



Good News for the Pews

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From Pastor Don

There is a lot going on in the English Worshipping Community these days. So much in fact, my contribution to *Good News for the Pews* will be shorter than usual. Read through this issue and see the updates from our various committees and groups. But I did want to take a little time and share something that I am witnessing in the community that I think is really wonderful. During Lent we were blessed in so many ways. We had an excellent number of Lenten Devotions written by the members of our community. Through them we all gained new insights and about our sisters and brothers in the faith and their reflections on the Scriptures. We also had a series of shares and discussions in Tea Time during Lent, led by our Conclave of Clergy (I'm testing collective nouns for a group of ministers).

For our Maundy Thursday service this year, we were blessed again to hear the theological reflections of seven of our strong women of faith as they shared their interpretations of the traditional "Seven Last Words of Christ," or more accurately the seven statements collected from all four Gospels that Jesus said while he was on the cross. What we heard was profound, powerful, and deeply moving.

Following up on that, the School of Discipleship, which meets Monday mornings at 9:30 a.m. on Zoom, has just finished up a series of meetings where we have all shared personal stories of our faith. Some shared the moment when they choose to become Christians. Some shared their faith journey. Some choose to talk about a particular moment when they felt God's presence, whether the Holy One, or a specific sense of connection to the Creator, or to Jesus Christ, or to the Holy Spirit. This precipitated a follow-up in the Wednesday Night Bible study on the topic of the Trinity.

These stories that we share, these call stories, or faith journeys, these moments of connection to the Divine (by whatever name or concept that feels the most authentic to you), these stories have been amazing to witness, and have helped us gain new insights and understanding into people that we have known for years, even decades. Against the

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Jonathan Y. Chan

I grew up in San Ramon over in the East Bay. I'm the oldest of three children: I have two younger sisters. My Dad was born in Hong Kong and is part of the third generation of his family to come to the U.S. My Mom was born in South Korea; she's part of the first generation of her family to come here.

I attended a few different churches growing up. Church was definitely the primary way my family socialized with other immigrant families. Language posed logistical challenges: my Dad doesn't speak Korean, my Mom doesn't speak Cantonese, and I don't speak either. At one point in time, after we all attended one church service together, my mom and sisters would go to a second Korean service at another church. I also remember the Korean church would organize small group Bible study meetings at people's houses. But naturally people were often most comfortable speaking Korean instead of English.

So although there were lots other kids at church growing up, it ended up not being where I made lasting friendships. I bonded more with kids I knew from school.

At college I also sometimes ran into language and culture barriers. Once, in a conversation about personal beliefs, a classmate from Europe was incredulous that I had mentioned philosophers from the West, but none from the East. Ironically, another time a classmate condescended that I couldn't really understand something the group was discussing because I was too Americanized.

Fortunately, generally people I met in college were a lot more cosmopolitan and friendly than in suburban California. It ended up being where I made all but a handful of the friends I regularly keep in touch with today. But I still certainly have a sore spot around community and my identity. I find some dark humor in that I jumped right in to another controversy about community when, after graduating, I moved to the city to work in tech!

I learned about PCC when I moved to my current apartment right at the beginning of the pandemic. I hadn't regularly attended church after moving to the city. My excuse had been that I felt bad about leaving my dog alone; all services moving online removed that excuse! I had doing a lot of reading on and off, starting in college, in an attempt to better understand Christianity. I can thank having good friends who were formerly Christian for the motivation to investigate my own beliefs.

I started attending virtually and stuck around because of the sermons. David Soohoo reached out and added me to the mailing list, and by a stroke of luck (!) the Inquirer's Class was starting! I appreciated the opportunity to meet everyone there. Pastor Don's thoughtful answers to my questions gave me the confidence to get over my anxiety about communities and to join the church.

It's the very beginning of my time with PCC, but I already appreciate the warm welcome. I'm looking forward to meeting everyone in person when it is finally safe!



Social distancing with my dog, Yeti, at Huntington Park

My journey

I was born into an unapologetically imperfect Christian family. My dad grew up in Chinatown and was an agitator from early in his life -- in both good and challenging ways as many of you know. My mom had a rollercoaster journey with her faith in God like most of us. She was also an extremely committed first grade public school teacher in Union City. My parents contributed a huge amount to communities and our society throughout their lives. They serve as my role models. They were imperfectly but resolutely mission-driven, extremely action-oriented, and dedicated to the betterment of our society.

I went to Sunday school when I was very young, but I found it boring and my parents didn't make me go when I said I didn't want to anymore. I rejoined a youth group in middle school and became "really religious". Meaning, I really did feel a closeness to God. I prayed, I got re-baptized in the gross Foster City lagoon, and I truly looked forward to summer church camp (Mo Ranch) in Texas with my brother and nephew - not only for the freedom, recreational activities, and cute boys - but also because it really did create space for me to reaffirm my faith annually.

While I refound my faith on my own between the age of 12 and 18, I also picked up a more traditional and judgmental perspective on sex and this eventually pushed me away from worshipping regularly - along with a busy schedule with sports and school and student leadership. Over time, my dad likely contributed to my increasingly critical look at how organized religion has impacted society over the last several centuries. As far as academics go, I went to Boston University and studied International Relations, Public Health, and African Studies. I continued to complete my Master's in International Development with a focus on gender equity and global health at George Washington University. I learned how religion was used as a justification to wage war against and take advantage of vulnerable communities. I watched the news slowly and painfully come to light about the prolific and deep-rooted child molestation throughout the Catholic Church globally. This abuse of power and trust disgusted me. I wanted to distance myself from any sort of organized religion, especially knowing that my dad's own congregation, this PCC congregation, had an unfortunate similar history to the Catholic Church.

Throughout university and early in my career, I still enjoyed cognitively intriguing conversations about religion and its role in our society. I elected to take a class on Islam, Christianity, and Judaism and their similarities. I emailed my dad back and forth for the three months I lived on the coast of Kenya in 2010 to discuss the different sects of Christianity and how evangelicalism came to be what I witnessed and experienced in semi-urban communities outside of Mombasa. I never disavowed Christianity, but I slowly came to rely wholly on my career to put my values and principles into action.

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When my dad died in 2013, I was 23 years old. I was just about to complete graduate school and was working full time as a grant writer for a health humanitarian response organization that I loved. After he passed, I continued to throw myself further into humanitarian response in the service of others. I truly felt called in this global health and nonprofit sector. Even with my passion and intrinsic drive in my career, I felt lost spiritually and emotionally. My dad was always someone who not only pushed me to be better, but made sure I also never felt I was better than anyone. He taught me that actions speak louder than words, but words are equally as important in how you use them. The loss of my father, best friend, and mentor was palpable and the most painful thing I've experienced so far. It's taken me years, but I now realize that he left me with more lessons than I can count about what community, being a Christian, and being a good person means. I hope to be able to keep sharing those lessons.

Over the last decade, I have not only reflected on these lessons from my father, but I have also incrementally gained respect for the role of religion in communities and our world based on my own experiences. Seeing how faith can keep people stuck in the cycle of poverty resilient and optimistic is incredible. I witnessed the positive power and impact of religion throughout my travels in Kenya, Uganda, and Jordan. Moreover, seeing how faith can bring groups of people together for a common purpose motivates me to think how might we, as PCC, tackle systemic racism and contribute to eradicating poverty in our own community. Lastly, reflecting on my dad's imperfections and journey with his faith and career in the church made me confident that I was ready to re-join a church. Experiencing the traumatic decline and death of my mom in 2020, coupled with Uncle Al's passing and seeing Auntie Shar's own grief process supported at PCC, it felt natural to rejoin this community in worship and I'm so grateful.

My dad attributed his path into ministry and away from gang life to Cameron House and PCC. This community is more than just a community of Christians who I really enjoy worshipping with and exploring my faith with. This community is the seed that I have grown from. I'm honored to be a member.

Thank you,
Whittney Tom



With partner Robert Amjad



Christmas 2012 with family