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THE
TABLE
ADVENT & CHRISTMAS

Letter from the Editor

WHEN WE TALK ABOUT HEART, we usually don't mean the one in our body. For all intents and purposes, we often mean our Self—the essence of who we are. Think about heart as the Home of Us: where we live and experience and be, as well as where we *become*. And our thriving as beings requires both the functionality of the physical, oxygen-moving muscle in our body, and the healthy growth and expression of our personhood.

Rowan Williams explores the difference between *individualism* (a cultural definition that he decries) and *personhood* in his wonderful book *Where God Happens*. He says “If we can get to the true depth of the heart, what we find there is the echo of God’s creative word. Each one of us is a unique kind of echo of God...With every person there is one way in which that person can show the life of God—and that person only. The life of God is reflected in a distinct history and a distinct set of responses and creative engagements in the world” (pgs 49, 56). This rare and precious thing—the unique Self within each person—is an utter and unasked for gift bestowed upon each of us at birth. And it is known and shared in the world through the intentional act of giving that only we can decide to engage in.

When I was pregnant with our first child, I experienced a memorable moment of panic as I contemplated the limitedness of my humanity alongside the introduction of another person into our family. How would parenthood affect my marriage, as my love would now be divided amongst more individuals? I was reminded (divinely, I warrant) that with love, the equation isn't one number divided by another, but one multiplied by another—just as it is in friendship. Indeed, I have found that expanding our family has increased my capacity for love rather than diminished it. When we are existing in healthy relationship with one another, we are in a constant state of exchange that leads to a mutual expansion.

Generosity is pervasively thematic in this issue of our magazine, and I see that I am naturally talking about it again here, with the giving of ourselves to each other. I love that part of the definition of generosity is “the quality of being large.” Ultimately, generosity is more about the state of heart than a state of material things. When we keep back for ourselves, the reality is that we are not richer in the end, but poorer. Not larger, but smaller. Vulnerability, however messy, unsightly, or imperfect, connects us to one another. When we share life with one another, we find that we are much more malleable than we thought, stretching beyond the limits we assumed for ourselves.

That said, humans are not always kind, open, giving, and forgiving. We are not always trustworthy, and that is an important factor in the sharing of our hearts. When we choose to give of our hearts, we crack open the door that we closed to protect ourselves. We have to break open in order to reveal what is within, and we have no control over what happens next. Sometimes the result is deep

wounding. The beauty and gain of this process exists in tandem with the pain and loss we face: both are valuable and honored. I am thinking now about trees. It is growth that causes their trunks to split, fracturing into unique shapes and textures. The original layers of bark remain even as the tree expands with new “skin” fit for its larger self. What we are remains with us even as we evolve, and we are marked and made by all of the experiences of our lives.

The heart is revealed and experiences expansion in engaging with others, but it is ultimately a place of Self where God is intimately known, and its cultivation is a personal, often private work that cannot be neglected. “...try thinking about this place as the core of your being,” Nouwen says in his book *The Inner Voice of Love*. “...where all human sentiments are held together in truth. From this place, you can feel, think, and act truthfully.” On page 15, he calls the heart the “place where God dwells and holds you” and implores himself (and us through the vulnerable sharing of his experience) to pursue unity of self with God.

You might consider [your heart] the place of unification, where you can become one. Right now you experience an inner duality; your emotions, passions, and feelings seem separate from your heart. The needs of the body seem separate from your deeper self. Your thoughts and dreams seem separate from your spiritual longing. You are called to unity. That is the good news of the Incarnation. The Word becomes flesh, and thus a new place is made where all of you and all of God can dwell. When you have found that unity, you will be truly free.

Humans have an unbelievable capacity to grow and give from our lives in ways that nourish the world around us. Simultaneously, there is a hidden mystery happening within—the processing of all of our unique desires, experiences, actions, and reactions into the compost from which our outward growth is arising. Compost is the miraculous, divine alchemy that happens when a conglomeration of things—much of it dead, useless, and rotting—become rich and essential in the coming together as one. It is an inward process necessary to make the outward, relational experience possible.

In the end, it is only because of the gift of this first and greatest Heart that we can be generous with our hearts. Without Him, the pain would be debilitating, the risk too great, the rewards too unpredictable. But we exist in a system of love and redemption that allows us to give generously of ourselves despite the risk, and when we dare to do so, everyone benefits. Wherever we are in nature’s cycle of life and death, we take part in the feeding, changing, and growing of this ecosystem we share by reflecting back to God the echo he placed uniquely in us, nestled in this home called heart and found nowhere else in the world.

**With Joy,
Laura Fissel
Managing Editor**

ABOUT THE ART

Cover Art by Scott Erickson

Scott Erickson is an artist, author, performance speaker, and creative curate who mixes autobiography, mythology, and aesthetics to create art and moments that speak to our deepest experiences.

“One of the goals of my work is to create a visual vocabulary for

the spiritual journey. We all are an amalgamation of body and soul, and I want to illustrate the mystery and wonder of the journey we find ourselves on as we are making sense of that.”

Please check out Scott’s work at scottericksonart.com and on Instagram at [@Scottthepainter](https://www.instagram.com/Scottthepainter). You can find information there about his many wonderful books, including *Honest Advent*.

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MATTERS *of the*

lessons learned from the works of Søren Kierkegaard

“**Y**ou are great, O Lord . . . you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”

With this line St. Augustine describes his spiritual autobiography, aptly titled *Confessions* since, for St. Augustine, one’s life is his/her confession before God. We confess our heart with our life. Jesus suggests that, “The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). We live out of who we are in our hearts. So, to view one’s life as a prayer, a confession, lived before God and revealing one’s heart, is an essential component of a Christian understanding of confession.

“Let every heart prepare Him room” rings Isaac Watt’s well-known Christmas hymn “Joy to the World”. In his book *Worship is a Verb*, Robert Webber suggests that Advent is a time of preparation and anticipation, much like when we have invited a special guest to our home for a meal. Webber talks about cleaning house and decorat-

ing in order to make the guest feel special and welcome. He suggests that during Advent we prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus Christ through confession, anticipation, and expectation.

When I think of preparation, confession, and living one’s life as a prayer of confession before God, I cannot help but reflect on the works of that great Danish philosopher/theologian Søren Kierkegaard. Three works come to mind as I consider preparing my heart for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ at Advent: *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*, *The Sickness Unto Death*, and *Works of Love*.

Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing

Kierkegaard wrote his work *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing* as a “preparation for the office of confession.” In *Purity of Heart*, Søren Kierkegaard suggests that a pure heart is a heart completely and utterly set on the will of God. The work is challenging to read, and even more challenging to live, as Kierkegaard exposes the various motivations of the heart that would render it impure. He calls these impurities “barriers to willing one thing.” Kierkegaard suggests that we get hung up on a variety of great moments in our lives—those times we did the right thing—and think of how good we were to follow God in that moment. While fleetingly good, these are not the same as willing the one thing—consistently and constantly willing (living) the will of God—every moment of one’s life. This tendency, to be satisfied with some accomplishment, also takes the focus off of God and places it on oneself. Kierkegaard also shows us that we often will God’s will out of desire for reward or fear of punishment, which means we are not willing the one thing—the will of God—but rather willing a reward or a punishment for ourselves. This means our heart is not pure in willing God’s will. He also suggests that we sometimes want to will the Good

(God’s will), but we do so with our eyes on how good it will make us look (or feel). Or, we want to do God’s will, but only to a certain degree, perhaps until it hurts or is inconvenient. When I read this work, I recognize my sinfulness, my humiliation, and am prepared to confess my life before a Holy God who only desires good for me in doing His will. The restless heart, it seems, has the wrong focus—oneself instead of God.

For this reason, *Purity of Heart* is the perfect work to read during Advent since it lays bare all of our heart’s ulterior motives and opens us to the coming of Jesus Christ. The reader begins to recognize his/her need for Jesus Christ. In the end, the only way to purity of heart is simply to will God’s will because it is God’s will, that is, without regard for any other motive or any circumstance. Only Jesus has done this. So, we can only will the one thing as we participate in the life of Jesus Christ in us. Only Jesus can work in our hearts toward this end. The Holy Spirit draws us into the life and continuing work of Jesus Christ done on our behalf before God the Father. Only if Jesus Christ is in our hearts can our hearts be aligned to God’s will without reference to ourselves.

The Sickness Unto Death

In his “Christian psychological exposition,” *The Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard shows that every human being is in despair (sin) and there is only one solution to this despair—faith. In this work, Kierkegaard describes faith as “. . . in relating to itself and in wanting to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in [God].” Thus, confessing one’s life before God, as St. Augustine has suggested above, means at every moment living transparently before God. It is Jesus Christ instilling a posture of the heart that enables one to live this way.



heart



This requires purity of heart since it means living in response to God and His will at every moment. Essentially, this is what Kierkegaard means by faith. Faith is a continuously and constantly lived posture that brings every moment of life before God. It is impossible without Jesus Christ. Perhaps this is why Kierkegaard, when asked if he were a Christian, responded by saying, “No, but I am becoming one.” He recognized that faith was not a position or intellectual assent to some position, rather it was moment by moment living before God. It was the taking of this temporal existence and making it eternal—that is, lived in Jesus Christ before God by the power of the Holy Spirit. It was, in essence, living one’s life as a confession before God.

God calls us to love Him and love one another. This is God’s will. The only way to really love is to have this kind of faith. This lived faith draws our hearts into God’s heart and enables us to live before God in such a way that we see others as God sees them. Only when we can see others as God does can we really truly love them. This love for one’s neighbor is the subject of another work by Kierkegaard: *Works of Love*.

Works of Love

The Sickness Unto Death is a diagnosis of the disease of sin and an appeal to faith as the cure, and *Purity of Heart* represents an imperative ethic demanding that the Christian align her/his heart with God’s

will. *Works of Love*, on the other hand, is not written as an imperative but rather an indicative ethics. It indicates how love works its way out of our hearts into our actions. It is titled *Works of Love* because Kierkegaard believed, just as Jesus Christ taught, that love always works itself out in our actions if it is real (and not selfish) love. The heart transformed by the love of God has consequences in our actions. It is not that Kierkegaard did not acknowledge that emotions have a part to play, or that the heart experiences emotions, but rather that emotions will only take us so far. Love, as commitment, goes beyond emotions to actions. Our hearts are disciplined by love to act in certain ways, even when we do not feel like it.

I suppose my life, as St. Augustine’s, has been the song of a restless heart seeking rest. In faith, living my life transparently before God, I have found a place of rest. To live a life as a confession, transparently before God, leads to purity of heart. A pure heart—one always responding to God’s will—always produces action. However, it is not our work towards this that counts. Jesus Christ is always loving God the Father and the Holy Spirit draws us into the vicarious response of Jesus Christ on our behalf. So, loving is simply a response to the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. Out of the heart flow actions—works of love—that are a kind of participation in the work of Jesus Christ in the world. So, in this season of Advent, prepare your heart to find its

rest in Jesus Christ once again. Amidst the busyness of the season, slow down and allow God to show you His good and perfect will and join Jesus Christ in living in that place. God delights in worship and celebration, but worship also brings a heart to its resting place in Him. Let your heart prepare room for Jesus this season of Advent.

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“ Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6) ”



Pilgrimage of the Heart

our soul's desire

by Tom Benson

In the Fall of 2015, I began a two-year certification program with the Soul Care Institute. It was a new path along my spiritual journey that awakened my soul and deepened my awareness of God's presence in my life. My soul had been thirsting for something more in my spiritual life in response to God's stirrings and movements that I was having difficulty understanding. I thought the most logical way forward was into ordained ministry. However, in that season of my life, this wasn't the path to which God was directing me. I still had more to tend to with my family that I wasn't aware of at the time. Fifteen years later, after a period of wandering and mourning, the Lord put a Spiritual Director in my path whom he used to unveil to me a new perspective and paradigm-shift. I sensed God's presence in my life as I began practicing contemplative prayer forms and disciplines, and started experiencing an interior life with God that I had not known before. I was being still and quieting myself, giving attention to the Lord, and abiding with him (Psalm 46:10a). Previously, my prayer life had consisted of external prayer forms such as ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication), praying at a distance to the Father who dwells in His Heavenly place. Although I had gained a "knowledge of" God over the years and was trying to live my life according to His commands, I had not come to "know" God in a deeper, more intimate and transforming way. In this process, I saw who God was calling me to be: His "Beloved"!

I knew God loved me and as a lifelong Christian, I was practicing dutiful tasks as a husband, father, church member, worship musician, community group leader, friend, mentor, and coach with those I was responsible for at work. I was striving to be a man of faith and living a life of devotion to my Lord and Savior. However, in my life, I had never experienced being the "Beloved": being

loved for just being me, warts and all, with unconditional love—that emotional, deep love that values me above all else (Ephesians 3:16-19). This began to change as I practiced spending time with the Lord in silence and solitude, following an internal path within my innermost being: The secret place where Jesus says the Father meets us in secret and rewards us (Matthew 6:6). It's in this time of prayer, giving my attention intentionally to the Lord, abiding with Him as He abides with me (John 15:4 – NKJV), that God's presence is known to me and His love embraces me as His beloved child. I then carry forth this knowing of God into the ordinary moments of my day and life, my life transformed into the true Self God created me to be.

There is mystery in this experience that comes by faith: that God is molding me and shaping me (Isaiah 64:8). His hand is at work when I have an open heart and open mind, and a willingness to die to self (ego) and allow Him to transform me through His mercy and grace. This is a lifelong process and journey that requires patience and perseverance (Romans 5:1-5). It's by this intentional "be-ing" with him that I am able to "do" all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens me (Philippians 4:12-13).

During the last seven years of my spiritual journey, God has been directing my steps towards this interior life with Him (Proverbs 16:9-RSV). It's in this transformational experience that I'm being formed and growing in Christlikeness through the dismantling of my false system for happiness and being made new in Him (Ephesians 4:22-24). There is much to be dismantled in my life, much of it unknown to me, until I become more aware of unconscious themes, messages, suppressed traumatic experiences, fears, anxiety, worry, disappointments, unmet and erroneous expectations, selfish desires, wants—in short, my human condition. The Lord wants to free me from this milieu of oppressive thoughts and actions that diminish my quality of life as His Beloved (Matthew 6:25-34).

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE:
PILGRIMAGE OF THE HEART

references

Day 1: Proverbs 3:5-6	Day 7: Isaiah 64:8	Day 13: Matthew 11:28-30	Day 19: Psalm 121
Day 2: Psalm 42:1	Day 8: Romans 5:1-5	Day 14: Matthew 22:34-39	Day 20: Matthew 6:21
Day 3: Psalm 46:10	Day 9: Philippians 4:12-13	Day 15: Mark 1:35	Day 21: Psalm 84:5
Day 4: Ephesians 3:17-19	Day 10: Proverbs 16:9 (RSV)	Day 16: Psalm 34:8	*NIV unless otherwise noted
Day 5: Matthew 6:6	Day 11: Ephesians 4:22-24	Day 17: John 4:1-26 (NKJV)	
Day 6: John 15:4 (NKJV)	Day 12: Matthew 6:25-34	Day 18: Psalm 46:10a	

As I follow the path to the secret place of my innermost being in silence with the Lord, He eases all my tensions and reassures me as I rest in Him. He invites me to “let go” and invites me to put on the easy yoke of Christ (Matthew 11:28-30).

When I first met with my Spiritual Director in the spring of 2015, he shared with me a story about him meeting Brennan Manning, author of *Ragamuffin Gospel*, who put a life-changing question to him: “How is it with your soul?” I now spend time examining myself, my soul, and my life with Christ and reflect on all those who God calls me to love in all the ordinary moments and days of my life. Saint Ignatius of Loyola developed Spiritual Exercises to assist individuals in exploring their journey with the Lord. One practice he developed is the “Daily Examen.” The purpose is to look back on the day and ask, when did I notice the Lord (Consolations) and when was I distant from the Lord (Desolations). In other words, was I aware of God’s presence during the day and how did life events unfold? Did I miss opportunities to be a light onto the world? Did I get caught up in myself and pursue and act in ways that I regret, that I can learn from, that I can bring before the Lord for guidance and direction so that I might change (metanoia)?

How is it with your soul? There are a plethora of books, courses, and training for building up knowledge of God and discerning His calling in your life. The first and foremost is the Sacred Word of God—the Holy Scripture. In the gospel of Matthew, Chapter 22, Jesus is asked by a Pharisee, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” What does this look like? How can we engage God in this way?

I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.” (Psalm 121)

Begin your “Pilgrimage of the Heart” today (Mark 1:35; Psalm 34:8) by meditating on this scripture verse and allow it to permeate your soul, your mind, and your heart as you thirst for the “living water” (John 4:1-26 NKJV) and desire a life with the One who calls you “His Beloved.” Meet Him in the depths of your innermost being, where He dwells with you in your secret place and in the sacred silence of His presence (Psalm 46:10a), praying “Abba

Father, you are my soul's delight!”

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:21)

“Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.” (Psalm 84:5)

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE (21 DAY PILGRIMAGE)

As you start your Pilgrimage of the Heart, take time each day to read a scripture reference from the article and meditate on them, asking God what word or phrase is He bringing to your attention. As you reflect on the word or phrase, ask God how He is inviting you to respond. As this becomes clearer to you, ask the Lord to guide your path in fulfilling His purpose in your life. Then become still and rest in the Lord for a few moments, abiding with Him as He is abiding with you. Journal your pilgrimage experiences each day. You can find a soft copy of the scripture references listed in essay order at centerforcontemplativeliving.org/contemplative-practices.

“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” St. Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1.1.

Suggested reading: *Life of the Beloved: Spiritual Living in a Secular World* by **Henri Nouwen** (find a review of this text in “The Book Nook” on page 32!).

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God's Creation of Sabbath

by Lena Van Wyk

Most of us think of Sabbath first as one of the Ten Commandments, though maybe the commandment we take the least seriously and we (wrongly) think of as the most optional. But before Sabbath is included as part of God's law for his people, it is introduced to us in Scripture as a principle God bakes into the very foundations of Creation itself.

In the beautiful creation narrative of Genesis, God spends six days creating the intricacies of every level of creation: from the complexity of seas to all the winged creatures, and plants and animals of every kind. The language is that the seas "swarm with swarms of living creatures" and birds fly "across the expanse of the heavens" (Gen. 1:20). God delights in the extreme abundance of creation, of filling every nook and cranny with diverse life. Scientists estimate that currently there are 8.7 million species of plants and animals on earth, the vast majority of which scientists still have not cataloged and named. When applied to all five known eukaryote kingdoms of life on Earth, the breakdown is as follows:

- 7.77 million species of animals
- 298,000 species of plants
- 611,000 species of fungi (molds, mushrooms)
- 36,400 species of protozoa (single-cell organisms with animal-like behavior, eg. movement)
- 27,500 species of chromista (including, eg. brown algae, diatoms, water molds)¹

And this is just an estimate (likely an underestimate, scientists think) and one that

doesn't include all the species that God created that are now extinct, due to earth's changes over vast eons of history or as an effect of human causes. Just reading those numbers makes me want to start praising God for the magnitude of his creativity!

After all of that creation, on the seventh day, God decides the best use of the last day of Creation is to set aside the whole day as a "holy" day to rest and appreciate all that He had made that he called so "good" while he gazed upon it (Gen 1:31-2:3). It's sad to me that the modern human probably imagines God spending this day of rest checking out, spent and exhausted, on a leather couch watching Netflix. We have such a pathetic vision of rest. For God, rest doesn't imply exhaustion: I'm willing to bet that the Creator of the universe doesn't feel exhausted. He rests for the sake of delight and appreciation. Instead, imagine God picnicking under a stunning white oak tree on a hill overlooking a green valley of abundant plant and animal life and just grinning with delight. Rest for the sake of delight in God and his Creation is the essence of a true Sabbath posture.

The poet Wendell Berry describes "Creation's seventh sunrise" in one of his Sabbath poems:

*"Time when the Maker's radiant sight
Made radiant every thing He saw,
And every thing He saw was filled
With perfect job and life and light."²*

A.J. Swoboda notes that we tend to think of the creation of humanity as the climax of the creation story, but the real climax is the seventh day of rest—the Sabbath day. And humanity is invited into that climax of creation. Since they are created on day six, the first day of Adam and Eve's existence is not spent in work, but in resting with the Lord and marveling with him at all that had been made.³ God is clear when he articulates the commandment for his people to keep Sabbath in Exodus 20:8-11, that he instituted this Sabbath day from the beginning of time and that he expects every creature to be included in this non-optional day of rest, and specifically names men, women, children, those in servitude, livestock, and immigrants.

We act as if rest was a luxury, only for the privileged few and only when earned by hard work (and even then most Americans don't take all our vacation days). But for God, rest is an inbuilt requirement for ev-

ery creature, essential as oxygen itself and equally gifted to all. As Swoboda states, "Just like Adam and Eve's need for Sabbath, our need for rest is like gravity. It just is. Our feelings and opinions cannot change it. Humans need rest. Animals need rest. Land needs rest. And without rest, things will cease to exist as they should. Still, we may choose to ignore this need for a while, but gravity always wins. When we look honestly at our workaholic, boundary-less, frantic lives, we can hear God say, 'Not good.' Like he saw Adam's need for a helper, God sees our need for rest. His judgment is his love. [...] To Sabbath is to live as God intended. When we enter into that rest, it is like entering back into Eden."⁴

And the glory of this commandment is that it is not drudgery: it is an invitation to pure pleasure. In the business of our daily lives, we forget to take pleasure in all that God has created. St Augustine says that a daily miracle is so "excessively common it has lost its power to strike wonder, and by its very frequency has become commonplace."⁵ One of the purposes of Sabbath is to teach us to see the miracle all around us, to pause from our work long enough to appreciate Creation's God-given glory. Sabbath is, fundamentally, a day where "we worship to the Lord in the beauty of holiness" as we say in the *Book of Common Prayer*, quoting Psalm 96.

Marva Dawn, who wrote a beautiful book on Sabbath, says that Sabbath is about four things: ceasing, resting, embracing and feasting. My longing for you is that you come to see the Sabbath as an extravagant gift of the Creator for you and those you love—and for all of Creation. I hope that you come to long for each Sabbath day as we long for enchanted days like Christmas and Easter—that Sabbath would be filled with the fragrance of God for you. Jewish fathers traditionally give their children a spoonful of honey each Sabbath morning so they will remember the sweetness of the Sabbath for the rest of their lives. I pray you would get a taste of that first Sabbath of Creation and that its sweetness will speak to you of the eternal Sabbath in the age to come with our Lord.

¹ Wendell Berry, "1979/III: To Sit and look at light-filled leaves," in *Timbered Choir* (Counterpoint, Washington, D.C., 1998), 8.
² A.J. Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2018) 7.
³ Swoboda, 16.
⁴ Augustine, "Sermon 242A," in *Sermons*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle, *The Works of St. Augustine III/7* (New York: New City Press, 1993), 85.





Public Worship as Our Source of Joy

One of my favorite passages in the New Testament is the record of St. Peter's sermon, delivered on the Day of Pentecost, as found in Acts 2:14-36. After connecting the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Jerusalem gathering to Joel's prophecy (2:14-21), Peter goes on to talk about the resurrection of Christ (2:22-36), for it is Christ's resurrection from death in our human nature which opened the door of heaven so as to shower spiritual gifts upon the people of God (Eph. 4:7-10). The authority over death and hell, which was taken up by Christ in His triumphal procession from the grave up into heaven, is now to be put on display in the gifts which He showers upon His people. As Peter goes on to put it, "Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear" (Acts 2:33).

In order to show that Christ's resurrection and rescue from death was itself the subject of biblical prophecy, Peter cites Psalm 16:8-11. David says of the Messiah, "I foresaw the LORD always before my face, for He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of joy in your presence" (Acts 2:25-28). I want to focus here on the way David connects the joy of the church with the presence of the Lord. The reason David's heart "rejoiced" and his tongue

was glad is because he knew the Lord was at his "right hand," and always before his "face." Being in the protective presence of the Lord causes joy, and this joy overflows in the vocal praise of God in the temple—now newly refashioned since Pentecost in the shape of the Christian church (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:21-22). No doubt Peter intended this reference to the gladdened tongue of David to shed more light on the joyful proclamation of the "wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:11), in the form of speaking in other tongues. David predicts in Psalm 16 that one day the Lord will make him "full of joy" in His presence, and this new "fullness" of joy is what burst forth from the tongues of the Spirit-inspired church as the effect of the Pentecostal outpouring. In other words, the church on earth has the same joy which David and other saints enjoy in the heavenly presence of the Lord, for they all now partake together of the same "ways of life" (v. 28). The "ways of life" can be understood as the means of grace—the word of God, the sacraments, and the prayers of the church. This setting of worship explains the marvel of speaking in "other tongues," for as the book of Acts unfolds, we see that the worship of the New Testament church from henceforth will be performed in the languages of all the nations, joined with the praises of the angels in heaven (1 Cor. 11:10; 13:1). And these praises of heaven joined to earth in sweet communion, will be animated by the powerful presence of the resurrected and enthroned Lord in the midst of His joyful church.



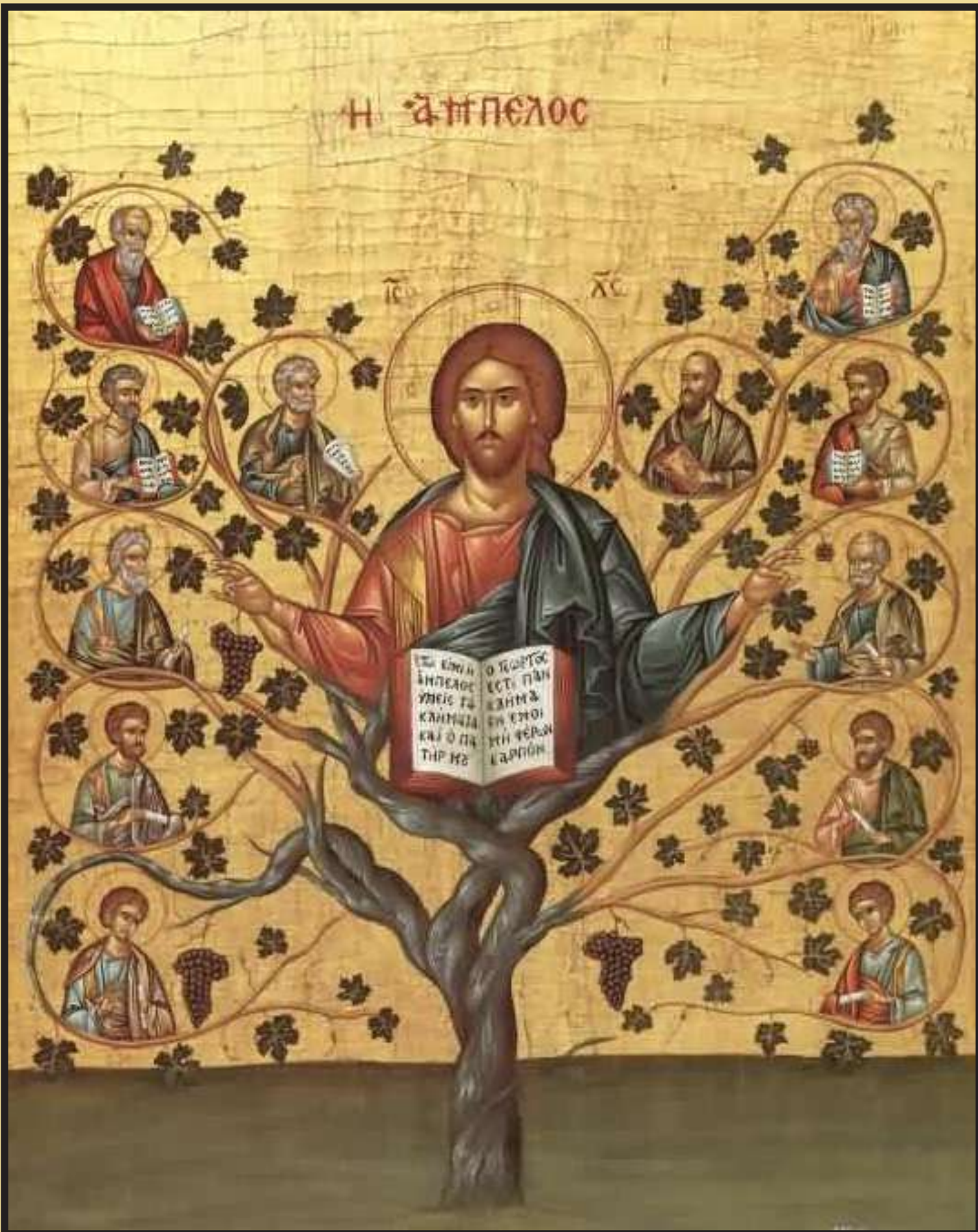
In the western liturgical calendar, the new Christian year begins with Advent, as the church turns its attention afresh to the presence of Christ with His people. Christ made Himself present on earth through His Incarnation; He makes Himself present in our hearts weekly through the Eucharist; and He will make Himself present to renew all things at His glorious Second Advent. Given the Pentecostal connection between the presence of Christ and the gift of joy, we can think of Advent as a yearly renewal of our heavenly joy in Christ, as we meditate in a more focused way on the promise of His presence—past, present, and future. In the Gospel according to St. John, we find a focused development of this theme in a handful of key passages that very much complements the connections brought together in Peter’s Pentecost sermon.

In John 3:29, we find John the Baptist addressing his relative status in relation to Jesus: “He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.” Far from being jealous of the increasing public stature of Jesus, John rejoices to see his Lord increase, while he decreases before the eye of the watching crowds (3:30). John rejoices at the voice of Jesus, which is another way of speaking of the gift of Jesus’ presence, for one can only hear the voice of one who is present. We too, as Christ’s spiritual bride, following John’s prophetic example, must welcome the voice of Jesus in our midst, and we too must diminish in our own eyes as we are sanctified weekly

by the means of grace. Jesus makes himself present to us by speaking to us through the reading and preaching of Holy Scripture. Our Lord speaks to us verbally in the Bible, just as He speaks visibly in the sacraments. As we gather in God’s house to perform the liturgy of spiritual sacrifice each Sunday, we hear afresh the voice of Jesus speaking to us, reminding us that “He must increase, but I must decrease.” And in this losing of ourselves, abandoning the idol of our self-importance, we find the joyful life that comes from being with Jesus. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). “Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live” (5:25).

We find further instruction in these matters in John’s Upper Room Discourse, where Jesus says: “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11). In these beautiful words, our Lord connects “fullness” of joy with “abiding” in the mutual love of the Father and the Son mentioned in the previous verse: “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (15:10). The “things” which Jesus has spoken here are His commandments. We cannot abide in Christ’s love without keeping those commandments, because they are the God-given means of fostering our love. The commandments, we might say, have as their spiritual goal and outcome this abiding in the love of God, so “that your joy may be full.”

Η ἄμπελος



To grasp Jesus' teaching here, we must understand that "love" is the basic fruit of our union with Christ, and thus the end in view throughout this chapter: "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (15:2). The process in view is what we call sanctification. The key to bearing this fruit is abiding: "Abide in Me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me" (15:4). And again: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit" (15:5). These are gracious commandments for needy sinners who desire to be conformed to the love of God, not legalistic badges of merit or self-righteous piety.

We get a further insight into the nature of these commandments in 15:7-8: "If you abide in Me, and my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." This fruit is the effect of abiding in God's love: "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love" (15:9). The commandments we keep are those means of grace which strengthen us and enable us to cling to Christ, so that we in turn know that fullness of joy which is the overflow of the Trinitarian love. The means of grace are not hard to find in the context, which hints at several of them in verse 7. We must "abide" in Christ, which in John's teaching is the effect of Eucharistic participation: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in Me, and I in him" (6:56). We must allow Christ's words to abide in us ("and My words abide in you"), which happens through the gift of Holy Scripture. And we must engage in public prayer: "ask what you desire, and it will be done for you." The pronouns in John 15:7 are plural, so it is acts of corporate worship which are in view here, not exercises of piety in quiet solitude. Discipleship is never a private enterprise in the New Testament, but always an open-hearted reception of that fullness of joy God conveys to His church through His promised means of grace. Those who would seek to practice Christianity as a personal philosophy, without the aid of corporate worship and the sacramental grace dispensed by the church, would do well to heed the warning of Jesus: "If anyone does not abide in me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned" (15:6). What this seems to suggest is that in their isolation from Christ's body they wither, due to the absence of that fullness of joy which can only come from keeping the commandments and abiding in the love of God.

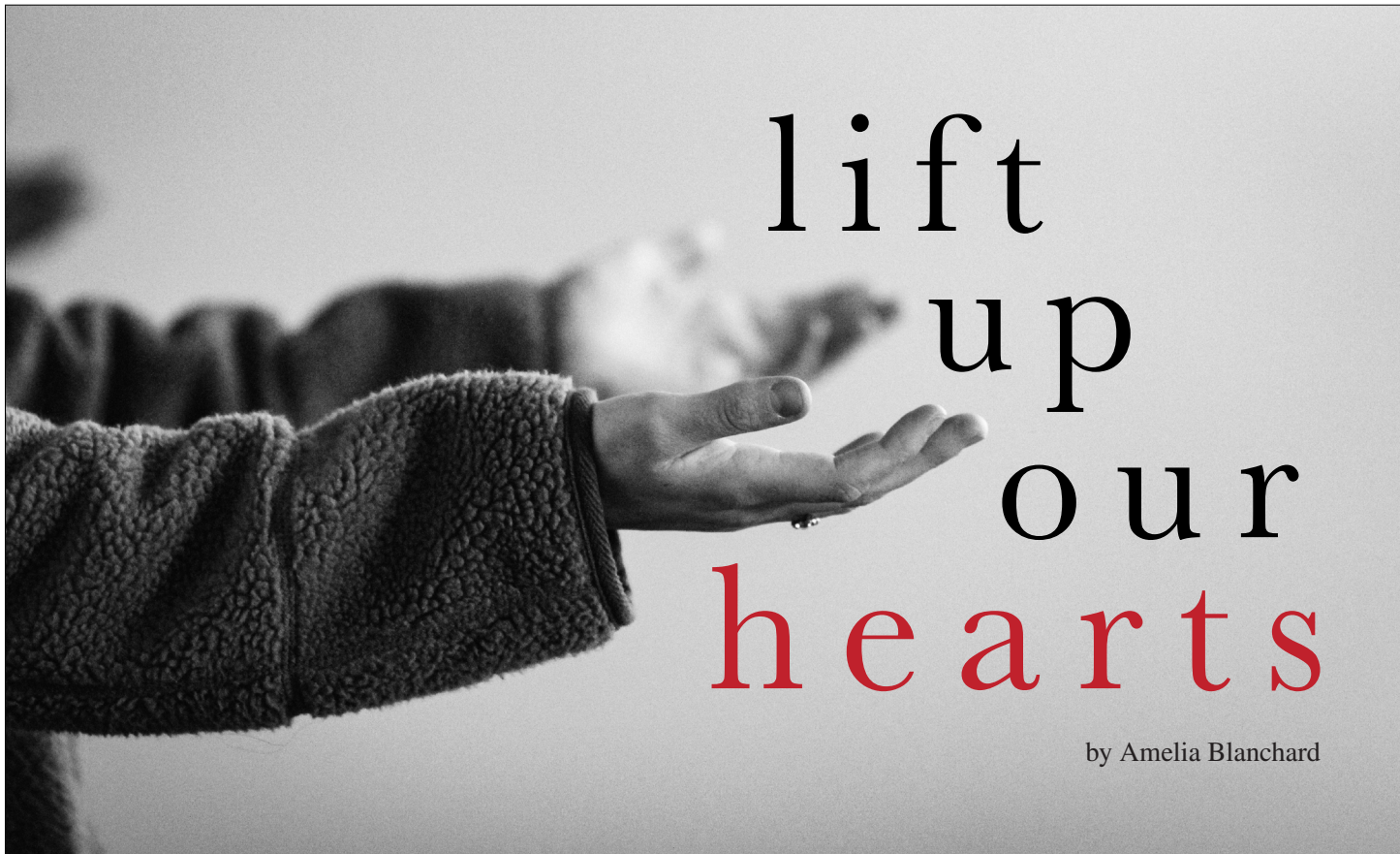
Later in the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus turns to the topic of His imminent departure from this world: "A little while, and you will

not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father" (16:16). In this cryptic statement Jesus seems to be anticipating His return to the world in visible fashion on the Day of Pentecost through the descent of the Holy Spirit. For John, the Holy Spirit mediates the presence of Jesus in the midst of the gathered church. Right after speaking of the coming of the Holy Spirit in John 14:16-17, Jesus says: "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (14:18). And later on: "It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you" (16:7). Jesus will send the Holy Spirit in His place to abide in the church, joining the heavenly Lord to His mystical bride on earth in a union of loving fellowship. After the Holy Spirit comes, the disciples will "see" Jesus in a new way, no longer in the local form of His natural body, but now in the spiritual form of His mystical body wherever the church is located. What is interesting is that this new form of Jesus' presence among His people is once again connected with the gift of joy: "Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy" (16:20). The period between Jesus' departure and His return on the Day of Pentecost is identified as a time of sorrow, but it will be transformed into pure joy with the descent of the Holy Spirit: "Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you" (16:22). This will be the inauguration of the age of the New Testament church, to fulfill Jesus' desire that God's house be a house of prayer for all the nations (Mark 11:17). "And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full" (John 16:23-24). The church will no longer ask anything of Jesus, for He will not be among them in the form of His natural body. Instead, in God's spiritual temple they will know the joy of raising their prayers to God the Father in the name of His only begotten Son, being assured of the answer to their requests due to Christ's heavenly advocacy on their behalf.

What is this joy of which Jesus speaks? It is the joy of beholding the beauty of the risen Lord in His new and better temple. As the Psalmist put it: "One thing I have desired of the LORD, that will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple" (Psalm 27:4). Indeed, it is just as Our Lord promised when He said, "you will see Me, because I go to the Father" (16:16). And this privilege of beholding the presence of the Lord in the form of the church's public liturgy is the truest path to real joy: "Therefore I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tabernacle; I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the LORD" (Ps. 27:6).

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lift up our hearts

by Amelia Blanchard

The heart—often referred to in the West as the seat of our longings, desires, feelings—that wild and unruly thing: who can understand it? And what role, if any, does or should it play in our relationship with God and our worship of Him, especially as we seek to know and live according to what is true?

In my own life and journey with God, I have felt a particular bent toward the things of the heart and have wrestled deeply with this question. It wasn't until I started going to an Anglican church three years ago when I started to learn how to value the heart and the role it plays in our relationship with God while remaining rooted in the steady, reliable truths of God.

Various arms of the church have tended to pendulum swing to one extreme or the other when it comes to engaging our hearts—either totally neglecting them or embracing them and their whims as the be-all and end-all of relationship with God. Many faithful Christians, in the desire to live faithfully, have gotten stuck in the fear that entering at all into the “land of subjectivity”—the land of the heart—will lead them away from the truth. This is a valid fear, given the many examples we have seen of such things happening and the caution of our Lord not to be caught up in deception and falsehood.

However, dare we shut off our hearts in the pursuit of Truth—Jesus Himself? I have found that to even know and live in the truth, we must begin with the honest reality of where we are, which most certainly includes our feelings and longings, and allow Truth Himself to meet and transform us there.

As I look at Jesus' encounters in the Gospels, it appears to me that they often begin with, or find their trajectory in, Jesus drawing out the longings and desires of those He is interacting with. He seems

to be on a mission to tenderly expose and draw forth their hearts. Consider the woman at the well in John 4, whom Jesus meets in all her shame and hiddenness. He compassionately pursues her heart and offers her what she truly longs for—living water, so that she would never thirst again. It's through drawing forth her heart that He comes to reveal Himself as the fulfillment of her heart's desire. Think too of blind Bartimaeus, who encounters Jesus through the longing for his sight, and the guttural emotions of desire and hope. This is where Jesus meets him. I believe that we come to know the truth, and ultimately Truth Himself, only as we allow Him to meet us in the honest places of our hearts.

So then, what could it look like to live somewhere in the middle of the pendulum swing—to recognize that our emotions, feelings, and desires have a place in our relationship with God, and yet be able to know and live in the truth that is often beyond (sometimes even other than) what we feel?

More specifically, what could it look like to do this (as a microcosm of our lives) at a Sunday service at Redeemer? As we come into the service, can we acknowledge our hearts honestly before the Lord with expectancy that He will meet us where we are, while also acknowledging and yielding to the truth of who He is regardless of whether or not that aligns presently with our emotional state? Consider what the Opening Collect for Purity invites us into at the beginning of each service:

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name through Christ our Lord. Amen.

We begin by first acknowledging that we have hearts and desires, and that they are fully known to God. Then we ask Him to cleanse our hearts (or more specifically, “the thoughts of our hearts”), by the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth, that we might come to love and worship God rightly. God already knows our hearts and desires—let us acknowledge them to Him and to ourselves, that then we might be open to the Holy Spirit’s cleansing work of bringing us to Truth.

How then do we continue to engage our hearts and yield to truth? We progress through the service with this posture of openness and expectancy into musical worship. Particularly in musical worship, because of the generally acknowledged heightened desire to “feel God,” it seems as though this tension is highlighted. We’ve heard the caution not to get caught up in whether we “feel God” or not so that we won’t base our faith in the presence of God upon what we experience or feel.

However, I believe the desire to truly experience God and know Him in personal lived experience (through musical worship or whatever other means) is such a natural and beautiful desire—for what lover wouldn’t want to spend real, embodied, quality time together with their love? A.W Tozer in his book *The Pursuit of God* talks of how we must expect such a relationship with our God:

For millions of Christians, nevertheless, God is no more real than He is to the non-Christian. They go through life trying to love an ideal and be loyal to a mere principle. Over against all this cloudy vagueness stands the clear scriptural doctrine that God can be known in personal experience. A loving Personality dominates the Bible, walking among the trees of the garden and breathing fragrance over every scene. Always a living Person is present, speaking, pleading, loving, working, and manifesting Himself whenever and wherever His people have the receptivity necessary to receive the manifestation.

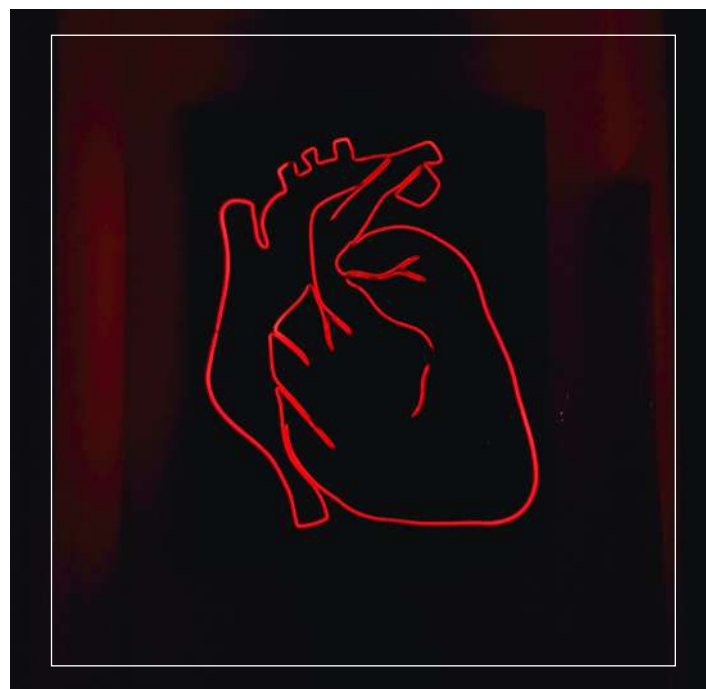
Thus, how can we honor the longing heart (in musical worship or otherwise) that seeks to feel and experience the presence of God, just as we see Jesus honoring Bartimaeus? Perhaps the skeptic in us can learn to make space for the desperate longings of our hearts. May we not be quick to shut these down in ourselves or in others.

Though at times we may have sensory encounters with God, we may not always sense or have a visceral experience of His presence. What then? We are always able to rest in the knowledge of the truth that He is present, and we can practice seeking and worshiping Him for His sake, only. Ultimately, we must surrender to the truth of His presence in musical worship and engage Him by faith, while not shutting off our longing to experience Him.

In all of this, the beautiful thing about musical worship is that, by participating, we are effectively engaging our hearts, minds, and bodies before the Lord. Music has a way of bypassing our rational brain and accessing something deeper (and oftentimes more emotional) in us—calling us to an awareness of our own hearts. And yet, music is also subconsciously forming and nourishing our minds. Whether we realize it actively or not, through the words of the songs that we sing, we are proclaiming and resting in truth (if the songs we sing are indeed theologically sound). So, we can trust that we will be resting in truth as we sing truth together with the people of God.

How then do we seek to engage our hearts just as our minds and bodies are being engaged? The structure of worship overall at Redeemer—the Anglican liturgy that forms and shapes our Sunday service—provides a helpful framework for musical worship. Unlike many other churches where musical worship is half the service and is expected to be the main place of encountering Jesus, we understand at Redeemer that the whole service is one of worship and that we encounter Jesus throughout it all, with special awareness of how He reveals Himself in Word and Sacrament. (Fun fact: We actually call the celebrant—the person who guides us through the liturgy—the worship leader for the service!) Thus, there is less pressure for musical worship to be especially powerful or emotionally moving. This has been healing for me as a music leader here at Redeemer. I don’t feel the same kind of pressure that I used to in other churches for the time of musical worship to be especially powerful for people as the primary moment when God would move or speak or reveal Himself to the congregation. I sense an overall simplicity of trust in God’s presence and goodness from this congregation that is not dependent on whether or not people feel/seem visibly moved. Yet, while we generally seem released from unhelpful pressure, how do we continue to engage our hearts with expectancy for God to meet us in musical worship? This can feel rather risky, even as singing itself can often feel risky for some. Singing with others invites us to step outside of a place of safety and normalcy, as we stand maybe a little too close than we’d prefer to the stranger sitting one chair away from us. Singing can be vulnerable! Perhaps this same invitation to risk and vulnerability is also extended to us in the way we engage our hearts, not just our vocal chords.

I long for Church of the Redeemer, participating in worship together as a whole, to be a body of believers who risk being people of the heart and who truly experience the living presence of Jesus in our lives. May we be honest and wholehearted people of expectancy and faith who open ourselves vulnerably to Jesus while we wait on him, believing that He wants to meet us right where we are. May we honestly name the truth of where we are while ultimately resting in the Truth—Jesus Himself.





a teenage cathedral

by the Very Rev. Canon Dr. Dan Alger

Her pink dress was stretched and stained, the ringlets in her hair were matted with a mix of lollipop and dirt. I was standing in the back of a high school cafeteria after the Sunday service of a new church plant when the little girl came running by. She had the grace of a two-year-old, which is to say not much. There was a mix of concentration and exhilaration on her face as her little legs churned and she chugged through the crowd of people. Just as she reached the spot where the planter and I were standing, she tripped over her own feet and crashed face first onto the ground, sliding a bit before the sticky cafeteria floor finally arrested her momentum. I instinctively reached down to help her up, but before I could act she bounced back up and ran on. She was a mess—awkward, dirty, a frenzy of unfocused energy, covered with bruises—but she was a beautiful and happy two-year-old.

The church planter smiled and said to me, “That little girl was born on the very day we started this church. So, when I get frustrated about things we haven’t done yet, or things we don’t do well, or when we make mistakes, I look at her and remember: our church is only that old. Maybe I should have some grace and patience.” He was wonderfully right. No one looked at that beautiful little girl and thought that her grimy face and uncoordinated locomotion was odd or inappropriate; she was only two.

Churches, like children, start small and clumsy and change as they grow and mature; this is natural and normal and good. As we watch our children grow, we can look back fondly on the memories of when they were toddling around in princess dresses covered in sugar and sweat, but it would be awkward in the least if they never matured out of that phase. Our hope for our children is that they will grow into strong, healthy, mature adults who flourish in their relationships, professions, and life in Jesus’ church. Likewise, we want to see our church plants grow to be healthy, faithful, established churches that are able to multiply disciples and plant new churches as a natural part of their lives.

A SEASON OF CHANGE

Redeemer’s first service was in December of 2007. That makes us a healthy fourteen-year-old. There is significant change in the life of a teenager: new discoveries, new skills, new responsibilities, and new friends. And so it is true of Redeemer. Most visibly, we have had leadership changes. Alan Hawkins planted Redeemer and served as rector until January of 2022 when I was asked to step into this important role. Alan was elected bishop coadjutor of our diocese last year, which means that he will take over as the bishop of the diocese in the next couple of years when our current bishop (Steve Breedlove) enters into retirement. Alan’s new role also means that Redeemer has become a pro-cathedral of the diocese. This is more than a change in name. As a cathedral, our vision expands to serve the churches of our diocese: to strengthen, encourage, and plant wherever we have the opportunity. Alan built a strong foundation at Redeemer, full of an amazing vision, beautiful relationships, and committed leaders, and we are thankful that he is still a significant part of our life and ministry at Redeemer. As I live into the calling of rector of Redeemer (also called dean of the cathedral), my desire is to honor the people, ethos, and faithful work of the church for the previous 14 years, and lead us humbly into the next stage of our life and ministry together. I have the honor of being the father of teenagers in more ways than one. No matter how in sync Alan and I are with each other, however, a new person in this role is a big change for the church.

We've had other staff transitions as well. With a staff of 22, change and turnover are inevitable. Some folks we have sent out into new mission: Drew Hill, our long-time associate rector, took a call to be headmaster of The Covenant School, which he helped to start many years ago; Cherie Weber, our Director of Children's Ministry, is preparing to move to Rwanda with her family to serve the Lord with our sister church in Gahini Diocese; Lena Van Wyk, who was the lifeblood of our farm for many years, has transitioned into the important missional role of full-time mom. Others have had changes in situation or calling and moved on to serve in new ways at Redeemer or elsewhere. We've also had many new wonderful faces join our staff recently. Jared and Abbi Wensyel joined us a little over a year ago as Jared began our curacy program. He has now been ordained a priest and is serving as our assistant rector. Abbi is a lifesaver for me as my executive assistant. Amelia Blanchard, Madison Miller, and Ana Howland all graduated from our Fellows Program and serve in various roles on staff. It has been astounding to see how the Lord has provided every time we have had a need: JD Meeder has joined us to give direction to the Fellows Program, Steven Hebbard succeeded Lena as Farm Director, and Jessica Ronnevik has swept in as Children's Ministry Director just as Cherie needed to step out. I don't have room to list all of the changes in people and position here. What I can say is that in the midst of a whirlwind of change, I have been amazed at the swiftness of God's provision and the quality of leaders he is bringing to us. With these new leaders come new ideas and new ways of doing things, but at the same time, the identity, mission, ethos, and faithfulness of Redeemer is unchanging.

As should be expected in transitions such as these, there will naturally be differences in communication style, emphases, leadership choices, etc. It is of utmost importance as we walk into this new season together that we are intentional about patience during a time of getting to know each other in our new roles, grace as we all adjust together, and purposeful trust in one another.

In addition to new leadership, another change we are seeing as we live through our teenage years is a large number of new faces and friends joining us in the congregation. The Lord is doing great things at Redeemer! Our Free Farmer's market served over 600 families last year and entered its third year on October 1st, running through November 19th; our community gathering on Wednesday nights, called Connections, is serving more than 150 people, including a record number of kids who are participating in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd; we are expanding our multi-ethnic services to include an Arabic service; and our youth group is growing! Scores of new people are joining Redeemer--what an amazing thing to see!--and with this, we are seeing new baptisms and dozens of confirmations every year. Our family is expanding. With new faces comes new relationships, new energy towards our corporate mission, more hands joining the work, more seats around our family meal.

With many new people, we have had to develop new systems for everything from pastoral care to communication to safety policies to discipleship. Budgeting is different, our long term strategies for ministry are adapting, new challenges are being addressed, and we are working hard to figure out how to more consistently control all these stinking weeds on our property! We have changed Sundays to hold two morning services in order to welcome as many people as possible. There is a lot to do in order to love and steward our people well. All of these changes have come on top of three of the most disruptive years in the history of our nation with political division, economic upheaval, and a global pandemic. People who are only just now returning to Redeemer after being separated during Covid are returning to a place that looks very different. But at its core, Redeemer is still very much the same. Just like in growing up, change is not always loss, it is sometimes simply the next season of life.



SOME THINGS WILL NEVER CHANGE

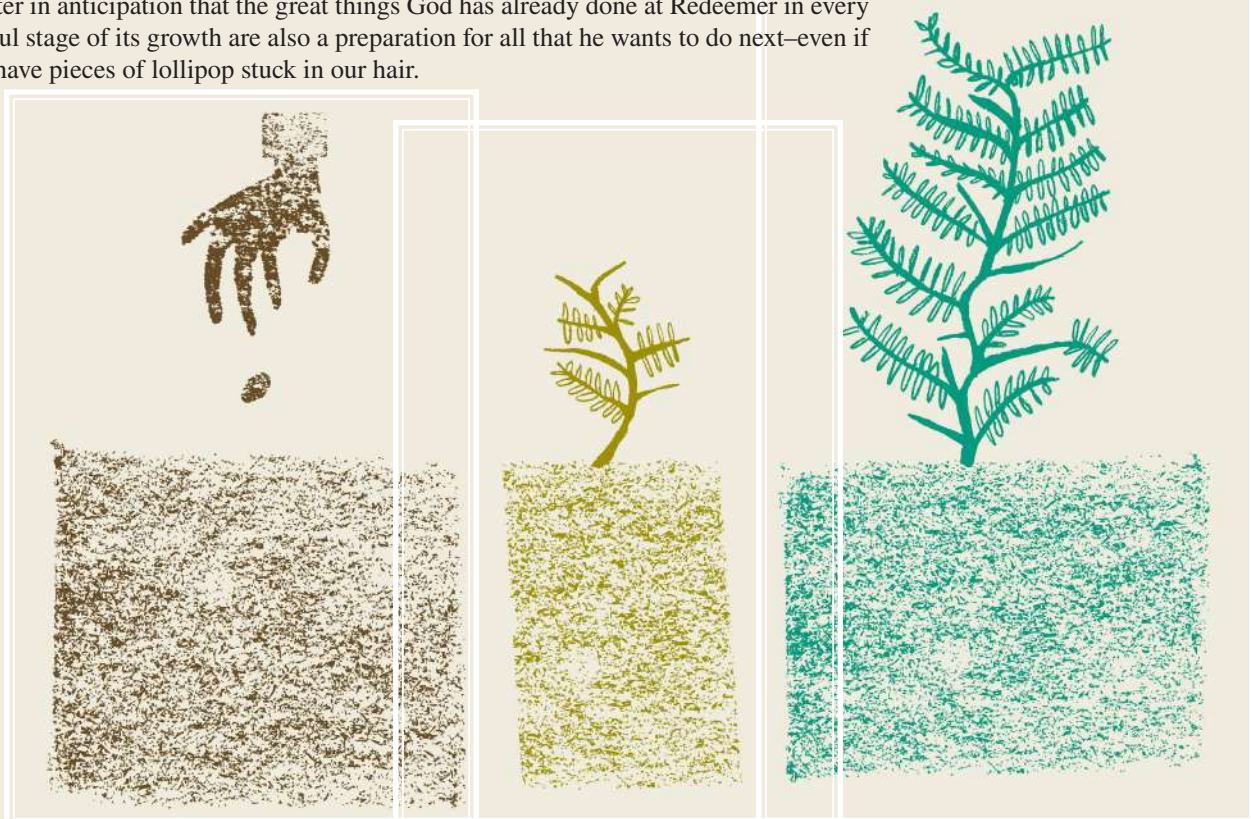
This edition of The Table is focused on the heart. Not the fleshy organ inside of our chests, but rather what it stands for: the seat of our passions, emotions, loves, and intentions. Through all of the changes of this season, the heart of Redeemer is what has remained unchanging. The same driving passions, mission, ethos, and beliefs that had us sprinting forward as a toddler remains constant for us as a teenage church.

Our staff, vestry, and clergy are working hard to ensure that even while there are so many new things taking place, those aspects of Redeemer that should never change remain ever-constant. Redeemer will always serve Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, according to the authority and truth of the Scripture. Our continued vision is to love those inside Redeemer well and remain passionate about reaching those outside of our church with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have an identity that we define as Parish, Park, Farm, Abbey which we remain committed to pursuing. We are a place of hospitality, authenticity, generosity, service, relationship, and community. We are multi-ethnic and intentionally multi-generational. We are committed to Word and Sacrament as we worship as part of the historic Anglican Tradition. Above all, we remain a place that proclaims grace, is in need of grace, and receives grace—all in the name of Jesus.

THE AWKWARD TEENAGE CATHEDRAL

My church planter friend framed the stage of life his church was in by looking at that beautifully stumbling child. Sometimes Redeemer is a beautifully gangly teenager. Our body is growing but our coordination has not caught up. We recognize our continued need for maturation, but sometimes we slip backwards into stages of life we thought we'd grown out of. Like a teenager, we are beginning to see more clearly who we are becoming, the sort of impact we can have on the world, the potential for what God wants to do in us and through us. At the same time, we are caught in a wonderfully awkward stage of growth and development. Our systems need to catch up to our growth, our leaders need to adapt to new ways of doing ministry: we are sometimes all knees and elbows. Our church started in living rooms, school cafeterias, local parks, and hotel conference rooms with a small staff and a big vision. Now we sit on acres of land with hundreds of people in our midst, but we still trip over our own feet. Even though our body is growing and changing, it is still the same heart in the chest of Redeemer: a heart of faithfulness, worship, mission, and community that reflects the heart of Christ.

So, Redeemer family, as we walk through these awkward teenage years together, let's embrace both excitement and grace with one another in our church. Change is a part of the natural growth of a person and a church. Yes, we can look fondly back on our childhood years, when we ran energetically around on cafeteria floors, and we can look forward with excitement to the amazing, mature life God is calling us into. At the same time, let's embrace these current years when we are somewhere in the middle. Have grace with what hasn't grown up yet. Rejoice in the progress that we have made. Recognize that the changes we are experiencing are normal and good—we are growing up. And no matter what stage of Redeemer it was that you joined the family, let us enjoy together these teen years of new friends, big decisions, and significant learning. Let the thumping of the heart of Redeemer give us comfort in its consistency and may it race a little faster in anticipation that the great things God has already done at Redeemer in every wonderful stage of its growth are also a preparation for all that he wants to do next—even if we still have pieces of lollipop stuck in our hair.



every good thing by Alice Wolfe

Many years ago, I witnessed the birth of my nephew. That event culminated a long, holy pursuit by God and a winding heart-journey for me as I was, by the sheer awesomeness of the incredible reality of life, swept into the kingdom of believers. All my intellectual and rational analysis of “faith” disappeared, and my faith was birthed just as surely as that baby entered the world and started squawking. What a miracle that birth was, and what an unbelievable gift that baby was.

God’s most incredible gift to me – salvation from sin and guidance in living a life devoted to loving Him and others in order to bring Him glory – is unbelievable...and completely undeserved. I reasoned (here my intellectual and rational analysis creeping back in) that perhaps all facets of my life were gifts from him, not just my salvation. Perhaps the blessings that made up my life—husband, children, church, friends, the plenty of everything in this country that we take for granted (the list is endless)--were undeserved gifts, regardless of my hard work and diligence. If this were so, such gifts demanded a response. The result of my evaluation was a systematic review of my life in order to “give back” to God the many gifts he had so lavishly given.

When I was 40, I decided I wanted to complete a triathlon. I could already swim and bike pretty well, but I disliked running. Nevertheless, I started running. I was super slow and it was hard! But I kept at it and, lo and behold, I got better. With discipline, I even reached the place that other runners used to tell me about – the runner’s high! It was delightful and re-

warding! Similarly, I have had many opportunities to exercise giving back over the years, with varying degrees of success. However, I have found that if I stick with the exercise, I almost always grow.

God has been incredibly faithful over the years to provide many opportunities for me to grow in my understanding of how to

we “give away” by praying for it, serving it, tithing regularly and introducing others to it. We have experienced heartache and redemption in our lives, and we attempt to come alongside others struggling with similar issues. It takes discipline to exercise the giving muscle in much the same way that running was challenging to me, but

and over with nudging from the Spirit how sending even a small gift or donation to a particular cause was powerful beyond what we could imagine. We started off small (oh my gosh, tithing means giving 10%?!?!), but as we exercised our financial giving muscles, we grew! Not only did God sometimes allow us to see results, but He even gave us a hunger to give more. Sometimes it did not seem we could “afford” to give, but as we prayed and remained faithful, God always showed up. God is still growing us in generosity.

I write this article not long after the Redeemer Gives campaign has launched. What a wonderful opportunity to call each of us in this church family to begin, or to deepen, our pursuit of generosity. I pray for each family and person at Church of the Redeemer to truly seek God’s guidance for how they might exercise their financial giving muscle. God does not need our money to accomplish his goals, but he does want our hearts. I think for many of us, exercising giving muscles, especially in the area of finances, is connected to an increased giving of our hearts to God. Generosity offers a unique opportunity to grow as vibrant, healthy Christ followers, glorifying Him and demonstrating His incredible gifts to us by giving back. One of my all-time most convicting Bible verses is from Philemon “...be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ” (v. 6).

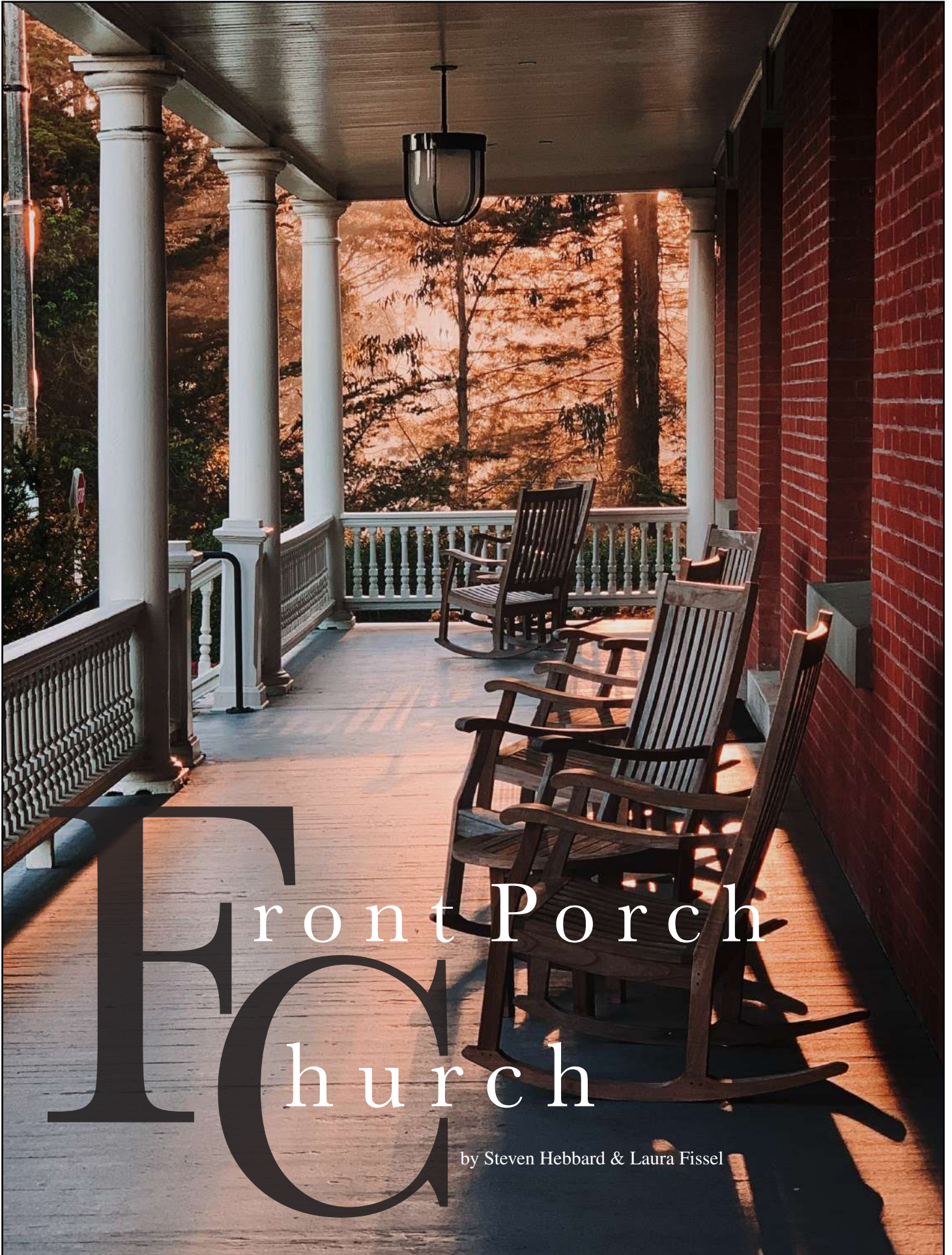
I believe that giving is a way of sharing our faith. In giving away to God/giving back to God, we grow in our understanding of how unbelievably we are blessed.



“give back” to God the many of the gifts He has given to me. My husband and I have been blessed with a beautiful home which we try to share with others regularly. Our family and extended family are wonderful and numerous and often gather: We love to include others as we gather and fellowship. Our church is a wonderful gift that

I have found the same wonderful rewards as I have stuck with it over the years.

One of the most profound ways I have seen God work in my heart is through the discipline of giving away money. Early on in our marriage, my husband and I wanted to share the fruits of our labor, so to speak. God was so sweet to show us over



Front Porch
Church

by Steven Hebbard & Laura Fissel

A BUILDING ETHOS

In 2015, Steven Hebbard was working his dream job at Mobile Loaves & Fishes (LF) in Austin, Texas. He and his wife Bethany were living and farming in LF's master-planned community from the chronically homeless called Community First! Village. As the founder of the Village's farm program, Steven was empowering a team of formerly homeless men and women to work alongside him as teachers and hosts to the thousands of volunteers who served on the farm each year. LF's goal is to "empower communities into a lifestyle of service with the homeless," and though Steven was witnessing this work taking place in a powerful way, he couldn't shake the feeling of a disconnect in the model that had long-term implications.

Churches across Austin eagerly donate time, talent, and treasure to LF, but as the non-profit used these church resources to accomplish the work of the kingdom, it failed to deliver in a sacramental way—as Mark Sayers would say, they were functioning as a "kingdom without a king." The church was essentially sending its people out to "do the work" of the kingdom, but without the holistic, discipleship-rich approach the Church is meant to provide: the strength and reach of the workers, their resources and motivation and support, was ultimately limited. Steven felt like he saw the writing on the wall: LF had a shelf-life. If you do good work but it's not paired with the transformative power of Christ, it won't last.

This way of doing Kingdom-work in the world is part of an ongoing cultural shift to "neutral world" thinking, with churches focusing on winsome things to accomplish in the world that capture people's hearts and participation outside of the church community. Good works in the world—addressing homelessness, injustice, hunger etc.—captivate a broader audience, but if the work itself is the end-all-be-all, with nothing bigger feeding the hearts and lives of those in service, its longevity will match the limits of the finite people involved. Steven saw this unfolding in LF. In 2015, Steven and his wife Bethany became the first residents on the LF property. Soon after, a number of other Christians, most of whom had started as volunteers on the farm, also left their homes and moved to the Village. Eventually, many of these people left their churches because their worshiping communities were not equipped to support this type of radical, enduring calling.

In 2017, Steven met Alan Hawkins at a Matthew 25 conference where Steven was speaking about his life and ministry. Alan told him about New Garden Park (NGP) in Greensboro and its holistic mission. At that time, Alan also spoke about an article by Ralph Winters discussing the concepts of "modality" and "sodality": terms from anthropology that Winters applied to church growth in 1971. This deeply resonated with what Steven had been processing about the Church and its work in the world.

Modality is essentially a unified, vertically structured, non-restrictive group: in essence, the One Church, with a single door of entrance, so to speak, where all may enter no matter who they are or where they are coming from. Sodality is the more restricted, horizontally-organized, task-oriented entity: it describes the outward, specialized element of the Church that is the missional movement. At one time, the church was good at rooting the sodali-

ty in its modality—its outward-seeking service fueled by a singular invitation of welcome into grace and acceptance. Steven processed these ideas through his experience, realizing that what he felt with LF was the separation of modality and sodality, and he was feeling a deep need for these to be radically and practically reunited. Through this introduction to Ralph Winters, Alan Hawkins gave Steven the language he'd been searching for to express the disconnect he was feeling. What he believed he was seeing was that the church was willingly giving up their sodality to the secular world—who often ended up doing it better, temporarily fueled by the motivating feelings of purpose and fulfillment that service can give a person.

In the midst of this internal journey, Steven and Bethany had just moved from the Village to cultivate a new mission on a new piece of land just as Covid hit. Like so many others, they had to regroup and reconfigure their way of doing things. They ended up building a huge garden that was then disseminated through a free farm stand with the ethos "bring what you can; take what you need." It did not just offer food, but also relationship, as this established and consistent work lent itself well to the opportunity of developing friendship. The Hebbards quickly found that the people coming to the farm stand were more hungry for connection than food. From this space and experience, through a continuing series of events, they eventually took up an invitation from Alan Hawkins to come to Greensboro to continue their work at New Garden Park.

FRONT PORCH FARMING

Often the church can be monolithic. In contrast, the method of farming called permaculture is about the edges: where one part of your farm meets another, feeding and benefitting one another to create a self-sustaining energy loop. Gardening is a very public work that time and time again finds a way of creating a "middle space" of connection between people.

After coming to Greensboro, the Hebbards bought a house and moved just after Easter 2022. They immediately started building a large garden on their property. They learned that one of their neighbors hadn't left his house since 2019. One day in 2022, his daughter came to get him for a haircut and as they passed the Hebbard's garden, he started asking questions. The very next day, he left his house to come see their garden. They began to build a relationship with this neighbor and his wife, having them for regular dinners: the entire relationship began because of the publicity of the home garden.

The term "parish" is often misconstrued. Although it may be found defining one worshiping body, what it truly means is the place and people the church cares for. The average church lost 40-50% of its congregation because of Covid, these numbers centering around those already attending with the least frequency. What has been lost is the bottom third of the church—irregular attendees who were not fully bought in but were seeking something and finding it in the church. We are experiencing less connection between the church and the world than we ever have before.

The garden or farm can serve as the Front Porch of the church, and of the world. It is the “meeting ground of two different places”--the inside of the “house” (the church’s worshipping body) and outside of it. In general, a rich front porch culture draws people out of the home while drawing people in from the road.

At the Farm at New Garden Park, our goal is to increase our “edge effect,” creating room for people to encounter and integrate into the Kingdom of God. The more dynamic the farm, the more opportunity to bring people in to experience the goodness of it. The Front Porch is a short step into the world and it’s a short step out of the world. It’s a place of meeting that requires a little bit of give

and take from both sides of the spectrum. It is a communal space where common ground is found and common work and purpose shared. If the church is indeed those “inside the house,” we want to invite the church to come onto the porch to “shell peas,” becoming visible to the “passersby” in our community in a way that invites them to participate in communal living and friendship. But we do not only want to be a nonprofit inviting a broader community into the work of the Kingdom. We want and need to be simultaneously rooted in the gospel, utilizing church traditions (liturgy, morning prayer, feast days etc.) so that what “the stranger” finds when they enter into communal work is the transformational and sustaining power of God, available to all who seek it.



THE FUTURE OF THE FARM

In 2007, Steven lived down the street in Austin from a neighbor who was essentially house-bound. Every day, Ms. Olivia would sit on her porch, covered in layer after layer of clothing. She owned a lot of animals, and was not really keeping up with herself or her home. When you shook her hand, the scent of her stayed with you through several hand washings. In this small way, she became one with you when you encountered her. A friend of Steven’s once referred to this neighbor when speaking of the “Bouquet of Christ”--that it was found here, in the least of these. Indeed, Biblically, this is where Christ says to seek and find him. It’s Matthew 25! The hungry, thirsty, lonely stranger--sick, naked, and imprisoned. If we truly believed this to be true, we would give ourselves over to it: transforming mere transactional relationships by diving completely in and giving our whole selves--not just a handshake, but a big bear hug. When you’ve encountered Christ, it transforms you. You take on the scent of Christ.

20 years ago, Steven went to seminary knowing God called him to ministry but not knowing exactly how. In 2020, the week of the Covid shutdown, he was ordained as a deacon in the Anglican church with the very specific calling to connect the land and the

church to the poor. As he continues to deepen his understanding of this mission, he is realizing that his tools to cultivate the hearts of God’s people are the poor, and if the church misses that, they are in danger of missing God altogether.

As the Farm at NGP does the work of the parish in our community, we seek Christ where he may be found. Mission trips are intense experiences, a call to the margins that is short-term, transformative...and hard to replicate afterwards. How might folks be called out missionally in a daily capacity--to work with people, embracing their experience and scent, becoming one with them in friendship in a long-term, sustainable way?

While working at NGP as Park Director, Steven was employing a homeless man to work at the property, but there was no “front porch” where he might be invited to consistently encounter the people of the church in the day-to-day. Wednesday night Connections is a new way at Redeemer for calling people “out” from the porch to a common place of meeting. At the Farm, we want to continue to draw people in from the road to our shared space, and the publicity of a garden is a great place to begin.

At the Farm, we have always grown East African crops. There is no East African grocery store in our community; we want to take a greater initiative to get these foods into this community even beyond our East African service that meets at New Garden Park, either deeply discounted or free as we expand the use of these crops to build friendship and Kingdom in this particular community. One goal of the Farm at NGP is to take the annual Free Farmer's Market and shrink it down in size while expanding its time frame through Front Yard Farm Stands. This concept is for groups of 5-10 families to organize a regular farm stand in their communities, employing it as an opportunity to feed bodies as well as souls as they share food as well as things like expertise, conversation, interests, skills, and friendship.

Even as we build Front Yard Farm Stands throughout our city, in the Spring, we will also look towards making connections in the Triad with produce from the Farm through established markets in our area.

These are only a couple of the ways that we at the Farm will be working towards a Front Porch culture that feeds the bodies and souls of our Parish. As a part of this endeavor, a Farm Production manager has been budgeted for the farm, and we are in the process of interviewing to hire that position. We are also raising a Community/Volunteer manager to help coordinate our upcoming initiatives. Participation in the work of the Farm, now as well as in the future, is built into the Redeemer Gives campaign: this is a great place to begin increasing your buy-in and work with the Farm and its mission!

There is always work to be done in the gardening life, and we look forward to joining together on the front porch with friends new and old as we put our hands to harvesting, processing, and enjoying the labor of the field we've been given.



shalom

Greetings! My name is JD Meeder, and I have the privilege of serving as the Director of the Greensboro Fellows. In this transitional season for our ministry, I've been blown away by the goodness of our God, and the delight He has in giving His people good gifts. We have six amazing individuals making up our 2022-2023 Fellows class, and we are excited to have them in Greensboro for the next nine months.

Along with my wonderful wife Katherine and our two year old daughter Nora, I moved to Greensboro in January of 2022 to be closer to family. In April, the Lord blessed us with our son Jack. It's been a season of trust and transition! While we're relatively new to Greensboro, I have some experience with the work of Fellows: While living in Charleston, I had the privilege of helping launch a Fellows program and serving on its leadership team. Through our time with the Holy City Fellows, we saw the Lord meet the next generation in powerful ways, and that experience makes me excited for what He has in store for this new season of our lives and of the Greensboro Fellows.

Why does this work matter? I challenge you to pause and look back on the pivotal moments and seasons of your own life. Many of us think of marriage or the birth of a child, and rightly so! These are times that alter the way we view the world around us, the way we view ourselves, and even the way we view and interact with God. I would argue that the transition season from student to adulthood is one of the first critical seasons of life that leads to these kinds of wild shifts! The data is clear that the rhythms and habits that are developed in this period will impact who we are as employees, spouses, parents, and beyond.

The world that this current Fellows class is entering is more difficult than ever before, and many don't feel equipped for this transition. According to Boston Children's Hospital, 20-25 year olds, "find themselves facing some instability in this 'in-between' period of their lives."¹ A recent study by the Mayo Clinic showed that

over one-third of college students experience significant depression and anxiety, and up to 44% reported symptoms of depression.² According to numerous surveys, this is the first generation in American history that doesn't believe their lives will be better than their parents. They are entering a new kind of broken and fallen world, and they don't feel prepared.

In 605 BC, the nation of Israel was ravaged by the Babylonians, and through multiple waves, they were taken out of the land and culture that they knew, finding themselves in one that was hostile towards them in nearly every way. Their land was taken away and Solomon's stunning temple had been burned to the ground. Can you imagine the anxiety and struggle? Their response was similar to what you might expect: they started to look for people to tell them what they wanted to hear and false prophets rose up saying that they would only be in exile for a year or two.

It's in that place where Jeremiah writes his letter to the exiles in chapter 29. He lays out the instructions for a people who are entering a foreign culture that is hostile to them. In the midst of wondering if they're staying or leaving soon, Jeremiah makes himself clear: "Build houses and live in them" (in modern day terms, "settle down") (vs. 4). In this passage, we find some key areas that we want to put at the heart of everything that we do in the Greensboro Fellows program. A critical part of the program for the Fellows is settling into a place, a city, and a local church. Jeremiah encourages them to establish themselves in their city, and to not let their focus waver into where they may be called next. In the midst of that city, he calls them to the community. Our prayer is to replicate that right here in Greensboro, establishing Fellows in a host home, with work, and in a local congregation at Church of the Redeemer.

Jeremiah continues with his instruction: "plant gardens and eat their produce." While not every church has a farm, this is a reference to work and vocation. The Lord God is interested in our vocation and work.



In the Fellows program, we spend significant time exploring why work exists, how God himself is a worker, and the role that it plays in our lives and in our faith. The Fellows are placed into a part-time job throughout the program that aligns with their gifts, passions, and interests. It's critical that they explore ways to invite the Gospel into their work, as their career will be a foundational element of their life and ministry.

A few verses later, Jeremiah shares a thought that would be seen as shocking to the original readers. In verse seven, he says "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf." Can you imagine? These are people who have been ripped away from their home. They're in mourning and pain, and attempting to navigate a city that hates them. In the midst of that, through Jeremiah, the Lord commands them to seek the city's welfare, or in the original language, to seek the *shalom* of the city.

The word *shalom* is not one to be taken lightly. The common translation is the word peace, but that vastly sells short the heart behind it. Shalom is a reference to the Garden of Eden: it describes Adam having the full human experience. *Shalom* was Adam and Eve being in right relationship with the Lord, with themselves, with each other, and with creation, all of which was lost in the fall.

Shalom is also a reference to the future, The "Prince of Shalom" (Isaiah 9) is promised to come to the people to build a new Kingdom. Jesus Christ has come, and will return again to wipe away every tear, to separate the sheep from the goats, and to bring all things back into proper order. Jesus Christ came to reestablish *Shalom*. It is this heart, a heart of complete peace and fulfillment of all of God's promises, that the Lord commands His people to bring to their relationship with Babylon.

In case his argument wasn't compelling enough, Jeremiah continues on in verse 7 to explain, "for in [Babylon's] welfare, you will find your welfare." Through this, we see the brilliance and creativity of the Lord. God uses a creative incentive structure, and ties the growth and success of His people to the well-being of the city. They can't escape their call to seek *shalom* for it in their time there. So what does this mean for the Fellows? Why is this important?

What's at the heart of the ministry of the Greensboro Fellows? The answer is to seek *shalom*. The heart of the Greensboro Fellows is to see a generation of people intentionally pause for nine months to invite the Lord into every area of their life. When they do, they find out who God is, who they are, what they're to do in their relationships, and how to embrace their roles as the stewards of creation. During the program, they engage in many things with intentionality: They embrace rigorous theological training; they are placed in fruitful and challenging work environments that align with their gifts and passions; they are paired with mentors and asked to embrace vulnerability and growth through relationships; communally, they explore their stories through assessments and retreats, discovering who they are and how God has wired them; they travel to Rwanda and are exposed to God's global perspective; they are placed in a Christian home for nine months to experience the rhythms (and the beautiful mess) of family. And they do all of this to grow the fullness of *shalom* in their lives. When they graduate, we send them out to do the "work [he] has given [them] to do" (Post-Communion Prayer(s) from The Holy Eucharist, 1979 Book of Common Prayer), ultimately bringing *shalom* into a culture that so desperately needs it until the day that He returns to make all things fully right.

I pray that hearing about the mission of this program encourages you, knowing that the Lord is at work, and that through this program, Shalom is growing in your city! I want to invite you to be a part of this work. We need your prayer, your advocacy, your gifts, your talents, and your treasure. If you are interested in discussing this further, joining what God is doing in and through the next generation, I would love to talk more with you about it! May the Lord bless you, and may you experience, and share, his Shalom in ways that you never before thought possible.

1 <https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/college-students-and-depression>

2 <https://money.howstuffworks.com/personal-finance/financial-planning/millennials-first-worse-parents.htm>



the generosity of hospitality

by Bethany Hebbard

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Hebrews 13:2).

How do we respond to this exhortation?

Perhaps our hearts feel heavy. We can't remember the last time we welcomed friends to our table, much less anyone foreign to our neighborhood, language, race, or class. Or we might hear these words with weary longing: if only we had more time, if only we managed our days better, if only the children were older, if only, if only. We might even feel afraid. Entertaining angels, you say? We know from Scripture that angels may come to comfort, but are just as likely to bring a message that turns their listeners' lives upside down.

Let us not soften this truth: strangers are perilous. At the very least, they interrupt the ordinary household economy, requiring our time, our food, and space in our home. They may bring their trauma, their loneliness, even their diseases into our havens. They may need money, or company, or a bed or friend. And in this age of division and mistrust, they may need us to seek them out, to search the streets and persuade them to come and be our guest.

Too much! our hearts may say. *It is too much.*

And left to our own resources, it is too much. How generous does our Father expect us to be, anyway?

We turn back to Hebrews, remembering that this call to hospitality follows the litany of the faithful, those who were “were stoned, [...] sawn in two, [...] killed with the sword [...] destitute, afflicted, mistreated...” (11:37). We are not comforted. Not until we look again and catch a glimpse of the homeland those faithful heroes died to gain: “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering” (12:22).

Angels in festal gathering - why would the angels come to us for hospitality when they could be feasting in the city of God? Why disguise themselves as strangers and submit to our poor and halting welcome when the God of the universe sets a table for them?

They must have something to tell us. (They are messengers after all). And what message are they bringing? Judgment for our reluctant welcome? Shame because we are weary? Secret knowledge to summon a more bountiful table or spacious schedule?

Or perhaps the message is something like this: Yes, you will empty yourself for those at your door—the little ones, the strangers, the elders and the weak. You will take on the form of a servant, give your last mite. But fear not. The paltry seeds you sowed with tears running down your cheeks will grow into sheaves so heavy you can't help but laugh with joy. The lunch of fish and bread will feed thousands. What you thought was the last of your oil and flour,

made into bread for a guest, will never run out.

These paradoxes might sound too easy, too much like a fairytale, to those who have never tested them. But the message seems trustworthy to those who have put the words of Hebrews into practice. When a guest is welcomed in the name of Christ, weeknight suppers shine with glory.

The eighteenth century Greek Orthodox monk Cosmas of Aetolia recognized hospitality as one of the most noble works of a Christian household, a practice where the domestic and the epic met. “The Martyrs won Paradise through their blood,” he wrote, “[but] you, my brethren, who have children, how will you win Paradise? By means of hospitality...”

Hosts and martyrs, saints and suburban families. Strange, with all this talk of death, that our hearts begin to lift. The weariness, the regret, the sense of scarcity – these are not facts, nor evidence of our failure. They are the pangs of self-emptying, the lingering fears that the angels-in-disguise have come to put to rest (Fear not!). God alone is strong enough, glad enough, to welcome the world's strangers. But the angels have done their work. We see now, even in our smallest rooms: the golden outline of a door that opens to the City of the Living God.



an unimaginably relational God

by Ben Weber

More than once when carrying an object from one place to another I have asked one of my small children if they want to help me. (I don't need their help.)

Walking slowly with the chair or box or bag while they walk beside me with a hand on some part of the object, exerting (I imagine) at least some upward force, they insist they are "helping daddy." (They are not.)

Often, they hang on the object at just the wrong time, or pull it into a wall doing more damage than I would expect, or walk in such a way I can't get through a door. Their "help" often slows me down and makes a mess of things. They are, however, with me, and that is the point. I want my children with me, participating in my work, walking beside me, doing what I do.

When God created the world, he spoke light into being, organized it, and then gave it a name. After making Adam, he placed him in the garden and gave him the task of tending it. God brought the animals to him to see what he would call them. Adam was invited to participate in bringing order and in the giving of names to creation. God could have done both things more efficiently with Adam watching on the side, but God wanted the new human to participate in creation with his creator. God wanted a relationship with him.

That relationship was severely damaged in the fall. When Jesus came to restore that relationship once and for all, he called his disciples, and invited them to participate once again in his work. Only this time, he was calling people to help in the reconciliation between him and his people. God could have told everyone all at once about Christ and been done with it, just like he could have made the whole earth a perfect garden without Adam's help and named all the animals instantly and just told Adam what their best possible names were, but he wants us to join Him in his work, so he sacrificed efficiency for relationship. He sent us, weak and scared, and still terribly damaged by our own sin to introduce others to a relationship with an unimaginably relational God.

Cherie and I feel as if God has now taken us by the hand, stood us up, and said to us, "Come here, I want you to help me with something over here." Part of me questions how much help we are going to be. Part of me likes where I had been sitting, working with what God had given me to work on, and now he is asking us to put down those things and follow him around a corner to help with a bigger and scarier task. It's not just us either. We have been told of several other families that God has taken from different areas and led to work with Him in Rwanda. God is doing something new in Rwanda, and he is inviting his people to come work with him.

God is not only doing something over there, but God is also doing something inside of Cherie and I, and inside of our children. God is recreating our hearts as well. The more we prepare for our move, the more we learn, the more we pray for those we will be working

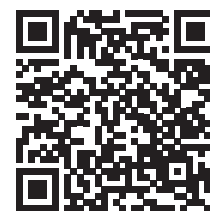
with and doing life with, the more our hearts have turned toward them. Before this, I never thought about Rwanda, but now there is an inexplicable longing to go back to a people I barely know. Our children are processing all this as well, struggling with God's call on their life to leave their own country and go to a place they have never seen.

I do not believe that Cherie and I are the only ones called to this work, or that our type of calling is somehow greater than anyone else's. I believe God has called Church of the Redeemer to help him with this work in Rwanda, just as he has called our brothers and sisters already living in Rwanda to help him in what He is doing in their midst.

Why does he want people from another tribe and culture and tongue to reach out and connect with people in central Africa, and join them in what God is doing in their communities? I can think of a dozen reasons why this is not efficient. I can think of another dozen reasons why I want to stay. There is so much to be done in Greensboro. There are so many hurting people who need to see the love of God. It has been so exciting to be part of a church that has been working to make that love visible through a dozen different ministries that are all as big a part of what God is doing in the world as anything I can imagine God is doing in Rwanda. Why not stay? Because God is all about relationships.

God never wanted his people to huddle together and keep all their gifts and blessings to themselves. He calls us to look outside of our group, outside of our community, outside of our nation, and see God's heart for people that are not like us. God has been calling Redeemer to that work of reconciliation for years, and for years Redeemer has been responding in obedience. Redeemer is unique in having three services, each in different languages. We have been serving the poor with our farm. We have been helping refugees. We have done and are doing so much. Yet God never calls his people to stay where they are. Redeemer is constantly being called to move out of its comfort zone, to change, to grow into something greater, and to respond to greater obedience. I believe Cherie and my calling is directly linked to Church of the Redeemer's calling to Rwanda. I believe we are called because we are from Church of the Redeemer. And I could extend that calling to all the churches that are joining with Church of the Redeemer through Friends of Gahini. God is calling his people to a greater and deeper participation in His redemptive work, and different members participate in that calling in different ways. How are you called to participate in what God is doing?

BEN, CHERIE, AND 6 of their 7 children will be moving to Rwanda early next year as missionaries. They will be working with the non-profit Friends of Gahini as liaisons between churches here in the USA and churches in the Diocese of Gahini in Rwanda to help facilitate their sister church partnerships. They are going under the Society of Anglican Missionaries and Senders (SAMS). If you would like to receive their newsletters or partner with them in this ministry, scan this code.



a big adventure

It was Fall of 2019, and Eamon and I were sitting in our first membership class at Redeemer. We had felt called away from the church we had been in for our entire marriage. It wasn't an easy decision, but we believed it was the right one. We listened as Alan talked about the history of our new church, and some of its future plans. I had come straight from a long workday and was very tired, but I was trying to pay attention. Then something crazy happened that reached through the fogginess of exhaustion to grab my attention. Alan mentioned the idea of "Redeemer Village:" A community on the New Garden Park campus meant to reach people through a housing ministry using tiny houses. I didn't hear anything else he said for the next ten minutes as my mind raced with excitement and ideas. I was suddenly more sure than ever that we had landed exactly where God wanted us.

Several years before, tiny houses had become a bit of an obsession for me. I wasn't planning on living in one (it sounded like a life more ideal for pre- or post-kid couples), but I was fascinated by the concept. It seemed to me that tiny houses could address so many issues people are facing: Families who struggle to pay for a larger home could reduce to a smaller space and not have to work four jobs to make ends meet; people who are trying to reduce their environmental footprint could help take care of God's creation by living in a home that takes less energy to support; people drowning in American excess could downsize their possessions and focus instead on what really matters as they simplify their lives. I couldn't get enough of the articles and videos addressing current issues and

challenges through "tiny living."

Hearing the idea for Redeemer Village opened my eyes to even bigger possibilities. What could tiny houses do for a ministry? Could it provide a safe place for families who lost their jobs and needed to downsize while they got back on their feet? Could it be a place where students and interns could live on site, limiting debt they might be accruing while they pursue their education, even perhaps offering a kind of family community while they transition to adult life? What about single parents who are trying desperately to find a way to support their family without working every single hour they are awake? What about the homeless? What about those who are trying to find more environmentally friendly housing solutions to honor the planet God has given us? I was so excited about the possibilities, it was hard to think about anything else. For months. I couldn't believe we had ended up in a church that shared this kind of passion with me. I couldn't wait to see it unfold.

Spring 2020 hit. I lost my full-time job and began to wonder about the uncertain future of my family. The mortgage on our "regular sized" home suddenly loomed large over us. I began to think that maybe it was time to consider applying my tiny obsession to my own life. I talked to Eamon about selling our house and using the proceeds to buy and move into something tiny, escaping the squeeze of our mortgage. He agreed and we began to investigate it.

That's when my eyes opened to something I had not considered before: I

thought downsizing would be simple. It wasn't. In fact, we had the door slammed in our face at every turn. Even when we found friends who were going to let us park in their yard, I was horrified to find out that the laws, insurance, and logistics were an absolute nightmare for individuals to navigate. After months of praying and planning, we pulled the plug on the plan. By then, Eamon had begun a new job that was making our bills much more manageable, and we were no longer in crisis mode. But I found that much of my excitement about the prospects of tiny living had turned to anger.

I was angry that it was so hard for people in need to be able to make the changes they wanted to keep themselves out of crippling debt. Angry that the laws made it tricky for people to open their homes (and yards) to those in need. Angry that we are facing an energy crisis, and yet it was so difficult for people to move somewhere that could help solve it. And then after I felt angry, I felt sad. I thought about the countless people that could be reached through something like a housing ministry, but were left to try and figure it out on their own. I saw the huge influx of people fleeing to Greensboro from Afghanistan and wondered what it would look like if we had actual homes for them to come into while they started their new lives. What if the church not only opened its arms and doors to the least of these, but already had an established way to meet some of their most basic needs—like a roof over their heads?

in a tiny place

by Cassie Bryant



During my time helping on the Farm, Lena Van Wyk and I had bonded over our mutual excitement for the possible future of Redeemer Village. In Fall 2021, I approached her and asked what was keeping the ministry from moving forward, since it seemed like the ministry had become more relevant than ever. She said that what it really boiled down to was that we didn't know what we didn't know about having people live there. How complicated would insurance be? Would the neighborhood be thrilled or angry? How much energy would a family actually use? What are the hundreds of logistics that we just won't know until we put real live humans on the property? And that's when the idea came to me: I asked Lena about putting a test family on the property.

In May 2022, Eamon and I sold our first home and purchased a used tiny house that was shipped in from Virginia. We went from 1,000 sq ft with a full garage and shed to 320 sq ft with two lofts to sleep in. We moved our two children (and two cats) into a house that was less than a third of what we had lived in before. And so we began the grand experiment of seeing what it would mean (both for our family and for the church) to have people live at New Garden Park.

We have already discovered a lot. Some things were far easier than we imagined, and some issues popped up seemingly out of nowhere. But as we move forward each week, we collect more information about how a village of this type could actually work. We spent months trying to track down insurance that would cover us, but we've

found it and now, we can tell others that need it where to find it! We've spent hours every week working on the Farm and property to see where it would be helpful for people who live on the property to barter work for the ability to live on site. We've talked to Steven and Bethany Hebbard, who came from living in a tiny house village in Texas, designed to help house the homeless, and learned a lot of practical advice about housing ministries and intentional community. And as we have told our story to others, we have seen their faces light up as they share their own ideas about where they could see this ministry going. They talk about how we could reach the elderly who cannot maintain their larger homes. They talk about their loved ones with special needs who would benefit from such a place of communal living. We've watched families try to recover from the financial hit of the pandemic, looking for ways to cut costs. We've listened as people speak about how they have desperately wanted to do something like this, but didn't know where to start.

We can't provide housing for everyone in the world who needs it. We can't even provide it for everyone who needs it in Greensboro. But, and this is perhaps my favorite part of the whole experiment, we are creating a guidebook for how to serve the community through housing. Once we have the information we need to launch Redeemer Village, we can share that with anyone and everyone who wants to provide a roof in Jesus' name to those in need. What if one church were to start a village for those fleeing or immigrating from other countries, and another

church started a village for the homeless, and another for families in need, and another and another and another? What if the Church responded to the housing crisis by creating affordable housing options? As we continue to pursue a vision of helping those in our community, we can also become an equipping station for other churches who see this growing need and can reach out in this way to their communities.

As we figure out the logistics of our situation through trial and error (who knew toilets would be so complicated?), I am encouraged daily by the fact that with each new thing we learn, we can share that knowledge with those around us, working together towards being Jesus' hands and feet by filling a great need of our community. This has become our church home in an entirely new way, and I hope to help others find a home here as well, in more ways than one.



fill his house

by Sam Cox

Recently, Erin and I attended several weddings and received invitations to several more. This season of weddings made us think about the guest lists that often are so troubling for the bride and groom to work out. Do you invite that great aunt in Topeka you haven't seen in ten years? What about your college roommate with whom you no longer keep in regular touch? Will the guest list be large or small, family-only or 600 of your "closest" friends? Whose feelings might be hurt if they are not invited: does it really matter since it is your wedding? How much will it all cost? I imagine that such perplexing questions weigh on the hearts of all brides and grooms to some degree or another.

As I ponder this, I am reminded of the parable of the wedding feast and the great banquet in Luke 14. As the bride of Christ, He invites us all to the celebration so that we might feast, regardless of our status or wealth. Jesus never frets over our blood relationship, how long we have known Him, or our standing in the community as He invites all of us to sit at the table with Him, to break bread and feast on His body and blood for all eternity. Regrettably, all too often those of us who have been invited to the wedding banquet, like the guests in Jesus' parable, decline the invitation, and Jesus extends the invitation to "the poor and crippled and blind and lame...and still there is room." So Jesus says we should then "Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled" (Luke 14:7-23).

One of our core values at Church of the Redeemer is to be "radically hospitable." As the Gospel of Jesus radically welcomes us, we welcome others too. We are to "Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality" (Romans 12:13). There are a myriad of ways we can do this and are doing this through our Parish, Park, Farm, and Abbey. The Church of the Redeemer truly lives up to this core value as we regularly practice radical hospitality. The Abbey in particular, though, is a way we can extend this biblical value outside the four walls of the church and the nine acres of our farm and park.

The First Century church, as well as later in the Middle Ages, saw parish ministry as a way to spiritually form both new and mature believers, while also establishing parallel but separate missional outreach ministries to serve their respective communities both locally and abroad, spread the Gospel, and to be ambassadors for Christ in a fallen world. In the European medieval church, this was done largely through the monasteries, including their missionary outreach. One example was in the Irish (Celtic) monastic movement, whereby there began to be the integration of the parish with the emerging local economy, as the nomadic Celtic "barbaric" tribes began coalescing around the monastery. The Abbey developed and essentially became the seedbed for a stable economy, learning and culture, and fellowship within the emerging Christian communi-

ty. For nearly five centuries, from around the Fifth through the Tenth centuries AD, until the church began moving away from this model and, in the British region, King Henry VIII closed all the monasteries so that he could confiscate their wealth for his selfish purposes. These communities, while they lasted, centered around the monastic Abbeys, and were the spiritual, cultural, academic, and economic centers of their regions. And, like Jesus' invitation to the wedding feast, the missionaries to the Celts invited all to come and dine, to fellowship, to take part in the spiritual, cultural, intellectual, and commercial activities of the Abbeys.

Jesus did not come to set up a new political kingdom nor to invite only those who know the language and customs (the secret handshake, if you will) of the church, but rather he came to establish a new community, one that consisted of redeemed, called out, people. This redeemed community would live out the Kingdom of Heaven rather than legislate it from an earthly government. In the Early Middle Ages of Europe, these communities were often the Abbeys.

Fast forward sixteen centuries later and the Church of the Redeemer abbey is "living out the Kingdom" in the arts, in business, in the marketplace of life, often to reach those not necessarily inclined to step through the doors of the church. These independent enterprises are growing up around the parish, not as subservient to it, but as the context out of which can be lived--poverty alleviation, welcoming the lost, coming alongside refugees, counseling both believer and nonbelievers, ministering to those with various intellectual or physical challenges, racial reconciliation, and so many other forms of ministry, not as demanding it from a decaying society, nor by requiring church membership for it to be extended, but living it in the Micah 6:8 fashion. For "what does the Lord require of [us] but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with [our] God." While the parish devotes much of its time to discipleship of believers, much of the heart of what we do is lived out on the periphery with the abbey ministries reaching the broader community and welcoming them to the Kingdom.

We have that opportunity today at Church of the Redeemer, with our--unique today but not unique to the historic church mission--Parish, Park, Farm, Abbey quadrivium as separate yet parallel and united ways to minister to the greater community. As our post-Christian secularism and gnosticism increase, we should be vigorous equally to prayerfully solicit the help of the Holy Spirit in the spiritual formation of our church members and visitors in our Parish, while also providing outreach beyond the confines of the church proper with our Abbey. In part through our Abbey, we want to practice radical hospitality and invite those outside our church to participate in the wedding feast Christ invites us all to attend.

The Church of the Redeemer Abbey provides support, structure, accountability, networking, and guidance in this often chaotic community that is living out our faith. The Abbey provides, essentially, marketplace ministries to reach the last, the least, and the lost. The Abbey's mission is "to serve and equip God's Kingdom by building a network of support to ministries living out their faith." At Church of the Redeemer, we seek to revive the ancient Abbey ministries to serve and equip the greater community by spreading the Gospel through various tent-making, marketplace ministries. We want to be equally committed and vigorous to prayerfully solicit the help of the Holy Spirit in the spiritual formation of our church members and visitors in our Parish--those coming to church on Sunday mornings, while also providing outreach beyond the confines of the church proper with our Abbey. The Abbey is an extension of the church, a connected entity looking outward rather than inward, seeking to minister to "the last, the least, and the lost" (Matthew 20, 25). The Abbey extends our reach further with an assortment of external marketplace, both formal and informal, ministries to reach a wider audience, often those who might not otherwise hear the Good News of Jesus Christ.

We currently have a variety of disparate Abbey ministries, each led by a COTR member, with the Abbey Director serving as a liaison between these independent, non-profit marketplace ministries

and the church. These Abbey ministries serve both locally in the Triad as well as some of them globally. These ministries include New Wineskins, led by Jenny Noyes; Pathways Innovation, led by Mack Arrington and Steve Hase; Molly Mac Gear, led by MacEntryre Allen; The William Wilberforce Center for Justice and Human Rights, led by Jeff Weber; The Center for Contemplative Living, led by Tom Benson; World Relief, led locally by Jonathan Musser; Always Forward, led by Father Dan Alger; The New Garden Institute, led by Dr. Jason Myers; Friends of Gahini, led by Cherie and Ben Weber; a local chapter of Anglicans for Life, led by Brianna Bracken; Kinneret Counseling (in Israel), led by Ashley Medford; Christ in Ordinary Life, led by Dr. Nathan Hedman; Business as Mission, led by Tripp Graziano; The Covenant School led by the Rev'd Drew Hill; Southern Liturgy Brewing, led by Eric Marohn and Patrick Lineberry; Christian Educational Ministry to Pakistan, led by Max Graham; along with a large handful of other existing and start-up ministries that are considering linking arms with our Abbey.

May we "[G]o out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that [His] house may be filled" (Luke 14:23). May we dine at the table together, whether as members of our particular church or not, and may our hearts overflow with the goodness and kindness of Christ as we spread His Gospel throughout His land.





the heart of Children's Liturgy

by Karen Alger

Children are valued, precious souls that God loves and pursues. God has charged parents and guardians with the stewardship of not only the physical and emotional needs of children, but their spiritual discipleship as well, and the Redeemer Kids Team is passionate about supporting and aiding in this work in the lives of those in our parish. We pray that our ministries of nursery, Children's Liturgy, and support of families worshiping in the sanctuary not only facilitate true worship while at Redeemer, but go beyond to aid in the deepening of faith in the daily lives of these families.

Children's Liturgy (CL) is the name given to the Sunday morning worship opportunity for children at Redeemer. To the best of our ability, the Redeemer Kids Team is always working to answer the questions, "How can we take care of these children while they are with us on Sunday morning; and how can we come alongside families in discipling them the other six days of the week?" The vision is for CL to be a sustainable, weekly cycle of welcoming children into a safe environment that is loving and hospitable with volunteers experiencing life-giving worship alongside children; a place where God's Word is studied, children have the opportunity to pray and share their concerns, and families are equipped to live lives that please him.

To these ends, each week, CL seeks to provide a safe environment that meets children where they are while studying God's Word

and worshiping in the Anglican tradition together with developmentally appropriate language and activities. Parents who choose for their children to attend Children's Liturgy can have an expectation that their children will learn Biblical truth and practice Anglican liturgy. Following our Anglican tradition, CL avails itself of an ongoing, never-ending liturgical cycle: this means that whatever children walk in the door, in whatever time or season they join us, we are ready to receive them and they can integrate seamlessly. The environment is safe and consistent, following a familiar and predictable structure like the liturgy being experienced in the sanctuary. We believe in the power of scripture and long to help children hide God's Word in their hearts so that they are equipped for the daily challenges they encounter. Each week, God's Word is read aloud, and children are given the opportunity to interact with it and with each other; they are given the opportunity to offer prayers to God, letting their voices be heard, and are equipped with different methods of interacting with God. We challenge kids to understand the difficult concepts of sin and salvation, explain that baptism is one's entrance into the Church as the worldwide body of believers, and invite them to participate in sharing God's love with others.

Children's Liturgy seeks to do its part in fulfilling the mission of Redeemer to be a "worshiping, missional, community of faith" by providing an opportunity for au-

thentic worship to any child who comes into our community. We do not seek to entertain or to promote any particular agenda but abide strictly to our charge to study God's word and practice Biblical worship. Our volunteers help children practice different tools for prayer and worship so that they are equipped to study, worship, and pray every day—not just on Sundays. In addition to the mission of Redeemer, CL also seeks to align with its values: radically hospitable, Biblically faithful, thoughtfully Anglican, intentionally intergenerational, ethnically diverse, and freely generous.

Safety is one of the ways we offer hospitality and generosity to our children and their families. All of our volunteers go through a lengthy process of background checks and child abuse prevention training. The Redeemer Kids Team also puts hours into cleaning the Grove, encouraging families and volunteers, and designing activities that children will love. Each week, we invite kids into our space and into our lives no matter who they are, where they're from, or how long they're going to be with us. We are vigilant in thinking through what would make a person comfortable and able to engage, brainstorming as a team—in real time and through post-service reflection—how we can best prepare our space before the kids arrive. Knowing that kids are coming from all different experiences and home situations, with all different abilities, needs, and gifts, we work hard to provide welcome and safety while kids are with us.

Our number one priority is that we stick strictly to God's word. Almost every single line of our liturgy is from scripture or from the Book of Common Prayer, which is based upon, often quoting, scripture. God's Word is living and active. We hide it in our hearts so that we might not sin against Him. We are not shaping children into our own understanding of what a Christian should be, but instead stepping aside for scripture to function as its true and active self. As we remodel our new CL room, our goal is to have scripture on every wall in the room so that kids will be surrounded by God's word at all times. We long to help children memorize scripture, believing it will equip them to read God's Word and experience its power for themselves.

Our liturgy follows the church calendar and lectionary, celebrating the liturgical seasons and thereby allowing children to orient their lives around the life of Jesus. When children leave the sanctuary and arrive in our worship space, they are immediately welcomed and oriented to the space. Within a few minutes, a child liturgist steps forward and begins the liturgy from the point where we left the sanctuary service. Our worship time includes Songs of Praise (utilizing a song our Music Director, Amelia, has recorded for us), the reading of God's Word by a child reader, the study of the scripture, Prayers of the People, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Confession and Absolution, and the Passing of the Peace. Every week, a member of the Redeemer clergy is assigned to participate in CL for the confession and blessing of the children. We also make space for "liturgical nuggets" when we explain or discuss a piece of our liturgical tradition. We invite children to serve as Cross-Bearer, Pointer (who directs participants to our written liturgy), Reader, and Liturgist, and when children reach 4th grade, they are invited to learn to serve as acolytes in the sanctuary services as well.

As with the participation of our clergy in CL, the role of our adult volunteers is intentional, active, and essential. Volunteers not only set and manage the physical environment, but through their lives and the use of unique passions and gifts, they model love of God and the beauty of worship. When kids come to CL, they are given an authentic worship experience. One of our regular volunteers often chooses to lead us in worship with his guitar, thus sharing his love of music and how it informs his per-

sonal connection to God. In this way, and many others, volunteers are sharing how and when they feel close to God. Volunteers are trained and encouraged to interact with the kids in a real and authentic way—sharing our struggles and real-life experiences so that the children see what it looks like when someone is living out a relationship with God. In CL, there's a sense of drawing near to God together: intentional modeling in humility and vulnerability that shows that what we are doing there is real and relevant, not fake and theoretical. We are doing our best to be true worshippers and through the use of liturgical structure and personal modeling, we aim to shape the children we encounter into people who do not just go through the motions of worship but internalize that experience authentically for themselves. We know we are operating in a successful way when our volunteers are healthy and worshipping alongside the children, not burdened by service but given life by this intergenerational worship experience.

One of the ways we love our kids well is by engaging them in their particular developmental stage. Children are always welcome to stay with their families in the sanctuary during corporate worship. However, we considered that children are sitting under a sermon that they may not be able to absorb, and so we wanted to provide an opportunity through CL for children to step out of the sanctuary and come into another worship space designed for their developmental level. There, we're able to pick up where we left off with the liturgy in the sanctuary and present things, like the sermon, in a way that they can understand. As leader of Children's Liturgy, Karen Alger attends service planning meetings and is on all communications for the preaching team, so she is able to prepare ahead of time for what the sermon will be about, almost always addressing the same theme or topic as the sermon does through the lectionary. When a sermon's content is not appropriate for younger listeners, we usually address the gospel reading, contextualizing it for kids. We never change the words of the scripture or liturgy themselves, but customize the interaction with and discussion of these things in a way that ages 4 through 5th grade may find accessible. The liturgy and the environment of CL is universal to all kids, who share similar questions and have the same need to be welcomed and seen where they are. During our time in CL, we

offer ways to share God's love with others, strategies for resolving conflict, and suggestions for how to serve God within the parameters of being a child. For the places where our children's needs differ by age, we have the opportunity to split into smaller groups so that older kids have time together to engage in journaling and discuss more complex thoughts, prayer requests, and issues. In all things, CL seeks to build community as children are able to worship and interact with others of a similar age.

With Redeemer's shift to two services this fall, Children's Liturgy needs more faithful adult volunteers. We welcome adults of all talents and trades who are willing to vulnerably share their lives and experiences as they make themselves available to love and serve our kids well. We are so excited to now have our very own space. What used to be the middle school youth room is now the CL room; we are working to update and make the space our own and need helping hands to join this endeavor! Having just completed our first full year as a program, we are seeing a new smoothness to our structure and processes, and are witnessing a sense of camaraderie between our volunteers as well as our participating kids. We see our kids becoming more Biblically and liturgically literate and this fuels our energy for the work ahead. We pray that Children's Liturgy may play a part in helping to build authentic faith that bolsters our children's life experiences throughout the week, and that we might be a rich resource for entire families to turn to God and long to live a life for and with him. Ultimately, we work tirelessly to fulfill the commitment "we will!" that is shouted by the congregation at each baptism service when asked the question "Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?"

*For questions or to join in worshipping
with the Children's Liturgy Team,
please email Karen Alger at
Karen@redeemergso.org.*



The Heart of the *Matter*

by Brianne Bracken

In 2020, I started to see the word *matter* everywhere. Black lives matter, All lives matter, Blue lives matter: it seemed the phrase had caught on to just about anyone and anything. One could say that Life was a big theme in 2020. Every single person on the planet was affected by the Coronavirus. Worldwide, people were struck by the fear of losing life.

The heart is the core of us. Without it, we have no life. It is the first organ that begins to form immediately after a baby's conception and is fully developed by 8 weeks. Our hearts are the powerhouses that hold the key to making our bodies function. Ironically, this is where the Lord tells us that he dwells.

When the Lord dwells in our heart, he gives us the superpower of the Holy Spirit to guide us in truth and help us conform our hearts to His. As humans, our sin nature often gets the best of us and for so many, we never come close to discovering the immense power of the Holy Spirit that dwells in us. But God tells us in 2 Corinthians 3:17-18 "For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is there is Freedom. So all of us who have had the veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord, who is the Spirit, makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image."

In 2020, God began to use the Holy Spirit to reveal to me new depths of his heart of forgiveness, truth, and compassion for sin. The world was in such turmoil: Covid, political strife, racial unrest, crumbling marriages. I found myself on my knees most days and nights calling out "Oh Lord how I need you; my family needs you; our world needs you!" During this time, the Lord began to move me to seek truth about who he is, discover ways to share his heart with a broken world, and practice courage in using my voice in the world.

My curiosity was led towards the issues of abortion, teen suicides, sexuality, and depression that was stealing so much joy from lives. I discovered that so much of what our world is in turmoil over ends up at the doorstep of an abortion clinic: racial injustice, oppression, abuse, sex trafficking, pornography, gender issues, promiscuity, depression, drug addiction, greed, power, even money!

The Lord began to open doors for me to be a part of the pro-life community. I ended up joining the Triad Coalition For Life at the abortion clinic in Greensboro. When I arrived it was very confusing: I felt a pit in my stomach as I witnessed such division in that parking lot between very different perspectives both believing that they were there to help the women who had come to the clinic that day. On one hand, there was a large, pink ultrasound mobile unit and women handing out bags of information as cars drove in. On the other hand, there were escorts wearing bright colored vests, playing loud music, and meeting women at their vehicles to es-



cort them in. My heart broke as I watched these vulnerable women navigate this confusing environment as they faced a very difficult choice. It caused me to think about our own church community and the teens, college students, and women there whose hearts have been wounded either by their own decisions or by decisions someone else made for them. The guilt, shame, and grief that they may carry. I came away from that experience feeling strongly that ministry to such as these is needed in every church across the nation, and I wanted to be a part of making this happen.

After talking with Bishop Alan about it, I came to find out the Anglican church has a wonderful organization called Anglicans for Life. Since then, I have been in conversation with the President, Georgette Forney, about bringing a Chapter to Redeemer. Abortion is often the issue with the most heated opinions, voices speaking out, and press coverage because it is about the fate of so many lives. In God's actions on the cross, we see him demonstrating his heart when he sacrificially gave his life so that we could live. I want to be a part of sharing with others the power of that substitutional love, and help others know that the Holy Spirit that can guide their every decision and lead them to freedom from the burdens of the world.

Georgette has helped me see how Anglicans for Life encompasses all life-sanctifying choices, not just as related to abortion. The mission statement of Anglicans for life is: "Every Person in every church doing one thing every day to uphold the sacredness of life." "Sacredness of life" encompasses abortion, infertility, suicide, adoption, abstinence, sexual promiscuity, sexual identity, and bioethics, and upholding it seeks to protect the vulnerable—including the unborn, the infirm, and the elderly.

Inhabiting the heart of God can transform our spirits to be hopeful no matter our circumstances, to not fear the burdens of tomorrow, to love our enemies, love our neighbors, and to forgive without ever needing it in return. Perhaps if the entire world knew our Lord's heart and lived those principles, the divisions we experience would not exist. When our bodies are cracked wide open, we are all made of the same matter and every one of those lives does matter!

REEL WORLD REVIEW

by Mikey Fissel

OCCASIONALLY, I love to go back and re-watch films that made an impact on me in earlier years to see if it's lost some of its heft, or if perhaps my life and experience draws out something that I missed the first time. I'll admit, I have been looking forward to sitting down with this one since Robin Williams's passing nearly a decade ago. I recall his character in this film being wise, grounded, and affecting: While Will Hunting (Matt Damon) is the focus of the film, Williams' Sean is its beating heart.

Good Will Hunting is a film that feels like it benefits from life experience. It is crazy to think that Matt Damon and Ben Affleck were merely in their twenties when they wrote it. It captures a lot of what it felt like to feel young and aimless in the late nineties (a theme that was explored a lot at that time). The world was getting smaller through the availability of information, but systems and practices were still in place as hurdles to achievement (ie. college degrees).

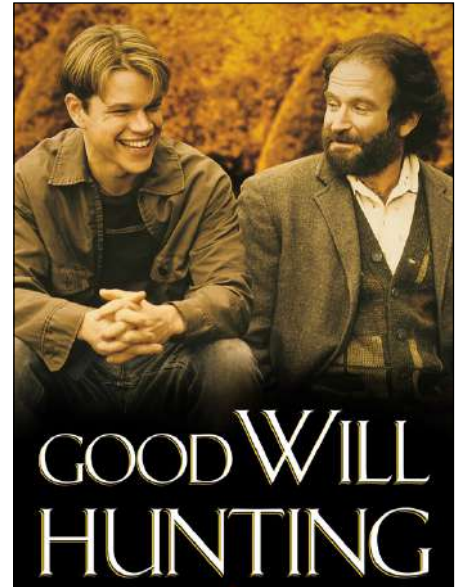
Looking back, the film, outside of the refer-

ences to a physical library being the center of collected information instead of something like Wikipedia, ages rather well. There is still, at its core, a story about a boy who, though gifted, has incredible trauma in his past and does not know how to deal with it. While Sean isn't perfect, he is able to see through the mechanisms Will puts up to protect himself that actually also shield him from experiencing hope or joy.

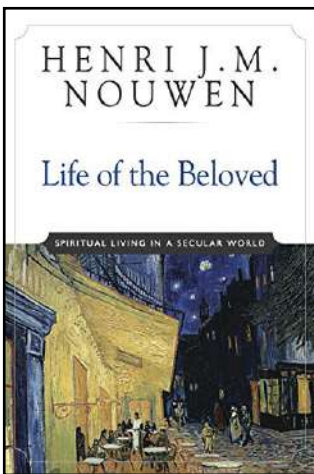
It's 2022 and social media has shown no sign of a slowing down of its influence on people. The internet is the great barrier. It provides us with more connectivity and information than we've ever had; yet, it also provides more isolation and anonymity than we could have ever imagined. Williams' pivotal monologue from the film still rings true. I could watch it over and over. There is a huge difference between knowing and experiencing and we cannot experience without risk. The walls that prevent us from experiencing grief also prevent us from experiencing hope. Eventually, Sean is able to get through to Will and Will's life is changed because he allows his heart to lead instead of his head, so to speak. This doesn't mean Will leaves his genius behind, he just allows the two to work in unison to allow him a full shot at the human experience.

It's films like this that sometimes seem to hit at just the right time. Advent is a time of longing and, in many ways, grief. It's a time of reflec-

tion on the pain of the past juxtaposed with the hope of the future. One does not exist fully without the other. What is all the knowledge in the world if the world was never meant to simply be understood, but lived in? Much like Will being vulnerable to his past so that he can make way for his future, we embrace Advent to fully celebrate the joy of Christmas because without our hearts being in the right place, Christmas is just another holiday where we go through the motions and come out on the other side unchanged.



Life of the Beloved by Henri J.M. Nouwen



WHEN I FIRST READ *Life of the Beloved* years ago, I remember it being so rich and inviting. Each word, sentence, and paragraph was so thoughtfully considered and chosen. I have often referred back to it, occasionally pulling it from the shelf to flip through, or just recalling the cycle described therein of being taken, blessed, broken, and given as a sign of the beloved of God. Each week as we gather as a church body and share in the Eucharist, we recall together that the bread and the wine of Christ's body

and blood are taken, blessed, broken, and given for us. And each day is filled with opportunities to see this cycle in our own lives as well.

It had been a while since I had read it, so upon re-reading it recently, I realized that I had forgotten the inspiration of a friendship that both called and enabled Nouwen to write this book. I appreciated the reminder that in friendship, we are heard and known, challenged, and share in one another's burdens so that we have the strength and the courage to press on. Returning to the theme of friendship later in the book, Nouwen writes, "deep friendship is a calling forth of each other's chosenness and a mutual affirmation of being precious in God's eyes." What a beautiful description of how we are invited to participate in the Kingdom of God by recalling to each other that we are beloved, chosen by God, and that we are

known and loved. That the Good Shepherd calls us each by name and seeks out the one that wandered away because each one is so valuable. It can be so easy to convince ourselves that we know this most essential truth, but I know that I am so deeply encouraged and feel so deeply cared for when a friend takes the time to remind me of my belovedness.

I am most grateful for and most challenged by Nouwen writing, "The real question is not 'What can we offer each other?' but 'Who can we be for each other?'" In this world, and even in the church, we get caught up in keeping score and finding value in what we have to offer and what others have to offer us. We need to be reminded that our presence and our posture toward one another speaks much louder than the things that we can do for one another. That isn't to discount the overlap between simply being and showing love to one another by doing things, but haven't you noticed the difference between feeling the need to perform or meet a standard, and being welcomed and celebrated for who you are as a beloved child of God? If our starting point is to recognize that we are chosen, and to lift up the chosenness of others, shouldn't it follow that our primary focus is on the true identity of the person before us? And if that is the foundation for one's identity, we can celebrate the gifts and talents of others without confusing what they do with who they are.

To be addressed as Beloved—don't we all need that reminder again and again? What Nouwen invites us into with this book is simple, practical, and profound. Whether you have read other books by Nouwen and are familiar with the depth that he offers, or this is your first taste of his rich way of speaking to the essence of something, I hope that you will be encouraged and your soul nourished as you read. And if it sparks questions or just exclamations of joy, I would love to hear about it!

reviewed by Tressa Czynsz

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