

## Putting Away Childish Things

It was about 7pm on a warm September night. Nick had been playing cops and robbers with several of his friends, aged 12-14. His father instructed him to put the gun away and go inside, but Nick wanted to play just a bit longer. He was rounding the crook in the stairwell of the complex he lived in with his toy gun when an officer appeared at the bottom of the flight of the stairs. Responding to a 911 call of shots fired in the area, the officer, with gun drawn saw the figure at the top of the stairs, fired once, and Nick was down. He died eight hours later. An honor student, a basketball player who had just been selected for the varsity basketball game and was on student council, Nick was just thirteen.

Nick's father, Nicholas Sr., recently reflected on the twenty-one years since his son's death. "I wonder what it would be like to have a son, 33 years old. I would give my life today if I could... just have him back," Heyward says. "He was something special, he really was something special."<sup>1</sup>

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As I heard this story, I was so sad hearing this father talk about his son. I wondered how God must have felt, knowing God's son died in his thirties. Did God ever consider what Jesus might have done had he lived longer. Wondering about what would have happened had someone lived longer or differently is something so many of us think about. Lives cut short, lives lived short of their full potential—we have so many examples of just this. It's natural to wonder and imagine.

We are nearing the end of the Easter season, with only Pentecost Sunday left after this. This week, the church celebrates the Ascension of our Lord. After weeks of post-resurrection interactions with various disciples, Jesus has finally gone. He has done what he was supposed to do. He has ended with a 'farewell tour' of sorts. Gentle teasing about fishing practices, a beach picnic, talks in the garden, and final words and prayers—after all that he is really and finally gone.

Today's gospel continues Jesus' final prayers in the garden. He is talking with God about the ones left behind. He wonders about their future. While not biological 'children' the disciples are his charges in much the same way. His prayer today sounds much like that kind of mulling. Jesus received them as gifts from God, and he has gently led their formation as followers of the Way. He has given them all the preparation he could. He has taught them about grace, righteousness, mercy, persecution, standing tall in the faith, and what fate will await them. What will they be like as they mature in faith and courage?

But he knows the disciples are like children. They have to figure it out on their own. They have to make their own mistakes. They have to absorb the gravity of their own path forward.

Today, he is praying for strength for them—for us. He is reminiscing about the way they have been together. And he imagines the future. He prays 'all will be well, and all manner of

things will be well. ' And there is a wistfulness, a curiousness of the 'what will be', and his own sadness that he will not be there in person to rejoice as they come into their own. He is the absentee father-figure.

Having watched Jesus ascend from the ground straight up to heaven, we are left with a hollow feeling, and a sense of the gravity of the situation. This is it. Now it is our turn to serve as guideposts. We are the ones who will make the difference. We are both nervous and excited. It is our time.

And so here we are. Clearly in the same lineage, and wrestling with the same issues and challenges as those first disciples. This space in our church year can be likened to riding a bike without the training wheels for the first time, or to high school graduation. It is a period of unsteadiness and uncertainty resulting from lack of experience. We come to this time of year not as novices—for many of us have been here repeatedly. But we can remember how it was the first time. Wild excitement and passion of being a new Christian need to be harnessed and carefully brought to bear on the tasks ahead. Any ineptitude will be left behind as discipline and practice take the fore. Lackadaisicalness makes way for an eager desire to follow Jesus with all our hearts.

We know that we have been down this road to Pentecost before, but not with all the wisdom we now have. We have never been more resolute than we are now. We can feel Jesus' presence more than ever before. We are keenly aware that the world needs us as never before, so we gird our hearts, and gather our armor, and bring our best 'game' to being faithful witnesses.

On to Pentecost. We are ready to become the Church. **WE ARE THE CHURCH!**