

On the mind of the Rev. Dr. Nathaniel Jung-Chul Lee...

A little over a decade ago, while working in a hospital as a “chaplain resident” during seminary, I had a conversation with a young couple named Brian and Claire. Claire was fifteen weeks pregnant. They had recently been told that the child she was expecting would be so severely disabled that it might survive only a few agonizing days after birth—maybe only minutes. I asked them the two questions I always ask: “What’s the best thing that could happen?” Claire said: “That I might find peace.” “And what’s the worst thing that could happen?” She said: “That I might have this child and it might live terribly troubled and hugely disfigured, and that my friends might come ‘round once or twice, and then I’d be left all alone.” So I said to Brian and Claire: “What you want is peace. And what you fear is being alone. But may I suggest that what you need is *the church*.”

“Oh,” said Claire. “My dad is a Christian. He’s totally against abortion. He thinks people who have abortions go to hell. My mom’s all for women’s rights. She thinks it should be my choice.” So, I replied as gently as I could: “Can I suggest to you that we’re not really talking about campaigning against abortion, or campaigning for women’s rights? I’m not really sure it’s about legislation, and I don’t think it’s about going to hell. Because all these persons, with all their certainties, and for all their self-importance, have left you—as you’ve just said—*alone*. Alone now with your decision. Alone in six months time when you might need all the help you can get. You don’t feel able to ask for real help, and you sense probably rightly that real help isn’t there. Of course it makes sense that you’re drawn to a technological solution. But the real problem isn’t one a termination will solve. You need people who won’t leave you on your own. You need a hope that knows there are things worse than physical suffering. You need people around who will make your life beautiful even if it isn’t happy. What you need is the church.”

When the conversation ended I stared into space for some time. I knew I had broken most of the accepted conventions of pastoral counseling—and in truth, I wouldn’t approach this situation the same way today. But in the end, that’s not really what bothered me.

For as I stared out into space, I saw before me two churches. On the one hand was the church represented by Claire’s father. I saw it captivated by two notions: universal rules and righteous judgments. And on the other hand was the church of Claire’s mother. I saw it captivated by two similar notions: individual freedom and progress through legislation.

And as I stared out at these two churches, they both looked so alike to me. They were both obsessed with the nation state, and they were both preoccupied with the individual. And they had both made the church invisible. On the one hand they’d assumed America was their church, and they’d gone to battle to win America with the weapons of campaigns and lobbying and government and legislation. On the other hand they saw Christianity as largely a vehicle for self-actualization and personal fulfillment. So the church became little more than a pawn in a personal or political chess match.

But meanwhile, both churches had failed Brian and Claire. Because both had left them alone. Alone in the defining crisis of their lives. Claire’s mother’s church had proudly secured their right to choose, but had left them alone with an impossible and agonizing choice. And Claire’s father’s church had sternly demanded they uphold life, but when the time came for supporting that life, it was nowhere to be seen. These two young parents were all alone. What they needed was the church.

And so what bothered me, above all, was this question: Could this young couple—somehow, by some miracle—possibly find the congregation they needed? One as quick to offer care and support as it is to argue for legislation? One as quick to offer radical, sacrificial love as it is to demand personal responsibility? One as quick to offer healing and redemption as it is to point out costly mistakes? One in which all people, in all the difficult choices of their lives, can find generosity, mutual interdependence, and the transparent grace of broken, open lives?

I’m sure there’s been a lot of feelings in our congregation after the news of the past few weeks. And, I won’t pretend to know what you’re feeling, or that I know all the answers. But here’s one thing I do know. Every time we open the doors of our church, people walk through them who have made—and maybe even, are having to make *right now*—that hard and sometimes terrible choice.

And so my question for us is: What kind of church are they finding when they do?

TODAY AFTER CHURCH!

Join us right here in the sanctuary for “The Contemplative Gaze” from **12:30 to 1:30 p.m.** The Rev. Posey Krakowsky, artist and Priest Associate at Church of the Ascension, will lead a workshop to help us reflect on the sacred art in our midst. We’ll spend some time learning the technique of contemplative group observation of art, which is then used as a catalyst for dialogue.

COME, HOLY SPIRIT

This week we begin a new Christian formation series focusing on the Holy Spirit, the most mysterious and seemingly elusive person of the Trinity. We’ll gather in the Parish House and also on Zoom for the following sessions held on **Thursdays from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m.**

- **May 19** – Introduction: How the Holy Spirit Works
- **May 26** – Charism: The Gifts of the Spirit
- **June 2** – Holiness: Life in the Spirit

At the start of each session, a clergy member will share about their own understanding and personal experience of the Holy Spirit to kick off our time together. All are welcome.

SHOP TO SUPPORT “EARNING HANDS”

Earning Hands is a program of Women Development Services, a ministry of the Diocese of Raiwind, Church of Pakistan. Through this program, women who have been exploited in the sex trade develop skills that enable them to earn an income, raise their families out of poverty, and break the cycle of generational prostitution. Items created by Pakistani women in the Earning Hands sewing and embroidery workshop – including clothing, scarves, handbags and jewelry – will be on display and available for purchase in the Parish House on **Tuesday, May 31, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.**, and again on **Sunday, June 5, during Coffee Hour.**

NEWCOMERS RECEPTION

Those who have recently begun worshiping at Incarnation are invited to a reception in the Rev. Adrian Dannhauser’s apartment, located in the Parish House, on **Friday, June 3, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m.** RSVP by emailing Adrian at adannhauser@churchoftheincarnation.org. Please note that in light of Covid, we use the term “recent” loosely! If you started coming to Incarnation at any time during the pandemic, you are more than welcome.

COMMISSIONING CELEBRATION

All are invited to the special service for the Rev. Adrian Dannhauser on **Friday, June 10, at 6:30 p.m.:** “Celebration of New Ministry with Commissioning as Priest in Charge.” Followed by a reception in the Assembly Hall. Please RSVP through Paperless Post (an invitation was delivered to all on our email distribution list on May 6) or by contacting Thomas Reefer, Parish Administrator, at treefer@churchoftheincarnation.org. We hope you can join the celebration!

WEEKDAY WORSHIP AT INCARNATION

Wednesday Holy Eucharist: Join us each Wednesday at 12:15 p.m. for this Rite I spoken service of Holy Eucharist, which includes a brief homily and organ music.

Thursday Candlelight Communion: Join us each Thursday at 6:15 p.m. for Candlelight Communion, a service of Holy Eucharist that incorporates chant and silence as well as elements of contemporary worship. This service is informal and contemplative, with music led by a Cantor and a brief reflection by one of the clergy.

Daily Office: Services of Morning Prayer, Noonday Prayer and Compline are held via Zoom. To view the weekly schedule, go to churchoftheincarnation.org/worship.

To receive access information for offerings held via Zoom, join our email distribution list by filling out the yellow Connect Card found in your pew or signing up through our website.