

West Chicago Church of Christ *Family*

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

Apothecary, Expandable, Woebegone, Expedient, Myriad, Cacophony, Antiquity, Derivative, and Serendipity. How many people actually use these words in everyday conversation? I keep a list of words I type into my telephone “Notes” application for a couple of reasons. Firstly, they are fun to say. And secondly, my brain alone can’t contain all the words I find interesting.

Each word rolls off your tongue in its own way. And if you are educated in music you’ll notice, some are (staccato) which means, shortened and articulated, like the word “Ubiquitous”, some are (legato) meaning, fluid continuous motion as in the word “Reminisce,” and some are a combination of both like “Sriracha” pronounced SIR-RACHA. Words are great! I find that they have texture as well as meaning.

For me, a word may naturally connect to a particular color. “Anomaly” seems to suggest a (cool) color like blue or purple. In the word “Outlandish” I imagine the (warm) color orange. Certainly, as a descriptive word, it feels animated and vibrant in its nature. How I imagine words and colors is the way (as my daughter Rachel described while home for Christmas) some people envision certain numbers as either “boy numbers” or “girl numbers.” Do you do that too? Isn’t it funny how our minds work? And, even though not every word I’m drawn to sounds attractive as in “Cantankerous”, I am still drawn to those words “Nonetheless.”

To put another twist on the idea of words, I’m reminded that my aunt, Dorothy Sternberg, my dad’s sister, had hanging on her wall a poem about words entitled, *Boys*

Flying Kites. It goes, *Boys flying kites, reel in their white winged birds, but you can’t do that when you’re flying words. Thoughts unexpressed fall back dead, but even God himself can’t kill them once they’re said.* She always used to tell us, that no matter where we are, not to forget who we are. I think her intention was to help us realize that the words we use, can say as much about who we are as anything we may do and to use those words wisely.

The Bible has some great things to say about this very topic. **Proverbs 18:4** *“A person’s words can be life-giving water;*

words of true wisdom are as refreshing as a bubbling brook.”

Ephesians 4:29 says also *“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.”*

I’m certain my aunt Dorothy was familiar with these particular verses. My belief is that she wanted her son’s, nephews, and grandsons (until my cousin Beth came along, it seemed like there was only boys) to be “builder-uppers” and not “tearer-downers.” There’s two new interesting hyphenated words for my list.

Additionally, the Bible says, *“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”* **Hebrews 4:12**

Are we communicating with one another? There’s no rule about “who, what, when, where, and why”. No fancy interesting or obscure words are necessary. Only the heart.



Painting by “Uncle” Clarence Oscar Sternberg

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When I wake up in the morning and it is light out, I can see the sun beginning to cast shadows in the front yard as it shines through the trees. This gives me a positive feeling. I realize that it is day. Everything is illuminated. I can see what is going on. People are about, and stuff is beginning to happen.

Just before Christmas we began to experience the Winter Solstice. What I understood as a kid was that this time of year reflects the onset of winter. Long nights and cold frigid weather. And darkness! When I was in high school, my brother and I were on the swim team. Unfortunately, we had to rise at 4:30, in the dark, to make a two-hour practice before school. For me that was a challenging time. I always felt pretty sleep deprived anyway.

What I learned as an adult however, is that even though Winter had formally begun, with the Solstice the days were actually beginning to get longer. Think about this. In late December, light was fading around 4:00 p.m. Today, as I am

writing, Wednesday January 20th, the projected sunset is 4:54. On Sunday, when you will most likely be reading this article, 4:59 is the time of sunset on that day. This is a kind of a fast moving process. To learn of this actual reality was exciting to me. Just before the solstice, short days are actually kind of overshadowed by the excitement of Christmas. And, even though there's nothing springlike about a polar vortex we often experience through January and February, we are undoubtedly heading in the right direction. Light is kind of an important thing.

Sally recently shared with me an example from her childhood that is a great illustration for this point. Often when company was coming, more specifically if one of her older siblings was returning from college or visiting from out of town, her mom would have Sally go around the house, upstairs and down, and turn on every light (anything with a

bulb). As the youngest, she was probably 10 years old when she can recall these memories for the first time. It felt special. It was fun and created a game-like atmosphere. It was a preparation for something important to come. Years later, on my second ever meeting with Sally, my buddy Keith Hall and I were on our way out into the Indiana countryside to find Sally's parent's house. It was 9:00 at night and we had been spontaneously invited to bring our guitars to play and sing. In rural terminology, "one block" as we know it to be in town, actually translates as one country mile in the rural spaces. Being lost, I told Keith to steer toward the only

farmhouse we could actually see across the fields, a house that appeared to have every light on. When I went to the door to ask directions, it came clear, we had found our destination. Sally's house.

By way of an important parallel we can put this same idea into a spiritual context.

John 12:35 *So Jesus*

said to them, "The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going. These may be among the last words Jesus will publicly preach before being arrested and so were important for the people to hear. The light that physically guides our way could be the difference between life and death. In the context of the verse, this is most certainly true. There is no reason to bump into the furniture or stub your toe in the darkness. God gives us an easily accessible light switch. 1 Peter 2:9 says, But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Look out from the darkness. It won't be difficult to see where you are going. Where God calls us to, every light will be on.



Sally's house.

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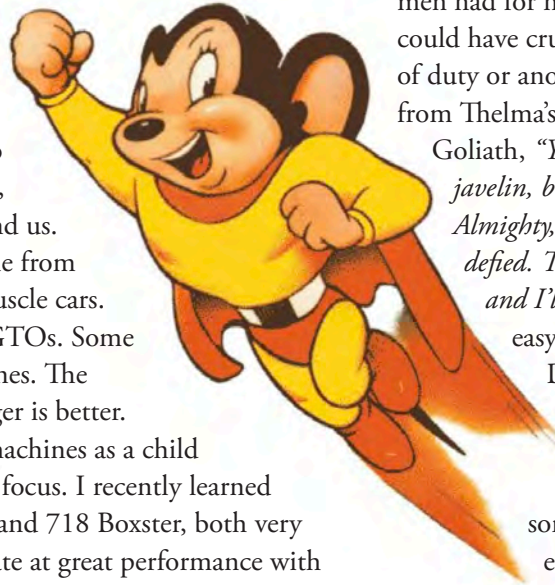
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What is a micro computer? Why were transistor radios so important. Do you remember when compact cars seemed to be a popular thing? Why would I want a studio apartment? These are things that are small in size, yet encompass important functionality. Years ago the company Texas Instruments designed a small-scale device, the Pocketronic that did basic math calculations and later Hewlett Packard, the HP-35 (which would perform increasingly more advanced math functions). They made it possible to carry a compact computer around in your pocket. Pretty amazing at the time.

There is nothing smaller than the atom. We may remember from science class that atoms can join together to form molecules, which in turn, form most of the objects around us.

In contrast however, I came from an era (albeit just barely) of muscle cars. Camaros, Mustangs, Pontiac GTOs. Some with big block 8-cylinder engines. The feeling back then was that bigger is better. I remember these impressive machines as a child in the 1970s. But, back to our focus. I recently learned that the Porsche 718 Cayman and 718 Boxster, both very sporty driving machines, operate at great performance with a 4-cylinder engine. (For those who are interested, they do have a turbocharger which I understand, has an impact on this performance also.) Again, we've learned to get great power from those things that for necessity or practicality are small in size.

Tim highlighted in his bulletin article last Sunday, the importance of those people we cross paths with in our lives and so I wanted to mention a person that is very important to me personally and who is helpful for illustrating my point. It is sometimes difficult to talk about a person without embarrassing them a little bit. My good friend Thelma Griffin, who I've been fortunate to get to know in recent years, likes to laugh when I crouch down or kneel to talk with her. We are only, quite literally face-to-face when I am



kneeling. I like a particular story she told me once about her experiences as a high school librarian. If I have the story correct, there were two large male students, getting into an argument, maybe elevating into a brawl, just outside her library. She responded to the commotion and somehow interjected herself between the two students, maybe not physically, but with the right words to deescalate whatever was going on. Certainly her telling of the events would be more accurate than mine, but both would highlight what I saw as her authority, and some level of respect the two young men had for her position. Thelma said in hindsight that they could have crushed her if they had wanted to. Whether out of duty or another force, she did not shy away. This event from Thelma's career makes me think of David who said to Goliath, *"You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head.* It's not easy to picture Thelma battling Goliath, but I see David's spirit in her action, a certain lack of fear. If you know Thelma, you will know, she has literally traveled the world.

Our church is small, but there is something dynamic about what God has empowered us to do. There is our yearly VBS, support for Shults-Lewis (Christmas gifts and Annual Day), RCC, HHI (Magi Project and Walk4Water), Food Pantry, Mission Lazarus, Doka support, Alfred Beyans, Zacherie Bien-Amie, Tuesday Ladies Class, and ALS Walk. These are just the opportunities that have proper names. Some are ongoing, others are opportunities that just crossed our path. But, like Thelma, we don't seem to shy away.

Size doesn't seem an issue to action. Our friends at West Chicago District 33 Preschool told our sister Jackie Robinson, that they think of us as the "church that does." Our stature as the "church that does" has more to do with our heart, than our height. *Galatians 6:9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.*

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I recently did some research to determine things that characteristically improve with age. Items I found include... blue jeans, cheddar cheese, pickles, wine, leather stuff, your 401k, a cast iron skillet, a greater capacity for patience, wisdom and love.

Several years ago, Sally bought me this great jacket. I could actually wear it all the time. It doubles as a sweater inside when the weather is extra cold outside. I feel comfortable wearing it for any occasion. It is flexible and resistant to the elements. I've worked in it, and worn it to church on Sunday. I've had it for several years and one thing has never changed. It is reliably durable, warm and comfortable. This jacket hasn't yet faded to a pleasing patina however.

My understanding is that this particular coat, if not somehow lost in a fire or other garment tragedy, will last for many years to come, and so will fade and become slightly threadbare and look really great. Why do I want my coat to become threadbare? I guess I don't really, but the idea that something can be comfortable, and somehow permanent is kind of a metaphor for God, the church, the kingdom. **Psalm 102:25-27:** *Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end.*

I'm highlighting one of my favorite verses, a great example of the permanence we find in His love. I've included some thoughts interjected within the verses and emphasized Jesus as the source. **I Corinthians 13:4-8:** *Jesus is patient and kind; he is not envious or boastful; he is not proud*

or dishonoring of others. Jesus is not self-seeking but following his Father's will, left the glory of heaven to empty himself and serve us and sacrifice himself for us. Jesus is not easily angered. Jesus keeps no record of wrongs so that he can rejoice over us in our sins and failings. He has forgiven us all our trespasses, throwing our sins into the depths of the ocean to be forgotten forever. He has justified us. Jesus rejoices with the truth of his grace that declares us righteous; he delights in us and over us. Therefore, in Jesus we can bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things. Jesus never fails. He never ends. "Jesus is love" after all.



That we can be a mirror of God's love is kind of an intriguing idea I think. Jesus told the apostles, "A new commandment I give to you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" **John. 13:34-35.** Jesus says "Love one another" three times. This must be a very important point. He is actually giving it to us as a command. But, also significant is that "everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

The Bible tells us that God loved us before the foundation of the world. God's love will not age, or fade, or become threadbare. He is the same, and his years have no end. Our love for Him, for Jesus, and for one another will improve with age, but there is no equal to the love that God has for us. **Psalm 90:1, 2:** *Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*

Elder Jay

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A month or two ago I wrote an article highlighting my love for words. An update to my list includes: painterly, uncanny, tenacious, jejune, hyperbole, esoteric, aficionado, bellwether and gorgonzola. By coincidence, these new additions are all either nouns or adjectives. Spending time with words and definitions, I find that often times I use a noun (a thing) as an adjective (a descriptive word) as in the example “Walter Payton was like a **dynamo**.” I use “dynamo” to mean, the energy he displayed, probably in just about everything he did on the football field. The word **dynamo** however, is actually a noun to identify a machine that converts mechanical energy into electrical energy. Quite different. But this is a great “simile” to describe this very famous Chicago athlete.

Interestingly, the word **adjective** is a noun, and similarly, the word **noun** is a noun. That is not a pattern that makes it easier for me to understand. I feel like I am creating a great big pot of literacy soup. This is actually fun for me however.

Anyway, words are important and so nouns, verbs, prepositions, conjunctions and determiners that make up a sentence can create meanings based on how we use them. Many meaningful expressions and phrases we use in our English language regardless of origin are a compilation of these building blocks.

My dad, when he was nearing the point of doling out a discipline would warn my brothers and I with the phrase, “I’m getting ready to lower the boom on you.” At 55 years old, I’ve only just looked that one up. And, though I knew his meaning at

the time, here is the origin of the phrase. *To lower the boom is to land a telling or knockout blow. The world of prize fighting in America borrowed the original nautical phrase during the early 1900s. Before this, being struck by a lowered or wildly swinging boom, the heavy spar at the base of a mainsail could be equally painful or I would contend, deadly.* Having grown up on land in the American Midwest the visual didn’t have much impact, but having connected the phrase with this actual lowering of the boom was very influential to my brothers and I.

So, I am acutely aware of, and drawn to interesting expressions. Some great examples are, (1) “**Straight and narrow**” (2) “**See eye to eye**” (3) “**The blind leading the blind**” (4) “**Sign of the times**” (5) “**Kiss of death**” (6) “**Head on a platter**” (7) “**O ye, of little faith**”

I remember my mom saying this when me or my brothers would show skepticism for whatever reason. (8) “**The truth will set you free**” (9) “**Twinkling of an eye**” (10) **Labor of love**. What makes these common phrases intriguing is that all have their origin in the Bible. Scripture reference for each are as follows.

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|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Matthew 7:14 | 2. Isaiah 52:8 | 3. Matthew 15:13-14 |
| 4. Matthew 16:3 | 5. Matthew 26:48-50 | 6. Mark 6:25 |
| 7. Luke 12:28 | 8. John 8:32; | 9. 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 |
| 10. 1 Thessalonians 1:3. | | |

This is just a small sampling from my research. That these phrases are memorable, applicable, and accessible is evidence that the Bible can contain great depth and simplicity concurrently. Parallels I am able to understand.

A favorite rock artists of mine, a Canadian band called Triumph recorded a song entitled “Fight the Good Fight.” The lyrics make reference to the importance of *giving* found in the Bible. So I’ll end with one last notable phrase from 1 Timothy 6:12 “***Fight the good fight for the true faith. Hold tightly to the eternal life to which God has called you, which you have confessed so well before many witnesses.***” What simple phrase from the Bible is encouraging to you?

Elder Jay



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I believe everything in God's creation has its own special meaning and symbolism. Daily reminders in our line of sight that reflect his love for us and further make us aware of his presence. One example is in Mark 1:10. Jesus having come out of the water after his baptism, sees the heavens open up and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. The "Dove" generally symbolizes innocence and purity bringing into perfect perspective the importance of baptism for washing away our sins. The "Rainbow" is God's way of revealing his covenant with us. Following the flood God showed to Noah and his family the rainbow as a sign of his redeeming grace given to humanity.



Additionally, the "Lamb" is a foreshadowing of Jesus' sacrifice. We can see this when Abraham and Isaac offer up a ram to God and again during the last plague on Egypt, when Moses gave the Hebrews instruction to smear lamb's blood along the doorposts and lintel of their houses, a symbol to us of the blood pouring from Jesus' head and hands during his great sacrifice on the Cross.

Since I like to identify parallels, I want to talk about some additional things in God's creation I find most impressive.

In Sequoia National Park in California, there is a tree considered to be the most massive single organism on the planet. Endearingly referred to as "General Sherman," it weighs an estimated 2.7 million pounds, stands 275 feet tall and measures 100 feet around at the

ground. It is thought to be over 2000 years old. When European Americans arrived in California in the 1500's, the tree was already a natural wonder and quickly became admired and given formal protection. Interestingly, though it is the largest, there are actually other Sequoias that are older. In my mind, these wonderful trees are symbolic of scale, strength and persistence.

Somewhat different but my favorite is the Baobab tree. Its bark is fire resistant. Its fruit is edible. It is unfazed by the driest



droughts. It is one of the longest living, strangest looking trees in the world. They exist mostly in the semi-deserts of Africa and southern Asia. Growing to be nearly 100 feet tall, its bulk and stature are what is so astonishing; many have trunks 30 feet in diameter. Like

the majestic Sequoia this tree is a natural wonder planned at creation as a beautiful visual expression and an emblem of God's imagination and glory. Likewise, He made us.

We have great Sequoias growing in our church, in our family. Some at our work or school. Some are older having faced time and others are just seedlings. In simple terms, we are the Sequoias. Some of us may be a little more unusual and qualify as the Baobab (this I proudly claim) but no less strong in our resistance to time, continuing in our upward climb to heaven. The Sequoia, Baobab and Mighty Oak remain anchored, resolved to carry on their purpose in the natural order. In **1 Corinthians 15:58** Paul similarly encourages us in his direction. *Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

Elder Jay

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Several weeks ago in Tim's sermon he shared an experience that seemed like a good subject to explore. His example, which Sally and I and our kids experienced firsthand also, takes place at Mammoth Cave in Kentucky. I was reminded of our walk through the cave, and that at a certain point in the tour, the guide turns out the lights to make some kind of point. I don't remember what the point was, but the lack of light created an effective physical result.

I read online the account of a tour participant who began to feel great anxiety as the guide, who lost track of time began to ramble from his prepared remarks down in the cave. For almost nine minutes the group stood in this unfamiliar and uncontrollable darkness. This individual found himself mentally wandering in many different directions. He thought that if he closed his eyes he would be immune to the darkness. But opening them again only increased his anxiety, fooling his senses and creating the feeling of unreality, even blindness. Helplessness and loneliness began to creep into his thoughts. His imagination began to get to him. What if he found that the twenty other people who had entered the cave with him, slowly and covertly tip-toed away and he was left alone? What if this current condition was somehow permanent? He could be lost in the darkness and never get out again. These overwhelming visions piled up pretty quickly. As the lights came up however, he saw others whose faces mirrored a look that expressed a common passing anxiety. And, he was surprised at how quickly everything seemed to return to normal as they continued on their way through the cave.

I don't as a kid remember having a specific fear of the dark, but we did have long curvy stairs that led to our first floor from the basement. These steps had no risers, which if you don't know, means your feet are accessible to whatever scary thing might be in the dark under the stairs. Again,

I wasn't afraid but if you couple that with a really great imagination, it just about evens out to "anything is possible". And so, I usually bounded up the stairs.

More practically speaking, people tend to be afraid of the dark for lack of visual context, that is, the ability to see what is around them. Additionally, when one sense is constrained in some way, others are often enhanced, explaining why our ability to hear strange noises increases when we're home alone at night.

Recently we've had much talk about the resurrection in Tim's study from Mark and Curt's Kid's Connections leading up to Easter. And so, I started to think, what would the darkness of Jesus' tomb have been like. If "we" had to endure the quiet, the darkness, the loneliness of the tomb,



where would our imagination take us? What strange noises would we have heard in the dark? Certainly not the creaking of floorboards. His tomb was much more secure. It was covered by a large stone after all. Alone in the tomb the stone over the entrance would surely have made our condition undeniably permanent.

I want to stress how impassible Jesus' burial place must have been. That a man could escape these confines, let alone rise from the dead is pretty inconceivable. But, unlike our trek through Mammoth Cave, Jesus' emergence from the tomb "did not" return things to normal. As the stone rolled away and He appeared, light was not let into the darkness of the tomb, but rather, the light was made to pour out onto the world. God's promise that He will raise us up again to be with him in heaven for eternity. And so, the Bible says:

Romans 8:11 *If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. Amen!*

Elder Jay

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I collect all kinds of stuff. Old soda bottles, old radios, cameras, musical instruments, fishing lures and reels, and ashtrays. I have a collection of glassware from the depression era. I have old tools, shiny and rusty and some interesting antique clocks and lamps too. And of course, books! Does every thing work? Well no, not exactly. Only about half of those things with a function, are actually working. Why then would I keep them around if they only qualify as decorative and not functional? Why in my eyes do these things have enough importance that I would clutter my house with them? Do they truly have any value at all? Some of these things if I felt inclined to bring them up to snuff (so to speak) could be quite costly to repair properly. What potential do they really have?

My... our decor, can definitely be called eclectic. And so, the rest of our house can be classified this way also. I am the interesting objects equivalent of the person who takes in stray animals, feeding them

and giving them a good home. I may get some new(old) object out of a dumpster, the neighbor's front yard or other seedy place, and wipe it off so that it is clean enough to be allowed in the house.

Certainly there are things in our home however, that have true personal value. These are things that would never be thrown away. Photographs, children's artwork, inherited antique furniture, dishes or other things that

came from our families. It is not difficult to see the difference between these two categories and how we tend to assign their value.

Several years ago Chuck Miller published for us a list of important facts entitled, "Who I Am in Christ." The list encompasses a number of verses that emphasize our importance to God. How "secure," "significant," and "accepted" we are. **Romans 8:28** says: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* Also, from **2 Corinthians 5:17**. *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!* His "acceptance" of us is evidenced in **1 Corinthians 12:27** which reads, *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.* Additionally in

Ephesians 2:18 *For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.*

In these verses God does not differentiate and assign special value to a select few. In fact, he finds potential in each one of us. I may have a cracked lens, while you are suffering from a broken spring. But he by no means desires to throw us away.

Romans 3:23-24 *...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace*

through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

In God's eyes we are an eclectic collection of people. His children, all very different. He certainly places value on us and doesn't categorize us as simply decorative. He planned to bring us all up to snuff. It was quite costly. But we know, the cost for this repair has already been paid. It was covered by Jesus' blood.

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Have you ever experienced a miracle? If you did, how would you know? Growing up, I recall using the term miracle in the context of describing something I would consider impossible. As in “It will take a miracle for me to pass the test tomorrow. Or, “That winning basket at the buzzer was a real miracle.” In fact, I would suggest that the concept of a miracle may be so illusive in our minds that we tend to use it in jest as a way to describe how difficult something is. My understanding is that a miracle has to do with a surprising event that can't really be explained by natural or scientific laws. It is generally considered to be the work of a divine force. And so in fact, it isn't actually impossible to pass that test tomorrow or to make a basket from half court at the buzzer. A little practice and some added conscientious study can easily explain the “miraculous” success in those instances. I believe we can easily take miracles too lightly. We don't always give the idea behind miracles its due credit.

Sally and I recently watched a Steve Martin movie entitled “Leap of Faith”. The main character, (Steve Martin) a faith healer, puts on quite a show for the masses, stirring up their emotions. He is able to convince his audience that he is performing miracles. Of course, his entire act is based on “smoke and mirrors.” What he doesn't plan for is that one of the congregation, a young man, has true faith. He is healed and able to throw aside his leg brace and walk. The faith healer is dumbfounded and confused. He believes he has been hustled by the young man. He can only create the illusion of a miracle, yet a miracle appears to have happened independent of the healer's false acting.

Miracles are a supernatural occurrence. But, like the movie I described, do they have to have a sensational appearance for us to accept them as authentic? I contend that miracles happen all the time, but they hide within the confines of our daily experiences.

If your eyes are open, following are some miracles you might watch for on any given day. • *Encounters with old friends which are unexpected* • *Resolution of conflicts which have been impossible for you to resolve by your own efforts* • *Response to prayer*

- *Wisdom from scripture and the Holy Spirit for challenges you might be encountering*
- *Blessing of life in God's created world (perfect weather on that special day!)*
- *Occasions where God's timing seems to align with a very important decision on your part*
- *New friends! As in brother Chuck's “Who I Am In Christ”, the items above come from wise council he has shared with me from our time together in years past. Additionally, we can very well tie in Rick's challenge for us to identify a daily blessing and to actually label some of those as miracles.*

How can we tell if a miracle comes from God? A miracle is something that glorifies Him. The above examples suggest that miracles declare that God is active in our world and that he can disrupt the activities of nature to reveal his character and accomplish his purposes. The essential test of a miracle is: Who receives the glory? Like the faith healer in the movie, beware of people (such as Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8:9) who boast of their own greatness. Interestingly, what makes this story great is that Simon was moved by Philip's message, and was turned toward Jesus. The Bible says in Acts 8:13 that he (Simon) was astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

Do not be fooled by the miracle cleaner that removes rust instantly (*boasting of its own greatness*). After all, it is derived from elements of God's creation. This, from our daily experience, could represent a simple and convenient kitchen miracle. There are however, many more substantial and meaningful miracles for us to discover. Keep your eyes open, and your heart also.

Elder Jay



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I like being in the water! As kids my brothers and I spent lots of time in the water. My parents had a boat so we spent much time during the summers swimming and skiing on Kentucky Lake. We camped near a flooded quarry and used to hike to the ledge and spend hours jumping off the rocks into the water. I was on the YMCA swim team as a kid and later on, the high school team. Not quite as leisurely or exciting, but still, I liked being in the water.

We lived in Ottawa at the fork where the Fox River empties into the Illinois River. Almost every year, the rivers would flood and our neighborhood almost became an island. Our parents struggled to keep us from riding our bikes through or playing in the dirty water. We used to bicycle around the edge of “Old Man Harper’s” field, as my brother Doug reminded me, to get to the rope swing at “the Point”. I never saw him, but the neighborhood story was that Mr. Harper would fire his shotgun at you if you were near his field. Once at the Point, we had to swing out as far as we could over the water before letting go of the rope so we would enter the water just beyond the drop off and not hit the bottom.

On multiple occasions we swam across the Illinois River from the Point to Bull’s Island, privately owned by the Starved Rock Boat Club (*woop-dee-doo* – of course, we weren’t members). We had to swim across against the current or else we would be swept downstream and miss the island before we could reach the other shore. We always took the challenge, testing a potential peril because, on the island was a diving board and a floating raft in the middle of a beautiful, sandy, clear water pond. As goofy, lunk-headed boys, some of our experiences with water nearly involved

the borderline between life and death (Rock quarry, Harper’s shotgun, Illinois River currents). We took water so much for granted. In my experience, water has always been present in great abundance.

There is however, in our world a borderline between life and death that involves communities who suffer from a great lack of clean water. It’s just not accessible.

The whole idea of walking for miles in order to get just enough muddy water to cook, and drink, and rinse out your few clothing items for the next day, is truly humbling. We

really don’t fully understand. Especially when my worst problem on a given day may be that I have to re-enter my Netflix password... again! This routine to acquire water needed for life, is a daily chore for most. For them, close, clean water will literally be a life changing event.

Our **Walk4Water** activity is a great opportunity. I want to encourage everyone taking part to finish strong. Even after the event, our page will remain open for a time so we can continue to inspire others to help us meet our

goal. **John 4:14** *But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life*”. Certainly, this eternal water is what we ultimately want to share. What is truly great is that providing this earthly blessing can shine a light and mirror God’s love for everyone. My hope is that we can help provide a way to make this water accessible. An opportunity for a child in Haiti to splash his face from a new well, and to say, “I like being in the water!”



Elder Jay

West Chicago Church of Christ *Family*

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

There are certain sounds we hear that have a very pleasing ring to them. Sounds that elicit an emotional response, or a nostalgic memory. Sounds that create a feeling of relaxation, or one of excitement. I believe everyone has their own particular sound that can bring about this agreeable effect.

Some examples are, the melodic chirping of songbirds, swift water flowing over the falls, a child's joyful laughter. The clanging of the dinner bell and the sizzle of bacon in the pan. Or the sound of a muscle car's idling engine, low and grumbly. There is the audible crack of the Louisville slugger as it makes its connection followed by the roar of the ballpark crowd.

This year is the return of the Cicadas, chanting in unison their orchestral buzzing. I see this as nostalgic because, I last heard them at age 39 and before that at age 22. We know they only come around every 17 years. And this "Cicada sound" for me is an echo of warm summer nights when Rachel and Charlie were just 11 and 8 years old. I know you have sounds that trigger your own very special memories about people and things.

My personal favorite however is the quiet trickle of the automatic drip coffee maker, brewing up its "black gold" at 6:00 in the morning. Certainly, this example affects multiple senses. How else is a person able to wake up at this solitary hour? Sally is fond of the sound of the screen door's rusty hinge squeal and constant slam as it opens and closes with a hot summer day's activity.

There is a certain familiarity associated with these sounds. But, my challenge is to wade a few steps deeper. I can remember the distinct voice of my aunt Dorothy preparing boiled cookies on the stove as she would tease my uncle Clarence sitting at the table banging his pipe in the ashtray. And, his low chuckle as he passively sat by and allowed her to lovingly disparage him with false accusations of laziness or some other unsavory characteristic. These sounds suddenly have context.

While on vacation this spring, our family was at the Walmart store in Florida shopping for vacation stuff. Three of us were standing together in the aisle and Sally asked, "Where is Charlie?" Rachel replied, "Charlie is over there, I could hear him breathe." It might seem crazy but, can you not recognize the sound of your loved one when they cough, sigh... or just breathe? And, so it is with God the Father, and us with him.

John 10 says. *The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has*

brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

I find a certain security in this verse. It is assurance to me as part of his flock, safety from the enemy. It suggests fellowship and love as part of a family under his care. We know his voice. It is familiar to us. It's the water flowing through the rocks in the stream. The chirping of birds and the laughter of children. It is the unison of the Cicadas and the familiar sigh from the next aisle.

Elder Jay



West Chicago Church of Christ Family

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

When I graduated from high school, I won a very distinguished award. I wasn't expecting it. I don't remember conscientiously working to get this coveted prize. There was no build up or worry that I might not make the final cut. No tough competition from a classmate nemesis. In fact, I didn't even know I was in the running. When I heard from the podium, our principal read his prepared words, "winner of the award for perfect attendance, Jay Charles Hearn, I feel as if I might have slouched slightly in my chair. I know I waited a few moments hoping the ceremony would move to the next big observance, but as it was, I was expected to walk to the front and receive this bittersweet recognition and to be presented this great honor in front of the entire graduating senior class. Had I known ahead of time, I might have taken some small step to change this outcome.

In my mind, it wasn't on par with, "The Science Award", or "Editor of the Paper" or "Winner of the Helpingham Scholarship." It felt more to me like, "The Guy Who Liked School So Much He Came Every Day!" In hindsight, I feel the only day acceptable to miss class, aside from being sick, which strangely I was kind of immune to, was Senior Skip Day. It just so happened to fall on the same day as the Track and Field Sectional meet that year, which I couldn't miss.

Who knows what caused this irregular habit of getting there every day? In my normal struggle to get through and succeed at my average academic level, I just never felt a need or desire to deliberately skip school. And so, in this way, I distinguished myself.

There are many positive things we try to share with graduates at the end of their high school careers. Some of these may even top the cliché list, sounding corny or repetitious. They are no less true however. Examples are: "Follow your dreams." "Don't take the easy road." "Challenge

your abilities and develop new ones." All good and viable advice.

A particular anxiety that has been shared by almost every graduate at one time or another is, "What's next?"

Jeremiah 29:11 *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Read also Proverbs 16:3 Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established.* Be prayerful, refer to the "Follow your dreams" model and God will help fill in the gaps.



I can recall my first year at college. I was anxious to be on my own, nevertheless I sometimes felt alone and distant from family and friends. **Deuteronomy 31:6** *Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.*" Keep these thoughts close and don't forget them.

And lastly, as a young adult, no matter where you are, there are always potential distractions, things that satan puts in your path to throw you off focus, spiritually, academically, in relationships or on the job. The Bible says: **2 Timothy 2:15** *Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.* The verse says, "Do your best." That is the best you can do.

Go out into the world! Distinguish yourself in YOUR own unique way. And know that your Church Family at West Chicago is behind you always. We've been blessed by you and so we commit you to the Lord and share, with our love, this familiar verse. **Numbers 6:24-26** *The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.*

Elder Jay

West Chicago Church of Christ *Family*

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

My father-in-law Rex Witham tells a great story that happened several years ago. He was gassing up his car at the Mini Mart in the small town of Mentone, Indiana and struck up a conversation with two young men. Being “older” he asked one of the men if he would stop by his farm and help him replace a tattered old flag at the top of his rustic flag pole. The young man agreed. He came out, did the job and refusing to accept payment, Rex asked him who he was. In this brief exchange, Rex learned that the guy was actually a grandson of one of his sisters. This young man was very personable and kind, and his help, kept Rex off the ladder. More importantly it resulted in the discovery of a “distant yet new” family member.

I’ve been encouraged lately for a few reasons. Firstly, many families in recent weeks have gathered together, and others likewise will get together around graduation celebrations. During these times especially, we are fortunate to see families at their best. Supporting and building up, honoring and acknowledging the accomplishments of the one being celebrated. What is more, these observances extend to friends and church family alike. We are allowed in, to take part, to share our pride and to offer our encouragement, and to be considered as extended family. This is not wasted on me.



Rex Witham's flagpole and tattered old flag.
06/23/21

Additionally, our gradual emergence from physical distance and a renewed level of close proximity of fellowship is creating an atmosphere of belonging and a renewed, or a new sense of “family.”

It’s a physical illustration of just how important it is to have people to support and encourage us, to remind us that we belong and are loved. Recent Sundays with the gathering of “families” (into “a family”) have been a great reminder of this very thing. **Psalm 133:1** states, “*How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!*” Our ability to coexist in love and to be unified as a body of believers, a family, is a delight to God.

We’ve been blessed through the spirit to discover “distant yet new” family members. From Liberia, from Haiti, from Honduras, from Nigeria and other places near and far.

Hebrews 10:24-25 “*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another.*”

Being adopted, the idea of family has a pretty powerful meaning for me. One definition identifies family as “all the descendants of a common ancestor.” Again, with my adoption, I see this definition being clouded by a more accurate and diverse reality. Many years ago when asked, “Which of your boys is your real son?” my Mom emphatically replied, “They’re all my real sons!” The Bible expresses a relevant and compelling parallel to this story. And, subsequently, it applies to each one of us. *This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.* **Romans 9:8** The Bible also says: *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.* **1 John 3:1**

When asked who His real children are, my faith tells me He will answer emphatically, “**They’re all my real children.**”

Elder Jay

West Chicago Church of Christ



Family

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 It says: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”*

We all have stuff that happens to us that we think no one else understands, has experienced or could possibly help us with. Often times we don't immediately know who to call, where to turn, or even what to think when we face unfamiliar difficulties. After we've been through a traumatic situation be it big or small, we may find ourselves in a position to give aid to someone else when this same difficulty arises. However, it may also give us the resources to help someone in any difficult situation.

Sunday night while getting into bed, I shifted wrong and my lower back went into a spasm. It was sort of like getting burned and electrocuted at the same time. I tried to lie flat on the bed but there was no position I could get into that allowed the spasm to stop. The pain made it too difficult to fight yet I couldn't lie still. As I expressed to brother Tim, for a short time I felt like I wanted to die. I was finally able to position myself in such a way that the spasm quit. However, gobbling the 12-hour maximum dose of Tylenol in a 7-hour period, and along with a sleepless night, I attempted to get out of bed. Of course this only triggered the same horrible barrage of pain from the night before. As Mr. DIY, (do it yourself) I thought I could get dressed, and at the least, allow Sally to drive me to the emergency room. All the time wondering in silence, “is this something they can fix?” With help, I was dressed pretty quickly, however, there was no way Sally could help me out of the chair and into the car without my going to my knees in pain again. Making a long story short, in about eight minutes there was an ambulance and ladder truck fire engine parked in front of my house. Between three firemen and two paramedics, they got me out of the house, onto a stretcher and into the ambulance. It only took three pokes to get an IV into my arm. They could have stuck me with a spear

gun, as long as it delivered the pain medication to relieve the agony in my back. The most redeeming part of the trip was the sound of the siren. I found this strangely soothing as we drove up Roosevelt Road toward the hospital.

I spent most of Monday in the ER and Monday night and all day Tuesday in a hospital bed. The distance between active and invalid can be so short. Anyway, my story isn't special or uncommon. We have individuals in our body who have experienced the same or worse. What makes it special is that it's allowed me to realize, then to empathize with the pain that another person might have experienced.

Empathy however is a much deeper subject. My understanding is, that to feel and display empathy, it's not necessary to share the same

experiences or circumstances as others. Rather, empathy is an attempt to better understand the other person by getting to know “their perspective.”

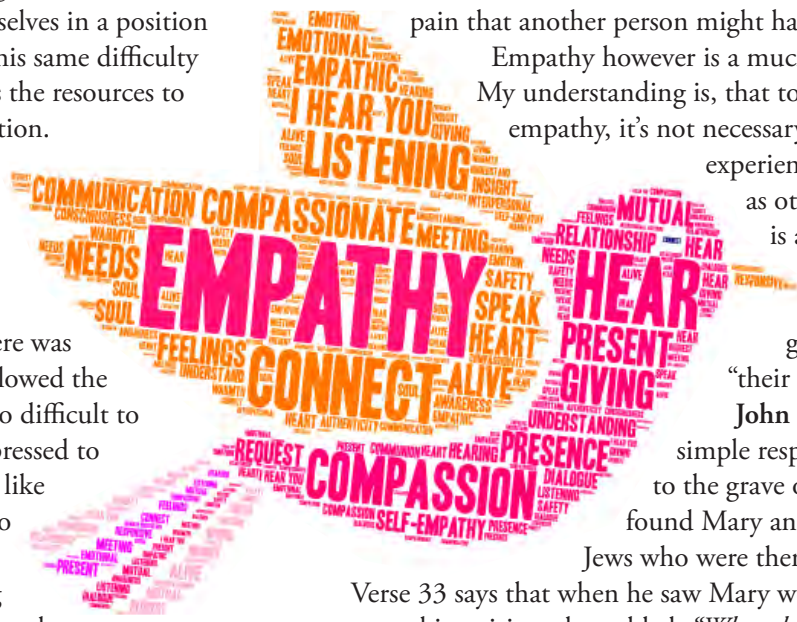
John 11 describes Jesus' simple response when called to the grave of Lazarus where he found Mary and Martha and the Jews who were there to offer comfort.

Verse 33 says that when he saw Mary weeping he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. *“Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied. Jesus wept.*

Empathy is a trait that comes from the heart. It's a desire to be present in whatever is happening with another person. There are those who have offered to be present in my recent uncomfortable experience. It's really not my way to accept or even ask anyone for help. Perhaps, I confess, this is something I need to work on. I am truly grateful, and am comforted, and feel blessed.

It is certainly not necessary to have been ill or injured in order to feel empathy for your ill or injured brother or sister! Rather, refer to *“the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”* Be well, be present, and love one another.

Elder Jay



West Chicago Church of Christ *Family*

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

It is kind of an honor to be with someone during their last moments of life. In a way it feels a bit like being present at their birth. For those in the family of God, I guess we are actually. Nevertheless, it's the marking of a very important event. And, it can have a truly lasting effect on us individually.

There are powerful and confusing mixed emotions that won't leave our minds. Especially in the case of a family member lost, it can feel unbearable to let go. For one who has passed from the family of God, we know they have a special reservation for permanent residency at a much better location. But, I have to admit, in these situations, my prayers can be all over the place. "God, please heal this brother", "Lord be merciful", "God, don't let my friend linger in this state for long." And then back to the beginning again, "God please heal this brother." These are times of great melancholy and we can stumble around in our grief without any relief or solace.

When I first visited Marvin in the hospital last Saturday, and seeing his condition, my mind was scrambling to remember those familiar things about him that I didn't want to be lost to me or forgotten with his passing. In a small way, I began to feel robbed of these very important memories.

What is strange, is that when our friend is lying in a hospital bed and not expected to survive, we really don't recognize them physically. This has always been my experience. What I have come to realize, is that God separates those good memories from the image of this body in distress. I believe he wants the good and the bad to exist separately.

We put this body to rest in the ground and we don't see our loved one in that state ever again. What develops then, is that suddenly those pleasant memories begin to come back. That through family and friends and reminiscence, that load eventually lightens some, and our good and precious memories are manifested again.

What I remember most is Marvin's physical presence. He had a broad smile and a soothing voice and always a peaceful countenance. This always made me feel peaceful too. I told Rochelle's sister Toria that Marvin's handshake was one of the most satisfying I can imagine. His physical gesture of greeting always put me at ease. He was a man of thoughts and ideas and a vastness of love for his family.

If I could even attempt to offer some kind of comfort or encouragement to Rayshod and Rose, I would say, take the love your Dad had for you, and continue to grow it.

In your family, in your relationships. In the way you relate to others. Marvin, your Dad, was a great example of this. It was pretty clear in the way he talked and shared even in our briefest conversations that he was proud and loved you without limits. He is now seeing you through God's eyes, but in fact, he's been doing this all along.



If I could attempt to offer some encouragement to you, the body of Christ, I would say, please reach out to Rose and Rayshod. Rochelle expressed the importance of this contact in helping them heal through this traumatic experience.

This verse has always been uplifting to me.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-17. *And now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with him the believers who have died. We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet him ahead of those who have died. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their*

Continued on page 2.

West Chicago Church of Christ *Family*

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

DIY (Do It Yourself) is a big thing for me. Taking on projects that might normally be handed over to someone professionally more capable and qualified than themselves may be the usual route for most people, but I always seem to jump right to YouTube for a solution. This is without fail my first reaction for remedy when something breaks down, something needs built, or when a new idea arises. My reaction comes from several different places actually. Most predominant is that I don't always trust someone to do a job the way *I think* I want it done. Additionally, I am too cheap to pay someone to do something I know how to do myself. What is more, is that often times my ideas are only half-baked and my project in many cases comes to completion through a series of subtle course correction until... suddenly, my final true vision comes into view, I make a couple tweaks, and... I'm finished! It would be impossible to keep pointing a hired craftsman, mechanic or landscaper in multiple directions until *I feel* comfortable and happy. This would surely generate an atmosphere of animosity, regret, and overtime charges.

What I have found as a major fault with my whole process is that I sometimes dive into a new project without benefit of required experience or knowledge needed for a successful completion. (I bite off more than I can chew.) Again, of course I'm thinking, YouTube should have the solution.

"How hard can it be?" This is the mantra I've used for years. It is a blessing and a curse. It's allowed me to save time and money and also, caused me to waste some time and money. Certainly, my positive outcomes have far outweighed my negative results, or else I would have put this personal Standard Operating Procedure away years ago. Nevertheless, it's important to remember that we have no guarantees when it comes to the unknown.

One of the easiest things to do when life gets rough is to take a DIY attitude. I am certainly guilty of this. Relationship

problems, spiritual struggles, financial challenges all qualify as things that should be aimed at insight from above. Unlike finding a video with steps to replace your worn brake rotors, or the best way to bake a perfect sugar cream pie, there isn't a great YouTube video available to help us when we encounter these other often troubling experiences. The Bible in **Isaiah 41:10** is encouraging. It says: *Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

I recently installed some Bluetooth lighting in my home. The possibility of controlling every aspect of the lights capability from my smartphone was intriguing. Crawling

through the insulation in the hot sweaty attic to install the lights was the easy part. Then came the PROGRAMMING of the phone app. I tried three times to select, group, test, then reset without success. Then under my breath, I whispered, "Lord I can't do this on my own." This application for prayer seemed pretty superficial at the time, but like any conscientious craftsman, God stood behind his Guarantee of Quality. My request was answered.

I'm sure He put me through the process several

times to help me develop familiarity, thus teaching me for future installations. I know I said earlier, we have no guarantee when it comes to the unknown. But prayer seems to bring a clarity and peace when I've used up my options. God may not complete the job the way *I think* I want it done, but his solutions always seem to go over and beyond what I could imagine.

Hebrews 4:16 says: *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

I may sometimes bite off more than I can chew, or struggle with a challenge where I have no experience. But God is faithful. In his hands, I can truly say, "How hard can it be?"

Elder Jay



Five years worth of DIY brake repairs – successful. Photo: Jay Hearn

West Chicago Church of Christ Family

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

Aaron Copland was an American musical composer who lived between 1900 and 1990). He was a teacher, writer, and later a conductor of his own as well as other American music. Copland was referred to by his peers and critics as “the Dean of American Composers”. His music has a wonderful air of Americana. By this I mean, the combination of notes, the musical dynamics (how loud or quiet the music is), his choice of instrumentation (violins, trombones, a piccolo for example), musical pauses and emphasis on certain notes and phrases create a mood, and incidentally, form certain imagery.

Fanfare for the Common Man is the piece that might be most familiar to classical music fans. My favorite is a tune entitled, *Simple Gifts* from his popular ballet composition, *Appalachian Spring*. Growing up in the

Midwest, I see back roads and meadows, blue skies and sunbeams rising or setting on the horizon. I derive from the music and imagery it inspires, a settled feeling, a contentment, a sense of peace. These thoughts stifle my need to rush, moving from one place to another without thought to the journey. It inspires me to “stop and smell the roses”. The season it brings to mind, is Summer.

I was able to spend some time with Don Lemley on Thursday and we got to talking about some of the things that we did during the summer months as kids. Some are things that children don't seem to do so much anymore. This prompted me to reflect on my own childhood. Examples include: running the neighborhood between breakfast and lunch. Then again, with instructions to be back by dinner. There were no cellphones. The only communication was mom yelling from the back door which could be heard halfway down the block. Then, the sound of the screen door slamming. We never strayed too far. I remember that every laundry load included at least three pairs of blue jeans



with grass stained knees. And any given week could include one or two skinned knees also. We climbed trees, and fell sometimes. We got up and kept moving. A stitched forehead or hand was not uncommon. They became a badge of honor and we considered them as war wounds. We mowed lawns on some days, and on some days, we mowed all day. We swam in the river, which I do not recommend. And, the neighborhood, our territory, seems huge. Our friends and school classmates lived next door, across the street, and

down the block and we knew everyone's mom and dad and they knew our parents too. For some reason I put all these memories to a soundtrack and put them in the context of Summer because I feel this is the season that most allows us to let our minds wander a little bit. **Colossians 3:15** says: *And let the*

peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. In my twenties, I used to bicycle in the country, sometimes for several hours. Being summer, and living in an agricultural community, the roads were lined with farms and fields, trees and pastures, streams and ponds. I always felt this to be an ideal surrounding. Images that God lay along my cycle ride to make the workout more enjoyable... and peaceful. This beauty gives me a connection to God. A feeling that all is right with the world.

God has prepared for us a place in heaven. And, as great as our memories of years past and those things we savor and enjoy now, they won't compare with what we will find in the heavenly realm. I believe, those things we find most pure, precious and dear will be with us in heaven and that God will provide the essence of these special things as part of our heavenly reward. I certainly draw peace from the important words of **Hebrews 13:8** “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*” Amen!

Elder Jay

West Chicago Church of Christ

Family

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

It's not supposed to be fun, that's why they call it work. I've been told this. Probably by one of my parents. I don't think I would ever have complained to a boss or coworker. From time to time you might hear of a person who has what is considered a "cushy job." But generally there is some challenge, either mental, physical, or technically related that an employee has to navigate to do the work effectively. Alternately, some workers are hired because they appear able to learn these new tasks over time "on the job." Hired personnel have specific capabilities and additionally a potential to increase their viability and broaden their skill-set over time. What I mean to say, is that if we are conscientious, we can't help but get better at our work.

I once expressed some trepidation when a new employer challenged me to learn some special skills related to a website development project. His response was, "you'll learn pretty fast, the only ability you need here at the start is *availability*." This is certainly a well known cliché but just one example of my "learn on the job" experiences. Justin Florio who was a good friend to so many once told me that if you're not entirely sure what you're doing, "fake it till you make it." What he was telling me was to do my best until I learn the ropes. I worked for a time with a man who told me that on his first computer programming job, he kept a code book hidden in a washroom stall behind a stool in the men's room at his office. That actually sounds too wacky to be made up. But, here was a guy following the same encouragement that Justin had given me. In a way, I feel his words fit well with a mantra I've always shared with my kids, which is: "How hard can it be?" Interestingly, most of us have had the experience of learning on the job. The first step, is to get there (on-time certainly) and do your best while you are there.

Thelma Griffin has shared a number of interesting stories with me about her work as the librarian at Hinsdale Central

High School. Recently however she told of her more formative experiences learning about the value of hard work. Her Dad was employed at Western Electric, but also owned and ran a small grocery store and deli at Grace and Paulina in Chicago. If I understand correctly, Thelma worked several summers to make money for her college room and board. I'm not sure of the exact time frame, but she worked summers in a furniture

store also. Her Dad actually charged her a sum for room and board during her summers at home. His rationale was that he was paying her tuition and that it was important for her to help with expenses.

Thelma was once hired to type out information for sale fliers. The employer assumed it would take her the entire summer. Because of her efficiency, Thelma actually typed herself out of a job. Every story she tells has an air of tenacity attached. This persistence and determination is how she operates. She quickly found another job working in a candy factory. Again, not to buy a pretty dress or a fancy, whatever... but to earn money for school.

God puts challenges in our path. If our duties were easy, our need to be conscientious would disappear and we would never get better at

our work. As our children grow, we pray for God to give them boldness and vision, and for tools to take advantage of the opportunities He provides for them.

This same prayer applies to our work in the kingdom of God. What is that thing you do for the Lord? Are you getting better at it? **Colossians 3:23-24** says: *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.*

Enjoy the respite from your labors this weekend and thank God for all of His blessings.

Elder Jay



Owen Smith, *New Yorker* cover art, April 2002

West Chicago Church of Christ *Family*

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

How many kinds of “change” can you think of? I can change my socks after stepping in a puddle, change the kind of coffee I’m drinking. (too much caffeine keeps me up at night.) I can change my answer on a test or change my mind about mowing the lawn. It’s too warm out today!

There is: Planned Change, Directional Change, Strategic and Operational Change. Some will recognize these as suggestive of elements in a business atmosphere. There is the change in my pocket I use to complete purchases down to the penny.

(not really appropriate to the pattern we have going certainly.) There is a change of season when the weather warms and the plants begin to blossom and bloom, and changes both negative and positive we experience as we age. The bottom line is, things change, some through deliberate effort and others through natural progressions or random action.

A natural statement from many young people is: “I’m just here doing whatever, and waiting for my life to start.” News flash! It’s all ready begun and changes are happening all around you. You might as well take some control over how things change.

For many, the thought of swaying from the normal pathway onto a rough and unfamiliar surface can be a bit disconcerting. Even if we know this new and different route leads to a potentially better thing, whatever that might be for you personally. There can be a string of tough choices and effort that goes into actually making a change work for the good. There is commitment involved and sometimes even a certain level of accountability. At the least, to ourselves. And, this can be stressful but rewarding concurrently.

There’s a great story in Acts about the man Saul who went through quite a great change. Saul you might know was

pretty intent on persecuting those that were following Jesus. What makes his task worse however is that his authority to do this came from the chief priests making his actions all the more harmful, creating fear of arrest among Jesus’ early disciples.

What happens then is that God determines Saul is actually going to be an instrument for the kingdom. By taking Saul’s site away on the road to Damascus, He sent him a pretty strong message. Like so often when a positive change

happens though, other people may be involved. God sent Ananias, albeit somewhat fearful, but no less obedient to make a contact with Saul at the house of Judas. Ananias laid his hands on Saul and with a very few words explains God’s intention for him. His site was immediately restored, he got up, was baptized and changed his message altogether. My Bible says in Acts 9:22 that *Saul baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.*



“Straight Street” in Damascus pre 1946. Judas’ house may be somewhere in this photo.

Have you every been going along a pathway in your life and realized that it wasn’t the right direction? I contend that everyone has experienced this to some degree. Saul’s encounter on the road was pretty extreme. Sometimes we can figure these things out on our own and sometimes we fall pretty hard. We may need help from someone else at times. The resulting change can be subtle or dramatic. In Saul’s case the word that comes to mind is “transformation.” In our case, the body of Christ, the word I think of is “restoration.” The trip we take isn’t always clearly mapped out. We can make many changes in our course, but the important thing is that no matter how much the roadway turns, we always ends up at Jesus. I pray that you safely reach your destination!

Elder Jay

West Chicago Church of Christ *Family*

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

I was fortunate to travel to Honduras on a couple of occasions to participate in activities attached to our partnership with Mission Lazarus. On my first visit we were fortunate (or not so) to land in Tegucigalpa. For those familiar with this flight, you might remember, it requires a pilot experienced with landing at this particular airstrip. It's not exactly a straight approach, requiring the plane to bank several times through the surrounding hills before aligning with the relatively short runway.

With that harrowing feat behind us however, we find we've arrived in a beautiful tropic surroundings. Driving south through the countryside toward Choluteca the scene was spread with hills and valleys, lush and green. The climate certainly matched what I would have imagined Central America to be. Warm, humid, and slightly breezy. Albeit, a warm breeze. Immediately I noticed one of the most plentiful things on the landscape. Rocks! Those in different shapes and sizes. Many in vibrant colors and others in earth tones and neutral hues. In our Midwestern farming mentality, all these rocks would certainly drive us out of our minds. In Sally's Dad, Rex Witham's fields, these rocks have been piled at the corners and edges of the field plot as they have been plowed up and unearthed over the years. The fields bordered in barbed wire. Still, however, the volume of rocks in northern Indiana can't match what I saw in Honduras. So, what to do with these interesting stones?

I learned that in Honduras there are individuals whose occupation it is to take these stones and stack them into structural barriers. It seems like it would be easy enough to pile the rocks up and have them provide a stable architectural element. I seem to remember Jarrod Brown explaining that the stones are arranged in such a way that they lock together, supporting one other with no mortar to hold them in place.

This would require an artist that is able to build using a very efficient arrangement of stones. Someone truly deliberate about their craft.

These stones can represent a multitude of different important ideas. The variation in sizes, shapes and colors could symbolize diversity. This, in both our origins and our talents. They can be representative of His (God's) desire that we work together, that we lock in and support each other to form a spiritual structure that can't be breached. The verse

from **1 Peter 2:5** clearly illustrates this where it states: *You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*

If I am a stone in this structure, I might be wondering, "what is my place in this spiritual house, this holy priesthood?" If you look at the image, the stones at the bottom are larger and more substantial.

I contend, they are

characteristic of God. He is our foundation. He holds us up and gives us a solid place to rest. The remaining stones are us. Some of us are in the middle. We're all bolstered up by God, but many of us act to hold up others also. We're locked together in such a way that we are immovable. Sometimes when difficulty or struggle happens, we migrate to the top, held in place by others. But all the time, God remains as an underpinning, a bedrock, a permanent support.

As stones, we could easily be scattered at the corners and at the edge of the field. Our true purpose in God's kingdom would be pushed aside. This is what Satan would like. But, together we form something greater. Something with meaning and with amazing strength. Its foundation is from above. With God as the artisan putting together the stones, we're part of a tight and deliberate arrangement. There is no need for mortar. We form a spiritual house! We are, a holy priesthood!



Elder Jay

West Chicago Church of Christ Family

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

At my house, we've always enjoyed watching movies. We have fun repeating famous quotes. Sometimes doing lame character voice imitations. For many of the more contemporary films we need our kids to explain the back story or to clarify character development so that we know who everyone is. This is most important when watching a Marvel movie with so many alternate universes. Movies are much more complicated to watch than they once were.

Movies with meaning and message are made richer by discussion that helps us to hash out what is being seen and heard and how the movie makers have artfully achieved these ends. In recent years however it seems, a movie's storytelling can often be clouded by visual effect or other production that doesn't rely on good acting to move the plot.

This past weekend while Sally and I were away, we saw a special showing of a movie at the **Peoria Riverfront Museum**. The film was entitled: **The Best Years of Our Lives (1946)**. Among other great actors, the main characters were played by Fredric March, Dana Andrews, and Harold Russell. Harold Russell who's character in the movie lost his hands in a fire on his carrier ship, actually did lose his hands as a member of the military in 1944. Each character, through events of the movie expressed a few interesting parallels. Certainly each man was a soldier, returning to previous life from his experiences at the front during World War II. Each was subject to challenges of a changing world and to the past routines of their military service. What was interesting however, was how each described their experience during battle.

Frederic March (Sargent Al Stephenson's) son exclaims, "Awe Dad, you've been to a lot of places, you must have seen everything." Al responds with great seriousness, "Son, I've seen nothing."

Harold Russell (Petty Officer Homer Parrish) was asked if he had seen lots of action. He replied, "I didn't see much of the war, not like you did, I was stationed in the repair shop



Fred, Homer, and Al returning home in the nose of a B17 Bomber.

below deck when our ship was hit. Sure, I was in plenty of battles, but I never saw the enemy or heard a shell coming at me." Likewise, Dana Andrews (Captain Fred Derry) a decorated bombardier explained that the nose of the plane, a B-17 Flying Fortress was his office during the war. His altitude lessened proximity to his target obscuring his ability to see what was below or to experience the destruction firsthand.

As military men, each had a job to do, an objective. For us however, our orders, job description, the location of our office, possibly far from where the final outcome of the work is located, can create a gap in our understanding. We don't always have a clear picture of what God's will is. With the military as a backdrop, these three men illustrate

the importance of doing their work with a confidence that they are contributing to a greater good. Of course, we call this faith.

Our work and support in Honduras, Haiti, Taiwan and Liberia is far from where we are physically. We've been to some of these places as individuals and small groups but overall, our proximity keeps us from seeing the action firsthand. We've been stationed in the repair shop, stuffing MAGI boxes or rustling up sponsors for our

Walk4Water activity. These are just a few among so many other works we've done over the years. Our faith tells us that as part of a greater good, we are meeting our objective.

2 Corinthians 9:12-13 *This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.*

You are the body of Christ and should likewise be decorated as soldiers returning from action and service. You may not always see the outcomes of your efforts firsthand, but God is praised.

Elder Jay

West Chicago Church of Christ

Family

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

Have you ever tapped your finger on an object? Maybe just randomly or because of nervous energy or out of curiosity? I sometimes do this as a way to find out what something is made of. Often times I wrestle with a compulsion not just to tap on every object within my reach, but to tap every surface to see where the best sound comes from. Each one has its own dynamic capacity and so, it's just a fun and interesting exercise.

Imagine from your experience, the tactile difference between a drinking cup made from plastic and one made from glass. There is a noticeable contrast in the feel of the surface, even the weight. Back to the tapping thing though. A plastic "drinking glass" has quite a dull, lackluster response when compared to the tapping of one made from glass which tends to make a clear, sustained, almost musical sound. Its physical component and makeup is hard and dense, turning the energy from striking into a resounding chime. I find it pleasing that these vibrations are both percussive and tonal concurrently.

This same idea also fits into my growing interest in guitar building. This is a semi-complicated topic I've been approaching somewhat slowly over the last 4-5 years. One idea here is that wood has an extra special ability to carry vibrations and turn them into sound. This happens when a string is plucked and comes into contact with the wood. Of course with a guitar, the strings are stretched between two bridges that conduct the vibrations into a great big wooden box with a hole in the middle.

Elder Rick and I were fortunate to attend a basic guitar building workshop where we learned some very interesting concepts that help to emphasize this point. One bit of information the instructor shared was that the strings, the wood, the bridge that conducts the vibration, all need to be able to work together without obstruction. Obstruction is anything that diminishes the woods ability to vibrate to

its potential. Loose braces, cracks in the wood, improper adjustment, even too much glue holding the instrument together can create an obstruction. Obstruction reduces its ability to properly resonate. Resonance can be described as the quality in a sound making it deep, full, and reverberating. As the instrument resonates free of obstruction, it is projecting a musical sound, a clear and audible message.

In Romans Paul is giving a description for the work that God is calling him to do. In **Chapter 1:16-17** he says:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to

last, just as it is written, the righteous will live by faith." I hear Paul saying, the gospel is more than words—it is the power of God for redemption and it's intended for anyone who has the faith to receive it. The message in Romans then, is all about God's salvation.



The Gospels resonate with multiple examples of God's important, resounding, clear and audible plan.

John 5:24 *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."*

Acts 4:11-12 *Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."*

When I read the words in these verses, I hear no obstructions muting the message of God's will for us. There's no broken or loose braces in what he is saying. He has used just the right amount of glue between us and the bridge (which is Jesus), providing a good and strong vibration, the beautiful words meant to draw us closer to him and to salvation. If we listen, we can hear him tap, tap, tapping.

Elder Jay

West Chicago Church of Christ *Family*

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

I've been thinking recently leading up to this particular article that it is important to define the difference between Memorial Day and Veteran's Day. As a younger person, I may have been guilty of linking these two important days together and unintentionally viewing them as two different names for the same thing. Memorial Day in May has always come with very special municipal ceremonies. Being part of the high school marching band in my town, I was naturally a part of these very meaningful observances. Because of my youth, I don't think I quite realized the importance the idea of Veteran's Day represents. As an adult, personally knowing men and women who serve and have served unselfishly, I am aware and look at this day in an entirely different manner.

Certainly we know that Memorial Day is important for remembering military members who have died. Veterans Day then was initiated in order to pay honor to ALL who have served in the military. I like the idea that we have an opportunity to express our gratitude to those among us who have served in the military.

A special day for veterans not only to know but to understand that we know their roll and importance in defense of our country.

As a kid I had a special sense and some mental images provided by my uncles, my Dad's three older brothers, about the experiences they had as soldiers during WWII. Hearing these stories certainly added much realism to the understanding that they had been in a war, sometimes under fire, and that no tomorrow was ever guaranteed. Their stories however were of a lighter nature. As an army mechanic, a sailor, and a cook in the 1st cavalry, they talked about the work they did. Places they traveled, antics they participated in to conceal monotony. They described allied families and individuals they met as they "rolled through" villages and towns in Europe, and the kindness they received. Clarence, my Dad's brother-in-law shared a story from his time in Germany. He and his buddies were sitting around the fire when they heard the sound of a shell. My understanding

is they scattered from the vehicles which I learned are generally the intended targets. When the dust cleared, a truck had been blown up. The only casualty besides the truck was his duffel containing his special can of coffee sent by my aunt in the states. This story he always laughed about in hindsight. My uncle Andy told of how on his first day working in the laundry on an Aircraft Carrier, his group all agreed to get pirate earrings and tattoos. Something I'll always remember were the images of *Betty Boop* tattooed on his forearms.

What makes the stories so meaningful is that they were and are experienced and told by ordinary men and women.

Normal people called on, and who responded.

Veterans Day recognizes ALL those who served honorably in the military – in wartime or peacetime. What I found interesting in my research is that, according to a poll commissioned by the Cohen Veterans Network, 49% of veterans feel uneasy with the expression, "Thank you for your service." I believe that most veterans feel that they were simply doing their duty.

Our parallel as we work for God is this: *And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." Isaiah 6:8.* Many have expressed in quotes, their perspective of just how important this willingness is.

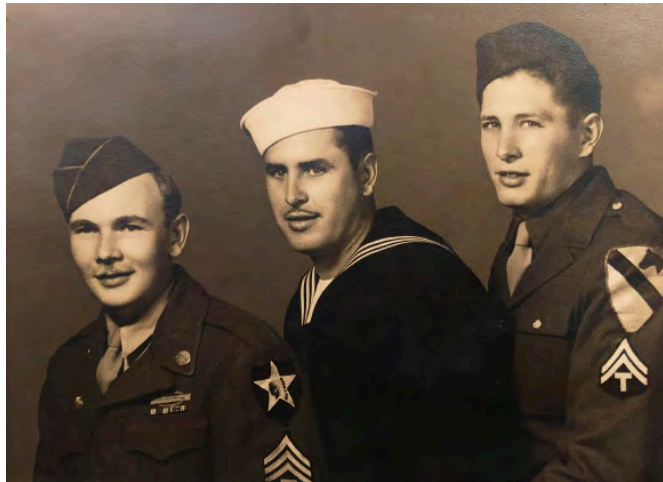
"Guard zealously your right to serve in the Armed Forces, for without them, there will be no other rights to guard."

– John F. Kennedy

"We must never forget why we have, and why we need our military. Our armed forces exist solely to ensure our nation is safe, so that each and every one of us can sleep soundly at night, knowing we have 'guardians at the gate'." – Allen West

Thank God for all our veterans. We are...truly thankful for your service.

Elder Jay



West Chicago Church of Christ *Family*

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

In my yard I have six Maple trees. When we moved in twenty-eight years ago, I thought, what a great thing, I now own six Maple trees. What I soon found out was that these somewhat tall, beautiful, canopy-like trees also produce a very high number of yellow and brown leaves in the fall, and without fail require a multi-day cleanup. Living on the corner however, my backyard is open to the curb at the front and side of my house, so I can easily start at my back corner and blow the leaves out toward the North and to the East, right up to the street so the city can vacuum them up and take them away.

My description may make it sound like a simple process and very systematic, but there are always complications that add to the work. Because I live on the corner, I am also subject to receiving leaves from three other neighbors. I understand they are getting some of my intruder leaves also. But it often happens that I get them swept out to the street in good time for the pick-up. Then a strong wind comes through and the leaves my neighbor didn't get raked up over the weekend are caught up in the gale and in a matter of seconds my lawn is covered again.

What is interesting to see, is my Maple leaves, the neighbor's Elm leaves, some Oak leaves, all mixed with two varieties of Pine needles and those big ugly seed pods from the Honey Locust tree two doors down. I don't understand how those big brown pods can make their way to my lawn 30 yards away.

I can easily complain about the neighbors and suggest that I should only have to deal with the leaves from my six Maples, but my job is simply to gather up the leaves. On the "outside" it might appear I'm assembling a mix of reds, yellows, oranges and browns into a very attractive pile. On the "inside" though, the leaves come from different trees, some from a great distance, possibly from as far away as two doors down. All possess different chemical properties and

react to their habitat in different ways. How else do we get to see such a diversity of colors, sizes and shapes? It has happened that I will see in this raveled mess, a really beautiful leaf I don't recognize. Strangely this might prompt me to search the neighboring lawns to find the origin of this new leaf that has entered the mix. It's really much easier not to question, but to merely enjoy the differences. In practical

terms each is an individual, and so, make for a more interesting gathering together into one pile. If we are open to metaphors we can combine these images with certain helpful scriptures.

Galatians 3:28 says: *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Paul is explaining to us the extraordinary unity that is possible through the love of Jesus.

I'm encouraged by so much of what he writes. This verse too, is no exception. **Philippians 2:1-4** *Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being*

like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

When I rake the leaves out to the street, I find that once they've been consolidated, they somehow seem to stay together until the truck comes to collect them. Consolidate is actually defined as making something physically stronger, or combining a number of things into a single more effective or coherent whole. There is neither Maple nor Oak, neither Elm nor Hickory, nor is there White Pine and Honey Locust, for they are all "one" in nature created by God and so also, are we, in Jesus Christ.

Elder Jay



West Chicago Church of Christ Family

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

Our church created a bit of a pleasant surprised for the Shults-Lewis representatives that came on Wednesday. They had in mind as they walked through the door, a simple collection for their commodity drive. When they saw the gifts that had been purchased, attentively wrapped and set aside for them to take for their young residents, they were genuinely taken aback. They were truly surprised.

We have been fortunate to have opportunities over the years to be supportive of Shults-Lewis. Certainly we have some indirect, though very important connections to the work there. Chuck and Bobby Miller were house parents and their family lived on the campus. Dewayne was a resident as a young man for a time. Others may have special ties also. All these have helped to make Shults-Lewis a special place for our church family, and one that we endeavor to continue our connection with.

There is a story in Acts 9 about a woman named Tabitha. The Bible says she was a kind, generous person and that she was diligent in the practice of doing good for others. Unfortunately however, Tabitha got sick and died. Being close to Joppa where Tabitha had lived, Peter was called by the disciple there to come with them without delay. When he arrived, he was taken to an upstairs room where Tabitha lay dead. There was a great outpouring of grief by all the widows there. They were weeping and showing all the wonderful garments that Tabitha had made while she was with them. If you don't already know how this account ends, **Verse 40 of Acts 9** says: *But Peter sent them all out and knelt down and prayed, and turning to the body, he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up; and calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive.*

It is amazing that through Peter, God brought Tabitha back to life. She had had quite an impact on those around her. *"She was abounding with deeds of kindness and charity*

which she continually did." I'm pretty sure that even before her death, God's plan was to continue to use her in some big way. Her kindness and charity were continuous after all. What I find satisfying about the whole story is that her rise from death became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

I have heard from several people recently here in the pandemic age, a sentiment that I believe has been more of an obscure idea in years past. It is... **"When I take time to help others out, my own troubles seem much smaller."** If you

have experienced this to be true, my challenge is to continue this practice and to encourage others to try it out for themselves.

There is a great directive in **Proverbs**. Chapter 3:3 says: *Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man.*

Not knowing how the good we do in God's name will affect someone else over the long run doesn't stop us from doing the good. Our love for Shults-Lewis

is a good example where we determine not to question, but to give from even our modest means. We can only pray that like Tabitha, our desire to share through simple acts of kindness and God's blessing, they might amount to something important. And as her story in Acts concludes, that some, or many, may believe in the Lord.

The verse from **Hebrews 10:24-25** is a great "call to action". *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* Without being boastful I want to suggest how proud I am that there are individuals and families in our church that seek to share love and kindness with others. And, like Tabitha, these gifts of love and generosity appear unceasing. Truly, this for me is no surprise.

Elder Jay



West Chicago Church of Christ



Family

Welcome to the West Chicago Church of Christ

What are images that you equate with Christmas? In my town growing up, I knew Christmas was coming when decorations would suddenly begin to appear on the light posts up and down Columbus and LaSalle Streets. The stores were brightly illuminated (this was before LED lights) and the church bells in town played carols that could be heard far beyond the perimeter of Washington Park.

Traditional Christmas music was always prominent on our AM radio, and if you were listening on Christmas Eve, the weather man always broke in to report a Santa Claus sighting. He was seen as an “unidentified flying object” over Lake Michigan but the description was always unmistakably Santa Claus.

The tree in our front room was jammed in between the piano and the big book shelf so the lights could be seen through the front window. There was a tiny nativity underneath that we would play with and it was strung with those big, multi-color, hot burning light bulbs that we thought would surely catch fire. I think the heat actually accentuated the smell of spruce as we knelt to put a newly wrapped gift underneath. Multiple times during the weeks leading up to December 25th, the film **It's a Wonderful Life** could be heard on the TV as background noise while we went about whatever holiday preparation was most pressing. Streaming Hallmark movies wasn't a thing yet.

I can remember our parents taking us to Marshall Field in Chicago, standing in line to see Santa and so to tell him of our Christmas wishes. I'm sure we stood there among the other tired, irritable children waiting to express what they wanted for Christmas. I love that I can remember this.

My mother had a book of popular Christmas music. When we were youngsters in the grade school band, and I guess all the way through high school, my brothers and I would play the instrumental parts while she accompanied us on the piano. Christmas is filled with sounds and images

that connect the past and the present. Certain traditions allow us to push the rewind button every year and experience established family, “fun stuff” again and again.

Every Christmas was a “White Christmas”. This is how my recollections tend to illustrate the past. I include all the best things and put them in place of anything less than perfect. In my memory however, there was a time I felt a little uncomfortable compiling a list of those things I wanted to receive for Christmas. I was adopted. I felt happy and fortunate to have a family.



Understand that these feelings were self-imposed. I was undermining my own importance in the family. I was never made to feel this way by my siblings or my parents. In time I became mature enough to understand my part in the family, reminded of my importance. Christmastime is truly a special family time and I felt a part of a special family. The things we do, the people we spend it with, the traditions, remind us of this importance. And, this idea is not limited, it's not constrained to those who share our genetic makeup. As important here is a great verse as reminder of our special adoption in God's house. **1 John**

3:1 *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.*

As an adult I shared with my younger brother the apprehension I'd had for a few years as a kid. I told him how I didn't feel entitled to anything. His reply was, “You are entitled to everything.”

Remember, *what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God.* No need to cover up the memories that are less than perfect. We don't have to wait in line at Marshall Field to receive his special blessings. We are reminded of our importance. His special love for us is great and it truly entitles us, to everything.

Elder Jay