

About

Episcorific

Heya! you're holding the thirteenth issue of Episcorific, a zine for and by the young adults of the Episcopal Church. The big idea? Young adults are not big church-goers generally. Our lives are hectic and often unstable. We are at the mercy of the education system, budding careers, frequent moves and our own indecisiveness. We are justifiably self-involved as we try to make our place in this world, define the bounds of our lives. But for many of us the church is an important site for that self-creation, a place of expanding the me-box to let God in. So, this is just another attempt at bringing the few, the brave, the young adults of the Episcopal Church into closer communion. Read. Listen. Think. Pray. And when you're ready, lend your own voice to the babble. Let's share our lives of faith.

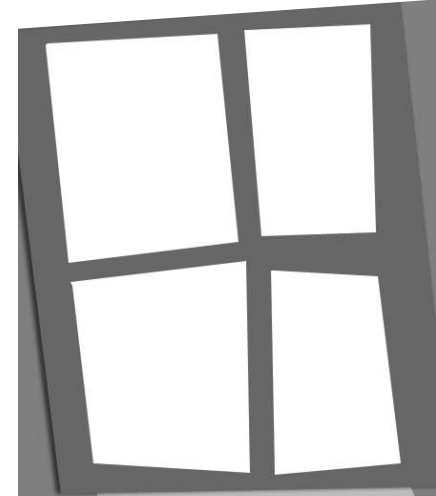


episcorific.org

Episcorific

for and by the Young Adults of the Episcopal Church

ISSUE 13, LENT AND EASTER 2011



shadow
and light



A Note from the editor(s)

I'm not much of a green thumb, let me just be honest here. I can plant seedlings or baby plants and hope they take, but mostly I just plant and pray for God to help with the rest.

Last fall I brought in one of my potted plants hoping it would live through the winter, to be planted outside once the ground thawed. For a few weeks it provided a cheery green burst to an otherwise drab corner of my kitchen, soaking up sun from the window (and water when I remembered). We lived in harmony for a while, until one day I was moving things around and it was left forgotten on a faraway sunless table in another room I don't go into very often.

Removed from the light it began to droop. Without nourishment drawn up from its roots it began to wilt. It must have lived—or struggled to live—like that for a month. It was lost to me; I no longer had that bright cheerful reminder to provide sustenance for something that depended on me for survival. It wasn't until I went into that room and saw it, browning and sad, that I felt an inward guilt for not paying attention.

Luckily, all was not lost. I initiated Operation Rescue, placing it back in its sunny corner and moistening its parched soil. After one day it began to perk up; after a week it was almost back to normal, with only a few brown leaves ever hinting that at some point this plant almost ceased to exist.

I realized one Sunday sitting in a pew just how poignant my almost-floricidal-incident had been. We were talking about Lent and how it provides us a time to reflect and turn back to the light. My poor plant had its own time in the desert thrust upon it, and I realized that I also

Opportunities for you

Middle East Peace and Young Adults

Interested in getting to know your church better and getting involved in advocacy on the churchwide level? The Office for Young Adult and Campus Ministries is piloting a new series of opportunities for young adults called the Episcopal Leadership Institute for Young Adults starting this spring with the Churches for Middle Easter Peace advocacy conference May 21-25 in Washington DC. Apply today to be one of the first to take part in this brand new program: http://episcopalchurch.org/events_127702_ENG_HTML.htm Applications due April 15.

Why Serve

Young Adults of Color across the Episcopal Church are invited to Sewanee once again this fall for four days of study, reflection, community and relaxation with the ethnic ministry offices of the Episcopal Church Center, June 2-5, 2011. This year's event will again focus on discerning for all types of ministry: lay, ordained, inside the church and without. Sign up today: <http://episcopalchurch.org/whyserve/> Registration deadline: May 1, 2011

Episcopal Service Corps

Episcopal Service Corps' third and final rolling deadline is fast approaching: May 15! Apply to be part of one of thier amazing year of service opportunities across the church: episcopalservicecorps.org

Episcopal Young Adult and Campus Ministries

As always, the Office for Young Adult & Campus Ministries webpages are full of helpful info as well as upcoming events and job opportunities. episcopalchurch.org/youngadults & episcopalchurch.org/campusministries

Broadcast

A newsletter for young adult and campus ministers with plenty of articles relevant to young adults themselves, explore this monthly update on the latest happenings, opportunities and resources in the world of Young Adult and Campus Ministries. Subscribe today at episcopalchurch.org/broadcast/



IN THE SHADOW OF A PERFECT EXAMPLE

by Lauren Caldwell

I was born on my mother's birthday which happens to be April 6th. If I were a follower of astrology, I would say this means we should be very similar. My mother is a very devout, sweet, perfect woman who I am nothing like on paper. She is a great example of a "good Christian," although she understands the silliness of that statement. You have to dig a bit deeper to see those qualities in me.

I am not a model of the traditional southern female gender role. I have opinions, a loud mouth, an adult sense of humor, and a vocabulary that could rival any sailor. I am an extrovert who loves to be the center of attention and most people think that I like the sound of my own voice. These are all things that some people think make me unfit to take an active role in church leadership. I, however, think these are the gifts God has given me for ministry. These are the things that make me approachable and an "everyman."

My priest once told me that I am just one example of God's vast imagination. Romans tells me that "I am alive because God has accepted me." God doesn't make mistakes and I am included in that. I can say it, but this season is for learning to believe it. We are all examples of God's imagination and we owe it to each other to start celebrating our uniqueness. None of us are model Christians and I am never going to be like my mother. That is what makes us so beautiful and is why Jesus allowed himself to die for us all. He laid out his arms on the cross to die for our uniqueness and we should be celebrating that gift.

Imaginative God, thank you for reaching into the depths of possibility and creating each of us in a unique way. Please stay close to us as we learn to understand the beauty in each other and the beauty in ourselves, just the way we are. Amen.

have darkness thrust upon me sometimes too. When I turn back to the light, when I turn back to ask for God's grace and forgiveness, when I do those things that give me sustenance, it's like coming alive again. Dark thoughts fall like brown leaves to the floor, swept outside and replaced with a bright green joie-de-vivre. I experience my own Easter, a resurrection of faith and life and love that can truly be appreciated after the dark time that preceded it.

May you come through the darkness and into the light, to experience a resurrection in your own lives and in the lives of those around you. May you find the sustenance you need to pull through and bring about an Easter joy, and may you do so in the glorious light of Jesus Christ. Amen.

—Kathleen Clark
Editor

A big thank you to all those who contributed to this issue, to those who helped spread the word and especially to you for reading. We hope you'll find food for thought and conversation.

Feedback for the authors can be sent to episcorific@gmail.com. Let's keep the conversation going.

Episcorific is a publication for and by young adults, who may or may not otherwise be affiliated with the Episcopal Church. All opinions expressed in Episcorific are the opinions of the writers themselves and are in no way meant to speak on behalf of the official body of the Episcopal Church. The works belong to the authors and artists and you should ask their permission to reprint them outside of Episcorific. Just in case you were wondering.

The Episcorific editorial board consists of Lauren Caldwell, Rachel Graves, Ross Heinsohn, Kathleen Jaco, Hanna Kang-Brown, and co-founders, Jeremiah & Jason Sierra.



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Can we not now ask God for our own renewed sense of calling in our own lives? For us to “carry” those close to us during their tribulations of mental deterioration requires a new time of special prayers and meditations so that we can deal with freshness and love the outward expression of end-of-life failings. The grief we feel for our relatives and for ourselves ultimately for the same dementia or Alzheimer’s is normal.

The life-giving responses need to include a renewed relationship with God through the example of Jesus our Healer. So, the focus of this Lenten season can be nothing less than a fasting from heaviness of spirit, a new vision for our trials of modern living, and a renewal of our sense of God’s presence in our own lives. May the light of Christ fall afresh on us.



photo by Jeremiah Sierra

Quieter Eyes

Fasting from heaviness this Lent

by Peggy Metcalf

Ever diminishing eyesight meant he misread the insulin needles, especially at night.

The resulting low blood sugars meant four trips to hospital in five months, and a fifth trip due to a resulting myocardial infarction.

At 93 his mind was now betraying him to bad judgment,

anger,

ugliness,

loss of memory,

loss of reasoning skills,

the results of diabetes, stroke, and dementia.

Absolutely no fun to him, much less his caregivers and family.

Scientific speculations on the age of 120 eventually becoming normative for us humans seems initially to be a great idea. Until you realize:

there is often no paying work for the elderly past 75 or so,

support systems, like extended families, are no longer extended or available
assisted living situations are well beyond your budget

And you yourself are becoming more forgetful,

more worried about your own health

in the midst of attempting to care for a parent.

His distrust of you,

along with his wish that he be independent at all costs,

casts shadows over your own desire to be of godly assistance

in the midst of your own physical failings.

How do you have “the mind of Christ” in this modern conundrum?

Moses lived to be 120

and Abraham to 180

at times when the average age was perhaps 40.

Chosen by God Himself for special tasks,

they surely were amidst a community of support,

sharply attuned to God’s calling,

capable of fine speech and ability to motivate His people

in long trying periods.

Unlike us their long age was not “normative”,

but rather touched by God’s special calling on their own lives.

lent/lent/

short for Lenten, from O.E. lencten “spring,” the season, from W.Gmc. *langa-tinaz (cf. O.S. lentin, M.Du. lenten, O.H.G. lengizin manoth), from *lanngaz (root of O.E. lang “long”) + *tina-, a root meaning “day” (cf. Goth. sin-teins “daily”), cognate with O.C.S. dini, Lith. diena, L. dies “day.” the compound probably refers to the increasing daylight. Church sense of “period between Ash Wednesday and Easter” is peculiar to Eng. - etymonline.com

Almighty God,
we pray you
graciously to
behold this your
family, for
whom our Lord
Jesus Christ
was willing to
be betrayed,
and given into
the hands of
sinners, and to
suffer death
upon the cross;
who now lives
and reigns with
you and the Holy
Spirit, one God,
for ever and
ever. Amen.

- Collect for Good Friday, BC

“The Episcopal Church observes Lent in solidarity with Christians throughout the ages. Lent has anciently been understood as a time of solidarity with those who are to be baptized at the Easter Vigil. It’s a time to focus on prayer and study and fasting, and in some traditions, almsgiving. Each of those, when done in solidarity with those preparing to be baptized, is an invitation for us to deepen our own Christian spiritual practice.

The way in which we use our resources is a spiritual matter. The way in which we live on this earth is a matter of faithfulness. Can we act in solidarity with those who are preparing to enter this community and do so more thoughtfully and in a more compassionate way that considers all of God’s creation?

I invite you to a blessed and holy Lent, to a Lent of prayer and study and compassion through almsgiving and fasting.”

*Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori
from “Are you traveling light on the earth?”
Presiding bishop’s message for Lent”
Episcopal News Service*

Hoping in the Face of Despair

by Jordan Trumble

I always thought serving God seemed pretty glamorous, or at least I did until I decided to make it a full-time job. Like many people my age, I was bitten by the “change the world” bug and so, four months after I graduated from college, I packed two duffel bags and boarded a plane to sunny Los Angeles, where I would spend an entire year serving marginalized populations throughout the city. In retrospect, I don’t know what I had been expecting. I’m a little ashamed to admit that my idea of life in Los Angeles was probably based on visions of hitting the beach and getting a tan between run-ins with the Jonas Brothers and Leonardo DeCaprio. I had taken classes related to social justice issues, had done volunteer work, and was all too familiar with egregious stories of social injustice but somehow I had romanticized the idea of helping others and so nothing prepared me for what I would encounter in Los Angeles.

I was assigned to an HIV agency for my year of service; I became a certified HIV counselor, worked with a needle exchange program, and helped run a drop-in program for homeless youth. By about my third week of work, my entire concept of what it meant to serve God and serve those around me was completely shattered. I didn’t see myself changing the world. I wasn’t curing world hunger--I was giving Hot Pockets to homeless kids. I wasn’t clothing the poor--most of the time, I didn’t even have clean socks to give out. I wasn’t helping people get off of drugs--there were so many barriers to entering rehab that people often gave up before they could even start detox.

I felt myself wondering what I was doing in Los Angeles. I sent text messages to my closest friends that said things like “I don’t know how I’m going to do

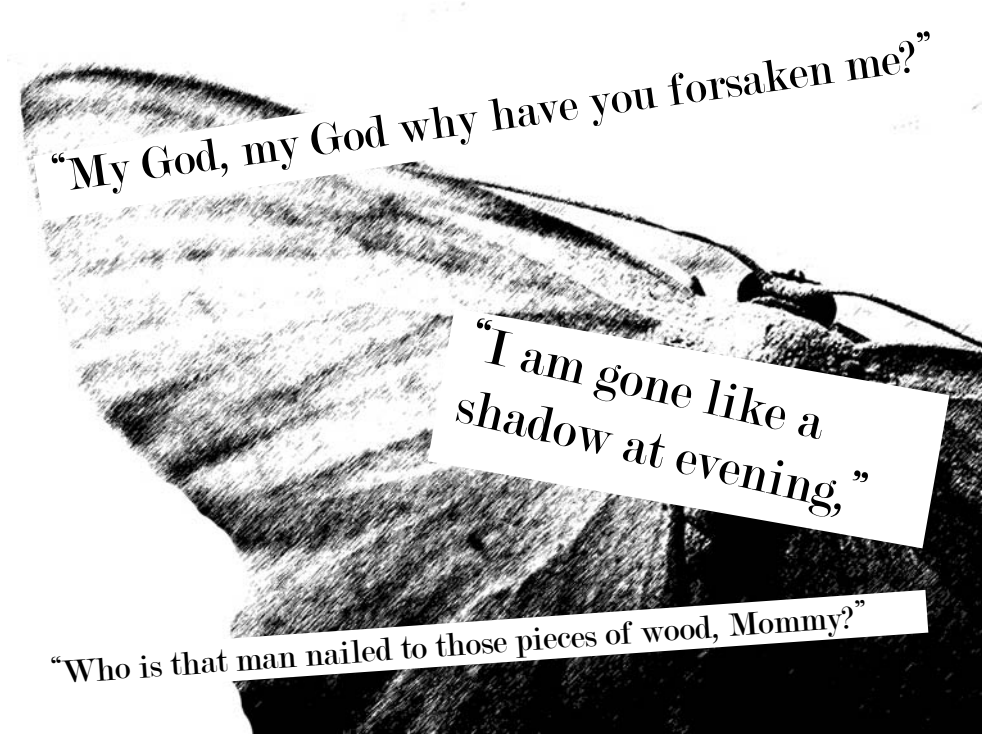
pieces of wood, Mommy?” When we look at that image of suffering and sacrifice, Jesus somehow turns the question back upon us.

“Who are you?”

“Which shadow are you living in today?”

For Jones, we cannot come to terms with Jesus without being in touch with the shadow that says, “Here I find myself damaged and broken.” When we are gone like a shadow at evening, we relate to Jesus staring back at us, and suddenly in whatever way we can understand or might make sense to us, the work of reconciliation begins. Jones puts it this way, “In the midst of our rebellion and weakness God speaks to us. God speaks to us in the form of a broken and ruined man on a cross.” It is the power that turned Jesus of Nazareth into the resurrected Christ. It is the power that finds us in a shadow of despair and sin, but draws us into a communion, under the shadow of God’s wing.

The light is coming. It is here. It is in our being. It is in our becoming. It is in the love that loves us too much to leave us alone. In the last words of the Catechism, “Our assurance as Christians is that nothing, not even death, shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.”



I was looking for 1

Who, then, are you?

by Charles McClain

This morning I shuffled out on to the back steps, and underneath the leaky awning a singular drop of cool rain splashed against my forehead. Instinctively I looked up just in time to see a moth emerging from the secret inner workings of the rusty porch light fixture to face the rainy February miasma with me. My insect brother. We were both faced with the certainty that there was not much darkness left; there is a reason “under cover of darkness” is such a tired turn of phrase.

**What is
it about
humanity
that we so
easily either
find comfort
or come face
to face with
our own
mortality in
the shadows?**

What is it about humanity that we so easily either find comfort or come face to face with our own mortality in the shadows? The Psalms seem to reflect these experiences with equal frequency. Sometimes the shadow is a picture of angst, the dread realization of life slipping away, while others find the shadow comforting, a home in the solace of a shadow projected over us by the Most High. How can the psalmists find such disparate states among the same shadows? The Psalms sing the range of human experience. We find communion with God in the midst of our worship and praise, and also when we stare into the darkness. Perhaps the mark of our mortality is the fixed number of our days that create an urgency in the life we live. Maybe the very same shadow that intensifies the brevity of life also draws us into the shadow of God’s wing.

What then about the shadow of the cross that looms large during this season? If in no other time in His life, Jesus was looking into the shadowy depths on the cross. It is interesting that He felt such a connection to the Psalms that he quoted one (at least in Mark and Matthew’s Gospels) as His last words, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” The words from Psalm 109, “I am gone like a shadow at evening,” could very easily fit the same sentiment. The Jesus we hear speak from the cross so identifies with humanity that He can’t help but mourn a time that perhaps feels like it has come too soon, a tragedy we have all felt and fear.

In Alan Jones’s book *Passion for Pilgrimage*, he tells the story of a curious little girl, who upon seeing a crucifix, asks her mother, “Who is that man nailed to those

this for a year.” I was tired, frustrated, and disappointed. I felt despair over the injustices I saw but could not change. I felt helpless and hopeless.

One day in the spring, Marcus, a young man I’d come to know pretty well over the previous six months tested positive for HIV. There really is only one way to proceed after telling someone they’ve tested positive for HIV: sit and wait. And so, after telling him the results, I sat. And I waited. I watched the news wash over his face, the laughter leave his eyes, and his smile change first into a frown and then into jaw-dropping shock. I watched tears and questions fill his eyes. He didn’t want to talk but I told him to come back another day. I would give him the names of doctors, help him apply for a case manager, and answer any questions he had. We always told people this but they usually didn’t come back. Marcus came back. I spent a lot of time with him over the course of the next few months; he got a case manager, started seeing a doctor, and dropped by my office to see me several times a week.

It wasn’t until that time, near the end of my year in Los Angeles, that I truly began finding joy in my work. I was looking for hope and peace amidst poverty and injustice, and I realized that I had been expecting happiness and fulfillment to be free of any signs of strife. I also realized that I would never be content if I simply waited for the world’s problems to go away. Marcus helped me learn to hope against a backdrop of suffering. I cannot, of course, say that I am glad Marcus contracted HIV but it certainly gave us an opportunity to strengthen our relationship.

Each instance of pain and suffering that brought someone into my office every day also gave me an opportunity to serve them, treat them with dignity and humanity, and build a relationship. Though I try to hope, pray, and work for justice and peace in the world, the pain, injustice, and suffering in the world give us each a chance to live out the Gospel in our lives each day. Bringing peace and light into the despairing corners of the world brings hope just as the resurrection of Jesus Christ brought hope to a world darkened by the pain of the crucifixion.

hope and peace amidst poverty and injustice, and I realized

Lovers and shadows

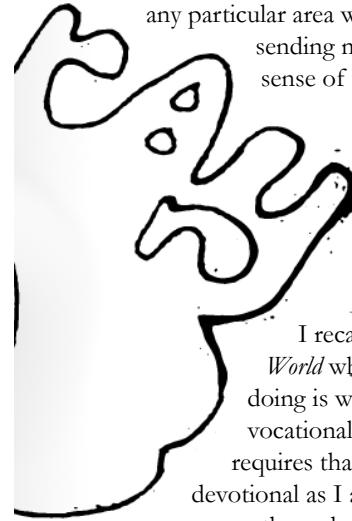
by Cristy Rose Smith

My shadow self in him, my lover,
Shames me.
My face on his body
Tells me I'm disgusting,
That the other night,
When my blood
Came
Into the bedroom,
It was something awful.

And, then, I am
The wounded child. I am
Hurt. I withdraw and hide. I am
Not enough. I am
Unloved, unlovable, and ashamed
Of who I am when I am truly me -- real, flesh, fierce, fragile
-- I am
That young girl
So in love
--with love letters and longing glances and endless hours in journals and drugged out feelings --
Until one morning
He
Says, "I don't like you anymore."
"I just woke up this morning, and felt that way."

And, then, I am
The shadow self,
Protected
And proclaiming that mantra
As my own.
Unattached and unfeeling,
I don't feel.
Unloving,

a known and heavily parented young person places me on a pedestal I don't always care to occupy >>, as well. In addition, the fact that I am single and not deeply rooted to any particular area widens the playing field of opportunity, while simultaneously sending me into fits of hyperactive indecisiveness and a genuine sense of placelessness.



The very moment I feel comfortable in what I have processed, I find myself flat on the floor of life, victim to yet another mental or experiential monster that has tied my shoelaces together...either while I wasn't looking or wasn't paying close enough attention.

I recall a quote from G.K. Chesterton's *What's Wrong with the World* where he comments that, as mere mortals, "Anything worth doing is worth doing badly." Some days I'm really bad at the formal vocational discernment process: I wave fists at the hoops my bishop requires that I jump through, blow raspberries at my *Day By Day* devotional as I attempt to maintain a daily prayer routine, and hem and haw my way through questionable challenges that my priest claims will "be good" for my year in discernment.

And yet, by many strokes of grace and (I sneakily suspect) a grace-filled throng of angels working overtime to counter my constant flip-flopping, I'm still here and I'm still willing to pursue this call...on most days. Between my parish-based discernment committee and a monthly series of Saturday classes run by my diocese, I am slowly learning how to settle into this muddled atmosphere of gray, the color I have assigned to the not-black/not-white of living into discernment, instead of constantly living at odds with the loss of my black and white way of defining the life I am living, and the lives that intersect my own in all sorts of strange and wonderful ways.

As a faithful twenty-something—an anomalous and lonesome existence, some of the time—I maintain sanity with persistent reflection, constant boundary setting, and playing bouncy pop music on my violin. I place myself in communities that support me and are willing to put up with my well-intentioned, sometimes-volatile phase of transition and frustration (even when I struggle with the transition and frustration... and my good intentions) and fully accept that I am no longer the shy, timid girl I was in grade school.

With each breakdown/breakthrough, I seem to find a new way of maturing into my authentic adult voice. I don't know if I'll ever reach that light at the end of the tunnel I dreamed of as a star-truck young girl, mostly because I no longer believe that such an "arrival" in this earthly life even exists. At the same time, I feel deeply connected to my faith and more willing to accept and embrace the grey realities incessantly knocking at the window of my soul. I think I like them...on most days.



With each year added to my life, I'm noticing less black, less white and more gray. This recognition of mine isn't anything novel as I've heard elders in my community tout similar wisdom before, but at this juncture in my life—the transition from student and processor to employee and producer, I am coming face to face with the giant leap of a difference between that wisdom which is read and digested versus that wisdom which is experienced and regurgitated.

Why now? I am twenty five years old and in some way or another I have been discerning a call to the priesthood for ten years. This last year, however, stands separate from the other years, because last September, I became an official candidate in the process toward ordination, as opposed to a casually curious observer of the process.

In this arduous journey of high highs and low lows, I'm continually finding that my positive moments in the process are as equally mind-shattering as my negative moments. Some examples: The reality that my mother is an ordained deacon in my sponsoring diocese works just as much in my favor << in that I am well-known and loved >> as this reality works to my disadvantage << in that the pressure of being

I don't love.
I say with my body and all that is within me,
"Keep your distance, and I will like you."
I enjoy the chase. Chase me.

But, it's not about me chasing my tail.
It's not about these games
I am playing against myself.
It's not about my lover whose face is
a projection of what I grew up with or
my inner demons.
It's not about the god I want him to be, or the man who I've objecti-
fied to fit the story
Called "my romance" or "an affair to remember."

No, it
Isn't even about how I want us to touch each other
And to not stop until I say so.

--Or the shower I took to clean off
Or the prayers I said
And the candles I lit
And the sage I burned
Or the sleep I desired like a mini death
--All so that I could be reborn and free
Of these oppressive voices.

It is about how these are all distractions and obstacles –
Power, control, manipulation, anger, sadness, coping skills –
And, yes, these might be the make-up of life,
And, yes, I must invite the shadows in. But oh!
Cristy Rose!
Let me be me! Let me be me!
Let me be loved and love.



Under the shadow

Ask anyone old enough from New Hampshire where they were on 28 January 1986, and they will be able to tell you. Even at the age of five, I know where I was that day. I don't remember much from when I was five but I remember that day. I was in kindergarten. I loved Kindergarten. Growing up in a small rural town of less than 3,000 people, kindergarten was the only opportunity I had for

play, especially during the cold winter months where I couldn't spend more than 15 minutes outside without being frost bitten. I grew up only an hour outside of Concord, where Christa McAuliffe, the very first teacher/astronaut taught school, and she was going up into space.

The day of the launch was very exciting for me. My little kindergarten class had spent the week wrapping cardboard in tin foil, making helmets, coloring control panels, and pretend microphones. We even had a lofted play area (decorated perfectly) as our space shuttle. Some friends would be at the control panels on the floor at Ground Control, and other friends would be up in the shuttle, wearing their helmets and waiting. We spent a whole week practicing.

On that particular day, we were going to reenact the shuttle launch as it was happening. The rest of the schools in the state were watching the launch live, but since our tiny, private kindergarten didn't have a television, our teachers thought us acting it out would be the best alternative. I vividly remember that I wanted to be an astronaut.

I remember there being a delay; our performance was supposed to be at a particular time but it was held off. Teachers were huddled in a corner, with their heads bowed together in discussion. One of them sighed as the group of us started to complain and get antsy. Finally, our teachers gave us permission to begin our launch. I climbed up into our shuttle, put on my tin-foil helmet, held up my cardboard microphone, and began our launch, "Challenger to ground control. Come in ground control."

Someone responded... maybe it was Donnie or Jeb...fingers were tapping against the pretend control panels they had resting on their crossed legs..."We hear you, Challenger. Confirm: ready for lift off."

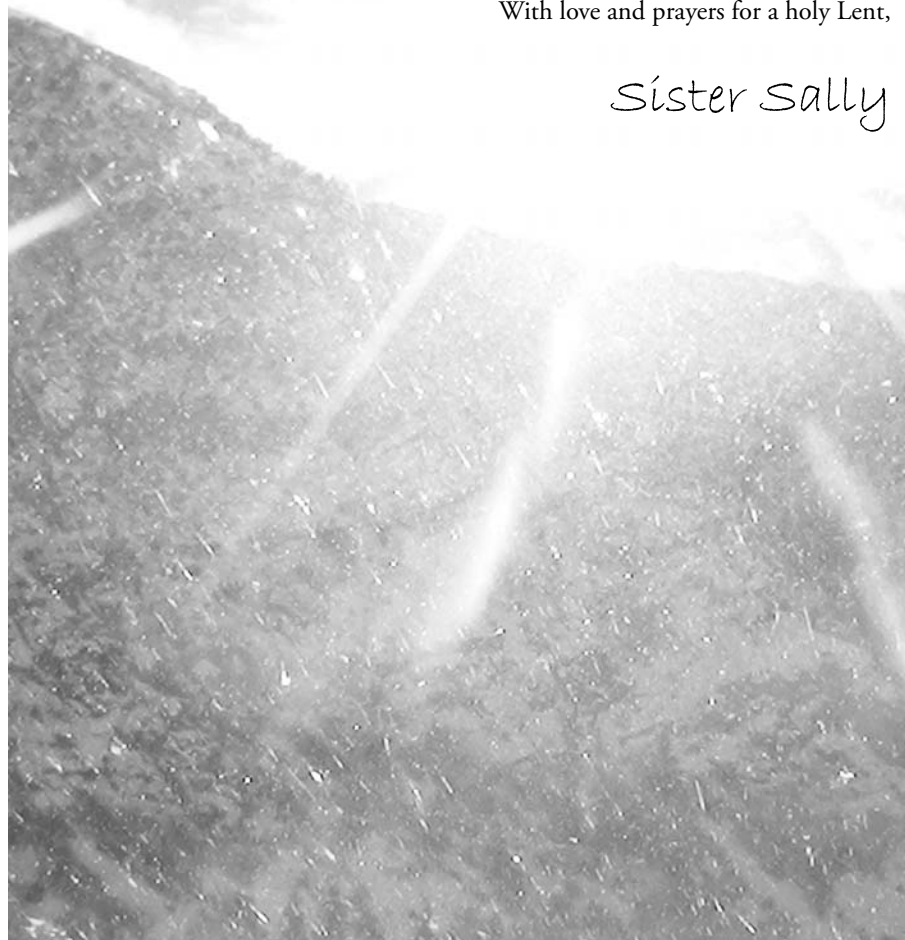
Five little astronauts, me included, shouted at the same time "Ready!" "Count down begins...Ten, Nine, Eight...." By "Seven" ,everyone had joined in...

and winter was back, in full force...and it was Lent...in a community house...full of nuns...

I stepped outside later that night (after the cleanup was done, and Monday morning had started to loom in my consciousness) to smoke a dirty cigarette and steel myself for the week ahead...for more winter...for Ash Wednesday. I remember sitting on the lowest step on the wide porch, and just sitting with my head between my knees, smelling the detergent on my sweatshirt and wishing that I could just wake up in a different place. And from nowhere, this freshening wind blew sideways through the yard, carrying the smell of green and growing things: of flowers that were still asleep, trees that were just beginning to wake up, lambs about to be born, and tombs that were about to be emptied. The breeze blew in and out in a matter of seconds, but I knew one thing for certain. Winter could not last forever. Spring was on her way, and nothing could stop that. Thanks be to God.

With love and prayers for a holy Lent,

Sister Sally



SISTER SALLY SAYS

*An extraordinary,
exceptional ex-sister,
superbly sassy
and slightly sarcastic.
She's here to answer
your questions.
Why should you listen?
Because, Sister Sally Says...*

I remember the backyard of the DC house vividly. The lattice work on the left-hand side and the bench seat where I sat and read for a solid afternoon... the steps where I would sit and smoke my dirty cigarettes in silence and solitude...the little patches of grass on either side of the sidewalk...the abrupt blacktop parking lot that took over from the yard, just ten feet away from the porch...the brave tiger lilies that bloomed and bloomed and bloomed and bloomed...that backyard seems close enough to touch. It seems strange to me that I should remember a place I only lived for a year with such detail. But on a no-name night in late February 2001, still a bare seven months before the world changed forever, I stood in that yard and felt spring months before it really started.

It was a long, cold winter, and learning to live in a community with total strangers, thousands of miles away from my family, with no money was a profoundly challenging experience. I felt myself growing smaller and smaller, tighter and tighter, colder and colder as I was swaddled by Washington, my work, my angst, and that strange emotion I now think of as "growing pains". By the time February rolled around, I knew I had to go home: back to my mother, back to

Texas, back home...nothing was worth going this crazy. I became utterly convinced that the rest of my life was going to be grey, cold, and stinky—just like my walk to work at the convent offices. I would sit in my office, which had been some old nun's bedroom, and stare at the blinking light on top of the Washington Monument for hours, wishing I was anywhere but at that desk, in that convent, in that city.

We had a huge Mardi Gras party the Saturday before Ash Wednesday at the house, and invited everyone we knew from the neighborhood and our workplaces. There was still some snow on the ground, and it was cold enough that we didn't even have to ice down the keg that we ordered and stored on the porch, for the party. The house was full. At some point, I remember Bruce Springsteen blasting through the speakers in the living room, and Sister Mike dancing like a dervish on top of a coffee table, while two twenty-something Lutheran volunteers looked on in mute amazement. The next day and late afternoon were sort of a blur of cleaning up and headache-y daze,

w o f i n n o c e n c e

by Kelly Muir



"Six, Five, Four, THREE, TWO, ONE!!"
There was a loud thump as someone slapped a big colored circle on the side of our cardboard shuttle with their palm.

At this point, we little astronauts began to shimmy and shake, as we had expected it to be a bumpy ride through the atmosphere. We braced ourselves against the walls, giggling and shouting "Whoa!!" as the shuttle lifted off the ground, and into space.

Ground Control announced, "Challenger, We have lift off."

Everyone clapped.

We pretended we were floating weightlessly in space, our arms drifting slowly at our sides, as we concluded the play with a bow.

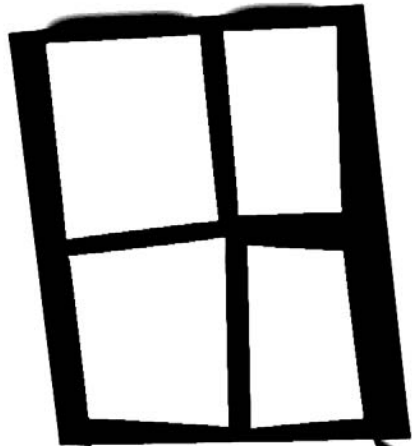
And the teachers never told us that the shuttle Challenger had disintegrated shortly after take-off, that all the astronauts, even our almost-hometown teacher, had not survived.

In all honesty, it could be that they told us after, or that our parents told us when they picked us up, but this is how I remember it - how I remember that day.

I still wonder if it was right or wrong for our teachers to let us keep pretending, even after they knew the launch had failed. I know they kept the news from us out of love and out of respect for our innocence, but I wonder sometimes if it was the right thing to do.

I do know that it's not such a terrifying memory as others have of that day. When I think back to it, to that accident, thinking of the first teacher/astronaut, Christa McAuliffe, the gravity and the loss of the day still make me sad, but remembering also makes me think of weightlessness and peace, just the way I pretended it to happen, when I was five.





“The devil is also a man...the white man is the devil.’ The white people I had known marched before my mind’s eye...The State white people always in our house after the other whites I didn’t know had killed my father...the one who told me in the eighth grade to ‘be a carpenter’ because thinking of being a lawyer was foolish for a Negro...”

—from the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*



The Cloak of Darkness

by *Jabriel Ballentine*



visited a Lutheran friend’s church during the Christmas season. There I saw an interesting poster with all kinds of numbers of monetary and blanket contributions that the ELCA and LCMS, two different synods of the Lutheran Church with their personal differences, came together to make for the impoverished in other countries. These are Christ’s people at work! This is reconciliation! Going back as early as 400 A.D., the Creed of St. Athanasius defines our Christian faith and our place as Christians in the world. We believe in a triune God and of his Son who was both Divine and Man, and who suffered and died for our sake, and was resurrected. Most Christians I know believe this, regardless of what their worship tradition may be. Working together with them, not separating them based on what their denominational label may be... coming together as fellow Christians ecumenically working for one goal... this is reconciliation.

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Lent challenges us to let go of selfish concerns. Personal regrets that accumulate as the result of possible mistakes or being victims of the tough economic times we’re in have a huge potential to pull us under. Our over-concern with self-preservation and falling into anxiety during dark times can make us feel unworthy to be worker-bees for our Lord, blocking us from ever reaching the true Light of Reconciliation.

Another YouTube blogger I stumbled upon, Bishop David McMannes (<http://www.youtube.com/sedonajazz>), made a video where he talks about fear as inhibiting us. He points out many Biblical examples of people called for work but who were afraid to answer that call. He reminds us in the video that God wants us to seek the Kingdom and to “fear not”, as the Scriptures say. Anxiety can be our greatest enemy, and the only remedies for it are Trust, which we put in God, and Love, which is what God commands us to do. This Love can include coming together collectively to fight for a just cause, to help our neighbors in need, or something as simple as a phone call to a friend you haven’t talked to in a while to show you are interested and care about what they are up to. This practice of Love is something that can keep us on the right path, away from the darkness, and toward the Light of Reconciliation.

The Light of Reconciliation

By Drew Christensen

Lent can be viewed as dark time; its place on the liturgical calendar represents a time of Christ's own battles in the desert against evil's temptations. It is therefore a time of self-reflection for Christians in which we too find ourselves battling against darkness of the past in hopes of embracing light in the future. Lent also falls shortly after a busy time in which we—both religious and secular spheres—enjoy customs of celebration, holidays through which we may unite with our families and enjoy happy company. Then we move on to a more neutral period of waiting: Lent. This can be hard on the mind for us young adults, who go back to work or college longing for another euphoric burst of merriment. How do we find the Light? How do we seek Reconciliation?

Reconciliation is defined differently depending on the context you use it in. It can indicate a feeling of completion, or a need to come together. In dark times like Lent, reconciliation prevails over doubts and negative emotions, and looking to our fellow brothers and sisters is where we get strength to accomplish it. A few weeks ago we observed Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. The importance of Dr. King's contributions to music and the arts, his emphasis on scripture, and his incredible ability to stand immovable in his faith are undeniable and something that can be of great inspiration to all Christians. Our Book of Common Prayer contains several forms of prayers to be used in liturgy for the "Peace and Unity of the Church of Christ". Presently, when looking at Christianity as a whole and how fragmented and divided it may apparently seem to be, should we be downhearted or see this as something contrary to reconciliation?

An Episcopal Priest and video-blogger Fr. Rob Baldwin (www.youtube.com/FrRobBaldwin) made an interesting video about one of the unique characteristics of the Episcopal Church. He describes us as "ecumenical": we work with other Christian denominations, respecting their traditions and coming together for the common mission of the body of Christ. I

I'm reminded of Malcolm X (or should I say Denzel Washington, playing Malcolm X) coming to this realization in prison. I see him opening the dictionary to the word "black." You can still perform this experiment.

Really...take a moment to look up that word: "gloomy; pessimistic; dismal...harmful; inexcusable...boding ill; sullen or hostile; threatening...without any moral quality or goodness; evil; wicked...indicating censure, disgrace, or liability to punishment...marked by disaster or misfortune...based on the grotesque, morbid, or unpleasant aspects of life...deliberately false or intentionally misleading...a member of any of various dark-skinned peoples, especially those of Africa, Oceania, and Australia; African-American."

Imagine if this was your identity. Or more specifically, imagine if this was the definition of the word used to refer to you...to your skin color. More bluntly, imagine if the people who enslaved you, colonized you, denigrated you, and dehumanized you had left a lasting negative imprint as a testimony to who they thought you were. It is no wonder that to this day black children still overwhelmingly prefer the white doll for her "purity, goodness and beauty."

But let us draw out this irony further. For if we look up white we find: "being a member of a group or race characterized by light pigmentation of the skin...decent, honorable, or dependable...auspicious or fortunate... free from spot or blemish...morally pure; innocent...not intended to cause harm."

This is an identity of which to be proud! Who would be ashamed of being associated with the word white, as defined?

So, despite the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the Holocaust, the Trail of Tears, the Crusades, the Inquisition, the Witch Trials, etc. one can still be proud of being "a member of a group or race characterized by (being) decent, honorable, fortunate, morally pure and innocent."

Who knows how all of this began. I did some etymological work on the word, trying to discover when it came into the language and how. But, that's not really the issue. At issue is, "how did the word 'black,' with all of its negative connotations become attributed to a people?"

The thing that makes the most sense to me is a theory my father, and philosopher, Krim Menelik Ballentine, offers. From the year 711 AD until the early 1200s, the areas now known as Spain and Portugal were conquered and ruled by Black Africans known as the Moors. The Inquisition was a direct response to the ousting of the "last" of the Moors from Spain and Portugal. The goal of the Inquisition was to ensure that all remaining Moors were either expelled, converted to the Christianity of Western Europe, or killed.

Roughly two hundred years later, the Portuguese sought their revenge: the African Holocaust; the Transatlantic Slave Trade. This vengeance was sealed by the “successor of the key-bearer of the heavenly kingdom and vicar of Jesus Christ” (and thus, by the head of Western Christendom) in Pope Nicholas V’s *Dum Diversas & Romanus Pontifex*. These papal edicts served to justify the seizure of “pagan” lands and the enslavement of “pagan” people without fear of losing one’s “Christian salvation.” According to my father’s theory, in trading slaves with other European nations the Portuguese preferred to use the word “negro,” referring to the people’s color, rather than “Africano,” referring to their geography.

The implications here cannot be ignored. In choosing to call the people African, although being enslaved they would have still been essentially people: although an enslaved people. However, in choosing to call the people Black, all of the negative connotation of “black” were ascribed to this people and the people became “other”: effectively dehumanized.

The brutality of slavery could only be justified in this way. For if the enslaved had remained people, the brutality of slavery would be a mark of dehumanization for the enslaver. Yet, in calling the Africans “black,” the enslaved were easily relegated to sub-human and deserving of - liable to - punishment (see the definition above).

With the complicity of the Western Church (through the Pope’s blessing), the “various dark-skinned peoples, especially those of Africa,” were dehumanized not simply through the brutality of slavery and colonialism. These “various dark-skinned peoples” were dehumanized spiritually and made to be created not in the image of God, but in the image of Satan.

Through the aforementioned edicts of the Western Church, all cursedness was ascribed to “black” people. The biblical curses of darkness served as justification for maltreatment of “any of the various dark-skinned people.” Even now as we observe Lent and make our journey from the darkness of our fallenness to the light of Christ, the “various dark-skinned peoples” are left (subconsciously) to sojourn from the cursedness of blackness to the blessedness of whiteness.

No Ninety-Five Theses, no Protestant Reformation, no Acts of Supremacy, and none of the subsequent denominational strife have thought it important to repent of those foundational issues and their social ramifications, which have been passed

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down like an heirloom worn as an albatross. Some churches have apologized for their “role” in slavery. But, what is an apology without anything being done to repair the wrongs? And, how can the wrongs be repaired if the dehumanized spirit is not restored to wholeness?

Is not the point of our Lenten fast to bring us to wholeness? And is not the goal of it “all” that humanity be restored to the image of God? Does not repentance call us to redress our own wrongs and those bequeathed to us? Or should we be satisfied with the “cheap grace” that assures us of having done enough to repair the human brokenness we helped construct and proclaim there to be no turning back?

Where do we find the moral courage to begin?

Such an endeavor would cause us to dig deep. But, it is an endeavor ripe for Lenten meditation. How vulnerable can you allow yourself to be? When you look at the incarceration rates, unemployment rates, access to healthcare, homeownership rates, infant mortality rates, abortion rates, diabetes and blood pressure rates, etc. the racial disparity is undeniable. Can you allow yourself to see how the association of the “various dark-skinned peoples” with all cursedness and darkness has caused great spiritual and psychological damage? Use that as the lens through which you look at the societal problems facing the communities of those “various dark-skinned peoples.” It is then, when we realize that repentance is more than “I’m sorry.”

There is no simple prescription...no simple formula by which we can repent of this stain. Can we simply erase the definitions of the word “black?” No. Can we simply wave a magic wand and make people cease to associate those negative connotations with a people? No. Negroes...I mean, Afro-Americans, I mean Blacks, I mean African Americans have tried switching their names ad infinitum. Yet, that has done nothing to sever the association between black, fallenness and the “various dark-skinned peoples.”

So, what does it entail? I cannot really say: I am not of the culture that built this construct. But, it certainly must entail work to destroy those mores that undergird the systemic dehumanization inherent in our society. When we do that, maybe we can resurrect the image of God within all of humanity and be one as our Lord prayed.

