



A Call to Prayer: Waiting with God

by Kevin Whitfield

One of my favorite books to read with our kids is *Waiting is Not Easy* by Mo Willems. The main characters are Piggie, a pig, and Gerald, an elephant (obviously). Piggie tells Gerald he has a surprise for him. Gerald says, "I cannot wait!" To which Piggie replies, "You will have to." Gerald complains during much of the waiting. He quits the waiting process a number of times ("I am done waiting!") only to recommit himself. He cries, pouts, throws a fit. Finally, Piggie points Gerald's eyes toward the night sky where stars and galaxies shine with brilliance. Gerald, mesmerized, says, "This was worth the wait." Piggie says, "I know."

I need this book as much or more than the kids. Waiting is not easy, but we all must wait.

We must wait in traffic. We must wait in school pick-up lines. We must wait for each other—to be ready to go when we are already late, to apologize for a wrong done, to finally get our act together.

More importantly—and painfully—we must wait on God: to intervene, to fulfill a promise, to reveal a way forward.

Waiting is not wasted time in God's economy. God does not waste anything. He invites us to be with Him while we wait. In my experience being with Him while I wait

is where He does His most important work. How do we wait with Him? One of the most ignored forms of prayer is silence. This is a kind of prayer that moves beyond words to a place where words no longer suffice. "For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation" (Psalm 62:1). In this place, one simply exists in the presence of God.

On December 3 we enter the season of Advent. This season recalls the waiting of God's people for the Messiah, Jesus. It also speaks to our own waiting for His action in our lives and His final return. Will you use this season to enter more deeply into your own waiting with God? We recommend *the Book of Common Prayer* or *The Church of the Incarnation's Advent Guide* for daily prayer and Scripture reading.

You will be surprised by the growing sense of God's presence in your life when you make a habit of this type of prayer. Waiting is not easy, but God wants us to wait with Him. He wants to wait with you.

Peace,

Kevin

Visit churchofthelamb.org/advent-practices to view links to Scripture resources and this description of prayer throughout the Advent season.

Let's Pray Together

As a way of waiting together, will you set aside noon each day as a time of silent prayer?

- Set an alarm to chime at noon each day of Advent. If noon does not work, select another time.
- Set a timer for at least 5 minutes.
- Take a breath and use a prayer to remember that you are in God's presence: The Lord's Prayer, the Jesus Prayer (Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner), or another brief prayer.
- Whatever thoughts, worries, fears, or distractions come to mind, hold them before God saying, "Lord, have mercy."
- When your time is up, thank God for being with you. Ask Him to be with you through the remainder of your day.



All I've Done is Watch Trees: My Experience as a Graduate of Catechesis

by Ellie Velker

As a true Catechesis of the Good Shepherd grad, I encourage you to read this out loud! Everything is much too fast nowadays, take some time to enjoy:



My earliest memories involve tree watching. There, just there (under the maple!), I would lay—my head on moss, in pleasant presence, and observe invisible wind in a quiet dance with each leaf.

This may seem odd (only to adults as the children know that this is normal) as a 5-year-old's unprompted chosen activity, but I was never one for conventionality. There, just there (under the maple!) I became settled on the fact that God was real. For how else could the leaves move in such a way? How else could the light shine just like that without God's existence? I can't recall my 5th birthday, any Sunday school class, or what our priest said in really any sermon, but I can recall the exact way those maple branches curved.

As most adults know, teenagerism gets quite complicated. So much change occurs in such a short period of time forcing a period of struggle and change. These times of struggle and change are when we need God the most, which makes things confusing, because as a teenager your faith is challenged the most. You are told that your desire to seek something higher is a myth, you are taught that there

is no “real evidence” that God exists, you are taught to put your “misplaced faith” into other things that are more tangible.

For me, Catechesis was a beautiful validation of the things in which I had already been born knowing. An unlearning of structures that had been placed upon me through the quiet discovery of my own relationship with God. This relationship was discovered in two different ways: sometimes through practical work on the Barn with Uncle Dan and my Dad (Randy), and sometimes through meditation, art, and creation with my Mom (Renee).

Relationships require a certain amount of independence and also guidance.

Independence: Forcing a relationship with God may result in temporary belief (a “Jesus High” if you will). However, with no self discovering of a mutual relationship, it will end in rebellion with most abandoning faith entirely. I believe that this is one of the biggest things that traditional programs often overlook: what it means to have a relationship with God.

Guidance: Our youth Catechesis opens with mid-day prayer from *The Book of Common Prayer* then moves to meditation on a passage from the Bible. Through this guidance and the act of calling ourselves back to The Word, we are reminded of the true God and his message.

You may believe me biased, as it is my parents who run the program, but I would not have taken the time to write this had I not noticed a shift in my own life and relationship with God. The simplest practices are often the most formative in developing our faith. I strongly believe that Catechesis could benefit anyone: 5 or 50 or 105. For me, when I rise in the morning, I am reminded of a 5-year-old's unwavering faith, simply by looking at a maple tree.

Meet the A. Napotnik Family

Hello! We are Aaron and Heather Napotnik. We have one son, Graham and another son on the way, due in March! We live in Elkton, VA, where Aaron runs 2 businesses (Union Paper and Elkton Brewing Co.) along with his parents and brothers. Heather previously practiced nursing at UVA but is now a stay-at-home mom.

We have lived in Elkton for 2 years although Aaron was born and raised there. He attended Church of the Incarnation for several years while living in Harrisonburg. We met in 2018 and were married in 2019. We lived in Fishersville for a little over a year after getting married and attended Incarnation together. We eventually started attending Church of the Lamb in 2021, when we moved to the Elkton area. We love the community that we have found at Lamb and are grateful that we can raise our children in this church. Aaron helps out with bagel pick-up and counting the offering and Heather serves as a scripture reader during the service. We are so thankful to be a part of this church family!



Meet the Deacon

by Travis Dorman

For those of you I haven't met, my name is Travis Dorman and I've been a deacon at Church of the Lamb since July of 2021. My wife, Andrea and I have been blessed to be a part of Lamb from the beginning, raising our kids Stella (11), Jay (9), Jeremiah (8), and Ezra (4) as part of this church family. Since the role of deacon is new to some of us, and is a bit unique within the Anglican tradition, I've been asked to write a bit about the office of deacon.

First off, there are some Anglican deacons who are on staff at their church and serve in a full time, compensated capacity. However, most of us (myself included) have regular jobs outside the church. I work for a manufacturer specializing in stormwater management products managing one of the company's four markets. Specifically, my part of the business develops solutions to remove pollution from stormwater. Most weeks, I'm traveling somewhere across the US to meet with my team or members of our field sales and engineering groups to better position our solutions for success. I'm grateful to get to be a part of so many peoples' lives around the organization, and I consider it part of my ministry to walk alongside these folks in a wide variety of contexts and geographies.

The first deacons in the Bible are mentioned in Acts, when a number of men including Stephen and Philip were selected to help meet the needs of the congregation. The current role of a deacon is, as articulated in the Ordinal section of the *Book of Common Prayer*, to share in the humility and service of Jesus for the strengthening of the church, read the Gospel and proclaim Christ, instruct the young and old in the Catechism, preach and baptize at the direction of a Bishop or Priest, assist the Priest in public worship, guide the intercessions of the congregation, aid in the administration of Holy Communion, care for the poor, and carry communion to those who cannot attend church. I have also been honored to officiate weddings and funerals as part of my time as a deacon.

Bishop Steve Breedlove and other diocesan leaders have emphasized the importance of the office of deacon in recent years. The role is an important one in the life of the church and serves a unique position, being described as having one foot in the church and one foot in the world. Stated differently in the Ordinal, the deacon "is to interpret to the Church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world." While I



am an ordained clergy member (it's still strange to see the occasional piece of mail addressed to The Rev Travis Dorman), I also work every week in the secular world, so I have a unique perspective as compared to full time priests.

The diocese takes ordination to the diaconate seriously in order to protect the members of our congregations and to ensure sound doctrine and theology. The current process is at least a year long and involves a background check, local and diocesan discernment, assigned reading, four graduate level courses in Anglican studies, a medical exam, a psychological exam, multiple written exams, child safety training, at least two retreats with other ordinands, and a final interview with the bishop. This list is neither to intimidate nor boast, only to ensure that our diocese and province are diligent in evaluating and preparing folks for ordained ministry.

Of all my diaconal activities, my favorite thing has been serving communion each Sunday. It is such a wonderful privilege to prepare and serve the sacrament and to pray blessings for those who come forward but do not partake (particularly children, I love to pray for your kids). Please know that when you come forward every Sunday, I'm grateful to stand there with you. Whether you're coming forward beaming in joy or struggling and heartbroken, know that I see you, know that you are cherished, and know that you are drawing near to something much more sacred and powerful than either of us fully understand.

Our Brother's Keeper

by Daniel Zimmerman

Each Advent since I turned 18, a poem haunts me anew. It's written by Edwin Arlington Robinson and is entitled "Karma," and it goes like this:

*Christmas was in the air and all was well
With him, but for a few confusing flaws
In divers of God's images. Because
A friend of his would neither buy nor sell,
Was he to answer for the axe that fell?
He pondered; and the reason for it was,
Partly, a slowly freezing Santa Claus
Upon the corner, with his beard and bell.
Acknowledging an improvident surprise,
He magnified a fancy that he wished
The friend whom he had wrecked were here again.
Not sure of that, he found a compromise;
And from the fulness of his heart he fished
A dime for Jesus who had died for men.*

Like all good poems, this one invites the reader to muse upon matters left unstated. Why did the sight of the Salvation Army bellringer remind the happy and well-to-do protagonist of his friend's financial calamity? Why did the decision to buy or sell paralyze that friend? Was his indecision due to mental illness? Financial illiteracy? Pure bad luck? Did he take crazy risks or make bad bets? Did the protagonist deceive him or take advantage of his naiveté? We don't know. However it happened, the flaw devastated the friend financially, and the protagonist reaped the windfall.

Guilt-stricken, the protagonist, like Cain, defensively asks whether he is his brother's keeper ("Was he to answer for the axe that fell?") Notice how he describes this calamity in the passive tense, as if axes just fall of their own accord.) The dripping sarcasm of the second section melts his equivocation.

Yes, we are to infer, he is and should be his brother's keeper. It doesn't matter if the friend was an idiot and the protagonist earned the money fair and square—he "wrecked" (active tense) him and profited off his demise. The bellringer's appearance on the street corner may have been a surprise, but there was nothing "improvidential" about it; God stationed the Santa there to convict the protagonist of his rapacious profiteering.

But it is the protagonist's response to this conviction that cuts the deepest. He doesn't repent, for that would require him to seek forgiveness and make things right. He merely "acknowledges" the unfortunate reality and deludes himself with a sentimental magnanimity. His "compromise" is to pay off his conscience by chucking a dime into the red bucket.

Christmas, you see, is about justice. It's about the birth of a new King who swore to procure equity for the wretched of the earth and to correct the sins and systems that subjugate the meek, the lowly, the destitute, the runts, the vagabonds. This is why it was good news to the shepherds! An army appeared in the sky, promising to overthrow the corrupt overlords who had exploited them!

It would be an interpretive mistake to think that the poem seeks to dissuade us from almsgiving, for almsgiving has always been the primary means by which Christians jamb a stick into the spokes to counteract the world's brokenness. Almsgiving is how we cast a decisive vote in favor of a righteous allocation of the world's material goods, and it's how we throw off our self-centeredness and apathy. But the poem does warn us that it is all too easy to swap out the Christian ethic of justice for the pagan ethic of karma, to deceive ourselves that we have been charitable when instead we have settled for a compromising magnanimity that strokes our ego but does nothing to draw the estranged near. In our almsgiving, we must avoid a condescending spirit and, like Emmanuel, we must actually condescend. True charity binds up the wounds, rights the wrongs, reconciles the estranged, and enables us to dwell together in harmony with God and man.

