

The Red Door

St. Mary's Episcopal Church

October 2023

RAMBLINGS FROM THE RECTOR



When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it. But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry.

Jonah is probably my favorite prophet. Not because he embodies what I hope to be, but rather because he shows us that God will do good things even when, in our human reluctance, we do everything we can to get in the way. Jonah was very set in his judgement of the people of Nineveh. He wanted them to pay for what he perceived to be their great evil. God saw an opportunity for a society to change for the better and called them toward that chance. God prevailed. Jonah got angry. God didn't give up on either Nineveh or Jonah!

The story of Jonah can serve for us as two distinctly different types of example. The first I described above – the example of God's faithfulness and mercy in the face of our disobedience. The second type of example it provides is as a negative role model ... don't be like Jonah. Jonah was totally focused on his own desires. He had no compassion for people who were different from him. He was so self-involved that when God showed mercy, he took it as a personal affront. He could not see that the change in Nineveh was of more value to all than its destruction.

If we look, we can see Jonah's attitude everywhere around us (and even within us). We are encouraged to look to our own benefit before we even consider the benefit to others. We are taught that our personal rights are of more value than the greater good. This does not fit at all with the good news (gospel) of Jesus Christ and I pray that it is an attitude that I can resist (and that you can as well).

Rev Warren Huestis

PARISH READING

EXTRACTED FROM THE CLUTTER OF THE RECTOR'S DESK

We Have Put Individualism Ahead of the Common Good for Too Long

The US flag flies at half mast outside the US Capitol in Washington, DC, on March 29, 2023. - A heavily armed former student killed three young children and three staff in what appeared to be a carefully planned attack at a private elementary school in Nashville on March 27.



BY RICHARD WEISSBOURD AND CHRIS MURPHY
APRIL 11, 2023

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As he toured America in the early 1800s, Alexis de Tocqueville observed the new world's fascination with individualism and entrepreneurship with a combination of wonder and worry. He recognized that America's future greatness and power likely lay in its citizens' obsession with individual advancement. But he also questioned whether a society could hold together when existence becomes atomized and individual success crowds out the common good. America, he worried, would descend into a morass of avarice, self-interest and envy without a means through which Americans could prioritize virtue, character, and common good over personal interest and individual achievement.

In a way, the story of America's success in the two hundred years since de Tocqueville's tour is our ability to properly balance this tension between individualism and collectivism. America's genius lies not just in our spirit of entrepreneurship and pick-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps individualism, but also in our decision to make sure that this value on personal responsibility and success is never absolute. To varying degrees over the course of our history, it has been matched by a concern for the community and the collective. We measured success both by how well we were doing and how well the communities and the country we belonged to were doing, and we tended to view our individual and collective well-being as powerfully entwined.

But something has changed. We all feel this. In America today, far too many of us are disconnected from each other, lonely, self-protective, or at each other's throats. Sacrifice for the common good feels anachronistic. Everything not nailed down has been commoditized or turned into a source of personal enrichment. The daily
(continued on next page)

VESTRY

Parish Reading *(continued)*

John Joy, Sr Warden
 Charles Everhart, Jr Warden
 Richard Davis
 Andrea Harner
 Judy Sauer
 Matt Sauer
 Barb Zumwalde
 1 opening
 Newsletter editor—John Glaze

“shout” shows and nonstop social media hostility push us into corners and reward balkanization. Sacrificing personal gain for the common good or treating people with different views respectfully or prioritizing collective success over individual success—it’s all for the suckers.

Much has been written about why we tipped toward ourselves over the last several decades. The villains in this story include declines in religious participation and social outings and clubs, fueled in part by television, which keeps us at home. Workplaces also became more focused on profit than on employee well-being and solidarity, and we started lionizing those who stepped over others to get ahead. While those people always existed in society, they were usually identified and treated as outliers that needed to be constrained, not as examples of American greatness.

In 1985, *Habits of the Heart*, an extensive study of values in American life, reported that Americans speak a “first language” of personal ambitions and only a “second language” of commitments to others and the collective. Perhaps more than any country in the West, we also became immersed in the 1970s in psychological talk and a self-help culture that, for all of its benefits, occupied many Americans with their inner lives and caused them to wade into themselves—not their communities—to find meaning and vitality. More recently, researchers and social observers have decried how social media betrayed its promise to connect us, instead deepening our sense of isolation and anomie. Making matters worse, we now consume different news sources that convey different facts, undermining the shared reality that is the glue of any healthy society.

This change in our priorities is reflected in how we raise our kids. Research indicates that American teenagers are more likely to prioritize aspects of their success—happiness and achievement—over caring for others, and they’re more likely to view their parents as prioritizing these aspects of success in raising them.

Alexis de Tocqueville’s warning was not wrong. It no longer feels like America can hold together when we all exist in silos, with little concern for collective health. Our country’s survival may rest on our ability to restore the prior balance between individualism and the common good. As a social scientist who has long studied Americans’ retreat into ourselves and as a U.S. Senator raising children amidst this new national reality, we believe the question of how we restore in Americans a stronger sense of responsibility for others and their communities is one of the central cultural and civic concerns of the moment.

We see this as two critical, distinct challenges. One is to restore community at the local level. Put simply, one cannot have a sense of community if the community doesn’t exist. Healthy, inclusive communities have all sorts of benefits, including increased safety; a greater sense of belonging, identity and pride; and a buffer in times of crisis. They’re also a vital antidote to pervasive loneliness in this country, which takes a large physical and emotional toll and is distressingly common among the young. Soon-to-be published results from a recent *Making Caring Common* national survey indicate that 34% of adults aged 18-25 suffer serious loneliness. But today, our towns, neighborhoods, and local communities are suffering. The industries that defined places have disappeared or been gobbled up by faceless global conglomerates that have no stake in building strong communities around their facilities. Local business districts have vanished, as the economy has gradually been Amazonified. Local newspapers that connected neighbors together through common storytelling have been swallowed by national news outlets that erase our local identity and insist on bunching us all together in one loud, messy, conflict-obsessed national conversation.

The other, perhaps more important challenge, is to expand Americans’ circles of care and obligation. For too many Americans, their community is tightly drawn – kin, religious or ethnic group or political party. Republicans view Democrats as the enemy, and vice versa. Rural and urban Americans feel like they are living on different planets. Black and white people often lead segregated, culturally separate existences. We must convince Americans that there is reason for them to care about those outside their immediate community.

Government can—and must—meet these critical challenges. To address the first challenge—the loss of connection to, and identification with, community – there is no shortage of government solutions, most of which do not fall along traditional right/left divides. First, why continue to pretend that the consequences of technology’s unstinting advance are value-neutral? It is entirely clear today that our retreat into online life is not a substitute for in-person connection. Why not use policy to steer technology companies toward products that breed connection and happiness, not loneliness and anxiety? Government could require social media compa-


 pg4

SENIOR WARDEN REPORT

Although summer is winding down and fall is definitely in the air, it feels more like spring around St. Mary’s to me. I believe we have turned the corner with our building project and have already begun to make substantial progress towards getting back to normal by the end of this year, or early in 2024. We have the scheduled power outage behind us, with our electrician, Cleve Bartley of Greenfield, getting the new outside panels and disconnects installed. We have selected Weller’s Plumbing and Heating as the HVAC contractor for that portion of the work. The Vestry is in agreement with using Weller’s, as they are a strong local company with the commercial and industrial experience to handle more complex projects than “residential” focused firms typically handle in HVAC installations. We are meeting with Weller’s shortly to finalize the project details, and look forward to making solid progress in the next few months.

Other signs of growth and rebirth abound at St. Mary’s. Barb Zumwalde and Judy Sauer were instrumental in setting up a booth at the Highland County Fair for us, and has also started up our Soup’s On program again after a long absence. New folks are coming to our services and are stepping up to take active roles in the life of our church. The convention to elect a new Diocesan Bishop will be held September 30, and we are looking forward to the leadership provided after the completion of that process. A huge thank you goes out to you all for your support and involvement at St. Mary’s!

John Joy

Senior Warden

Rev. John Steele, who “came in 1866 from Australia, large and powerful looking man, preached best after a highball. Sent away.” (per our outspoken Mrs. Yeoman) John Steele had come to Hillsboro to preach two sermons upon the recommendation of Bishop McIlvaine, and he was called as Rector after those Sunday services. Mr. Steele’s rectorate lasted just a few days beyond five months, apparently one of the unhappiest periods in the annals of St. Mary’s existence prior to or since that time. There are many pages of correspondence from Mr. Steele to the Vestry and from the Vestry to Bishop McIlvaine that are included in parish memorabilia and reflect accusations of the Rector against the Vestry, and refutations of these charges by the leadership of the Parish.

Prof. Isaac Sams’ reminiscences of 1876 give a brief account of Mr. Steele’s time as Rector, from the perspective of the Senior Warden at the time: “Revd. John Steele accepted our call at \$600 per an. 11 November 1866. Later Bishop McIlvaine proposed that the Vestry should pay \$700 and the Missionary Board would supply \$300, thus making the salary \$1,000, which was done accordingly. Very soon, however, Mr. Steele importuned the Bishop to write to our Vestry to procure for Mr. Steele a house for his residence. The Bishop’s letter was a source of regret to our people, since a house could only be purchased in debt, and the hire of a house would add insupportably to the augmented salary which at the Bishop’s desire they had agreed to pay. The Vestry felt themselves obliged to decline to act in the matter. Mr. Steele then proposed to supply funds for a part payment on a house if the Vestry would assist. The lady owner of the house that Mr. Steele wanted was waited on by Mr. Steele and a committee of the Vestry. Her answer was short and decisive: ‘Pay me \$1,300 down and you shall have the house.’” (The next line is crossed out on Prof. Sams’ manuscript: “Mr. Steele came away disgusted at the idea of ‘transacting business with a woman.’”) A few days later Mr. Steele sent a letter to the Vestry stating that his expenditures had exceeded his income by \$256 and requesting a donation of \$120. The Vestry, having heard a rumor of his intending to remove to another parish, ordered a committee of the wardens to enquire as to that point. Mr. Steele said, “Yes he was going to Dresden, where a house was ready to receive him.” The committee remarked that under such circumstances Mr. Steele could scarcely expect the contribution he had demanded. His last sermon (March 31, 1867) was a flaming philippic against the parish in general, and in particular, the Sunday School.

The Vestry minutes of December 29, 1866 refer to a letter from Bishop McIlvaine to Mr. Steele recommending that he, with the authority of the Vestry, “Proceed to Cincinnati and Columbus to solicit pecuniary aid from the clergy of those cities.” At the next Vestry meeting Steele reported a cash collection of \$15 from his visit to Cincinnati, but as the Vestry paid \$21 for his expenses, this excursion did not achieve its purpose of raising a significant amount that could be used to buy a Rectory for Mr. Steele and his family.

Senior Warden Isaac Sams continues in his historical summary, “The Vestry, in view of the startling complications forced upon them by Mr. Steele, thought themselves in respectful duty to their dearly beloved Bishop to lay before him Mr. Steele’s letters to the Vestry and a circumstantial statement of their doings with that clergyman.” A copy of this twelve page document which also includes five letters of Mr. Steele’s, is included in the parish records and makes distressing reading. Although this entire document might be of interest, the final pages will give some indication of the sadly adversarial nature of the relationship of Mr. Steele and St. Mary’s Vestry.

The Vestry writes: “Sincerely should we rejoice, if even now we could close this unhappy narration.” This letter is dated Monday, April 1, “On Sunday evening Mr. Steele preached his last sermon. In the course of that sermon, he told the large congregation assembled in the church that the Bible was not taught in the Sunday School, that his son, who had been attending many weeks had never been asked to learn a single verse of scripture; and that he advised the people to send their children to the Sunday Schools of other churches rather than to that of the Episcopal Church of St. Mary’s.”

“The atrociousness of this preaching lies first in its untruth, and then in its treachery. The Bible is taught in the Sunday School. The class in which Master Steele stood was for all his time drilled in the Catechism. Moreover, Mr. Steele assumed arbitrary control of the S. School from his first coming, reducing it by the changes he introduced, from about 50 average pupils to about 25, and if there was any such want of teaching, who was responsible?”

“But whatever may have been the deficiencies of the school, what a sad spectacle was it for him, the reverend pastor, to betray his trust in that pulpit and labor with all his heart for the destruction of a church which it was his pledged duty before God and man, to teach, to improve, to help & to uphold.”

In his letter of April 1, 1867, the Rev. Mr. Steele announced to the Vestry that he had accepted the rectorship of Dresden in Muskingum County near Zanesville. The closing words of this letter sets forth his condemnation of the Vestry, from his perspective, during the brief and sad period of his rectorate: “Beseeching Almighty God to teach you by his Holy Spirit, for Jesus Christ’s sake, what your position and duty as vestrymen is, when undertaking to control the ministry, and interfere with the work and progress of true and undefiled religion; and in his great mercy so lead

you as to save from again giving offence & hindrance to the church of God.” Although Mr. Steele had been paid in advance through May 11, the Vestry seemed glad to bid farewell to one to whom they referred in their letter to Bishop McIlvaine as an “imperious gentleman” who hurled arrogant and bigoted charges at the Vestry.

In trying to search for the “imperious gentleman,” I could find nothing of him. St. Matthew’s Church is permanently closed, so no source there could be found. Perhaps he returned to Australia. (editor) (letter shown is from Rev. Steele. He and his family were living at the Ellicott Hotel at the time.)

Ellicott Hotel
Hillsboro 1st April 67
To the Vestry, Wardens,
Saint Mary's Parish
Gentle
I have to inform you that
having accepted the Rectorship of Dresden
Ohio, I now retire from the missionary
charge of this Parish.
In this course I have, after due deliberation
performed: He Sp did not wish it;
and I, knowing ^{how} very detrimental to the
best interests of the church, such constant
changing in the ministry in this Parish
must ultimately prove hurtful: larger
perhaps than was due to the dignity of my
sacred office, certainly, as many say,
larger than was just to my family; an undue
stress laid on honor, an area which the
Sp sent me here, not being complied with,
but ~~sent~~ on the contrary evaded, together
with your resolution agreeing to provide a
house for me as ministers of this Parish,
having been violated, no alternative
remained to me but the one that I have



October
Happy Birthday!
5-Oct Herschel Hook
23-Oct Dallas Harner

The Red Door

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SERVICE TIME
Sunday - 9 am



nies to restrict access for minors to a short period of time each day (akin to the recent Tiktok announcement), or require these companies to disclose their algorithms so as to create downward pressure on the prioritization of unhealthy or prurient content. America doesn't need to pretend that these platforms are outside our control. We could choose to pressure these companies to act more responsibly and to disincentivize individuals, especially children, from disappearing into their phones.

Government should also play a central role in revitalizing the health of local communities and institutions. Before small town business districts and churches and social clubs began to dry up, these were the places where strangers met, relationships were formed, and identities were constructed. Healthy, vibrant places and social institutions also provide opportunities for non-political, non-sectarian identities that are likely healthier than ideology-based identity. This effort would involve thoughtful industrial policy, designed to bring good paying industrial and high-tech jobs back to small communities, but also deliberate support for places of worship and clubs and local newspapers—institutions where local identity is formed.

There is much else that government can do to create a social infrastructure. We might take cues from the United Kingdom and Japan, which have both created purposeful national strategies to combat loneliness. Primary care physicians, for example, might routinely ask about loneliness at annual physicals and provide “social prescriptions,” connecting patients to, say, relevant religious organizations, or reading groups or non-profits. Political leaders might task housing and urban planning departments with developing more concrete strategies for promoting connections and community. Government can support the growing trend to reimagine public libraries as vibrant, cross-generational community hubs that provide, for example, classes, civic events, collaborative workspaces and story-telling.

Expanding national service programs would help address the second challenge, bringing young people together from various backgrounds to work on common causes, creating ties across the usual divides and strengthening young people's commitment to their country. Yet government could think well beyond these programs in bringing diverse Americans together to solve problems and to address the harm caused by the pandemic. Policymakers might support the expansion of programs like CoGenerate's Generations Serving Together, which unites older and younger generations in solving “problems that no generation can solve alone” and that curbs loneliness, which especially afflicts not only the young but senior citizens. Policymakers might organize diverse volunteers to tutor children and to assist teachers in redressing the brutal learning losses students suffered during the pandemic. Parents are often isolated, with high costs to themselves and their children, and government can expand the wide array of family support programs that enable parents and other caregivers to connect with and strengthen each other.

All of this work ought to be placed within an ethical narrative. Americans need leaders who can convey that while we all have different stories, we are also part of the same story, a “story of us”—a story about what it means to be an American that resonates with diverse people across the country. Woven into this narrative should be more thoughtful and consistent talk about the civic values that undergird a healthy democratic society and political community. Americans seem to be longing for moral leadership. Seventy-one percent (71%) of respondents in an online survey Making Caring Common conducted in October 2020 agreed or completely agreed with the statement, “I'm very troubled by the moral state of our country,” and only 13% disagreed. Despite our diverse religious backgrounds (or lack thereof) and ideological differences, there is wide agreement among many Americans on crucial values, including fairness, decency, caring, respect, honesty, loyalty and hard work. Elevating these values and talking about what they concretely mean in our daily lives can mitigate the worn out perpetual conflict between left and right on hot button political topics.

This all may feel like a herculean task, but there are good reasons for hope. Post-pandemic, Americans' motivation to live outside themselves and invest in the common good may be at an all-time high. While survey data reveals strong partisan animosities, this data also indicates that Americans have not given up on each other and do not want a divorce. Two-thirds of respondents in a 2021 national survey reported that they cared for all Americans regardless of their political views, and a similar percent preferred to live in politically diverse neighborhoods.

But there is no time to waste. Government needs to put front and center the challenge of restoring Americans' commitment to their communities and our collective life. Individualism will always be a hallmark of American identity. But it is time that we took deliberate steps to raise up concern for the common good. When our community does better, we should feel as much satisfaction as when our own personal lot improves. It is upon this work that our brave, beautiful experiment in democracy may depend.

<https://time.com/6269091/individualism-ahead-of-the-common-good-for-too-long/>