

# THE LION'S TALE

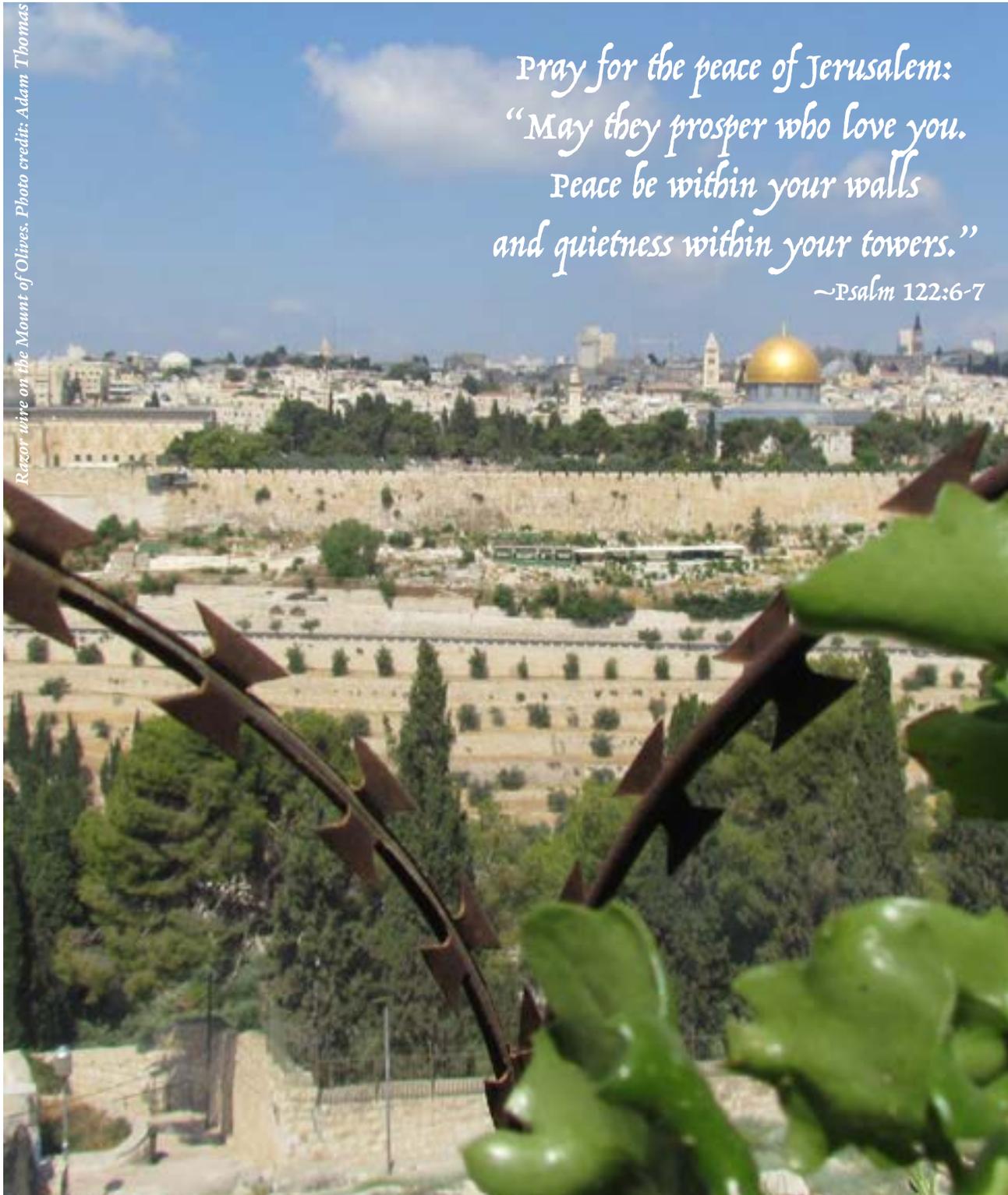
*The Seasonal Magazine of St. Mark's Episcopal Church*

BACK TO  
SCHOOL  
2019

*Razor wire on the Mount of Olives. Photo credit: Adam Thomas*

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:  
"May they prosper who love you.  
Peace be within your walls  
and quietness within your towers."*

*~Psalm 122:6-7*



**SAINT MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

15 Pearl Street • Mystic, CT 06355 • (860) 572-9549 • [stmarksmystic.org](http://stmarksmystic.org)



## SAINT MARK'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

15 Pearl Street  
Mystic, CT 06355  
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[stmarksmystic.org](http://stmarksmystic.org)

### Ministers

*All members of the congregation*

*The Rev. Adam Thomas, Rector*

*David Tubbs, Music Director*

*Madeline Wilson, Parish Admin*

*Ken Knott, Senior Warden*

*Kurt Cramer, Junior Warden*

*Eric Bookmiller, Clerk*

*Bob Ness, Treasurer*

### Vestry

*Craig Koehler*

*Lisa Noonan*

*Sarah McDermott*

*Erika Roberts*

*Kim Carlson*

*John Kennedy*

*Doug Barrett*

*Joanne Murray*

*Louisa Broadbent*

*Gene Roure*

*Ted Kietzman*

*Ann Ragsdale*

## A LOOK BACK AT MY TIME ON SABBATICAL

*by the Rev. Adam Thomas*

For twelve weeks beginning the day after Easter, I was living a time set apart called a “sabbatical” (also known as Professional Development Leave). Twelve long weeks set apart from (at least some of) my normal rhythms. I spent a good chunk of it in my basement. The parts I didn’t spend in my basement I spent in Alabama, North Carolina, and Israel-Palestine. I also visited my spiritual director three times, and her insights were (as always) helpful, inspired, compassionate, and kind.

I went into this sabbatical time with four written goals and one unwritten goal. The unwritten one was not to be so bound to my four written goals that I didn’t move where the Holy Spirit was leading me. The four written goals were:

1. Integrate through personal writing much of the reading I’ve done about racism and white supremacy.
2. Prepare myself for pilgrimage to the Holy Land and make the most out of that opportunity.
3. Rest, rejuvenate, and step back to see the proverbial forest instead of the trees.
4. Begin habituating a spiritual practice of silence and Christian meditation into my daily life.

Because of the unwritten goal, I am striving not to quantify “how well” I achieved the four written ones. Rather, here are a few observations about each one.

### **Personal Writing About Racism and White Supremacy**

This was the most ambitious goal on my list because I had another list of about thirty topics that came up as I was reading book after book about these urgent issues. If I could write four essays a week during the weeks I wasn’t traveling I could write about all thirty!

Turns out writing about racism and white supremacy and how my own life contributes to the systemic nature of both is really, really hard. Systemic racism is systemic in that it affects our entire society in countless ways. But systems are made of people and the only way to change the system is to change the hearts and minds of the people in it. Policy fixes are great and totally necessary AND they must come hand in hand with personal/communal confrontations with these great sins in the lives of individuals and groups.

After writing my first two essays on these issues, I revised my estimate. If I could write one to two thoughtful and personally revealing essays during my writing weeks, that would be plenty because each one took a lot more time than, say, a standard sermon.

I am glad I wrote what I have written. I’m not sure the best venue to share the essays with you, but I will in some form some day. For now, I wrote

the essays for me so I could begin the process of rooting out the infection of white supremacy within myself, uncover some of my internalized biases, and become a more willing participant in the struggle for justice and dignity for all people.

The trip to Alabama with local clergy was so very valuable to me because it gave me new language and new images to use in my personal examination and in my public witness. Thank you to all my clergy friends, new and old, whom I accompanied on the trip (and especially Claudia for organizing it).

### **The Holy Land Pilgrimage**

At my July spiritual direction meeting, I spoke at length with my director about my time in Israel-Palestine. I can speak one-on-one about the experience, but I'm still not ready to put it down in written form. For now, I'll say the trip was a bundle of contradictions, and the overriding image that keeps entering my prayer is of Jesus in the modern day trying to travel from Bethany to Jerusalem and not being able to because of an ugly, twenty foot high, razor-wire topped wall (see image on cover).

Above all, the pilgrimage opened and expanded my perspective on many things – current political issues, as well as biblical/historical realities. The first adult forum series this fall will share much of my experience, as well as that of parishioner Jaye Lyon, who was also on the trip.

When all was said and done, the best part of the pilgrimage was not the places I visited, but the people I visited them with. I count myself especially blessed to have formed a new friendship with my friend Erin.

### **Rest, Rejuvenation, and Renewed Perspective**

I spent the first week of the sabbatical moving into my new rhythm by building the largest LEGO set of all time, the Millennium Falcon from Star Wars. I had so much fun doing that!

A bunch of people asked me how I could spend so much money on what is essentially a toy. Two reasons: first, Leah and I budget our income every single month, and part of that budget is some “fun” no-strings-attached money for each of us. I saved mine for eight months to buy the LEGO set. The funny thing is that if we weren't budgeting there's

no way I would have ever “splurged” on something like the most expensive LEGO set ever. But because it wasn't a splurge, but a long-term plan, it worked out well. Second, if the LEGO set came pre-assembled, I would not have purchased it. The act of building it over the course of the week allowed me the space to slow down, concentrate on something entirely different than normal, and physically build my way into a new rhythm. Come by my office if you'd like to see the *Falcon* in all its glory!

My parents invited me to their house for a week in May, and I'm so glad I went. They just retired and moved to a brand new house in North Carolina. The room above the garage is so peaceful, I could have stayed there forever. I actually wrote three long essays while I was there...and watched a lot of YouTube.

This time of a different rhythm has also led me to some deep thinking and praying about how best to respond to God's call on my life as both a pastor and a writer. I have no clarity around this right now, but the sabbatical time has bubbled it to the surface.

One thing that came out of this section of the sabbatical that I am excited about is a collaboration with a friend of mine on a podcast project that lives at the intersection of my nerdiness and my Christianity. The “Podcast for Nerdy Christians” is coming soon, in which we explore some ways to bring our faith and nerd culture together.

### **Silence and Christian Meditation**

A late addition to my sabbatical goals, the idea of building a silence practice came at the behest of a parishioner at St. Mark's. I am so glad she pushed me to this because I am thinking that, out of everything that happened in these last 12 weeks, a practice of silence and Christian meditation will be the longest lasting effect (and also the one that is able to hold all the others together).

The goal now when I return to my “old” rhythm is to not fall back into all my old patterns, but to renew the rhythm with new practices and adaptations. The practice of silence will be one of them.

### **A Few Extra Items**

Here are few other things that did not fit comfortably in the categories above.

When I took control of my church email back from Stacey, I separated my personal email from my church email. I have never done that before, but the time set apart has taught me how necessary it is.

Because I wasn't working on Sunday mornings during my sabbatical, I took the opportunity to visit the worshiping communities of some of my friends in ministry, specifically All Souls UU in New London, Mystic Congregational Church in Mystic, and St. James Episcopal Church in New London. Thanks to Carolyn, Christa, and Ranjit for the warm welcomes. I also went to the Church of the Holy Comforter a few times. (That's a joke I'll let you figure out on your own.)

My grandmother Dorothy died a few days after I returned from Israel. She was "full of years" as the Bible says and died in the holy embrace of God and family. I thank God for her life and for her never-failing enthusiasm for my work and my writing. Thank you to everyone who offered your condolences. I feel so much love from many corners.

I worked with my father, the Rev. Dr. William Carl Thomas, to brainstorm, design, and launch

his new website and business, "WCT.coach." The website is still under development, but you can see a chunk of my design work on it now.

At the very end of my sabbatical time, I completed the edits for the third book in my series *Shields of Sularil*, which is basically a novelization of the long-running Dungeons and Dragons campaign I have been dungeon-mastering since 2015. Book Three is called *True Sight*, and I'm very happy with how it came out.

People have asked me if the sabbatical time flew by. I can honestly say it didn't. It took the amount of time it needed to, and I was ready to return following my vacation. I thank the people of St. Mark's for supporting me during my time set apart through their prayer and comments on my sabbatical notes. I thank Pastor Stacey Kohl for being an amazing curate who spent those three months "in charge" at St. Mark's. I thank my family for their flexibility when I was traveling, and I am sorry I was gone so much. I thank God for all the blessings poured out during my travels, especially for keeping me from throwing up on the flight to Tel Aviv. And I thank Jesus for the example of a time set apart.

## SITTING ON A THORN BUSH

*by Teresa Norris*

I brought my coffee down to the lawn chair one morning, purposely removed from the sound of the television just inside the house. I needed quiet and peace. My thoughts were anything but quiet and peaceful given the blaring news on mass shootings and immigration raids.

As I sat, I watched a bird alight on the nearby fence post and, in that alert manner birds have, cock its head here and there. Then it did a curious thing – at least I found it curious. It flew a short distance to sit on my sea rose. It seemed to adjust its stance just a bit as I asked it, "Now why did you do that? You're sitting on a thorn bush." (It will come as no surprise to those who know me to learn I speak to birds, though any further resemblance to St. Francis stops there!)

However, I do like to ponder things, so I wondered:

Is there something this bird is trying to tell me? Am I sitting on a thorn bush now with my painful thoughts? It's not a comfortable spot to perch, that's for sure. If metaphorically I am "sitting on a thorn bush," it's worthy of note that while those concerns weighing down my heart are not of my choosing, that bird chose where to sit.

In fact, it sat there for a couple of minutes, all the while looking off away from me. Then another curious thing happened. It flew toward me, so close that for a second, I thought it would fly at me. But instead it flew to the ground, scratched its beak against the grass, and flew to the nearby wall with something in its beak. It pecked at it, ate some, then flew away with it.

It was no longer sitting among the thorns. It found what it needed – or at least I can assume it did. If

this were a parable, I'd want Jesus to explain it to me; but as I sought to put it all together, here's what I came up with:

Sometimes we all are "sitting on a thorn bush." Sometimes, out of compassion, we even allow ourselves to share the sorrow of others. Still, we don't have to stay among the thorns. We can seek some nourishment and find a better direction to settle. For me, after such horrific news stories or other distressing worries, I seek my faith community. There I hear the word of God and listen to the comfort and inspiration shared in a sermon. I enjoy a laugh with a friend or make a plan to pursue some ministry.

There I realize the thorn bush is gone. Instead, sitting in the company of the faithful, I am being nourished. And there and then, my soul takes flight.



## KAIROS

*by Maggy Gilbert*

My spiritual mentor was chaplain at the Garner Correctional Institution in Newtown, which housed male prisoners who were the worst of the worst. I imagined it as a terrible place. Yet when I learned of the powerful healing that occurred there, I had a visceral reaction — I knew prison ministry was for me. But I didn't know how it would be possible.

That was 25 years ago, and, through God's gentle reminders, I attended my first Kairos Inside weekend in 2010. Kairos's mission is to develop a Christian community behind bars. It all begins with a 3 ½ day weekend serving the incarcerated. This year I'm blessed to be the servant leader for our 18th year at York Correctional Institution for women in Niantic.

Who in our lives hasn't longed for a safe, non-judgmental space to reveal our deepest desires, fears, guilt and emotions? Such an environment of unconditional love and nonjudgmental listening exists here at St. Marks, but it's absent—and sorely needed—in prison.

Many of these women have been degraded, ignored, or ridiculed most of their lives. When we hold their wounded hearts as they reveal them-

selves, we receive them gratefully and lift them up to the Lord for spiritual healing. Building trust is paramount. We listen and love, allowing God's grace to help them open up without fear.

This is a new experience for these women. Within prison they constantly experience betrayal and violation of confidences. Kairos breaks that toxic culture.

We form families of six residents and three volunteers who stay together the entire time. Sharing without shame, the women soften emotionally and create a community that can endure prison life knowing there are others within York with whom they can be totally themselves.

Kairos is similar to Cursillo, Tres Dias, and Road to Emmaus. It's a short course in Christianity where we present a loving and forgiving God. Although diverse in our denominations, we go in as ONE. The team spends 12 hours a day with the women and go to a local motel in the evening where we decompress and do a LOT of eating.

The crux of the weekend is the Forgiveness Ceremony that's held the third night. By then, the talks by team members and table discussions have helped dissolve the sense of unworthiness they

live with. They grow to understand God's love and boundless desire to be in relationship with them. This enables hearts to open and receive healing.

Afterward, the Kairos team returns monthly to hold reunions. Here we sing (there is always LOTS of singing) and residents share their concerns and praises. And, of course, there are lots of prayers of

thanksgiving, as well as petitions.

Kairos extends to the whole family. Kairos Outside retreats are for friends and family of the incarcerated. There's also a Kairos Inside weekend for incarcerated men. To learn more about this prison ministry visit [mykairos.org](http://mykairos.org) or contact me anytime.



## THE STORY BEHIND THE HYMN "BREATHE ON ME, BREATH OF GOD"

*by David Tubbs, Director of Music*

The story behind the hymn, "Breathe on me, breath of God," actually begins with the story of creation in Genesis 2:7 where "the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." This leads us to John 20:21-22 when "Jesus ... breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" Here lies the basis for Edwin Hatch's hymn, "Breathe on me, breath of God."

Edwin Hatch, born on September 4, 1835 in Derby, England, was educated at Pembroke College, Oxford, where he graduated in 1857 with honors. He was ordained into the Church of England and ministered in an East London Anglican parish before accepting a teaching position in classics at Trinity College in Quebec, where he also served as Rector of Quebec High School. He returned to England in 1867 to act as Vice-Principal of St. Mary Hall, Oxford, where he also served as the Bampton Lecturer, Reader in Ecclesiastical History, and the Hibbert Lecturer. In 1883, he later became Rector of Purleigh. Hatch was recognized as an authority on

the early church and is remembered for the book *Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages Upon the Christian Church*, published after he died on November 10, 1889 in Oxford.

While Hatch was known as a great Biblical linguistic scholar in his day, he is also remembered as the composer of the hymn "Breathe on me, breath of God." The United Methodist Church said, "The simplicity of this profound hymn belies the education and knowledge of its author," Hatch knew that the "simple words" he used had profound meaning: They referred to God's creation of humankind and to the gift of the Holy Spirit given to us all at Pentecost. His hymn was not written from a historical or theological point of view, but as an outcome of his personal relationship with the Holy Spirit. It matched his faith, which has been characterized by many as being "as simple and as unaffected as a child." Within the lyrics Hatch asks the Holy Spirit to enter and transform his life. This makes the hymn more personal and meaningful for the singer who is seeking renewal.

Hatch did not write a lot of hymns, but he is noted for this one in particular because it has become very popular and has been published in 285 hymnals. Written in 1876, and originally published in 1878 as “*Spiritus Dei*,” it was originally meant to be an ordination hymn, but it is also appropriate for Pentecost, Trinity, baptisms, ordinations, etc. and all times when the Holy Spirit is the focus. Hatch also composed a book of organ pieces, a mass, and a cantata – all based on Pentecost and the Holy Spirit.

Hatch used the words “Breath of God” when speaking of the Holy Spirit. In the Greek language, depending on the context, the word *pneuma* (as well as the Hebrew word *ruach*) can mean either “breath” or “spirit.” Jesus said in John 6:63: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” St. Paul put it this way: “It is the Holy Spirit’s ‘breath of life’ that revives us from spiritual death in sin; if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness”(Romans 8:10). And also Galatians 5:25 – “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” The breath of God fills us with “life anew” and makes it so we see as Christ sees; we become “imitators of God” (Ephesians 5:1). Hatch is dealing with sanctification, not as just a one-time event, as some believe, but as a process “as we are built up and strengthened by the Holy Spirit of God” (Eph. 2:22, 3:16).

“Breathe on me, breath of God, until my heart is pure...” Purification has been an essential part of many religions, and signs of purification were included in the law given at Sinai. In Christ, however, purification is available to us all. Jesus prayed, “And for their sake I consecrate Myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.”(John 17:19) And in the Letter to the Hebrews, the writer says “For if the blood of goats and bulls, ... sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit

offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:13-14) This purification and sanctification begins during baptism when our sins are washed away through the blood of Christ (1 Peter 3:21; 1 John 5:6). “Beloved, ... we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure.” (1 John 3:2-3)

Although the hymn deals mainly with spiritual life here and now, verse four also introduces the hope of eternal life in the future, through the gift of the Holy Spirit of God. “He who raised the Lord Jesus

will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into His presence” (2 Corinthians 4:14). “For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life” (Galatians 6:8).

“Breathe on me, breath of God” has been set to many different tunes including “Aylesbury,” “Carlisle,” by Charles Lockhart (a blind organist); “Veni Spiritus” by John Stainer; “Trentham” by Robert Jackson; and “nova vita” composed in 1914 by Lister R. Peace, 1885-1969. “Nova vita” is the hymn tune used in Hymnal 1982 (#508). Critics of “Nova vita” might say that this hymn tune and the way it is sung does

not create life because it is too quiet and lacks fervor. But fervor does not necessarily have to be loud and boisterous to give life. It can be soft and intense and be just as effective or even more so. Peace’s tune is gentle and graceful. It rises and falls as if it itself is breathing. It creates a deep longing to be renewed in Christ, and to be made pure by the Holy Spirit.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
fill me with life anew,  
that I may love what thou dost love,  
and do what thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
until my heart is pure,  
until with thee I will one will,  
to do or to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
till I am wholly thine,  
till all this earthly part of me  
glows with thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
so shall I never die;  
but live with thee the perfect life  
of thine eternity.

References || Bradley, Ian. *Daily Telegraph Book of Hymns*, p. 70. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006. || “Breathe on me, Breath of God.” *Hymnary.org*. 2017. || “Breathe on me, Breath of God.” *Wikipedia.org*. Regal Publications, 2002. || “Cathedral Newsletter,” *Diocese of Sodor and Man*, April, 2014. || “Edwin Hatch.” *The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology*. Online. Canterbury Press, 2013. || Julian, John. *Dictionary of Hymnology, Appendix, Part II, 1907*. || Lister Peace. “Nova Vita,” *Wiktionary*. Online. || Osbeck, Kenneth W. “Amazing Grace, 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions.” || Petersen, William, “The Complete Book of Hymns,” Tyndale House Publishers, 2011 || *Resultats de la cerca de Lister Peace (translated)*. *Viquipèdia, L'enciclopèdia Lliure*.



**The walk goes on!** October 20th at 1:00 pm starting at St. Mark's! St. Mark's Team Captain this year is Sarah Kelly. Please join us and walk or sponsor our team; you can register or donate on-line at [www.crophungerwalk.org/mysticct](http://www.crophungerwalk.org/mysticct). If you have questions, Julia Porter will be happy to answer them at 860-536-2405.

FIRST CLASS MAIL

THE LION'S TALE  
St. Mark's Episcopal Church  
15 Pearl Street  
Mystic, CT 06355

**THURSDAY  
MORNING  
BIBLE STUDY**

**RETURNS  
9/5 @ 8:15 AM**

**CHOIR  
REHEARSAL**

**THURSDAYS  
BEGINNING  
9/5 @ 7:00 PM**

**GODLY PLAY  
CHILDREN'S  
PROGRAM**

**SUNDAYS FROM  
9/8 @ 10:00 AM**

**THEOLOGY  
SANDWICHED IN  
BOOK GROUP**

**2ND WEDNESDAY  
9/11 @ 12 NOON**

**COME ALIVE  
MS & HS YOUTH  
PROGRAM**

**RETURNS  
9/15 @ 11:30 AM**

**ADULT FORUM  
HOUR**

**SUNDAYS  
BEGINNING  
9/15 @ 9:00 AM**

# THE FORUM HOUR

Nearly every Sunday morning at 9 a.m. in the Undercroft

## STORIES FROM THE HOLY LAND

**September 15, 22 & 29 October 6 & 13**

Join Pastor Adam and parishioner Jaye Lyon as they recount their experiences on pilgrimage in Israel-Palestine. They will show you a lot of pictures. A LOT!

## STEWARDSHIP CELEBRATION SUNDAY

**October 20 – No forum in lieu of mission event**

## SPECIAL GUEST: THE REV. DR. WILLIAM THOMAS

**October 27**

A.K.A. Pastor Adam's father, newly retired priest, who will be with us while Adam is at Diocesan Convention. Ask him anything you want. He likes to talk.

## DIOCESAN CONVENTION REPORT

**November 3**

## STORIES FROM THE PEACE AND JUSTICE PILGRIMAGE

**November 10, 17 & 24**

In April, Pastor Adam went to Alabama with a group of New London area clergy. They visited important Civil Rights sites in Montgomery and Birmingham. In this forum series, Adam will share the trip's profound impact on him.

## RE-EXAMINING THE NATIVITY STORY

**December 1, 8, 15 & 22**

More stories from the Holy Land, specifically surrounding the Gospel narratives of Jesus' birth. You should definitely come to this one. It'll be awesome.