



Sabbatical Gifts

by Kevin Whitfield, Rector

Hopefully you haven't already heard more than you would like about our Sabbatical. I want to share with you two particular gifts I received from it. They are a glimpse into the range of blessings I experienced.

One gift was seeing a piece of art we have used many times at our church—The Ghent Altarpiece. I wondered if it would really be that different to see something like this in person. Standing in front of it, I was stunned. The towering six panels contain the grand narrative of God's redemption in all its vivid colors. The central panel is the most famous, the Mystic Lamb of God. Recently experts were able to restore it close to the 1432 original. As they carefully removed layers of paint, the Lamb was discovered to have a remarkably human-like face. Looking on, I had the sense that the Person-Lamb was gazing back, even holding me in his gaze.

In front of the Lamb is the fountain of the water of life that flows from his throne. Surrounding the Lamb are choirs of angels, saints, the company of heaven, along with the most brilliant green plants and trees you can imagine. I learned that the artist, Jan van Eyck, researched plant varieties from across Europe and included over 70 different species. All this was done in an attempt to capture the breadth of beauty that will exist in God's redeemed, eternal Kingdom.

As I contemplated this, I thought of our Abbey at Lamb. Why do we plant orchards, terraced gardens, or sunflowers?

Because God loves them, and when our worship is complemented by fruit trees and sunflowers and terraced gardens, we hint at the fullness of God's coming kingdom.

A second gift was the extended time with our family and the memories made. Not only did we have quality time together. It was also spiritually nourishing, even the misadventures, of which there were many. For one part of our journey, we traveled to Acadia National Park in Maine where we tent-camped for a week. Katie and I set up our tent in a downpour that continued through the next day. We remained water-logged for several days. Ironically, we were still required to drive from our campground to rent showers. One is instructed to insert 7 quarters to start the water. After one-minute, a terrifying beeping alerts you that you have one minute left. Who showers in 2 minutes? Not three children!

Despite the Acadian water-torture, these moments proved more wonderful than anything we could have planned. On top of the opportunity to laugh together, I learned a bit more what it means to let go of all my silly attempts at controlling circumstances and entrust life to God.

Thank you so very, very much for making sabbatical possible. We are grateful to be part of the family at Lamb.

With love and thanks,

Kevin



The Gift of Beauty

by Daniel Zimmerman, Abbey Director

Victor Hugo's character in *Les Misérables*, Monseigneur Myriel, the Bishop of Digne, is a glorious clergyman. He constantly transfers wealth to the poor, even at the expense of his own comfort. He shields the powerless from predation and creates social programs to care for the destitute. He preaches the gospel plainly, but warmly and with power. He is fundamentally merciful: Hugo writes, "He seemed at times to be asking God to hand down lighter sentences." He is fearless, braving the ravages of highwaymen to care for his flock. He's a scholar, working late into the evening to complete a treatise on the subject of Christian duty. In the exercise of these virtues, he is unwavering.

There are only two areas where he seems to be needlessly extravagant. He has silver cutlery, plates, and candlesticks from which he eats his food (even these, however, he gives away to Jean Valjean, saving him from certain incarceration as a galley slave). The other extravagance is in his garden. Behind his house, he has four garden plots built as squares around central paths that make the shape of a cross: in three beds, he plants vegetables, and in the fourth, flowers. The sister with which he lives, Madame Magloire, scolds him: "Monseigneur, you are always so keen to put everything to good use, yet there's a useless garden bed for you!" Like Christ turned on Peter when the disciple suggested that He would not be killed, the bishop turns and rebukes her, "[Y]ou are mistaken. The beautiful is just as useful as the useful." After a pause, he added, "Perhaps more so."

We're building garden beds, and we intend to build many more that will produce crops that we can consume, give away, or sell. But we began with flowers: terraced garden beds, to be exact, and a whole field of sunflowers, from which we will receive no compensation. Why is that? Why shouldn't we start with something more pragmatic, something that provides for our material existence, something that brings in the cash?

The answer lies in the paradox that Bishop Myriel offers Madame Magloire. The pragmatist calculates that the poor are best served by attending to urgent material needs, and to be fair, there is no more ubiquitous command that the poor should be cared for save that God Himself should be worshipped and loved. But the pragmatist forgets two variables in his calculations: he assumes that the deepest impoverishments are material, instead of spiritual. The poor struggle for sustenance, housing, and clothing, but perhaps worse, they are consigned to suffer the indignity of abiding in ugly spaces, which grinds humans into despair.

The pragmatist also wagers that a person can persevere in love for the neighbor by moral effort alone. But this isn't true. Those who love most deeply, thoroughly, and persistently are not moral titans with more grit than the rest of us; no, they are those who are entranced by the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, which finds its ultimate expression in what Christians have called the Beatific Vision—beholding the face of God. It is no accident that our motto places "compelled to love" after "invited to rest": our love must originate out of the spiritual transformation that we have received, and in which we abide.

So, please, come enjoy our flowers. Come take photos. Come sit on our benches and behold a sunrise. Contemplate. Pray. Invite your neighbors to enjoy this beauty too. And when we are tempted that there's something more useful that we could all be doing with our time than planting flowers, let us not forget that it was the Son of Perdition, Judas Iscariot, who wanted to dispense with the beautiful to care for the poor.

All the best,

Daniel



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Belonging to Each Other

by Katrina Didot

We all have a story that we tell ourselves about ourselves. For better or for worse, our life experiences and how we interpret them write that story. In my case, the default story I often tell myself about myself is that people don't really want me around...that I don't belong. That story has kind of followed and taunted me most of my life. However, my experiences in community have over and over challenged the falseness of that story, and I think that is why I love Christian community so much.

There are many things that I have experienced that have built my own vision of community, but one sweet one that stands out to me was the year I was 23, living alone in a crowded Haitian town surrounded by close neighbors. My neighbors across the street adopted me and I adopted them. Luisna, their "restavek" (basically an indentured child servant), was a beautiful old soul of only 12 years-old who became a best little friend to me. She taught me so much about living life in Haiti (very importantly how to make a mean pot of rice and beans). We took care of each other as best friends and sisters do. I continually remember her and grieve that I lost touch with her.

I got really sick with malaria in Haiti and the intensity of the headaches, fever and dizziness left me so weak I could not get up from my banana mat bed. My economically impoverished neighbors could have taken advantage of my situation, but instead, they came into my home, brought food, brought cool towels, and allowed Luisna to sit by my side and nurse me back to health. Though a foreign concept to them, they respected my boundaries and my need for more alone times. But when I was inside my little house sick and suffering, they pushed through those boundaries knowing that I needed their care.

The Gospel story of the paraplegic man makes me think about this kind of "breaking in." Nothing in that story says that the paraplegic man wanted to be lowered on a mat into the house where Christ was teaching. Could it be that he was done with hope and afraid to have faith? Could it be that his friends "broke in" to his house of despair and hopelessness, so to speak, and carried him to the Saviour? Christ praised their faith, but spoke to the paraplegic only of forgiving sins. I wonder if his sin was unbelief and that his faithful, believing friends carried him without his asking to healing and Christ's salvation?

Far too often, I feel we are too shy (or maybe too busy) to push through the barriers of friends and families even when we sense concern or even danger—maybe not physical danger, but perhaps an emotional or psychological sinking to the depths.

In our case of Christian community, by saying "Amen" every Sunday at worship—together—we agree to trust one another to break past our barriers when needed. Perhaps we risk the vulnerability that comes from stepping in, stepping toward, and possibly being rejected.

I could have felt violated by my Haitian neighbors walking into my home. I could have ordered them out. We might push past a boundary and be told we have overstepped. Far too often in our culture of privacy and individualism, in our fear of overstepping, we "pussy foot" dither when in fact, we should take courage, walk through the barrier, and risk loving our neighbor.

My story about "not being wanted...not belonging" gets reinforced in my mind when I am left to my own devices and my own mental gymnastics. That story is re-written when my community pushes in and lets me know "we have missed you", "we want you around", "you belong".

For some of us, our fictional stories need to be re-written over and over again. For others of us, the struggles may be fewer. But those stories can be flipped, depending on life's circumstances or the voices we let into our minds and hearts. If your story is whole, then push through the barrier of a brother or sister whose story is broken and tearful. Sit with them and through the Spirit of Christ in community help them re-write their story. If your story is broken, then let someone in your door to sit with you—don't send them away with the all-American, "I'm fine."

Seasons come and go and at any given time we can shift from a healthy story to an unhealthy one. The beauty of our community based in Christ is that we are in this together—for the long haul. Every week we walk open-handed to that Table, hands extended in need, and we RE-MEMBER. We become part of the membership of Christ's family again... over and over again.

Deep community takes that Table home and extends it in our neighborhood and our places of work. And at times deep community walks it right into our brothers' and sisters' houses when the doors seem closed and sits with them. In that sitting with them, we write a truer story.

You are a child of God, we want you, we need you. You belong! *

Katrina

On Sundays, you might see Katrina leading worship alongside her husband Ernie. On other days, when not running around A Bowl of Good, the restaurant she owns, she's probably sharing her table with a friend or two... or twenty.

*During worship, we sometimes sing a song by Wendell Kimbrough called "You Belong" which reflects some of these ideas. You can find it on YouTube.

Kingdom Work in Sri Lanka

by Indi Hewavita

I am filled with gratitude for your prayers and provision for my volunteer project to Sri Lanka this summer. For as long as I can remember, it has been a dream of mine to do medical missions. Every time I tried to make it happen, the timing was off, or it was not possible for me to take off work. Earlier this year, I was at a conference in NOVA, where I was introduced to Limb Kind Foundation. Limb Kind provides prosthetic care for children around the world in countries that are underserved. Serendipitously, the foundation had a trip planned to Sri Lanka and needed ONE more prosthetic practitioner. I never imagined that I could use my vocational gifts in my country of origin. As many of you know, I immigrated to the U.S. as a young teen.

In July of this year, I and a team of other medical professionals flew to the other side of the world to meet 40 children with limb loss. We evaluated each child, fabricated, and fitted 40 prosthetic limbs! We also had the honor of being able to partner with a local charity organization in Sri Lanka (Center for the Handicapped). Due to the time constraints, we had to put in long hours to accomplish our goals. Over and over, the local staff told us that we worked too much, and we should not be skipping mid-day tea time! I am very familiar with the island culture of hospitality and unhurried conversation over tea. Despite some minor cultural differences, we got along splendidly and managed to meet our goal of seeing 40 beautiful smiles!

Sri Lanka is a place where spirituality is undeniable present. You cannot walk even a mile without noticing a place of worship—usually a Buddhist temple, a Hindu temple, or a Mosque. Christianity has a minority presence on the island and is viewed unfavorably due to hundreds of years of colonial oppression. During my brief stay on the island, I felt the hospitality and smiles of a place both familiar to me and removed from my daily life. There is something about hearing your name pronounced in your native tongue that makes it sound just right. The Lord also used the time in Sri Lanka to speak to me in new ways. I am thankful and hopeful to see what the Lord has for me in the future as I continue to focus on hearing his calling.

Fun fact: Sri Lanka was once called Serendib—which is where we get the word serendipity!

Thanks so much!

Indi



Meet the rest of the family: *the Hewavitas*

by Kim Hewavita



Indi and I (Kim) are so thankful to be members at Church of the Lamb. We were drawn to Lamb by the liturgy, the abbey, and the vision for the youth. We have four children—Neela (13), Zhara (12), Rohan (7), and Cedar (5) and live on a mini homestead in Mount Crawford. I grew up in Richmond, and Indi grew up across the globe in Colombo, Sri Lanka. I studied painting and printmaking at VCU. Indi attended NC State to study Biology and Cal State for prosthetics. We met in North Carolina, spent seven years married in California, and have now lived in the valley for ten years. Indi works hard at his own prosthetic and orthotics company, while I am home teaching our children.

We enjoy cups of tea with friends, our menagerie of farm animals, hiking, campfires, good conversation, and laughing until it hurts. We treasure the gifts the land here gives us, the blessings and challenges of homeschooling, and the rhythms of worship at home.

I am excited to begin serving in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd with the littles, and Indi will be helping with the older group. We look forward to all these new faces becoming familiar faces and being bound together as a church body longing for His kingdom to come.