
Letters to a Young Episcopalian: Gratitude

This letter is part of a series of fictional letters by Canon George Maxwell intended for Episcopalians young and old who wonder what it means to be faithful in the world today.

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Dear Anna,

I ran into Adam Anderson yesterday. I don't think you have seen him since his son died last year.

I know you like the hymn, "God is working his purpose out."

Adam's story reminds me of that hymn.

Adam's son was only sixteen when he died. It's still hard for me to believe. I wasn't sure that Adam would be able to bear the loss. He just couldn't make sense of it.

Adam remembered a prayer that our priest prayed as he scattered dirt on the coffin. "In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to almighty God our brother"

Adam realized that the hope in this prayer was a hope for a new creation – not just for his son, but also for all of us.

Paul Tillich said once that resurrection is not just something we think might happen in the future. It's the power of our union with Christ to create life out of death, here and now, today and tomorrow. It is the power of that new being to create eternity out of every moment in time.

Adam stopped looking for explanations, and began reimagining what his life would look like if he were a new being, participating in the new creation.

At some point, he came across a meditation by Henri Nouwen that uses the story of the two disciples who walked from Jerusalem to Emmaus and back as a basis for reflecting on the Eucharistic life.

Adam felt like he was reading his own journal. He saw all of the loss, separation, and resentment that he felt. But, he also heard the promise of finding life after death in the offering of hospitality to strangers.

Adam began working in the Saturday arts program at Emmaus House, an organization that provides social services to a neighborhood on the south side of town. He met Thaddeus there, a sixteen-year-old boy who also worked in the program. Thaddeus lost his father years ago and grew up in the neighborhood with his grandmother.

You should see the two of them together; laughing with each other and helping each other help the other kids. The gratitude they feel for each other is all over their faces.

In the words of the hymn, it's like "when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea."

I thought you would like that picture.

Your affectionate uncle,
Ames

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