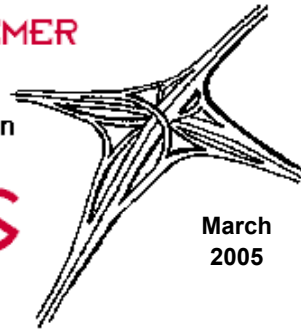




CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

A Christian Liberation Community  
in the Episcopal Tradition

CROSSROADS



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36 South Street, Morristown, NJ 07960

(973) 539-0703

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## Lent: A Season of Changes

*by Peter Arney, Warden*

As we enter this Lenten season, we are reminded of the themes of change, renewal, and resurrection. We are challenged to take inventory and consider what kinds of changes we need to make in our own lives. Sometimes these changes are personal and manifest themselves in the ways we think about things. Often changes are incremental and don't seem to have much impact on our daily routines. Sometimes they are performance based and affect the way we behave. Such major changes represent milestones where we acknowledge that our life after the change is no longer the way it was before hand. A career change is an example of such a major life change.

For me, I experienced such a change about 10 years ago. In the mid 1990s, I was working for a Corporation as a project manager for an instructional design group within the company. We were responsible for developing and delivering training programs for employees whenever new programs/systems as well as major enhancements to existing programs/systems were released to employees throughout the company. As a former teacher, instructional design seemed like the right line of work as it is focused on developing training programs that enhance adult learning. It was also challenging as each new program or enhancement had to be assessed and yesterday's knowledge and skills could quickly become obsolete. I enjoyed the challenges of the job and the opportunities it provided me to interact with employees from all over the country.

At the same time, I often thought about working in a helping profession. I began to feel more strongly that I was drawn (perhaps called) to do something that serves the interests of people in need rather than achieving the goals of a Corporation. I began to take note of comments people would make that I was a good listener. Some would ask if I had ever considered working in a helping profession such as counseling or as a therapist. A very dear friend of mine is a Social Worker and I remember speaking with her at length about the Social Work profession in general and her work in particular. She encouraged me to take a closer look at myself and to really listen to that voice within as well as those voices from others and to discern what they were telling me. At the same time, I had a close friend at work who was going through the difficult work of caring for elderly and ill parents. I tried to be a good listener while at the same time I was aware of the need to assist people in such situations and help them to feel supported and not so overwhelmed.

I had several experiences as an AIDS buddy through the Hope House in Dover. I saw death and dying up close and personal. The interesting thing is, it did not horrify me. Rather, I was fortunate to experience the death of my first buddy Steven as an intimate, gentle and loving experience. As I look back on that time, I believe it was a gift he gave me which has led me to the hospice work I do today. I learned from Sr. Pascal, who was one of our instructors in the buddy program, that a good way to die is a good way to live, surrounded by love and connection. And so, in the Fall of 1997, I left the Corporate world to attend Rutgers Graduate School for Social Work. In my second year, I had the opportunity to do my field placement with the Morris County office of St Barnabas Hospice. After graduation, I was hired by them as a full time social worker assigned to the green team which serves families mainly in urban areas such as Newark, East Orange, Irvington, Jersey City and Elizabeth.

And now, the focus of my work is helping patients and their families to cope with the challenges of providing end of life care for a loved one. Sometimes the work involves empowering families and advocating for them as they navigate the social services system, as well as independent community based organizations, in order to help them obtain additional concrete services, such as more home health aid support. Sometimes the work involves providing emotional support, helping patients and families cope with the stresses of the situation. Sometimes it is working with the family to help resolve conflicts, solve problems and reframe the situation to look for the hope, to see opportunities for loving connection and a peaceful death. In the Corporate world I used to be driven by deadlines of milestones and deliverables as we worked to get each project to the field on time. Now, my deadlines are around how quickly we can push this Medicaid application through or how quickly we can get Cancer Care to respond to a request for additional services.

In conclusion, for me it was about listening to that quiet voice within as well as to feedback from others, which made me aware that I had gifts I wasn't using as effectively as I could. I am fortunate that I have had the opportunity to make a career change and now am blessed to say that I feel I'm doing the work I was meant to be doing.

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## A Labyrinthine Life

*by Sr. Shane Margaret, Pastoral Assistant*

I love labyrinths. Large and small, walking labyrinths or finger labyrinths, of all designs - I love them. They are for me a perfect image and metaphor for life. For some of us the turns are dramatic, for others they are more curved and gradual, but we all face our share of changes and unexpected diversions from our plans. I'd like to share some of mine.

When I was a teenager I went to a Renaissance Faire in California. One booth had a man who poured molten lead into a stream, freezing it into a shape. Another man interpreted the shape, like a fortune-teller. I still remember my shape. It went two inches in one direction, then abruptly reversed direction. It was rough at first, but smoothed out later. Unsurprisingly, the interpreter told me that my life would soon begin to change and improve. This fortune has been borne out in my life, but I've had so many changes and so much improvement that I think the shape should have been a corkscrew!

I've lived all over: Ohio, Illinois, California, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New Mexico, and finally New Jersey. I've lived with men, with women, with my dogs, and now with nuns (yes, they are women, but it's different). I wanted to be a singer, but I became a college professor. I went from writing and speaking on LGBT politics to leading prayer. It seems like a lot of big shifts, but I think they are all recognizable parts of a labyrinthine path. The heart of the labyrinth is God.

All my life I struggled with the battle between my senses, which told me there was an energy and power beyond what I could touch and see, and my intellect, which said that God didn't exist. When I was eighteen I decided to cast my lot with my intellect. I banished spirituality to a corner of my brain, whence it periodically leapt out. Singing was the closest I came to communing with God; all my life I sang in college and community choruses, singing sacred choral music. When I sang this music, I felt the power of the words as well as the music, but I hid that awareness even from myself.

Of course I dabbled in other ways. My graduate work was in political theory, which included the history of Western philosophy. You can't do Western philosophy without grappling with Christian thought - at least I couldn't. I studied New Testament Greek, read Augustine and Aquinas, Luther and Calvin, and took courses on the Bible and politics. I argued for the importance of these ideas, but always from a distance.

What changed? Through the process of recovery and growth, I gradually reached a point where I was willing to risk following my heart and my experience rather than my intellect. I wanted to love more than I wanted to be sure I was right.

I knew from my study that the universities grew out of monastic roots. The academic life is in many ways the direct descendant of the monastery. Both call for time alone to study, and for shared time. Both call for discipline in the service of something beyond wealth or power. But academic life has moved far from its roots. For me it was too lonely, too driven by the need to publish in the right place and prove how valuable I was.

My field of research was identity and community, especially gay and lesbian identity. I knew that in some way I was talking about souls, about who we are and what we need to be who we are. I knew, too, that I was writing out of my longing for a community that was not defined by narrow categories. Oddly enough, I found it in a convent.

I still think about souls. I think about who we are and what we need. But I don't have to write about it in professional journals anymore. I can share it with you, I can preach it, I can share it at Daytop, and I can live it with my Sisters. And best of all, I get to let my heart and my head talk to one another. When I do that, when I risk having faith and living in faith, I have energy and joy beyond anything I ever thought possible.

Labyrinths have forty turns, one for each day of Lent. I hope you use your Lent to reflect on the path of your life and to take the turns with hope. May Holy Week find you in the center, resting in God.

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## Life is a Journey

### *by a Member of the Congregation*

I was asked what had brought me from a fundamentalist background to Redeemer. I, too, wondered after having being asked why I was here. It is soo different to what I am used to. Here I am, a person who was a raving radical fundamentalist. I have been a Christian for almost 20 years now. I had been in Churches that had exploded with people. Prayed every day in 'tongues - a heavenly language' - prayed for the sick to be healed - seen miracles. Had experienced God's healing power. Been slain in the Spirit etc. I was bent over from a bad back and was prayed for and immediately straightened up. No explanation possible. Been on numerous mission trips to Asia and Europe. Been instrumental in sending out missionaries. Was an avid supporter of Focus on the Family and other right wing groups. Had danced, run around Churches waving flags during worship. What you may have seen on television I have done it. My very first visit to the US was to Morristown for 4 days to a Church outreach where I, and others, sang on Morristown green and handed out flyers.

I arrived here 5 years ago with my wife and daughter to work in a Church in Bridgewater. After 2 years decided things were not working out so moved on. Started to visit a large evangelistic Church. After a while was criticized by some people for wearing jeans to Church - looked at the people and wondered what was going on. I then started to look at myself and ask what was life all about. What was I all about. I still believed in God, but questioned things. Was the Bible the inherent word of God? I used to believe that every word was written by Him. It was 2 years ago, this spring, that I reached 'burn out', I exploded one day at Church and began to cry. I just sobbed and sobbed. I was told that I should attend a Bible study and get a grip of myself. I didn't need that. I needed people in my life. I have always been a people person and missed the warmth of friendship. I decided to leave and do 'my own thing'.

It was at this time that I attended the gym and there I met a little Columbian man who attended Redeemer. I used to spend more time talking to him than exercising. I poured my heart out to him and he suggested that I visit Redeemer. Me, a fundamentalist, attend an Anglican Church -the Church of Desmond Tutu - after all he was a new ager and not even a Christian - they sang hymns no guitars no dancing in worship no speaking in tongues etc - they even married gays!!! Scandalous, what would the people say in South Africa????? Well I visited, am still here and people are praying that I will see the light and move out of Redeemer!!!!!!

What I have seen at Redeemer is Christ's love in action. I learnt that I had to stop condemning people because they did not agree with me. I had to love and leave the judging to God. A difficult lesson for one who always judged. I learnt that gays are children of God and that God created them, loves them and will let them into Heaven. Scandalous!!! I had to repent of what I had said about Archbishop Tutu and see that he is a man of God. In other words I saw a community of people that love one another no matter what. I began to remember the hymns of my youth and I think of the people I normally sit with in Church who sing with great gusto and to see their faith. I saw faith in action - a vicarage turned into a home for Aids patients, a soup kitchen serving the community and all the other projects. All showing Christ's love. Is this not what we as Christians are all about. Is it not about serving our neighbour and the community?

As I sit at the back of the Church I contemplate all these things and ask myself the question - Why Am I Here - perhaps God just might be in our midst, contrary to the judgement from other Christians. Perhaps He would choose to be with us sinners, after all that is what He preached. I sincerely believe that the worldwide Church is ready for another reformation, like in the days of Martin Luther. I believe we have lost what it is all about. We are concerned if the preacher holds a doctorate in divinity, if we wear jeans to Church, what the Church looks like. I have seen people in Africa and China who have nothing but pray with great hearts to God. We need to get back to basics and start again.

So to answer the question - I guess I am here because I feel God's presence in the group of people that attend the Church of the Redeemer. In our crazy world it serves as a beacon on a hill drawing people to come, sit in peace and safety to reflect on their lives and God. I also believe we should become wild radicals and spread this love to others and other Churches!!!!!! (Still some wild passion in me)

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## Peace on Earth

### *by a Long-Time Congregant*

I was interested in Tricia's article in Crossroads for December/January to do with establishing a Department of Peace in the Federal Government as a part of the President's Cabinet. Then, having attended the seminar she conducted Dec. 12, I was prompted to agree with her basic premise that world peace should be the "organizing principal of our nation."

For the past seventy-five years since my graduation from the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University I have contemplated the phenomena of war and peace because the mission of the State Department of which Foreign Service is a

part, is dedicated to bringing about world peace through international understanding, cultural, economic and social support, and business, industrial, and commercial inter-change.

Human services provided by thousands of religious organizations, the health and well fare organizations as proposed by the President of the United States Woodrow Wilson through a League of Nations in 1920; the manifold agencies operating through the United Nations, founded in 1945 under Presidents Roosevelt and Truman; and the billions of dollars used every year by Foreign Service and Peace Corps, the U.S. and other nations, to provide education, medical care, and other relief to countries in need - all of this testify to the cause of Peace.

As a Christian I learned at a young age that selfishness, greed, and avarice are sins that violate the Ten Commandments, and other man-made laws base on these commandments. Our Christian faith teaches us to love God and to love others, as ourselves.

These are ideals and virtues which come from the heart and soul, inspired by the Holy Spirit and are the foundations of Christianity and all other world religions. These laws cannot be legislated or enforced by man-made law and government.

Peace and love are powers of the Holy Spirit and will remain the purpose of personal prayer and conduct as mortal beings and eternal parts of the Holy Spirit.

O Lord, make me an instrument of your Peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love  
Where there is injury, pardon  
Where there is doubt, faith  
Where there is darkness, light  
Where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that I may not seek to be consoled as to console,  
To be understood as to understand,  
To be loved as to love,  
For it is in the giving that we receive,  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
It is in dying that we return to eternal life. - Amen

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## From the Cauldron of Despair: Recovery

*by D and d (Congregants)*

*"More than anything in the world, I want to die!" I screamed.  
And then my soul sighed, "This life is much too painful to continue."*

No matter what the words, recovery always starts the same. It begins with the darkest despair, loneliness beyond comprehension and, finally, surrender to a Power outside any personal experience. Our book, Alcoholics Anonymous, calls this the "moment of clarity". I called it HELL and so have others who have embarked on this road to freedom from addiction.

Addiction is a demon of a thousand lies. It tells us that we are powerful, but we are powerless to stop. It tells us that others fail to recognize our worth, yet we feel worthless. It tells us that the drink (or drug) will free us from the pain, yet it enslaves us to self-inflicted torture. It tells us that God has abandoned us, but we have abandoned God. And it insidiously erodes our soul the very essence of our being. Finally we see that there is no way out of this hellish existence and that we are truly powerless. From this cauldron of despair, the miracle of recovery emerges.

The journey for us is not easy. It requires admission of our utter powerlessness, continuous reliance on our Higher Power (God) especially when it seems that we are better and can resume control of our own lives. We engage in soul-searching to discover ourselves and our motives for behavior that causes us pain. We forgive and ask for forgiveness and try to live our lives based on the principles of AA. On the most mundane level, recovery is found in church basements, at AA meetings, where we remind ourselves of who we are, what we became and miracle of God's love that brings us infinite possibilities of becoming. Our book calls this "a profound psychic change" marked by "hurtling into the fourth dimension." We call it the gift of spirituality.

Were it not for our addiction and recovery, we (D & d) would not have met. We would have never allowed the self-discovery of coming to love each other. We would not have been open enough to find Redeemer, the place that nurtures our souls yearning for still more. We would never have realized that the feeling of belonging and acceptance comes from participation and commitment. And because we are a family bound together by stories, let us tell you ours.

"d" and I met in 1991 at an AA meeting. We had nothing in common. She was a retired school teacher with 10 years of

sobriety; I was an old "fuddy-duddy" married lady of some 20 years and new to the AA program. Ultimately, she became my sponsor so we spent many hours together exploring this new way of life called recovery. I learned from her experience, gathered strength from her loving kindness and borrowed her hope that "this too shall pass" into a joyful new life. Our relationship deepened from our sharing fears and dreams, something common in the sponsor-sponsee relationship. At this point, we became incredibly good friends, each recognizing that there was a strong spiritual bond between us. Neither of us thought we were gay or that we would come to love each other.

We actively participated in the AA program, "practicing these principles". We found our social outlet in the fellowship of AA. We went on retreats to feed our spiritual needs. But undeniably we found ourselves in love. The AA program teaches us to be honest, open-minded and willing. And so we admitted and accepted our love for each other. As they say, the rest is history.

But look where we went and how far we've come. I got divorced to end a life of lies. "d" and I moved in together only to realize that the house in Morris Plains did not belong to us. We found our town house in Hackettstown and had it blessed. We shared that blessing with our Redeemer family. Last year she was informed that her great niece was transgenering to become her great nephew. Our Redeemer family helped us to understand and accept this choice. Last summer we became Domestic Partners. We have expanded our Redeemer life through additional ministries. And so our lives continue to evolve.

Our experience illustrates the wisdom of the Asian proverb: "Every journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." And so dear family, we say to each an every one of you: Thank You for helping us as we become.

Shalom. May the peace of God be with you.  
*Delivered by the entwined hearts of D & d.*

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## Transformations From the Inside Out

*by a Transgender Member of the Congregation*

Lent at Redeemer is at least partially about looking inside ourselves and reflecting, and as part of that, this issue of Crossroads is dedicated to what often comes out of such reflections, change.

Looking back 10 years ago it is staggering to see the amount of change that has come into my life and that of my family since then. Yes, there is the obvious issue of the physical transformation that has come about as a transgender person in transition, but the biggest changes of all are the emotional ones.

Back then I was emotionally closed off to my past in a way that left a lot bottled up inside me, and by not being able to feel those emotions, it in turn kept me from experiencing a good part of myself, spiritually and emotionally.

Looking back at the process of change in my life, the first thing that I see is the concept of change agents, which can be of a positive or negative nature. The process, for example, that had me start moving towards wholeness (along with my family as well) came from a very ugly situation. Growing up, and until the time in question, I had had few boundaries with my family of origin. During the period I am talking about, first my mom died, and then other issues concerning my birth family and myself came to a head. This in turn left me as low as I have ever been and very nearly caused the loss of the most precious things I had/have in this world, my wife and our son. These events, though, as painful and horrible as they were, proved to be the change agent that helped lead to the path of healing and discovery through getting myself into therapy.

A positive change agent was the therapist that we were fortunate to find. They say the right teacher comes along when the student is ready, and this was our story. I cannot give her enough credit in my, and my family's return to wholeness. She taught me how to deal with my emotions, and how to go through a very rough process and keep my sanity and dignity by talking about life and how it can be. My family and I owe a lot to her skill and caring in this journey we have been on, along with the willingness to work things out on our part. Another positive was Mr. Ken, my electrologist extraordinaire and second therapist, who besides being fabulous, taught me about living life and being myself to its fullest despite being different.

Sometimes agents of change can be a mixed blessing. In my own journey, as many transgender people do, I reached out into the transgender community, both on the Internet, and in the form of support groups and peer counseling. The positives of this experience were that I met some really great people, some of whom are still dear friends, who taught me a lot about becoming my own person and finding my way through this process.

On the other end, I also experienced a lot of negatives as well. There were people in the groups and elsewhere who tried to convince me that if I had a family I should immediately get a divorce and go away from them if I wished to transition, and not even try to stay together. I also saw the negative side in bad images projected all over the so-called community, for example, encouraging a person into giving up "male" things they might like (sports, for one example). Another one was that somehow being a "real" woman meant hanging out in dingy transgender clubs, or presenting as a woman out-there femme in clothing and makeup, or in acting like a 12 year old girl. I think the ultimate was when I heard people telling me that their big wish was to be able to do or talk about "women" things with other women (whatever that is, still haven't figured that one out.)

What often results in my experience is people clinging to other people's notions of what it means to be a woman and hanging out in what a friend called "trans space" exclusively, instead of interacting in the real world and simply being themselves. It is what my therapist would call replacing one artifice with another. I was fortunate to have good people around me to help me challenge these notions, including my wife, my therapist, members of a gay mom's group, and friends of mine further along in the process. I learned it was about being myself. As a friend told me a long time ago, it is the same concept as feminism in which this process is about being able to define ourselves as we feel we are, not about what others say we should be.

Lastly, change, as much good as it can bring, also inevitably brings pain. Po Bronson in his book *What Do I Want To Do With My Life?* makes the point that real change is going to bring pain to someone; it is just its nature. In my case there was plenty of pain to go around. There was the pain I had in setting boundaries with my family of origin (and in subsequently losing them), and the pain of experiencing a lot of less than pleasant memories in therapy. Then there is the pain I caused the people I love the most in this world, my little family, especially in the pain I caused to them through actions that were less than thoughtful or noble at times. These in turn still give me pain as I reflect upon them.

Change, in the end, can, and often does, bring good with it. The changes in my life, despite all the pain they have wrought along the way, have seen me move towards wholeness emotionally, physically, and spiritually, that would have been impossible in that person I was 10 years ago.

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