



**St. James at 175 Years**  
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When we lived in Evanston, there was a shop around the corner from our house; every fall they put a sign in the window that read:

You can help teach your child the values of

- compassion
- responsibility
- commitment
- respect
- friendship and
- nurturing

all learned – so naturally – through the magic of pets.

Every time I passed it, it reminded me of what my children have taught me -- through the magic of pets: hysteria, paranoia, frustration, anxiety, and various techniques for spot removal.

On the whole, I still agree with the shop window's wisdom. My experience of the magic of pets has been a character building and character testing enterprise.

A letter writer called Peter is doing some advertising himself this morning.

*Rid yourselves, therefore, of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander. . . Come to him . . . chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

Like the sign in a shop window, he is calling his sisters and brothers in Christ to a character building enterprise, -- all learned so naturally through the magic of Christian community.

The New Testament authors are scarcely romantics about the possibilities of faith communities. Run through Paul's famous letters, or the epistles of John, James and the rest, and check out what they have to say about what their brothers and sisters in Christ have taught them through the magic of Christian community.

The list is vaguely familiar - hysteria, paranoia, frustration, anxiety. I don't know about spot removal. Although it could be a metaphor for the tricky business of forgiveness.

The earliest versions of this enterprise we call Church faced some tough challenges. The heroic and the hysterical, the flawed and the foolish; the guilty, the gullible and the grieving, the privileged, the pious and the oppressed. These are the kind of folk that had to figure out how to be the Church - this 'company of strangers' who made up the tiny, illegal, persecuted, house churches of the first Christian centuries. Maybe we still are.

The messy magic of Christian community - scarcely a neat, serene or efficient way to propagate the faith. The New Testament testifies to the struggles, the outright battles between factions; who is in and who is out and how do you tell the difference? And they left us more than one answer to some complex questions.

But the biblical witness is clear and consistent in some things. It is in life together, in worship and work, in prayer and care, in study and service, even in conflict and hardship, that the character of God's new people will be formed, and tested and blessed. And it is life together that will be a sign to others of God's love, of Christ's presence, and of the Spirit's power.

The apostles and their successors wrote letters to novice Christians because Jesus had given them a vision and a passion about what works to call forth character worthy of the Christ, the necessary virtues for building up communities that would be faithful to his work.

The apostles wrote lots of letters because congregations weren't very good at Christ like togetherness. More than twenty centuries later, they write to us, because we still aren't.

More than twenty centuries later, we struggle with the same feisty, uncomfortable, messy magic that is the Christian community, this local one as well as the larger arena - - with everything that teaches us of godly virtue, that fills us with sheer delight in

being part of a godly company, and with all that can make us crazy - the frustrations, hysteria, fears, anxieties that come from life with other human beings.

And more than twenty centuries later, we still trust the same truths that our mothers and fathers in faith came to know - that Christian community still beats the world's odds only because it finds enduring meaning and an ongoing mission in the mystery that is the Christ.

That same mystery gathered a small group of Christian pioneers in 1834, in a rugged frontier town; the mystery that pulled them into a new faith community, into a peculiar and particular expression of life in Christ. The Episcopal Church.

They were immigrants – not to the young American nation, but to another kind of promised land in our mid-western wilderness; they came from the East, not wise men exactly, but men and women with passions and courage and ambitions and greed and curiosity and talents for creating newness and carving out meaningful lives in a difficult place and challenging times.

Every church I've ever served, has had in its own mythology, a strong and central figure from the past; most often a rector, whose own vision, passions, ego, ambitions, character, even his flaws and foibles, have somehow become part of the DNA of the parish – a genesis for the spirit of the place, for both good and ill.

What that has meant for future generations of a congregation has depended upon how they have understood that spirit and how they participate in shaping any ongoing expression of it – not a blind acceptance or rejection of such a force – but a capacity to comprehend how it has shaped them, and the wisdom to act faithfully out of that awareness.

For anyone who has ever been associated with St. Luke's in Evanston, it is easy to be touched by the spirit of George Craig Stewart in the place – not because he became Bishop of Chicago, but because every stone and statue and stained glass window in the lovely church still speaks of his visions, his genius, his churchmanship, even his ego and his faults.

In 175 years, no one name has seemed to stand out in quite the same way at St. James. A long succession of rectors and deans have shaped this place in their times, some beloved, many respected, most able, a few not so much.

Our story reads like the familiar marriage vows – for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health. This congregation has known it all. And our tendency as Episcopalians is to assign clergy leaders to mark various times.

Yet, in my little more than two years as a priest in this congregation, in research and reading, in pondering and praying, I have discovered a soul from our past, whose story and spirit still resonates; a spirit whose passions and visions and maybe ego and ambitions still permeate the meaning of St. James as I have come to know it and love it.

She is in fact our founding mother. Juliette Kinzie, Connecticut born, a gently raised middle class educated lady, a life-long Episcopalian, who married a dashing trader, entrepreneur, Indian agent named John Harris Kinzie. The adventures that brought her to a Chicago in its own infancy in 1834 are chilling – both figuratively and literally – following sojourns with her spouse through Wisconsin in the dead of winter.

Her husband's father, John Kinzie, was a colorful persona – his story laced with corruption and intrigue, treason, multiple marriages, betrayal, and murder. Some historians credit him as the first permanent white settler of Chicago; Juliette herself says that the first white man who settled here was a Negro – Jean Baptiste Point DuSable.

She means us to remember that this land was home to proud native peoples before the traders and explorers and entrepreneurs arrived and took it over.

In October of 1834, a community of Episcopalians was gathered in Chicago. Juliette's husband's name, John Harris Kinzie was among the list of the first elected vestrymen of the congregation. But hers, not his, was among the first communicants. St. James was a congregation before there was a diocese, a bishop, a city or a mayor.

Juliette and her friends gathered a church – made up of speculators, adventurers, gamblers – entrepreneurs building businesses, easterners establishing cultural institutions on the frontier, and visionaries creating what would become a city with a national profile.

Juliette wanted a church, this church, to give moral and religious structure to her family, and to a thriving new commercial community – to counter the intense preoccupation of the settlers with money making and speculation. Perhaps to counter the rough reputation of her colorful father-in-law and to offer the disciplines of the Book of Common Prayer and the mysteries of the sacraments to a community on the frontier.

Her efforts brought the Rev. Isaac Hallam to Chicago from Connecticut, to be the first rector of St. James, named after Hallam's parish in Connecticut.

A contemporary called her the ruling female spirit of the parish, a force of power and influence. When Hallam left St. James after nearly a decade a new rector arrived.

The Reverend William Walker was heard to comment about Juliette – “I would put her down . . . she should rule the parish no longer as she had done for years. Either I or she would be rector.” He was gone within the year, headed back east, and later relieved of his orders.

By the time Juliette Kinzie died in 1870, St. James was an established, effective congregation in an important city. A second church, a beautiful edifice with a grand tower and a memorial altar to remember those who died in the Civil War -- "In Honor of Those Who Fought : In Memory of Those Who Fell." was brought to completion.

The story of St. James and the story of Chicago continued to unfold – the winds of change blew both hot and cold – sometimes very hot.

In 1955, a new kind of chapter began in the life of St. James. My friend Moki Hino, Canon Pastor of the Cathedral in Honolulu preached here last month. He said he served a royal cathedral – founded by the king and queen of Hawaii.

We are, I thought then, an accidental cathedral.

If the Cathedral Church of Sts Peter and Paul had not burned in 1921, if Bishop Anderson’s dream of a great metropolitan Cathedral and diocesan tower complex had not crashed with the stock market in 1929, if Bishop Conkling galvanized the diocese and raised the money to tear down this Victorian barn and finally erect a grand cathedral edifice on this site -- things might look different at the corner of Huron and Wabash today.

Maybe God had other ideas. It was Bishop Burrill, in 1955, who asked the vestry and people of St. James to become the Cathedral for Chicago – the Bishop’s Church -- this place, this location, this people.

Some called us a cathedral by default. For the people of St. James questions linger. About the life, identity and mission of this historic parish, and about its role and readiness to serve our Bishops as the cathedral of a diocese in the nation’s third largest city.

I do believe this accidental vocation is not about being a grand Cathedral edifice, but about being ‘the Mother Church of the diocese’ with a peculiar ministry and mission of service and outreach on behalf of our bishop.

That is not a new thing for St. James. It is who we are, who we have always been.

To understand ourselves in that way is to reclaim a spirit that belonged in this congregation from the beginning.

A tough, gutsy, talented, feisty Christian woman poured her heart and soul into a new kind of community – she longed for a church, a people, who would be a gracious presence in gritty times and in a place marked by some grim realities. And that hasn't changed. Her spirit still moves in our midst and can stir our hearts.

The Indian wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century have yielded to gang wars of the 21<sup>st</sup>. The massacre of Fort Dearborn is bloody piece of our history. The massacre of young people on our city streets is a bloody fact of life now.

Like Juliette Kinzie, we live in a place continually being reshaped by the forces of history, now more than an emerging national economy, rather a global one.

The entrepreneurial spirit that settled this city is alive and well – with the same unbridled greed and capacity to exploit resources, natural and human.

We are now a community of urban pioneers, many of us immigrants to this area, aware that our destiny as individuals is somehow linked to the destiny of our city, and that our souls are still shaped by a Church, gathered in and for the city.

With a mission to confront and challenge the distortions of the culture that surrounds us, to celebrate and enhance the gifts that also abound in it.

Like the infant Christian communities of the ancient world – or one that had its beginnings in a frontier town in the Midwestern wilderness, we still need to ponder wisdom that encourages us to persevere and to examine the values and virtues we hold dear in the light of Christ crucified and risen.

We need as well to note the costly nature of our common life. Even if the lions are not roaring in the Arena, the people who sit in our pews put themselves at risk to be here, in ways we may not ever fully know or understand.

Week after week, we place ourselves in the path of a life-changing, world shattering Gospel, despite all the forces of our culture that say such choices are foolish, dangerous, or irrelevant.

The magic of Christian community is nothing without the mystery of the Christ.

- We are held together by a greater power than our own good intentions and grand ambitions;
- We are held together by a greater promise than like-minded ideas.
- We are held together for a greater purpose than our own peace of mind.
- We are held together beyond our diversity, our differences, even our divisions.

We are held by a God who joined us in the messy mystery of our very humanity, who joins us still in the muddled magic of our life together; who hangs out with us in mundane materials like bread and wine, who hung for us on a Cross that bears the weight of all our flaws and fragility, our suffering and our guilt.

My sisters and brothers, it is still our call, our vocation, to hold out to this city, to this diocese, the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. He calls us to follow him and gives us a disconcerting company of fallible, flawed and sometimes downright irritating siblings to be the only visible, accessible means to a lovely end.

We can promise miraculous birthings, and passionate dyings, and surprising intrusions. We can promise encounters with God, as we grapple with the forces of history and culture, and as we collide with one another. For if we cannot recognize Christ in each other, it is hard to know how we will ever meet him at all.

This is our blessing, our call, our mission: the messy, creative, redemptive magic of Christian community. The magic that takes us as we are, and still shows us how we are called to be more; that promises that we will get there only in the company of one another.

For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health – the story of St. James over 175 years of mission and ministry in and for the City, in the Name of Christ. And more, much more, to come.

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

JER+