take on such an important leadership position.

Q: Do you have any thoughts or reflections on the upcoming Synod you'd like to share?

A: As we continue to think of the qualities we seek in a Bishop and continue this discernment, it is important to be well informed. If the delegates to Synod missed the three Town Halls that were held, they can talk with someone who attended, continue to visit the Diocese's website and the websites of individual candidates, to consider the variety of opinions as well as any other opportunities that become available. The delegates should get to know the outstanding gifts of the candidates and, most of all, keep at the forefront of the needs of the diocese. The decisions made on September 17 will have a lasting impact on all of us.



DINING FOR THE REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP FUND

"How can I help the refugee sponsorship committee raise the funds to sponsor refugees – Kambiz, who arrived July 14, and the two families it is planning to sponsor over the next few years?" One idea is to host a fundraising dinner. The first fundraising dinner was held in mid-May. Nine guests of varied backgrounds and interests gathered in the home of a friend and St. James Cathedral parishioner for a delightful evening of sharing food, conversation, and ambience. What a wonderful way to generate \$540! A big "thank you" to Kate Merriman for helping with organization, and to our guests and hosts for making room for this event in their busy calendars.

PEALS FOR THE DEANS

The weekend of April 16-17 was a special one for ringing in Toronto. The previous Dean of Toronto and Rector of St. James Cathedral, The Very Reverend Douglas Stoute, retired in January and the ringers wished to ring a peal for him to mark the occasion. Douglas was the Dean of Toronto when the idea of having change ringing bells in the Cathedral took shape and he was a tremendous supporter of the scheme. He continued to support ringing and the ringers from the time of the installation in 1997 until he retired. Dean Stoute is a member of the North American Guild of Change Ringers (NAG) Roll of Honour (1997). At the same time we also wanted to welcome his successor, the Very Reverend Andrew Asbil.

It was only fitting to try to ring a 12-bell peal for this very special occasion but we didn't have 12 ringers in Toronto who like to ring peals. The Toronto ringers are therefore very grateful to their North American Guild friends from Pittsburgh PA, Rochester NY, Boston MA, Birmingham AL and Washington DC for making the journey to Toronto to help them in this endeavour.

Because we had never rung together as a 12-bell band before, and indeed because some of the band had not rung much on 12 bells at all, we decided to get together for a practice on Friday evening to see how well we would work together. Friday evening felt good and our conductor, Don Morrison, was happy with what he could see (and hear).

We had scheduled 3 peal attempts over the weekend to fit in between services. The first was an 8:30am start on the Saturday morning and we were all pleased (relieved?) when the peal of 5016 of Plain Bob Cinques came round in 3 hours and 15 minutes. We then had a short lunch break before we had a photo call with both Deans.

Several of the morning band were happy to have rung just one peal in the day but 7 of the morning band were happy to try for another. Michael went home to look after the children which allowed Olivia Gamache to join us for 5008 of Plain Bob Major which came round in 2 hours and 59 minutes.

On Sunday our visitors joined us for service ringing and then after the second service of the day we set off again. This time it was spliced 5060 of Plain Bob Cinques and Plain Bob Maximus, which duly came round in 3 hours and 9 minutes, a first for all the band.

It was the first time in ages that many of us had rung two peals in two days, to say nothing of those who rang three peals in two days. There were also a number of additional footnotes to the peals. Four ringers rang their first twelve bell peal on Saturday morning and one her first of Cinques. Saturday afternoon saw David Hawkins reach his 100th peal and Don Morrison his 600th for NAG. Sunday afternoon was Michael Hinton's 25th peal and Don completed circling of the tower, the first ringer to achieve that milestone.

Everyone had a very enjoyable and rewarding weekend and it was obvious that the Deans appreciated the peals being rung for them. As we succeeded in scoring three we decided to dedicate the Saturday morning peal to Douglas, the afternoon one to Her Majesty the Queen for her 90th birthday, and Sunday's to Andrew.

- David Wilcox

SEE PAGE 6 FOR MORE



OUR LEGACY TO EMBRACE & SHARE

FROM THE CAPITAL AND MAINTENANCE SUB-COMMITTEE

Since our last update highlighting the necessary maintenance needs of the Cathedral, the Cathedral Centre and the St. James Cemetery, we have heightened efforts and discussions in prioritizing the work to be

done based on the urgency and the potential impact on our community as a whole.

We have been thankful for additional generous donations received this year that were specific to maintaining the internal and external beauty of the Cathedral; with these funds and the approval of Cathedral Council, you may have or will shortly notice work commencing in the following areas:

- Restorative maintenance on the stone work at the base of the east, which will continue to the south and west sides of the Cathedral building.
- Replacement of the outer protective covering of the stained glass windows with tempered glass is expected to begin soon. Once completed, the new outer covering is expected to enhance the



Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord

Jan 6	Istvan Lendvay	Jun 26	Austin Ardinel Chesterfield Clarke
Mar 22	Robert Bruce Ford	Jun 27	David Dennis Bradshaw Crombie
Mar 28	Merija Vikmanis	Jul 13	Marjorie Ethel Clough
Apr 20	Dr. Charles Plaxton Crompton	Jul 16	Caleb Arthur John Burton-Williams
May 20	Elizabeth Barnes		
May 21	George Judson Newell		

Holy Baptism

Mar 26	Vinoka Basnayke Matthew Ferguson Evodia (Rui) Han Jiahong (Catherine) Huang Chloe (Yuhan) Li Guiyang (Gilbert) Li Ran Li Chen Liang Yufei (Serena) Song Fang (Linda) Tian Wenyan (Jessie) Tong Zhe Wang Zimeng Wang Jialei Zhang	Apr 3	Oliver Ulysses Mazurkiewicz Elliott Robert Young
		May 22	Zizhen Wang Cyrus Josiah Ahmadi
		May 28	Midori Harper Brown
		Jun 26	Charles Oak Arnold Logan Birch Arnold Remi Viola Poole John Gregory Sproat Sutton Nicole Sproat Paxton Alexander Tokarsky Pierson William Tokarsky
		Jul 16	Caleb Arthur John Burton-Williams
Apr 3	Naomi Jane Myfanwy Davis Alexandra Elizabeth May Flett	Jul 30	Jakob Samuel Koenig
		Sep 18	Owen Joseph Hopkins



PHOTOS FROM THE PEAL HONOURING DEANS STOUTE AND ASBIL, APRIL 16.

BOTTOM LEFT: THE BAND WITH THE DEANS AFTER THE SATURDAY MORNING PEAL; **LEFT TO RIGHT:** DAVID WILCOX (TORONTO), DAVID HAWKINS (TORONTO), ROBIN CLARKE (TORONTO), DEAN ANDREW ASBIL, TED CLARK (BIRMINGHAM, AL), CHRISTIAN HALLER (ROCHESTER, NY), DONALD MORRISON (PITTSBURGH, PA), DEAN DOUGLAS STOUTE, ROBERT BANNISTER (WASHINGTON, DC), MEREDITH MORRIS (WASHINGTON, DC), SUSAN O'NEILL (WASHINGTON, DC), QUILLA ROTH (WASHINGTON, DC); **NOT IN PHOTOGRAPH:** MICHAEL HINTON (TORONTO), ELAINE HANSEN (BOSTON, MA). PHOTOS BY MICHAEL HUDSON

beauty of the windows while at the same time increasing incoming daylight by at least 33%. Necessary repair work will be completed concurrently on the stained glass windows themselves.

- Consultations continue for the organ restoration

It is always important for us to remember that the Cemetery is an important component of our ministry. As we mentioned at Easter, Hillside H was sliding towards Rosedale Valley Road: our good news is that work is on

the way to stabilize and reinforce the area. The work mentioned above consists of those items of maintenance and repair work that had the combined element of receiving donor funds and being in dire need of repair. Still on the roster of work necessary for maintaining the Cathedral as a structurally sound beacon in our city are:

- The front steps at the Cathedral Centre (65 Church Street)
- Repairs to the Tower masonry
- Repair and structural strengthening of the gables at the east and west porches

- Interior painting
- Exterior painting and repair in areas such as the louvered windows on the steeple
- Repair and necessary adjustments to the pew doors

As we work with Council to eliminate items from the maintenance roster, and establish a feasible cycle to identify and determine repair needs, we will continue to look to you; our St. James family and friends for every type of support (financial and moral) in moving forward.

- Angela David (Chair)

Upcoming Dates

Two weekly recitals are offered year-round: Sundays at 4:00pm, and Tuesdays at 1:00pm

- OCT 9** **Harvest Thanksgiving:** Liturgies at 8:00, 9:00, 11:00am and 4:30pm
- OCT 13** **York Group Field Trip to St. John's Convent** (details online); Also meeting Nov 10 and Dec 8
- OCT 16** **The Feast of St. Luke:** Choral Evensong celebrating healing ministries, 4:30pm
- OCT 18** **Taizé Worship** in the Cathedral at 7:00pm; A bilingual service in Mandarin and English with music led by James Liu; Also Nov 15 and Dec 20
- OCT 22** **The Affordable Art Affair:** See details to right
- OCT 23** **The Bishop of Jamaica preaching** at 4:30pm Choral Evensong
- OCT 26** **"Dialogues on Assisted Dying" Interfaith Panel:** 6:00pm Evensong and Service of Light; 6:30pm Refreshments; 7:00pm Panel Discussion
See further details, far right
- OCT 29** **Amnesty Int'l Action Circle:** 1:00pm in the Cathedral Centre; Also meeting Nov 26
- OCT 30** **All Saints:** Liturgies at 8:00, 9:00, 11:00am and 4:30pm
FaithWorks 20th Anniversary celebrated at 4:30pm Choral Evensong; Archbishop Johnson presiding
- NOV 1** **All Saints at St. Bart's, Regent Park:** Solemn High Mass at 6:15pm (509 Dundas Street East)
- NOV 2** **All Souls Cantatas in the Cathedral:** at 6:00pm; Pay What You Can
"Dialogues on Assisted Dying" (Part Three): 6:30pm Refreshments; 7:00pm Lecture and Q&A; *See details, far right*
All Souls at St. Bart's, Regent Park Solemn Requiem Mass at 6:15pm (509 Dundas Street East)
- NOV 5** **Annual Requiem Eucharist for all the Faithful Departed** at the Chapel of St. James-the-Less (635 Parliament), 11:00am



THE AFFORDABLE ART AFFAIR: RAISING FUNDS FOR REFUGEES

There has been a whirl of activity this summer in preparation for the "Affordable Art Affair" to raise funds for our refugee sponsorship program. **The event will take place on the evening of Saturday, October 22 from 5:00 to 9:00pm in Snell Hall.** The Affair will feature live and silent auctions of notable original works as well as a gallery of fixed price items, like reproductions and framed posters, to meet every budget.

People both inside and outside of the Cathedral have donated art, and we have received some lovely, unique, and in some cases, valuable, pieces already. Our own Maurice Snelgrove and a number of other Ontario artists have donated recent works. In addition, abstracts by Ray Mead of Painters Eleven fame will be auctioned, and John A. Libby Fine Arts has agreed to provide a small work by the Group of Seven as well as a number of other items to be included in the live auction.

Pauline Brown has taken on the task of designing the display space for the sale and rounding up donations of wine and refreshments. Wines have been donated by DGB Wines.

John Libby, of John A. Libby Fine Art, which specializes in Group of Seven and Contemporary Artists, has offered to be our auctioneer for the evening and to advise on evaluations.

Thanks go out to those who have donated and continue to donate their previously loved works of art that needed to find a new home.

We are looking forward to a very fun evening, at the same time knowing that we are supporting people who are coming to Canada, as so many people have, to find shelter from the harshness of violence and oppression and a new home for themselves and their families.

- Carol Kysela

THE CHANGE RINGING BELLS & RINGERS OF ST. JAMES CATHEDRAL

Have you heard the bells ringing on Sunday mornings between the 9:00 and 11:00am services? If you think that they are being rung by a machine you are wrong! The bells you hear are change ringing bells, also known as "English style full circle bells," being rung by the ringers of the St. James Guild of Change Ringers. There is one person per rope for the number of bells you can hear. You may see some of the ringers on the television screen hanging in the entrance to the Cathedral.

If you are at all interested in knowing more about bell ringing or if you would like to try ringing please contact stjamesringerstoronto@gmail.com.

CATHEDRAL LECTURE SERIES EXPLORES ASSISTED DYING

What is the relationship between human agency and death? Is there a “right time” or “way” to die? Is death something we can ethically “choose”? These are only a few of the difficult questions stirring around Canada, as our communities, from the familial to the national scale, consider how to discern “physician assisted dying.” Please join Saint James Cathedral for our three-part series on this topic. Our first lecture will be an exploration of the ethical, theological, and social complexities of assisted dying in Ontario on Wednesday, September 28 featuring The Reverend Canon Douglas Graydon and The Reverend Joanne Davies, experienced Anglican chaplains. **Our second event will be an interfaith panel on Wednesday, October 26, titled “Death, Dying, Discernment, and Ritual.”** Three speakers, from the Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist traditions, will speak on how their particular tradition understands death and dying. They will address questions such as: how does one prepare spiritually for death? What is the role of the community in death and dying?

How is death ritualized in your tradition? Is death something one can consent to, such as in the case of physician assisted dying? Our panelists are: Dr. Amina Jabbar, Geriatrics Fellow at McMaster and member of El-Tawhid Unity Mosque; Dr. Chander Khanna, Vice President of the Hindu Institute of Learning; and the Rev. Dr. Marco Mascarin, Buddhist Chaplain at the University of Toronto, co-founder of Contemplative End of Life Care program, and Buddhadharma teacher. This panel may help stir contemplation on mortality, which throughout the Christian tradition, has been considered a spiritual practice. Do we fear death or suffering, and where do we place our hope? **On November 2, our Canon Graydon and Reverend Davies will offer a closing panel, following the All Souls Cantata in the Cathedral titled “O Eternity, You Word of Thunder.”** They will discuss “having difficult conversations and making difficult decisions,” from their experience in palliative care chaplaincy. There will be opportunities at each event for questions and round table discussion. Please join us for these important dialogues as we contemplate faith, hope, death, and community this autumn.

- The Reverend Leigh Kern

“CREATION” from page 1

Those old memories seem so distant now. It's partly the passage of time, but it's also about living in surroundings of mostly concrete, steel and glass. It is about the reality of losing touch with the earth, of reaping our food packaged in plastic and cardboard. It is about the expanding margins of the city that puts more distance between us and the field. The land seems so far away. I remember meeting a seminary student of indigenous descent who had just arrived in Toronto. I asked him, “What do you think of our city?” He said, “You can walk forever without ever touching the earth...”

Harvest Thanksgiving calls us to reclaim an intimate relationship with the land. It is a time to slip back down to the earth,

to appreciate the fragility, strength and abundance of creation. It is a time to give thanks for all that is essential; food, health, friendship, family and farmers who nourish us and help us to grow. And it is also our moment to remember the patience of God who, in spite of our failings and brokenness, gleans the field to pull us along so that we might bear fruit, that our lives might reflect kindness and mercy. May our ministry at the corner of King and Church Streets show forth the goodness and justice of the Kingdom...that is the sustenance of our daily bread.

Yours in Christ,
Andrew

*The Very Reverend Andrew Asbil,
Rector of St. James Cathedral & Dean of Toronto*

THE CATHEDRAL NEWSLETTER

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More Dates

- NOV 6** **Remembrance Sunday**
Liturgies at 8:00, 9:00, 11:00am, 2:00pm, and 4:30pm
The Duruflé Requiem sung by the Cathedral Choir, 4:30pm
Daylight Savings Time ends
- NOV 13** **Barbadian Independence 50th Anniversary Celebration Service**, 4:30pm
- NOV 16** **Truth & Reconciliation Lecture with Dr. Brenda Wastasecoot:** 6:00pm Evensong; 6:30pm Refreshments; 7:00pm Public Lecture and Q&A
- NOV 27** **An Advent Procession of Lessons and Carols** at 4:30pm
- NOV 30** **Advent Lectures** with Archbishop Colin Johnson; *Watch for details*
- DEC 4** **Amnesty Int'l “Write for Rights”** following 9:00 and 11:00am services
- DEC 17** **Messiaen’s La Nativité du Seigneur**, An organ recital by David Briggs, 4:00pm
- DEC 21** **The Choir of Royal St. George’s College** sings Nine Lessons and Carols for Christmas, 7:30pm

CHRISTMAS LITURGIES AT ST. JAMES CATHEDRAL

- DEC 24** **Christmas Eve**
4:30pm: A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols | **7:30pm:** Choral Eucharist & Procession to the Crèche
- DEC 25** **Christmas Day**
8:00am: Said Eucharist | **9:00am:** Sung Eucharist | **11:00am:** Procession & Choral Eucharist
- JAN 1** **The Epiphany of the Lord, New Year’s Day**
8:00am: Said Eucharist | **9:00am:** Sung Eucharist | **11:00am:** Procession & Choral Eucharist | **2:00-3:30pm:** The Archbishop’s Levee | **3:00pm:** Festive Music | **4:00pm:** Choral Evensong and Presentations of the Order of the Diocese of Toronto

More information about all listings available at 416-364-7865, or info@stjamescathedral.on.ca



LIGHTEN OUR DARKNESS

It is referred to by Chaucer, Milton, and Shakespeare; it is mentioned in Louis Stevenson, Dickens, and Trollope; it is present in Plath, Wilde and Auden, yet one is invariably met with looks of bewilderment and flabbergast when declining a friend's invitation with the words, "I'm sorry I can't make it - I'll be attending Choral Evensong." The dialogue proceeds in this guise: "Well, what kind of song is Evensong anyway? I didn't realise you were (...awkward pause...) religious." Before being able to muster a conflated response integrating the nuances of 17th century politics, compositional techniques, architecture and poetry, the assumption is made, the stereotype is formed, "It's just church, I suppose."

In reality, Evensong is something of an eccentric dark horse, the joker in the pack, when it comes to preconceived notions about "just church." For starters, unlike the sacramental liturgies of Eucharist, or Baptism, it doesn't require any clergy for it to take place. It is an example of 'Divine Office' (an oxymoron, surely?) which has been passed down through the centuries from the Apostles, and daily Jewish prayers before them. These prayers were adopted and adapted by monastic institutions and reached something resembling their current format just under half a millennium ago following a domestic dispute involving an Englishman, a Roman and a Spaniard. The choral rendering of Anglican Evening Prayer is also peculiar in that it has, amongst Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and even hardened atheists, a burgeoning popularity. Richard Dawkins has been quoted as saying, "I have a certain *love* of Evensong." The Guardian, the Telegraph and the Economist all report a 35% increase in attendance for the service since 2000, all of this taking place within a church that its own primate once declared as "one generation away from extinction." With my own eyes I have seen people camp out in tents to participate in

the service, people have queued in the freezing rain waiting for a seat, I have even seen a fully regaled, robed and professional choir sing Evensong to a congregation of zero. How can this be explained?

Evensong's zealous appeal grows from a curious combination of ingredients. The order in which they are presented is crucial. You enter the Cathedral to the sound of music. It takes a moment to recognise that the organ is located all around the building, creating a 'surround-sound' effect that is practically unique in Toronto. The organist is playing on not four, but five different keyboards, one of which is being played with their *feet*. As the bells toll to signal a service is about to begin, the music gradually quietens and we hear the immortal sound of the human voice. The choir, not yet visible, sing a short prayer, or introit, to focus the mind away from the frenzy of King Street. As the procession enters the space, it's hard not to notice the dazzling white surplices, the elaborate copes, the academic hoods as the slowly gliding company of women and men make their way up to the ornately neo-gothic high altar. The service begins, as it has on this very patch of earth for over two-hundred years, with the chanted words: "O Lord, open thou our lips." We begin from a position of penitence, of weakness, of ignorance. We plead, "make haste to help us, make speed to save us."

The choir, singing on our behalf, begin chanting a Psalm appointed for the day. Did they really say, "I am become like a pelican in the wilderness"? Who is Og the King of Basan, and why does he have fat bulls? Was throwing a shoe at Edom a common thing to do, or to describe Moab as a washpot? What of earthquakes, pescicide, unicorns, lions, delightful legs, leery drunks, olfactory malfunction, culinary adventures, gnashing teeth, and herb for the use of men? Did the lyrics to Queen's *Another One Bites the Dust* really come from Psalm 72?

The Old Testament reading begins, and it's far from soporific. In the course of a month one can guarantee an airing of tales that deal with jealousy, betrayal, murder, family feud, sea monsters, erotica, the list goes on: eat your heart out Game of Thrones. Jesus Christ 'meek and mild' doesn't enter the picture until the Magnificat, or Song of Mary, is sung. Even then he has not yet been born. This great declaration of the Incarnation, God stooping so low, launches us perfectly into the Second Lesson which fixes our minds on the ground-breaking acts of Christ and the Apostles before we join the aged Simeon in his hymn of praise: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."

We now pause and see how far we've come. We stand and say the Creed together. This is the Church's summary of the truths we have been learning about. Another, more substantial, piece of music is offered as a meditation, followed by prayers reflecting on the day, as the shadows lengthen, the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over.

Evensong grapples with so many dramatic, and yet universal themes that it is no wonder that those who encounter it, experience it on such a viscerally stimulating level. It has at its core the fundamental tribulations of the human condition, which, in combination with Thomas Cranmer's gorgeous command of language, has an enduring charm and resonance. This is all to say nothing of the staggeringly high quality, and constant variety of music written for it. Even composers who were avowed atheists such as Vaughan Williams, Tippett, Maxwell Davies, Rorem, and Britten, composed some of our most treasured church music for the service because of its fertile landscape for creativity and inspiration. It is not for me to comment on the quality of the music on offer at St. James, but I think that everyone who can hear has something to glean from this crowning jewel within our rich tapestry of a tradition. Should you know someone to come away from the plush musical banquet of Evensong (every Sunday at 4:30pm, entirely free) not feeling uplifted or spiritually nourished then you might consider the advice of Lorenzo in *The Merchant of Venice*:

*"The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord
of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night
And his affections dark as Erebus:
Let no such man be trusted."*

- Robert Busiakiewicz,
Director of Music