Sermons, Reflections and Meditations

KING'S COLLEGE CHAPEL, 2015-2016

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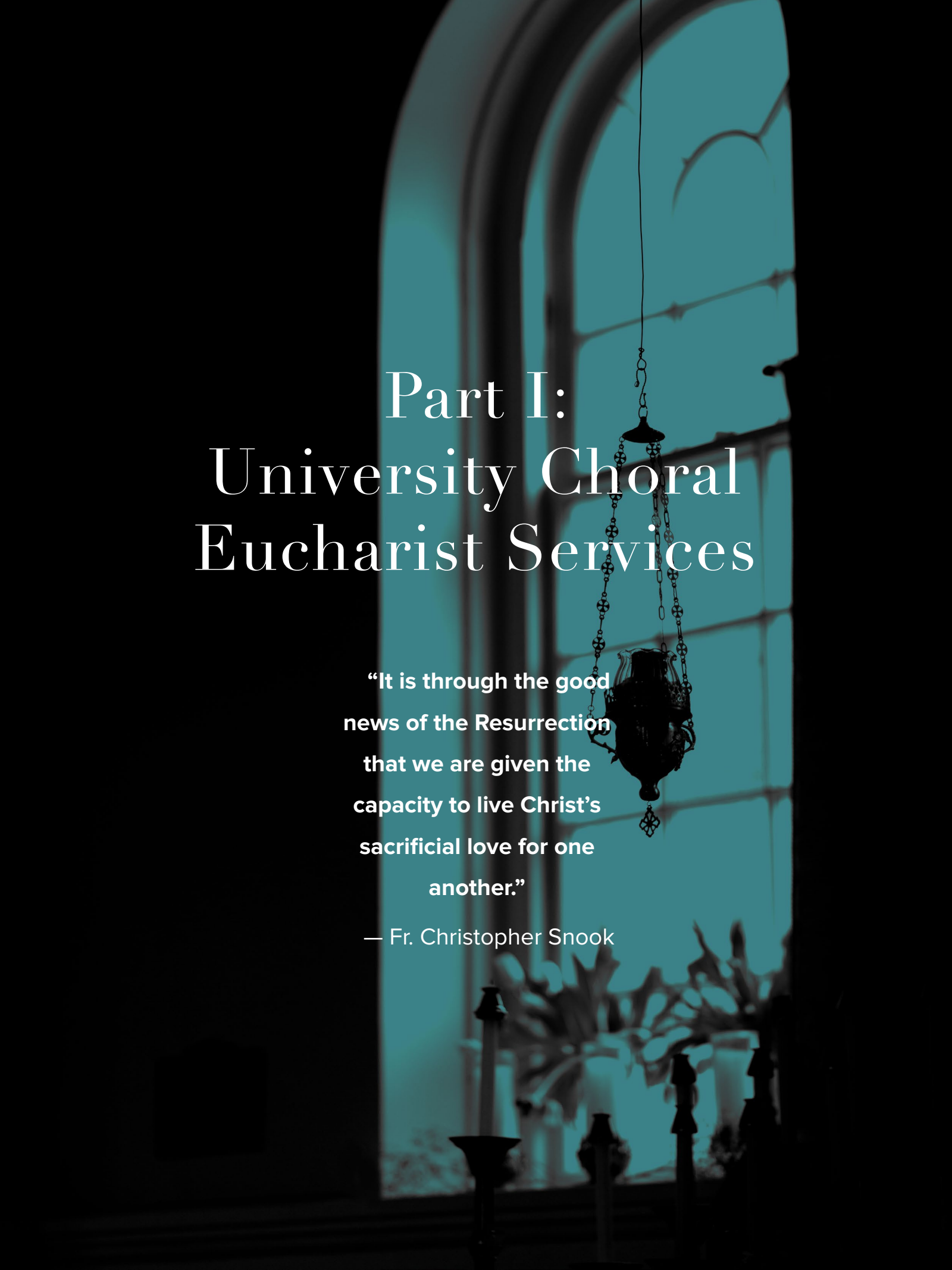

Part I: University Choral Eucharist Services

"It is through the good news of the Resurrection that we are given the capacity to live Christ's sacrificial love for one another."

— Fr. Christopher Snook

Trinity XV

FATHER NICHOLAS HATT • SEPTEMBER 17

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow" (Matt. 6:28).

Our Gospel lesson this evening comes from Jesus' famous "Sermon on the Mount", his first substantial address, early on in his public ministry, as recorded by Matthew. It contains an exhortation which, on the surface, doesn't seem very helpful: "Be not anxious about your life," he says. It's the worst thing someone can say to us when we are feeling anxious. It conveys neither empathy nor sympathy for our situation, and usually makes us feel even more anxious than we were before!

But Jesus is not trying to empathize with us this evening.

He is trying to teach us about the nature of reality, about how to understand our relation to God and nature and one another.

This is the question of the ancient world; indeed, it is a question which looms in every text we read in FYP, in some form or another: on Monday, Professor O'Brien reminded us in his FYP Lecture that Odysseus' journey is to discover whether human desire can be reconciled to the limitations posed by the cosmic order, including our relation to one another, to nature, and to the gods.

Jesus has the same question for us this evening.

"Ye cannot serve God and Mammon," (Matt. 6:24) Jesus says. Somehow, Mammon—that desire we all have to choose lust over love, personal gain over constraint, greed over charity—is in opposition to God. "[W]hoever serves mammon submits to a hard and ruinous master," says Saint Augustine: he will become entangled in his own lust, he will find his heart—his desire—in conflict with himself.

But the conflict in our hearts is often not apparent to us. It comes about so unexpectedly, in the most hidden of ways, explains Augustine: we head out to do a good work—a work of charity, a demand for justice—intending to help others. But whom are we really serving? asks Augustine. We suppose that we are serving others, but perhaps we merely seek our own gain: to feel good about ourselves, having accomplished a good deed.

And what happens when that good work demands something from us? What happens when our efforts go unappreciated, or even seem to have made the situation worse? What happens when it no longer just feels good to do good for others? We get tangled up in our own desires, our desire to help conflicting with our unacknowledged desire for personal gain. It can feel as though we are being punished for our good deeds. We feel defeated, undone, even betrayed, with nothing left to give.

No wonder we are left feeling anxious.

This is, says Jesus, the order of things: "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon".

Jesus puts the alternative before us, however.

"Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns," he says, "yet your heavenly Father feedeth them" (Matt. 6:26).

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow," he says. "[T]hey toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Matt. 6:28).

These smallest of creatures, the most ordinary things of nature, have something important to teach us.

They labour not for what they eat or what they wear, and yet they are fed abundantly and beautifully adorned.

In everything they wait—and unlike us, they must wait—upon the Providence of God.

"If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven; shall he not much more clothe you?" Jesus says. "Therefore, be not anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?...for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things" (Matt. 6:30-32).

When Jesus tells us not to be anxious, he's not dismissing our anxieties. They are real concerns, after all. But he calls us to re-examine them, to recognise the necessary limits of our desires and to accept our dependence upon the Goodness of God. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow," (Matt. 6:28) he says. "[Y]our heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things" (Matt. 6:32). Can we believe this truth?

The Gospel reading concludes this evening with Jesus' exhortation to "seek first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). This passage is often interpreted as a moral imperative, suggesting that we will be handsomely rewarded for proper behaviour.

But if this were true, we would merely repeat the error of our former ways. We desire God not for the sake of personal gain or reward, but simply because our ultimate desire is for God, for divine Goodness and Truth and Beauty.

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto?" What can this mean for us except that we must wait patiently on the Lord, to abide his Providence, knowing that he, in his "perpetual mercy", shall provide for us? "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow" (Matt. 6:28).

This doesn't mean we must refrain from acting in the world; but it does mean seeing the world in a new light, from a new perspective: we must discern the right moments to act and the right moments to wait on God's action. It means learning the proper limits of our own agency and how to respect those limits.

This is the question with which the Gospel repeatedly confronts us, and it is the question which confronts us now more than ever. Do we believe that God is faithful, and that he will provide for us? Or, to ask it another way: How will the demands of justice be fulfilled?

Of course, it is hard to discern these moments, and we will probably get it wrong, more often than we get it right. And often another will see us entangled in our own desires sooner than we shall see it ourselves. That's why, as Father Thorne reminded us in his sermon last week, we do this work together, bearing one another's burdens with patience, praying and hoping upon God's grace for one another. This evening, in this Eucharist, God himself will carry you and all your burdens. May we open our hearts to receive this Grace.

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow" (Matt. 6:28). AMEN.

Trinity XVI

FATHER RANALL INGALLS • SEPTEMBER 24

From the Epistle of St Paul to the Ephesians, "For this cause I bow my knees to the Father [...] that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, [...] might be filled with all the fullness of God."

Jesus' miracles are signs. They are always called 'signs' in St John's Gospel, and with good reason. If the miracle in this week's Gospel was some other or something less than a sign, we might well wonder why the compassion that moved Jesus to call this young man from death did not lead Him to raise the countless sons of widows who have wept in utter destitution in the same way at other times and in other places. The raising of the widow's son is a sign of Christ's compassion for human suffering. To that extent it is of a piece with his tears at the grave of Lazarus, his friend. But this sign also reveals something of who Christ is – always, everywhere, and for all, and what He is always doing. It is a sign to point us beyond appearances to the reality that He is the Word and Wisdom of God, from Whom all things proceed, by Whom all things are sustained in being, and to Whom all things return either by the power with which He endows them in Creation or by His Spirit in mercy and in grace or both. It is a sign of the power over death and beyond death that is Christ's just because He is the Word and Wisdom of God – the power that will be more fully displayed in his own resurrection from the dead.

Christ's power over death and beyond death brings with it no promise to those who know and follow Him that they will escape loss and suffering. 'Take up your cross,' he says, 'and follow me.' And we know where the way of the cross leads. Still less does Christ promise that a chosen few may one day survive to see a paradise on earth, transformed by technology harnessed to master nature. Christ was no stranger to suffering, and he assured his followers that some among them would not have perished until they saw his Kingdom come in power. And come it did, in His resurrection, in the ascension in which he made a place for our flesh and blood – our human nature – in the life of God Himself, and in the gift of the Spirit, by which men and women are able to live here and now in this world in a Kingdom not bound by time or space, nor divided by human failure, folly, and perversity. But those who were first made citizens of this universal kingdom of love and knowledge were immediately sent out to bear witness to it in the face of every kind of indifference, contempt, hostility and rejection. To the best of our knowledge, all but one of the Apostles died violent deaths.

Hence St Paul's message for the Christians in Ephesus in this week's Epistle. He is imprisoned and in danger because of his faith in Christ. From prison he urges them not to be dismayed by anything he may be called upon to suffer, not to imagine that Christ has abandoned him, and so not to suppose that Christ has abandoned them. Rather, he reminds them that the God and Father of Jesus Christ is the One 'from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named'. He is the author of a universal family, a universal Kingdom, and Christ has opened the way to this Kingdom for the whole human race. St Paul prays that they may be made strong by the Spirit of Christ, 'that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith'. Strength requires roots, so he asks God that they may have such roots: roots in the love and mercy of God toward the whole human race which in Christ overcomes every obstacle. In all their weakness, folly and perversity, the Christians at Ephesus may still have such roots in love, in 'the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge'. All of it – suffering, loss, weakness, folly, perversity, and even death itself - has been redeemed by this surpassing love.

It was the calling of Lancelot Andrewes, whom we commemorate this evening, to recall the means by which all things are brought into the redemption accomplished by Christ gathered to God. He bore witness to the way in which God gathers all things together in an age of division, fragmentation, and often violence. In 1555, the year in which he was born, three reforming Bishops were burned at the stake in Oxford under Queen Mary. He was still a young boy when she died, but England under Queen Elizabeth I and James I continued to be plagued by bitter and sometimes violent divisions. These would bear bitter fruit after his death in the English Civil War.

Andrewes lived a life of study and prayer. The Scriptures drew together the thoughts that were the fruit of hours of study day after day, decade after decade, and public worship drew together the holy desires born of hours spent each day in prayer. His words, and especially his preaching, rooted as these were in this disciplined life of study and prayer, presented the means with with which God has provided the human race in Christ to draw together all things to Him. If there is a theme to his life, it is that of this gathering: God gathering all things to Himself in Christ, human beings

learning to gather all things to God in Christ in a way that brings order, direction, meaning and beauty to their lives all human failure, folly and perversity notwithstanding. Andrewes words have not lost all this power. It was first from Andrewes that T.S. Eliot, one of the twentieth century's greatest poets, learned to hope for a gathering to God of all things even in the shattered remains of western civilization in the aftermath of the atrocities of the first World War. Some of you will know Eliot's testimony to this shattering in poems like 'The Lovesong of Alfred J. Prufrock' and 'The Wasteland'.

Andrewes was devoted above all to the Holy Scriptures. Fluent in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, Chaldee, Arabic and at least fifteen modern European languages, he devoted his vast learning to their study. When King James I set up a commission to produce an authorized translation of the Bible for use in the English Church, it was natural that Andrewes should be part of it, and in fact he was made responsible for the first part, from Genesis through second Kings. But Andrewes love of Scripture went hand in hand with a desire to gather the fruits of every form of learning, rather than to scatter them. If the first generation of magisterial reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin were determined to shatter and break institutions they were convinced had gone badly wrong in the name of the Word of God, Andrewes is concerned to put pieces together and to build. His love of the Bible therefore did not lead him to disparage or distrust other forms of learning. He approached them with a robust confidence in truth and a deep respect for and devotion to every kind of learning, including the new sciences. Francis Bacon, one of the great early pioneers of modern scientific investigation and discovery, called Andrewes 'my Inquisitor', indicating not hostility to what he was doing, but the keen interest of an intellect quite capable of grasping the significance of what Bacon was doing. Andrewes was possessed of patience in the pursuit of truth, and he recommended such patience to other. He was prepared to work in darkness indefinitely, to pursue the unity of truth through the careful consideration of its fragments for as long as it took to gain the unity of understanding, without recourse to cheap shortcuts. As one preacher put it in this chapel some thirteen years ago, 'in the magnanimous mind of Lancelot Andrewes, as in a gracious court, the ancient fathers, the mediaeval schoolmen, the learned reformers and counter-reformers as well as the new thinkers of the emerging enlightenment day, are all brought into holy conversation on the things of God.' And as Andrewes himself wrote, '[T]here is no truth at all in human learning or philosophy that thwarteth any truth in Divinity, but sorteth well with it and serveth it, and all to honour Him who saith of Himself, Ego sum Veritas, I am the Truth.'

Another of Andrewes great loves was public worship and the Sacraments. It was a love that began when he was very young, and very much of a mind with Protestants who would go on to be very critical of the Church of England for a failure to rid itself entirely of what they would describe as 'the rags of popery', and continue as Andrewes with others came to have a deep appreciation of the continuity of the worship of their Church with a great and wide tradition. So, for example, in a Christmas sermon he compares the Baptismal font to the Blessed Virgin's womb. To both he attributes a power to conceive, to bring forth new life. As God comes there to share our human nature, He comes with the means to lift us to a share in His. Similarly, every one of the sixteen sermons on the Nativity preached by Andrewes as court preacher for King James I concludes with a consideration of the Eucharist as God's means of being with us, and our means of being with Him. Not the only means, and more than the Scriptures are our only guide to truth and wisdom. But the highest and the best: the means that open to us a pilgrimage home to God for people who do not have it all together, who know their own weakness, folly and perversity, and yet who trust God's mercy and goodness toward them and toward the whole human race. Andrewes would agree wholeheartedly, I think, with his almost exact contemporary, who described the Scriptures as 'the doctrinal instrument of salvation' and the Sacraments as 'the moral instruments of salvation'. Doctrine, or teaching, and morals: things to be believed, and things to be done. Not the only things to be believed, but the things to be believed which bring unity and coherence, order and direction to our thoughts and our lives. Not the only things to be done, but the things through which God gathers the fragments of our lives to Himself in Christ, and forges of them a unity.

Andrewes also recalls for us history and circumstance as means whereby God gathers us to Himself. He drew immediate and practical consequences from this understanding. For example, his confidence in God's providence in history led him to obey public authority 'in all things godly and honest' so that he published only what he was commanded to publish. At the same time, this same confidence strengthened him to speak truth to power on occasion as, for example, in March of 1599 when the Earl of Essex was setting out to Ireland. His biographer Peter McCullough records that 'he condemned the pride of military ambition in a sermon' preached in the presence of Queen Elizabeth I 'that not only glanced at Essex's bellicose chivalric revivalism, but also anticipated the pacifism that he would express twenty years later in opposition to England's involvement in the Thirty Years War'.

The sign in today's Gospel, then, points to the new life beyond anxious self- preservation that is set before us in today's Epistle. It points to the possibility of a life in which all things are gathered to God: not just our wisdom, but our folly; not just our accomplishments, but also our failures; not just our virtues, but our vices; not just our triumphs, but our

betrayals. Both the miracle of the raising of the son of the widow of Nain and Lancelot Andrewes point to Christ as he stands ready everywhere, always and for all, to raise us to a new life. This is not merely a hope for the future, though it embraces all futures, too. It is here and now in this world that we begin to receive from God's hands the freedom to love that we have lost. In this new life, all things find their unity and meaning, not in spite of but through suffering and loss, human weakness, failure, and perversity. Only what we cannot carry to God in humble repentance and faith need be left behind. Christ's coming means that nothing need stand between us and a share in the divine life. Not our sins, nor our circumstances, not the economic, political and ideological powers that rule the age in which we live, not the questions and misgivings which burrow like worms through our minds and hearts in a dispirited age. Here we find a wisdom that is more than cynicism, more than a cultured nihilism. As one of Andrewes most able twentieth-century interpreters put it, he can help us hear a 'call to humankind in its entirety to be caught up in the divine life and to take responsibility for the whole creation.' The invitation this evening to come and receive the Body and Blood of Christ is an invitation precisely to this life, to this responsibility, to take our share in the royal priesthood of Christ.

And now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit be ascribed as is most justly due all might, dominion, majesty and power, henceforth and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Trinity XVII

FATHER NICHOLAS HATT • OCTOBER 8

“Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God” (Mk. 12:34).

Earlier this week Father Thorne swept into my office, held out his hand and said, “I wanted you to be the first to know that I am giving up.”

And then he promptly left.

I couldn’t have been more relieved.

Finally I knew what to write about for this week’s sermon.

Because our Scripture readings today are all about “giving up.”

In this evening’s Gospel, the scribe, the lawyer whose job is to interpret the law, asks Jesus whether he knows what the first and greatest commandment is.

Jesus, being well versed in the Law—remember, this is the same Jesus who taught the doctors in the Temple when only a teenager—replies with the Shema, a passage repeated daily in the Temple:

“The first of all the commandments is, Hear O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord; and though shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.”

That’s not so hard for us to understand. John Chrysostom explains it this way:

“To love God with thy whole heart means the heart is not inclined to the love of any one thing more than it is to the love of God…which we cannot do unless we withdraw our hearts from the love of worldly things. To love God with thy whole mind means that all the faculties are at the disposition of God: he whose understanding serves God, whose wisdom concerns God, whose thought dwells on the things of God, whose memory is mindful only of his blessings, loves God with his whole mind. To love God with thy whole soul means to keep the soul steadfast in truth and to be firm in faith.”

Easier said than done, but it makes sense. God is one, the source of everything, and so all that you are and all that you have is owed to him. Be grateful, and serve him in everything you do. Loving God demands our whole conversion.

To God be the Glory.

But Jesus offers an additional piece of information, a second commandment, even though the Scribe had only asked for the first:

“This is the first commandment,” Jesus says, “and the second is like it, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.”

Thankfully, this second commandment isn’t really that hard for us to understand either, and for some of us may be even seem easier to understand: Love thy neighbour as thyself, treat others the same way that you would treat yourself. It’s going to take a lot of work, but it’s doable.

And the Scribe affirms what Jesus has said: “Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other than he; and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is better than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

It seems like Jesus and the Scribe are in agreement.

Indeed. Our works of charity, our good deeds, our constant striving to do good, is a more powerful witnesses to the fact that Christ lives within us, than any prayer or worship could ever be. These good works shall be the way of our conversion to God.

Love God and love your neighbour.

Just do that, and it will all be okay.

But the Gospel story doesn’t end there. Jesus has his reservations: “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God,” he says to the scribe.

“Thou art not far.”

How can this be?

Isn’t loving God and loving your neighbour enough? These are no other commandments greater than these? What more could we possibly do?

“Thou art not far.”

What can Jesus mean by this?

Recall, if you will, the scene in Book VIII of Saint Augustine’s Confessions, where he tells us about his conversion. Like all of us, Augustine struggled to give his life over to Christ. He describes it as a battle of wills, within himself, as though he had two wills:

“Such was my sickness and my torture,” he says. “I was twisting and turning in my chain until it would break completely.” (I hope the FYP students notice Augustine’s allusion to Plato’s Cave).

“My old loves held me back,” he says. “They tugged at the garment of my flesh and whispered: ‘Are you getting rid of us?’

This is the struggle we all endure throughout our lives in many and varied forms.

You probably already know—and I am probably only reminding you—that the struggle is only resolved for Augustine when he gives up, when he abandons the struggle.

Sitting in a garden, weeping bitterly, he hears a child’s voice telling him to pick up the Scriptures and to read it.

So he does. There is nothing else he can do.

“…put [ye] on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh,” he read, from Saint Paul’s Letter to the Romans.

Augustine’s striving could only get him so far: “Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God,” says Jesus.

The final step of his conversion—of ours, too—is finally accomplished when we abandon our striving, when we realise its necessity, but also its ultimate futility, and give ourselves to God and to one another.

But you say that you can’t make that sacrifice? That you can’t give up your “old loves,” as Augustine calls them? No worry. This evening, at this Eucharist, not only does God in Christ model the kind of self-sacrifice to which we are all called in our own conversion, but his own sacrifice will be for us the very abandonment of self which we need. This is the depth of God’s Mercy for us, and we shall be as far from the Kingdom of God as we turn away from this Mercy.

At the end of our Gospel reading this evening we are told that even “David himself calleth him his lord.” You will remember from the Advent and Christmas narratives that Christ, the Messiah was to be an earthly descendent of the house of King David. Even mighty King David himself will call his own descendent, his own son, his Lord.

Let us not think ourselves too important or too self-assured to give ourselves up to God’s Mercy.

“Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God”
(Mk. 12:34).

Trinity XIX

FATHER CHRISTOPHER SNOOK • OCTOBER 15

"[…] greet one another with a holy kiss […]" (2 Corinthians)
"[…] betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke)

I would like to begin this evening by speaking about kisses for reasons that I hope will become clear in just a few moments. This is not easy for me, because as many of my friends have observed, if there were an imaginary country for the prudish and the awkward, I would more likely than not be prime minister. Nonetheless, it is impossible to avoid the fact that kisses are ubiquitous in the holy Scriptures, the Christian oracles. In the Old Testament love poem, for example, the Song of Songs, the bride sings of her Beloved: Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth. Joseph kisses the brothers who sold him into slavery when he is reconciled to them in Egypt. Samuel kisses Saul when he anoints him King over Israel. Most famously, perhaps, there is the excruciating kiss in the garden of Olives when Judas comes out with soldiers to arrest Jesus: Judas, says Christ in the garden, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss? These are just a handful of obvious examples from Scripture, but one might go on listing explicit kisses and even kisses that are only alluded to in the Bible: the kisses of David and Bathsheba, for example, the kisses of the prostitutes with whom Jesus eats and drinks, the kisses of parents and their children…

All of these kisses hover round St Paul's exhortation to the faithful on at least four occasions to greet one another with a holy kiss. In part, this practice was simply an extension of the ancient world's most common form of greeting, still practiced in many places today. But more than this, St Paul's holy kiss of peace was a kind of theological and spiritual proclamation. On the one hand, it was intended to undo in the life of the Church, as it were, Judas' kiss of betrayal by a kiss of love. On the other hand, it was a mystical and symbolic kiss. It looked in some sense towards the end of time, taking up those words from the Song of Songs – Let him – the heavenly Bridegroom – kiss me with the kisses of his mouth; in another sense it looked towards the Holy Communion, when the Bridegroom as it were kisses us in the Sacrament. In some churches Paul's exhortation to greet one another with a kiss became a liturgical practice. St Cyril of Jerusalem summarizes the practice in his commentary on the liturgy in the 4th century: 'Then the Deacon cries aloud, "Receive ye one another; and let us kiss one another." Think not that this kiss is of the same character with those given in public by common friends. It is not such: but this kiss blends souls one with another, and courts entire forgiveness for them. The kiss therefore is the sign that our souls are mingled together, and banish[es] all remembrance of wrongs.'

I share these lengthy observations about the kiss of peace this evening simply because the use of our lips is central to the lesson from St Paul's letter to the Ephesians that we have read. In that lesson, you will remember, Paul draws a contrast for the young Christian community in Ephesus. Before you learned Christ, he says, you walked in darkness; but now that you have been taught Jesus Christ you are called to put away the works of darkness. Paul goes on to describe the differences between the old way of life and the new, many of which have to do specifically with the use of our lips, our words. Paul says, for example, that we are to put away lying, to speak the truth; that we are to "put away corrupt communication" and to speak "only that which is good to the use of edifying"; we are to put away all "evil speaking." An inordinate number of Paul's observations about the transformed life of the Christian community have to do with our lips, with the ways that our words as it were kiss one another. They lead us into life or into death, they edify or they betray.

I suspect that there is not one person here that has not seen this week, perhaps this day, how our lips may lead to life or to death. I suspect that there is not one person who has worshipped in the Chapel for any length of time that has not seen words of grace lead to new life or words of anger and insensitivity lead to heart break. Our words are like those kisses of Judas or of St Paul, those moments of betrayal or of love. St Cyril tells us that the Deacon cries: "Receive ye one another; and let us kiss one another." And as the Gospel lesson makes clear this evening, those kisses of betrayal suffered at the hands of another or offered by us to others, afflict the soul with a kind of palsy, a kind of shaking sickness and paralysis.

The man carried on the pallet in the Gospel this evening – he is each and every one of us. We all come to pray in one way or another with hearts paralysed or, better, left shaking. The man on the pallet is the 'old man' described by St Paul in the Epistle lesson who walks in darkness. Any number of things can immobilize us on that pallet. We may want, for example, to be people of peace and yet find that whenever we open our mouths anger or malice comes out. Or we

may find that we wish to receive peace from others and yet whenever they open their mouths rather than words of grace we hear words of bitterness or judgement. All of this immobilizes us, as it were, or leaves us shakey.

And so we find ourselves here week after week and for what purpose? So that like the man in the Gospel we may be carried to our Beloved, all of those betrayals kissed away by the word of forgiveness, and walk again. Remember what Jesus says to the paralytic: "Son, be of good cheer [...] thy sins be forgiven thee." And afterwards he takes up his bed and walks. What else is the life of this community if not the place where we carry each other, hold each other before the Beloved so that we may be kissed. Let him kiss me, sings the Bride, with the kisses of his mouth.

All of this is true, I hope. All of this is good, I think. But none of it makes it easy to be betrayed by a kiss, by a word, by a look. Jesus may kiss away your betrayals of me and mine of you, but how do I understand these betrayals? How am I to relate to this pain that is part of the warp and woof of life together?

This evening we are commemorating the martyrdom of Bishops Latimer and Ridley. They were burned at the stake on October 16 1555 during the reign of Queen Mary in the midst of the wars of religion that left many in England dead or dispossessed. When Bishop Latimer was arrested in his country house he surprised the guard by proclaiming that he went willingly to London. He had lived under the threat of arrest for some thirty years and had previously escaped to the Continent. But like the ancient Christian martyrs, in 1555 Latimer counted it all grace to be able to suffer for Christ. Indeed, Latimer would have known the famous proclamation of Bishop Ignatius in the second century, that it was only in his dying for Christ that he would finally become human. Famously, in his last moments of life, Bishop Latimer encouraged his colleague Bishop Ridley with these words: "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as (I trust) shall never be put out." Latimer and Ridley had been betrayed. That is, they were martyred not by adherents of another religious tradition, martyred not even by another nation, but martyred under the authority of their own Sovereign, at the hands of fellow Christians. But Latimer knew his betrayal not as outside of God's providence, but as included within it for the sake of a greater good. We shall this day light such a candle... What does it look like to have our betrayals kssed away? How do I live with your betrayals and you with mine? By the confidence of Latimer and Ridely that in the Providence of God even the world's betrayals will be used for the sake of the Kingdom. As Latimer himself preached, in sermon on the parable of the wedding banquet: when my neighbour doth me wrong, taketh away my goods, robbeth me of my good name and fame, I shall bear it willingly, considering that it is God's cross... when I am injured or wronged, or am in other tribulation, then I have a great desire for him, to feed upon him [Jesus] .. to be, in a word, kissed.

In a few moments the liturgy will invite us to make our confession. That is, we will be invited to lay down before God all the deeds that have paralyzed our souls this week; the things done and left undone; the things done by us and those things done to us. And having made this confession, Jesus in the person of his priest will pronounce our forgiveness: "Be of good cheer," Father Thorne will say; or rather, Christ will say in him, "thy sins be forgiven thee." And then we will be called to walk in the life described by St Paul: to speak the truth, to put away evil speaking, and to only use words that build up the Body of Christ. – to kiss one another, as it were.... As Cyril writes: 'Then the Deacon cries aloud, "Receive ye one another; and let us kiss one another... this kiss blends souls one with another, and courts entire forgiveness for them. The kiss therefore is the sign that our souls are mingled together....' 'Then the Deacon cries aloud, "Receive ye one another; and let us kiss one another." Even our betrayals will be used by God for the salvation of the world.

AMEN.

Trinity XX

FATHER RANALL INGALLS • OCTOBER 22

From the Gospel According to St Matthew, "Many are called, but few are chosen."

'The Kingdom of heaven,' says Jesus, 'is like a certain King which made a marriage for his son.' What is 'the Kingdom of Heaven?' we might ask, but I'd like to put that on one side for a while to ask how we enter the Kingdom of Heaven, according to Jesus. There is much to be learned about what the Kingdom of Heaven is from what Jesus tells us about how it is to be entered.

Very often when we think about entering the Kingdom of Heaven or when people talk about it or when comedians help us to laugh about it, we think of it either as a just reward for services rendered, or a gift with a whole lot of conditions attached, many of them quite arbitrary. Not only must we refrain from thievery and murder, the reasons for which seem clear enough, but we are supposed to do and refrain from doing all sorts of other things. Furthermore, the list of dos and don'ts appear to differ according to who we talk to at the time. Often the whole business appears hopeless. We quietly wash our hands of the whole mess. It appears that there can be no intelligible connection between faith and the actual shape or our lives. So we plump for respectability or our own good opinion of ourselves or 'good intentions' as the measure of our lives. Or we console ourselves with the observation that whatever our own faults may be, at least they are not as bad as those of our neighbours. We may even take a perverse delight in unmasking them as hypocrites.

Christ's parable invites us to start again at a new beginning. It suggests that the problem is not with God's will, but ours. We do not want what God freely offers. So the invitation to the wedding feast goes first to those who make light of it. They are not able to recognize the invitation for what it is – a great gift, an unmerited honour and privilege. They therefore turn away from it toward the things they can take seriously: their farms and their merchandise – the means of their livelihood, the means to security of their person and their property, the means to what the English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes called 'commodious living'. Notice that the problem is in their will. The king's heart is all generosity. He extends the invitation. He has the marriage supper prepared at his own expense. He sends messengers out not once but twice. But his messengers are scorned and finally rejected with murderous violence. Love of security and the desire to be self-sufficient often lead to this. They often end in violence toward those who would disrupt that security and self-sufficiency in the name of things not recognized or understood. The problem is not with the King and his desire, but with those who receive and scorn his invitation, and their desires.

The generosity of the King will not be defeated in this way, however. He sends his servants out 'into the highways and byways' to people who could not dream they were fit to be invited to the wedding feast of a King's son. Just to underline the point, we are told that those who come include both 'good and bad'. What these people have in common and what makes them fit to be guests is not virtue or status or great accomplishments. The King judges them fit guests simply because they are able to recognize his invitation as a good gift, and so to receive it.

In the Epistle, St Paul urges his hearers to be like these people. In effect He is saying to the Christians in Ephesus and to us, 'Remember the invitation you have received, and so allow yourselves to ruled by the Spirit of gratitude. In that Spirit sing and make melody in your heart to the good Lord who has called you to partake of a feast which far exceeds anything they desired or deserved. To humble hypocrites called to be saints, Paul says, 'Give thanks in all things' – all things - even the loss of security, even the loss of your livelihood, even in the face of rejection and persecution.

The generosity of the King wins the hearts of those not enslaved to love of security and money and the so-called 'practicalities' that belong to the pursuit of 'commodious living'. These are 'the good and bad' whom the King's servants bring to the feast from the highways and the byways. But this alone is not enough. One refuses to put on the vestments provided by the King that they may be dressed for the feast. When the King comes to this man, he calls him, 'friend'. Once more Jesus underlines and emphasizes the fact that what keeps us out of the Kingdom of Heaven is not God's will, but ours. The King gives the man opportunity to speak for himself, to enter into conversation, to resolve the issue. He has befriended all his guests, condescending to their state in order to lift them to his. But the man is speechless. He has nothing to say. He has received the invitation and come, but he is not ready to be raised up and made fit to be there. And so he is cast out.

Notice that at every point in this parable the feast is a gift. It is never earned or deserved. However, the gift cannot be received against the will of those who are invited. If they

stay away, it cannot be forced upon them. If they come but refuse to be clothed, they cannot stay.

So it is with us. If we imagine that the Kingdom of Heaven is something earned or deserved, we do not have so much as a place in this story, for in this parable the feast is always and everywhere pure gift. If we will not lift up our minds and our hearts from the anxious search for security in material prosperity and devotion to 'practical' matters which put to one side love of God and love of neighbour, we will miss the invitation to the new life that is everywhere in all things presented to us by the messengers of God in the circumstances of our daily lives. If we take up the invitation, but remain in closed silence when He speaks, unwilling to enter into that commerce in holy thoughts, holy desires and holy things through which we share here and now in the life of Heaven, we exclude ourselves from the very life of Heaven, which is the very life of God.

What have I tried to say? Something very simple. Something said with brilliant clarity by the Coptic saint, Matthew the Poor: '[T]hrough prayer there now exists a true, constant, and intimate bond between man and Christ. Therefore, without a life of prayer with Christ, there can be neither life nor kingdom nor light nor victory over the devil.' Truly to pray, truly to bring our desires into God's desires, our life into His life, is to partake of that wedding feast in which, through Christ, heaven and earth are brought together.

The greatest of our Reformation teachers, Richard Hooker, put it no better, but somewhat differently. I quote him in the hope that he may prove helpful to some, as he has often been to me. We are, he says, by our very humanity, 'capable of God'. The restlessness of human desire bears constant testimony to the fact that we were created for a happiness we do not possess. 'Capable we are of God both by understanding and will: by understanding, as he is that sovereign Truth which comprehendeth the rich treasures of all wisdom; by will, as He is that sea of Goodness whereof whose tasteth shall thirst no more.' Because we are capable of God, we look to share in the good things God enjoys by means of the highest powers with which God has endowed human nature: the power to understand, and the power to love. We naturally look to come to the happiness we seek as the result of what we do and the reward of our labours. But it cannot be so. We direct our highest powers to lesser things – security and 'commodious living' – or we look beyond these things only to have our understanding and desire fixed on something less than God, to be won on our own terms. Hooker sums all this up by saying, 'The light of nature is never able to find out any way of obtaining the reward of bliss, but by performing exactly the duties and works of righteousness.' This way is impassible, closed. But Christ has opened to us another way, the way of grace received in repentance, that walks by faith, hope and charity. '[B]ehold how the wisdom of God hath revealed a way mystical and supernatural, a way directing unto the same end of life by a course which groundeth itself upon the guiltiness of sin, and through sin desert of condemnation and death.' The free opening of our dark hearts to God in repentance makes possible commerce between earth and heaven, a commerce in holy thoughts, holy desires, holy things.

For what is the assembly of the Church to learn, but the receiving of Angels descended from above? What to pray, but the sending of Angels upward? His heavenly inspirations and our holy desires are as so many Angels of intercourse and commerce between God and us. As teaching bringeth us to know that God is our supreme truth; so prayer testifieth that we acknowledge him our sovereign good.

When we have rejected 'commodious living' as our life's aim, and responded with glad hearts to Christ's invitation to the wedding feast, we may expect the Father to come to us asking why we have not clothed ourselves in the garments He has provided that we might be fit guests at His table. Then let us not be silent. Then let us pray. Then let us continually and repeatedly cry out that we will not content ourselves with what we have already received of God's goodness, but will gladly receive more, and so be clothed again and again not with the rags we ourselves hang on our dumb idols, but with the true and living Christ, who is always greater than any idea we have of Him. As St Paul says, 'Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.' (Romans 13:14).]

If we pray in this way, there is no telling where God may take us, and what he may make of us. Last week my eldest son sent a link to the story of a young American doctor who lives and works in a war zone in the southern part of Sudan, amongst the Nuba. He is the only trained surgeon. His life consists of receiving the Holy Communion each morning at 6:30 a.m. and then working twelve to fourteen hours most days week after week, month after month in squalor, filth, and the human wreckage of war. The author of the article begins by asking why he does not leave? In the end, he gets an answer. Love. Love that will not pretend that a white man's life is more valuable than any other by fleeing when the fighting gets close. Love that leaves him completely unable to return to his old life and be content with something less than that to which Love has called him. He is a prisoner to Love, and He is most free. He does not look to die, but he is no longer a prisoner to the fear of death. He is no longer prisoner to desires and fears that war against Love. He lives 'in Christ'. Christ is all: Christ present in the sacrament; Christ present in those broken bodies and desperate souls who flood into his little hospital day after day in the heat and the flies and the stench; Christ before him at the end of all things, as their consummation and meaning and end.

Every kingdom, every city, is constituted by exchange,

by commerce. By true prayer we enter into that commerce in holy thoughts, holy desires, and holy things which constitute the Kingdom of Heaven. By the lives we lead we so often draw back from this life – to our 'farms' and 'merchandise'. By the way we live we draw back from the fullness of life and love to which God calls us, to serve mute idols. May God who comes to us in holy gifts in the Sacrament we celebrate this evening break our hearts open to true prayer, to dare to ask not only for God's gifts, but for God Himself, and not only for God as we think or imagine Him to be, but for God as He is and knows Himself to be: God in whom in are 'the rich treasures of all wisdom'; God who is, in the words of Richard Hooker, 'that sea of Goodness whereof whoso tasteth shall thirst no more.'

Trinity XXI

FATHER CHRISTOPHER SNOOK • OCTOBER 29

In just a few days time on the Feast of All Saints and the Commemoration of All Souls, the Church will celebrate its fundamental conviction that everything wakes up.

"Wondrous sound the trumpet flingeth;" we shall sing on All Souls day, "Through earth's sepulchres it ringeth;"

"All before the throne it bringeth. Death is struck, and nature quaking, All creation is awaking, To its Judge an answer making."

All things wake up -- in this life or the next, here or there, to eternal joy or eternal heartbreak, but one way or another everything wakes up. The trumpet will sound and the dead shall arise.

The Scriptures, the Christian oracles, bear witness to this mystery time after time: In the book of Ezekiel, for example, the prophet comes to a valley of dry bones and the Lord restores them to life before his eyes – they wake up; in the book of Job, the hero says that even if he dies yet he shall live and see his maker face-to-face in his body -- he shall awake; and not only is Jesus risen from the dead, but in his healing miracles he constantly uses words of resurrection: Arise, Get up. In all of this he signals that the fundamental reality of redemption is Resurrection. Everything wakes up -- wakes up at the end of time when the Lord comes again to bring all things to light, to judge and to heal; wakes up here and now by merciful judgements, mutual love, and the bearing of one another's burdens. Everything wakes up... sooner or later, in this life or the next...

I say all of this today, because this evening we are commemorating the witness of Bishop James Hannington, martyr. He was the son of a prosperous British family and first Bishop of East Africa. His final diary entry was recorded on October 29, 1885. For the week prior to his death, he had been held captive in a small tent by soldiers sent by King Mwanga of Uganda. The young Bishop was on expedition when taken captive, trying to cut a road through Uganda that would bypass the routes used by slave traders. Banana peels littered the ground of his cell, and rats and vermin were constant companions. On the first day of his incarceration he wrote poignantly: "Shall I live through it? My God, I am Thine." Later in the week, as his body succumbed to fever and his difficulty standing and dressing increased, he wrote in his diary: "I am very low, and cry to God for release....O Lord, do have mercy upon me and release me." His final diary entry, on the day of his death, reads:

"I can hear no news, but was held up by Psalm xxx, which came with great power. A hyena howled near me last night, smelling a sick man, but I hope it is not to have me yet."

Shortly afterwards he was led out of his enclosure and put to death. A memorial to Bishop Hannington in Hove, England, cites a verse from Psalm 30 – that Psalm which "came with great power" to him: Thou hast turned my heaviness into joy. The Psalm itself suggests what Bishop Hannington hoped: that everything wakes up, the seeds of eternity are planted in our mortality. The trump shall sound and the dead shall arise.

The Gospel lesson this evening of course is about the dead, or the nearly dead, rising. A nobleman's son, we have heard, is at the point of death. When the man hears that Jesus is close by, having returned to Cana, he goes to him and asks him to come and see his child. Jesus does not go; rather, he tells the man and those who have gathered around him that their generation is obsessed with a desire for miracles, for signs and wonders. The man asks again, "Sir," he says, "come down before my little boy dies." And then we read these words: "Jesus said to him, 'Go; your son will live.' And the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way." Your son will live; the man believed the word ....

It is not clear who is dying in this story, who has, as it were fallen asleep. On the surface, it is the boy of course. But we are not told if death is a cause of fear for the child; we do not know if he is facing the prospect of death peacefully, or hopefully, or full of indifference. Rather, in this story it is clear that it is not just the boy who is dying; it is also his father. His heart is bound to the one whom he loves just as our hearts are bound. When the man asks Jesus to save his son today he is also quite literally asking Jesus to save himself: lift up my son, he might have said, and I will be lifted up; resurrect him and I will be resurrected as well; wake up my boy and I will awaken....

The meaning of this lesson on the surface, I think, is clear. Jesus speaks; the man believes the word. The word of God in Christ is life; receiving that word by faith is life for us and may even be life for others, as it is for this man's child. Commenting on this Gospel some 1400 years ago St Gregory the Great observed that this is obvious enough. But what is less obvious, he suggests, is a single moment in the lesson upon which all else depends. The moment is

this: that the man wants Jesus to come down to his son; he is convinced that unless Jesus is present in the body then there will be no healing for the child. The Lord must be present where he seems to be absent. The work of Christ in the Gospel is to bring the man to understand that as God, there is no place that Jesus is not -- no suffering, no trauma, no dying to which he does not come. To know this is to wake up…

The problem, of course, is that we live in a world where so much falls asleep. People fall asleep in their spiritual lives, in marriages and friendships, fall asleep to their children, to their neighbours. Paul describes this sleepiness in the Epistle today – it is our captivity to what he calls powers and principalities and the rulers of darkness. Whatever else these may be, they are at least those spiritual illusions and half truths that can dominate our lives and, indeed, the lives of entire nations, keeping us asleep in the presence of the Lord: worldly ambition, anger, sadness, the determined conviction that we are unloveable, the certainty that another is unforgivable -- all of these illusions are soporific, making the soul sleepy.... so much falls asleep. As Auden writes, "Defenceless under the night, our world in stupor lies." And so this evening the inspired word comes down in order to wake us up… Everything wakes up.

This is already so much to have said – too much. But I must say this much more: that I wonder at times what I shall see when I wake up.... It is not for nothing, perhaps, that the Church sings that dreadful song on All Souls day, Day of Wrath, Day of Mourning at just the moment we affirm that all things wake up. When my eyes are finally opened and I see my life in the light of Christ's love will there be anything more than vanity and neglect and illusion; anything more than self-will? Will I ever have come to Christ, like the man today, for the sake of another? A trumpet shall sound. The dead shall rise. Sooner or later, in this world or the next; to everlasting life or to weeping; in one form or another it all wakes up. And like the man in the Gospel, we discover tonight that it is not by confidence in ourselves that we wake joyful, but by confidence in him. Thy son liveth… he believed the word. And so it is not in any simple sense by prayer for ourselves that we come to know Christ's mercy best, but by prayer for one another… or perhaps better, by coming to know the other as in us and we in them. It all wakes up.

Let me conclude: This evening we commemorate a martyr Bishop. And this evening we continue to celebrate the ordination of Nicholas Hatt as a deacon in the Church of God. In his first week of captivity, Bishop Hannington asked: "Shall I live through it?" No doubt these words have been yours from time to time as they have been mine – and no doubt the particular warfare of the diaconate will lead Father Nicholas to wonder the same at times. "Shall I live through it?" His ordination, like every vocation, has been an intervention of God's mercy in his life, making him in time what God knows him to be in eternity. Shall he live through it? "Shall I live through it?" asked the Bishop. And then he continued: "My God, I am thine." Surely this is the movement in the father's heart from the Gospel this evening. And surely we pray that this will be the movement in the heart of our new deacon, now commissioned to wake us up, and surely we pray it shall be the movement in us.

"Shall I live through it? My God, I am thine. Everything wakes up. The trumpet will sound and the dead shall arise. My God, I am thine."

AMEN.

All Saints' Day

REV. KRISTIN MACKENZIE • NOVEMBER 5

From our Gospel:
"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

Our year in the life of the church allows us the opportunity to know the saints, If we follow the Church's calendar day by day , we come to know the stories of those saints whose feast days we observe. They can inspire and encourage us in our own Christian pilgrimage. We pray for the "communion of saints", a people made holy through their mutual participation in the mystery of Christ." The saints are the holy, common people of God, first made ordinary and born into humanity as each of us and then they make the choice to follow a righteous life, a life of devotion and dedication, to further seek Christ to deepen their participation in the mysteries of our faith.

In our humanity God gives us the opportunity to become like the saints, to be used by God to do His will. In order to help us to be more like Him, He first became like us. When God took on human form in Jesus he lived a life like ours. God became man to show us what humanity could look like. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. He walked and talked with us, lived and died as one of us. With each saint that we celebrate we glimpse into the face of Christ, we see His workings in these holy men and women.

But we also don't look to the saints as a group which is completely set apart from our reality. We celebrate the lives of the saints because we are now called to become saints. We are called to follow the same example given to those saints gone before us.

God's involvement in our world is ongoing, God has not stopped equipping the saints, we have not fully put on the armour of God. His Word spoken to us through the church and through the Holy Scriptures is our means of coming to know Him more closely, understanding Him more fully.

I lead weekly bible study at different churches in my parish. Most of my congregation are older adults, this particular bible study is mostly people in their 80's, they're long since retired, all involved in community projects, keeping in touch with family, some baby sit their great grandchild. They keep busy, their love their church and bible study is something very important to them. But last week I had a refreshing reminder that studying the scripture isn't something they're doing to kill time, to occupy themselves or because there's nothing else happening Tuesday night.

A woman brought up how God is at work in our community and that God had done a good job bringing the different denominations together, how wonderful it was that we get along with the other groups.

And this dear man, his name is Doug and he's 82 stomped his foot down and said "He's not finished. God still has a lot to do around here. And he's not finished with us. God isn't finished with me".

And I did not have a response. The conversation continued and we turned to the scripture to discuss God working in us. It's a limited view of our Christian call to assume we'll have it all figured out if we live to a certain age. I don't know if it encourages me or exhausts me to think that if I'm blessed enough to live to a healthy 82 years that I will still pray that God use me to do His will, that God equip me to do the work of a saint.

The appointed Gospel for the occasion of all the saints is the passage containing the Beatitudes. These teachings instruct us that we receive God's blessings at unexpected times. In each blessing bestowed in the beatitudes Jesus does what He does best, he presents a way of living which is not at all what we thought it would be, He turns the world upside down with His revolution. He challenges us to look at how we perceive ourselves and our world and reminds us to look further.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. For us someone that is poor is lacking in something but for God the poor in spirit have everything to gain, and so He fills them, for theirs is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are they that mourn. To mourn is to honor the feeling of loss, the feeling of heartbreak. It is a recognition of our fragile humanity that we ought to mourn. And we will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek. We are to be meek in the face of the Lord, to present ourselves, our souls and bodies humbly before him. When we are open to God's Grace in this way we shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: We know the feeling to long for something, and our souls are constantly in longing for relationship with God, in psalm 42 we read: "as the hart desireth the waterbrooks so longesth my soul after thee O God." And so those who

hunger and thirst for righteousness, for the righteousness of Christ working in and through them, they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus instructs Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. These words adorn the stained glass above one of my altars. They serve as our reminder that our hearts are not pure, we do fall short of God's glory and fall into sin. But it is our deepest prayer to be pure in heart, it is our goal in all things we do.

Blessed are the peacemakers, these are the holy saints of God that work to bring about harmony in this life. To do what we can to mirror the kingdom of God, that place where there is no pain or suffering, no war or conflict and so shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Jesus was persecuted, He suffered for his righteousness, for our sinfulness. He reminds us, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

Each of these teachings, these blessings hinge on the fact that we are in constant motion. We do not achieve the status of comfort before we first know the pain of mourning, the state of this transitory life. Jesus taught us that these blessings will be provided in abundance when we come to Him in faith and allow ourselves to be transformed by Grace.

God isn't finished with us, He is never finished. He will keep working on us and we will keep working to be more like Jesus. This is the life of a saint, being human and limited but allowing God to work through you. To allow God to use you, to bless you at all times and in all places of life.

Because He isn't finished with you.

Trinity XXIV

FATHER NICHOLAS HATT • NOVEMBER 19

"For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole" (Matt. 9:21)

"[...] Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole" (Matt. 9:22)

In his mercy, God has put before us this evening two miraculous stories of healing: one, a woman healed of a chronic illness; the other, a woman raised from the dead.

The Gospels are indeed full of these kinds of miracles, and we probably know some better than others: the Wedding at Cana, for instance, when Jesus turns water into wine; Jesus' raising of Lazarus, who had been dead nearly four days; or the Feeding of the Multitude, when Jesus feeds 5,000 people with only five loaves of bread and two small fish.

Contemporary Christianity is often quick to dismiss such miracles as the byproduct of a superstitious age which, in our modern maturity and wisdom, we have long since abandoned. Indeed, centuries' worth of scholarship has been devoted to trying to conceive of a scheme whereby we can somehow reconcile ourselves to the embarrassment that the Christian religion seems to be based on these supernatural occurrences.

I will not—I cannot—try to come up with another scheme this evening to help us understand how Jesus' miracles might be possible in our modern age. All I can suggest is that our ability, or even our desire, to acknowledge the reality of them is a measure of our faith. The degree to which we believe that the miracles are true is a reflection of our confidence that the Kingdom of God has come in power and authority in the person of Jesus Christ.

As Father Robert Crouse told us many times in this Chapel, the miracles are signs meant to tell us something about the mission of God we find revealed in Christ.[1] The Feeding of the Multitude, for instance, tells us that Jesus is the bread of life, who has come to nourish our starved, hungry souls; the raising of Lazarus shows us that Jesus is Lord of all creation, and that through him, we shall never be separated from God, even in death; and the changing of water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana shows that Jesus is the author of an even greater marriage, the union between God and his people.

Above all, for Christians, the miracles reveal to us that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the one who the ancient prophecies in the Old Testament said would come to heal us, making the deaf to hear, the blind to see, and the lame to walk, inaugurating a new age of peace and prosperity. No doubt, these claims seemed as outlandish then as they do now, but they are no less urgent, especially given the insidious violence and terror we suffer and commit in our own age. The need for healing, for ourselves, for our neighbours, and for our world, is pressing.

"If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole" (Matt. 9:21). This is the cry of woman in the Gospel this evening.

And it is the cry in all of our hearts.

"If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole" (Matt. 9:21).

I wish it were more difficult for us to imagine the woman's particular circumstances: her illness meant that she was considered unclean, according to the ancient laws of purity, effectively isolating her from her community. She is made to feel ashamed and afraid in the midst of her ongoing suffering. Her deepest desire is to be delivered from this pain and anguish.

This is akin to the tragic nature of sin: it lurks and hides in all of us, often, it seems, through no fault of our own. This is what is so frightening and terrifying about sin: it keeps coming back, year after year, catching us unaware, when we least expect it, despite our longing effort to be freed from it. No wonder it leaves us feeling ashamed and afraid. "...deliver us from evil," we pray.

There is a second event which frames our Gospel story this evening. A daughter has died. Evil seems to have taken the upper-hand: "My daughter is even now dead," (Matt. 9:18) her father says to Jesus.

These moments can lead us into utter despair.

But the message of the Gospel, and, in particular, of the miracles God has put before us this evening, asks—demands—us to reach out for healing in these moments, when the darkness seems to have set in all around us. We are called upon to reach out in faith, to believe that God has the power to overcome this darkness. We are called to believe that the Kingdom of God has come in the person of Jesus Christ.

Can we believe this truth?

This is what these miracles are about.

The father comes rushing up to Jesus: "…come and lay thy hand upon [my daughter], and she shall live," (Matt. 9:18) he says.

This is his moment of faith, and it is a moment of intercession for his loved one.

Jesus goes to the father's house and shows mercy upon both him and his daughter. When Jesus tells the assembled crowd that his daughter "is not dead but sleepeth" (Matt. 9:24), they laugh at him. Indeed, the despair within our own hearts will cause us to laugh or be embarrassed at these miracles, even though the healing we find in them is what we most deeply desire for ourselves and our loved ones.

Jesus "took [the young woman] by the hand, and [she] arose" (Matt. 9:25).

Jesus will heal us.

The woman who was sick, ashamed, and afraid, reached out, in faith: "If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole" (Matt. 9:21).

And she was healed: "…Jesus turned him about, and when he saw her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort, thy faith hath made thee whole" (Matt. 9:22).

May our hearts be stirred this evening to reach out in faith for the healing that he gives.

AMEN.

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[1] See R.D. Crouse, "The Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity," *Common Prayer, Volume Six: Parochial Homilies for the Eucharist Based on the Lectionary of the Book of Common Prayer*, 1962, *Canada* (*Charlottetown: St Peter Publications*).

Sunday Next Before Advent

FATHER RANALL INGALLS • NOVEMBER 26

From the Gospel According to St John,
"Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, where dwellest thou?
He saith unto them, Come and see."

Some of you will remember the Ents from J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. The Ents are the guardians and shepherds of the trees. Tree-like themselves in body, they resemble the trees with respect to their habits of mind, too. When news comes that their great friend and ally the wizard Saruman has betrayed them, they take days to decide what to do, and especially whether participate in the war that is now encroaching on their beloved woods.

Now in Tolkien's book, the fruit of the Ents' long deliberation is a decision to hearken to the warning brought them by two young hobbits, Pippin and Merry, and to take their part in the struggle against the forces of evil. As the result of long and careful soul-searching and discussion among themselves, they go to Saruman's stronghold and destroy it. In Peter Jackson's film, this is not what happens. After days of slow and careful consideration, the Ents decide that this is not their struggle, and take Pippin and Merry to the edge of the woods. It is only as they come across the horrors of war in the utter destruction of large parts of the forest that they change their mind. Reason cannot stir them to stand with those who are bearing the weight of the struggle against evil, nor to take up their responsibilities as guardians of the trees. Only passion - only rage - stirs them.

Peter Jackson's interpretation has bothered me for years, and perhaps I read too much into it. But it seems to me that this part of Tolkien's story is rewritten in this way deliberately. It appears Jackson finds it impossible to imagine action arising out of the use of reason in a disciplined and sustained engagement with important questions, or he believes his audience will find this unconvincing. I can't help but wonder if this is evidence of a long tradition in the Western world since at least the time of the great Scottish skeptic David Hume that denies to reason the power to discern what is good and worthwhile, and to move the passions, and allows to it only the power to chop logic, after the fashion of a Mr Spock in the original *Star Trek* series. 'Captain,' he says coolly, 'I calculate that the odds of surviving this engagement are 1714.2 to 1.' In Mr Spock we see reason as calculation to the exclusion of reason as the instrument of spiritual vision.

What is certain is that today's Collect, Epistle and Gospel are addressed to a quite different understanding of reason. When we pray, 'Stir up, we beseech Thee, the wills of thy faithful people…', we are not asking God to stir our blind passions, not even to do random acts of kindness. Looking to the beginning of a new Christian year, we are asking that God would use this new year to renew our memory and our understanding, and so to renew a love which is precisely not blind, but sees. Of course, many of you will recognize St Augustine in this. In common with many others, he maintains that it is reason which makes us human. But by 'reason' he does not mean calculation or cleverness or the power to chop logic. He means the power to love with the eyes of the mind open. It would be presumptuous of me to say very much here. You are surrounded by people here at King's who know far more of Augustine than me. Nor is Augustine unique amongst the thinkers of the early Christian centuries in believing that what makes us human is the power of a love which is not blind, but sees. But he gives a powerful account of the renewal of the will – the renewal of love, the renewal of amor and eros – as proceeding from the renewal of memory and understanding. To put it in a few words, there is a 'stirring up' of passionate love which, far from leading us away from what is present to memory and understanding, actually proceeds from them. Here is a love which is not blind, but comes to fruition and actuality precisely in vision, in seeing.

In today's Collect then, we have asked God to 'stir up' our wills by the renewal of understanding. And the single most important source of this renewal is the Bible, read in the way the ancient system of prayers, epistles and gospels – the ancient lectionary - teaches us to read it. The collect assumes an understanding of the Bible as a means not to replace the use of our minds but to renew and strengthem them in the pursuit of wisdom and love. It is this same understanding that Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop of Canterbury who translated and edited the first two versions of *The Book of Common Prayer* when he said, 'the Scriptures be the fat pastures of the soul.' He said it, and meant it, and did not consider that he was saying anything new when he said it, because he knew something of the countless witnesses who had understood them in precisely this way before him. Because he believed this, he retained the ancient lectionary and an approach to the Bible which seeks in them first an answer to question what we can hope for, and on what grounds, and how to live so as to take hold of this hope. So

Cranmer will have us pray in two weeks on the Second Sunday of Advent that we may so 'hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest' the contents of the Scriptures 'that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.'

With all these things in mind, the Epistle and Gospel make excellent sense. At the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, St John the Baptist points to Him and says, 'Behold, the Lamb of God.' Here is the one for whom we have been waiting. Taking their master at his word, John's disciples leave him to follow the One for whom he has prepared the way. 'What seek ye?' asks Jesus of them, and of us. 'What are you looking for? What is the desire of your heart?' Trusting John, they ask to be near Jesus, that they may come to see for themselves what John has told them that he has seen. 'Rabbi (which is, being interpreted, Master), where dwellest thou?' And Jesus answers them, as He answers us if we would dwell with Him to see for ourselves what holy men and women have seen in Him, 'Come and see.'

'Come and see.' That is the business of the new Christian year, as it was the business of the old. To come and see, that we may find for ourselves how ancient wisdom and warning – the law of Moses and the preaching of the prophets – points to Him, and come to fulfillment in Him. 'Come and see' how in Him the promise recorded in the lesson from the prophet Jeremiah is fulfilled. Memory is to renew understanding, and understanding stir the will – stir up love – no longer simply by recalling how the Hebrew slaves in Egypt were freed from an outward bondage. The Wisdom of God has drawn closer to us. It has come in our very flesh and blood, calling us from where we have scattered to a unity in a life of continual conversion, continual movement deeper into a wisdom and love that reaches across borders and barriers of language, culture, religion, prejudice, and long and bitter histories. We are being gathered into a Kingdom of the Spirit, an eternal Kingdom, a universal City 'whose builder and maker is God', as St Paul puts it.

All around us there are forces at work to stir up blind passion. The violence of the recent Paris massacres is intended to stir us up to blind fear and hatred. The muzak soundtrack and the constant barrage of advertising to which we are subject between now and Christmas is intended to stir up blind greed and envy, and to turn our every whim into a need that will make us miserable until it is fulfilled, and perhaps more miserable when it is, as we discover that the things we have longed for cannot deliver on their promise of happiness. And then there are the voices that rejoice in others faults, that call us to a grim feast of self- righteous delight in others failings. That seems to go on all year. It needs no special season.

All around us are voices that seek to override and replace our humanity. They deny to us the power to see the good, however dimly, to know it, however inadequately, and to love it, however feeble and shallow our capacity for love. They would turn us from the slow, arduous movement of the soul into the life of God, and make us serve gods which must disappoint and frustrate the deepest desires of the human mind and heart with a blind devotion, by means of blind passions. Here, at the turning of the Christian year, the ancient prayers and readings call us the renewal of the powers of the human mind and heart to see, to grasp with the understanding, to be grasped by truth and beauty and goodness, to look upwards through His gifts and above all through the gifts of Jesus and His Spirit into the face of the Good God, who loves us and all the human race and the whole created order which is His handiwork.

Surely Tolkien got it right, and Peter Jackson missed it. The Ents by diligent, patient pursuit of knowledge of what it is good to do in a violent and dispirited age take their part. At the same time, they take on the burden of their brothers and sisters among rational creatures who have taken up the costly struggle against evil, and fulfill their calling as guardians and shepherds of the forests entrusted to them. We, too, have been entrusted with many precious things, and we must find out how best to serve them in a world that is violent and dispirited. But it is not to blindness nor to blind passion that Christ calls us, but to love which sees, love which knows, love which remembers, love which is informed by Wisdom, love which looks toward and longs for what is highest, best, most lasting and most worthwhile.

We pray, 'Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people.' Stir us up truly to love what is truly good. Men and women transfigured by wisdom and love point to Jesus and tell us that here are the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, so that we ask, 'Master, where dwellest thou?' And to this prayer Jesus answers, 'Come and see.' See for yourself. Look and go on looking until faith is swallowed up in vision.

Epiphany I

DR. JESSE BILLETT • JANUARY 14

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1).

What St. Paul asked the young Christians in Rome to do is also what we are gathered here to do. A few minutes from now, when we have eaten the broken bread that is the communion of the Body of Christ, and drunk of the cup that is the communion of the Blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16), the priest will say on behalf of all of us, "And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto thee." The meaning of the mystery of the Holy Communion can't be captured in a neat formula. But a great deal of its meaning is in these words of St. Paul. We present our many bodies, so that we may be made into the one Body of Christ, and so be members one of another.

When I sit down to dinner later tonight, I will be able to say with entire accuracy to the bread on my plate, "You are about to become my body." I will eat it and absorb its nutrients, so that my body can grow and flourish. The bread of the Holy Communion works differently. Here Christ says to each of us, "When you eat this bread, you will become my Body. You will be nourished with my life, and grow to be a complete human being: not complete by the measure of worldly standards, but by the measure of the stature of my fulness" (Eph. 4:13). Our bodies become His Body, so that we have true Life.

But what is this true Life? What is the point of presenting our bodies to become one Body? St. Paul tells us this too: we present our bodies a liv-ing sacrifice: a sacrifice laid on the altar of God; a sacrifice not destroyed but remade in the fire of divine presence, not killed but made fully alive. This is in fact the whole point of the Incarnation. The eternal Word, God the Son, takes human flesh so that a human being may make a complete offering to the Father, not of animals or food or money, but of himself. As we read in the epistle to the Hebrews: "Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me" (Heb. 10:15). Christ's complete offering of himself in obedience to his Father, right to the very end, to the point of utter humiliation and painful death, is vindicated in his Resurrection on the third day: what seemed to the world to be shame and futility was revealed as glory and victory. Here we present our bodies to be made into the very same Body that was humiliated, tortured, and killed, so that it could truly live: a living sacrifice.

I wonder how many of you are at this moment politely refraining from shouting out, "Those are fine, high sounding words. What do they actually mean?" That's the right question to ask, especially of a pompous fool like me. I must admit that whenever I get to thinking or writing about "sacrifice," I can get grandiose images in my head. I think of myself as a steely-eyed martyr scorning the offer of a blindfold as I stare down the firing squad, crying out with my last breath, "My only regret is that I have but one life to give for the Gospel!" while the whole time I can hear the invisible choir of angels singing me up to glory, assuring me that my sacrifice will be immortalized in the annals of history. Like Dietrich Bonhoeffer with a soundtrack by John Williams.

But the actual experience of real-life sacrifice teaches me otherwise. I remember a few years ago being wakened repeatedly by two sick children during the night. Already exhausted from the work of the day and now deprived of sleep that I desperately needed, I was having to pace up and down with a fussy baby who could not be consoled. My plans for the next day were shot. I would be falling farther behind on a deadline. I felt completely hopeless. Then it was as if a small voice spoke in my ear to ask, "Are you at your limit already, you who wanted to die for me? Did you think sacrifice was supposed to feel good? Do you think I was just acting when I cried out on the cross, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' This is what a father's love for his children looks like. It's time for you to get over it, and get on with it." I'm embarrassed to say that it was the first time I had really admitted to myself the Jesus didn't have a soundtrack to make sense of his sufferings. He loved his own who were in the world, and loved them to the end, out of pure obedience to the will of his Father (John 13:1; John 6:38; Heb. 5:8). And that's it.

St. Paul—a real martyr—didn't suffer from my delusions. When he speaks of our being "transformed by the renewing of our mind," that transformation simply allows us to discern the will of God, a will that is good, and acceptable, and perfect. And the upshot of it all sounds at first hearing rather mundane: "don't think of yourself more highly than you ought." You are a member of a body. The limbs and organs of a body have different functions: learn what your function is, and perform that function humbly, not imagining that you're better or worse than any other member of

Christ. What does that mean for a place like this? Are you a teacher? Humbly seek after the true Wisdom, and form your students in it. Are you a student? Be humble and learn from your teacher: don't imagine that you can yet decide for yourself what is valuable and true. Are you an administrator? Govern this household humbly as one who will have to give an account to the master whose household it is. Are you a musician? Don't be swept up in arrogance by your gifts: do all in your power to glorify God and uplift your neighbours, and then realize that you too are an unprofitable servant, doing only what was required of you (Luke 17:10). Are you a husband, a wife? a parent, a child? a neighbour, a citizen? a boss, a worker? rich, poor? clever, simple? Whatever you are, offer yourself, your soul and body, to be a living sacrifice. And yes, if it should ever come to that, be ready to die for the sake of the true life that is growing within you (Heb. 12:2; Rom. 8:10). We are not necessarily called to a radical break from all our relationships. But all of those relationships are transfigured by in-corpora-tion into Christ's body.

The story of Christ as a boy in the temple is a kind of icon of this way of life. If you were listening attentively, I'm sure you noticed some important parallels. The twelve-year-old Christ has gone to Jerusalem to keep the Passover. He is missing for three days as his family is sorrowing. And when he is found, he is in the temple—the place of sacrifice—among the doctors of the law, and wonders why his mother and foster-father didn't look there first. Twenty-one years later, Christ goes up to Jerusalem to keep the Passover. He is killed and in the grave for three days, while his followers are sorrowing. And on the third day, two of his followers are accompanied by a stranger who, like a doctor of the law, opens their minds to understand the scriptures, asking how they could have failed to understand. And at the very moment when the stranger breaks bread in their presence, enacting the new sacrifice that has forever perfected and completed the sacrifices of the old Law, they recognize him as their risen Lord (Luke 24:13–31).

In our life together as members of the one Body, we too are repeatedly going to lose Christ in the crowds. Sin is continually at war in me, as I know it is in you, trying to separate me from him, trying to make me deny that he is really my head, that my life flows from his life. We will assume that he is with us and carry on as we always have, in our relationships, in our work, in our worship. But when those seven deadly sins of pride, envy, wrath, sloth, greed, gluttony, and lust bear their poisoned fruits in our individual lives, and when uncharitableness, division, arrogance, and conflict arise in our common life, we will realize that we have left him behind. And then we must "seek him sorrowing" where he can always be found: in the Temple—no longer a temple of stone made with hands, but in the place of the true Sacrifice, which is his Body. And we will know when we have found it, because there will be gathered the doctors, the prophets, the inspired writers: both those who foretold his coming, and those who recognized him when he had come, as the suffering and rising Messiah predicted of old.

Epiphany is a season of manifestation, of revelation, when we are able to see Christ for who he truly is. He is here among us now, ready to open our eyes in the breaking of bread. As you come to the altar to meet him, present your body to him as a living sacrifice. And pray, as I will pray, that he will grant us to "perceive and know" him there, and nourish us as members of his Body with "grace and power to fulfil" all that he calls us to do (Collect of the Day).

Epiphany II

FR. NICHOLAS HATT • JANUARY 21

"The mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine" (John 2:3).

It's not uncommon at this point in the academic year for many of us to feel some degree of growing anxiety or regret when we think back over how the past few months have gone. While we may have begun in earnest back in September, about now we begin to feel a bit tired, worn down, and perhaps a bit frustrated, for a whole number of reasons: we may not have made all the friends we hoped to make; our marks may not be as high as we had expected; or perhaps we are anxious about what next year might bring. Like our Gospel story this evening, it can feel as though the party has suddenly run out of wine.

In our Gospel today, Jesus and his mother and his disciples are at a wedding feast. Part way through the party, they run out of wine. Mary points this out to her son, and Jesus steps forward, and asks the servants to fill the six stone pots with water. When they draw it out, they discover that it has been changed into wine; and not just any wine, but the best wine served at the feast. The Gospel writer tells us that this was Jesus' first miracle.

Commenting on this passage, St Augustine says we should not be so quick to dismiss this miracle as some fanciful, fictional tale: the Lord performs such miracles every day before our very eyes, he says; we just fail to recognize them. "For He who made wine on that day at the marriage feast, in those six water-pots…the self-same does this every year in vines," Augustine writes. "For even as that which the servants put into the water-pots was turned into wine by the doing of the Lord, so in like manner also is what the clouds pour forth changed into wine by the doing of the same Lord". Augustine goes on to say, "For who is there that considers the works of God, whereby this whole world is governed and regulated, who is not amazed and overwhelmed with miracles? If he considers the vigorous power of a single grain of any seed whatever, it is a mighty thing, it inspires him with awe" (Tractate on John, VIII). But we fail to recognize these daily, natural miracles, Augustine says, because they recur so often; we grow numb to them, and are—quite naturally—distracted from them by our own worries and anxieties and regrets. Miracles such as that performed by Jesus in the Gospel today are necessary, Augustine says, in order to wake us up to the miracles performed by God before our very eyes every single day.

This season of Epiphany, which we have celebrated for the past few weeks, has been all about waking us up to these realities. As Father Crouse often reminded us, the season of Epiphany is about the showing forth of God in the person of Jesus Christ. In some sense, this might seem unnecessary to us, because God is always present and always manifest to us, everywhere in all his works, as Augustine says. As we read in Paul's Letter to the Romans, "the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead" (Romans 1:20).

But the Epiphany season is meant to take us a step further. "Epiphany," Father Crouse wrote, "is not about the showing forth of God in his works, but the showing forth of God in himself." During this season, we are meant to see in Jesus Christ the revelation of God's very nature, so that we might come to know and participate in that divine life ourselves.

The miracle put before us in the Gospel reading today is therefore meant to reveal to us God's enduring power over the whole of creation, and his power to transform and give us new life. He can transform the tasteless banalities of our lives into a rich, powerful wine. We are meant to become intoxicated with the Spirit of God.

Our anxiety, I think, comes from our forgetting of this reality; too often we think we must produce our own wine; that our ambitions, our ideals, our achievements are all we've got, and when we fail in them, or they fail us, we have nothing left to live for.

But the message of the Gospel lesson this evening is that we do not have to produce the wine ourselves; the Lord shall do this for us. If it feels as though we have no wine, that's because we don't. The good wine of his grace must be given to us; and we must wait patiently for it. If we find it hard to believe that the Lord could work such a miracle in our lives, we need merely remember Augustine's exhortation, that water is changed into wine all around us, every day.

The Epistle reading this evening is meant to recall us to this reality, too. Paul reminds us that, like the rest of nature, we too are the beneficiaries of God's many gifts of grace. "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us…," he writes. St Paul exhorts us to use these gifts with honesty and modesty: "he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he

that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness". Through such gifts, performed so reasonably, we are meant to show forth the recreated, transformed life of God within us. Our gifts are not the foundation on which we stand, and in reality these gifts are not ours at all. We are meant to be intoxicated with the wine of his good grace, not the wine of our own vain ambitions and conceits.

The question I therefore want to leave us with this evening is very simple: How has Jesus turned water into wine in your life? If we can begin to recognize these moments, we will have begun to move away from our anxiety and worry and frustration.

Of course, all of what I have reflected on this evening is easier said than done, and the truth is that our lives will be full of contradictory moments: there will be and have been times when we have allowed God's grace to shape and transform our lives; and there have been and will be moments when we act out of our fears and anxieties, and reject the goodness that God offers, in favour of our own pride and vanities. Our only hope, therefore, can be that God would transform even those moments of rejection to our good, and bring us to repentance.

I therefore want to close this evening by offering my own brief reflection on the Giving Tree. You'll remember at the end of the story, the boy and the tree sit together, in silence. The tree has given everything to the boy. The boy has taken everything from the tree. There is, I think, a sense of defeat, for both of them: "I have nothing left to give...," says the tree. "I have nothing I need, except a rest," says the boy. To stay with our analogy, both, I think, tried to make wine for themselves: the tree was intoxicated with helping the boy, regardless of whether it was to his benefit or not; and the boy was intoxicated with taking everything from the tree, his insatiable greed fed more and more as the years went by. In the end, they nearly destroyed each other. Too often, this is the outcome of our lives: our wine seems to have run out. But new life can be found in these moments, if we can sit silently with one another, and in that silence acknowledge the pain we have inadvertently caused, and seek forgiveness from each other. As St Paul says in our Epistle: "Be kindly affectioned one to another, in honour preferring one another".

This Epiphany season, may it have been our joy to rediscover the Mercy of God which is all around; and may we become intoxicated with his Good Graces, rather than our own.

"They have no wine," says Mary. Thanks be to God.
AMEN.

Septuagesima

FR. CHRISTOPHER SNOOK • JANUARY 28

I would like to place at the centre of our thoughts this evening an observation made by St Catherine of Siena, an Italian saint born in the early 1300's: All the way to heaven, she wrote, is heaven, for Jesus said, I am the way. All the way to heaven is heaven for Jesus said I am the way. When Catherine spoke these words she knew better than most that much of what we see in the world seems far from heaven indeed. She was one of twenty five children, for example, and half of her siblings died in infancy. An outbreak of the plague occured during her lifetime and she worked among the sick and the infirm. Catherine knew that much of what we encounter in the world seems far from heaven – more like desert and dry land. And so when she wrote, famously, that all the way to heaven is heaven because Jesus said I am the way, she was not naive. Rather, she meant that every "way" or road we un-dertake in our lives, whether easy or hard, is a way upon which we may encounter the Lord. If the way is difficult we will encoun-ter the Lord as we learn patience; if the way is joyful we will encounter the Lord as we learn thankfulness; if the way is fearful, we will encounter the Lord as we learn hope. All the ways to heaven are heaven because Jesus offers us in every circumstance a way to encounter Him and with him, the life of heaven.

I share this at the beginning of our reflections, because this evening we hear again the lessons for Septuagesima Sunday. Septuagesima is the Sunday upon which we are called to begin our preparations for the season of Lent. St Paul alludes to the the disciplines of the season in the Epistle: "every[one] that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things." Though Lent is a jour-ney into the desert with Christ, this evening's Gospel reminds us at the very beginning of our preparations that the goal of our de-sert pilgrimage this season is not desert but vineyard. Or, perhaps better, the goal of our wilderness wanderings is to see the desert as vineyard: "THE kingdom of heaven," we have read, "is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard." All the ways to heaven are heaven.

This is the first things I hoped to share this evening: simply that our goal this season is to come to know the desert as vine-yard, and to do so by entering into the desert with Christ.

But secondly, I wanted to suggest this evening that the labour of workers in a vineyard has something to teach us about our proper spiritual labour. To work in the vineyard in the Gospel this evening is, plainly, to make wine. In the Scriptures —the Christian oracles— wine is an image of at least two things: On the one hand, wine appears early in the Scriptures as an offering or a sacrifice to God. In the first pages of the Book of Genesis, for example, the old priest Melchizadek appears with bread and wine to offer God in thanksgiving for Abraham's support in battle. Wine is used in the Temple sacrifices of ancient Israel, called the drink offering. And of course for Christians all of these Old Testament uses of wine as an offering to God foreshadow Christ's own use of wine at the Last Supper: "...He took the cup and when he had given thanks gave it to them, saying, 'Drink ye all of this, for this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many.'" Wine in the Bible is a sacrifice, an offering. On the other hand, wine is also used in the Scriptures as a symbol of joy. In Psalm 104 we are told that God gives wine to "glad-den the hearts of men." In the Book of the Prophet Isaiah we are told that God himself shall furnish wine in his kingdom as a sign of joy and celebration: "On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined." And if nowhere else, then surely at the Chaplain's open house on Epiphany, you all learned that wine is for joy.

To be called into the vineyard as in the Gospel is to be called to the work of wine-making - that is, to find our joy in the life of sacrificial love; to find our joy by making, as it were, the wine of tender and loving self-denial for the sake of another. This is meant to be the shape of Lent for us and of our lives. The struggle is that precisely this way of loving feels so often like desert and not vineyard, feels so much like losing rather than being filled up. And so in Lent we abide the self-emptying, we undertake the losing, if only in the conviction that, as Isaiah writes, "the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad [...] the desert will rejoice and blossom like a rose." The desert —at least in principle— is vineyard.

But let me conclude. This evening's lessons frame for us the pilgrimage, the quest, of the season soon to begin: on the one hand, we will journey into the desert in order to see it made vineyard; on the other hand, the labour the journey demands is the labour of love, which we pray will become, by grace, our joy. All of this —the journey, the loving, the labouring— all is gift. None of it earns us a place

in the vineyard. Rather, having been called in, we labour in thanksgiving. But urgently, I think —and as a final image for our prayers this evening— we must see this about the Gospel lesson for Septuagesima: the God who invites into the vineyar is relentless in the invitation. He goes out early and at mid day and late at night. And for those of us who may despair at the prospect of a holy Lent, or for whom the call yet again to love one another seems difficult, or imposing, or overwhelming -- for those of us who fear that we may be left behind on the journey, we are reminded this evening that we need never despair. All are called in: the worst hard luck case you know -- even if it is yourself -- is called in not because we are good, but simply be-cause he is good. And so we call Jesus not simply Saviour, but in the prayers of the Church, we call him the Lover of Mankind. We need never fear; he is relentless.

We are invited this evening to prepare ourselves for the season of Lent. In Lent we shall see the desert blossom — this will be the story of Holy Week, for example, and of the Cross. And in Lent we shall see our Lord's love for us be his joy. And we shall pray for the desert places of our lives to blossom, shall pray for our loving one another to become our joy. All the way to heaven is heaven. But we begin the journey by submitting ourselves to hope: the master of the vineyard seeks us all —seeks those for whom we have no hope and seeks us when we feel beyond hope. The desert is a vineyard.

AMEN.

Lent II

FR. RANALL INGALLS • FEBRUARY 25

From the Gospel According to St Matthew, "Jesus answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

Jesus says to the Syrophoenician woman in today's Gospel, 'Great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.' But in what consists the greatness of her faith? What is it about her faith that Jesus commends? The importance of this question may become clearer if we recall what we heard just before Lent began. The Collect, Epistle and Gospel for Quinquagesima were all about love. They reminded us that the whole purpose of our Lenten journey is love. From the Gospel that day we understood that we are going up with Jesus to Jerusalem. This journey, this pilgrimage with Christ and his disciples to Jerusalem to witness his Passion offers us the possibility of the renewal of spiritual vision. Hence Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus in answer to the disciples' bewilderment when he tells them something of the suffering that lies before him. It is a sign. Through the journey the disciples are about to take with Him, Christ will renew powers of spiritual vision: of memory, understanding, and desire. This renewal, this new life, is a gift, and all his doing. At the same time, to receive this gift will not be easy. It will not be easy to look on Christ's affliction, and to go on looking. It will not be easy to look on Love in such a way as to be transformed by Love. This journey into the heart of Love will demand something of us.

Last Sunday's Gospel began to unfold what will be required. It will require solitude, fasting and struggle. Christ's temptations are our temptations, and his struggle our struggle. 'Turn stones to bread.' Use the spiritual powers with which we are endowed as human beings for the sake of our own comfort and convenience and the satisfaction of our bodily desires. 'Cast yourself down from a pinnacle of the Temple.' Force God's hand to save us. Put him to the test. Insist that he win our loyalty and service by doing our bidding. 'Bow down to me and I will give you the kingdoms of this world.' Make ourselves the measure of what is good and true and beautiful. The journey into the heart of love will demand of us that we receive our bread – bread for our bodies, bread for our understanding and our desires – at God's hands. As today's collect puts it, 'we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves'. This journey will demand of us that we put ourselves, our souls and bodies at God's service, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice. It will ask of us that we allow that we are not the measure of truth. We seek truth, and we seek a heart that is able to rejoice in truth – a heart no longer chained and enslaved by its illusions.

When Jesus says to the woman in today's Gospel, 'Great is thy faith', then, it is of the greatest importance. Here is the faith that is ready to receive the gift of the renewal of our powers of spiritual vision. Here is the faith that is able to receive the renewal of our humanity in Wisdom and Love. Here is the faith that is able to make the Lenten journey with Christ to Jerusalem, and to profit from it. What is it, then, that Christ commends about this woman's faith?

Well, we notice first that, like blind Bartimaeus, this woman brings to Christ a crying need. Bartimaeus calls out from his place where he begs for a living near the side of the road, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.' Like Bartimaeus, she will not be silenced or put off. When people in the crowd try to silence Bartimaeus, he becomes louder and more insistent. When Jesus will not answer this woman's pleas and his disciples beg him to make her go away, she throws herself down at Jesus' feet so that he cannot get by her without walking around her and cries, 'Help me!' When he offers her what appears to be a humiliating insult, calling her a 'little dog', she does not turn away, angry and disgusted. She has one thing on her heart: her daughter. And she has one conviction with respect to Jesus: He can help if He will. She is not there for strokes. She is not there to have her own good opinion of herself confirmed. She has no pride to save. Life and death are in the balance.

Michael Ramsey, at one time Archbishop of Canterbury, once said that the work of a priest is to be with God with the people on his heart. And the priest does this so that every Christian, the whole body of Christ, may exercise this same priestly ministry, for the whole people of God are to be 'a royal priesthood, a holy nation' (1 Peter 2:9). In her humility and desperate need, this woman is exercising the priesthood to which the whole human race is called in creation, and which is restored to us in Jesus. She carries her daughter on her heart to God in Christ. And so closely does she identify herself with her daughter that when she casts herself at Jesus' feet she says not, 'Lord, help her!' but 'Lord, help me!'

The difficulty is that we do not want the dignity of priesthood, or, if we want it, we don't want it nearly as it calls out

to be desired. When we murder one another in our hearts and by our indifference and callousness, like Cain the first murderer we say to God sometimes with our lips and more often by the lives we lead, 'Am I my brother's keeper?'

The greatness of this woman's faith lies first in the fact that she brings to Christ a crying need. Her daughter is possessed by demons. That is, her desires are fixed on illusions that promise life and deliver death. She has lost herself, she has been robbed of her humanity, robbed of reason and love, of the ability to live with others. Secondly, this need is not only her own. It is not merely private or individual, though it is personal. To pray truly is to pray as belonging to and representing others. This is why Christ teaches us to pray, 'Our Father', and promises that where two or three are gathered in His Name He is in the midst of them. This is why in the Lord's prayer to receive forgiveness requires of us that we be prepared to see others forgiven, including especially those who have wronged us. There can be no prayer if we are determined to remain alone, for it is in the nature of prayer and in the nature of the God to whom we pray to draw us out of our isolation and into communion and fellowship with Him and with one another: into relationship with the Creator and all creation. This woman's faith is such that she prays in just this way.

More than this, once having brought her daughter to Christ in this way, this woman is prepared to wrestle with Him. This is Christ's desire. He knows she has it in her. She will not be put off by what he does to call forth her strength. He would not bait and taunt her otherwise. Notice that Jesus does not deal with everyone the same. He is a physician, and he seeks the cure of souls. What is medicine for one is poison for another. But here is a faith that is ready to receive strong medicine, and so Christ administers it. She flings herself down at his feet crying, 'Help me!' and at last he speaks to her. He deals a humiliating blow. 'It is not right to take the children's bread and feed it to the dogs,' he says. But He has exposed himself. She sees her opportunity. She did not come to demand her rights. As a despised Canaanite she knew she had nothing to stand on before this Jewish rabbi. She had no ground for confidence that He would help her except whatever was already in His own mind heart. And, having opened His heart a little to her, she sees her opportunity. She takes hold of his words, and makes them her own. He has given her a hold, and, like a good wrestler, she will throw Him now. 'Truth, Lord. Yet even the little dogs eat of the crumbs that falls from their masters table.' Game. Set. Match. Its all over in a moment. As Martin Luther says, 'Was not that a master stroke? she snares Christ in his own words.'[1]

But this was always Christ's hope. He treated her with such apparent callousness precisely in order to call forth from her this fighting spirit, and called it forth precisely so that He might be overcome by it. One can almost see his face alive with delight. She has won her way through the barrier of centuries of hatred between Jews and Canaanites to a glimpse of the universal purpose of God, his desire that through Abraham all the nations of the earth should be blessed. She has won her way through to a glimpse of the fact that in Jesus God is carrying out this good purpose. Those who have been despised 'little dogs' will soon be children together with those who have so long despised them. In Christ Himself the divisions and ancient hatreds are to be overcome in principle. Where people are ready to receive this hard-won reconciliation, they will be overcome in actuality.

What is the faith that will make it possible to receive the gift of the renewal of our powers of spiritual vision? What faith will receive the power that is in the passion, death and resurrection of Christ to renew our minds and hearts, our families, friendships, communities – all that binds us to one another and to God? A faith that brings to God crying need. A faith that recognizes that we belong to one another and we represent one another before God. A faith that is prepared to wrestle with God, that seeks opportunity, that watches and waits – listening, attentive – ready to find itself in what He says and use this to advantage.

How shall we gain such faith? By God's work in us purifying, lifting up and uniting our desires, our loves. So the priest prays at the beginning of the Mass, first addressing God as the one 'unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid' he goes on to ask God to 'cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit'. By God's work... By the practice of those disciplines through which we win freedom with respect to our unruly, divided and conflicting desires, as described in today's Epistle. By God's good gifts, and especially by the gifts of Word and Sacrament, through which God gives us Christ Himself, the Bread of Life, to be our spiritual food. God Himself shares with us the power to overcome Him, as we do when with an undivided heart we demand of Him that He do what His own good will. It is by His gift that we win from Him undistracted love for the Source of all truth, all beauty, all goodness. What appears from one perspective as our work is, from another, all God's. In the words of St Augustine, 'God crowns His own work in us.' God crowns His own work in us, giving us the courage and the desire to wrestle with Him as spiritual athletes, with the power to overcome even Him, as our understanding is drawn upwards into His Wisdom, and as our desires are drawn upwards into His Love.

By the Holy Mysteries we celebrate this evening, and by all God's good gifts, may it be so among us.

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[1]Quoted in Trench, *Miracles*, p. 368.

Easter Thursday

FR. CHRISTOPHER SNOOK • MARCH 31

"Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead [...]"

For well over a year now I have been haunted by a single verse of a very long poem called "Susanna." The verse is placed in the mouth of an elderly woman in her final days of life. Opening her eyes to find a stranger standing at her bedside in the hospital, the old woman says:

> You want to know the truth? [...]
> It's something that
> My mother told me
> There's not a single inch
> Of our whole body
> That the Lord does not love.

"There's not a single inch/Of our whole body/That the Lord does not love." It is an extraordinary statement, echoing as it does the many passages in holy Scripture that refer to the Lord's tender care for each and every human person – care not simply for their souls, but even for the finest details of their bodies (what a different poet has called the "visible soul.") In the Old Testament, for example, the Psalmist writes: "you [God] knit me together in my mother's womb." (Psalm 139:13) In the New Testament Jesus reminds his followers that "even the very hairs of your head are all numbered." (Luke 12:7) In images poetic and theological, the Scriptures affirm what the poet says: that the Lord loves not only our souls, not simply our personalities, but that he loves every inch "of our whole body." It is Easter Week and in some sense the Resurrection of our Lord confirms this simple observation. In Jesus, the human body as well as the soul is loved into new life, indeed, loved into a new creation in and through the Cross: "Christ being raised from the dead", as St Paul writes, "dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him." "Behold", says Jesus at the end of the Scriptures, "I make all things new."

In the Gospel lesson this evening we are reminded that just as God loves soul and body, so too do we. Salome and the two Mary's – the myrrh bearing women – come to the tomb of Christ to anoint his dead body with "sweet spices," assuming that after three days his body will be in a state of decay. In their desire we can recognize, I suspect, the ways that we tend the bodies of our loved ones in their final illnesses: there is the holding of hands, the massaging of feet, there are the tender ways that we shave and dress and otherwise care for them. Until relatively recently we would also have washed the bodies of our dead and helped prepare them for burial. We visit graves. In all of these ways, like the women, we come to our dead to anoint them, as it were – to bear witness to the love we had, but which is frustrated by the grave.

But when the women arrive at the tomb they discover that the Lord is risen and gone ahead of them: "Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here..." And the message for us is simple and profound: His tomb is empty, and its emptiness is a sign of God's promise to bring to life to all who have died – first Christ, and then those who sleep in Him when Jesus returns. The first meaning of Christ's resurrection in Eastertide, then, is that we too will be raised, and not only us, but all those whom we love and have lost – raised not bodiless spirits, but crucially raised precisely in the body. "There's not a single inch/Of our whole body/That the Lord does not love." We adore one another in and through our bodies; we know Jesus in his Body; and so the Lord will raise us up in the body. Christ is the first fruits of them that die.

But Christ's Resurrection is not only about hope after our deaths. On Easter Sunday we were reminded by St Paul that the Resurrection of Jesus is not simply a promise about our bodies at the end of time, but more specifically is a promise even now about the resurrection or the raising up of our minds. "If ye then be risen with Christ," St Paul proclaims on Easter, "seek those things which are above." But how? How is it possible to live the resurrected life even now? The answer is as simple as it is profound: We know the life of resurrection here and now by learning to live the Cross.

This is the mystery, the paradox at the heart of our faith. *It is through the good news of the Resurrection that we are given the capacity to live Christ's sacrificial love for one another.* And so St Paul exhorts us in the Epistle lesson to remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead -- but he exhorts us, extraordinarily, from prison. That is, he exhorts us to remember the Resurrection while himself living the Cross. We know by experience of course that the cost of true love is death – death to selfwill, death to self-absorption, death to self-ishness in order to live for another. But this dying is painfully difficult because it often seems as if staying alive demands not that we give everything away, but that we hold on to tighly to things – hold on to some vestige of power, to some sign of control, to some measure of self-interest. And so we easily refuse to die. But only what dies can rise again. Bishop Ignatius of Antioch, martyred in the year 115,

is one of the great exemplars from the first generation of Christians. Anticipating his martyrdom, he writes: grant me nothing more than that I be poured out a libation to God [...] pray that I may have power within and without [...] that I may not only be called a Christian, but also be found one. Living the Resurrection looks like the Cross, looks like this willingness to be poured out for one another as an offering to the Lord. And so, in the light of the Resurrection, we can love our enemies; do good to those who persecute us; turn the other cheek; give to those in need; store up treasure in heaven – we can live the life of Christ because on Easter we discover that on the other side of every death is resurrection.

But what of the women who have come to the tomb and their desire to anoint the body of the Lord?

Anointings of many kinds have been with us throughout Holy Week and Easter. Mary of Bethany anointed the Body of the Lord with costly perfume before his death; after his betrayal of the Lord, Peter figuratively annointed Christ's body with his tears of repentence. The actual Body of the Lord was anointed and prepared for burial after he was taken down from the cross.

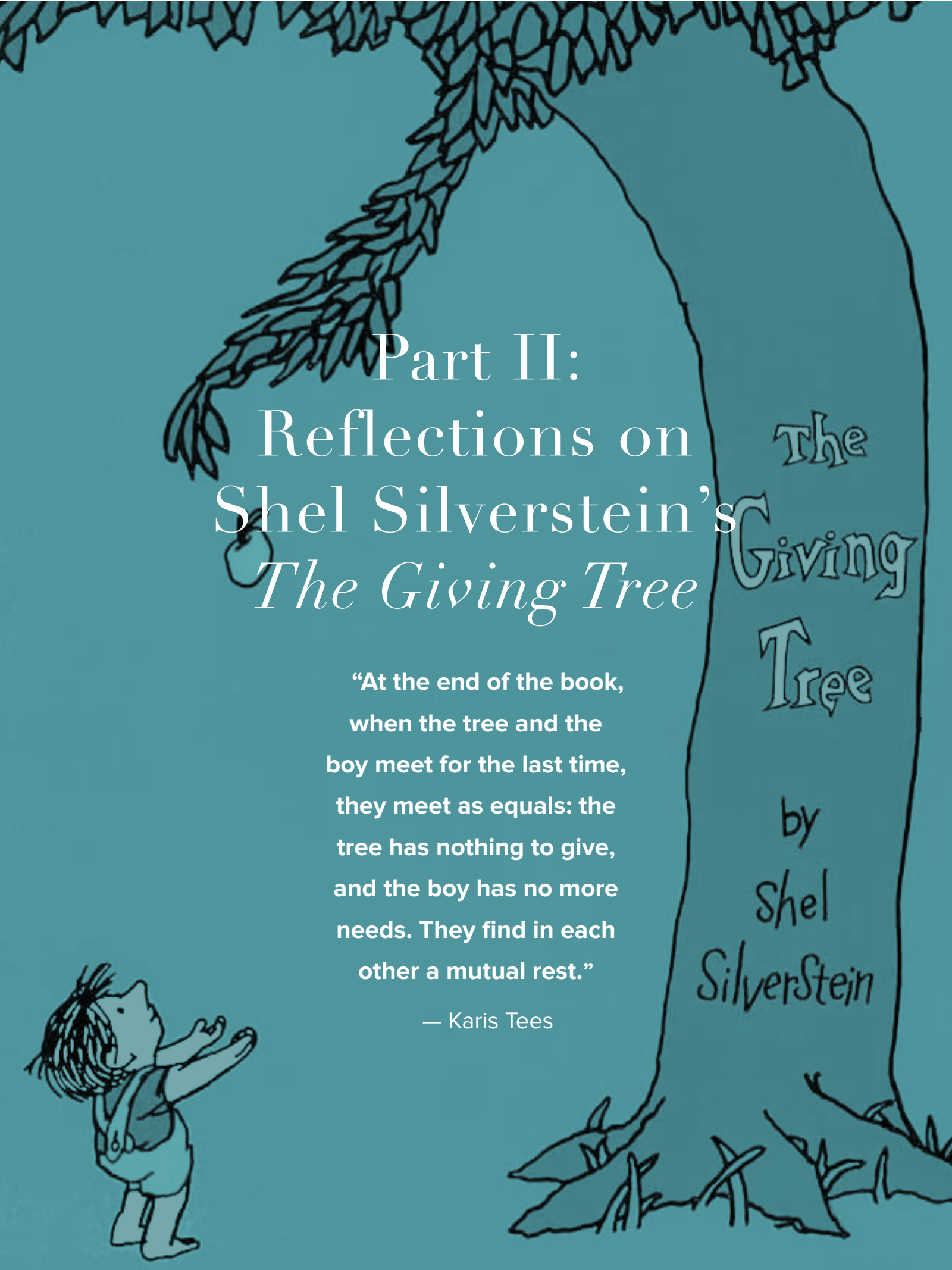
The angels tell the women in the Gospel who have come to anoint the dead Body of their Master to go their way and to proclaim to the disciples that the Lord is risen. Surely this proclamation, in its own way, is a kind of anointing – it is the sprinkling, as it were, of the good news of the Resurrection on the fearful souls of the first disciples; it is the perfuming of their hopelessness with hope. In some sense, it seems to me, this is the anointing of the Body of the Lord to which we are all called. For we too are called to anoint the Body – that is, the Church, one another, our neighbour -- with the good news of the Resurrection. Our prayers for one another anoint the Body; our tears on behalf of each other are anointings; our acts of kindness and burden bearing -- they are the anointings of Christ himself, the light than lightens the heart of every person born into the world. "There's not a single inch/Of our whole body/That the Lord does not love."

If we are to "remember Jesus Christ, and him risen from the dead," we will do so best by anointing his sacred body in one another. And this can be joy as we discover that dying for one another is the only way to life. Only what dies can rise.

Let me conclude with the final words of Bishop Anthony Bloom's Easter Message preached in 1972: "All of us, sooner or later, will stand before the judgment of God and will have to answer whether we were able to love the whole world – believers and unbelievers, the good and the bad - with the sacrificial, crucified, all-conquering love with which God loves us."

"There's not a single inch/Of our whole body/That the Lord does not love." There is not a single inch of his Body that we are not called to love. So let us gather up the sweet spices of our prayers and perfume of love, and spend it lavishly on each other. All that dies, shall be raised.

AMEN.



Part II: Reflections on Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree*

"At the end of the book, when the tree and the boy meet for the last time, they meet as equals: the tree has nothing to give, and the boy has no more needs. They find in each other a mutual rest."

— Karis Tees

Dr. Sarah Clift

EVENSONG, JANUARY 13

From the Gospel According to St Matthew,
"Many are called, but few are chosen."

As you may know, Shel Silverstein's classical work of children's literature, *The Giving Tree*, just celebrated its 50th anniversary. Hard though it might be to admit, the numbers don't lie: I too recently celebrated my 50th anniversary. That puts me neck-and-neck with The Giving Tree. Perhaps an obvious question arises here...which one of us is the tree and which the boy?

I loved this book when I was a child. I loved it as a new mother, introducing it to my child. So, when the occasion arose to reflect a little on the book, I was both daunted and grateful for the invitation.

The other evening Tovah and I sat down to revisit the story, her copy (having been mine, dated Christmas 1970, Love Mummy & Daddy) long since relegated to the 'Baby book' boxes in the basement. I was delighted that she was keen to go through it again. It was almost as if we were taking up old positions, adopting a beloved posture with each other (one that we rehearse only seldom now, her teen years pressing upon us both). So there we were, reading lamp alit, her nestled beside me with the keen anticipation of one about to indulge in guaranteed pleasure.

Imagine, if you will, the scene that followed: we alternated reading, page for page, as we moved through the book. As we progressed, a feeling of dread developed in the space between our pages, between our voices, the story unfolding before us. It being completed, we sat in silence. Complete and total disappointment on both our parts. Sadness of an aching variety. Tovah: He never said 'thank you', not even once. She wasn't dismissive, and nor was she even judgemental. "Imploring' is the only word I can think of, verging on desperate.

We left it there. Quite frankly, I had no energy to engage much in the way of conversation about the story, the difficulty we both felt that made our previous nostalgia about the book feel naïve, simplistic, duped, even. Truth be told, I felt a little nauseous, as if some small magical diamond of my childhood had just been shown up to be a cheap trinket. I wondered: how could I have ever experienced this story as the real truth of unconditional love, of friendship's simple endurance, when what was now revealing itself to me was as an emotionally intensified iteration of the most standard clichés of endless maternal generosity and exploitation of that generosity as the naturalized modus operandi of a 'boy' unwilling to grow up, etc. Even the writing style made me feel a little seasick: The monotonous incantation of "you will be happy" and "and the tree was happy."

So there you have it: proof positive that, at a certain level, you can never go back. Had I changed, I wondered? That's for sure. But was that it? Is there a positive message to be gleaned from this book; was it ever meant to be positive?

So here I am, supposedly prepared to say something thoughtful, mildly intelligent or thought provoking, and, at the very least, reflective for you tonight. But all I've given here is a confession, and a quite pathetic one at that. So rather than say something about this story, in the face of which I feel quite trapped, I will say something about my reaction to it—and in particular, about my strong feeling of betrayal.

As I probed this feeling – one attended by a great deal of cynicism at the monstrous ghoul-author pictured on the back page – I began to ask myself: Hmmm, what has happened (in me, in others, etc) to the idea of unconditional generosity? One thing that struck me is how easily the ideas of unconditional love and unconditional generosity can be leveraged to legitimate all kinds of exploitation: from devastation of the environment on the basis that nature is a gift that will keep on giving, to the low wages paid to early child-care workers (they don't do it for money, you know, they do it because they love children) – a coincidence that these are both feminized? Not by a long shot.

So, as I followed my own train of thought: Aha, I thought! The book is meant as a critique of such exploitation, the thumping and toneless "the tree was happy" meant ironically to suggest a masochist's rationalization of extreme self-denial. The more fulfilled the 'boy' is, it seems, the more amputated becomes the 'giver.' – I thought too of the Lars von Trier film Breaking the Waves, a connection that has not ceased to haunt.

So, done and dusted, I thought, my sense of self being restored through my act of critical interpretation. But then another disturbance started creeping in. "Am I substituting "unconditional generosity" for a more desirable quid pro quo, equally out contributions, so that everyone feels as if they get in return what they have given?" In other words, is generosity only palpable for me when it is reciprocated

in a kind of exchange? And if that is true, x for a y of equal value, then what I am saying about generosity and about gift-giving in general? Am I saying that the only gift worth giving is one that will be paid back, and how far is this from an exchange of goods for cash of equivalent value? Am I saying that, outside of economic rationality, there is no gift at all that is not exploitative, duped, suffering from false consciousness, or whatever?

I am caught within this tension: critical of a romantic ideal of feminized unconditional giving, but also deeply unsatisfied with the idea of the gift's impossibility, and the expectation of reciprocity. Perhaps then I will just finish off by saying that the brilliance of *The Giving Tree*, and perhaps even what makes it a gift that keeps on giving, is that it refuses to settle this matter. Rather, in lieu of a positive message, the story makes generosity a matter to think about, an impossibility to mull over, and to mull over well beyond the confines of the story itself, in our own acts of generosity, our own acts of taking. Until we get any of this right—and it seems to me we are still very far from doing so—perhaps we would do well to take my dear Tovah's advice: in whatever way you may choose to do so, always remember to say 'thank you.'

Veronica Curran

EVENSONG, JANUARY 27

Among the scientific discoveries of the 20th century, it became understood, in some circles, that plants are sentient, that they have feelings. This presented those in the field with the horrifying idea that plants may feel it when they are consumed, that we may in fact be eating them alive. After further research was conducted, it was learned that fruits and vegetables did not, in fact, react negatively toward being eaten. As one scientist was reported as saying, "It may be [...] that a vegetable appreciates becoming part of another form of life rather than rotting on the ground, just as a human at death may experience relief to find himself in a higher realm of being" (As found in: Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird *The Secret Life of Plants* 8) The relationship between plants and their humans is a real and live one, and I would like to explore in the next few minutes the ways in which we and plants are similar and how this is demonstrated through *The Giving Tree*.

When Dr. Jesse Billett was here a couple of weeks ago he drew to some of our attention the balance of nourishment that takes place during the communion service. While the fruit of the tree and, for that matter, the bread and wine of communion are physically becoming part of us, we humans are nourishing and becoming part of the body of Christ through the act of taking communion. While the miracle appears to us through the gift being given, the act of receiving and accepting is equally as important. In this act we not only take the physical nourishment, but also take the grace of God. For humans, this action can only go in one direction; it is not possible to give grace back.

In our Gospel reading this week, which you will have a chance to hear again tomorrow, we were told about the labourers in the field: although all of them are called to work at

different points in the day, they are all paid a full day's wages (Matthew 20:1). What I want to draw our attention to in this Gospel is not the matter of the payment, but rather the matter of the call to action. The most important thing that the workers do is answer the call, no matter what time of day, or how late in life it is. In this way Christians are called to the faith and must answer, they cannot put away that call until life's end and hope that the offer is still available. There is a moment to be seized and an offer to be accepted.

This is related to our story, *The Giving Tree*, in several ways. First, it is not until the end of his life that the man, or former boy, seems to understand his relationship with the tree. As Dr. Clift very aptly pointed out two weeks ago, he never does say thank you, but I would argue that something does change about the nature in which he takes in these final moments. He takes a place to rest, but in doing so, he gives the tree the one thing she truly wanted, his love and company. In the same way that the tree has nothing else to give, neither does the man. He tells her, "My teeth are too weak for apples [...] I am too old to swing on branches [...] I am too tired to climb" (Silverstein). It is in both of their moments of great poverty, that they are able to have a relationship of mutual love. If he has made an error, it is mainly in not having learned this far earlier in his course. If he could have heard the tree's requests for friendship, instead of focusing on his own needs, he might have received a much greater comfort than the materials items ever allowed. We are not given the impression that he has lived an easy life or that obtaining the things he feels he needs has made his life any easier.

The second connection between *The Giving Tree* and our Gospel is that we have to ask the question of whether the boy was wrong to take everything that the tree had, everything that was offered. If we compare this to the parable of the workers in the vineyard the receiving is a holy act. It does not, however, in the parable, destroy the thing that is doing the giving. This is why Jesus's human life is so important and how it helps Christians to understand the consequences of this earthly life. The Giving Tree makes no sense when we take the tree to be God the Father (the tree is actually female, but I will leave that to one of my fellow Giving Tree interpreters), because our taking does not hurt God in anyway. In fact, it is a large part of being a good Christian to simply take. We take forgiveness, and grace, and manna, and the list goes on. But this is in a way what our relationship to God is meant to be.

It is when we look to our relationship with God the Son that we see the problem. Jesus spends his whole life giving and in the end we, humankind, take from him his life and his dignity but in doing this we allow him to fulfill his life's purpose. Is this a comfortable thought? Of course not! We, in the Chapel, actually dwell on this discomfort by reading and reenacting the Gospel accounts of the Passion over and over again during holy week. We do this so that we can together have the experience of pleading, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" a refrain that each one of us unknowingly re-

peats in our actions and thoughts over a lifetime.

I suppose what I am getting at is that this story has the same effect as that moment in the reenactment of the Gospel. This is not to say that the boy goes wrong by simply accepting the offer of the tree, he goes wrong because he does not appear to be aware of his own actions or their consequences. We are being reminded in this book to be aware of ours. We are being reminded that life requires weakness and accepting the help of others, even accepting that it may hurt the other person to take it. This acceptance must, despite the harm it may cause, be done through love. We must examine our actions and be certain that they are acts of charity and not malice.

This story also points to the fact that when in life we are at our strongest, we should strive to be the tree, to be Christ. Father Thorne's constant refrain that we must "Bare one another's burdens" was the first thing that came to my mind when I reread this story a few weeks ago (Galatians 6:2). The act of giving can be the act of letting go of things that we believe ourselves to desperately need, it is not always pleasant and at times it takes more from us than we know if we can bear. Remember, the boy's requests are never strictly frivolous, they are always connected to things that we all think of as earthly necessities; money, a home and family, and some rest through escape. The tree does not judge the worth of these requests, but simply accepts that the man feels he needs them. Sometimes bearing another's burdens means giving that person the thing that will give them immediate relief, whether it helps them in a greater sense or not. In these and so many other ways the role of the giver can be difficult and painful. However, in these moments of struggle we must remember that we are called to accept and in fact take spiritual grace in order to fulfill earthly duty. While we strive to be givers on earth, we are all takers in spirit.

Karis Tees

EVENSONG, FEBRUARY 24

The Giving Tree is a children's book written by Shel Silverstein, first published in 1964. For the sake of those of you who have not had the chance to read it, since this is the first of these reflections given at All Saints Cathedral, I will give a brief, very inadequate, summary. The book tells the story of a boy and a tree. As a young child, the boy plays with the tree in a kind of garden bliss. As the boy grows older, the tree beckons him to come and play, but he declines the invitation, instead opting to follow the path of his life: work, marriage, household life, etc. In an apparent attempt to help the boy find happiness, the tree gives the boy everything she has: she gives him her apples to sell for money, her branches to build his house, her whole trunk to build him a boat. Each time the tree gives to the boy, we are told that she is happy. By the end of the book, the tree is a stump and the boy is an old man. The tree has nothing left to give to the boy, but since all he needs is a place to sit, he sits on her stump to rest. The book concludes with the repeated line: "And the tree was happy."

Over the past few weeks, listening to other reflections on *The Giving Tree* and in some subconscious way thinking about my own reflection, I had decided to begin by saying, in an inflammatory way, "I am sick of this book! It only makes me angry!" And I do feel this sentiment very strongly! On the one hand, I do not feel sorry for the boy, because I cannot have sympathy for this ignorant person who takes advantage of the tree's giving and whose selfishness destroys her in her selflessness. On the other hand, I am angry at the tree for giving her entire body to the boy, so that she is just an old stump who must pathetically "straighten herself up" at the end so that the boy can do her the indignity of sitting on her. I do not understand why she must destroy herself. Apparently, the tree has no sense whatsoever of self-preservation, and so I don't have much sympathy for her, either.

Recently I had a conversation with a friend in which we spoke of how anger is never a primary emotion. That is, it seems to always be a secondary cover for some other deep-rooted emotion, which is really the one that must be attended to. And, as I discovered and rediscovered while reading *The Giving Tree* on two different occasions in preparation for this reflection, my primary response to this book is not actually anger at all, but a kind of absolute sadness (I had also considered reading the entire short text as a preface to this talk, but I am unable to read it aloud without crying).

So, I admit it: this book makes me deeply sad. And instead of reflecting on the Christ-image of the tree, or the obvious critique of the common but futile search for fulfillment in material possessions, or—as Dr. Clift so shrewdly pointed out—the difficult imagery of endless giving which is so often feminized, I am just going to try to probe the reasons why this book makes me so sad.

In this chapel community, I have discovered that an appropriate response to this broken world—or, to be more topical, to the oppressive consumerism that encourages self-obsession and the corporate political structure that is determined to erase the conditions for true community—is to humbly attempt to bear the burdens of others and to release my own burdens within a community of people who are attempting to do the same. This way of being is not very "worldly": it certainly contradicts common notions of self-care, but by virtue of this lack of "wordliness" it is refreshingly contrary to the endless haunting chant of consumer culture which repeats, at every turn, "then you will be happy." And yet, truly submitting to a life where you take on the burdens of others, and—even worse—release your own burdens, makes you extremely vulnerable! Despite my great commitment to this place and my feeble attempts to interpret and follow St. Paul's exhortation to "bear one another's burdens," ultimately I am not willing to allow this extreme vulnerability because I am afraid of being destroyed. I fear giving as the tree gives, because I sense a great danger in giving as the tree gives. I think that this book makes me so sad in part because I just cannot stand to see the tree being destroyed, and somehow finding lasting peace with being a stump. I fear the reality of Fr. Thorne's prayer to the choristers before Evensong over the past few weeks: I am afraid of being "stumped." I expose these fears to you partly in the hope that you will inhabit them with me, but more primarily in the hope that there are others here who already share these fears, whether you have thought to articulate them in this way or not.

It is a precarious and terrifying way of living, to rely on others to forgive you, and to come through for you when you need it, and to accept you as you are. The giving tree is only happy when the boy comes to visit, and so most of her life is spent in long, lonely periods of sadness. As I suggested above, she has no sense of selfpreservation, while the boy knows only self-preservation. He does not

even claim to seek his own happiness (it is the tree who suggests that he might find it), but rather goes through the motions necessary to perpetuate his life: making money, owning a house, and eventually, in an apparent moment of crisis, building a boat in an attempt to escape the unhappiness he has never admitted. Perhaps the boy's way of living is, on the surface, less precarious and terrifying than that of the tree, but in the end, he is just as broken down as the giving tree. At the end of the book, when the tree and the boy meet for the last time, they meet as equals: the tree has nothing to give, and the boy has no more needs. They find in each other a mutual rest.

This is all very sweet and I know in my head that it is true, but in my heart I am still devastated on behalf of the tree. I still cannot come to terms with her destruction. The boy has reached the bitter end of his human lifespan, but the tree's life has ended prematurely for the sake of another. If I let myself, I weep while reading this book. I wept while writing this reflection. My only consolation, if it can be called that, is that this season of Lent allows us to dwell in the fullness of our sadness, and I am grateful for a space and time that does not sweep it under the rug or make light of it.

Dr. Christopher Elson

EVENSONG, MARCH 2

This book does not harken back to a golden moment of childhood for me. I have no prior relation to the text whatsoever. I think I skimmed through it once a few years ago and again recently when I was asked to offer a reflection during Lent. Only last night did I give it my sustained attention, so what you have today will have the character, to some extent, of first impressions, I think; organized but impressionistic, urgent if not worked out, fragments that are, if not exactly inconclusive, at least unwilling to conclude too definitively about some aspects of this odd classic.

The way this term has worked out on Wednesdays, I've only managed to hear one reflection on *The Giving Tree*, that of Sarah Clift whose tale of an unexpected and heartbreaking change of heart stayed with me. Tonight, I'm afraid, there will be no conversion nor any falling away. I am only approaching, not adhering, not rejecting. I struggle with this text, with its emotional tonalities, with its graphic-text mixture, with its account of giving and taking, with its representation of mortality, with its possible symbolisms, with the idea that I am missing something. Struggle too with the idea that there might not be that much there.

What I will offer now are a series of four linked thoughts that are largely based on considering the book as an *illustrated* book, that address themselves to the balance of image and text. On the horizon too is an attempt to define the very particular emotional tone or tones that we find here, feelings that I find somewhat elusive, more than a little tough to pin down.

POINT 1: THE FRAME.

I take it that it is significant that we never see the whole tree. It is a kind of plenitude that defies adequate representation. Its emotional capacities are infinite, almost, its material resources plentiful, its strange consciousness oddly and variably poised between transcendent wisdom and immanent engagement and suffering.

The second two page spread is poignant to me: (There was a tree says the opening line, we turn the page and read [...]) And she loved a little boy. We see the tree surging out of the empty ground into the beyond of the top of the page, leaning in to what we infer is a whole world. And just peeking, if feet can peek, into the negative space of the almost blank page, we have the foot and lower leg of (presumably) the little boy. It is love that makes things come into visibility, love that makes individuality and category nouns appear. But language here belongs neither to the tree nor to the boy, it is superimposed and if we take the balance of words and image seriously, it is taking great care.

If we trace through the representation of the tree as it/she progressively sacrifices itself to the desires of the boy, this same logic of partial representation applies right up until the point at which the tree is only a stump, I will come back to this later.

The frame does admit and come to hold the boy, the boy in his animated childhood, in his ambitious youth, in his worried maturity, disappointed old age and resigned senility (all the while still remaining the boy). But the tree's apples, its limbs, its trunk, all that the boy needs to devour, to transform to fulfill his ends, are only partially represented. At one point in the simple development of the story, when the boy-man is discouraged with life and wants to sail away on a boat, the tree offers her trunk and we have a sudden image of horizontality as the tree and the old-man-boy form a kind of human-plant hybrid, the legs and fingers only of the boy visible as the tree suddenly overturned and related differently to the uncertain ground is carried out of the space of the page.

Verticality with its implication of a logic of elevation, of a relation to something that might be permanent or might exceed calculation, is drastically reduced to a burden. Grace or unconditionality or something like it is translated to clumsy gravity, even on the promise of escape.

Elevation, abundance, constant flourishing are brought down to a vestige, a trace, a remnant.

POINT 2: GENTLE VERBS AND STUTTERING SYNTAX.

The opening moments of the text are all articulated by a non-verbalized (within the space of the action) verbal unfolding: playing, climbing, swinging, gathering, eating. Lots of interesting beautiful and frequently paradoxical things here would be worthy of some commentary, like sleeping in the non-existent shade, like playing hide and seek with an all seeing, overarching presence (what is the point...; that is the point). Everything is in a state of adequacy and fulfillment. Even the hint of glory-seeking is content with the dimensions of the undescribed forest.

The turn seems to occur with the carving, the inscription of the initials M.E. and T. on the trunk of the tree.

The stutter begins there. “and the tree was happy”

“But time went by.” “ And” “And”

From here on in it is just all ands and buts. Time becomes ageing while difference, appearance and disappearance become loneliness.

“And”, cumulative, additive, unlimited always balanced and perhaps ultimately undone by ‘but’, exceptional, dislocating, particularizing in a needy way.

We see the boy growing up, experiencing closeness and love for another human being. Inscribing something else. The leaves fall from the tree.

Then, suddenly, in a turn that I found so abrupt that it was almost sickening, we have a conversation between the tree and the boy. They both speak the same natural language. Whatever gentle verbal call to action and to sharing there was beforehand, now there is a need for an explicit request, one that is met by an egotistical expression of need.

The link still appears to bring the tree happiness, even as what is asked for is progressively more destructive to her. Always framed by some kind of dialogue that rings heavy and empty.

A kind of escalation of taking which the kind of giving the tree is, is just incapable of refusing and which needs no return. Except that it does.

POINT 3. AND THE TREE SHOOK WITH JOY.

“Except that it does”, I just said. “One day the boy came-back… and the tree shook with joy.”

The love of the tree for the boy never falters but her own adequacy and her self-resourcing fund, storehouse, whatever we might call it, does. In the most austere of the pretty austere two page spreads we read “And the tree was happy…. But not really” and the crude stump, now crucially drawn in a way that we can’t see the carved” M.E. and T., is like a sad marker of something that cannot even be said or remembered. This is ground zero.

When the old man/boy returns yet again the tree begins by apologizing for her poverty, her reduction. But the oldest version of the boy needs nothing but a place to rest, and from the adequacy of the horribly reduced tree springs a richness again. A richness born of loss.

The stuttering syntax finds measure, adequation, in their last dialogue, perhaps the only true one, before a falling-again-into-silence occurs.

In that commensurability the old-man-boy can rest, and in the presence of that rest the tree’s love can become happiness again.

POINT 4. I’M STUMPED.

What to call this feeling as we arrive at the end of the text? The stump and the moribund boy together at the end. M.E. and T. visible again, affirming the continuity through all of these metamorphoses even in their radically transformed state? What is this end of need, what is this diminished effective generosity?

A sublime melancholy, real and uncontainable, is one way of putting it, putting us into the tension of the final rest of The End and our own struggles with giving and taking, with plenitude and harsh division, with fault and forgiveness and favour.

Vanessa Halley

EVENSONG, MARCH 9

I remember encountering this book, *The Giving Tree*, when I was a child. We had it among our books at home, on the shelf. But it was never a favourite book for me, and I tended to avoid it. I recall that I found it intriguing – particularly the illustrations, and the idea of a close relationship between a person and a tree. But the book was sad, I knew it as a sad book when I was a child. Not simply because the tree is reduced to a stump by the end. What I remember feeling more is the sense of foreboding in those opening pages. Children, in my experience, pick up far more information, and are far more tuned in to underlying emotions than adults realize. As a child, I sensed right away that the bliss of the opening pages, like the Garden of Eden, would not last. The opening pages read, "Once there was a tree, and she loved a little boy. And every day the boy would come, and he would gather her leaves, and make them into crowns and play king of the forest. He would climb up her trunk and swing from her branches..." and so on. I think perhaps it's the use of the word "would" that gives a distinct impression, right from the start, that something is going to change and it's not going to be like this forever. "Would" means "used to". And as a child I didn't want to turn the page and hear about the change from that idyllic world to a world fraught with loneliness, worry, and loss of innocence and beauty.

A tree is a living thing, and we are all taught as schoolchildren that trees are wonderful things that help us and even create the air we breathe. On top of all of this, the tree in this book has huge personality, right from the start, thanks to the illustrations where the tree is always leaning, even arching towards the boy, or wrapping her branches around him, or beckoning to him. Yet even a child understands that a tree is a stationary thing. It cannot move from the spot where it is rooted. So the tree in this book is a sentient, feeling being that is limited in her ability to go find the boy and is instead dependent on him coming to see her. And the other character - a child, a little boy - is also a vulnerable, limited being who cannot, as a young child, be the master of his own destiny but of course would be dependent on others (the adults in his life) who determine and control his movements and whereabouts.

So I think all of this added up to a sense, even as a child, that for a tree to love a little boy, and a little boy to love a tree, is a wonderful yet inherently fragile situation where any number of things outside of their control could come between them and change their lovely little world.

Fast forward thirty years and now my first impression upon re-reading *The Giving Tree*, this time as a parent of a 7-year-old (and I still feel very much a new parent, full of worry), is that Shel Silverstein wrote the book for parents (perhaps for children, but more for parents) to help us come to terms with and understand the kind of love that a parent may feel for a child, and both the heartbreak and the fulfillment of that love.

The book may be understood as written from a parent's perspective. (By the way, I am talking about parents of both genders – the tree is feminine in this story, but I view it as representative of both mothers and fathers.) The tree demonstrates very human parental feelings and emotions. We are simply told that the tree loves a boy – that's all the background information we are given about the tree and the boy – and we notice that, throughout the book, the boy remains "the boy" to the tree, never "the man" or "the old man" but always "the boy". In the beginning of the relationship, the tree is able to provide directly for the boy all the things he needs as a young child: nourishment (apples), rest (in the protected shade of the tree), and both physical and mental development through play – all the basics for a young child. And the boy loves the tree. These are the early days of parenthood, when your child is utterly dependent on you and loves you for the care you provide to them.

Then the boy gets older and reaches an age where he starts to go out into the world and meet other people and look for other things. The tree can no longer provide all that the boy needs. The boy has other interests – including a girl that he brings to the tree and carves her name in a heart above the old carving where previously it was just him and the tree. We don't know anything about the girl. We just know that the tree looks lonely hovering over the two young people, with two leaves falling nostalgically down. Here the parent is left looking on as the child becomes increasingly independent and has other interests in his life. The tree is still protecting the boy, still playing a parenting role as she bends over the boy and the girl, but the tree no longer has the boy to herself.

The boy then reaches what looks like teenagehood and wants to go out and "buy things and have fun." This, I thought, is that dreaded stage which, as a new parent, I've

heard all about. I'm told all the time, "Just enjoy the early days while they last. It all changes when they become teenagers." The relationship is shifting. Instead of providing direct nourishment, the tree tries to help the boy in a more indirect way. The tree's apples now can be sold to get money.

The next stage for the boy is early adulthood. The boy is busy. He is staying away for longer periods of time. He comes to the tree to tell her he needs a house, and he wants a family of his own: a wife and children. The tree is trying to help the boy through each stage in life, to provide all she can to help him survive these changes and challenges at each stage. She offers her limbs for him to build a house.

After that, the boy comes back in later adulthood, when the he reaches what seems like a retirement age, and he describes himself as "old and sad." At this stage, the boy wants a boat to sail away in. The tree offers her trunk for the boy to build a boat. And the final stage is when the boy is a very old man, and all he wants is rest. The tree offers her stump and they rest together. And the final words are that the tree was happy.

As I said earlier, to me this book represents both the heartbreak and the fulfillment of a parent-child relationship. The heartbreak is not just the shifting relationship and the potential loneliness of the tree who, like a devoted parent, has sacrificed all, but the realization that there are no guarantees, that no matter what you do or what sacrifices you make, you cannot protect your child from the cares of the world, and you cannot guarantee their happiness. Once the boy is beyond young childhood, he never again seems truly happy. No matter how badly the tree wants to make the boy happy, and no matter how great her sacrifice, the boy always comes back seeming sad and worn down.

The fulfillment that I see here is the happiness that the tree gets from the boy. The tree is happy each time the boy returns. The fact that the boy never abandons the tree but keeps coming back is important. In the end they find rest together, and we are told the tree is happy.

On the other hand, this book is daunting because although the tree has human feelings, the tree is inhuman in her seemingly endless capacity for love, humility, and self-sacrifice. How can a parent possibly live up to this? And why would the author choose a tree rather than a person to be the boy's parent in this story?

The tree, although clearly a living, feeling being, is distinctly not human, and certainly not of the human world. The tree does not have the cares or pressures of our human existence to deal with, such as work, money, and living in society. The tree sees the boy having to grapple with these things, and she yearns to help him. But all through the story, the tree is set apart and separate from the boy's human world. The boy at first spends lots of blissful time with the tree, but as the story goes on he is increasingly called off to that other world off the page that we never see, and comes back only periodically to tell the tree about the challenges and pressures he experiences in that other world and to get her help. In the end, the boy has run his race, and he comes home to rest with the tree and to get away from the world. The tree is bearing the boy's burdens, and seems particularly able to do so because she is not part of the world he is having to live in. In this way, the tree represents love, taken out of the world, out of context, out of human experience and distilled to its purest essence.

I feel that we are all in search for the tree in our lives, but no one wants to be the tree. We have a hard time believing that the tree can really be happy (though we are told it is), reduced as it is to a stump. We feel that the tree SHOULD NOT feel happy as a stump. It has been cut down and used. The tree is not glamorous. The tree is, if anything, pitiful. No one wants to be this in reality. Yet every single one of us yearns for the kind of unconditional friendship and love in our lives that this tree provides for this boy. And the tree does not even seem to recognize her sacrifices for the boy as sacrifices.

I recently started reading David Brooks' book, *The Road to Character*. In the Introduction, he talks about two sets of virtues that are explored in Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik's 1965 book, *Lonely Man of Faith*. David Brooks says,

> Soloveitchik noted that there are two accounts of creation in Genesis and argued that these represent the two opposing sides of our nature, which he called Adam I and Adam II. Modernizing Soloveitchik's categories a bit, we could say that Adam I is the career-oriented, ambitious side of our nature. Adam I is the external, résumé Adam. Adam I wants to build, create, produce, and discover things. [...] Adam II is the internal Adam. Adam II wants to embody certain moral qualities. [...] Adam II wants to love intimately, to sacrifice self in the service of others, to live in obedience to some transcendent truth [...].[1]

Brooks argues,

> [...] Adams I and II live by different logics. Adam I – the creating, building, and discovering Adam – lives by a straightforward utilitarian logic. It's the logic of economics. Input leads to output. Effort leads to reward. Practice makes perfect. Pursue self-interest. Maximize your utility. Impress the world. Adam II lives by an inverse logic. It's a moral logic, not an economic one. You have to give to receive. You have to surrender to something outside

> yourself to gain strength within yourself. You have to conquer your desire to get what you crave. Success leads to the greatest failure, which is pride. Failure leads to the greatest success, which is humility and learning. In order to fulfill yourself, you have to forget yourself. In order to find yourself, you have to lose yourself.[2]

In chapter one, Brooks summarizes his research on what he terms the shift in North American culture from what he calls the "little me" social code of humility of only a couple of generations ago to the "big me" culture of today. He cites various astonishing statistics, such as the Gallup poll which, in 1950, "asked high school seniors if they considered themselves to be a very important person. At that point, 12 percent said yes. The same question was asked in 2005, and this time it wasn't 12 percent who considered themselves very important, it was 80 percent."[3] He cites psychiatric research that has shown that the average narcissism score has risen 30 percent in the last two decades. One of the largest gains has been in the number of people who agree with the statement "I am an extraordinary person."[4]

Looking at popular culture, social values, and educational practices over the last couple of decades, Brooks sees a moral shift from a culture that valued humility to a culture of "you are special". It seems Adam I is winning out over Adam II in our current time and place. Suffice it to say that personal sacrifice is not a popular notion these days. It can even be politically incorrect, depending on the context.

In *The Giving Tree*, all we know about the tree is that she loves the boy. That's all we need to know. It's not that the tree loves the boy but she has her own life goals and own self to look after. She does not say, "I love you but you cannot chop me down." That would be a thoroughly modern and acceptable stance. The tree would be aware of what self-sacrifice would mean for her and would not allow it. But in this book, in the case of this tree, there is no "but". And that is precisely why the tree is indeed the Giving Tree. Does the tree lose its integrity through its sacrifice? Does one lose oneself in serving others? That is our big fear – the shift in our culture that Brooks has explored.

I would argue that *The Giving Tree* demonstrates that the answer to these questions is, No. True, the end of the book is not a fairytale ending – it is rather ambiguous and leaves it to the reader to determine whether the tree's sacrifice was worthy or not. But it seems to me that the tree gains her identity and her integrity through her sacrifices. At the end of the book, it is the tree who, though a stump, we remember as The Giving Tree. We do not remember the boy except for his needs and wants. He seems rather like any other boy, man, or old man. He seems, in fact, generic, except that he is defined by the tree's love for him. And if the tree had not made her sacrifice, she would still be a full and presumably beautiful tree, but she would not be The Giving Tree. I cannot get away from the sense that at the end of the book, it is the tree who seems more personally fulfilled, rather than the boy. The boy is a sad, worldweary old man. I do not envy the boy. The tree is a stump but the final words are, "And the tree was happy." At the end of my life, looking back, and in the eulogy at my funeral, I would rather be the tree than the boy.

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[1] D. Brooks, The Road to Character (New York: Random House, 2015), pp. xi-xii.
[2] Ibid., p. xii
[3] Ibid., p. 6.
[4] Ibid., p. 7.

Dr. Laura Penny

EVENSONG, MARCH 30

First, I'd like to thank the Chapel community for inviting me. That you would invite a reprobate like me to speak is a testament to the Chapel community's generosity. I really enjoyed reading the reflections from Dr. Clift, Veronica Curran, and Karis Tees, and I'm sorry I missed the other talks. I mean this not just in the polite, Canadian sense, but in the actual regret sense, because I think this book, like all good books, is open to a range of interpretations, and I hope I don't repeat too much of what wiser people than me have said before.

My first point, which is totally pedantic and literal, is that all trees are giving trees. Even that fateful tree in the garden was innocent, offering its forbidden fruits to presumptuous human hands. Some read the tree as an allegory of parenthood, while others think of the tree as a symbol for nature's relentless generosity. As both Sarah and Karis noted, the tree is a lady tree, and they both rightly, I think, bristled a little at this absolute giving, this down-to-the-stump generosity being figured as feminine as it so often is.

Similarly, Mother Nature is a trope or idea that allows us to treat the world as the boy treats the tree, as a resource, as a thing we can appropriate for profit, for pleasure, for our own priorities. But in the illustrations, where the boy is just a pair of feet, that look like leaves, emerging from one part of the tree or another, we see that we are in and through nature. Silverstein also does a lovely job giving the tree some personality; we can see her branches beckon to the boy, or hug her own trunk, as a kind of consolation, when she is left alone.

The second thing that really struck me when I was re-reading this book was that the boy stays the boy. Even though the drawings, and his demands, make it clear that the boy is a teen, then a man, then a rather crochety and weary old man, Silverstein never calls him the man. One possible reading of this is that we see him from the tree's point of view. He will always, no matter what he demands, be the playful lad that the tree loved and still loves. My mother still calls me her baby, even though I am clearly a crochety and weary middle-aged woman. Love can, particularly when it is sustained over time, preserve and recall our lost selves, can still see the baby face in the haggard old bag. Even though he can't sell this, or turn it into a boat, this might be the greatest gift of the giving tree. It has witnessed all the boy's selves, and still wants nothing more than to share companionship and offer comfort.

The other thing I like about the boy remaining the boy is that it captures the fact that most of us grow old, but never really grow up. The boy goes through all the standard adult-type changes; he wants money, he wants a house and wife, and he eventually wants to escape everything he wanted. But he still remains the boy, even when he is too tired to play and his teeth are too weak for apples.

The third thing that I think is striking about this text is its repeated refrain: "And the tree was happy". I am pretty confident that someone wiser than me has pointed out that this line echoes God's refrain in Genesis: "and God saw that it was good." It's also worth noting that when the tree offers the boy her leaves, her fruit, her branches, and her trunk, she does so in the hope that then, the boy will be happy, that money or marriage or a nautical escape will satisfy him. But is he ever happy?

The text does not make this claim. The illustrations show us a grinning and gamboling boy, but as he ages, his face becomes frownier, scowlier. The last time we see him sort of smile is when he is absconding with her branches, off to build a house for the wife and children we never hear about again. The fact that he keeps returning to the tree, with a new demand until there is nothing left to demand, suggests that he is never really satisfied, that he never learns how to be happy.

Now, of course, happiness has a long and contentious history in philosophy. Nerds have been squabbling about happiness since approximately Aristotle, who insisted that we all, ultimately, want to be happy. To give a more recent example, Happiness Studies has become a very popular course and research field at Harvard, and they've been instrumental in developing a branch of psychology called positive psychology, which considers our adaptability and our good feelings rather than the regularly scheduled pathologies, diseases, doldrums, and bummers.

I am profoundly skeptical about much of what passes for positive thinking. Telling people to think positively is often just callous, or victim-blaming, or a way to get people enduring difficult circumstances to shut their yaps. Still, some of the Harvard research on happiness strikes me as germane to The Giving Tree. One of their most consistent findings is that we are remarkably bad at figuring out what might bring us contentment or joy. Many of our attempts to make ourselves happy are as futile as playing hide and go seek with a tree...but not nearly as fun.

The boy's first request—I want to buy things and have fun—is certainly one model of happiness that is pretty popular in an economy that depends on us purchasing lots of things and fun. But the research suggests that money does not really make us happy. Certainly moving from below the poverty line to a level of economic comfort makes us happier, but beyond that, we find that mo' money brings mo' problems.

One pretty consistent finding in happiness research is that it is actually our relationships that bring us the most lasting happiness. This is, I think, very germane to The Giving Tree. The tree is happy when she is helping, when she believes she is giving her beloved boy what he needs to be happy. It has been my experience that giving makes me much happier than achieving, or receiving. One of the best solutions for our own problems is other people's problems. One of my favourite things about my job is that you young people have so many wonderful problems. It's a pleasure and a privilege to help you with them any way I can, since it distracts me from, and ameliorates, my existential dread.

Moreover, to make a more morbid point, we are all stumpward bound. There's another Silverstein poem I'd like to share with you to help me underline this point.

LOSING PIECES

Talked my head off
Worked my tail off
Cried my eyes out
Walked my feet off
Sang my heart out
So you see,
There's really not much left of me.

Nobody gets to keep their leaves, their apples, their branches. We are going to lose—time is going to take—all of these things anyhow, so we might as well give them away, happily. This is all "me" really.

Mary-Dan Johnston

EVENSONG, APRIL 2

When I read *The Giving Tree*, something rises in my chest, a warmth makes itself known. It doesn't last long, though. Within moments, another feeling comes: the warmth curdles into grief, as the asymmetry of the relationship between the little boy and the tree dawns on me. I wrestle with this transition, convinced of the goodness of the tree's generosity while wondering how the little boy could ask for so much without ever saying thank you. I feel caught in the tension that Dr. Clift described at the beginning of this series of reflections, compelled to pick a side, but sure that if I do, I will be trapped in that half of the dichotomy. This is a struggle that runs like an electric current through my life.

My first reading of the story is the interpretation of a child who wants nothing more than to be good to other people, to avoid confrontation, to ensure that things flow smoothly. I read the tree as existing to meet the needs and expectations of the little boy, and identify with her, imagining myself in that role. I ask myself: What can I give to others? How can I be of service to them? When it seems that all I can give has been taken from me, how can I continue to be useful? I see in Silverstein's depiction of the tree the way that I am supposed to be; that is: goodness embodied, unquestioning sacrifice, giving as synonym for generous.

The second reading feels adolescent, more awake and aware. I wonder why the author assigns a gender to the tree. Reading the tree as a woman, I cannot help but see my mother, her stretch marks, evidence of her many labours for the sake of her children, the hardships she endured, the pain that could not freeze her heart. As the boy in the story grows older and returns to the tree to ask for her fruits, her branches, her trunk, I am seized with grief, acutely aware of my own selfishness, of what I have asked for from those who love me unconditionally, many times without even a thought to say "thank you".

It doesn't take long for my brain to transform the figurative "mother" into a generalized caricature of "the oppressed". I begin to imagine the lives, lands, and labours captured and coerced, installing them in the position of the tree, while still imagining myself as the child. Something sinister seeps into the story – the questions begin to pound in my brain: how much of what we have received through the years do we consider to have been freely given? What does it mean that we do not generally care to distress ourselves imagining the conditions under which the things we depend on were made? Such questions are agitating. They irritate and infect open sores, which fester and weep if ignored.

At this point, I should say that *The Giving Tree* was not my childhood morality tale. My aunts on my father's side were really into Shel Silverstein: they'd take turns reading his poems aloud after dinner at the holidays, but the verses seemed trite to me. Choosing one for each family member to stuff in Christmas crackers felt cheap, a way of pretending to know me without putting the time in. I had a different favourite.

In the rafters of the mess hall of the summer camp on Miller Lake where I worked as a teenager, someone (perhaps the director, a 22-year old King's grad who double majored in Classics and Biology) had placed a copy of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince*. If you were strong, you could jump up from the floor and grab onto the splintered beams, using your arms to pull yourself up to the catwalk. One night, after the kids were asleep in their cabin, I decided to make an attempt. Despite my lack of upper-body strength, I managed, with the help of a chair stacked on top of a table, and my co-counsellor, to drag my weight up there, and crawled tentatively along the plank that ran the length of the hall towards the French-language edition, propped up against the far wall.

St. Exupéry is part of my moral frame in a way that Silverstein is not. << On ne voit bien qu'avec le cœur. L'essentiel est invisible pour les yeux. >> This is the thing, St. Exupéry says, that children know: the essential is invisible to the eye. It is only with the heart that we can see rightly. In the book, The Little Prince recalls for the stranded pilot the story of the fox, who, by spending time with, the prince had tamed, and the rose, which, through attention, he became responsible for. If memory serves, up in the rafters eleven years ago, there was a note tacked to the wall where the book sat, which read, "do it for the children."

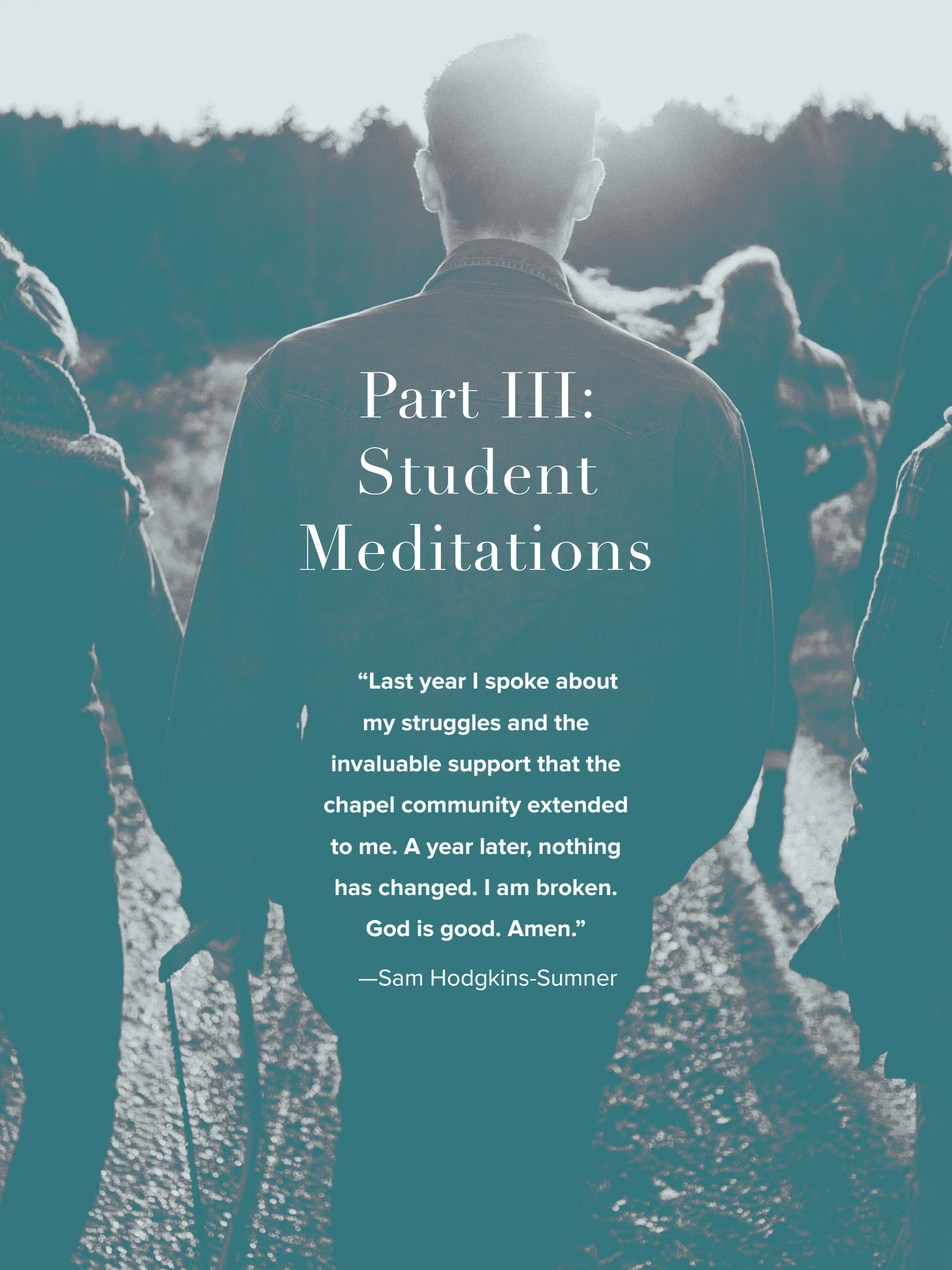
One of the first things I learned in university was that I needed to cultivate an historical imagination: the academic disciplines of philosophy, sociology and economics were useless if I took their facts at face value. Looking at the blankness surrounding the illustrations in *The Giving Tree*, I find my education urging me to reconsider the facts of this

story, and to seek the conditions that allowed the tree and the boy to interact on the page.

When I look at Silverstein's drawing of the tree, I see a living thing that did not spontaneously appear, but had been growing for many years. At the beginning of the book, the little boy arrives at the tree separate from her, but enjoys her company, the riches she provides to him: juicy apples, strong branches to climb and play in, leaves from which he fashions a crown to mark himself the king of the forest. The illustrations depict a tall tree with a lush canopy, and thick roots that dig down into the earth. Although we see no signs of the forest, the author alludes to it, which tells us that the tree belongs to something larger than the spot where she is rooted.

Indeed, as a tree, she belongs to an ecosystem: that is, to a community of interlocking needs and provisions. In biology, we understand the components of an ecosystem as linked together through flows of nutrients and energy. Thinking of the tree in terms of ecology, the relationship between the tree and the boy comes easier to understand... but its contingency is not eliminated. While the tree provides for the boy, she needs to be nourished too: by the soil, the air, the rain and the sun. All of those nourishments can just as easily stunt growth, though, if they are contaminated or do not come in the right amount. Water can be poisoned, soil depleted, air choked and the sun's rays amplified when the o-zone layer disappears. If her needs are met, the tree does more than just provide for the whims of the little boy – she helps to keep the ecosystem together. Her trunk likely provides a home from various small creatures, her leaves decompose and fertilize the soil, and her roots hold the earth together, preventing it from eroding.

An active historical imagination is what allows me not to escape the tension that Dr. Clift described, but to descend into it...to imagine a kind of history for the little boy and the tree that lies behind Silverstein's blank page, beneath the surface of his line drawings. In doing so, I believe that we can think through the story of the *The Giving Tree* in a new way, and draw a lesson from the book that neither legitimates the perhaps unthinking demands of the little boy nor praises without question the selfless generosity of the tree, but adds a new layer of interpretation: one that takes ecology as its leading metaphor, and calls for both attention and responsibility to our world and each other.



Part III: Student Meditations

"Last year I spoke about my struggles and the invaluable support that the chapel community extended to me. A year later, nothing has changed. I am broken. God is good. Amen."

—Sam Hodgkins-Sumner

Clifford Lee

EVENING PRAYER, DECEMBER 11

"Come to me, all that are heavy ladened, and I will refresh you."

I would like to first thank Sam Hogdkins-Sumner for inviting me to speak here, for this Friday in the Second Week of Advent. This is my first time ever delivering a meditation at the Chapel, or really speaking here at all. I have mostly listened, and witnessed countless times, the Liturgy of many different services that occur here and have listened to others, far wiser than I, deliver excellent meditations and sermons. All of this is in accordance with the Collect for this week, which makes a request of God "...who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them..." (*B.C.P.*, 97). This prayer of desire can be applied to all of our Daily Offices and services, which are particular to our Chapel and tradition, and have been sculpted and chosen for particular activities and purposes.

As you can see, I wear the academic gown of a graduate student from this College. It is one of our proudest, but not always observed I might add, traditions to wear academic gowns to Chapel services and events. One might think it's not a requirement for sanctification, and that just because we are not wearing them, it does not mean we can become closer to Christ. They are absolutely right! However, wearing one symbolizes our particular unification of knowledge both revealed and studied, from both sybil and philosopher that we uphold here in the Chapel of King's College. Wearing a gown helps us realize that we are on a particular journey, different from many other people. It helps us realize that we belong to a Chapel, not a Parish.

For what does our Chapel do? Well, in one sense, it can help alienate us from the outside world. Outside, in the world beyond the university, is a larger community preparing for the joyous celebration of Christmas. Decorations have been hung since November, Butterball turkeys were purchased when they came on special, immediately following Hallowe'en, and we are ordered by the social powers that be that this is the most wonderful time of the year, and should behave so. Namely, everyone else is having a glorious time ramping up to the Yuletime festivities.

Now what of the student? At about this time, your average student is living in a time of dread. The promised and long awaited end of term essays, exams and assignments are upon him or her, and they seem insurmountable. Right at that point, when you have finished one major paper, which seemed to have taken forever, and have about two more equally long ones, plus an exam between the due dates, you start that process of despair. First comes the anger and frustration at the task at hand, and the memory of all those readings skipped and precious hours and days you could have spent researching. All of which would have made this so much easier. Then the sadness, seeing those lucky and smarter people, who finished everything, are having goodbye drinks and are ready to board the plane home . Then the promise to some unknown power or God that next term, next term it will be different. You'll have everything planned out, you'll start the research for the essays as soon as you get the syllabus, just an hour here or there a week so that this is a cakewalk when April comes. That doesn't help you now, as you fall into the acceptance of the mountainous task at hand, and take a break of cold pita and hummus to muster up the courage to tackle it again. We are in the wilderness.

The wilderness, similar to the one that Dante finds himself in at the beginning of his Inferno, is what we find ourselves in. All the old assurances are not there, and we are faced with the consequences of our actions up until this point. It's more at this point do you feel the wolf, lion and leopard snapping at your heels than you did when first read the Divine Comedy. Do not despair though, for this is a necessary, and at the same time both destructive and sanctifying time. In a way, every student, whether they choose to or not, and are believers of something or nothing undergo the Christian experience of Advent through the exam period. I do not speak of the Advent associated with cardboard calendars full of chocolate, but the Advent which takes us on the road to the coming of Christ.

If you have been paying attention to the readings from Morning and Evening Prayer ever since the Sunday Before Advent, you'll notice that they take on a cautionary tone, at the very least. Our readings today come from the two main sources of this tone. The first is the Book of Isaiah, the famous prophet of Ancient Judea, who frequently prophesied the coming of destruction to the kings and their kingdoms of Israel and Judea. Isaiah and his contemporaries witness the downfall and subjugation of Israel by the dreaded war machine of the Assyrians, the most ruthless and destructive civilization seen until that point. The other is the Book of Revelations, which chronicle a vision of the coming Apocalypse and end of all things. Today we see the terrible vision

of the pouring out of the Vials of Judgement on all things. These readings refer to the coming of Christ and the Apocalypse, and the end all that we know.

This is certainly a contrast to what we would normally feel that Christmas is about! It certainly does not warm the cockles of your heart to hear about the collapse of kingdom's and the end of the world. It certainly seems like the last thing that we should have to listen to, at this time of year. It's hard enough to keep cheerful at a time when it feels wrong not to be. Why should we spend our time listening to these books and readings which contain these terrible images.

The answer that I would put forward, for this question, is that it is our vocation at this moment. As students of this College, we are to ask these questions, and face these difficult and terrible things head on. If you have taken FYP, you were warned on the very first day that your perception of the world, and the ideals you have, would be turned upside down. During this season of Advent, the idea that we have of the loving, personal God that we are familiar with, who truly loves us, who sacrificed himself for us that we might have love, becomes the destroyer of our world. What are to make of this contradiction?

Christianity is a religion full of contradictions. As we hear from Christ himself, he who would be first will be last, and he who would be last will be first. The weak come to dominate the strong. Even the scene of Christ as an infant lying in the manger contains these contradictions. One that stands out are the two groups of witnesses to the infant Christ, the shepherds and the Magi. You must realize that these are two groups and social classes that would NEVER be associated with each other. They would never meet. The magi are reckoned by most biblical scholars to be the noble Zoroastrian priests. A holy mixture of king, priest, scholar and philosopher, who represent in one image, all earthly power. The shepherds, are definitely lower on the totem pole of power. They dwell in the wilderness with their flock, and come from the lowest social classes. Their very presence, and smell alone would be repulsive to the lofty Magi. Yet, here they are together, both summoned with the revealed knowledge and scientific observation of God, to witness God himself. God the infant, is a destroyer, the destroyer of worldly kingdoms, class and power.

I have used the word: terrible several times to describe God's power. How does one reconcile him or herself with this apparently negative adjective used to describe God? An answer for me, lays within the writings of Charles Williams. Charles Williams was a contemporary and colleague of both C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. He was also one of the lesser known members of the famous Inklings: a group of friends who would meet to discuss each other's writings. From these meetings arose *the Lord of the Rings*, *the Chronicles of Narnia*, and many other writings.

In his book, *Descent into Hell*, Charles Williams deals with death and of attempting to understand God's power. If you'll allow me, I'd like to read a passage to you. The passage describes the meeting between Mr. Stanhope, the noted playwright of the fictional London suburb of Battle Hill, and the potential actors involved in his newest play. He attempts to describe the nature of the "powers" that exist within his play to his cast, who are composed of rather naive English suburban folk.

Read: Page 16, "Don't you think so" [...] "Measure the Omnipotence?"

I would like you to focus on the question that Pauline, the character who comes to understand Stanhope's vision more, asks: "And if things are terrifying...can they be good?" What do you think? Can that which is terrifying, full of terror, be good?

I'm not sure if this provides any reconciliation for you with all these gloomy thoughts. This is a viewpoint which can seem quite sobering and at the very least, makes us aware that God and his power can come in many forms and actions.

Now, I could end this here, except my dear wife would scold me for making you all depressed, especially when things are stressful. I can just see her now: "Cliff, it's so gloomy". She would insist that I should focus on the good things and the hope that the Christmas season offers. Certainly that is something that we all look for at this time of season. The commercialization of Christmas, which, of course we could say degrades these holiness of days, addresses a real need and desire that all people have at this time of year. We all seek deliverance from sadness, anger and all the cares of the world. We seek our hope, and deliverance from the Wilderness. What is this hope?

I mentioned one of the Inklings, and at this time I should mention a more famous one: J.R.R. Tolkien. I will only mention him briefly, but I would like you to focus on image of Gandalf. The wandering wizard who helps those who need him, on many a dangerous journey, with his last being the destruction of the Ring of Sauron. The most powerful source of evil in Middle Earth. Through Gandalf, Tolkien tells us that at the last, when all plans have been made and put into action, and things seem their worst, all we can focus on is hope. Hope that the good will win through, and it does.

Our hope in this world has come once, and will come again. The first time was in the form of a babe in a lowly stable, who through no action of his own, simply being caused the most powerful and lowly to worship together as equals. He upturns the natural order of things out of love for us. Think now, what this babe can do at the end of things. Yes, it may seem terrible, but it is a love nonetheless. All things

have been created and are maintained by the love of God, and will be undone by his love.

Now for you, the student, who has had to sit and listen to me tell you why and how you have been miserable. Take heart. Tighten your belts, pick up your spirits and take hope. Return to your struggles, and remember from our Liturgy: “Come to me all who are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.” You will be refreshed with hope at the end of all things.

AMEN.

Sam Hodgkins-Sumner

EVENING PRAYER, JANUARY 8

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight. Amen.

I find myself in one of the best situations of human history. Doubtless my FYP tutors would pull their hair out if they heard me start my meditation with such a vague and sweeping claim. Evidently I've taken nothing out of my University education thus far.

Let me clarify. My situation is ideal, it would seem, both in terms of material comfort and the personal support required for growth and edification. I live in a peaceful liberal democracy that allows a panoply of freedoms. I have the right to speak freely, vote, and practice my religion. Furthermore, I am fortunate enough to access medical treatment through socialized health insurance. Due to the fact that I'm a white male, I walk down the street without double consciousness, and without looking over my shoulder after a late night out.

In addition to the advantages of my personal particularities, I often feel that I've won the great parental crapshoot. My mom and dad raised me to value intentional community, and that instilled in me a desire to serve others from a young age. They also continue to make incredible sacrifices on my behalf: they pay my tuition, and provide me with a weekly allowance. When my seasonal affective disorder and the depression that it breeds overwhelm me, I can count on them for affirmation and encouragement. They've even bought me a happy light: a small device that imitates solar rays and thereby provides its user with the Vitamin D that Haligonians so lack in the winter.

Then why am I so unhappy? Why do I so often find myself in a pit of apathy and despair when I have so much to be thankful of? In my case unhealthy habits of living- lack of sleep, irregular eating patterns, and infrequent exercise- undoubtably contribute to my depression. In other cases those who suffer from mental illness benefit immeasurably from counselling. Establishing healthy routines and seeking professional help are definitely psychological boons.

But my brokenness runs deeper than lack of blood sugar, endorphins, serotonin, or vitamin D. Even when I find myself in the summer palaces on slopes, both literally and spiritually, I often fret about my lacks and limitations. "If only I had that skill, experience, relationship", I tell myself, "I would be fully at peace". Even at times in my life when I feel contentment and a sense of purpose, the insidious voice of self-doubt lurks in my mind, ready to reintroduce feelings of jealousy and insufficiency. I suffer from what Montaigne called, "the uncouth affliction of despising one's being".

Pause.

This past Christmas Eve, my family and I were strolling across the cobbles of Vienna, sipping mulled wine. In response to my despondency, my dad told me to meditate on part of the twelfth chapter of Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians. It reads:

> Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Paul employs the greek *skolops*, here translated as "thorn", to describe the affliction he has been given. The term originally denoted something pointed and could refer to a stake, a thorn, a surgical instrument, or the point of a fishhook. The symbolic meaning of Paul's *skolops* has been a source of scholarly debate, with some scholars claiming it represented epilepsy, others depression, others carnal temptations, and still others opposition to his ministry. However, the ambiguity of this linguistic debate does not detract from Paul's message. If anything, I think the academic dispute renders the Paul's predicament more universally applicable. Each of us here present has our own particular *skolops* or *skolopses* that torment us.

Like Paul, the existence of our *skolopses*, must leave us no conceited illusion of being able to fix ourselves on our own. We cannot take steps towards health unless we remember that the healing has already been enacted, but not by us.

The Lord says to Paul that "my power is made perfect in weakness". The verb *teleo* means to reach an endpoint, and is here translated as "made perfect". God's power comes to perfection in his assumption of the ultimate weakness. Paradoxically, the Messiah's strongest act was to free-

ly offer himself as the man of sorrows; to allow himself to take on our fragile human state. At a time when the plight of refugees weighs so heavily on our collective consciousness, it is important to remember that shortly after Epiphany, the holy family sought refuge from Herod in Egypt. Furthermore, Christ encountered skolopses as he entered the desert for forty days, prayed in the garden, and cried out on the cross.

My prayer for our community this term is that we strive for Christ's mysterious paradox. Let us be weak so as to be strong. May His power rest on us as we choose self-effacement of charity over the seeming strength of the self. As we meet in the very dead of winter, a setting that will surely bring melancholy, let us each use our own skolops as the spur that causes us to turn to our friends and understand their sturggles. To empty ourselves and truly receive their burden. To accept help. Let us witness to one another how grace has manifested itself in our lives. All the while, let us keep out eyes fixed on the star that guides us and sets an example, without which we will can never reach the manger. It is only by receiving grace that we can move towards our telos on Calvary hill.

Last year I spoke about my struggles and the invaluable support that the chapel community extended to me. A year later, nothing has changed. I am broken. God is good.

AMEN.

Samuel Landry

EVENING PRAYER, FEBRUARY 12

I want to begin by thanking the Chapel community for the retreat to Mersey River this past weekend. It gave opportunity for the Holy Spirit to change me and I was moved by the fellowship we enjoyed. I am grateful for the testimonies of Father Mac, Father Justin, Father Gregory, and our Father Thorne. On Saturday before the lunchtime meal, Father Thorne explained to us that the daily office of Anglican noonday prayer reflects a progression to the unity of Christ's Church in its infancy. We firstly reflect on Christ's passion and the freedom he grants from the Old Testament law and the wrath of our father, God. We then reflect on Saul's conversion and his mission to the gentiles. Finally, we reflect on Peter's vision, which catalyzed the breakdown of cultural boundaries within the early Church. This liturgical pattern is a reflection of what I would like us to meditate on from today's lesson.

From the reading in the epistle to the Romans (chapter 15), I wish to explicate the notion of Christian identity, which was formed in the beginning of Church history. If through the gospel we are neither Jew nor gentile, what are we in Christ? This is my central question.

The Epistle to the Romans, chapter 15 beginning in verse 8 reads as follows:

> For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,
>
> "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles,
>
> and sing to your name."
>
> And again it is said,
>
> "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."
>
> And again,
>
> "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
>
> and let all the peoples extol him."
>
> (Romans 15:8-11 ESV)

As Christians, it is only through God's grace and mercy to us that we are enabled to partake in what was first only revealed to the Jews. Paul cites Old Testament prophecy, which we interpret to be looking forward to our egalitarian age of grace. The redemptive plan of our God allows for the election and salvation of those who were once completely contrary to his laws and ways. As our father, the Jewish God invites us into his presence and family.

A companion text, from Galatians, beautifully explains this extended adoption through which we can be saved.

> Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:23-29 ESV)

God has graciously extended his mercy to all of us. We are all, through faith, sons and daughters of God. As we are baptized into the Church, we acknowledge that our identity is as Christians. In this passage, Paul outlines contrary pairs: Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female. Paul is teaching that the Church is a place for all to come. We *together* are heirs. Our place before God our Father is not dependent on our distinctions, but on our common adoption. Through faith, we have "put on Christ."

I find that, often, I desire to place myself in categories of religious certainty. Though, my categories are not the same as those Paul outlines in this passage on the cultural collision of Christianity. I often see myself as a protestant, or a complimentarian, or a Calvinist. This semester, the fellowship that I've experienced with brethren of many denominations at King's has taught me that I ought to see myself foremost as Christian. God's adoption into the universal Catholic Church is more important than who I think I am. I ought to approach this chapel, this school, the Church, the world, my family and friends with humility, instead of identity in divisive categories.

What I am not saying is 'go believe everything' or 'go believe nothing.' Unity does not stem from Christians throwing away dogma and study. Our distinct beliefs aid in our personal relationships with God, but, can be difficult in the community of the Church. Just as in the early church one

could not do away with being a Jew or a Greek, or a slave or a freeman, or a man or a woman, I must hold to my opinions and interpretations while fellowshipping with those who disagree with me or are different than me.

So, in the apostolic age, the Apostle Paul gives us a pattern for life in Christ and community. It is a pattern that minimizes difference and invokes a family unity. He says that we have become heirs of Abraham. What was once only for the Jew, is now for all who are made in God's image and called into his adoption as sons and daughters. *I believe that as Christians living in the community of the Church, we ought to cling to Christ for unified identity, and mission.*

Now that we've made it this far, I'd like to discuss what this life, or Christian identity, we partake in looks like as a community.

I will now read the beginning of our Romans passage:

> We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me." For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. (Romans 15:1-7 ESV)

We are to help one another, through encouragement, sharing and friendship. We are to work for one another, as Christ sacrificed himself upon the cruel cross for us. We are to study the scriptures and doctrine together. We are to glorify God together, through our hymns, words and actions.

This communal identity in which we partake is nothing more than sharing one another's burdens and worshipping God as one living body. Hebrews 10:24 commands us to spur one another to good works. This communion we share as co-heirs in the gospel is institutionalized in the breaking of bread and the drinking of wine in the Eucharist, but, it is not only available in the liturgy of our services. (Though, I must say the sharing in a 6:50am service at Mersey River was quite helpful to my faith.) This past weekend, I was reminded of the joys of intellectually engaging with text *as a group*, walking outdoors as a group, bussing dishes *as a group*, looking for boots together in the pile of Blundstones *as a group* or ladling up some Newfoundland-style split pea soup to the sound of Father Thorne's reading of children's books about squirrels *as a group*.

This past week the Lord has taught me that when I seek and project personal certainty, the unity of the Church suffers. When I idolize doctrine and behaviour, I lose the fellowship shared by the body of Christ. It is in humility and empathy that I must join with believers of many traditions, gaining insight into the communion we all share with the unknowable who has become incarnate for us. Together, we must faithfully pursue the great commission to serve the world with Christ's love and message and to help one another. We are co-heirs – or brothers and sisters – with God the son. Our father, our 'abba' or daddy, is Almighty Yahweh. Only by his grace are we his family.

Sarah Griffin

EVENING PRAYER, FEBRUARY 26

As the school year begins to draw to a close, I decided to use this opportunity today to share with you some thoughts I've encountered this year at King's. Given the meditative nature of what I'm doing, I'd like to focus on the ways in which my testimony of faith has changed in light of my intellectual growth this year. Unlike many testimonies I've heard, and perhaps are the one's we hear the most loudly, because they seem most profound, mine is not one of where I experienced one significant event in my life that drastically changed the way I see God, myself, and my relationship to God. Today, I hope to share one small plot point of a greater testimony that serves an equal sense of meaning as the other events in my life that have led me to my understanding about who God is, and my relationship to Him.

I came to King's craving what I would have, at the time, defined as *restlessness*. I craved an experience where I could freely ask questions, solely inspired by doubt. Except, there was one qualification, that I didn't fully realize. In what was my definition of restlessness, the truth that I wanted to find was fully in line with what I already thought I knew to be true. I was searching for an explanation as to why what I previously believed about God was in fact correct. Restlessness seemed so intriguing because, if I conquered restlessness, which I naively expected to be able to in a very short time, I would be able to tell myself that I had come to know things with certainty.

I began FYP eagerly listening to the 'other side' of the story — the side that I didn't learn in Sunday school: How can a benevolent God harden Pharaoh's heart?, as we heard in today's old testament reading. 'Why has God predestined some to be his people?' - alluded to in today's Ephesians reading. I silently gleamed at the fact that I believed I would be able to come up with an explanation for this eventually - even though I couldn't at first glance, and every explanation I heard seemed unsatisfactory. It was in this state of, 'waiting to be proved right', per se, that I truly began to doubt. I grew up always being taught that it is good to doubt — which I of course firmly believe still today. However, because I was always taught of doubt in the context of the Churches I've attended in my life, it seemed to me as if there was a hidden implication that the kind of doubt that should be happening is only the doubt that makes you understand why what you were taught was correct — a justification of the preacher, perhaps. In considering concepts such as predestination and the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, I began to realize that true doubt necessitates not assuming a certain answer. I had been searching for an artificial restlessness, and I found a true doubt. Which led me to a true restlessness.

As I experienced an intellectual doubt, doubt of my understanding of life ran hand-in-hand. In what I discovered to be a life of, largely, searching for pleasure, I found myself to be truly falling into moments of pain — something beforehand, I would generally ignore. The more I experienced moments of pleasure, the more I realized its antithesis. The pleasure I do attain tells me that I can't always have it – it teases me. I began to realize that I was completely unaware of my selfish ambitions that were grossly intertwined with what I saw to be only the seeking of truth. Doubt became the norm, and the restlessness it produced in me caused be to either attempt to ignore it as something of a coping mechanism, telling myself that it would all make sense in the future, or I had to actually think through my doubts, and continually realize that I didn't have it all together in ways that I had comfortably thought I had.

In my more thoughtful moments, where I was briefly able to overcome my selfish pride of wanting to believe that I knew what my convictions are, I forced myself to consider my restlessness. In studying theologians such as Augustine and Luther, I began to look at Christianity intellectually only. If I can believe that there is a place of ultimate pleasure that I can partake in in the future, then I should be able to become complacent in my pain, knowing that it is temporary. Even if I am in fact deluded, it will enhance the quality of my life right now, so why not tell myself that what I had learned about God was true? In a convoluted society that says we all reach our own truth when we follow our desires, then society has no right to accuse my delusion as being any lesser than their delusion.I entertained this thought-process for a while. But, I found that telling yourself the only reason you're comfortable is because your understanding of life is all a delusion, is a quick road to a sense of anger and further restlessness.

If the teachings of Christianity are true, I am very lazy right now. I idolize the intellectual nature of religion. I often bypass practically living out my faith with the reasoning that I'm not entirely convinced yet by what I believe. Without thinking deeply, I see freedom in believing that my life is meaningless. There's a disconcerting comfort in thinking that whatever I do will never amount to anything more than

the action itself. But I am certain, despite my youthful naivety in many respects, that that stream of thought has left me empty. In denying some desires (such as my want to just give up and just see the world as pointless, which seems a lot easier), I have found glimpses of freedom — knowledge of the fact that my actions don't matter, not because it amounts to nothingness, but because I am saved despite.

All I can do to escape my nauseating sense of worthlessness in view of a purposeless world, is to continue to seek these glimpses of peace and freedom I've found. Even in passages such as our text from Ephesians today — where the doctrine of election is prominent — the doctrine is ensconced with words of grace and love. I take great comfort in knowing that I do know that the grace and truth alluded to is truly good because of the intellectual comfort and beauty I've found in it, and that at some point, the things I don't yet understand will make sense in light of the simple truths that I have understood, and found to be beautiful.

I seek for my life to be one of adapting what I discover about God theoretically to my life practicality. If I find pleasure in the fulfillment of my intellectual cravings, which I do, I need to transfer that to my practical life to live with a mind and character united. Ultimately, I want to constantly seek to be so entirely convinced of something that I have no doubts about anything. But I've been realizing that in order to even start that process, instead of giving up entirely and living for the fleeting lure of the moment, I need to slowly decide, bullet point by bullet point what I do believe. There is already a sense of peace in the knowledge that I do believe I will ultimately achieve peace in knowledge, because of the comfort I have found that I know is outside of myself and this world.

I came to university seeking restlessness, and found true doubt, leading me to tiny seeds of truth, which I can say I certainly believe overshadows any unexamined truth any day.

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