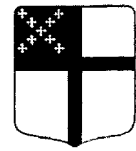


KEYNOTES

June 2022



The Quarterly Newsletter of St. Peter's Church, Lithgow

The Role of St. Peter's Volunteer Choir

Why it is a Vital Component of our Worship

by Nancy Vanderlee

Since 1988, (with the exception of a two-year hiatus) I have held the position of Director of Music at St. Peter's Church. A choir was first formed during the 1990s, but the support and nurture of congregational singing has always been valued. The choir has traditionally prepared anthems for Lessons & Carols, Christmas Eve, Palm Sunday, Easter, Pentecost, All-Saints, and Confirmation. Unfortunately, the choir was silenced from March 2020 through the Fall of 2021, due to the pandemic. However, many choir members continued to participate by submitting individual voice recordings, which were blended to create a virtual choir, (played through speakers for live and livestream services). The congregation, in its role as the large choir of St. Peter's, first had opportunity to sing en masse at the 2021 Memorial Day service and the first annual Hymn Sing (June 2021).

Summer 2021 saw a soft return to in-person choir rehearsals. Several informal practices were held, both on weekdays, and weekends. What a joy it was to reconnect, both personally and musically! Vocal skills were polished up, and the return to a role in the liturgy was eagerly anticipated. In September, rehearsals were begun in earnest, in preparation for October All-Saints' anthems, which were beautifully and confidently sung on October 31.

Throughout November and December of last year, our volunteer singers worked tirelessly to pre-

pare anthems for Lessons and Carols and Christmas Eve, only to be abruptly silenced once again by the resurgence of COVID.

As soon as it was safe to do so, we again resumed our rehearsals, gearing up for Palm Sunday and Easter. Thankfully, the choir was able to participate in those liturgies; we were finally back



The Choir at Easter 2017

on track! Since January, Rev. Jake has also welcomed us to provide musical leadership for all services, when there is no prepared anthem. Many members have made it a practice to arrive early to practice the hymns of the day and the new canticle, Pascha Nostrum, that has been added for the season of Eastertide. Our final anthem opportunities for the season will be the first

two Sundays in June: June 5 will feature a Pentecost anthem, and on June 12, St. Peter's inaugural intergenerational confirmation choir will sing!

Any member of our choir would agree that we prepare music to praise God and edify the congregation. We minister to the congregation and each other. Our ensemble serves as a conduit of faith for both the congregation and choir members. In a church choir, ordinary people can experience the satisfaction of text coming to life as they sing a well-rehearsed anthem, hymn or canticle. A volunteer choir creates a community unlike any other.

A healthy choir can be one of the strongest small groups in a congregation. St. Peter's is lucky
continued on following page

to have an ensemble such as this; we must nurture it and its members. A rare and special dynamic is created among people who gather on a volunteer basis. Singers need to feel needed! Choirs encourage good singing throughout the congregation and can be avenues to faith for visitors/guests who end up participating. (St. Peter's choir members have been known to gather for social events, such as dinners and movie nights, as well.)

In my role as choir director, I also serve as a voice teacher. Participants improve their vocal skills by practicing proper vowel and consonant formation, which leads to a more blended sound. Music reading skills are touched upon, but the ability to read music is not required for participation. Recently, some singers have been performing descants which I have composed specifically for our ensemble. Choir members always have access to practice sound files which I produce for them. This helps to boost their confidence. Every anthem that we sing is carefully chosen and tailored specifically to bring out the best in each person's voice.

I feel fortunate to work in a congregation which supports these efforts by providing me with funds for continuing education. With this financial backing, I continue to grow as a musician myself, by attending workshops and conferences, taking courses in choral arranging and composition, and performing as part of the Cappella Festiva Chamber Choir, led by Christine Howlett at Vassar College, an excellent mentor. My ongoing work as a musician outside the church, both past and present, is a constant

source of renewal and skill building, which directly enhances my effectiveness as a church musician. My experience of over thirty years as a choral educator in the public schools has directly informed my ability to minister at St. Peter's.

Before the pandemic, a paid singer was sometimes incorporated into our ensemble. For the time being, it is my intention to continue building St. Peter's Choir from within the congregation. We were silenced far too long. Our choir needs to have the experience to continue to grow and thrive on its own, fulfilling its role as a ministry. In August, while the choir is on hiatus, we will welcome Samantha Martin, a recent Bard Vocal Arts Program graduate, (coincidentally, a fellow alumnus of my alma mater, the Crane School of Music) to a service as a solo singer. Many thanks to those who have supported the St. Cecilia Music Fund to make this possible!

As I write this article, I am looking forward to exploring the new organ that was installed just yesterday! What a blessing for all of us to have an improved instrument to support our voices in congregational and choral singing! (*More on that in the next issue of Keynotes.*)

The choir will be on break until September; please consider joining us in the fall for a rehearsal or simply to help to lead hymns and canticles on a week-to-week basis. New singers are always welcome, and the commitment can be on a seasonal or weekly basis. Please feel free to contact me or any choir member if you need more information. Of course, encourage your friends, even if they are not parishioners, to join us, as well!

*Nancy Vanderlee
(914) 204-6472*

Deadlines for Keynotes

August 20

November 20

February 20

May 20

Please send submissions to: acgillis@optonline.net

Lessons in civility are relevant now

COVID-19 cases are rising; simultaneously, mask mandates are falling as a result of a questionable court decision. We take comfort that vaccination and boosters are effective in most cases to prevent serious illness, hospitalization, and death from COVID-19, but we know that some people who are vaccinated still get COVID-19, can be asymptomatic, may suffer from “long” COVID, and can still transmit COVID-19 to the vaccinated and boosted. We witness the extraordinary efforts of organizers of some congregate events (e.g. college reunions and gala Washington dinners, etc.) to require proof of both vaccination and recent or same-day testing. We also witness the confusion (frankly failure) of some organizers of other congregate events (churches, garden clubs, camera clubs, book clubs, etc.) to deal constructively with the chaos.

The tools for fighting COVID-19 are clear: vaccination, masks, social distancing, testing, and isolation. But, there is no generally accepted approach, nor any organization to suggest guidelines that will be followed. While a local church has no policy on vaccination and masks, a local school requires all visitors to be vaccinated and masked inside all school buildings. What is one to do?

The *Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior* of George Washington from the 18th century suggest a helpful approach: “If you cough, sneeze, sigh, or yawn, do it not loud but privately; and speak not in your yawning, but put your handkerchief or hand before your face and turn aside.” (Rule No. 5)

If George Washington were President today, he might not endorse mask requirements, but he would no doubt approve concern and respect for each other as we continue to battle COVID-19.

A COVID-19 Protocol of Civility and Decent Behavior might suggest:

1. Every action done in company, ought to be with some sign of respect, to those that are present. (Rule No. 1 from Washington’s *Rules of Civility*).
2. Get vaccinated and boosted as soon as possible to protect yourself and others.
3. Test for COVID shortly before attending a congregate event.
4. If the test is positive, call your doctor, isolate, and do not attend a congregate event.
5. If the test is negative, it is OK to attend a congregate event without wearing a mask, if you are vaccinated and boosted and have no symptoms.
6. If you do not test before a congregate event, it is OK to attend only if you are vaccinated and boosted, wear a mask at the event, and have no symptoms.
7. Maintain social distancing of at least six feet.
8. Wear a mask to protect both yourself and others.
9. Appreciate that those who wear masks do so to protect both themselves and you.
10. Labor to keep alive in your breast that little spark of celestial fire called conscience. (Rule No. 110 from Washington’s *Rules of Civility*).

It is up to event planners to organize their activities in a manner consistent with generally accepted standards of civility and decent behavior.

*G. A. Mudge
Sharon*

Easter



Another stunning wreath by Bindy Kaye



Altar flowers arranged by Anne Garcia & Torrie Larson



Sasha & Jake



Nancy Vanderlee directs the choir: Torrie Larson, Barbara Lindsley, Doug Larson, Lillian Chapman, Mimi Babcock, Diana King, Bindy Kaye



Jake Dell greets Marie-Noël Bastien & George Carmel, who were married at St. Peter's last August



Lillian Corbin does her Jake Dell impersonation



Eloise & Addie Eldredge

Photos by Lillian & Peter Corbin



Preparing for the Easter Egg Hunt

Memorial Day



The speaker, James W. Kinnear III, holds the attention of the congregation.

The Cross and Flag Bearers: Katherine Florack, Spencer Mandy & Ella Armstrong



Nastia Khlopina & Juliet Heyer



Lillian Chapman & Lea Cornell prepared the traditional gingerbread & lemondade.



Spreading the petals



David Greenwood prepares to give his annual tour of the cemetery.



Taps, played by James Osborn

Photos by Lillian & Peter Corbin



The Brass Band

Rogation Sunday

by Karin Shrubsole

It was a slightly muggy and overcast day on May 22 this year when, together with about seventy other people, I attended the Rogation Sunday Blessing of Our Sacred Earth, an Interfaith Celebration of God's Creation at Innisfree.

We all met on the Overlook for a welcome and introduction by The Rev. Matt Calkins of Grace Church and reflections on Innisfree by Kate Karin, Landscape Curator of the Gardens.

This was followed by the delightful and humorous Hudson Valley Canticle, which was adapted by The Rev. Alison Quin of Grace Church from a traditional African Canticle collected in Desmond Tutu's *An African Prayer Book*. Read it slowly or chant it!

All you *big* things, bless the Lord.
The Catskills and the Hudson River,
Wappinger's Creek and Lake Taghkanic,
Red oaks and tall pines,
Black bears, bobcats and coyotes
Bless the Lord.

Praise and extol God for ever and ever.

All you *tiny* things, bless the Lord.
Busy black ants, ticks and fleas,
Wriggling tadpoles and mosquito larvae,
Bumble bees and pollen dust,
Field mice and water droplets,
Bless the Lord.

Praise and extol God for ever and ever.

All you *loud* things, bless the Lord.
Thunderstorms and howling winds,
Woodpeckers and screaming crows,
Cicadas and katydids,
Waterfalls and spring peepers
Bless the Lord.

Praise and extol God for ever and ever.

All you *quiet* things, bless the Lord.
Turtles and garter snakes,
Butterflies and dandelion seeds,
Queen Anne's lace and goldenrod,
Sunlight and green grass
Bless the Lord.

Praise and extol God for ever and ever.

Donna Coane (Ohstonha Ohskennononton), from Schaghticoke First Nations, then read an Iroquois Thanksgiving Prayer, and, as we walked down the path to the lake's edge, Mountain Flower, a Mohawk Song, was played.

We stood at the lake's rim while Rabbi Daniel Victor (from Poughkeepsie) read from the Torah: (Genesis 2) first in Hebrew and then in English.

We continued our stroll, singing the hymn *Lord of All Hopefulness* until we arrived at the Canadian Geese Lawn (they were mercifully somewhere else for the afternoon) and there we heard a wonderful Hindu story about a cobbler who was visited by a great teacher (which I feel would make a delightful illustrated book for children.)

"I have just been to see Vishnu," said the teacher, "And he thought you might have some questions." The cobbler's mind went blank, but he dredged up a question. "What was Vishnu doing when you saw him?" he asked at last. "He was threading an elephant through the eye of a needle," came the answer. "Oh yes. Only Vishnu could do that!" the cobbler laughed.

"Surely you don't believe it," said the teacher, "I was just teasing." "But why can't he?" asked the cobbler, picking up a seed from beneath the banyan tree that was shading them. "Inside this seed is a tree as big as this one. If Vishnu can squeeze a whole banyan tree into such a tiny seed, then surely he can thread an elephant through the eye of a needle." And the teacher realized that this was a wise man because he could see the hand of God in everything.

Ani Lhadrun, from the Buddhist Monastery in Wappingers Falls, continued the readings with a prayer for peace from Yajurveda.

May peace radiate in the whole sky as well as in the vast ethereal space everywhere. May peace reign all over this earth, in water and in all herbs, trees and creepers. May peace flow

BLESSING OUR SACRED EARTH
AN INTERFAITH CELEBRATION OF GOD'S CREATION



INNISFREE GARDEN
MAY 22, 2022

St. Peter's Newest Parishioner

On April 3, Cecilia and [young] Bartle Bull brought two of their 7-week-old puppies, Fire & Little Sausage, to spend an hour in the Church School & Nursery. Although Emily Lynch (pictured here) hoped that her parents would adopt both, it was not to be: Little Sausage (now Sauce) has a new home with Sasha, Maia, & Jake Dell, and Fire stayed with the Bulls. Cecilia explained that Fire's name had to be changed to Lola because it would be too disruptive to shout "FIRE" when they needed to get her attention.



Will Morlock



Marie Scagnelli

Rogation, cont'd from previous page

over the whole universe. And may there "Always Exist" in All, Peace and Peace and Peace alone. Om Peace, Peace and Peace to us and all beings!

She ended her readings with excerpts from a Letter to Mother Earth from the great late Vietnamese Pacifist Thich Nhat Hahn.

We climbed the steps to the quiet spot near the original house site for a reading from the Quran:

Do you not see how God compares a good word to a good tree? Its root is firm and its branches are in the sky; it yields its fruit in every season by God's leave. God speaks in

parables to mankind so that they may take heed. But an evil word is like an evil tree torn out of the earth and shorn of all its roots. *Sura 14:24o-25*

The Rev. Heather Sisk (daughter of Bishop Sisk), Priest-in-Charge of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Pleasant Valley, read the Parable of the Seeds from St. Luke's Gospel. And indeed people had brought seeds and they were blessed—and so were we all. Our last song was *For the Beauty of the Earth*. Indeed, what a beautiful Earth, and what better way to spend Rogation Sunday than to join with people of all faiths, blessing it.

Claire & John & Italy & Covid



In early May Claire and John Reid were in Naples, Italy, planning to return to Millbrook after a holiday, when they were tested for COVID prior to boarding the plane. Unfortunately, Claire tested positive, so they were required to delay their trip by a minimum of 5 days while Claire went to a quarantine area and John to a hotel. After 5 days, Claire tested negative, but John then tested positive, and they switched residences. 5 days further on, they both tested negative and were released from quarantine. They were able to travel one more leg of their journey—to Dublin, where, as they were about to board the plane to New York, they were tested once again—and John’s test *came back positive!* And to underscore their misery, the airlines lost their luggage, so they were sent back to quarantine with only the clothes on their backs.

What wasn’t lost was their sense of humor. On May 13, when he first tested positive, John submitted the following to Keynotes:

I am told they say, “see Naples and die”
Though until we came here, I could not see why
But now we’ve been here for many days
I find that a most unwonted praise.

A negative Covid test for Claire
Left us in gloom, and deep despair
But, when I tested negative too
There was very little that we could do
But move me out of my one room apartment,
And Claire from her quarantine department,

And move our clothes and bags as well
And establish ourselves in a “nice” hotel.

We are scared to go out and breath in the airs
We have been very earnest about our prayers
And we are happy, not being left in the lurch,
For we heard there were prayers in St. Peter’s Church.

So please keep those prayers coming, whatever you do,
And, hopefully, we will come home to you.

After another few days they finally both tested negative and were able to return to Millbrook and to their Irish Red & White Setter Molly, who had been lovingly cared for by Sally Lynch, who was released just in time to move over to my house to care for my 2 dogs while I was out of town. Could Sally be the problem? Does she bring a Covid curse with her? I’ll let you know.

Anne Gillis

Barbara & Charlie & Italy & Covid

We have just received word
that Barbara and Charlie
Pierce are in the same situ-
ation—in the same country:
Barbara tested positive for
COVID and Charlie negative.
The photo is of their daugh-
ter Sheila Pierce Ortona and
Charlie visiting Barbara
through the window of her
quarantine room.



Keynoter at large . . .



STORIES

Jake spoke about stories in his May 8 sermon. He spoke of the story of Tabitha and I was struck by what he said. Her friends knew her story, because they talked to each other.

So Jake urged us to look into our own stories, because there are ways in which our stories intersect with the story of Jesus. We know that he suffered greatly on the cross. Each of us has known suffering at some level, so our stories do intersect at some point—and perhaps we should be looking at our own stories.

This reminded me that Jesus very often taught in parables. I like to think that a parable is a story that is told to make a point.

For example, The Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis tells this story in her article "Love Crosses Boundaries":

"Rabbi Jesus is talking to a religious leader—a lawyer—about what it means to be faithful. Together they review the Jewish scriptures: The way to live right is to love God with everything you have, and love your neighbor as yourself. Looking for a loophole, the lawyer wants to know who qualifies as a neighbor. Jesus answers by telling a story about a man who was robbed, beaten, and left for dead by a marauding gang. A priest and another religious man walked by and, seeing the man on the ground, they did nothing. But a Samaritan—a mixed-race person considered in ancient times to be an impure enemy of the Jewish people—did not cross the street. Instead, he tended to the wounded man. The moral of Jesus' story is that the despised Samaritan is the good neighbor...

In using this story to answer his companion's question about the definition of neighbor, Rabbi Jesus was getting to what he considered to be the essential laws: Love God with all you have and love your neighbor as yourself."

Shouldn't we share our stories of God at work in our lives and in the life of the world? Somehow, I believe that telling our stories, and hopefully sharing them in some format, will at least get us to know one another better.

And, God willing, it may start to kindle or rekindle our faith.

I am more of an analytical person than a forward planner. I can't figure out a way we can share our stories; does anyone have an idea?

We could start with a series of short meetings in which willing members tell the others stories of how they found their faith, or how they lost it, or something in between. It could be a story that reminded you that God is at work in the world.

I imagine that many of us are on a journey toward faith. I know we have many doubters in our congregation, but I have been told that doubt is a very important part of Faith.

If I were to share my story, it would be one full of doubt. I take solace in the phrase "Doubt is Faith's Shadow," quoted to me by an Episcopal priest.

I have taken further solace in reading several of the articles in the current issue of *The Episcopal New Yorker*, the Official News Publication of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, Spring 2022.

The Issue is called the "Doubt Issue," and contains several excellent articles on the general subject of doubt.

I could fill several pages with quotes from many of these articles, which spell out the incidents and feelings of doubt that have followed me since about 1961, when my unwavering faith, so well-instilled in me by the Roman Catholic church, started to give way.

Reading this issue has given me food for thought, and the knowledge, once again, that doubt is a very necessary part of faith.

I mean "necessary" when I realize that all we know of God comes to us in the life of Jesus, and those who tell his story, over the years, in different languages and translations. No wonder there is doubt.

In *The Episcopal New Yorker* issue, Suzanne Martinucci writes:

"Could it be that we have too long focused on doubt's negative aspects? If instead we considered 'doubt' in its questioning guise - as in opening a path to learning - mightn't it potentially enliven and enrich our journey in faith?"

She goes on:

"Surely our faith is likewise strong enough to bear sincere and honest scrutiny in our quest for knowledge."

Yvonne Davies, a vestry member at a church in Westchester, writes of her almost lifelong search, in various churches, for a re-kindling of the faith of her childhood. She has struggled, meditated, prayed, and finally found the Episcopal church, where questions were both allowed and encouraged. Her story is similar to many, many others.

Her story would be part of my story, to be sure.

The "Doubt Issue" is full of stories. It is well worth reading, especially if you have any doubts!!

Betsy Shequine

Confirmation Class Diary

by Jake Dell

April 23 – *Creation* – Bibles handed out. Discussed what the Bible is. Is it good for counsel and advice? Tried opening to some random verses to find out. Most did not make sense right away. Hence, we saw that the Bible is not like a fortune cookie but requires study. However, there is one book in the Bible that will usually give good and quick advice: Proverbs. We read and discussed a few. We read Genesis 1 and compared it to a Mesopotamian creation myth. The differences were twofold: (1) Genesis declared creation good, and men and woman were made to have dominion over the earth, which means they were made for freedom; (2) There was no mention of the goodness of creation in the Mesopotamian story and human beings were made to serve the gods as slaves.¹

Chocolate chip cookies served.

April 30 – *Jesus Christ* – Began again with Proverbs and a discussion of ethics. Linked this back to the goodness of creation in Genesis 1. Read the prologue to John's Gospel, John 1:1-14. Linked this back to Genesis. Both books begin with "In the beginning...." John links Jesus Christ with the creation as the Creator Himself.

Discussed the gathered community of those who receive Jesus, who believe in His name. How is this community formed? By birth. New birth. Not a birth by blood (i.e., family, race, or clan), neither by the will of the flesh (meaning not by nature running her course, by natural reproduction), nor by the will of man (meaning like our parents, who willed to get married and start a family), but of God. God starts His new family in Jesus Christ. *Sasha's brownies served.*

May 7 – *Passover and Exodus* – Prayer books handed out. Discussed what it is to pray and how reading the Bible is a form of prayer. Read and discussed more proverbs. Read from Exodus 11-14 and re-enacted the Passover and Exodus. The old parish

house became Egypt. We passed under the lintel and imagined the splattered blood of the Passover lamb. "It was a sign," one of the children said. Yes exactly, it was a sign, like baptism. The sacraments are signs. And what is confirmation confirming? "Our baptisms," they replied.

I asked, "If you were a slave and you wanted to be free, would the first thing you thought of doing be to kill a lamb and sprinkle its blood on your door?" Heads all shaking no. What would you do? "Run away, escape, hide...." And then what? "We might get captured, get lost, run out of food...." Yet God wanted to use a lamb. We'll have to find out why. Keep reading.

Who else is a lamb? Jesus is the lamb of God. What passed over? The destroyer, a.k.a. God Himself in His judgment on the Egyptians. What for? To free His people the Israelites. Why did they need to be set free? Because they had become Pharaoh's slaves. What did the Israelites do? They packed their things quickly and left. They also plundered their Egyptian neighbors for gold and silver as payment for 400 years unpaid wages as slaves. They didn't even have time to let their dough rise, so they ate unleavened bread.

Here we processed from the old parish house to the church, from Egypt to the Promised Land.

Then what? They reached the Red Sea. (We marched right up to the baptismal font and stopped.) Did Pharaoh relent? No, he

pursued them. He wanted revenge. (We imagined his armies at the closed doors of the church. One of the children described the church as a "safe space.") Then what? The Israelites were stuck. A sea in front of them, an army behind them. (We were stuck too. The stone sea of the font and the communion rail cut us off from the promised table of plenty.)

How were the Israelites saved? Moses stretched out his arm and parted the waters and the Israelites walked over on dry land. As for us, we had no choice but to read the prayer from the "Public Baptism of Infants" in the prayer-book and invoke the God who "didst safely lead the children of Israel through the



¹ Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and Other* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 14-15.

Red Sea, figuring thereby thy Holy Baptism..." Another sign. So, down into the waters of the baptismal font we went, then up and out as we crossed over on dry land — actually, it was red carpet — and then we came to the table of plenty.

Standing around the table (which was set for Holy Communion the next day), one of the children said, "It's all connected." Another said, "We've come full circle." Another said, "Someone really thought this all through." I said, "Here is freedom God's way. He leads us to His table where now He feeds us."

Then came several questions: "So, the Book of Exodus really was an *exodus*?" "Are all the book names like that?" (Some are, like Genesis, which means "beginning.") "Who wrote the Bible?" (God did, by inspiring the hearts of its many authors.)

My puppy, Sauce (*see page 7*), a regular attendee of the class, was sick to his stomach. *Rice crispy treats served.*

May 14 – I did a make-up class today for a student who was absent last week. It was followed by the regular class. My make-up student asked, "Why did God kill all the firstborn Egyptians? What did they do wrong?" Ah. The problem of collective guilt (which I described as *I spill the milk and you clean it up*). She'd asked a deep question and I gave her the answer, but I also told her that it will take a lifetime of growing in her faith to understand it. The simple answer is that we *all* die, firstborn, lastborn, untimely born, ancient Egyptians and modern Americans. But why? It was a nice segue to this week's topic of Original Sin. The rest of the class arrived, and I put her question to the group. "Maybe all of them were responsible." "Maybe God was trying to show them the consequences." "But wait, were they *all* responsible?" I suggested we read Genesis 2 and 3 to find out.

"Was Eden a real place?" That was the first of many more questions during this, the liveliest of the classes to date. Well, look at the text. Were Ethiopia and Assyria real places? (Gen. 2:13-14). What about the Euphrates River? (Gen. 2:14) Yes, these are real places. Seems like the *text itself* is saying Eden was a real place. "Maybe Eden got destroyed," someone said. Maybe it did. I told them we won't have time for the Flood story.

"The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground..." What is dust and dirt? Stumped them! It's death and decay. "Ohhh!" So, what was man made from? "Dead stuff!" Man is mortal. Death was in the first man's bones, or at least the *possibility* of dying. Yet God "breathed into his nostrils the breath

of life; and man became a living soul." Man was made for life.

"The Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat....' I asked them what trees do. "They grow." "They make fruit." What is fruit? "Food!" So, food comes from trees and trees are planted in what? "Soil!" "Earth!" "Dirt!" And what is dirt? "Dead stuff!" So, trees make food for life from dead stuff.

"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it..." The first rule. The first *law*. Who spoke the first law? "God." With what did He speak it? "Words." And what did He use to create the world? "Words." And in the beginning was what? "*The Word*." And the Word is Who? "Jesus." One of them asked, "What language does God speak?" Hebrew, I said, without missing a beat.

"...for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." So now we've come to the reason for death. "But they didn't die right away..." That's true, they didn't. Did you think they would? *Did you think the tree would kill them?* Remember, trees turn death into life. Skipping ahead, "the woman saw that the tree was good for food..." So, we know the tree wasn't poisonous.

A volley of questions followed, most of which they answered for each other. "So why did they have to die?" "Because they broke the rule." "Was it like a test?" "Why would God make a test?" Why do you take tests? "To show what I know." Why do you play sports? "To win." But you need another team to beat, right? "So, you need good and evil, to show what is good?" But there is no evil yet and still everything in creation was good. Time to move on to the making of the animals.

"And the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone....' Now, for the first time, something is "not good" in creation, and it is the absence of the woman that is deemed to be "not good." Furthermore, none of the cats or dogs or cattle or sheep or fish turn out to be "an help meet [good enough] for him." But the man *did* name all the animals. In fact, God "brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them." What was Adam doing? Did he give them names like Spot, and Bo, and Sauce? "No, he was saying what they *were*." And if the man could say what each animal was, what does that tell you about the man? "That he knows things." By naming the animals, Adam showed God that he knew things. The man was *making knowledge*. (Turns out he didn't need a tree to make him wise.)

Now, for the creation of woman. "The Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept:

and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof. And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.”

“Wait, so the man was made from dirt and the woman was made...” “From the man!” “From his rib!” From his *flesh*. From something living. *Life from life*. So, the man was made from dead stuff, but the woman was made from something *already alive*. (Thus, Adam would name her Eve, “because she was the mother of all living.”) “Was Adam like a tree?” Brilliant question! Have you ever heard the old Christmas carol “Jesus Christ the Apple Tree?” No? Listen for it next Christmas.

OK. So, to re-cap. So far, we’ve had the first what? “Law.” And then what? “The first knowledge.” And who makes knowledge? “The man.” And what did he use? “Words.” So, what did we just read? Stumped them again. Look at the way the text is set. What does it look like? “A poem.” A poem. Yes. Exactly, this is the first poem. What kind of poem was it? “You mean like a haiku or a sonnet?” No, I mean who was it written for? “Eve.” Why was it written? Blank stares. It was the first *love poem*. Adam wrote the first love poem for Eve.

“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.”

“So, he was saying she was the same as he was?” She was the same *kind*. You are like me, he was saying. “She was same species... woman... of man. Human.” Yes, exactly. He was saying the woman was *human*. (Not everyone has understood that since, but Adam knew.)

“And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” Any sign of evil yet? “No.” Everything is still good? “Yes.” Let’s keep reading.

Genesis. Chapter 3. “Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made...” Another volley of questions. “Was the devil in the garden?” “Did God make the devil?” Does it *say* devil? “No.” “But who made the snake?” God did. “Did God make the snake evil?” Remember Genesis 1. What did God call everything? “Good.” So, the serpent must have been good too. Good, but subtle. Someone said, “The serpent is a test” and a debate ensued. “If it was a test, and the serpent was just doing what God wanted him to do, why did God pun-

ish the snake?” (She’d read ahead.) “It couldn’t be a test then, because that would make God...” It would make God what? Capricious? Yes, it would.

And so, the man and the woman ate the apple. “And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.”

“Before they were not ashamed. Now, they are.” Yes. They’re making their own rules now, deciding for themselves what’s right and what’s wrong.

“...and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God.” Had they died? Not yet. But *something* had died, their friendship with God. What kind of death is that? “Emotional?” Yes. And what’s another way of saying that? When you’re happy you’re in what? Good... “Good spirits!” Yes. Good *spirits*. So, if this was an emotional death of their spirits, it was a what? “A spiritual death?” Yes, a *spiritual* death. “But they still *die*, die.” Keep reading.

Now to bring it home. It had been a lively hour so far and Mrs. Bellin had just arrived with the pizza. Everyone was feeling punchy, just in time for the blame-shifting curses of Genesis 3:14-19!

Who did Adam blame? “Eve!” Who did Eve blame? “The serpent!” What was the snake’s punishment? “To lose his feet!” “To crawl on the ground!” The boys briefly debated the evolution of snakes and centipedes. The girls told them that wasn’t the point.

What was the woman’s punishment? “To be sad and have children,” one of the girls said. And? “...thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee...” “Wait...”

Oh, this passage causes everyone so much grief.

From where did Eve come? “Adam.” Which part? Did she come from his head? “No.” “That would have put her in charge.” His feet? “No.” “That would mean she had to serve him.” From which part then? “His side.” “They were supposed to equals.” “They were supposed to be friends.” Indeed. But now man is making his own rules and is becoming a law unto himself. Women and animals have suffered ever since.

And what was the man’s punishment? “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” Death. Back to the earth. But not before a life of toilsome labor. What does the “the sweat of thy face” sound like? “Slavery.” And what was man made for? “To rule.” “To have dominion.” “Freedom.” And what has he become? “A slave.” Just like in the Mesopotamian creation myth. Who else were slaves? “The Israelites.” Who freed them? “God.” When? “At Passover.”

We'd come full circle again.

There were three more quick points I had to make as the hour ran out. First (as it was a day of firsts: the first law, the first poem, the first marriage, and the first sin), why not end with the first prophecy? "To the serpent God said, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." The rest of the Bible's story is now set up. The offspring of the serpent will do battle with the offspring of the woman, and one day, one of her seed will appear to destroy all the works of the other seed and undo all the damage that's been done. Who might that offspring be? "Jesus." (The answer in confirmation class is almost always "Jesus.")

Second. The first sacrifice and the very beginning of religion. "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them." Those skins weren't just off the rack. God had to kill an animal to make those clothes bespoke, and, ever since, man has been using religion to cover his crimes. At the heart of every primitive religion is an altar upon which a living creature (man or beast) must be killed in atonement. The table in our very own St. Peter's Church is a memorial — *and only a memorial* — to that bloody rite. But God sacrificed one of His creatures to clothe his two errant children, whom He still loved with a Father's love, because the world can be a cold place.

Third. There is no way back. "So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." "Paradise lost," one of the girls said. (I think I must have a very smart class!) Why was it so important that they not eat and live forever? "Because then evil would be immortal," one of the boys said. "And then evil would win," one of the girls said. Exactly so. But is that tree of life gone for good? I'll tell them next week.

Sauce couldn't make it to this week's class because it was later in the day than usual, and he was taking his afternoon nap.

May 21 — *The Tree of Life* — Revelation 20-22. The beginning and end of history. A hot, miserable day. I brought Sauce and gave him a chew. Set out a batch of chocolate cookies that I'd baked this morning. A mother arrived early, and we chatted. 2:30 p.m. came and I began class. Down one student and another Zoomed in.

We reviewed last week's class. I can see why the catechisms of old were in Q&A format. It's an excellent way to reinforce what's taught. For instance, in every class I've asked, "What is confirmation confirming?" By this the last class then can all respond in unison, "Our baptisms." I suspect that the problem (and what made catechisms of yesteryear boring) was not the scripted answers, or even the memorization, but of not giving the children the chance to put the answers *into their own words*.

Throughout this class I've emphasized words. God used words to create. That same Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Words are the constituent parts of Adam's knowledge. When reading a passage of Scripture, my question to them always was, "What does this say?" That was their prompt to put God's words into their own.

This week we jumped back and forth between the beginning and end of things. I reinforced the lessons of Genesis 1-2 that chronicles the very beginning of time and history. At the end of Revelation 20 I told them to draw a line in their Bibles and make a note in the margin reading, "The end of history." Everything after is eternity.

But what happens at the end of history? Death dies. Could John Donne have put it better? But where did that death come from? From man and his sin. And what does the death of death mean? It means hell's destruction. It means the relationship between the man and the woman is restored. It means the man is no longer a slave. It means the serpent might even get a second chance. After all, sin must serve God's purpose, or it serves

no purpose at all. Yes, even your worst mistakes don't have to remain so.

In eternity there is another tree. "It's not the same tree as the other two," one of the students noted. She's right. Paradise was truly lost. But this other tree, the tree of Revelation 22, the Tree of Life has healing in its leaves. In eternity there will be what? I asked. "Healing," they replied. "And no more pain." And God will wipe away our tears.

I left them with a final image. "Trees make what?" I asked. "Fruit." Fruit from what? "The earth, from death." Can you think of another tree, in addition to these three? Silence. What was the Cross made of? "Wood." And where does wood come from? "Trees." From the death of the old Adam to life in the new, the Cross is the tree of life.

photos by Elizabeth Bellin



A Kalahari Story

An excerpt from the book *Coffee with Elephants – A Memoir of Africa*

by Thomas W Keese

The pilot flew low at 5,000 feet as we watched the bush slowly disappear into the brown nothingness of the Central Kalahari below us. Tsohoh, our guide, met Randy and me at the airstrip and then drove us into camp. A journey of giraffe greeted us on the way in.

The camp consisted of eight tents around one central facility, all sited in a rare grove of tall acacia trees. In the desert, nothing grows above the size of a bush. The camel thorns, which in the Delta would be tall enough to have lunch under, here were no more than waste high.

The first morning we awoke at 5:30, well before the sunrise. The temperature was two degrees Celsius or just above freezing. Who would have thought that you could freeze in the desert? After tea and rusks, we got into the Land Cruiser and headed out into the bush. A heavy poncho, a wool blanket and a hot water bottle, helped fend off the cold, but nothing did much to protect our faces from the chilling wind. Even when the sun came up, it was cold; it was not until almost noon that it began to warm up. Tsohoh blamed it on South Africa where a late winter cold front had unexpectedly caused a temperature inversion, and the winds were blowing it north into Botswana.

The wide-open expanse of the desert, which had looked like brown earth from the air, was in fact covered with lush grasses, now dry and golden colored. The black thorn bushes were full of small white flowers, and the sweet thorn bushes had bright yellow ones. These gave off a sweet scent—the fragrance of the desert.

There were birds everywhere. Large kori bustards and secretary birds strolled through the grass while small marico flycatchers, yellow canaries and African pied barbets alighted on the branches of

the bushes and acacia trees. A pair of pale chanting goshawks, which Tsohoh called “PCGs,” circled above. There were many varieties that I had never seen before, like the Kalahari scrub robin, the desert cisticola and the northern black korhaan. In total, I counted 23 new sightings.



As we expected, game is scarcer in the Kalahari than in the Delta or the Tuli Block, where our own reserve is located. But some game that is rare in other places, here was in abundance. Springbok and gemsbok, or oryx, were everywhere. They are the impala of the desert. We tracked two cheetahs as they strolled

across the plain and saw one lone male lion that had come to drink at a waterhole. Tsohoh said that he was part of a pride, but we did not see the others.

The main attraction of the desert, though, was not the game. It was the bush people. This is the oldest race to inhabit Southern Africa. They were here well before the Europeans, or the Bantu tribes which moved down from the north. Now almost extinct, the few that remain can be found in the Central Kalahari.

Here the members of the Qikwe tribe still live as they have for centuries, grouped into small family bands of rarely more than ten people, moving across the *veld*, hunting game, digging for water-bearing roots and trapping scrub hare and lizards. But they are a dying breed. Many of the tribe have been forced to live in larger villages so that the government can provide them basic services, and some have adopted western ways, swapping leather aprons and karosses made from the skin of the springbok for cloth trousers, shirts and dresses. It will not be long before the traditional ways of the bushmen disappear forever.

A family of Qikwe was at the camp when we got back that afternoon, and, together with one of the camp staff of bushmen origin, who acted as a translator, we walked with them out through the *veld*. We went in single file, as is their way, with the eldest of the group, the grandfather, leading the way, followed by his grandson, and then two women, one, an elder lady, who was his cousin, and then another, his granddaughter. None of them were more than five feet tall.

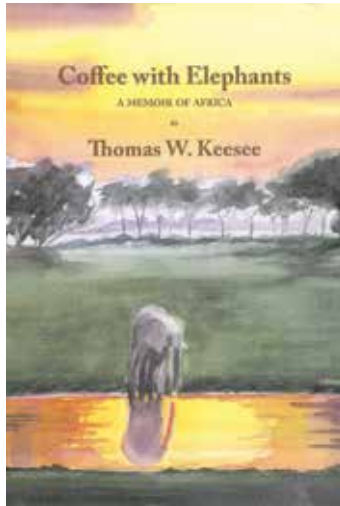
The grandfather explained how they hunted game using bows made from the wood of the thorn bush and with drawstrings made from the sinew of the springbok. The arrows were fashioned from the bones of the gemsbok, or more recently of metal, and had poisoned tips. The poison was made from the larva of a worm that they dug up beneath a special type of bush. It could take down a gemsbok or even a giraffe.

He and the grandson showed us how they set snares for steenbok, the smallest of the antelope family, and how they reached into rabbit holes with a long spear like instrument and then trapped the rabbit, dug it out and killed it with a club. The two women showed us how they found desert plants which had large tubers that they



dug out to eat for both the water, which they contained, as well as for the fiber. And they showed us how they collected melons and spiny cucumbers which grew on the desert floor, hidden within the grasses.

Then they took us to their *werf*, a small round hut made of thatch, and showed us how they created fire for cooking by spinning a smooth stick in a block of wood with four holes until the heat from the friction caused a bundle of dry grass that they held next to the block to ignite. Once the fire was started, they



lit their pipes, both men and women, made from the bone of an antelope, and smoked tobacco. After they finished smoking, they played music for us on a finger organ, a drum made of antelope hide, and on a bush guitar, the soundbox of which was a dried gourd. And they sang mood songs, with deep tones interspersed with the clicks of the Qikwe language, telling stories of antelope hunts and the birds, insects and animals of the veld.

That night, after dinner, we sat by the fire in front of the main unit and looked out across the plain, lit up by the moonlight. The night sky in the desert is like none that I had seen before. It is as vast as the desert itself and illuminated by every constellation that you can imagine. The Milky Way spreads across it all from top to bottom. The Southern Cross shines brightly as does Jupiter and Saturn. Tsoloh explained to us how to use the stars to navigate in the bush.

Then he told us the story of Orion, which we could not see, and Scorpio, which we could. Orion, he said, was a great hunter, and God felt that he was killing too many of the animals that he had created. So he sent Scorpio to sting him in order to slow him down. Scorpio did this, and then Orion was afraid of Scorpio. And Scorpio chased Orion. That is why you do not see both Orion and Scorpio together, because Orion is running away from him.

The next morning, when we awoke, again at 5:30, in the last half hour of the night sky, there above us was Orion, as big as ever. Scorpio was nowhere to be seen.

Later that day we flew out to the Tuli Block. A King Air with two South African pilots, a young man barely out of college and a pretty blond girl, picked us up at the airstrip. As we taxied down the dirt runway, we could see Tsoloh waving us goodbye from the Land Cruiser. We wondered if, the next time we came back, the bush people would still be there. Or if, like Scorpio, they would have disappeared into the morning sky.

Editor's Note: Please come to a book launch and wine-tasting party for Coffee with Elephants on June 24 at 5:30 pm at Merritt Bookstore in Millbrook.



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A note from Lee Liebolt:

Cristina got married this past Labor Day weekend. She and Lincoln Foran were married at St. Paul's Memorial Church in Charlottesville, with a reception following at the Farmington Country Club. The happy couple went on a wildlife safari in Tanzania for their honeymoon. They live in DC (NW) with their adorable 22-month-old black Lab, Rugby (who was the ring bearer at the ceremony). Cristina works as in-house counsel at a renewable energy crypto currency mining company, based in Easton. Lincoln is a staffer with the Senate Finance Committee.

