

*A Word about Besarion, a Father of the desert:*

*Someone who had sinned was ordered by the priest to leave the church. Abba Besarion got up and left with him, saying, "I, too, am a sinner."*

The saying above is curious. As one of the devout persons who had taken up a life of solitude in the desert, Besarion lived as a hermit. Why then, was he getting up to leave *with another person*? This *Word*, or Wisdom saying, from the desert captures the paradox of faith.

Throughout this season of Lent and into Easter, we here at Christ Episcopal Church have had many opportunities to grow in faith. To name just a few: Stations of the Cross, Centering Prayer, Formation Classes, Sunday and special services, as well as various Weekly Studies. But one thing I have noticed is that even when we are engaged in an individual practice, we are still in it together; for instance, we each individually *walk* the Stations of the Cross but we move and pray in unison from one to the next. In Centering Prayer, we focus on our own connection to God and yet, we sit together as we do it. And even when we practice this at home, we are aware of our wider connection to community. Even as a hermit monk, Besarion knew the impossibility of separating himself completely from the other; "I, too, am a sinner," just as I, too, am a beloved child of God. In Christ, we live, both individually and communally — and it is curious how one aspect feeds the other. It seems that without a personal relationship with God, faith dies; and yet, without others with whom we can share and grow, faith can also grow stagnant and die.

in 1943, a devout Austrian farmer, a husband and father of three children, was killed by the Nazis for his steadfast refusal to join Hitler's army. Franz Jagerstatter firmly believed that to take the military oath under Hitler would be to go against God and thereby to endanger his own soul. Knowing he would die otherwise, both his pastor and his bishop attempted to change his mind; but Jagerstatter held firm. Certainly, his own personal relationship with God was rock solid; and yet, what is also clear is that during his time in prison, this man of deep faith was bolstered up by letters from his wife, Franziska, the one person who understood that he could not go against his own conscience and still truly live. Shielding him from knowledge about the hardships of poverty and harassment of neighbors into which the situation had plunged her and her children, she instead continued to profess her deep love for him and to encourage him to hold firmly to God. While throughout his ordeal, Franz Jagerstatter's personal faith upheld him, it was also upheld, nourished and kept strong by the love and faith of another. He did not walk alone.

*Just as the body is one and has many members ... so it is with Christ...and we are the body of Christ and individually members of it (1 Corinthians 12).*