



Jesus Hacked: Storytelling Faith

a weekly podcast from the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri
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Episode 012: Jubilee! Holy Cross Church in Poplar Bluff

This episode's conversation runs from worship mobs to food pantries, from vacation Bible school to witnessing small and holy moments. The podcast traveled to Poplar Bluff, Missouri to celebrate the ministries of Holy Cross Episcopal Church, which became a Jubilee Center of the Episcopal Church on 4/28/17. Host Barbi Click, the diocesan Jubilee officer talks with the Rev. Annette Joseph, the pastor of Holy Cross.

Barbi Click: Welcome to JesusHacked, a weekly podcast on storytelling faith. I am Barbi Click. I'm a member of St. Paul's Carondelet and I'm, also, the diocese and jubilee officer. Today we are talking with the Reverend Annette Joseph, rector of Holy Cross Episcopal Church in Popular Bluff. Hello, Annette.

Annette Joseph: Hello.

Barbi Click: Thank you for meeting with me today.

Annette Joseph: Thanks for coming down.

Barbi Click: Yeah, and I'm here for a very special reason tonight or today, because this evening we're going to be commissioning Holy Cross as one of the newest Jubilee Ministry Centers of the Episcopal Church, so congratulations.

Annette Joseph: Thank you.

Barbi Click: Tell me a little bit about all the things that you've got going on here. I know that there are several things. We can start with the Jubilee Ministry, about what makes you a Jubilee Ministry. There's a few criteria for that, and one of those is charity. The other is advocacy and worship. I think that Holy Cross has covered all those aspects.

Annette Joseph: Yes. You look at those criteria and you think that it's such a big thing, but when you start talking about your ministry, and what you do, and the partnerships that we have, it just becomes filled out and more clear that way, what that all means.

Barbi Click: Let's break it down. Let's start with charity. How do you practice charity that is healthy and that is good?

Annette Joseph: Right. Giving back to the community, what are the ways that we can do that. One of the ways that we do that is the food pantry, and it's not just the giving out of the food. It's being with the clients. It's coming in and having somebody who may not be all together well asking you to pray for them and being open to that, being willing to do that as a part of that, because it's not just the food. It's the spiritual feeding, too, for some people, so both sides of that are important. It's not just one thing.

Barbi Click: Yeah. That is an important aspect of it, respecting the dignity of all people, and meeting the needs, meeting them where they are. First off, tell me how often is the pantry open?

Annette Joseph: We're open every Wednesday, and we get anywhere from, goodness gracious, 20 to 40 people that come a week, that come on Wednesday to the food pantry itself. Other than that, we served last year 3,000 some odd people for the food pantry itself.

Barbi Click: Wow. What type of people? Are they singles, families?

Annette Joseph: It's all over the landscape. We have people who are doubled up, who are living together with multiple families. We've got older adults who need help, seniors especially. We have a lot of them that come in. We have people with young children, grandparents with children. It ranges a whole set of different people that come to the food pantry.

Barbi Click: The worship mob, I want to hear about the worship mob. That sounds very interesting and very innovative.

Annette Joseph: It was a lot of fun to put it together. We have been in a coalition of downtown churches for quite some time, and we've done a Lenten series together. And through that we started needing to prepare for the Lenten series, and then we

took off into meeting every single month on the second Sunday of the month together. We've grown out these different ideas, so we have an Advent walk, a Good Friday cross walk, we call it, which is a Stations of the Cross in the downtown area, and then we do this worship mob. I had happened to hear about it on NPR, heard about it with a Catholic church doing what they call mass mobs, and they hit different places in the Detroit area, I think it was. So as they were giving that example, I thought wouldn't it be neat if we could come together as different churches in different varieties of faith, and, at some point in the service, we feel as though we've worshiped at our own church.

We try to incorporate that into every single mob worship that we do, so that every single place feels as though they've worshiped at their own house of worship. It means that for the Lutherans and for us, we need to have communion in whatever way that happens to be in the place that we're in, or for the Presbyterians and for the Brown Chapel AME, it means having the preaching of the Word, so making sure that the word is very important in the service. For our Pentecostal friends, having a Testimony, which is something that we don't do in our traditions at all, having that testimony time and being able to share with them and see that come alive. It's been really neat to do those partnerships with that.

Then we go to each other's different churches, so we're not at one church for that whole time, and the gifts that we have that day go to that church. We give up our service that day and go to the next church. We give our funds and our participation with one another, and then we just end up giving of ourselves, and it ends up being a whole new fellowship which we've created, which is really different and deeper.

Barbi Click: Before we started this interview, we were talking about what difference this all made to the community. What difference does it make to the people in this community? Can you see the difference or describe the difference that it's made in your relationship with others outside of Holy Cross itself?

Annette Joseph: Yeah. It makes a big difference in the community. They're more willing to speak to you. They feel as though you're more open to different things, that you're an open church. They'll call you with questions. They don't hesitate with that. It's not as intimidating as it once was.

One of the people came to food pantry at one point said, "We used to call this the closed door church," so it's changed that outlook in the community. That's been a huge change to be an open door church.

Barbi Click: That's amazing. That's wonderful. When we were speaking a little bit earlier, we were discussing the fact that this has opened up conversations on dismantling racism, and you, also, mentioned that after Ferguson happened that you took it upon yourself to go speak to some people. Can you tell us about that?

Annette Joseph: Sure. First of all, we invited our partner churches because of the worshipping experience together. We had a dismantling racism workshop that went on in Sikeston, and we went over to that, and I invited people from our partner churches to come and join in with that. We had some participants from Brown Chapel AME who came with us and did that together, and that was just a really transformative experience to be able to open that dialog up with another church, and to be able to hear their stories, too, and to be able to share in that. That was transformative for the persons who participated in that, and for us, also.

Then about a week after Ferguson happened, we had a little thing that happened here with a representative of the town council, who was posting racist remarks on Facebook and had been picked up, and, of course, it's the area of town that's heavily Black populated. I started going down to the corner store down here called Rattler's, which is right across from the historic Wheatley School, which was the Black school in town. The store is attached to the Wheatley School in a kind of way, because they didn't have school lunches there. People would come over to Rattler's in order to eat lunch every day, and so that was where they got fed. But this is also the gathering place for the community, and so I started going down there and just talking with the guys who come and sit there and talk together, and we've had very interesting conversations about what is true repentance, what does forgiveness look like, what's reconciliation about, any number of things that are on their mind.

It's meant that that's a kind of new community that Holy Cross has, in a way, because now the men, if there's something that goes on, that happens in one of their families, I get called. I get called if somebody dies. I get called if there's a concern and somebody's sick. That relationship has been strengthened and has made a difference to the community as a whole.

Barbi Click: That is amazing. That's beautiful. Other ways that you are involved with these partner churches, the United Methodist, the AME, the Brown ... Tell me the names of them.

Annette Joseph: First United Methodist usually participates in our Advent walk, and they participate, also, in the cross walk. Those are the two things that they usually do, because during the Lenten series, they have other things that make it impossible for them to participate with us, and, also, on a Sunday, it's very hard for them to participate in the worship mob, also. The two partnerships, we do whatever partnership we can where we can.

Barbi Click: When you can.

Annette Joseph: When we can. First United Methodist is one. The worship mob itself is Brown Chapel AME, First Presbyterian, St. Andrew ELCA, and us. Lively Stone was participating with us for a time and has decided that it's a lot on their plate right now, so they're backing out for a little time. We've done things with Mt. Calvary. They've invited me in before at a unity service to talk about ways that we look at

unity and being unioned, with keeping our minds on Christ instead of what are the issues that keep us different.

Barbi Click: Focusing on those things.

Annette Joseph: Focusing on those things that we hold in common, instead of those things that would break us apart, and so we've been a part of that, too.

Barbi Click: That is advocacy right there... The vacation Bible school and Bright Futures?

Annette Joseph: Vacation Bible school's been going on ever since I came here. The youth of the church put it on. Older youth help to do the artwork, or the games, or make the flow go, or play different parts in that. We have people who come in from the food pantry and attend, so we gained three people from that this past year, one girl who helped out with that. Another thing that we got was one of the guys down at the store heard that I was doing the vacation Bible school, and his son was coming in, step-son was coming in from Jamaica, and we asked Jay to, also, participate with us, and he came in and was a part of it, too, and we found that he's quite an artist, so that was really fun to get that help and that input in.

Then this year, we did something called Spy Parables, and it had little things that you could do out in the community, because it was spying the kingdom of God, where do we find the kingdom of God. We helped with the food pantry one day. We told parents that they'd stay until three o'clock, and they did different things with helping carry the bags to the car for the clients who came in or we bagged up soap. We also bagged up rice and did that. We got to help with different parts of pieces of the food pantry.

We went down and gave cards to the women at Recycling Grace, which is a ministry by Sandra Mick that works with women who have drug addiction problems, and so we gave cards there and walked down there. It was funny, because a lot of the parents are going, "You're going to walk down there in this neighborhood," but it's not really that bad of a neighborhood. It just has a bad rep as being a bad neighborhood, and it was really nice for the kids to walk down there and to give those cards to the women. It was a fun thing.

Barbi Click: Yeah. You, also, participate in the mule pack?

Annette Joseph: Yes.

Barbi Click: Tell us about that.

Annette Joseph: The school has a program called Bright Futures, and they partner with whoever will partner with them in the community to do different things for the school, and one of those things we found out this year was that old program called the backpack program was being phased out by another ministry, and so their new cook decided to take on this mule pack program, because our mascot is a mule,

and so they call it the mule pack program, and it's where counselors and teachers identify children who have a need for food during the weekend, and once that person is identified, then they can give them the pack that goes home very discretely without anybody knowing. They get to have food for the weekend, and so not only Holy Cross, but our partner churches, also, helped with that in supplying funds to be able to help with the establishment of that very much needed ministry to the young people in school.

Barbi Click: Again, respecting the dignity of all people, even the little children.

Annette Joseph: Yes.

Barbi Click: One of the things that I note in my own ministry is that we can't plan for these holy moments. We sometimes forget to look for Jesus in each moment, but sometimes Jesus appears to us anyway in spite of ourselves, in spite of how busy we are, and I think that those are the moments that make it all worthwhile, that make us understand what we're doing. Do you agree with that?

Annette Joseph: Yes. There was this really neat thing that happened yesterday. It's just being in the right place at the right time sometimes, and I happened to be back here talking with the cleaning lady, which has nothing to do with Jubilee, nothing to do with the food pantry or anything else, and this couple is walking up the side street, and, all of a sudden, I see him kneel and cross himself in front of the statute of St. Francis out there, kneeling in the dirt, and so that's what my poem was about on my blog this morning was kneeling in the dirt and that holy act.

It's so funny, because the cleaning lady turned to me and said, "It's too bad we didn't get a picture of that," and I thought, "But that's such a violation of that sacred." Sometimes we can't capture that sacred. It's just being a witness to that that's more important than capturing it and getting it to record and putting it down in some type of way, but how neat that we have that space that somebody felt as though they could do that here, and to be able to be open to that and to receive that sacred little time of prayer there.

Barbi Click: Tonight we are going to commission Holy Cross and its partners?

Annette Joseph: Yes.

Barbi Click: Yes. As a new Jubilee Ministry Center, which is very exciting, because Jubilee Ministries has just been reestablished in the diocese, and so it's very amazing and wonderful to be able to welcome you as the first one under this watch that I am on. I'm excited. Who all will be here tonight? Will any of the partners be?

Annette Joseph: Yes. The Superintendent of Schools will be here, and he'll be talking about Bright Futures. Shawn Thompson will be here from Mt. Calvary Powerhouse Church to talk about our partnership with the toy drive and other partnerships that we

have with Mt. Calvary. Some of the representatives from some of the other churches will, also, be here for our downtown churches pack, but they don't want to talk. Also, we have a new upcoming partnership that we're doing with an established ministry called Life Leadership that works out of Vandalia Prison with the women there, and we're partnering to give follow-up ministry to the women from Vandalia, so that after they get out of prison, they can continue on with some support and some things like that. That's what we're hoping it grows into, but this is just all groundwork and starting up.

Barbi Click: Beautiful. One of the requirements of being a Jubilee Center is that you are willing to have people contact you to find out ways that they can replicate, that they can do these same type of things. This is something that you have agreed to do, so to all our listeners, you can contact the Reverend Annette Joseph here at Holy Cross Episcopal Church in Popular Bluff, and she can lead you, guide you into a way of doing this whole new wonderful thing.

Annette Joseph: Right. We have to keep the records of the how-tos, too, to tell the mistakes we made, also.

Barbi Click: Right. Because why reinvent the wheel.

Annette Joseph: Right.

Barbi Click: Right.

Annette Joseph: I'm excited about tonight. Thank you.

Barbi Click: I'm excited, too. I'm very excited. I thank you for meeting with me tonight. I appreciate very much you taking this time.