

## About the meditations

On Fridays at 5pm in the King's Chapel, there is a student-led service of simple sung Evensong with plainchant psalms and canticles. Each week during term, a student or alum gives a meditation at this evening service. The meditations in this booklet come from the 2016-17 academic year.

Over the course of a year of retreats, sermons, meditations, informal fellowship, study sessions, and guest speakers, there are countless underlying threads that mysteriously connect this flurry of activity. The Friday meditations offer a chance for students to pick up on common threads introduced by others and to tease out thoughts and musings of their own. In this way, these meditations have come to weave the fabric of a community that is ever evolving as students come and go, and yet ever remains rooted in the eternal Word.

Students become spiritually vulnerable when they stand up in front of their peers to speak of their own broken hearts. In that moment of another's vulnerability, we can only offer our attention. In this way, the Friday Evensong Meditations offer students a space to practice a healing attentiveness to one another. With this printed collection of meditations, we invite you to enter into that space as well.

*Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.*

*Ps. 19: 14*

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*Thank you to all students and alumni who shared their meditations this year, including Nicolas Veltmeyer, Aidan Ingalls, Sarah-Jane Von Bredon, Meghan Kitt, and Verity Thomson.*

## Samuel Landry

September 23, 2016

In the earliest days of the earth we knew nothing but the sanctuary of God. We were harboured in his sacred garden to tend it and to name His creatures. The pilgrim Dante journeys through the garden of God before he ascends to Paradiso. Matelda, whom he meets there describes the lost state of communion which we once shared with the divine.

The Highest Good, pleased in Itself  
alone,  
Made man good, and for Good, and gave  
him this  
Place as an earnest of eternal peace.  
By his own fault, man did not dwell here  
long. By his own fault, he took up grief  
and toil, pawning his honest laughter and  
sweet play.

*(Purgatorio XXVIII.91-96)*

In our fall, we acknowledged a good and an evil. We divided God's creation into two spheres, the Garden of God, which was wholly sacred, and our own profane lands outside of the guarded sanctuary. In the language Dante, we have fallen from "Good" to "toil." We are in a state of change and discomfort.

In the book of the prophet Ezekiel, the divided world of our fall continues to dualise the world into the sacred and the profane. God speaks, through Ezekiel, saying:

Her priests have done violence to my law  
and have profaned my holy things. They  
have made no distinction between the  
holy and the common, neither have they  
taught the difference between the unclean  
and the clean, and they have disregarded  
my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned  
among them.

*(Ezekiel 22:26 ESV)*

Ezekiel writes as an exiled prophet, foretelling the eventual fall of Jerusalem, the city of peace. Jerusalem was our fallen image of the Garden-Sanctuary of God, which Dante calls the "earnest of

eternal peace" (XXVIII.93). In Jerusalem, God allowed us to re-enter his Holy Presence; yet, we did not revere it for what it was. We made the holy into the profane, the clean into the unclean, the Sabbath into work. While the prophet is indeed foretelling the fall of the City of Peace, the new Eden, we already had killed it, by not recognizing it as the Divine amidst the profane.

The redemptive plan of God, which will return all to the sacred, is declared in the writing of St. John the Evangelist. In today's lesson, we see ourselves as recipients of the sacred, and as its murderers. St. John writes:

Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath[...], the Jews asked Pilate that [the convicts'] legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. [...] But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.

*(St. John 19:31-34 ESV)*

The Passover feast was about to take place. No criminal could remain hanging on the tree. We only gave lip-service to the sacred, as the author of the sacred, the God-man Jesus lay dead. In Christ's life we see evidence of his work of re-sacralization. His sacred power proceeds from him into the profane world. For example, in St. Mark's gospel Jesus is in a throng when he perceives "that power had gone out from him" (St. Mark 5:30). What we touch is made unclean; what He touches is cleansed. The ultimate act of re-sacralization is this: "and at once there came out [of Jesus' side] blood and water." (St. John 19:34 ESV). From Christ flows the blood, which covers our sins, and is consumed in Holy Communion. The blood is mingled with water, in which we are cleansed from all unrighteousness, and baptized into Christ's own Body. Christ was pierced without breaking a bone. The Passover lamb is killed without breaking a bone. We declared that the bodies should be removed

to keep the feast Holy, when the body itself which hung ragged upon the cruel cross was the true Passover lamb.

Dante found himself in the Garden of God, created for us in the beginning of time; yet, he ascended further. He placed the Garden between Purgatory and Paradise. Through Christ, we are made much more than the original sanctuary of Eden allowed. The new Adam is far superior to the old Adam. At Easter Time the Western Church recites the Exultet, saying:

O truly necessary sin of Adam,  
destroyed completely by the Death of Christ!

O happy fault  
that earned for us so great, so glorious a  
Redeemer!

Through our fall, God has furthered our holiness; we can ascend as Dante. We must begin this ascent by extending the sacred to all the earth, through Christ's sacrifice. In Ezekiel, we failed to distinguish the sacred from the profane. In Christ, all is made sacred anew. God's sanctuary envelops the whole of the earth once more. Christ is restoring a more perfect Eden, and, it is in us that Christ claims his kingship and advances the work of re-sacralizing all things. "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand"

(St. Matthew 3:2 ESV).

## Amanda Shore

October 7, 2016

Recently I've been reading this spectacular and rather difficult book by Maggie Nelson. It's called *The Argonauts*, and it's a long feminist essay mixed in with metaphor and citation, and you stop being able to distinguish the writer's voice from the narrator's voice and I haven't read anything like it before. The writer describes the first time she learned about Anne Carson, and it was at a lecture that Carson was giving, where she was sharing her teaching strategies for students. One of the things she encourages young writers to do, is to *leave a space empty so that God could rush in*.

And perhaps this is just a nice mental image for a writer, and has nothing to do with God at all. I became increasingly suspicious because in the next sentence the writer offers a similar image, explaining that bonsais are often planted off-centre to make space for the divine.

But this got me thinking about how I approach communion with God, how I find closeness and how I make a clearing for God to rush in.

And this is in fact a crucial thing for us to consider, since it was this at-one-ness which was brought about by the resurrection and the new covenant—the purpose of Christ's death was to atone for separation, reconcile alienation, and close the distance between us and God that was created by sin.

And I like this idea of making a clearing because so often we're told to "put God at the centre" of our lives, as though I could ever have the capacity or responsibility to conjure up an idea of a God which I could fit into the centre of my life.

Rather, I try to find meaningful communion through prayer and solitude, which is indulgently my favourite type of devotion. I aspire to Hannah Arendt's solitude. *I am* Arendt says *'by myself,' together with myself, and*

*therefore two-in-one, whereas in loneliness I am actually one, deserted by all others.*

I like this active withdrawal, this intimate communion, this making space for God to rush in. That said, I wonder whether this type of devotion is selfish, and whether it's a product of growing up in churches that focus so heavily on individual sin and individual salvation. I was always taught that an intimate relationship with Christ is more important than ritual and good theology, and that's the core of a good Christian life. But I wonder if it's a product of the capitalist society we live in, where the individual is the only unit of measurement we know.

But what do we do about sin that isn't ours, that isn't anyone's, but that we're implicated in?

What do we do about large systemic issues that we're supposed to pray *about* or pray *over* but not to confess *to*. This comes up against my neat model of communion through solitude, which is comfortable, reliable, and allows me to reconcile the sins I know I committed.

But it's so much more difficult to reconcile privilege, histories of oppression, and natural disaster.

I'd like to think that there can be many ways to make a space for God to rush in that don't rely on the individual's comfort and meditative quietude. What if we could make a space for God through work, through service, through listening in community, through asking the right questions, through calling people in not calling people out, and through patience with others.

I hope that you all have time to celebrate the harvest, and to be with the people you love, and to celebrate God's blessings.

## Andrew Griffin

November 4, 2016

“My son, gather up instruction from thy youth: so shalt thou find wisdom till thine old age.” Let us today meditate on what it is to gather instruction and pursue wisdom.

“Come unto her as one that ploweth and soweth.” Wisdom is cultivated in a season of work and patience.

“Bow down thy shoulder, and bear her, and be not grieved with her bonds....Put thy feet into her fetters, and thy neck into her chain” I must submit myself to instruction and chain myself to wisdom... and like the uncertainty of a harvest, remain humbled by my limitations.

Wisdom is a discipline, an endeavor, and a submission that is motivated by this humbling.

Certainty does not belong to wisdom. Certainty is a relationship to my knowing. It is intra-subjective. Not a characteristic of the thing known.

To be certain is to be unaware of the participation of my own consciousness in the object of my certainty.

I do not need to put myself in the fetters and chains of wisdom if all I'm after is certainty. I will chain myself to wisdom because I am examining the role 'I' play in my knowing. Wisdom is self-conscious.

I come nearer to knowing something when I know how my prejudices participate in the thing I take myself to know.

“Search, and seek, and she shall be made known unto thee.” There is a Truth, and it is because of Truth, that I am concerned with the fact that it can be distorted.

Hegel proposes that certainty and truth come together in self-consciousness. How do I work towards self-consciousness and wisdom?

“Come unto her with thy whole heart, and keep her ways with all thy power”

“With thy whole heart” With my myself examined as a work in progress: emotionally, spiritually, and physically. “Keep her ways with all they power.”

Practice a persistent reflection grounded in the discipline of instruction.

An unexamined worldview is a total worldview. It explains everything. My reasons, justifications, and beliefs. The more I examine myself, the more cracks appear, and the less total my belief.

It is easy to remain impenetrable, to let no challenge break the defenses of my understanding of the world. I do not have to examine my beliefs, and nothing makes me do so: Neither university, nor my friends, nor the world around me.

My total view explains the world in terms of me, my reasons and attitudes are projected onto the world in such a way as to find a comfortable and stabilizing coherence. What is unknown already fits within my structure.

I make myself secure by making everything understandable. What is unknown is explained in advance of my encounter with it. To approach the object of my preconceived notion is terrifying. Since it far exceeds the concept I have limited it to, I am pushed to acknowledge myself both as vulnerable to the unknown, and limited in my capacity to know. We rehearse the dictum of Socrates often, but we still think we know the world.

I will propose that at the heart of the move to self-reflection is something irrational. To reflect on my outlook is to destabilize myself, to do something for which I do not have reasons. It goes against my reason precisely because I'm stepping outside of my own total view, and allowing something which I don't yet have reasons for, to participate in my world without being consumed by it. To give it an integrity of its own.

When I first walked into the chapel I was not making a rational decision, taking communion was not a rational decision. Choosing to believe, is not rational. BUT once you go to the altar, once you enter the community, and once you believe that being here holds meaning, THEN it makes sense. It is a leap of irrationality. Intuition maybe.

So, Wisdom does not possess the answers but is a hollowing out of myself into a readiness that does not accept uncritically, but approaches thoughtfully. “And then, shall her fetters be a strong defence for thee”

We read in Acts: “And the next sabbath day, came almost the whole city together, to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.”

If I reject Truth, let it not be because of prejudice. Let it not be because of envy, or a fear that my world is threatened. If I accept Truth, let it be likewise.

In our passage from Acts, there is a clash of identity and belief. The Jews see the multitudes, and they are jealous, they are threatened. In response, they dig in their heels, and become impenetrable to words. From thenceforth, there is only conflict to be had.

When I respond to an attack with fear, how do I ensure that I remain self-reflective? How do I avoid making a retreat into the security of my prejudices? Of us, and them. Of good, and evil, of home and abroad.

We grieve deeply with the victims of extreme violence all over the world.

When this points us to our own vulnerability, we must not rehearse harmful distinctions and so remain in the comfort of an enclosed world. We must not become impenetrable to words.

But rather, we must maintain a thoughtful relationship between our visceral demand for security and the truth.

We must examine our mind, our fears and insecurities, and approach the truth of the matter, in order that we do not create it.

Let us grieve the loss thoroughly. From grieving you do not return unchanged. It involves a reflection on ourselves as much as on the lives lost because of the way we are interconnected. We are absolutely vulnerable to one another.

So when we return from grief, let us return with a greater readiness to embrace others.

“For at the last thou shalt find her rest, and that shall be turned to thy joy.”.

## David Sheppard

November 18, 2016

"A tale out of season is as musick in mourning; but stripes and correction of wisdom are never out of time."

I have the misfortune to be speaking in the wake of the startling sermon given by our Chaplain at the University Service yesterday. I will in no way be giving a response to the challenge of that sermon -- not least because my remarks for today were largely written before I had heard it -- but rather what amounts to a digressive footnote to some of the same material.

If I may, I will begin by briefly recalling a few of the themes of the readings that we heard in the service yesterday. The epistle, taken from the first letter of John, includes an awestruck meditation on the relation between our present, temporal state, in which we know God's fatherly love for us through Christ by faith, and our eternal state, to be revealed and fully realized only at the end of time with Christ's return in glory. St. John writes:

...now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is.

In the gospel reading from Matthew, Christ exhorts us not to heed the "signs and wonders" that will from time to time be declared by false prophets to be portents of his imminent return. He then goes on to narrate a vision of that return, describing what are to be its unmistakable manifestations:

...then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.

The present week is that of the 25th Sunday after Trinity. Our Book of Common Prayer lectionary, though it lays out daily readings for 27 weeks after Trinity Sunday, specifies propers for only 24 Sundays. In accordance with the arrangement prescribed by the lectionary, the collect, epistle, and gospel that we heard yesterday are those appointed for the 6th Sunday after

Epiphany. As that Sunday is often pre-empted by the onset of the pre-Lenten weeks, these readings are just as often heard as we approach the end of Trinity season, as they are this year.

Placed at the end of the Advent-Christmas-Epiphany cycle, just before the turn toward Lent and Easter, these readings are a fleeting glance toward that final epiphany of Christ's return in glory at the end of all things -- a glance through and beyond the looming events of the Passion and Resurrection. Read in the present week, the week preceding the last Sunday of the year, they seem to be less "a tale out of season." Their apocalyptic content is highly appropriate, it would seem, for the very end of the church year, although in this they are very much of a piece with themes taken up at the beginning of the year, in the coming season of Advent.

In 1925, the Roman Catholic Church under Pope Pius XI introduced into its liturgical calendar the Feast of Christ the King, as an attempt to counteract the growing secularism of the age by re-emphasizing Christ's eternal dominion over all things. This feast was initially placed on the Sunday preceding All Saints' Day, but in the liturgical reforms of the late 1960s, the feast was moved to the final Sunday of the church year -- this coming Sunday. (In stark contrast to its simple designation in our lectionary as 'the Sunday next before Advent', the feast's official name was also expanded to 'the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.') The Papacy's stated reason for the change of date was "to better bring to light the eschatological importance of this Sunday."

In our calendar, despite its similar preoccupations at this time, the conclusion of the year is not punctuated by any particular moment of liturgical drama. It would in a way seem appropriate, even healthy, that the church calendar should finish off on a high note -- that its end should be marked by a grand climactic feast day, a moment of release, that would be for us an earthly and temporal image of that final moment of epiphany that we are taught to anticipate, to hope for, to desire. Instead, it feels as though we slip almost imperceptibly into the darkness of Advent. Our hope



remains in futurity, and the whole cycle of anticipation starts up again with a season of penitence and purification.

No doubt there is something right and good to be discerned in this particular way of marking the year's end. As we have heard in the first lesson tonight, "stripes and correction of wisdom are never out of time." We have been reminded not to be led astray by "signs and wonders" promising that Christ's return is at hand. And we have been told that to desire that moment is to look inward and prepare ourselves for it: "...every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."

I will conclude with a few lines of a sermon on our reading from St. John's epistle. St. Augustine writes:

"...because ye cannot at present see, let your part and duty be in desire. The whole life of a good Christian is an holy desire. Now what thou longest for, thou dost not yet see: howbeit by longing, thou art made capable, so that when that is come which thou mayest see, thou shalt be filled. For just as, if thou wouldest fill a bag, and knowest how great the thing is that shall be given, thou stretchest the opening of the sack or skin, or whatever else it be; thou knowest how much thou wouldest put in, and seest that the bag is narrow; by stretching thou makest it capable of holding more: so God, by deferring our hope, stretches our desire; by the desiring, stretches the mind; by stretching, makes it more capacious. Let us desire therefore, my brethren, for we shall be filled."

## Matthew Furlong

January 13, 2017

### “The Wound as Cosmic Structure”

Last semester I witnessed a remarkable meditation given by a young member of the Chapel community.

That meditation required a lot of courage to deliver. It was characterized not by sumptuous images and lofty feelings, but by alienation, grief, and even despair. In homage to his offering, I will attempt to contemplate the wound as a fundamental feature of the Christian κόσμος.

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The great French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) wrote an essay near the end of his life titled: “Immanence: A Life”. In it, he continued to explore the articulation of a singular life defined not by generalizing determinations such as rational substantiality, or political animality, or the so-called *homo oeconomicus*, or even the vaguely defined “philosophical subject”.

He argued that although we may experience the events which befall us as accidental relative to what we construe as our ongoing self-sameness, we become subjects through our subjection to what singularly befalls us as singular lives in the world of space-and-time.

That subjection also includes our transformation into human individuals through human relationships and institutions. Our first words are uttered in response to others. After all, who said the first word? We receive our names before we know them; many of us are baptized in infancy; we meet and make friends; we fall in love. We even befall ourselves through illnesses, injuries, psychic trauma, personal disasters – all sorts of wounds.

Deleuze says, “my wound existed before me.” I take this to mean that, in a very real way, we come to embody, or even become, our wound. This task necessarily incorporates the entire history of the world. In Christian terms, it all has to do with the cosmic principle that we receive our lives instead of making them.

Today, I would like to confess my wound to you.

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I have been separated from my best friend for almost fourteen years. You have probably heard her name in this Chapel. I thank you for your prayers for her and her children. Of her and me, I will only say that when you have sat in long silence staring into the black depths of another’s eyes, you can come to appreciate John 1:5, “And the light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.” This separation is my wound; I was born to become it.

How to confess my wound if its cause—and object—is excluded?

I will tell you about my time at the College as a Teaching Fellow in the Foundation Year Programme.

When I studied here from 1998 to 2003, the College was yet able to maintain for us students the image of a harmoniously-ordered whole; a just city; a family. I believe that that image even prevailed in FYP’s dominant pedagogy at the time. When I returned in 2010 the reality was clearly different. I quickly participated in a union drive to establish legal protections and bargaining rights for FYP tutors when I realized how the College treated them.

I felt indescribable disgust in realizing that my own tutors had been subjected to basic, fundamental mistreatment in undertaking their duties. I was not a very good student in FYP. But my main tutor, Dr John Duncan, just about saved my life. The connection between FYP tutors and their students can be very profound – at least in my experience on both sides of the table. To my knowledge, such a relationship does not exist anywhere else in Canadian society. I would be happily surprised to discover that it exists anywhere else in the world.

It is not wrong to say that, during the three years that I taught here and organized the tutors’ union, which I was later to lead, I was consumed by nihilating rage. The College’s hostility toward our undertaking was

beyond evident. I wanted frequently to destroy everyone whom I saw as perverting the College's mission, which Father Doctor Robert Darwin Crouse's thinking still embodies. The callousness, the blithe indifference, the thoughtless application of diabolical principles to our Collegial life all appalled me endlessly. When I left here in 2013 under acrimonious circumstances, I believed I would never return. I even cursed the place. It's taken over three years, but I have returned, although I know it won't close my wound.

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Nico's meditation, with its injunction to walk into the unknowable divine presence, to be co-present with God, in unknowing, brought me to consider the question of the wound as a cosmic structure.

In Dante's *Comedy*, the pagan philosophers reside in the Inferno precisely because they are not wounded. Their κόσμος is closed and complete. Only the Christian κόσμος is defined by the irruption of an irreducible difference—of a veritable *event*, in Deleuze's terms.

I think that all the great contemporary lay philosophers of singularity and the event preserve something essentially Christian in their thinking. Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault are just two names here among many. Their care for absolutely singular things defines their escape from an ossified world of monotonous representations and homogenizing concepts: the freedom of the market; the rights of man; progress in history; the substantialized and anthropomorphized divinity; the "philosophical tradition".

If we connect them to someone like Gregory of Nyssa or John of Damascus, I would suggest that these lay philosophers strive to transform even the most banal material things into something like religious icons. By trying to perceive corporeal things "without fantasy" (that is, without abstracting them away from space, time, and accident), they draw out each thing's immanent incorporeal ground. Finite, corporeal things are images of the divine *by inversion*, as the great theologian and philosopher Jean Trouillard might say.

For thinkers like Foucault and Deleuze, the history of the world—which Foucault refers to in a minor text as "a polycephalic cloud of events"—consists in eternal

newness. As Trouillard, again, says in his essay "The One and Being," "the procession is polycentric." We can grasp that eternal newness—or, perhaps, Christ—through Foucault's accounts of how we endlessly invent and actualize social κόσμοι. We can also see it in the black depths of another's eyes.

It is no accident that puncture wounds symbolize Christ's death. They are especially vicious and hard to treat. And, of course, the cosmic wound is eternally announced, inflicted, and suffered simultaneously in His despair on the Cross.

In the terms I have here adopted, thinkers like Foucault and Deleuze posit the wound as a pre-ontological reality. Thus they rob us of the strategies, policies, alibis, stories, and excuses we concoct in service of control fantasies. Concupiscence comes in many forms. And yet their lesson is not that we should reject the world, like Polyphemos in Homer's *Odyssey*, but rather that we should dive headlong into it *through the wound*.

I have returned to my College, not to heal my wound but rather to embody it; or, more radically, to become it. As Deleuze would put it, our infinite ethical task is to become equal to the event that befalls us.

But becoming for Deleuze is not identical to natural generation and corruption. To become is to undergo, or suffer, transformation, transubstantiation, transversalization — even transfiguration. Our conscious and self-conscious moments are linked, through conversions. We emerge as bread emerges out of flour, water, and fire; as wine emerges out of its *terroir*. We are named, we speak, many of us are baptized, we make friends, we fall in love, we suffer. For Deleuze, our psychic well-being hinges on whether we embrace or deny this reality.

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For all the years that I refused it, my wound turned me to diabolical ends. I have hurt many and been hurt by many in trying to make them be my best friend, or put them in her place, because I wanted to deny my wound instead of becoming it. I have also pushed and thrown people away for the same reason. I also have lied to myself and others for the very same reason. I have wandered in the region of dissimilarity. And the truth about my time here from 2010 to 2013 is that I brought my wound with me. I inflicted it on others

and myself, even in and through the good things that I wanted to do. Father Thorne probably recognizes all this better than I, and probably recognized it before I did. That goes for Shannon Parker-Nicolle and Father Nick Hatt as well.

For these things, I am truly sorry.

That is why I keep returning to the Chapel. I keep returning because I can tell you with certainty that if I do not become my wound, I will annihilate everyone and everything around me.

I keep returning to the Chapel because the Chapel generates the Return as the advent of the new and everlasting wound. We celebrate the *κόσμος* as a grand singularity realized throughout infinite singularities, themselves composed of infinite singularities.

Yet the very *eventality* of the *κόσμος* takes everything away from us. As Foucault says:

you read, for example, that a man killed his wife after a dispute: it's quite simple daily life which, at a given moment, in the wake of an accident, of a deviation, of a little excess, has become something enormous, and which will disappear straight away like a rubber balloon. There you go ... a daily life, an argument about a piece of land, about furniture, about old clothes. That's it: the unconscious of history; it's not a kind of great force, of a vital drive, or death. Our historical unconscious is made up of these millions, of these billions of little events which,

little by little, like raindrops, erode our body, our way of thinking;

and, eventually, these raindrops wash us away. As Father Doctor Thomas Curran has put it here in this Chapel, we are called upon to rejoice and mourn, at the same time, for the same reason.

I return to the Chapel because for me the Chapel is a moving, expressive image of the cosmic wound. For me, the Chapel is an event celebrating the wound sorrowfully, mourning the wound joyfully. Here, we co-generate and receive the Return in our midst. When I say "the Chapel," by the way, I do not primarily mean this building. But we also cannot understand, much less become, the Chapel without it—not for the time being.

I keep returning to the Chapel because the encounter of broken hearts is a salvific instrument here. Here we heal not by closing wounds. We bear one another's burdens. We assume and affirm the punctured *κόσμος*, and understand our wounds as cosmic mysteries. Maybe our spirit animal is a patchwork quilt, or an ancient rock wall crumbling quietly into the Earth in an abandoned Newfoundland outpost.

We come to the Chapel again and again in hope of the conversion that *is* conversion, pure becoming. Here we openly welcome the Return into the inner *and* outer reaches of mutable matter.

I keep returning to the Chapel because I cannot become my wound alone.

Ἀμήν.

## Sarah Griffin

January 27, 2017

At a recent Chapel exec meeting, Father Thorne said something that provided a lot of clarity for my developing understanding of who we are as a chapel. At the risk of misquoting, he explained that we need to be wholly secularized people attempting to do religion, rather than its opposite: a religious community attempting to understand and relate to the secular. I see the evangelical framework I grew up in largely characterized by the latter, and thus it is the framework I put in question today. I am beginning to understand the secular to be a necessary step towards my turn towards the Good, the True and the Beautiful. I must be fully in and of the secular to have the demand made on me to turn towards the divine. The secular cannot be an end in itself, despite its fragments of goodness, but rather, it is a necessary part of my turn towards God. Kierkegaard helps me understand the necessity of the secular. It is only in my being a wholly secular individual that makes clear to me my entrapment in being a selfish and reflective individual, that encourages my desire for something outside of my current framework.

I am easily satisfied with many things in this world. In a beautiful way, these things can point me towards the Good in their goodness. I can share an element of goodness with another, as they share an element of goodness with me. However, neither of these elements are the whole Good in itself, but both, together, point towards the existence of a Whole Good that they both partake in. I am fortunate to find moments of peace, joy and contemplation in community regularly. It is this that informs my understanding of what the Good is to begin with. However, with every moment of peace, joy or contemplation, an unsettled impermanence necessarily joins it. In some ways current pleasures are a teasing pleasure, as in every moment of it comes with it the knowledge that it is impermanent. I often fool myself into thinking that there is a whole satisfaction in these worldly manifestations of good and become complacent solely in them — a self-conscious ignorance of a sort. Perhaps even more dangerously, I also sometimes fall into the belief that these are the only satisfactions that I will be able to find. With so much of our way of

thinking being informed by the underlying assumption that this is all we have, how and why is it that I, and we, have become so complacent in accepting the state of things as they are, and curbing our desire for Good? Kierkegaard's leap towards the divine rests on the assumption that the religious individual is dissatisfied with the emptiness in the world. So, what has made me stop craving more?

As a secular person, I am forced to confront my insecurities and instability. In me, these things are prior to virtue, because it is only in them that I realize my emptiness and lack and see the need to turn towards Goodness and virtue to be satisfied. I can think of three possible responses when confronted by the ultimate emptiness of the world in its present state: defeat, distraction, or cultivating a desire for something greater. Defeat seems to be quite a popular response. I think it manifests itself in the notion that we can dwell in our problems, become complacent in them, and in some distorted way, we seem to learn to celebrate them, as seen so often in the language of 'embracing' that seems to celebrate pretty much absolutely everything. I think that what hides behind this is a complacent defeat to admit that there is pain and emptiness in the world. Distraction is no better, the more we distract ourselves to avoid confrontation with truth, whether it be through channeling our emptiness into abstract politics or something else that stops us from looking inward and relationally to others, the more we force ourselves into an ignorance that curbs our desire to find anything better.

The person who is able to make a turn towards God is the person that is willing to look emptiness in its face and see it as it is. This confrontation with emptiness can only be satisfied with a turn towards the Good, the True and the Beautiful. The proper desire for this turn towards God can only be cultivated when it is seen as the only option — we must want it more than our desire to distract ourselves from emptiness, or deny it, which I think can be produced in our humble recognition that a turn towards God is the only way in which we can live originally and with meaning. I must see myself as being left completely helpless apart from it, and in that way it should consume my desire. This

requires a confrontation of the desire for more, assuming the underlying belief that there could be something more to begin with. Kierkegaard writes that this turn towards God takes place at a crisis point when “the cruelty of the abstraction makes the true from of worldliness only too evident”. What is the nature of this turn towards God? It is easy to recognize a lack and a desire for more, but the nature of the turn is trickier. I think that, perhaps, the first step must be the recognition that my identity is reflective of the world, and that I myself am an instigator, in my complacency, in being that way. I must be humble in recognizing that I will only find satisfaction and peace in God, a perfect being.

I don't want to be entirely cerebral about this. But I have made that to be my comfort zone. In many ways, being cerebral about the necessity of the secular and the relationship I have with God as a result of that, allows me to have a false sense of accomplishment in my understanding of my relationship to God, because it doesn't require that I actually act on it, or engage my individual being with it. Focusing on the theological side gives me a sense of completion, when in reality,

making my beliefs practical perplexes and scares me. As a secular individual, how do I define myself in relation to God, practically? And since I struggle with this, does it mean I have not yet truly realized the emptiness of the world sufficiently that demands a turn towards God?

Today's New Testament reading from 1st Corinthians writes, “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me”. My original being comes from God's originality. It is not entirely me that makes this turn towards God, it is also the Grace of God that confronts me, so perhaps a primary stance of a humble acceptance is most adequate. To assume that I could make this turn towards God from the secular alone is naïve and perhaps a good explanation as to why I am completely daunted by it, and feel compelled, as I think much of the world does today, to distract myself from it or deny it.

## Ginny Wilmhoff

February 10, 2017

May the words of my mouth and meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you, Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

In 2011, I began a Master of Victorian History at the University of Manchester in England. I had previously studied at Mt. Allison University, earning a BA in History and Religious Studies, and I dreamed of becoming a professor. Doing the Masters was the first step along that path. And I loved learning about the New Poor Law of 1834 by reading *Oliver Twist*; exploring people's new conception of time as they moved from life on the land to life as factory workers; and viewing Emile Zola's take on both the seductive delight and exploitation of consumers through the new department stores. And yet, after I attended an open house day for the PhD programme at Manchester, I realized that I was not willing to make the sacrifices necessary to be a professor. The jobs in academia are now few and far between, and I was not willing to take on the unstable life of an academic.

While I was coming to this realization, I began to feel a call to the priesthood once again. Back in undergrad in 2002, I had discerned a call to ministry, but I was a Roman Catholic. My denomination did not allow women to be priests, so at that time, I had put my call on the back burner. While I was in Manchester, though, I finally decided to become an Anglican after several years of soul searching, and while participating in parish life there, I began to feel a call to the priesthood once again. I entered the discernment process with the Diocese of Manchester, and after my studies were over, I got a job as a parish assistant. And then, my plans all fell apart. Just before I was to complete the last step in the discernment process before seminary, the diocese told me that due to immigration regulations, they would not be able to hire me after I graduated. I was devastated.

Life went on, though. While I was in England, a couple of people had mentioned the Episcopal Service Corps to me. The Episcopal Service Corps is a one year American volunteer program. Young adults live in community, working for churches and social service agencies in exchange for housing, a stipend, and

student loan forgiveness. I applied and was hired as a case manager by the Bethesda Project, a Philadelphia non-profit serving the homeless and formerly homeless. I would have 20 men on my case load with severe mental health and/or addiction diagnoses, and my job would be to guide them through the social service system while also helping them with daily needs. I had never been to Philadelphia, had never even seen *Rocky*, was completely clueless when it came to US governmental systems, and knew next to nothing about schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, or addictions. I was scared out of my mind.

And yet through the relationships I built with those men, I learned what it means to trust in God. These men had lost everything. Their families had abandoned them, or they had abandoned their families. They lived on the bare minimum of government assistance. They had multiple health problems accumulated from their time on the streets. Their minds and their desires had betrayed them, and they were strangers even to themselves. And yet, they got up each morning and supported and loved one another. Through accompanying them to appointments, being yelled at by schizophrenic men, celebrating birthdays, helping them obtain health insurance, enjoying summer picnics, enduring the frustrations of the addiction treatment system, and even mourning the loss of one of these men, I bonded with each and every one of them. None of that had been a part of my life plan, but without that experience, I would not have learned what it means to love, what it means to have your heart broken for another, what it means to sacrifice for another. It had not been a part of my plan, but it had been a part of God's plan for me.

In our Old Testament reading this evening, we heard from the prophet Jeremiah. He lived through a time when the people of the Kingdom of Judah were caught between the designs of three foreign powers: Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. Jeremiah begins his prophetic ministry by calling the king of Judah, King Josiah, to conversion and reform; the prophet feared that without conversion, God would allow the kingdom to fall into foreign hands. King Josiah did

enact reform, but his son, Jehoiakim, like many sons, went in the opposite direction of his father, reinstating pagan practices. He was power hungry and not willing to listen to the prophet. Finally, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE, and many of the people of Judah were carted off to exile in Babylon in 586 BCE. Jeremiah himself ended his days in exile in Egypt.

Abraham Heschel has described Jeremiah as the prophet of God's *pathos* or divine sympathy. Though the prophet preached judgment, he ardently pleaded for conversion because he believed that God is merciful and would accept His people with open arms if they would only repent. And Jeremiah took his ministry personally. Jeremiah was willing to undergo suffering in order to get his message across, and the people's lack of conversion broke his heart. At one point, God demands that Jeremiah not get married, not have children, because once the kingdom is destroyed, the future for people will be one of terror and not of hope.

And yet, that is precisely what the people are given in the passage we heard tonight, hope. Chapter 33 of Jeremiah is couched in a larger section filled with a vision for Judah's future. Chapter 33 itself contains seven oracles which proclaim a new future for Judah. Hope does not lie in a sudden reversal of fortunes for the kingdom and its people; unlike a Hollywood movie, destruction will not be averted at the last moment. The oracles have been written while the people are in exile in Babylon, so the kingdom has already been destroyed. Jeremiah is reminding the people, though, that God's vision is bigger than their's, that God still has mercy and compassion for His people, that a new future does lie in wait for them. What will that future look like? The people of Judah see Jerusalem in this way: 'a waste without human beings or animals', in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without inhabitants, human or animal...' It is a place without the promise of life. It is a kingdom once held by unstable, weak kings, kings that lost their kingdom because they sacrificed to idols, because of their need for power. Yet, God promises that the kingdom and the city will once more be filled with life. The city will be ruled by kings, strong in the love of God. And priests will one day be able to offer sacrifices once again, and thank-offerings will be brought to the house of the Lord which will be rebuilt. In an oracle

which was read this morning at Morning Prayer, we heard these words: '[I]here shall once more be heard the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank-offerings to the house of the Lord.' God had asked Jeremiah to refrain from marriage as a sign to the people that Jerusalem would be destroyed, that life would not be possible there. Here, though, God shows the people that though new life might not be possible there now, Jerusalem will one day be ruled by a wise and good king; it will be a place where priests bring thank-offerings, a place of marriage, a place of new life.

And this peace and prosperity will all be due to the power of God. The God who will bring about this new life is the God who created heaven and earth: 'the Lord who made the earth, the Lord who formed it to establish it—the Lord is his name.' Jeremiah is exhorting the people to trust in this creator God, the God who made a covenant with His people, an unbreakable bond that will never be sundered. They are to call out to this God, and He will answer them. 'Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known...I am going to bring it recovery and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security. I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first. I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them; they shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it.' The people themselves will not be able to bring about the recovery of the city. Instead, only God will be able to cleanse them from their sin, restore the city to them, and bring about the new life of which they dream. They must trust in the mercy and the love of God.

Because of human fallibility, the restored city is often just out of our grasp. In Christian theology, the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ allows us to see and experience what life lived with God looks like. That does not mean we will enjoy the earthly prosperity and security promised in Jeremiah in this life; human fallibility still prevents that from happening. At the same time, we will have life lived securely with God in the next. While we are living in the exile of this life,



God is calling us through the prophet Jeremiah and Jesus Christ to live according to this vision, according to God's vision. Even when it is difficult to trust, even when we are living in exile, God wants us to live in His life in the here and now.

The times we live in today may feel similar in some ways to those of Jeremiah. We have political leaders who are beyond narcissistic, only concerned with their own personal gain and not the welfare of their people. We live in a modern and post-modern environment in which many of the foundations we have trusted in the past, religion and even science, are no longer trusted by many people. Since the 2008 recession, many millennials have not been able to trust that they will find jobs that will support them. Even if we do find work, we can't trust that our jobs will be stable ones, carrying us through the next few decades of our lives towards retirement. We, like the people of Jeremiah's day, feel like we are in exile. We no longer know what to trust or even how to trust, and the result is often anxiety, emptiness, escape, or despair.

And yet, God is still there for us. When we trust in the greater vision of God, that God knows things that are hidden from us, that God sees us, loves us, and will care for us, the results can be surprising and extraordinary. We may never have politicians that get things right, that really care for their people. We may never have stable futures with jobs that pay us good salaries. We may never achieve all the things we planned for ourselves. At the same time, God has a

plan for us; it may only be truly fulfilled in the next life, but it will be fulfilled. Trusting in God in this way, what we have been calling this year the *Via Affirmativa*, won't be easy or without cost; Jeremiah trusted in God, forsook marriage and family, and was even taken prisoner, living in exile in Egypt. And yet, he was transformed by the love of God. One of my favourite bands, Hey Rosetta, has a song called Psalm. The lyrics go like this:

But often it happens you know/  
That the things you don't trust are the ones you  
need most/  
So it's cautiously into the dark/  
But you see before long that your  
eyes will adjust/  
And under the night you  
can hear/  
The full moon rise like a psalm  
in the air/  
And the air goes into your  
lungs/  
And around in your heart and on  
through your blood/  
It goes cautiously  
into the dark/  
And you see before long  
that we all have a part/  
And under your  
skin you can feel/  
That the fear that you  
feel is what will set you free.'

We may feel a lack of courage to enter the darkness we fear, but even if we go cautiously into the night, the moon of God's promise, God's vision for our lives, will guide us. And don't be surprised if the air enters your lungs, goes around your heart, and on through your blood, transforming you along the way.

## Karis Tees

March 10, 2017

“And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God?”

I have nothing clever to say here. I have no memory for scripture, poetry, or sermons. Key ideas, phrases that move me, well-spoken words – all but a vague shadow is erased from my mind as soon as I leave the room or put down the book. I have a good memory for songs and lyrics, but that has mostly to do with the shape of the words and the lilt of the music. I can learn a song by heart within half an hour, but I might sing it for years without much idea what the lyrics are about.

This frame of mind in which I live makes it very difficult to write a meditation like this as we approach the close of a semester that has been embarrassingly rich in ideas and experiences – the series of Empathy talks, Friday student meditations, the guest sermons on Thursdays, the Winter Retreat with Dr. Roberta Barker, Dr. Susan Dodd’s quiet day, the Reading Week trip to Toronto. The urge to attempt a kind of synthesis, or to at least speak thematically, is difficult to resist. But the urge is useless anyways, because I don’t even remember fragments so much as indistinct blurs, as if every image has slid by without stopping to rest.

Our Chaplain sent an email out recently sharing a commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, which reads, “... the wise man seeks truth, and when he finds it, he does not hesitate to adore it, to subject himself to it. Have we Christians, in comparison, become indifferent, not because we have not found, but because we have found too much, all at once?” Fr. Thorne suggested that perhaps all of the beautiful discussions in the Chapel have been “too much, all at once.”

Although I am actually not convinced that this is the case, I am confident that this talk will only add another fragment or blur to your saturated minds. So, I will speak simply and briefly about just one sentence from the first lesson we just heard.

The sentence is this: “And when Joseph’s brethren

saw that their father was dead, they said, ‘Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him’” (Gen. 49:15). Having followed Joseph’s story for the past week and a half in the lessons for Morning and Evening Prayer, I find this attitude absolutely scandalous! I felt a kind of righteous indignation when I read it. As if Joseph has just been biding his time until his father died to take revenge on his brothers! As if the forgiveness and reconciliation that Joseph continually pours upon them in word and action is only for show! As if the fact that they are living in the land of Goshen with food to eat and water to drink is of their own doing! Who do they think they are? Of course, no part of their lives is of their own doing, and that is precisely what they cannot stand. As they see it, Joseph’s brethren owe their lives, the lives of their families, and the entire future inheritance of Israel to their brother, and they assume he is finally going to cash in on the debts they owe. An eye for an eye. They project their own selfishness on their brother Joseph.

But the attitude of the brothers is not surprising or scandalous. It is commonplace, and we can recognize it immediately in our own souls. When we have done serious harm to another person, the thought that they might truly forgive us and even wish the good for us is actually *beyond* the scope of our imagination. We may hope for forgiveness, but we do not expect it.

During Lent, we greet one another with the phrase, “forgive and bless.”

One of the few distinct but entirely unoriginal thoughts I had at the beginning of this year was that forgiveness must be a gift granted, a sudden or slow opening of the heart, and not an act of will performed by an agent. Forgiveness belongs to God. We can only pray that we might be overwhelmed by the forgiveness of God; that a space of forgiveness may be opened in our souls.

Joseph’s brethren do not owe their lives, the lives of their families, and the future inheritance of Israel to their brother, for he has only ever been an instrument of God.. In the final lines of the final chapter of Genesis, when the brothers ask for Joseph’s

forgiveness, they receive nothing less than the full forgiveness of God, in the person of their brother Joseph:

And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him. And his brethren

also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants. And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.

## Marie Dolcetti-Koros

March 17, 2017

I have learned that I am certain of very little - and those things that I am certain about are general concepts that are vague and that I probably haven't had the courage to question or examine.

Our fall retreat where Hannah Mills spoke about climate change, and Father Thorne's sermon in November about Abouna Yostos and his question "What time is it?", spoke to an urgency I felt within myself to *do something*. But what? Everything seemed so broken, there were wounds everywhere. What would anything change? What could it possibly matter? These doubts and fears grew within me, and for a long time this year I have been caught in a cycle of doubt. I have been lead to question much of what I held irrevocably true. If nothing we do in this world changes anything why try? Why bother even hoping if my heart will be broken anyway? I began to doubt the value of everything I was doing outside the Chapel. What is the point? Why care? Kirsten Pinto Gfroerer's visit brought the realization that action takes *courage*. Courage was not something that I felt I had.

For a time this year the Chapel and the experiences and community that come with it felt like a separate part of my life. Walking through the Chapel door felt like entering a different world. Along with my coat I shed the trials of the day, left the physical world behind and relished in the music, the hymns, the community. In here, the things that mattered in the world on the other side of that door didn't matter. They became irrelevant, if only for a time.

I spoke of the Chapel and of the rest of my life as two separate worlds. They seemed so vastly different, so unrelated. Bringing them together felt impossible - how could I when even the language spoken in here is so vastly different from what is spoken out there? Here we speak of universals, of love, eros, fear, truth, of good. The Chapel was an escape. How utterly wrong to see it this way. This is I see now the very opposite of what this space ought to be. What a realization! I have of course heard you all say it many times in many ways, but it is a realization I have had to come to slowly.

For many months now Father Thorne's comments about the secular and the sacred have further problematized this separation for me. The notion of the secular completely in the sacred and the sacred completely in the secular. If the secular and the social are wholly present in one another does this contradict the notion of moving beyond the social and political within the Chapel? Can they both be true? This is further problematized for me in the notion of the Chapel being a social space. We are in community - by definition social, together. It seems to me that the Chapel is itself social.

Slowly these two worlds began to come together. I believe that they seek the same things, that our search for the good, for community, for love and respect of one another is also sought on the other side of that door. What were two different worlds have now become two different spaces.

I now find myself in an elected position with the student union here at our university. I will speak frankly and say that I doubt the value of the work that I will engage in this next year. What can it change? What *good* can it possibly do? It is in many respects *easier* in the secular. Distinctions are clear, there is a clear set of expectations, guidelines, I know where I stand in relation to those around me. This position with the union requires me to have a position, to make distinctions. I am reactive, negotiating between opinions and guidelines and expectations. Out there, I have assumed a stance of calling out. I call out distinctions, making them more visible. This calling out is in part I believe, expected of me in this role, but I also recognize my own freely given complicity in it. Within the Chapel we partake in what I think is a calling in - in community, together, we call one another in moving beyond the differences we experience outside the Chapel.

I struggle with how to reconcile these two spaces, space that are and ought to be very different. I wonder whether I can live authentically in both spaces - and partake in both without betraying the other. Can I be authentic to myself - am I capable of holding the two together and being faithful to both?

I have spoken with many people about this over the past couple of weeks, so please bear in mind that many of these ideas are not my own, rather, an amalgamation of ideas from many people. The Chapel and what I have thinking of as the rest of my life from a dialectic. They inform each other, each lending itself to the other. They are however vastly different in their seeking out of this good. Each space uses a different language, each has different expectations, ways of interacting, speaking and even thinking.

The Chapel allows us to be vulnerable, to trust others, to doubt and to fear. In fact, I believe the Chapel *requires* these things of us. In many ways, the Chapel has become a space I need. I need a space to be vulnerable, to doubt, to question. To dwell in

uncertainty, and for this uncertainty to be okay. And I believe that I will need it even more given the nature of my position with the student union.

The Chapel will remain for me a place of refuge, but not one from which I can escape the world. I do not have answers to any of the questions that have followed me this year. Only that the same urge to do *something* is still strong within me. I want desperately for the vision that we hold in the Chapel to inform my life. But I have a deep fear of losing this vision.

Thank you.

## David Butorac

March 24, 2017

Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.  
- *Song of Solomon* 2:10

I have been reading recently the book written by a famous poet and man of letters who became a Christian and who was also diagnosed with a rare and vicious form of cancer, and whose name is, felicitously enough, Christian Wiman. While the book meditates on the meaning of suffering at great length and elegantly, one passage in particular caught my eye and so without further ado, I would like to provide you with what I happen to think about empathy. He writes:

The temptation is to make an idol of our own experience, to assume our pain is more singular than it is... In truth, experience means nothing if it does not mean beyond itself: *we* mean nothing unless and until our hard-won meanings are internalized and crystalized within the lives of others.

*My Bright Abyss*, 162

It struck me at that moment that the other speakers' remarks about empathy were beside the point, for they conceded the results of that temptation. They began, in some sense, with a barricaded self and then spoke about how one might breach that solipsistic castle, or even if we should or could, precisely because it is a castle. Yes, that pain is singular - so what can we do about it?

This reminded me the time when after second year, I was still vibrating from writing a paper on Plato's *Theaetetus* and I was home having lunch out with my mother at a posh restaurant. And of course, I was really very insistent that *aisthesis* was not *episteme* - sensation was not knowledge, *you see* - and my poor mom... we went on to talk about precisely this temptation, this idol. "David, you will never know what it was like to lose a child." My mom referred to her daughter, Natalie, my oldest sister who died 12 years before I was born. She was *never* mentioned at home, in that 60s generation kind of way (1960s, not

1860s) and so this was a tactical nuclear weapon employed upon my argument. Undaunted, I persisted. "But mom, if you can't share this, then anyone else who has suffered something devastating can't share it either, then we're all alone..." There was silence and then the subject disappeared from view.

"The temptation is to make an idol of our own experience, to assume our pain is more singular than it is..." Every temptation feels good and is good; every temptation insinuates itself into the wrinkles of our desiccated souls and invites us to a top of a temple and offers a chimera, the inverted world of the darkness of sin. That is the great conceit - we are alone and helpless. This same principle can be applied equally to the suffering others, usually by a third person, under the rubric of 'privilege'. *You* can't understand them; they can't understand you; *understanding* is right off the table - everyone is alone - is how I read this. But I must be certainly wrong about this.

T.S. Eliot, near the conclusion of his great poem, *The Waste Land*, has thunder clap and, through the *Upsbinads*, it is interpreted three ways. Here is the second:

DA

*Dayadhvam*: I have heard the key

Turn in the door once and turn once only

We think of the key, each in his prison

Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison

T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 410-414

Eliot makes reference here to Count Ugolino in Dante's *Inferno*, in the ring of betrayers, who is locked up in a tower with his three children, whom he soon cannibalizes: "then hunger did what sorrow could not do". It is a gruesome image and one of horrendous *loneliness*. But Eliot intensifies the image of the story, to characterize the *modern* waste-land of our civilization and souls, *of us*: *we put ourselves in prisons, we lock ourselves up*: "We think of the key, each in his prison / Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison". And yet the thunder - that thing that breaks through and startles us - is interpreted here as "Dayadhvam": *compassion*. From

inside out and outside in, how is compassion, empathy, possible here? If I am locked up, then I can't help you. Indeed, I can't even conceive of you. If you are locked up, then I can't help you. We are all locked up. Eliot writes,

What are the roots that clutch, what  
branches grow  
Out of this stony rubbish?  
Son of man,  
You cannot say, or guess, for you know  
only  
A heap of broken images...

My sense of the empathy talks was that the castle of Eliot's Count Ugolino was conceded: we are alone and all locked up, can I toss you some bread or something?

We grow accustomed to the dark and we like it. It becomes an unconscious social norm too - everyone around you is alone and likes it and has habituated it and completely internalized this logic. Castles are safe, even if they are in fact a self-incarceration. Like a fish in his water, he can't even *see* it, right? Because we cannot truly reach each other in this view, only more rules and regulations can fix things - only *abstractions* can be offered. Only more yelling and violence and despair - from apparently *opposite* sides of the political spectrum, often arguing for the *same* thing. The rage from politics and from university students - if I dare offer an opinion - is, in a real sense, an attempt to smash the walls of the castle, so there's *good* there too. Let me clear about that - in a sense it is a reaction against the loneliness. But what's the end point here? I think with this logic, it's a tragic war of attrition, a war of all against all, *although it intends to heal*.

What are the roots that clutch, what  
branches grow  
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,  
You cannot say, or guess, for you know  
only  
A heap of broken images...

*We* are broken images.... Instead of "we are the change that we have been waiting for"—what a perfectly diabolical paraphrase of Eliot's Ugolino?!—instead of this, what about *rest* and *danger* and "mud, dirt and hair" and true *eros*? What about the bloody particular? What about *you*, *belonging* entirely to God; you, *belonging*

entirely to your neighbour, you, there? It makes you feel uncomfortable, doesn't it?

Let the draw bridge down, open the gate and show me your wounds, Jesus says to each one of us by name. *How did I know about them?* Oh my sweet one. You think you are loveless and alone? Come with me that ye may be lovely. You. It is tender—pure romance—and it is terrifying—like pure romance—and it is the only way out of our violent, vicious loneliness, of which *all* bear the wounds. Bp. Hawkins noted that the first moment of the Resurrection was one of Eros: "Mary", Jesus said, a man and woman alone in the garden early in the morning. "Mary".

Last year in Athens for Greek Easter I was at the local church around the corner from my place. The service started outside, the doors of the church firmly shut. Then at midnight the priest—acting as the resurrected Christ—demanded, in no uncertain terms, that the door be opened. The Charon figure, inside of the church, was equally confused and dismissive: "No one has ever come through that door! It's shut! Go away!" (*Doesn't he represent our despair?*) "Don't you know who this is?", the Christ-figure priest responds. It escalated. Fed up, the Christ-Priest hoofs church doors open, hard, and then there was not so much a procession, as *an attack*. The castle of the hell of the self, captured; captors, ransomed and freed; the ushers hit all of the chandeliers and so all of creation was reeling and spinning.

I think the challenge is to see how the story and images of Christianity articulate the problem of humanity—alienation from God and then from neighbor—the story that we are so familiar with, the story that we are all ashamed to say we believe in to our friends and family, and how the solution which it offers - being saved by Jesus - addresses precisely the root problem, *the* problem, the problem that *I* feel, that I think you might feel, that we can see everywhere around us. Can we smash the idols of our own pain and loneliness? Rise up, my love, my fair one, says our creator and redeemer, and come away.

*This Meditation was given at The Sou'Wester Restaurant in Peggy's Cove, NS on a spontaneous trip with visiting guests from Saskatchewan, Rev. Wilfred and Theresa Sanderson.*

## Harry Critchley

March 31, 2017

A much smarter man than I once told me that education—and particularly education in the liberal arts—represents an opportunity for people to come together in dialogue with one another so as to learn to know, love and live fully within the world. However, what I want to talk about now is the opposite of that: the profound suffering and alienation experienced by those who feel cut off from or hurt by the world and for whom there is little to no possibility of anything like a life of dialogue with others.

I'm here today as the founder and director of the Burnside Prison Education Program, a Dalhousie program which offers free courses in the Arts and Social Sciences for men and women at the Central Nova Scotia Correctional Facility in Burnside, Nova Scotia. We're one of two university-affiliated correctional education programs in the country and all our instructors are faculty and graduate students working here in Halifax. We're in our second year of operation now and offer about twelve to fifteen courses per year at the correctional facility. We're also working with the Department of Justice and Literacy NS right now to develop a literacy tutoring program to help meet the needs of the large numbers of incarcerated men and women with limited reading skills.

You've likely guessed that I'm here to talk about prisons, and particularly the potentially transformative power of liberal arts education in prison. I should say that I understand the prison system can be a topic that many of us would prefer simply never to have to think about. Angela Davis writes that prisons are intimately tied up with and yet disconnected from our daily lives. We take them for granted as a grim yet necessary control mechanism on society, but are often afraid to face the realities they produce. As a result, we fail to come to terms with the possibility that anyone, ourselves included, could end up there, and instead reserve such a fate for 'others,' or even just for 'evildoers.' However, we can't afford to continue along this track. Canadian society has been ravaged by over a decade of

draconian "tough on crime" policies, which have contributed to a dramatic growth in the overall prison population and record high incarceration rates amongst Indigenous people, women, and African-Canadians.

Here in Nova Scotia, inmate overcrowding and chronic understaffing have led to a serious spike in violent incidents, with assaults—especially those on staff—increasing dramatically in recent years. Between 2010 and 2015, there were 8,500 reported cases of the use of solitary confinement in this province. Conditions for women incarcerated in the provincial system are especially bad. A combination of high security conditions and a lack of programming have led to the phenomenon of 'pleading up.' Many women actively request *longer* sentences so they can be sent to the federal women's prison in Truro, where inmates have more frequent access to their families, better counselling and work training programs, and less restricted living quarters. You may also have heard recently about Floss Cramman, who—despite living in Canada since she was eight—is currently on the docket for deportation, and who was also only un-shackled from her hospital bed at Dartmouth General after the intervention of our provincial Justice Minister, Diana Whalen.

What I want to argue today is that the policies of mass incarceration and all that they entail—systemic racism and sexism, the criminalization of mental health and, more generally, the false division between 'criminals' and 'victims'—threaten to undermine the very conditions under which our world can be something we share together. From the inside looking out through the bars, they cast the world in a brutal, alienating light, as that *by* which one is judged, but *of* which one has no part. From the outside looking in on the prison, they represent a black mark on our society—that *in* which one is implicated, but *of* which one wants no part.

However, it is my conviction that, despite all this, we can still reconstitute our common world and that the liberal arts can and perhaps must play a role on



this. So, I know I've already said a lot, but I'd like to end quickly with a story that I think exemplifies what I'm getting at here.

Last year we offered a seminar at Burnside on Sophocles's *Philoctetes* with Dr. Eli Diamond of Dalhousie's Classics department. The play tells the story of a Greek archer, who, en route to Troy, is abandoned by his comrades on a deserted island after contracting a terrible illness. Ten years later, the Greeks return to the island, heeding a prophecy that the Trojan war will never end without Philoctetes's return to battle. During our discussion of the play, one of the older men in the class asked to read a passage that had resonated with him:

This man was born nobility, / From a  
house second to none. / Now he has lost  
everything, / Alone without a friend in the  
world, / Living among the beasts in the  
wilds— / Miserable, hungry, and  
desperate, / Suffering incurable, endless  
agony. / The only answer to his hopeless  
cries / Is the perpetual call of Echo, / Far,  
far away in the distance.

He commented simply: "That is us. He could be describing life in here." Many of the other students felt the same and acknowledged that they too often felt they had no one to turn to.

Philoctetes's hatred and desire for revenge lead him to totally reject the possibility of communion with the world and with others—a radical, life-denying skepticism reflected in the rocky crags and barren landscape of Philoctetes's island prison. The fluorescent lights, stale air, and very walls of our own prisons here in Canada likewise seem haunted by a deep, and oftentimes suffocating sadness. Despite the

daily realities of overcrowding, and even double bunking in segregation cells, this sadness can and often does harden into a overwhelming sense of isolation—what Kierkegaard calls a "demonic despair" that rages against all of existence. That this despair can be generated within and even perpetuated by the institutions that structure our common way of life—and so produce a kind of radical marginalization that calls into question the very possibility that this life could be something 'common'—was a persistent concern for the Greeks. This isn't something that we've left behind, however—we might think of Adam Capay, for instance, rotting away in solitary without even so much as a trial for four years in the Thunder Bay District Jail.

Reforming our public perception of prisons means changing how we think about the people in them. This does not mean exempting people from the things they have done, but simply affording them the basic dignity Hannah Arendt calls "the right to have rights"—the right to appear and be counted as one amongst many and to have one's thoughts and opinions recognized as meaningful within our public discourse. When ten men in orange jumpsuits shuffle into a cramped room to discuss Homer's *Odyssey* or a poem by Audre Lorde, each reveals aspects of the world the others could not have imagined. There's an old Latin saying I've always liked: *amare et sapere vix deo conceditur*—even a *god* finds it difficult to love and to be wise. Though often extremely painful, the revelation I'm talking about here is vital if we are to affirm the world in the fullness of its delights and sorrows, and so reestablish it as something shared between people who both do harm and are harmed, but who never lose the ability to start anew.

## Andrew Griffin

April 7, 2017

“Off you go, right now, this minute, stand at the crossroads and bow down; kiss the earth you have polluted, then bow down to the whole world, to all four corners, and tell everyone aloud: “I have killed! Then God will send you life once more.”

I want to follow these instructions given to Raskolnikov, a murderer, by Sonya, a prostitute. Doing so, I might just get to the point, instead of breaking the silence with as many words as I am now going to speak.

In Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov finds no silence. The crime makes so much noise. Raskolnikov's crime is a cry for life. He wants to usher in a new truth by his own force of will, with one creative act done by strong will that will redefine human morality. But he wasn't strong enough.

Following the crime, Dostoevsky writes,

The conviction that everything was deserting him--even his memory, even the ability to put two and two together--was becoming an unbearable torment: “What, is this it already, my punishment?”

There is no silence in a disordered soul. “What, is this it already, my punishment?”

Led by another, Raskolnikov is brought back to life, little by little, slowly and unsteadily. There is no moment to isolate and label ‘repentance’. By no means does he go willingly and he never secures himself in any intention to admit his crime, or return to life. Just like the instant of committing the crime itself, Raskolnikov's confession, first to Sonya and then to the officials, takes place at a moment of indecision, without thought and without reason.

In ancient mythology the hero--Gilgamesh, Odysseus, Aeneas, Orpheus--descends into the underworld for the sake of knowledge, assistance, or to recover a lost love. He returns with understanding.

In North America that metaphor is past, we go to war, we give 'em hell, and leave progress in our wake.

There is no need to go through hell or tragedy to realize life's comic resolution.

But in parts of the world the ancient myths still resonates, perhaps King's is one of them. Aiming for the underworld, we knock on its door. Nietzsche tells us to forget the door and embrace life. Sartre says that the door is a mirror. Heidegger tells us to keep knocking because we'll learn something about ourselves. Derrida tells us that the hollow door is not real-ly there. Our modern city, our modern words, bar access to hell.

Let me tell you about my descent: unsteady, unapologetic, slow. I began recoiling from truth that I did not think was secure. I wanted something unequivocally true; a truth against which no one can level a reasonable contradiction. At no point was I looking for hell.

I liked the comfort of Christianity but it couldn't stand up to my questioning. There was some unseen manoeuvre made by Christians which no one was able to address. I was faced with a decision: partition my life, hold tightly to the fact that I “believe”, and for the sake of those good, secure feelings, subject my ‘real’ life--out in the world--to a list of rules that ensure that the good ‘feels’ continue. I did try hard but the pain of failure was too much, because I could not keep up my side of the bargain. I began to recoil. I didn't want to utter a new word like Raskolnikov, I still wanted THE word, any real word, but it wasn't there.

I recoiled and rested, and recoiled, and then again, until, every so often, I faced the nothing, nihil. I knew that there was further to go when I found myself facing a decision that I had to make. If I have to insist that something is the case in the face of an equally reasonable alternative, then I have not yet found what I am looking for. If it is true, then I ought not to have to make it so.

If the reason for which I live my life can be contradicted by an equally sound reason grounded in the same dirt, then true and unequivocal meaning

must not be possible! This *may* be good news, but, like Raskolnikov, I am no Napoleon. If 'all is relative,' then every truth effaces itself the moment it is spoken. Only the loudest and most tormenting silence remains.

And *with language went reason*, my remaining stronghold. In the words of Nietzsche: "Truth is error." "The conviction that everything was deserting him--even his memory, even the ability to put two and two together--was becoming an unbearable torment"

But that's just silly, relativism is only a problem because I have been brought up to expect immutable meaning. Using that same unseen maneuver, Plato made truth timeless and for the proceeding two millennia humans learnt to secure themselves in an immutable truth. I need to simply stop seeing time-bound truth as a problem, and start celebrating the freedom to make my own meaning. Look around, reason works, let's just use it. I didn't see myself in hell. The search was over, the non-existence of truth was pinned down and put to the test. It was time to learn to cope. I look back: Was I in Hell?

I decided on existentialism, which told me that it could be a humanism. I wasn't convinced, but allowances had to be made. I can't really "owe" anyone anything, but in other people was the only place I found distraction. I have to admit, people are the best meaning-makers out there, perhaps I can fall back on them, and maybe even they on me. Together we might bide our time enjoyably. Don't think this is a story of progress. I have not rejected existentialism.

I decided that I had to discipline myself for the sake of securing my happiness--I wanted to avoid emotional ups and downs. At times I thought that I was keeping up appearances "in the meantime," even though I had

already 'conclusively learnt' that meaning did not exist. I read the Nichomachean ethics. Through habits, by force of will, I grounded my the new meaning that I decided upon. Why this meaning? No reason.

I became very good at coping. I found love, and a more or less workable ability to keep my life in order. It still took a lot of distraction, and the corollary, concentration. Very quickly, all I did became for the sake of my love. I returned to reading seriously. My philosophy changed: essence may not be immutable, but I cannot make light of how firmly it has cemented in time. As I was drawn by my love into the Chapel, I resolved to attend because this tradition spoke to my soul. I have to choose something.

Raskolnikov's return to life happened simultaneously with his return to community. The first sign of life took place when, after taunting and torturing Sonya with his words, he spoke cryptically about his crime, and Sonya understood his meaning. "Oh what have you done to yourself?" She said in despair and, leaping to her feet, threw herself on his neck, hugged him and squeezed him tightly-tightly in her arms... A long unfamiliar feeling burst over his soul like a wave and softened it at once."

The return to community is the return to life. "This is what it is to go aright, or be led by another into the mystery of Love." Nothing of hell ought to be lost in the return to life. My journey into the underworld, the tragedy of humanity, is not complete. But reason is now given meaning by understanding, and I am not the measure of things. What a burden that was. But now I see anew--a divine comedy.

Remain in hell. Pursue truth. Hold 'tightly-tightly' to one another. And do not despair.

