



THE CALL

ST. ANDREW'S
EPISCOPAL CHURCH
WELLESLEY, MASSACHUSETTS

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Renewal



The Rev. Adrian Robbins-Cole

THE THEME OF THIS EDITION of *The Call* is renewal. This makes me think of how remarkable it has been to see the renewal of Sunday church attendance at St. Andrew's since the end of the pandemic.

Since last September we have seen attendance in person levels beginning to reach the same levels as in the pre-pandemic times. And when we add in the numbers of people who are watching the broadcasts of our

Sunday services online, we are back to pre-pandemic levels, or above. Each week we see new faces in our congregation with people "checking us out." Given that people no longer come to church due to societal pressure, this growth in attendance seems to reflect a renewal of genuine hunger for spiritual grounding in people's lives.

You may recall back in the fall of 2022, St. Andrew's presented the results of the RenewalWorks survey. It is a tool for congregations to understand their congregation's spiritual needs and paths towards religious growth. Members of the congregation were invited to fill out a survey and the answers were compiled.

From the data, we learned that "we have a satisfied parish that is happy together, but we still have an ambition to grow 'spiritually.'" What that meant concretely is that parishioners reported that they would like to understand how to read scripture and to learn more about what it means to be an Episcopalian.

In all sorts of ways, we have adopted those two goals into all levels of Christian formation. For example, you might have noticed that in the Sunday sermons, the clergy have a new focus of explaining the background and context of the Bible readings, in addition to exploring how they relate to us in our contemporary settings.

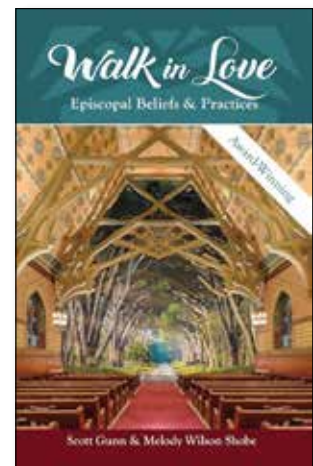
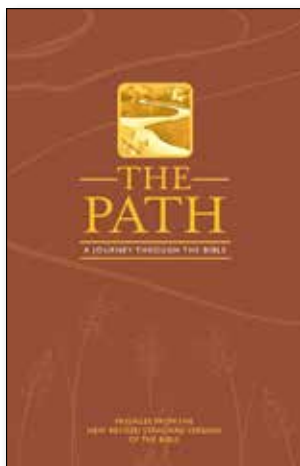
If you find you learn best by reading I have two books to recommend to you. The first is *The Path: A Journey Through the Bible*. It is an Episcopal publication from Forward Movement and is the perfect book for anyone who wants to get better acquainted with the Bible but does not know

where to start. Trying to wade through the Bible from beginning to end can be discouraging because it is so long, and in some parts, particularly in the Old Testament, can seem boring, and not very relevant.

To address this issue, the editors of *The Path* have chosen what they believe are the most important passages from the beginning to the end of the Bible. These are laid out in 24 brief chapters. At the end of each chapter there are questions that help focus the reader on the spiritual themes of the passages.

The other book is *Walk in Love: Episcopal Beliefs and Practices*. This book is described as "the most comprehensive—and comprehensible—guide to the Episcopal faith and practice available. A perfect book for newcomers, longtime members, and anyone in between." The book explores basic Episcopal teachings such as how Episcopalians understand prayer, the Bible, the sacraments (Baptism and Holy Communion), the

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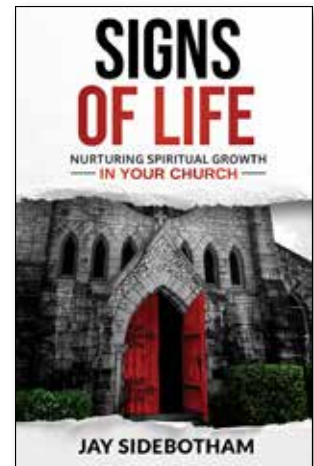
Renewal *continued*

liturgical year, the incarnation of Christ, the Creeds, and notions of salvation, sin, and grace. It also gives an overview of the organization and structure of the Book of Common Prayer and the Episcopal Church.

The theme of the book is how Episcopal beliefs and practices can draw us into to a deeper spiritual life and relationship with Christ. An appealing aspect of the book is that you can either read it from cover to cover, or, just dip in to explore a particular subject that interests you.

If reading is not your thing but you want to have a structure to help you renew your spiritual life, I would like to mention some practices suggested in a new book entitled *Signs of Life*. The author is Jay Sidebotham, the director of RenewalWorks who spoke at St. Andrew's in September 2022 to help launch the RenewalWorks initiative in our parish.

These practices include: developing a daily prayer practice that suits your personal spiritual temperament; being alert and looking out for experiences of the divine in your everyday life; trying to read or listen to the Bible every day;



saying prayers every day for three things you are grateful for, and saying three prayers of concern for someone or some people in need; and discerning how you are called in your life and context to work for relief of the poor, forgiveness and peace as a follower of Christ.

These are practices that we might all wish to undertake to renew our spiritual lives.

Yours in Christ,

Warden's Message An Easy Yoke




Megan Burns, warden

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

—Matthew 11:28-30

LIKE TO THINK that God has a sense of humor. Being asked to write a piece based upon the above passage from Matthew when I've just come inside from shoveling the walk seems particularly funny to me. Right now, it is two weeks



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into the New Year when everything I put off until “after the holidays” is coming back to me, and I am feeling as though my burden is anything but light. But by the time you’ll be reading this, perhaps there will be a hint of spring and we will all be looking forward to the joy that is the Easter season.

It’s possible that as Episcopalians (New England Episcopalians at that!), we find some discomfort in the idea of an easy yoke. We work hard and expect a lot of ourselves and each other. We often put pressure on ourselves to do more. But Lent should be a quiet time. A time to devote ourselves to perhaps more inward work. More thinking. Less doing. Or maybe just doing more of different things. Maybe a little more reading. Maybe a little more fellowship.

Just before the start of Lent last year, I started a new job. I was busy, as I always seem to think that I am. With all my responsibilities, adding one more thing to the

mix didn’t seem like a particularly good idea. But we were all starting to come through the pandemic more in earnest and for the first time in a few years, the Lenten potluck was back. There were other things I could have done on those Wednesday nights (and I confess that I did not attend every Wednesday) but making time for those evenings brought me comfort, and a rest for my soul and my mind, that I sorely needed.

Sharing a meal and conversation with other parishioners was such a wonderful break from the constant running around and perhaps more important, a break from the constant thoughts that run through my head. I talked to people I didn’t know terribly well. I enjoyed the delicious home baked desserts that others brought, and I tried to forgive myself for the store-bought ones that I contributed. Obviously, a lot of work goes into putting together those Lenten potluck suppers, but it didn’t take a lot of

effort for me to participate, and for that I am grateful.

Being able to relax and enjoy an evening with fellow parishioners gave me a sense of calm in a time when I was feeling a little unsure of my new role. That sense of calm made the unfamiliar yoke of a new job seem a bit easier and gave me a feeling of renewal on those chilly Wednesday nights that allowed me to move forward with the rest of the week.

Like many people, I often feel that my burden—sometimes the literal burden of wet snow on a shovel—isn’t terribly light. But I know that if I spend time in church with the fellowship of St. Andrew’s that I will feel a little lighter and a little more ready to engage with the tasks at hand. If I follow Jesus more closely and reach out to Him when I am weary or overwhelmed, I know that He will give me the spiritual rest that I’m always seeking.



Photo: stockadobe.com



Service and Joy



The Rev. Margaret K. Schwarzer

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

—Matthew 11:28-30

WHAT DOES IT MEAN for us to follow Christ when he says these words to us? I think part of the answer to taking on a “yoke which is easy” and a “burden which is light” means recognizing that all of us are called to both serve others and claim joy in our own lives. Renewal happens in both service to others and in the refreshment we find when we make room for joy.

I found both in an unexpected place many years ago when I was

a sophomore in college. I was 20, the age my son Ben is now. I was standing on a train station platform, waiting for a train to take me from Chicago to a distant town in Illinois so I could visit a high school friend.

I had my nose in a *Seventeen* magazine, and I was stomping my feet a little, as it was a freezing Midwestern winter day, when I realized that the noise of the crowd around me had suddenly stilled. I lifted my nose out of the magazine and looked up just in time to see a big bear of a man—obviously homeless and a little confused—coming towards me.

People near him were peeling away as he lumbered past them until he was standing still directly in front of me with no one else nearby. I steeled myself and looked up into his face. He had a wool knit cap shoved down low on his brow, a scraggly beard, dark, piercing eyes. “Here,” he said, “here’s a quarter; go buy something nice.”

Stunned, I said, “Thank you.” He shambled off; his task completed.

When I looked down at the quarter in my gloved hand, I thought about how much of his daily income that might be: substantial. I had just enough time to go to the little kiosk in the station and buy a roll of peppermint

LIFE SAVERS (my favorite). They cost a quarter back then.

During my three-hour train ride, I ate them while reading my magazine and I thought about his kindness. He knew that no one was too poor to offer a gift. He understood, perhaps instinctively, that both giving and receiving kept him human in his difficult homeless circumstance. He taught me that no one is too poor to give a gift, and he schooled me in making the most of the gifts we are given. It would have been so dismissive to shove the quarter in my wallet, to do nothing with his quarter.

When someone gives us a gift, even a quarter, or a verbal gift, like a compliment, do we receive it? Do we make room to let it change us? When it is our turn to serve, do we remember that each act of service we make will make a difference? One quarter, one emergency meal created, one shared cup of coffee, one gift to the Alternative Gift Fair has an impact.

Our service, generously given, builds up the well-being of the world, as does a gift genuinely received. Abundant life, the kind Christ promises us, is found when we make room for genuine service and genuine joy.

Christ said, “. . . I came that you might have life and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10)

Don't Judge Me



The Rev. Sarah Robbins-Cole

PLEASE DON'T JUDGE ME, but I am hooked on an Instagram influencer and her video posts. She's @elainamich. From what I can gather from her posts, she is in her mid-twenties, recently engaged, has a desk job, and her life is a gorgeous array of neutrals: white textured bedding; white and tan clothing (professional and athletic); white Smeg Kettle; cute white, black and tan Marc Jacobs tote to go with her sweet Kate Spade lunch bag and matching bento box, a forty-ounce white Stanley Quencher Tumbler and a taupe one, and a white BMW sedan with a brown interior. The videos are accompanied by satisfying sounds right out of an ASMR textbook. (Autonomous sensory meridian response: a term used to describe a tingling, static-like, or goosebumps sensation in response to specific triggering audio or visual stimuli.)

@elainamich is one of the innumerable social media influencers who post their morning and evening routines online. She is part of the popular #thatgirl trend. There is something so intriguing about another person's world and clearly many agree since there is no shortage of viewers who are hungry for this content. These influencers literally rack up millions of followers and get paid handsomely for their product endorsements.

But of course, what is most intriguing to me is why I am so interested in this person's morning and evening routines. In a non-academic search of the internet, I may have found an answer. These videos show a world with an impeccable sense of order and rigor that many of us would like to have in our own lives. There is something that is quite peaceful about watching a video where the content creator has enough time to read in bed, then get up peacefully and make their bed, spray linen spray on their coverlet, exercise, bathe, dress, put on a whole face of makeup and style their hair, put the laundry in, make a special hot drink to go with their breakfast bowl (porridge, goji berry, acai, etc.), pack their nutritious lunch, and get into their perfectly clean car and go to work.

Another answer I came across in my search is that many of us believe and hope that if we could 100%-get-our-acts-together, and lead a life like @elainamich, we'd have perfectly productive, healthy, and fulfilled lives. But of course, we also know that even @elainamich doesn't even have the life that @elainamich depicts.

But what this desire reveals to me, most importantly, as a Christian, is that there is a yearning within most of us to have lives that are ordered toward meaning. There aren't many people who feel fulfilled by doom scrolling through social media all night. No one is satiated by eating cheese for every meal. And the best start to the day is not spent trying to find one's keys and getting in a car to go to work on an empty tank of gas.

What I love about Lent is that it holds out two principles for us to embrace. The

first is that we can give up things that are not serving us now and establish new habits that do. Ideally, these sacrifices and habits have something to do with our faith. Second, we can embrace our imperfections with humility and grace which is far more life-giving, and less exhausting than emulating @elainamich however adorable she may be. And for those of us who have some role in the care of children, especially teens, when we can show by word, example, and deed that people should not be valued by the way they look or their lives look, but rather by the content of their character and the kindness of their actions, we will create a better world for us all. And you don't need to wear neutrals to do so.



Photo: Courtesy/ Instagram @elainamich

Parishioner Reflections

On the Theme of Renewal

Musings of a Septuagenarian



Harriet Thompson

NOW THAT I'M WELL into my seventh decade, I've been giving my Episcopal-Anglican heritage some thought. Many times, I've mentioned that my grandmother and Canadian great aunts were examples to me of a Christ-centered life. Joyful, devoted, loving people who influenced my early years and were part of my firm foundation.

I was baptized in 1953, at almost a year old, in our Episcopal parish church in Pennsylvania. The 1928 Book of Common Prayer (BCP) was in use then. I'm sure many older Episcopalians remember some of the glorious Elizabethan wording of prayers in that book. Despite its sexually exclusive language, "men" to mean "humankind", I treasure that edition and often read the traditional Collects and Daily Office from it.

In the 1979 BCP, I'm particularly taken by many of the newer prayers and translations. The Baptism service has one of the kindest, gentlest, most beautiful blessings. I always find it very moving when I hear it. The priest makes the sign of the cross on the person's head and says "...you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own forever." (BCP 1979 p. 308)

How lovely! It made me curious if such a beautiful blessing was given to me when I was baptized.

The 1928 BCP says: "We receive this Child (Person) into the congregation of Christ's flock; and do sign *him* with the sign of the Cross, in token that hereafter *he* shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under his banner, against sin, the world, and the devil; and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto *his* life's end. Amen." (BCP 1928 p. 280)

Jeepers! Toughen up girl! What an awakening! I'm destined to be Christ's soldier and servant. No sweet blessing on me! There's work to do!

After so many years of life, I do feel emboldened and proud to be a soldier and servant of Christ. I am a member of Christ Jesus' flock and was blessed with the Holy Spirit so many years ago. And I can attest that that holy spark has held me together through many a rough time. Yes, I, too, am Christ's own!



Photo: Peter L. Lull

What a Friend We Have in Jesus



Pamela Tusiime

WHEN I ARRIVED in Massachusetts, I barely knew what to expect, but I was ready to adapt to change. As the saying goes, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do.”

I was very honored to be hosted by a beautiful family of four in West Newton who became my second family, a family I never dreamed of having. They offered comfort to me with no interference. They did not try to make decisions for me but rather they gave me advice whenever I sought it, enabling me to work on myself and pursue my education.

I’m not sure if it is appropriate to talk about other people’s beliefs, but this experience helped me find St. Andrew’s. Because my host family included members who were Jewish and Christian, they had to find a common ground. They chose to attend the

First Unitarian Church, a church I never knew existed until 2019. While we attended Sunday services at this church, I noticed that God and Jesus were never mentioned. At first, I thought I wasn’t paying attention. One day I got the courage to ask Christine, a member of my host family, and our minister, why that was the case. The minister explained that the church welcomed all beliefs and wanted the congregation to feel included without favoring any one side.

Following that conversation with the minister and Christine, her dad, on Christmas 2022, suggested that I might visit St. Andrew’s and see if it would align with my beliefs. I always take my time to make certain personal decisions, so I continued attending online Sunday services from Lakewood Church with Joel Osteen.

One day I felt like I needed spiritual growth and in-person sermons like those of my childhood.

So, I grabbed my keys and took a drive to check out St. Andrew’s. When I arrived, I was surprised to see the word ‘Episcopal’ after St. Andrew’s. I made it a point to attend the Sunday service that week. It was in March 2023 that I attended my first service at St. Andrew’s. I sat in the back in the last pew just in case I had second thoughts and wanted to exit quietly.

To my surprise and happiness, it was the same exact service routine I grew up attending in the Anglican community. It had been years since I had recited the Nicene Creed, received Holy Communion, and said the Lord’s Prayer. Just that alone made my heart melt. That week, Margaret followed up to find out how I was doing, which was humbling. From that day on, the rest is history. I am so blessed and happy that I am now part of the congregation here at St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church.



Photo: Katharine Clark

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