

FELLOWSHIP

THE TYRANNY OF BEING “FINE” STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

FINDING THE GRACE TO GRIEVE

BY DAVID ROMANIK

Newcomers to this country are often surprised by how frequently Americans ask each other, “How are you?” In most other countries, such inquiries would be considered an invasion of privacy, or at the very least irrelevant to the conversation. Of course, newcomers are even more surprised to learn that this query is largely perfunctory. Indeed, there is only one “correct” response to this question. No matter what is happening in our lives, there is a collective cultural expectation that we will respond, “Fine” when someone asks us how we are. We are instructed and encouraged in this behavior from an early age. Even my 21 month old somehow knows to say “Good” when I ask her how she slept. While it may seem that there is nothing wrong with this, there is something troubling about this tendency. Our collective assumption that the only thing to say is “fine” when someone asks us how we are eventually convinces us that the only way to *be* is “fine.” When we force ourselves to be “fine,” we lose something elemental about the human experience.

What we lose is the opportunity to grieve. Sometimes being “fine” is not an option; sometimes, when we are faced with loss and uncertainty, grief is the only appropriate response. Yet, when we assume that “fine” is our baseline, grief becomes abnormal, something we need

to dispense with as efficiently as possible. We end up thinking of grief as a process, something we can “do the right way.” We cannot, however, approach grief as a problem to be solved; it is something we must experience as a fundamental aspect of who we are. Indeed, grief is a centrally important part of our lives because loss is central to our lives. Part of mystery of being human is that we have the capacity to love even what we know we will lose. Grief permits us to recognize this paradox, because it allows us to trust that even what we have lost belongs to God. The ability to grieve is part crucial component of the Christian life. The *Book of Common Prayer*, for instance, notes that rite for the Burial of the Dead “finds all meaning in the resurrection,” which is God’s pledge that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. At the same time, the prayer book notes that human grief is not unchristian: that the deep sorrow we experience when we lose someone is animated by the love we have for one another in Christ.

There are times when we are not “fine.” There are times that we experience that deep pain of loss that is a fundamental part of the human experience. It is in these times that we need to summon the grace to grieve, to admit that we are not fine, and to trust that even what we have lost belongs to God.

REFLECTIONS ON REDEEMER

FROM OUR BRYN MAWR COLLEGE WOMEN

Editor’s Note: Alexis and Rachel have spent the last four years in undergraduate study at Bryn Mawr College. We were blessed by their regular worship attendance with us at 9am on Sunday mornings. (Which alone says a lot for college students.) Melissa Wilcox asked them to share some reflections about their time with us. I hope you find their reflections as heartwarming and affirming of our community as I did. Let us wish them well as they depart for new adventures. KG



Alexis Van Venrooy
I first came to The Redeemer in search of comfort in familiar liturgy; however, I ended up finding so much more than I could have ever imagined.

My first years at Bryn Mawr, I was a fish out of water. I missed my home in North Carolina and had no clue how to assimilate into Philadelphia culture. As a result, I tried to find a way to make Bryn Mawr feel more like home. I was raised Episcopalian and thought that finding a church might be one way to do so. When I learned that a friend of mine, Rachel Clark, was also Episcopalian, she and I quickly planned to attend services at the nearest church, The Redeemer. The sense of warmth and welcome that was

felt while attending Episcopal services kept us coming back, week after week. Whenever school-life felt hectic or overwhelming, we always had a Sunday morning service to look forward to and reflect upon later in the week.

In addition to this spiritual nourishment, I could not believe how welcomed I was by the parishioners. Everyone’s friendly nature made me feel like Rachel and I truly had a place in the community. Three years later, my love for the community at The Redeemer continues to grow. I have the delight of meeting new acquaintances, as well continuing to grow friendships with the friendly faces that I met in my first weeks at The Redeemer. Whenever anyone asks me what I will miss most when I leave college, my answer is always the same: the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer. It has been an integral part of my college experience as well as a major highlight and a blessing beyond words.

PARISH BUSINESS

BY JAY EINSPANIER

Over the past few weeks, I have received a number of questions regarding the scaffolding that is resting on the Narthex roof. In most cases the questioner wondered if we would remove the material in time for an upcoming service. The reality is that the cost to simply remove and then re-erect the scaffolding was too high. So, I simply told them that the scaffolding was our attempt at constructing a modern Tower of Babel. To their credit, no one believed that craziness but they did bite on the magic stairway in the Rectory attic (see photo).

Well, the true story (no not the stairway one) is that the Rose window is bowing and could, in an extreme, fail. So, we thought it to be in our collective best interest to address the issue as soon as possible. That work will take place in two phases.

The first phase began in late March and continued into April. That work included the development of a scope of work by John Milner Architects and the preliminary stabilization of the window. We removed the outside protective covering from the Rose window in order to better inspect the tracery which holds the glass. Upon inspection a number of the tracery joints were found to be open which in turn allowed the overall window to shift. As a result, Joe Manero & Sons is filling those open joints to increase the rigidity of the tracery which stabilizes the window. They will also grind out and refill the mortar joints in the coping stones at the top of the church as well as the limestone façade surrounding the rose

window. This final step will seal the area against further water penetration which contributed, over time to the quarter inch shift in the window itself.

The second phase is yet to be scheduled. Before then, the protective covering will be re-installed over the window. The scaffolding will be removed and the additional work will be put out to bid. This step will be more extensive up to and including removal of portions of the stained glass. These glass pieces will be restored and re-installed into the tracery. The tracery itself will also be cleaned and the remaining joints cleaned and replaced.

Stay tuned for an update on both schedule and cost. In the meantime, please do not climb on the scaffolding. You really won’t get anywhere.



A parent wrote about their son’s experience on the recent Youth Mission Trip, “In many ways, his time in West Virginia has reframed his perspective about his own life and his own daily anxieties. It is safe for us to say that this last weekend has provided for our son a touchstone experience and a set of memories upon which he will continue to reflect and on which he will expand not only his world view but his sense of how he can contribute to the world.”



Rachel Clark
A little over two years ago, I was lucky enough to discover one of my friends in lecture was Episcopalian like me. We had agreed to go to The Redeemer

the following Sunday. Bryn Mawr College had been a lovely yet intense academic experience, but I really missed going to church. I’ve since discovered many facets to The Redeemer that I appreciate, especially the incredible efforts put into the services and the kindness I’ve felt from friendly parishioners. In such a beautiful church, the music and the pageantry of the services always prompt me to be truly present and thoughtful of what is around me. I’m then curious to hear how the sermons will present eloquent ways to relate to the Gospel, a perspective I need

each week.

I remember going to the Parish House for the first time, and Alexis and I didn’t stand around long before people began to introduce themselves to us. I love the welcoming nature of the community here. I’ve enjoyed seeing familiar faces and meeting new ones every Sunday, and I cherish the different perspectives everyone is willing to share. As I have become more attached to The Redeemer and its friendly atmosphere, I’ve found that it has eased my worst case of homesickness and put long and tedious semesters into a larger perspective as the liturgical seasons progress. I feel prepared to move on from Bryn Mawr College, but I do not feel ready to part ways with The Redeemer. I have so much to thank The Redeemer for. I found it to be an uplifting place no matter how tough my week might be, and I found my best friend as we walked to church every chilly Sunday morning. The Redeemer has been essential to my success and happiness while living in Bryn Mawr.