

Voice of The Redeemer

Episcopal Church of

Worship-Outreach-Fellowship of the people of the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer, Bryn Mawr

June 2023

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“NEWSLETTER SIGNUP”

“SUCCESSION” AND SCRIPTURE

By PETER VANDERVEEN

For most of the past six months, I’ve been fascinated by the amount of media coverage that has been given to the phenomenally popular HBO series “Succession.” I don’t watch much television, regardless of the many ways programs are delivered these days. And, truth be told, I have never watched a single episode of “Succession.” I felt I didn’t need to, given how expansively all its twists and turns were reported, week by week. The four-year series recently ended, on the last Sunday of May, with a typical, highly-promoted finale. And when all was said and done, the New York Times published an concluding retrospective entitled “‘Succession’ is over. Why did we care?”

Why did we care, indeed? Such a question should be asked and answered more often. But in the case of “Succession” the answer seemed all too evident. All of the characters lived in a world of obscene, excessive wealth, and yet none of them seemed in any way happy. Rather, they were constantly beset: greedy, ambitious, anxious, undermining, betraying narcissists. Money wasn’t the obvious

balm we generally take it to be. It was, in fact, clearly toxic, on every decipherable level. Imagine that.

The Times critic, Alexis Soloski, summarized the main cast with this unflinching observation: “They were all wounded. They were all suffering. They were all mostly terrible. Opposites

of Midas, they injured anyone they touched, unless those anyone were also armored in their own wealth and privilege. Another show might have offered characters to contrast this—an innocent, someone

genuinely good. Not this one. Everyone was venal. Everyone was for sale. Nearly every relationship was a transaction. This was a place where altruism went to die.”

As I read this, I realized that here was evil in epic proportion—still attractive and seductive even as it was destructive with reckless abandon. This was an evil of Biblical magnitude — though no one, across all the many reviews and critiques ever stated this, nor was it even intimated. But we in the church have a term for such persons; they

reflect a total depravity: an inability to, by themselves, save themselves. Paul understood this. So did the writers of the Gospels. And this is the whole thrust of the epic sagas of the Old Testament. Good never fully triumphs. It is always, sooner rather than later, forgotten or undone, no matter what

God asks or commands, no matter what the prophets say, no matter what all the priests and apostles and martyrs proclaim or how they sacrifice themselves. Nothing succeeds.

I know how little the Bible is read. Even more, I’m deeply aware of the stiff resistance many have of paying any attention to Scripture at all. Reluctance is too tame a word. After a few verses wandering through a Biblical text, people often signal their intense boredom. But why? And why do they, then, flock to a show like “Succession” when it is little more than a frail reiteration of core Biblical stories and accounts? Scripture is “Succession” writ large, across generations and centuries, not just several years of corporate boardroom squabbles. So

why such disinterest in the Biblical witness? I would contend that this is largely because we’ve drained the text of its drama. It merely scolds us now. Or so we think. But it’s meant to be a wild ride through all the variations of human interactions, exposing us for who we truly are.

Soloski concluded her review with two telling paragraphs. In her penultimate statement she noted: “Beneath the Shakespearean insults and the Upper East Side penthouses, there was something empty at the heart of ‘Succession.’ This was reassuring, yes, as viewers could tell themselves — as I could tell myself — that our lives were richer, no matter our bank balances. But were you to watch too many episodes in a row, you could feel the show doing to you what Ewan Roy, in his eulogy at his brother Logan’s funeral, accused Logan of doing to his ATN viewers: feeding a dark, mean flame in their hearts. In the series finale on Sunday night, as we have on so many other Sunday nights, we watched sister turn on brother, brother on brother, husband on wife, Greg on Tom—interactions that confirmed and suckled a belief in human nature as hollow, grasping, void.”

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Join Philadelphia-based swing group “Josh Lee and the Extended Family” in the courtyard of our Parish House. Founded in 2020, this group aims to pay tribute to the Swing Era through the music of African American bandleaders like Count Basie, Jimmie Lunceford and Chick Webb. The band is made up of the brightest young Philadelphia musicians who are unified by the goal of keeping this music alive for generations to come. An ice cream truck and refreshments will be on hand to celebrate this last concert of our season. \$35 per ticket. Free for students.

MAJOR CHANGES COMING TO THE VOICE

This is the final monthly issue of *Voice of The Redeemer*. In September, publication will move to quarterly issues which will focus on a particular area of our ministries together.

The new quarterly editions will feature a redesigned fully digital format to be more easily readable online with links to extended articles.

The fall issue will feature all the programs scheduled for the coming academic season.

Deadline for that issue will be Monday, August 28.

We will use the weekly *News from The Redeemer* to promote current programs and events.

PROGRAM

GOING TO CHAPEL . . . Ministries with Children



By TORY DUNKLE

Church school is on its annual summer recess. Which means children's formation here at The Redeemer

screeches to a halt until September rolls around again, right? Not quite. Every week, regardless of season, the crucifer processes down the center aisle and our children follow the cross to children's chapel.

Coming directly after the Gospel reading, children's chapel serves several functions within the service. While parents

may rejoice at this mid-service respite, children's chapel is more intentional and formational than simply a "break" from service. It is true it provides our

youngest and most active members a change of pace and space in the midst of the service. But it is not intended as a mere distraction from worship. Rather it seeks to deepen a child's participation in and understanding of the liturgy.

By mirroring the structure and order of the greater service (song, memory verse, lesson/homily and prayers), children's chapel seeks to reinforce what the young ones have already experienced within the liturgy, while also offering them age-appropriate insights into the day's Scripture readings. This service-within-a-service, allows our children the literal and figurative space to observe, wonder and inquire about morning's liturgy. By

allowing them to explore the Scripture readings, parts of the liturgy and life of the Church, it is our hope that our children leave chapel with a deep love and respect for worship.

As we transition from the Church School year into the dog days of summer, let's remain mindful that formation extends beyond the walls of the atrium—into the liturgy and chapel. Our children cannot nourish a love and desire for worship unless we encourage them to participate in the liturgy and understand it better through children's chapel.

EXPRESSIONS OF LAMENT

By REBECCA NORTINGTON

The Redeemer Youth Group, RYG, has spent the 2022/2023 school year talking about lamentation and the various expressions of lament as found in the Bible, in ancient poetry, in contemporary poetry through music by folks like Kendrick Lamar, in film, and in art-work. Processing sorrow is as human as

eating and sleeping. There is no way to 'snow plow' pain away, as many parents of Gen Z might like to do. Nor is it productive to sweep our struggles under the rug as so many of us were taught in the latter half of the 20th century. The pain has a way of worming itself into our lives whether we like it or not. Our Christian tradition starts with a story of disappointment and punishment. Adam and Eve are kicked out of the garden because of their choices. This is as human a story as it gets. We mess up—and there are consequences. Studying these stories can be a way of studying ourselves. We have spent our Sunday nights this year exploring our own coping skills: do we acknowledge our own suffering, or do we run away from it? Do we have trusted friends and trusted adults we can go to when we are in pain? Do we fully understand our own role in the experiences that hurt us? Do we have resilience to pick ourselves up and get back on the proverbial horse of life?

We have introduced meditation and journaling as strategies to process heartache. We have led the kids in kick-boxing and brought them to beautiful gardens to show them how endorphins and beauty, respectively, can change their mood and lift their spirits. It is not just about acknowledging the pain, it is learning to overcome it, and to avoid scenarios and choices that lead us into darkness in the future. Above all we have reiterated time and time again that the

bible, and our own experiences must remind us that we are loved no matter how we may feel about ourselves. God loves us, and our neighbor loves us. We are flawed, yes—Adam and Eve tell us that from the start. But we are enough even with all of our faults. We share this love with one another in RYG, and we offer it to the world.

As we look ahead to the fall we begin to think about our next theme: Hope. Last year was an Advent theme, one that encapsulated anxiety, unknowing, and the pandemic. How would we move forward? This year's theme of lamentation gave us a moment to acknowledge how

broken we feel as a community, society, and world. Between the pandemic and the impact of social media on our sense of relationality and community, we have seen how young people in particular have stumbled. But the word is out, every day there is a new article about the mental health crisis amongst teens. The need for "third spaces:" places for teens to congregate outside of school or the home, unrelated to social media or achievement is paramount. Church is this place—and it is a place literally built on hope, through love and forgiveness.



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Deadline for the Fall issue: August 28

PROGRAM

MAY 14 SERMON FOLLOW UP

BY JO ANN JONES

I may have left some of you wondering that Sunday as to how does one understand being in God's presence, or how to come to that experience. Briefly put, it is a practice that one develops. I am grateful for the experience of attending Quaker meeting worship for nine years, during which I begin developing the practice. I have come to rely on a phrase I have mentioned before: "Proceed as the way opens." Over time, in silence, I learned to empty my mind of intruding thoughts, and be still and wait.... Sometimes I would receive an inkling, a revelation of sorts, and I would hold it, and let it unfold and speak to me.

Much later, after my mother died and I had moved to Philadelphia, I often walked my dog in Fairmount Park near Belmont Mansion. There was a little grove of trees that was quite shaded, but rays of light would shine through. It was always quiet. There was an unearthly stillness, a peace there that I found nowhere else. It was there that I would turn over in my mind and heart all the unresolved issues with my mother, seeking some measure of understanding and ultimately, resolution and acceptance. I felt something click within me that signaled that there was resolve. I moved on: Step by step during my walk; and day by day, whenever I visited that spot in the park I was conscious of another's presence. I received some answer, some form of counsel, and bit by bit I came to acceptance of the outcome of those issues. That resolve arose independently of my efforts, and alerted me to the presence and action of the Holy Spirit. There came a day when the last matter on my mind and heart was addressed. I knew I had worked through all the open issues. There was a solidness to that moment. I had such a measure of peace. In all that time of coming to understanding, I knew that I had a companion who listened and counseled me, never insisting, but waiting for me to come to terms. I could once in a while feel the slight humming of a presence, and then resolve.

That grove of trees is still there. I have found other spaces and places in which to be still. To pray, and to wait. A word will come; an image might flash in my imagination; sometimes the line of a poem. The practice has not varied much. Be still. Wait. Proceed as the way opens.

"SUCCESSION" AND SCRIPTURE, *continued from the front*

Is this not a mere echo of what the Book of Genesis details in its initial chapters, which is then repeated over and over with increasing momentum. As soon as the Garden of Eden was closed off, Cain killed his brother Abel. Jacob cheated Esau out of his inheritance. Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because of their unremitting depravities. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. Endless conniving and intrigue. And there's no viable correction. Genesis is unsparing in its depictions. And this is both comforting and unsettling: comforting because whatever we face, it has happened before — from the very beginning; and unsettling because, whatever our measures of progress, in sheer human pettiness we have not made significantly moved the needle to the better.

The final paragraph of Soloski's ends piece, appropriately, with a comment on death. She wrote: "Perhaps there was no better illustration of that emptiness than in the funeral episode. After the eulogies, a cortege of town cars fast-tracks Logan's body through the Manhattan grid to a mausoleum purchased from a onetime pet food mogul. All that wealth, all that privilege, delivering an embalmed meatsack to a perpetual nowhere. And the worst part or the best part: You had to laugh."

Is this where we are? Is this who we are? Soloski's epitaph on the series is not so much a statement on "succession" but on pure demise. She

could have referenced Ecclesiastes: "Vanity of vanities. All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever." Instead of reducing anyone or everyone to an "embalmed meatsack" she could have doubled back to Genesis and our being nothing but a formed mound of dirt until God breathed into us the breath of life.

But just this marks a stupendous difference. The testimony of Genesis and of all Scripture is that life is not just ours for a time; it is never merely ours at any time. Life is the constant gift of God, a dynamic breath that sustains us and gives us a status that we can never earn and, by God's grace, never erase. We are stewards in God's creation; we are covenant partners in promise; we are the beneficiaries of God's infinite love, through whom love's redemption and reconciliation is made manifest.

By the end of "Succession" it is made clear that the grave will eventually claim everyone. All that toil for nothing. By the end of the Gospels, it is made clear that the grave is itself an empty threat. For we are the recipients of a greater destiny. Our toil isn't in vain, because succession isn't the goal. As Genesis points out, it's the enjoyment of the garden into which we have been placed. I think I would have found "Succession" riveting and captivating. In a very different way, I wonder why the same isn't true of Scripture, when it has so much more to offer.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO PAUSE

BY WINNIE SMITH

The end of this month will mark my one-year anniversary with you at The Redeemer. When I began here late last June, the church campus was quiet. Hot, hazy afternoons in this new office stretched on, and visitors to the Parish House were infrequent. Sunday mornings were livelier, but still, in those first months the place seemed like a sort of hushed, blanketed Church of the Redeemer. I was warned that September would bring something different, and that proved to be true. Now there are days when I have to shut my office door to block the noise of all the traffic downstairs, and I find myself energized by the congregation on Sunday mornings before people jet off to brunch or to a soccer game. But as summer approaches, I am looking forward once again to the very different character of our church that will take hold.

For me, summer worship is when "be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10) meets "will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?" (Baptismal Covenant, BCP p. 304). Our lives tend to fall out of rhythm a bit during July and August. People are traveling, schedules are—hopefully—

less full, and life is less structured than during the school year. This is a good thing! It is a gift to be able to relax and enjoy a bit of sabbath. But we make a mistake when we treat church as another obligation, as part of the nonstop schedule of things to do, and therefore as something we get to take a break from during this time. Church—corporate worship—is not a burden

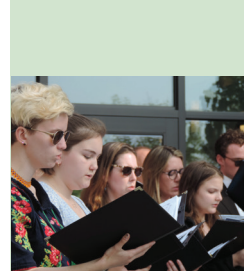
or a task, but rather an opportunity to pause, reset, to remember the world outside of ourselves. It is a time to be still, and to know that while everything else may be different or on pause, that God's presence is everlasting.

I am looking forward to so much about

summer: warm weather, long evenings, and trips to the beach. I am also looking forward to Sunday mornings when I will continue the practice of gathering with others to sing, pray, and learn, knowing that even in all the coming and going, the chaos and joy of the season, that this place will remain constant. I invite you—wherever you may be—to continue worshipping this summer. The routine of our Episcopal liturgy can be grounding, and you may recognize and appreciate that even more in the dog days of summer.



GARDEN PARTY/PARISH PICNIC



PARISH NEWS

NEWCOMER PROFILE



INTERVIEWED BY KEN GARNER

This month we welcome the Tagai family: Steven, Erin, Adrian and Anne. Thank you very much for sharing your story with us about your entry into The Redeemer community.

How long have you been attending services here?

We have been attending services regularly at The Redeemer since Fall 2022.

If you are newcomers to the Episcopal Church, what is your previous church experience, if any?

Erin grew up in a Christian household—attending services at a Presbyterian church when visiting family in California—and while Steven’s parents are Buddhist, he does not have much previous church experience. We have attended some services at St. Marks in Seattle and the National Cathedral when we previously lived in the Seattle and DC areas.

How did you find The Redeemer?

We live walking distance from The Redeemer and frequently walked past during the COVID-19 lockdown on daily family outings.

What inspired you to attend?

Born and raised west coasters (Erin: Seattle suburbs, Steven: Los Angeles), we initially thought our stay in Philadelphia would be temporary. However, as we have grown to love our neighborhood and Philly, we feel this is an ideal location for our family. As most of our family and friends are on the west coast, we were seeking to build our community.

What would you want to tell others about The Redeemer to encourage them to come and explore our parish?

We have felt so welcomed by The Redeemer and love the vibrant youth programming for our children. The Redeemer is an open, accepting community whose values fall closely with ours.

Tell us a bit about yourself outside of The Redeemer—your job, your family, your hobbies.

Erin is a research scientist at Fox Chase Cancer Center with research focusing on health equity and quality of life for cancer patients and survivors. Steven is an IT manager for a database performance consulting team, helping companies streamline their data—so you’re not waiting on hold forever while they find your account information. Our children, Adrian (5) and Anne (3) can often be seen (and heard) on the new Redeemer playground. Adrian loves to draw and build while Anne loves imaginative play.



Thank you for your wonderful response of donations of toiletries to be shared with members of the St. Gabe’s community.

FAMILY PROMISE OF THE MAIN LINE RETURN IN JUNE

From June 18-25 we’ll be hosting FPML families in person in the Parish House! It is a privilege to be able to relate face-to-face and to be present with those who have temporarily lost their homes. There will be opportunities to provide meals, eat dinner with our guests, interact with the children, stay overnight, set up or take down beds, or supply basic groceries. Parishioners of all ages can participate. Sign-up to help online at www.TheRedeemer.org/RSVP or our sign-up sheet in the Parish House to indicate how you can help.

Dinner, Conversation, Games, and More: A Family’s Experience Helping with Family Promise

BY LESLIE SUSSKIND

Danielle Trucksess and her nine-year-old daughter, Ashley, participated in Family Promise during the program’s March Redeemer visit. Danielle shared her thoughts about their experience, including what it meant to Ashley to be involved.

After they signed up to participate in Family Promise, Danielle talked to Ashley about why they were helping these families and what they would do there. But what really helped put the night into perspective for Ashley was when Danielle found out the names and ages of the guests before their designated night. She recommends any parents who bring their children do the same because that information made the experience more personal to Ashley and may have helped her feel more comfortable. “When Ashley learned there was going to be a child her age there, she was so excited.” It gave Ashley an idea of what to expect that night and something to look forward to.

Then, “When we got there, we first ate with the guests and then played a hide-and-seek/tag game, which could have gone on all night.” In fact, everyone was having such a good time that Danielle said, “Ashley didn’t want to leave, but it was close to 9 pm, and the children had to get ready for bed.”

Danielle believes several things make participating in Family Promise not just a wonderful experience for adults but a great one for children, too. “First, hosting and welcoming people to our church and space gave Ashley a sense of purpose. Second, meeting people outside of her community is enlivening and does not happen enough. And third, she saw that simple things like playing tag can be the ultimate bonding experience.” She also believes, “When parishioners bring their children to participate in Family Promise, it helps provide our guests with a sense of normalcy and fun during a difficult time.”

Danielle and Ashley look forward to participating again soon. If you and your family are interested in being part of the next Family Promise visit or want to learn more, please don’t hesitate to contact Barbara Billings at bandsbil@verizon.net. And Danielle is happy to talk to you about her family’s experience. You can reach her at dtrucksess@gmail.com.



More Community Connections Summer Activities

ElderNet Provisions Drive – July

Parishioner Bill Gross, President of the Board of ElderNet of Lower Merion and Narberth, describes ElderNet as a safety net that keeps low-income elderly and disabled persons in their homes as long as possible with dignity and safety. ElderNet provides three major services: 1) Volunteer program consisting of medical rides and friendly visits to alleviate isolation; 2) Care management by licensed social workers; 3) The Ada Mutch Food Pantry, serving 250 households who get food every other week.

The Food Pantry, coping with increased demand as food prices soar and government-subsidized food programs wind down, is asking for our help. Redeemer will be holding a drive for provisions – paper products and food - during July. Watch the News for information about the specific supplies needed by ElderNet and where and when to drop them off. For more information, see Leslie Boris, leslieboris@icloud.com.

FPML Hosting – again – Early September

Mark your calendars for September 3-10 when FPML guests will return!