

### **Isaiah 25:6-9**

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death for ever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

### **Revelation 21:1-6**

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'

And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.' Then he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.'

### **“Everything I Ever Wanted to Know About Church I Learned in Kindergarten”**

**Rev. Rebecca McFee**

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Robert Fulghum, in his book *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten* tells us that the essence of life, those things of sharing and playing and loving, we learn early. In fact, he warns parents, don't worry that your children don't listen to you, worry that they're always watching you. Children do that, you know? They watch us. They learn early what life is about. Indeed we learn early about faith and church and community. I was, at least according to my parents, and probably my husband, a stubborn person. Was, still am. My parents would say I had an attitude. And so I didn't really learn much until the first grade. Little bit behind the curve, because I had to learn life as I took it in. But in first grade, 1974 for me, you can do the math if you want, 1974 was the year that I learned a lot. So I thought, if you would humor me, we would go back to 1974 to my bedroom on a Sunday morning, where there stood a stubborn first-grader who had no interest in going to church. There I was. My mom stood in the middle of my doorway every Sunday morning. She held in her hand those three things I hated most. Tights, black patent shoes, and a dress. And I would just refuse, and I always told her that there were bugs in my tights, and I knew there were bugs in my tights. And then she would threaten me with my afternoon activities, and I always surrendered.

And an hour later, there I was, in the back of our wood-paneled station wagon, full of my 1970s garb, which was a hand-crocheted orange shawl, a black patent purse, and pigtailed.

There I was in the back with two older brothers, between them, who would squash me, and I would prepare my tactics for the next battle. The next battle always took place at church in the choir room. I was part of the Cherub Choir which, I want you to note, for two years I was officially an Angel. They were the Cherubs. No one would agree to that, but I have to insert that here. In our church it was formal, and so the Cherubs always wore these white robes that made us at least look like angels, and in the middle was a bit bow that always coincided with the liturgical color of the year. And so, by first grade, I can also tell you that I knew the colors of the year because we had to pick out our own bows. 1974 was a pre-Velcro era, which is not good if it's your mother that's in charge of getting your bow straight. The mothers would come in and you know those nice little safety pins that are about this size, felt like they were about this big when your mother's trying to poke and prod, and my mother, well, she's probably a perfectionist, because she would always say "No I didn't get it straight, we're going to have to start all over again."

By the time I got up to sing, I had already battled my mom twice. I was wearing everything that I didn't want to wear, and I always considered my church experience good if I didn't have little pin pricks in my neck. I didn't like church. It wasn't good for me. Choir was the other reason why I had irritations about church, and so I have to say a little bit about that. You know, I really liked the baby choir, and I can't remember what we were called, but we sang great songs about butterflies and donkeys, and we would get to use our hands a lot. But then around first grade we graduated into the Cherub Choir, and there we had a new director who was from the university, and he wanted to teach us things about scales and when to say our Ts at the right time, and I didn't like this. We only sang about the Psalms. Practice was on Wednesday afternoons at four o'clock sharp, and he ran a really strict rehearsal, and the only fun time was from 3:50 to 4:00 when we would run in and his wife would have cookies, fake Oreos, and Kool-aid for us to have before practice. Didn't like church.

And so it went, week in and week out, but you know, life has a way of changing our course, doesn't it. Sometimes for the good, sometimes for the bad, and this time it came in the way of a tragedy, and it changed a lot that year for the Cherubs. I don't know what it was that year, but a call came to our house, the call saying that our director and his family, his wife, who was pregnant, had been in a terrible car wreck, and she had passed away. He was alive but had multiple broken bones, and it was a hard time. And then the pastor called all the parents and encouraged the parents to talk to each one of us, first graders, and my parents sat me down and we had a talk about death and what that meant, and my parents made the decision to take me out of the school, and my dad got out of work, and I knew it was a big deal, and we went to the church that afternoon for that funeral. And I remember it was a hard time. I didn't understand what was going on. And we came into a sanctuary much like this one, and as we walked in, it was already full, packed at the bottom level, so the usher took us up to the balcony where I sat on the front row of the balcony, and there as a first-grader I overlooked. As Fulghum says, I watched. And I watched as the first hymn started, as my director, who I did not know very well came in the aisle he was escorted by his own father, and I recall it being a pivotal point in my childhood, in which I watched what was going on and something triggered something inside of me. It was not to cry as much as to realize that he was with his dad and I was

with mine, but I had a pretty good life. I was surrounded by people, and even those brothers who hit me and elbowed me in the car and the irritations of choir seemed pretty good. And you know, if it had been a Hollywood movie, they would have produced it where I would have run down from the balcony and announced all of these feeling I was having inside, but it was actually quite private. And I remember saying something, it was some sort of promise, up there in the balcony, that I needed to do things differently. That I could give more and I could be a kinder person, and that this was a man I didn't know, but if I could, I would try to take some of his pain away. We learn things early. And so a few weeks later, a call came to our home again. It was our pastor saying that the Cherub Choir was going to continue, and so would our director. He was going to continue being our director. And I remember that first rehearsal, back from the break, and when we ran in, instead of his wife, there he stood, saying, "How was school today? Why don't we go in the kitchen and try to find something to eat?" And we all stood and sat around this little island in the church kitchen where we stirred the pitcher of Kool-aid and I remember somebody reached for the fake Oreos and gave him a couple, and we talked, we talked about breaking our arms and we talked about who had gone to the hospital, and we got to feel his cast, and that year changed. And it was good to go on Wednesdays, because on Wednesdays we could carry his music in from his car, and on Wednesdays we got to see if his cast had come off. And I don't know if those moments of kindness was simply atonement for me, or maybe it was compassion, and I'm not sure it even matters. It was what I had learned community was about, the moments in which we share in one another's sorrows, in one another's suffering, and you know, there's an odd sort of return on your investment, because there I began to love music, and it was there that I kept with the Psalms and sang in the church choir until I was booted out to become a minister. Even though, David, you do both. You do both.

And we all moved away from that year, but it was the year in which I learned what faith and community is about. You know, my mother and I still occasionally battle over very minor things, and I never did reach the status of angel, even at my ordination. I'm not sure that I know the depths of faith. There's a lot that I have to learn. But by first grade, I learned who we are as a church, as a community. And so, if I would be honored at all to add to Fulghum's list of what we've learned since kindergarten, I would add just a few. That death teaches us best how to live, how to care for those around us, how to make sure we've done our best to take suffering from others and hold it dear to us. I've learned that that happens at any and all ages, and as the Stephen Ministry does so well, it teaches us it's not in the hands of just the pastors or trained counselors, but it's all of us, taking the pain from others, that we may journey together.

I've learned that the sacred moves best when we move together and not in isolation, and so whether it's stirring lemonade together or praying or singing or dancing, we are all companions together. And finally, that community occurs only when we participate in it, because you can't just watch. And so the invitation is that that comes from the Book of Revelation, for in the Book of Revelation there is a new heaven and a new earth, but I like the line that says, "See, the home of God is among mortals. God dwells with them, as their God, and they will be God's people." It is here that we create that community, that

we are with people that we journey, and it is here at this table that we gather, that Christ's presence is among us. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.