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SALT

Radiant Everyday Christian Life

by Elizabeth Myer Boulton

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? -- Matthew 5:13



SALT <www.saltproject.org> is a website project devoted to articulating and promoting a radiant, inspiring, everyday vision of Christianity and doing so in a way that effectively engages a new generation of Christian community. Through devotional writing, photography, video, music, and spiritual practices, we aim to build a community of conversation and resource-sharing that, like salt itself, enlivens, preserves, and seasons the best and most beautiful of the Christian tradition.

Like many congregations across the country, Old South Church in Boston is developing small group ministries and personal devotional resources, versatile tools designed so individuals can support and challenge one another along the way of Christian discipleship. Accordingly, we are constantly seeking excellent new materials to help focus, frame, and deepen small group discussions, enhance personal devotional life, increase theological literacy, and kindle a passion for the good news of the Christian gospel.

At the same time, many Christians and others interested in Christianity today are increasingly engaged in online forms of social life, learning, devotion, and recreation. In our view, as modes of social life shift and evolve, modes of Christian spiritual life and formation do well to follow suit. For younger adults (and others!), online resources and social networking are increasingly the coins of the realm, and any serious attempt to engage and deepen Christian formation must take full advantage of their promise.

SALT is both a venue for spiritual practice through the arts and a platform for interactive, grass-roots community building, including a devotional blog; networking through *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *Flickr*; and resource-sharing for Christian practices



All article images from www.saltproject.org.

and social change. What distinguishes SALT from other online initiatives is, first, our commitment to short pieces of elegant, original devotional writing paired with excellent photographs, short video pieces, music, and other arts; and second, our interest in parlaying this devotional practice into online community-building that strengthens personal and ecclesial Christian life.

Liz Myer Boulton (Old South's Minister for Discipleship) and Matt Myer Boulton (Associate Professor of Ministry Studies at Harvard Divinity School) assembled the SALT team almost two years ago. They knew they wanted to get their neighbor and First Worship attendee Maria Sheehan on board, a highly acclaimed freelance film producer based in Boston and NYC. And, because of her amazing ability to preach God's good news, they wanted Rev. Holly McKissick (Senior Pastor of Saint Andrew Christian Church and Liz's mentor) to join the team as well! It's certainly a labor of love for everyone involved but to have space and time for creativity has been such a blessing!

As evidenced by the comments below, we think we're on to something! As the comments indicate, SALT is filling a void: namely, a creative, tender, smart, and beautiful articulation of Christian faith and tradition.

Here's a sample from those comments:

"YES & AMEN! Finally salt is good for your blood pressure. Count me in."

"Thank you all... I'm inspired... I'm moved... I'm motivated... Let's Create!!!"

"My dear friend forwarded me your saltproject.org site. I needed to know that there are other bright, sunny, cheerful, peaceful Christians out there!!!!"

"Love it, Love it, LOVE IT! I am really passionate about the use of the arts in the church and helping to engage Christians in the 'everyday spirituality' that you all discuss here -very exciting work you are doing!"

"Isn't it funny that when we lose our taste for things, salt invites us and our taste-buds to sense again?"

"Thank you for this restorative and renewing place that I can take with me, wherever I go."

If you've never experienced SALT, here's a sample of what we're up to!

why christianity?



Photo by Karen Elliot.

"Why Christianity?"

A woman at the coffee shop asked me this the other day. I was working with the scriptures, trying to craft a sermon, and out of nowhere came that question, "Why Christianity?"

I stumbled. I hemmed. I hawed. I wasn't elegant in the least...

And so, my friend, here is the answer I meant to give. Here's what I meant to say over my tea, but didn't.

For me, Christianity is a poem. A beautiful and broken poem that soars to the highest heavens but not before it slugs through the trenches of violence, shadows, betrayal, abandonment, and finally, death.

For me, life wouldn't make sense without Christianity. Without Christianity, without a God who chooses to become flesh, to become breakable; without a God who, through Christ and the church, continues to side with the poor; without a God who stands in solidarity with every victim of every hate crime; without a God who transforms, redeems, and declares in the face of death, "You will not have the final word!" -- without this God, I couldn't make it through the day, I couldn't read the paper, I couldn't bring children into the world.

I choose Christianity because, for me, the world would be a veil of tears without it. For me, this beautiful, broken poem contains life and life in abundance."

paper or plastic

"When you send forth your Spirit, they are created; and you, God, you renew the face of the ground."
-- Psalm 104:30



Photo by Peter Kaminski.

Out for a morning run, I end up behind the trash guys. I'm amazed at their strength and agility. A hundred degrees and dripping sweat, or five degrees and frozen fingers, they rush from pile to pile, heaving the trash into the truck.

Worst of all, they deal with the smell. If I'm trapped behind the truck for a few seconds, I turn and run in the other direction, all the while thinking, now *why* did God make humankind?

From the first words in Genesis through the whole Christian tradition, humans are portrayed as the pinnacle of creation. With our higher thinking and moral reasoning, we are partners in God's creation, helpers who till the earth and keep it.

Running behind the trash truck gives you another view. Humans muck up the world -- and then spend a fortune trying to un-muck it. We generate giant piles of garbage: monuments to our over-consumption and thoughtlessness. While some (like my husband) take pains to reduce the carbon footprint, limiting the trash to one sack every other week, others (like me) leave a mess for others to clean up.

Why did God make humankind? One classical argument is that God wants our help. Honestly, though, sometimes I think we're not always that helpful.

There's another answer, though, found in the poetry of the creation stories: God made humankind because God, the mystery behind all life, craved connection, love, community. Even God, especially God, wanted a village.

Wanted it -- loved it -- enough to deal with our trash.

Try this discipline for Lent, or even just for today, one day at a time: Cut your trash in half. Think about the folks who have to pick it up and say a prayer for them, too.

God who sees our trash and loves us still, help us to be sensitive, kind, thoughtful stewards. Amen.

bright sadness

Our hearts are broken for our brothers and sisters in Japan. Even the mere idea of more than ten thousand lost -- perhaps many more -- is too much to bear. The terrifying footage, the unspeakable sorrow . . .

Facing such tragedies, Christians can do at least three things. May God grant us the grace to do them well.

First, we can deny easy answers. In suffering and disaster we confront great mysteries, and the mysteries demand to be honored. We cannot say, "God willed this," and we can respectfully, strongly object to those who do. But at the same time, by the same token, we cannot simply say, "This happened against or despite God's will," thereby conjuring up a world full of chaos against which God is powerless or indifferent. Either way, we claim to know too much, and we are in no position to make such pronouncements. We are in a position to pray.

And so second, we can pray. We can pray prayers of solidarity, standing as best we can with the suffering and displaced, the living and the dead. We can pray not only with our words but also with our wallets, our time, and our talent. We can reach out across the Pacific and around the block to all those affected, near and far. We can act, touch, listen -- and lend a hand.

Third, we can lament. We can join our voices with the brokenhearted singer of the Psalms, asking those passionate, difficult, ancient questions that ring down through the ages: "How long?" and "Why?" Anger and sorrow have a place in our lives and therefore in our prayers, and denying easy answers sometimes means persistently pressing the unanswered questions.

We stand today at the outset of the season of Lent, and sure enough, there is so much that needs to be done. People that need to be fed,



Downloadable postcard: "The Great Wave" by Hokusai & Psalm 46.

wars that need to end, bodies that need to be protected, homes that need to be found. Dictators that need to fall, nuclear materials that need to be contained, whole cities that need to be salvaged and rebuilt . . . It's enough to overwhelm us, too much, too much. It's enough to send us back to Ash Wednesday, to cover ourselves in dust and ashes, the very debris of death.

And yet, think of this: the Eastern Orthodox Church calls Lent the season of "bright sadness." That sounds just about right, doesn't it? We are called to be a light to the nations, to let our light shine – but not in a way that stands apart from the world's sorrows. On the contrary, we are called to shine in a way that illuminates those sorrows, and that stands with the sorrowful in their grief and their hope.

This is who we are: people of bright sadness. Each of us called to deny easy answers, and pray, and lament, and shine until the shadows become like the noonday sun.

Our hearts are broken. There's nothing easy here. Let us pray.

Holy and beautiful God, you created this soft, green earth, and you called it good. You made the oceans depths and the soaring mountains. For your earth and for your people: Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

God of wind and rain, God who said to the waves, "Peace - be still," we cry and beat our breasts with all those who are grieving. How long will the living search for the lost? How long will the poor and vulnerable suffer? How long will parents bury their children?

God of grief and anger, this is what we know: Even in the valley of the shadow of death, still we are held, still we are loved, still we are brought back to life, rocked so sweetly in your everlasting arms. God of hope against hope, we call on you, we depend on you. Deepen and brighten our sadness.

God of love and new life, for your earth and for all of your people, living and dead, lost and found: Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy. You are our refuge and strength. You are our very present help in times of trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be moved, though the mountains be toppled into the depths of the sea. Be with us now. Have mercy. In Jesus' name, Amen.

So, spread the word! We're looking for even more users, more co-creators, more traffic and site activity, more comments, more photo submissions, more followers on Facebook and Twitter. Our ultimate goal, however, is to create an ever-expanding community of tender-hearted and creative Christians, and an ever-evolving, vibrant conversation about the treasures and possibilities of Christian life. †



A LIBRARIAN'S LIFE OF DISTINGUISHED SERVICE

by Margaret Bush

"So what was it she got? Amanda asked at Fellowship hour. "Well," said her father Evan, "it was sort of like the Academy Award for librarians." Well, that was certainly stretching things, but I guess there might have been some similarities.

Evan's congratulations, which prompted Amanda's question, were among many I received last summer upon being given the Distinguished Service Award by a division of the American Library Association. As a long time member of the card crew at Old South —having written many dozens of notes of encouragement, sympathy, and other forms of cheer to church members and friends — it was fun to be on the receiving end of many nice notes and comments. Since the award was a pretty big deal, there were many other fun moments, too.

So what was it I got? Every year since 1992, the Association for Library Service to Children honors one person "who has made significant contributions to and an impact on library services to children." Wow! That's a whole professional field. As the 2010 recipient, I've enough long connections to the previous eighteen awardees (children's librarians, publishers, library educators) to fill a book. It's a grand honor to stand with them.

Here are some of the enjoyable aspects of receiving this honor. It was first announced at a national meeting held right here in Boston in January of 2010. (A bit more than half of the 50 years I worked in children's and other, library services were spent in our fair city.) It was actually presented to me later at another national meeting in June—this one held in Washington D.C., where I had worked at the Library of Congress and Howard University before coming to Boston in 1984. So many colleagues from all over the country and other countries as well were part of this event and those years of work. I had to make an acceptance speech to perhaps 300 of them, which was not as intimidating as

one I'd had to do for an earlier award in Boston. I have certificates, statues, and even a loving cup from earlier awards, but this one included a nice check. I had already forwarded that to Simmons College for a scholarship they established during my recent retirement.

One of the most surprising moments at the award ceremony came when I discovered that a person sitting near me was the current children's librarian at my hometown library out in California. She was so excited to learn that I had been a childhood user of her library. For me it topped off a much earlier meeting with the person who had actually been the children's librarian there back in those long ago World War II days. I hadn't really gotten to know her then but much later when I was president of this organization I appointed her to a committee. After that she was on a program committee that invited me to be one of the keynote speakers at an international conference on Children's literature. Like her current counterpart, she had been thrilled that I had spent many childhood hours at her library.

It appears that there were many connecting threads in this long professional career. They continue to weave in and out right down to the present day, sometimes in absolutely astonishing encounters. Though the award was very special, it was quite a small part of something much bigger and more satisfying. Those 50 years were so full that even I am amazed. Something I hadn't really thought about or expected has come out of all the work in libraries, teaching, writing, consulting, talks given in many states, offices held in professional organizations. I have got a huge field force with a great feedback loop in it. What a treasure!

There were surely some downsides in all those years: failed projects, tragic losses of colleagues and friends, hasty decisions, roads not taken. There are too many lapses in memory of names and people and even of some rather large things I did. Sometimes I was pushed into challenging tasks. (Clarifying a dispute between Mayor Menino's office and the Boston Public Library trustees and defending public library needs to the Cambridge town manager were a bit dicey.)

I have just a few regrets, but what a lot I have to savor! I got to see a lively interesting branch of librarianship evolve enormously, and sometimes I got to pioneer change. (What a stir it caused when I bought that new format, audio cassettes for the children's collection out in Illinois.) I got to start library collections from scratch and instigate changes in libraries and organizations that have taken root and still flourish. I gave many small and a few very large boosts to the professional careers of other people. What an honor all that has been.

So the biggest award, really, has been the feedback loop. Some day it will dwindle, of course, but for now it goes on and on, surprising me pretty much on a weekly basis. There are the e-mail messages from long ago students and brand new contacts. Interesting stuff shows up in my Simmons mailbox. People from my past turn up at library functions but also on streets, in elevators, in far away places, and even at Old South. I have a huge store of good stories and memories—from a career choice I stumbled into and a long time job I never even wanted to do. How richly blessed I have been! †

From <www.feedthehungrysma.org>.



FEEDING THE HUNGRY AT OLD SOUTH OF THE BORDER

by Jean Degnon

You may not be aware of it, but there is already a strong link between Old South Church in Boston and a wonderful organization in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico called *Feed the Hungry*. This organization has more than 35 kitchens, attached to schools throughout the area, which provide a nutritious meal each school day to close to 4000 children. In many cases, it is the only meal these kids get each day. Each school has cooks, hired from the ranchos or comunidades themselves, who are trained to observe the eating habits of the children. If they notice any marked changes, they will report them to the school's principal, who will then check it out. In one case at the school at Los Ricos de Abajo, where many of us have the closest connection, the cooks noticed that a little boy, who had before eaten normally, suddenly began grabbing dozens of tortillas and stashing them away. The cooks reported this to Lucha, the school's formidable principal (more about her later), who visited the boy's home, discovered that his father had been injured in the fields several weeks earlier, and there had been no food on the table for some time. This little kid was either scarfing it down or bringing home all that he could!



From <www.feedthehungrysma.org>.



The provision of this nutritious meal each day has had other dramatic results. A group of us volunteers to teach English once a week at the school in the comunidad of Los Ricos de Abajo. (This little village is perhaps the most in-aptly named place in the world. It means “the rich ones from down below,” most ironic for a hardscrabble, poverty-stricken pueblo situated on a rocky outcropping on top of a hill.) A few years ago, I had a little girl named Estrella who, I learned, had been found working in a brick factory — at age six — for \$5 a week, which her alcoholic mother took away for drink. She was placed with her grandmother in Los Ricos, where she was guaranteed at least one decent meal a day, and a relatively safe environment. The first year I had her in third grade, she was timid, shy, sat in the back and hardly participated at all. She had little to do with the other kids. However, when I had her again the next year in fourth grade, she was a different child—smiling, raising her hand, running happily in the school yard at recess! One of my most moving moments happened last October when I visited the school for the first time since the previous March, and Estrella came running across the yard and gave me a big hug! In this school and other schools, it was not uncommon for kids to pass out from hunger during the opening exercises, as they stood in the hot sun. Lucha and the other principals will tell you that the children are able to concentrate and to learn better with enough food.

So, what does Old South have to do with this cause, you ask? Well, thanks to Charlotte Simpson, *Feed the Hungry* has been approved to seek a grant from the Outreach Committee. Bill Amidon, a long-time OSC member and now permanent resident of San Miguel, is a board member of *Feed the Hungry*, and is working very hard to secure grants from wherever possible. His wife Pam teaches at Los Ricos, as do I, and it is one of my favorite activities of the whole week! Last year, Eleanor Jensen, who is a member of the *Friends of the BPL*, provided me with hundreds of used children’s books, some in English, some in Spanish, and some bilingual, for our fledgling library at the school. Carrying down these books became the “ticket” for all San Miguel visitors with ties to Old South: Charlotte Simpson, Ken and Jennifer Girvin, Mark and Tread Strickland, Maddie Burke, Anna Yoder, and Dianne Gaucher all schlepped books in their luggage!

It’s hard not to want to help, when you see the determination of Principal Lucha, whose love for these children manifests itself in her strict, leave-no-stone-unturned leadership. Not even 5 feet tall, she walks 45 minutes from the nearest bus stop to reach the school, armed with a machete to ward off packs of wild dogs. (Ask Bill Amidon about her dogged determination sometime.) . . . Or when you see nursing mothers, juggling their infants on their laps with one hand in order to take notes of everything the teacher says with the other; in our new adults English class. . . Or 40-year-old Jorge, who walks an hour and a half and has to get special permission to leave his job at the brick factory for the weekly English class. . . Or Jose Manuel, whose embarrassment over his teeth caused him to stop going to middle school but who attends every adult class and the after-school tutoring.

Another *Feed the Hungry* mini-miracle: Dianne, another FTH board member and the organizer of our teaching program, tried to get Jose Manuel some dental treatment, and was unsuccessful at first. But a chance meeting with someone from another children’s charity, this one health-related, brought a mobile dental van to Los Ricos recently. Jose Manuel showed up to class, a few minutes late, wearing a bandana over his mouth, looking like a bandito! Come to find out he had had two offending teeth pulled a few hours earlier, wasn’t about to miss class or tutoring, and is set to resume his studies in the middle school next year.

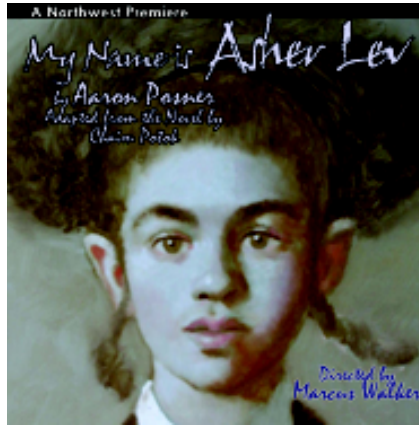
Donations are down to all of San Miguel’s charitable organizations, due to the worldwide financial down-turn, and especially the down-turn in tourism due to the undeserved bad rap that Mexico is unsafe, and infested with drug lords. Obviously, the narco-traffic is a terrible and tragic problem here, but the average tourist has about as much chance of getting caught in that scence as getting hit on the head by a falling flowerpot. (Ask Bill Amidon about that possibility too, when you see him next!) I am moved to tears each week by the generosity, work ethic, determination, and humor of these people, who have so little, but are so determined to make a better life for themselves and for their children. Come and visit, and see for yourself...but please bring along some books for our library, too! ✝



From <www.feedthehungrysma.org>.

ASHER LEV IS EVERY MAN

by
Evan H. Shu



After the northwest premiere of “My Name is Asher Lev,” at the Broadway Center in Tacoma, Washington on February 19, 2011, Director Marcus Walker and the actors sat on the stage and held a “talk back” session with audience members. A surprising number of men stood up and said, “That was my story, too!”

The play written by Aaron Posner is a retelling of the Chaim Potok (also author of *The Chosen*) book that tells the story of a Hasidic Jewish family in Brooklyn, NY in the 1950s that is burdened by a rift between father and son. The father in this case, wonderfully played by Elliot Weiner (he plays all the other male roles as well), has devoted his life to serving their leader, the Rebbe, by traveling around the world to bring the teachings and practice of their sect to other Jews. Asher (Jeffrey Alan Smith) finds his passion is in drawing and painting, secular subjects at first, then nudes, and finally, most alarming to his father, Asher begins to be obsessed with painting scenes of the crucifixion. Yes, that’s right: a Jewish boy obsessed with Jesus on the cross.

In the middle is Asher’s mother (Paige Hansen, who just as impressively plays all the female roles) who tries to mediate between the father and son, trying to uphold the father’s strictures and dictates to Asher, yet trying to foster and support his growing love of art between the margins of those restrictions. The family break comes when Asher’s father decides to move his family to Vienna to further the Rebbe’s work, but Asher, now in his early teens, refuses to go. The Rebbe intervenes and Asher and his mother stay in Brooklyn and Asher begins study with a great artist named Jacob Kahn, a non-observing Jew.

As the play continues, we see Asher develop as an artist and find success as a young prodigy. The rift in the family begins to heal as father (with mother’s help) comes to accept and even be proud of Asher’s success, although he don’t understand his fascination with the secular. But the wound is once again ripped open, perhaps irrecoverably this time, when in a big exhibition, Asher paints his master work, using

the symbolism of the crucifixion to express his mother’s torment in being torn between husband and son. Displayed in the theater lobby was beautiful original artwork, depicting this vision, by Bo Bartlett, a member of Marcus Walker’s church. (See Page 8.)

This play (and book), although set in a very specific time, place, and unique circumstances nevertheless plays out universal themes that many a father, son, and mother can relate to: the desire for the father to teach his son what matters in life; the need for the son to rebel and make his own way; and the desire for the mother to support both and keep the family whole.

The circumstances for my attending this play so far from home were unique indeed. The director and former Old South minister Marcus Walker was in what turned out to be his final weeks with a terminal case of metastatic melanoma cancer. As his disease progressed alarmingly quickly from its initial diagnosis in the fall of 2010, Marcus’ goal was to see this production to its fruition, his own “curtain call,” if you will. He made that goal by being able to attend the first five performances of *Asher Lev* before becoming bedridden and passing away on March 11, 2011.

The *Asher Lev* story had always been an crucial one for Marcus. While in church camp in Port Orchard, Maine in 1977 at the age of 19, he recalled being ill and up all night and talking with the camp nurse:

“We spoke of vocational struggle, mine between the desire to be a theater director and actor and the opposite pull to learn more about religion and, for me, Christian ministry. Our conversation wrestled with ‘Can one be both true to religious tradition and be true as an artist?’ — for me as a theater artist. She recommended this wonderful novel, *My Name is Asher Lev*, which became a favorite. It spoke of many of the thematic challenges of my whole split career as a minister and a theater artist.”



Asher with father and mother from <www.lakewoodplayhouse.org/>

Marcus told me of how this struggle had continued throughout his career; not only with his own father, but with various father figures and mentors that guided him through it all.

For many at Old South Church, we witnessed how Marcus' vocational split was unified in his ministry here in Boston from 1983-1989, where he not only served ably and memorably on the staff of Senior Minister Jim Crawford, but where he also founded TAOS, the *Theatre At Old South* company which staged many a wonderful production in Mary Norton Hall and whose continued work carried on for some 15 years beyond Marcus' departure from Old South. Marcus expressed to me how difficult it was at first to pursue both the ministry and his love of theater. His initial efforts at starting TAOS were met with some resistance and yet he persevered to the great gratitude of appreciative audiences, cast, and crew members who enjoyed many popular TAOS productions over the following years, such as *Godspell*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Lion in Winter*, and *The Crucible*. It is clear that at Old South, Marcus first discovered that "yes, he could do both" — to the betterment of both causes.

So, Marcus left Old South Church to receive a call to Tacoma, Washington, where he continued to try to do both. In the past 10 years, he served as the Managing Artistic Director of the Lakewood Playhouse as well as serving as minister for 15 years at the Burton Community Church on Vashon Island. We see how he has unified these dueling pursuits into a single purpose as he writes that "I've advocated that we present 'redemptive theater' or maybe call it 'theater of hope.' "



Director Marcus Walker (on ladder) on *Asher Lev* stage.
Photo from Marcus Walker's Facebook page.

"The Brooklyn Crucifixion" by Bo Bartlett <www.bobartlett.com>.



It is not only fathers and sons who can relate to the Asher Lev story but mothers too. The other reason for my visit to the Pacific Northwest was to see my ailing mother Ruby, age 90, who also has a terminal cancer. She agreed to accompany me to the play, not because she likes plays but for the company. In the end, she was totally entranced by the whole play ("I heard every word!") and if she could have easily stood up, she would have given it a standing ovation. The play recalled for her the story of our own family, where my father put intense pressure on me to become a physician (as both he and my mother were doctors), while I tried to wriggle out of his hold, knowing that was one thing I didn't want. My mother was continually mediating, supporting, protecting, and finding ways to encourage her son in the margins of his father's restrictions and demands.

We found that this play opened up a whole area of conversation and memory between my mother and me that brought us close over my week's stay. She told me that these had been the best times and conversations of her life.

It is a tribute to Marcus' desire for redemptive theater that the staging of *My Name is Asher Lev* ends on an upbeat note, despite its heart-rendering conclusion. We leave the theater uplifted by Marcus' theater of hope: that out of destruction and trauma, comes new creation and new promise. I found that in my own journey to say goodbye to loved ones, I was also able to say hello in ways I'd never been able to before. †

Note: A recent east coast production of "My Name is Asher Lev" was also staged at the Lyric Theater in Boston, from Feb. 11 to March 13, 2011, which was attended by a number of Old South members in solidarity with Marcus' west coast version.

THE ETERNAL THAT LIVES ON:

Thoughts on Marcus Walker

By Pam Roberts

The Reverend Marcus Scott Walker served as assistant minister at Old South Church from approximately 1985 until 1989, having made his debut at Old South with a splash as a ministerial intern from September 1983. A talented preacher to both young and old, he is probably best remembered for his tenure here as an inspiring actor and director, with a real passion for theater. To quote former OSC member and former Religion and Arts Chair Tom Keydel, upon the occasion of the 15-year anniversary of *Theatre at Old South* (TAOS):

“For those who remember Marcus, it was his sense of high calling to the ministry of theater that inspired many of us to take our place upon the stage. Marcus wasn’t just committed to this work — it was central to his vision of God’s presence in the world. Theater was an opportunity to engage in God’s presence, right here on earth. Fellowship, forgiveness, and love are all readily available, if only we take the risk and love the challenge that making art creates. Probably more than anything, Marcus inspired in others the courage to take that risk, and in so doing gave birth to a fledgling band of wayward artists, wanting to see what God’s plan might offer.”

Many souls, tiptoeing into Old South with shaky confidence in the strength of their faith or their personal talents, found redemption because of Marc’s strong-arming them into service, be it working on sets or lights, playing the piano, finding props, or mastering the scary art of a walk-on part where no such inspiration had ever existed. Marcus could wear down the wary guard of any newcomer with his favorite verbal warm-up, something that none of us ever became proficient at. It went like this: “I am a mother pheasant plucker. I pluck mother pheasants. I am the most pleasant mother pheasant plucker who ever plucked mother pheasants.” Through the community of theater, many folks discovered that they belonged in our church family. Cause and effect: a number of weddings came out of TAOS involvement, including that of yours truly and my wonderful husband Scott.

I began my 25+ year friendship with Marc and his wife Laurie when I joined the Committee on Religion & the Arts in 1985. We quickly discovered that we shared a quirky sense of humor and a love of bad puns; this turned our committee meetings into fun times! Marcus had an infectious personality: before I knew it, he had me acting in plays, assisting him with the annual elaborate Christmas Pageant production each year, and had managed to turn me into a co-leader for the senior high youth group, an experience I found quite



rewarding. Marc had an uncanny ability to understand children and teenagers.

Our teens were active, thriving on retreats and doing work projects. We took trips to rural Maine to paint a barn, drove down to Craigville on the Cape for spiritual discussions and “capture the flag” on the beach, and met every Sunday morning for check-ins on life from the eyes of a teenager. A highlight of our time as co-leaders was our work trip to Biloxi, Mississippi in 1988, as Old South teens joined forces with the UCC youth group from Lincoln/Sudbury. Through the Back Bay Mission in Biloxi, we scraped and repainted an elderly poor woman’s home; in the process, we got a first-hand account from this lovely lady and her grown son of the tensions and events of the 1960s racial crisis in the area. We took the kids to a genuine Mississippi swimming hole, made great friends with the fellows who owned a corner grocery store down the street, explored New Orleans and Bourbon Street with the teens on our first night in the South (we snuck into a performance of the Preservation Hall Jazz Band), and learned a lot about a part of the country that none of us had imagined visiting.

The following year, accompanied by Laurie and 5-month old Reuben, we took the teens to New Mexico. The work project that we were prepared to do fell through at the last minute; instead, we turned it into a cultural visit. We stayed at the Santa Fe Indian School, one of the boarding schools established in the late 1800s for Native American children from the state’s Indian pueblos. Using this as our base, we visited several reservation communities and met with youth and elders, sharing customs and ideas. The trip was capped off with a spectacular sunrise over the Rio Grande for a few early birds in the group.

While at Old South, Marcus also did stints as the ministerial advisor to the College-Age Group, as well as the Young Adults Group. Again, retreats and work projects were the focus. I remember one Young Adult retreat; one cold winter evening, we were all lying around in front of a fireplace. Marc took immense pleasure in the fact that “Amazing Grace” and the theme song to “Gilligan’s Island” can be



sung to each other's tune perfectly; this inspired group warbling all night long.

Although Marc and Laurie moved back west to Tacoma, Washington in 1989, we have remained friends. Marc has been artistic director at the Lakewood Playhouse for just shy of 10 years, and minister to the Burton Community Church on Vashon Island since 1995. Scott and I have exchanged several visits with them over the years; our most recent trip was two summers ago with our three children. As we spent time with Marc, Laurie and their sons Henry and Reuben, I reflected on happy he was, as he was doing just what he wanted: theater and ministry.

Marcus passed away on March 11 of metastatic melanoma. He leaves behind a vast legacy of people whose lives have been made a bit better because of his interactions with them. I know I am. Dare I quote the stage manager from Thornton Wilder's "Our Town", the first play with which Marc was involved?

"We all know that something is eternal. And it ain't houses and it ain't names, and it ain't earth, and it ain't even the stars . . . everybody knows in their bones that something is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings. All the greatest people ever lived have been telling us that for five thousand years and yet you'd be surprised how people are always losing hold of it. There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being." †

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS: MARCUS WALKER by Larry Bowers

I remember Marcus Walker. He was not that much younger than I was, but he seemed like such a kid, a kid filled with energy and enthusiasm, and all the joys of life. He was a minister to the entire congregation, but yet he drew special groups around him. He built bridges to the twenty-somethings, looking for a church for their generation. He offered acceptance to



gays and lesbians who felt unwelcome and rejected by church. He convened, empowered, and directed people of every sort and generation to express their faith – and their doubt – through theater. I even got involved, acting in a performance of *Waiting for Godot*.

Marcus, I'm still waiting.

From my perspective most vividly, Marcus Walker, helped by Laurie, his wife, provided a nurturing, vital, and loving program for our high school students, the age group which had completed Confirmation, and who definitely had other priorities for how to spend their Sundays rather than sitting around their parents' church. I would hear the tales of ski trips and dramatic performances told with excitement. My favorite was the teenage boy, who pretended to fall asleep in the girls' dorm room to see if he could con everybody into letting him spend the night there.

Marcus, you were a better acting teacher than you ever knew.

At this memorial service, we will share many Marcus Walker stories, some silly and some profound. Marcus told a great story about himself.

When Marcus Walker was a boy, his family raised pigs. Frequently dinner guests would be served pork. So there they would all be, sitting around the table dining on savory pork, cooked to perfection. About midway through the meal, Marcus would make polite conversation:

"You know that pig we're eating?" This was the sort of thing Marcus would say halfway through the main course. "We used to call him 'Hillbilly.' If he ever got free, he'd go zoom right up that hill. Boy, I put more holes in more jeans running after this hog. . . Until finally I learned that Billy loved tomatoes. I could use a tomato to lure Billy out of the bushes down the hill right back into his pen. I always would bring home a little piece of pizza for Billy. Not the crust but part of the center with the tomato topping. Billy liked that."

Of course at some point in the biography of a hog named Billy, very much of a person to the young boy sitting with them, the adult guests would put down their forks. They could eat pork, but they could not bring themselves to eat "Billy," who had especially liked tomatoes, and dashing up hills, and the taste of pizza.

Through reverence and irreverence, through drama and humor, through friendship and personal example, Marcus Walker broke down barriers, empowering us to encounter God and to encounter the "Other," our neighbor, as a reflection of ourselves. †

THE HOUSE THAT ATE MOSQUITO PIE

by Lauren Walker



There is a fairy tale by E.E. Cummings titled *The House that Ate Mosquito Pie*. Do you know it? The story starts like this. "Once there was a house who fell in love with a bird." After hearing an ethereal song in the clouds the house ponders, "for the house knew (all inside of himself) that the song was looking for nobody but him, and that the singing floating flying person was coming to see him and nobody else, out of all the sunlight and all the air and all the world and all the sky... Nobody can suppose how happy the house was when all at once the tiny flying person alighted right beside him and said: 'May I come to live in you?' The house answered, very humbly and very happily: 'Now I know why I have been very lonely for ever and ever such a long time — it was all for this day. Please live in me, and never stop living in me until we both stop living.' And later the house asked the bird, 'What shall we have for lunch?' and the bird thought and thought. Finally she said: 'Since you're such a beautiful house and since I love you so much, I should like to fly out and catch some mosquitoes so that we can have a bit of mosquito pie!' After being visited by bothersome humans who the house scared away, "the bird flew out and caught mosquitoes until she had enough for a delicious pie, and she brought them all back and gave them to the house who cooked them with a good deal of sugar and made them into a pie; and so the bird and the house each ate three big helpings of perfectly delicious mosquito pie (and let me tell you that they felt very well indeed afterwards). Not only that-but no people ever bothered them any more and so they were as happy together as happy could be."

Rehearsal for *My Name is Asher Lev* had a sweet quality during hell week. Sitting in the darkness in a warm theater; soft voices moving slowly through a light and sound cue to cue. The light behind the windows on the scrim moved through the colors of an artist's palette. We held hands. I was sad. It hit me in the hall as I moved costumes from the dressing room to the stage; a tzitzit, a kipa, a silk dress, a pair of shoes. Standing in the wings in the darkness, the stage manager commented that I looked lost. I was.

We returned home to take a bubble bath. We walked up the stairs slowly with me behind moving his right leg for him. Baths are the one thing of true pleasure and warmth for him and the only time of true intimacy for us together. Aside from maneuvering the recalcitrant limbs over the side of our claw footed tub it is a time for both of us for whispered gentle conversations.

Asher Lev's opening performances made Marcus very happy.

The wide surround of friends embracing him and his art made him whole. After the 5th performance he said, "that was the best performance. They made it sing. I don't need to go any more."

A hospital bed was delivered to our living room and there Marcus sleeps deeply. There are flowers and the sound of wind chimes. Sophie barks ferociously at everything that moves outside but otherwise lies still. Marcus oft times wakes to the land of a house falling in love with a bird. He is sweet and funny, charming and opinionated; distressed by his loss of time and reference.

My hips were made for child birth. My early job choices made me destined for where I am now. Working my way through college as a nurse's aid I loved to shower, dress and care for my charges. I was good at it. I loved working in the locked Alzheimer's wards the best. The nursing staff knew this. I was different. They live on a different plane," I've said for 30 years, "that's all." We pitied the patient's families for not being able to adjust to their loved one's new reality but often sweet nature. I didn't know.

He likes the idea of reincarnation better than heaven; a repeated theme since October. "I want to return as a river swallow. The river swallows," he says, "skirt the top of the water looking for sustenance." The air is clear and the scenery beautiful as they aerodynamically flit and dive. They sing simply and twitter to communicate during courtship. "Will you be a river swallow, too?"

Upon awaking from a nap one afternoon he said, "Where will I go when I am gone?" I responded, "You will be flying along the river as a swallow and will wait until I join you. I will build a nest for you and I will make mosquito pie." We looked into each others tear-filled eyes. †

Note: this essay, written by Laurie Walker (who is now Deputy Mayor of Tacoma, WA) was posted to her Facebook page on March 5, 2011, six days before Marcus Walker passed away on March 11. Photo (right) by Laurie Walker.





Spring 2011 Edition

Dedicated to Marcus Walker: *Friend, teacher, Christmas Pageant director, auctioneer, NH skiing companion, mission trip leader to Albuquerque, NM, Biloxi, AL and Craigville, MA, and "Best in the Class" at Old South Church. in Boston.*



On Wings

May you grow strong wings
With feathers the color
Of autumn maples
To match your hair.

May these grand wings
Propelled by gusts of energy
Carry you far and wide
To children of all ages.

May they be playful wings
Bringing joy and inspiration
As they continue, grace filled
To lift up all those they will touch.

May your loving wings
Full of care, embrace your family
With warm sunshine and cooling breezes
To dry away tears and comfort aching hearts.

May you direct choirs of laughing wings
Soaring like flocks of migrating birds
In search of magnificent adventures, as yet unknown
To all of us who gratefully celebrate your life.

-- Susan T. Campbell

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"We all know that something is eternal. And it ain't houses and it ain't names, and it ain't earth, and it ain't even the stars . . . everybody knows in their bones that something is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings. . . . you'd be surprised how people are always losing hold of it. There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being."

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