
Letters to A Young Episcopalian: Pentecost

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,

Years ago, I was watching a talent show called *Britain's Got Talent* when a seemingly unremarkable woman walked onto the stage. She announced that she was going to rock the crowd, but no one believed her. Then, Susan Boyle began to sing.

The words of *I Dreamed a Dream* from *Les Misérables* seemed to come alive in her voice. By the time she got to the second verse, the crowd was on its feet. Jeers became cheers and the applause continued long after she finished.

The judges seemed to experience their own conversion. They voted unanimously to move her on to the next round of the competition. One judge confessed to hearing the "biggest wake-up call ever."

They said it was the quality of her voice, or the courage of her performance, or the surprise of her talent. These things are all true, of course. But they don't explain the tears. They don't qualify as "wake-up calls." One of the judges, Simon Cowell, came closer to the truth. He admitted that when he heard Susan Boyle sing, he saw her as a "human being" for the first time. "You become part of a mob," he said, and then "you realize that you've gone too far."

It was a Pentecost moment.

Pentecost is a celebration of the miracle of the tongue, the gift of the Spirit that allows the Gospel to be proclaimed. But it is also a celebration of the miracle of the ear, the gift of the Spirit that allows the Gospel to be heard.

We might say that Susan Boyle experienced a miracle of the tongue. She found the courage to proclaim her humanity in the face of those who seemed so eager to take it from her.

But we experienced a miracle of the ear. We heard her voice and, to our joy, realized that she was one of us after all.

It's a mysterious thing, really, that what appears to be the weakest link turns out to be the only thing that is holding the human chain together.

Your affectionate uncle,

Ames