

{ Well Thought }

Engaging the city

ISSUE 002 JULY '13



MARLEY WAS DEAD, TO BEGIN WITH THERE WAS A UNEASY BOY CALLED HIMSELF EUSTACE CLARENCE IN HIS BED SCRUBB, INTO A GIGANTIC INSECT

AS GREGOR SAMSA AWOKE ONE MORNING FROM HIS DREAMS HE FOUND HIMSELF TRANSFORMED INTO A GIGANTIC INSECT

MR AND MRS DURSLEY OF NUMBER FOUR PRYET DRIVE WERE PROUD TO SAY THAT THEY WERE PERFECTLY NORMAL THANK YOU

IT WAS A BRIGHT COLD DAY IN APRIL, AND THE CLOCKS WERE STRIKING THIRTEEN

THE NIGHT MAX WORE HIS WOLF SUIT AND MADE MISCHIEF OF ONE KIND AND ANOTHER HIS MOTHER CALLED HIM "WILD THING" AND MAY

ALL CHILDREN, EXCEPT ONE, GROW UP

IT WAS THE BEST OF TIMES, IT WAS THE WORST OF TIMES, IT WAS

ALL THIS HAPPENED MORE

HE WAS SENT TO BED WITHOUT EATING

IN THE GULF STREAM AND HE HAD GONE EIGHTY-FOUR DAYS NOW WITHOUT TAKING A FISH SINK

I WRITE THIS SITTING IN THE KITCHEN

AND HE SCRUBB, INTO A GIGANTIC INSECT

AND HE SCRUBB, INTO A GIGANTIC INSECT

ALL THIS HAPPENED MORE

HE WAS SENT TO BED WITHOUT EATING

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Letter from the editors

Welcome to the second issue of Well Thought, a collection of articles, reviews, and artwork by members of the Jacob's Well community.

In our sophomore issue we concentrate on the power of story. When it comes to questions of ultimate meaning and purpose, humanity tends to turn to certain overarching narratives - call them "metanarratives" - to explain reality. The mythology of the ancient Greeks, Mayans and Native Americans are all examples of human beings seeking to articulate the truth of the world around them through stories. The Christian faith has, at its core, a story which claims to explain the origin of humanity, its deepest problem and that problem's resolution. In this issue, Matt Superdock explores that story and how it addresses one of the most enduring objections to the existence of God: the problem of evil. Scott Jones and Nick Godwin explore the metanarrative of Christian faith by interacting with two of this year's most compelling on-screen narratives. Mark Twombly examines how we might better approach the future in light of the Storyteller who oversees and sometimes frustrates our own plans.

In this issue we also tell some of the individual stories around us. While some may doubt the metanarrative of Christian faith, there is a unique power in the telling of our own stories. Author Richard Bauckham has said:

"Witnesses are not expected, like lawyers, to persuade by the rhetorical power of their speeches, but simply to testify to the truth for which they are qualified to give evidence. But to be adequate witness to the truth of God and the world, witness must be a lived witness involving the whole of life and even death ... In our time witness is likely to be the main contender for truth against the various manifestations of the will to power."

In short, it's hard to argue with a story. As such, we've invited Simon Clark to tell the story of his own experience in the disastrous Japanese tsunami and how he found God in the midst of the carnage. Reid Monaghan tells one of the forgotten stories of the Civil Rights movement and how one man stood for justice in the name of Jesus. Becky Garcia shares how God entered the story of Rushina Patel and continues to rewrite her story's unfolding.

If you're inspired by what you read here, we'd love to have you tell your own story or share a story that's worth telling from the lives of those around you. Feel free to email us your ideas at WellThought@jacobsWellnj.org. We need plenty more talented writers and artists to narrate the world around us through compelling words and images. Enjoy this second issue. We hope you're challenged and encouraged by what you find in these pages.

For the Glory of God and the Good of Our City,



Scott Jones & Becky Garcia
Managing Editors

Well Thought

JULY 2013

Issue II

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Jacob's Well is a Christian community which exists for the glory of God and the good of the city by extending hope through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

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Cover image by Brandon Rechten

Narrative Beauty

A Reflection on the Problem of Evil
by Matt Superdock

I just turned in my senior thesis. Holding the hardbound product in my hands was a profound moment—there it was, ninety pages of definitions and lemmas and theorems, cradled within an elegant black binding, with my name and the Princeton seal stamped in gold across the cover. The product was nice, but the moment was profound because of the story it represented: a season of frustration, a change in approach, a spark of insight, a hard-earned solution. There were plot twists: progress faltered, then flew, then hid her face again. There were other characters: my adviser, who set high expectations and wore his frequent disappointment on his sleeve. Holding that thesis in my hands, I reveled in the beautiful story God had written and bound. Beautiful, despite the frustration, anxiety, and even—dare I say—suffering. Or, perhaps I should say, through the frustration, anxiety, and suffering.

I hesitate to use the word, suffering, because my suffering was limited to stress and sleepless nights. More extreme examples abound, from the sudden shock of a freak accident to the gradual groan of a life sapped by starvation or sickness. Our own suffering, though sometimes less severe, is no less real. It hits harder and closer to the chest. And just like the suffering we see, the suffering we taste prompts blunt questions. Where is God? Does he care? To put it philosophically, how could a good God allow such evil?

These questions are profoundly human, and their difficulty stems from the logical problem at their root, famously described as “the problem of evil.” To state the problem, consider the following four (very reasonable!) propositions:

- **Proposition 1:**
God, a perfectly good, omnipotent being, exists.
- **Proposition 2:**
A perfectly good, omnipotent being would prevent any evil it could.
- **Proposition 3:**
A perfectly good, omnipotent being could prevent evil.
- **Proposition 4:**
There is evil.

The “problem” is this: It is logically impossible for all four of these propositions to be true. Therefore, if we attempt an answer to the problem of evil, we must suggest which one is false.

One common answer is to suggest that God uses evil in order to bring about good (the second proposition is false). Suffering produces character. Or, a backdrop of evil allows good to shine. Or, having the choice to do evil gives us the choice to do good. These statements are true, but by themselves, they fail to solve the problem. Each has the same fundamental issue: couldn’t God have found a way to produce

character without suffering? Or make good shine without a backdrop of evil? Or give the choice to do good without anyone ever choosing otherwise? If we claim that evil is necessary as a means to good, we limit God’s creative power; we say that God could not have created the good without the evil. It is true that evil brings about character, contrast, and choice; however, to give a convincing answer to the problem of evil, we must go further.

I suggest that God allows evil in order to create *narrative beauty* (again, the second proposition is false). The idea of narrative beauty is best explained by example: imagine a husband and wife speaking lovingly about their first moments together, or a family recounting the winding journey of their ancestors. In each case, a story is told, and the telling of the story is a profound good. This good lies not only in the goodness of the original events, but also in the story elements, in the way that events come together as though someone were writing them. And narrative beauty is often magnified where evil is present. Consider a war veteran speaking with quivering lips about his most harrowing battlefield experience, or a frail old woman telling of her long-standing struggle against cancer. There is a beauty to tragedy, particularly but not exclusively where it is ultimately redeemed. And the greatest narrative beauty often coexists with the deepest tragedy.

For humans, it is sometimes acceptable to allow evil in order to create narrative beauty. Early in the thesis process, my adviser asked me to solve some small problems, each one related to the main problem I would be working on. He knew the solutions, but he refused to share them, forcing me to struggle through the problems on my own. I was at first frustrated, but then thankful, as I saw good flowing from the process of struggle and solution. Part of this good was purely practical—my understanding of the

main problem improved. But part of this good was narrative beauty—those minor moments of discovery became a memorable source of hope and confidence as I later attacked the main problem.

By analogy, God might also allow evil in order to create narrative beauty; without a bit of struggle, our stories would have no conflict, and hence no plot. But what about the more extreme examples of evil? Imagine a freak accident is imminent, and a human has the opportunity to snap his fingers and prevent it. Would we not be appalled if he chose not to? And suppose he attempted to justify his choice by saying, “I thought it would make a good story.” Would we not be even more appalled? This, I think, is the reason why the problem of evil is such a problem. We cannot imagine a human choosing not to prevent extreme evil. How, then, can God choose not to prevent it?

Here it is relevant that God is omnipotent and humans are not. It is acceptable for a human to allow the evil of struggling through some math problems—a contained situation with a predictable outcome—but not to allow the more extreme evil of a freak accident. Why not? Because a human cannot guarantee that allowing the freak accident will produce any good at all, much less the good of narrative beauty. He has no knowledge of the people and families involved; he has no control over the subsequent chapters of their lives. But God certainly does. If God holds the future, he can ensure that even the most apparently meaningless evil finds its place in his larger story of redemption. The paradigm is Jesus’s crucifixion, an evil so apparently meaningless that the idea of it made Peter scoff, and the enactment of it made even Jesus cry, “Why?” But in three days, the catastrophe became the climax, and Jesus became a Joseph, a lost son who had saved his family from spiritual

famine. He became a Moses, a David; he became the Passover lamb. At the resurrection, what once had no meaning at all suddenly became the source of all meaning. Humans cannot work such a miracle; only God can.

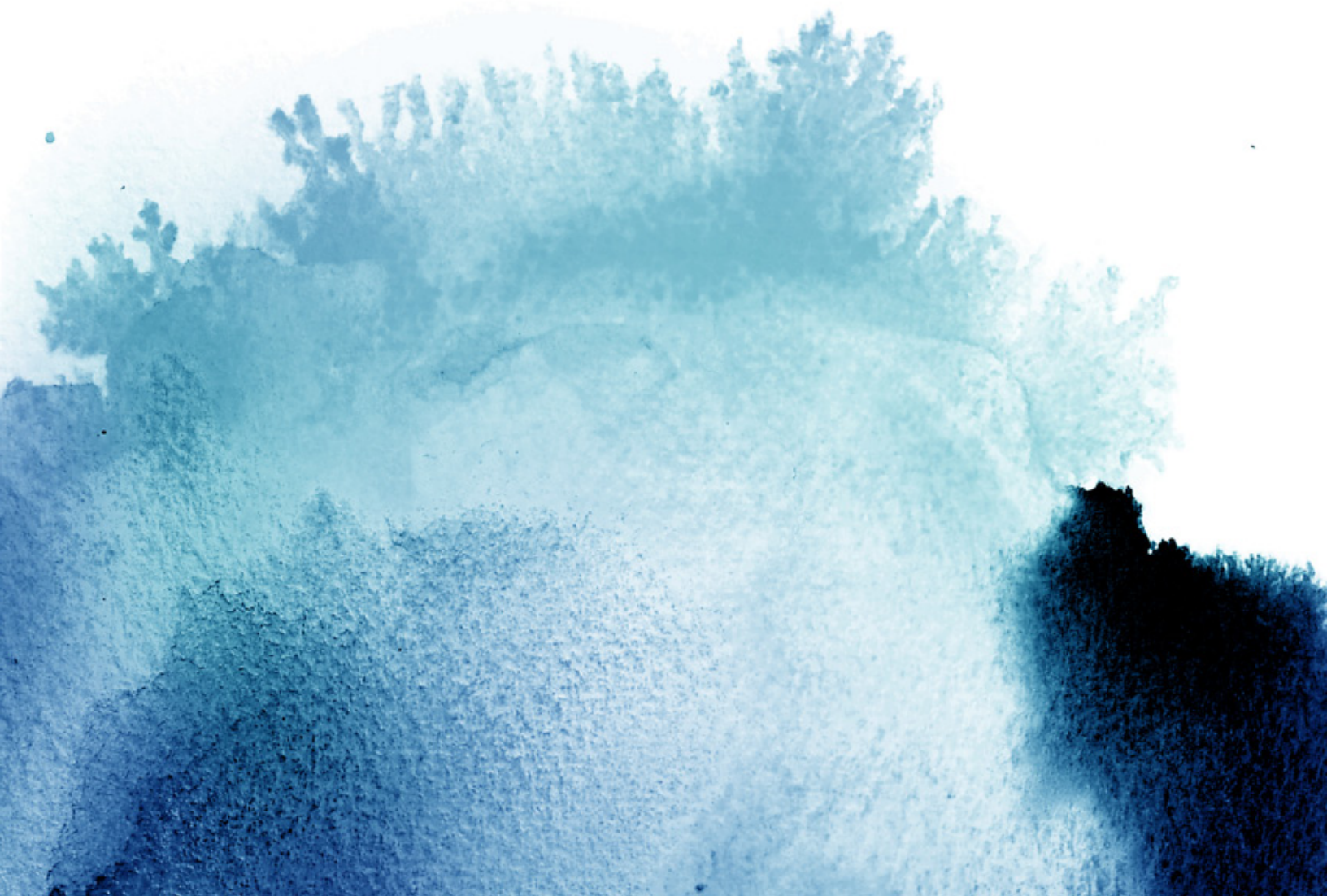
To conclude, consider again the objection I raised earlier. That is, couldn't God have found a way to bring about the good without the evil? In

the context of narrative beauty, the question becomes, couldn't God have created a good story without any evil? The answer is yes, but could it possibly match the beauty of the story we live in? This objection works when the proposed good is a *result* of the evil. But in the case of narrative beauty, evil is an integral part of the story, and so the good *contains* the evil. In other

words, by telling the right story, evil is swallowed up by good. The problem of evil arises because the conclusion is yet to come; no story makes perfect sense until its final page. But in the meantime, we endure suffering patiently, confident that our storyteller hasn't yet put down his pen. **W**



Matt Superdock – *Matt is a graduating senior at Princeton University, and a JWell-er since early 2011. His biggest passions (in order) are following Christ, teaching math, and listening to jam-band music.*



Life of Pi

by Scott Jones

The opening montage of director Ang Lee's excellent Life of Pi suggests a world that is both distant from our own and yet wholly familiar. This is partially owing to the fact that the film begins halfway across the world in an Indian zoo. However, the bursting, almost electric colors of the trees, animals and buildings seem a degree sharper than anything within our normal experience of reality, whether here or in that distant land. Even the dancing typography of the credits themselves portray a sense of wonder that pervades this real, and yet not-so-real place and time. Here we have the first hints of a theme that holds together this beautifully conceived film: does life, and specifically our own stories, consist of more than meets the eye?

The novel upon which the film is based was written by Yann Martel and received instant acclaim and a wide readership when it was released in 2001. The story is simple enough: A young boy is shipwrecked at sea and finds himself on a lifeboat with an unlikely cast of characters, most notably a giant Bengal tiger named Richard Parker. Martel has commented that the writing of the novel was an attempt to tell not just a story - lower case "s" - but a Story - capital "S" - through which he could piece together his own sense of the world. The novel and the film touch upon all the pertinent big questions. Love, spirituality, meaning, family, death and hope are all touched upon as we watch this boy go from the comfort of his family life in India to the turbulence of the open seas and beyond.

This is the rare film that actually adds to, rather than detracts from, the overall experience of the story.

Put simply: the film outdoes the book. At the heart of the story is the boy's attempt to control the volatile environment of the lifeboat. Along with the tiger, his shipmates are a testy hyena, a wounded zebra and an empathetic orangutan. As survival becomes increasingly difficult, this cast of characters is slowly dwindled to the boy and the tiger. It is at this point that Pi wisely abandons ship, building himself a smaller raft-like vessel which he moors to the larger vessel. Most of the movie takes place during Pi's wandering at sea and this is where the film is particularly enthralling. On the written page these scenes necessarily emphasize the increasing deprivation of both man and beast. The film, however, intersperses the growing desperation with moments of captivating splendor. In one particularly powerful sequence rendered as some mixture of reality and hallucination, a zoo's worth of animals suddenly surround Pi's raft. The colors

are brilliant - it's easy to see why this film won the Academy Award for Best Visual Effects - and climax with a fluorescent humpback whale bounding from the water and nearly capsizing both lifeboat and raft. While we're tempted to think that the scene was merely conceived in Pi's imagination, the real loss of supplies suffered in the whale's wake causes the viewer to pause.

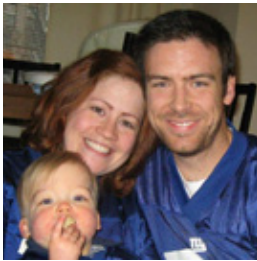
These sorts of scenes punctuate the movie until we finally have a thesis statement of sorts from the rescued hero. Sitting in a hospital bed, recounting his story to a pair of interested investigators Pi offers two versions of the tale. First, he tells the story we've just seen. Then, with tears streaming down his face he offers an alternative narrative in which the more fantastical elements are substituted out for a more reasonable set of circumstances. He then stares down his listeners and asks, "Which story do



you prefer?” Dumbfounded, the men respond, “The one with the tiger.” Pi then says, “And so it goes with God.”

This is the sort of film that doesn’t leave you once you’ve left the theater. In particular, this final exchange inevitably retains one’s attention even days after seeing the film. In my own pondering, I was led to thoughts from sociologist Christian Smith’s book *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture*:

“For all of our science, rationality, and technology, we moderns are no less the makers, tellers, and believers of narrative interpretations of existence, history, and purpose than were our forebears at any other time in human history. But more than that, we not only continue to be animals who make stories but also animals who are made by our stories ... We, every bit as much as the most primitive or traditional of our ancestors, are animals who most fundamentally understand what reality is, who we are, and how we ought to live by locating ourselves within the larger narratives and metanarratives that we hear and tell, and that constitute what is for us significant and real...”



In the same way that Martel set out to write not a story but a Story, so too do we find meaning not in stories but Stories. Put another way, human flourishing comes when we understand the Story within which we are living. This is one of the things that I find most compelling about the Christian worldview. Far from a detached set of rules and dogma, Christianity – at its most basic level – is a Story within which all other stories make sense. God created the world and humanity with deep purpose. Humanity turned from that deep purpose, most crucially relationship with God and one another. That rebellion has caused destruction and ultimately death to largely reign in human experience. God pursued healing and restoration by entering the story in solidarity with humanity in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus, the hero of the Story, suffered in order to save and now reigns as rightful King of this world. Through his people, he is now reclaiming and restoring the brokenness of this world and will one day reign over a renewed kingdom of perfect peace. Beginning, middle and end. Truth from, in and through story.

The final book of the Bible is called

Revelation or in the original language, the Apocalypse. Apocalypse is the combining of two Greek words – “apo” meaning “off” and “calypso” meaning “veil”. This wild book claims to pull off the veil of reality as we currently experience it. The graphic descriptions of cosmic warfare – dragons, angelic armies and all – suggest that more is at stake in our world than we think. Our lives are, indeed, more than meets the eye. Your story, when understood through the lens of the Story, takes on cosmic significance. Revelation, contrary to what we might originally suppose, is not an escape from reality but an escape to reality. The Life of Pi, in its own way, is a sort of apocalypse. The two parallel narratives that Pi tells in his hospital bed suggest that life may be more than meets the eye. However, the choice is left to us. Is life merely the result of time, space, energy and matter colliding together with the eventual outcome being your life? Or, is there a Story – with all the richness, significance, beauty, brokenness, despair and hope of Pi’s adventure at sea - that can make sense of every story, including your own? As Pi asks, “which do you prefer?” **WT**

Scott Jones – Scott lives with his wife Sara and son Drayton in Princeton. Scott works as a campus minister at Princeton University with an organization called Christian Union and is one of the elders at Jacob’s Well.

Les Mis

by Nick Godwin

I don't love musicals, but hear me when I say this: I loved Les Misérables. Pages and pages of writing could be spent discussing the actors' performances and Tom Hooper's direction through the rigors of live singing. What truly resonated with me and caused me to leave the theater satisfied, were the stories of redemption rising from the characters' unique circumstances.

Director Tom Hooper takes musicals to a new standard by filming the actors singing live. In a typical musical, the songs are recorded in a studio before any motion picture is taken, and then the actors lip sync to the music. Needless to say, it limits the actors' ability to, well, act. Live singing records the actual voice of the actors, giving them control of the tempo and volume of the music. It also enables them to fully act, which is no clearer than when Fontine, played by Anne Hathaway, reflects on the disparity between what she thought life could hold and her unfortunate, lowly circumstance.

Hooper uses the camera to make the viewer feel present with the characters. Rather than simply panning and zooming to keep the actor on screen, the camera moves up, down, left, right, circling the character. The viewer is brought face to face with the actors, giving the audience a heightened awareness of the characters' emotional state.

While the live singing and cinematography draw you into the moment, the narratives of redemption are what give the film so much power. But for redemption to occur, there must first be anguish.

From the first scene of the movie, the audience is introduced to the world's harsh cruelty and its recipient, Jean Valjean. After he's arrested and sentenced to five years in prison for stealing a loaf of bread to feed his sick and starving nephew, he then serves an additional fourteen years for attempting to escape prison before finally being released. His unjust punishment gets worse when his thoughts of freedom are squashed as Javert, a man who upholds the law above all else, demands Valjean have lifelong parole and forever be labeled a dangerous criminal; a harsh punishment for stolen bread.

While sleeping outside a church, a bishop invites him to stay the night in the church and share what little they have. Despite the kindness he is shown, Valjean runs away in the middle of the night, but not before stealing the church's silver. He's soon caught by the police who bring him back to the church and the bishop. Though he claims the bishop gave him the silver, the police threaten to take him back to prison. In that moment, the bishop tells the police that Valjean has told the truth, and proceeds to add two silver candlesticks to the bag of stolen silver, confirming his "innocence" with

the police.

Valjean is immediately confused that the bishop did not turn him in. The bishop then claims that he has been saved for God. After questioning what he's become ("a dog in the streets") and the pardon he just received, he decides to start a new life where he not only will be free from the slavery of the law, but where his hate can die and hope can be reborn.

After the transforming power of this experience with the bishop, Valjean's new life continues to unfold through the film. He is subsequently dedicated to living honorably and serving others, and even becoming a successful businessman and mayor of a town. Though still very human (as seen in a particular moment where his concern for himself leaves a woman unemployed and turning to prostitution), Valjean's story reflects a much deeper and much more transcendent narrative than the strife he encounters. His life shows something everyone has felt the need for: renewal, a fresh start, redemption. His narrative can be understood in three basic acts:

1. The law captures him and puts him into slavery.

2. He's shown grace and begins a new life, dedicated to doing good and redeeming the wrong done to others.

3. His life ends entering into glory.

Redemption is powerful. Deep transformation draws our gaze. Listen to the words of a close relative of mine who has been deeply exploring questions of faith over the last year:

"In the years of my being an atheist I was always moral and tried to see the best in things but when it came to really rough stuff there was just no

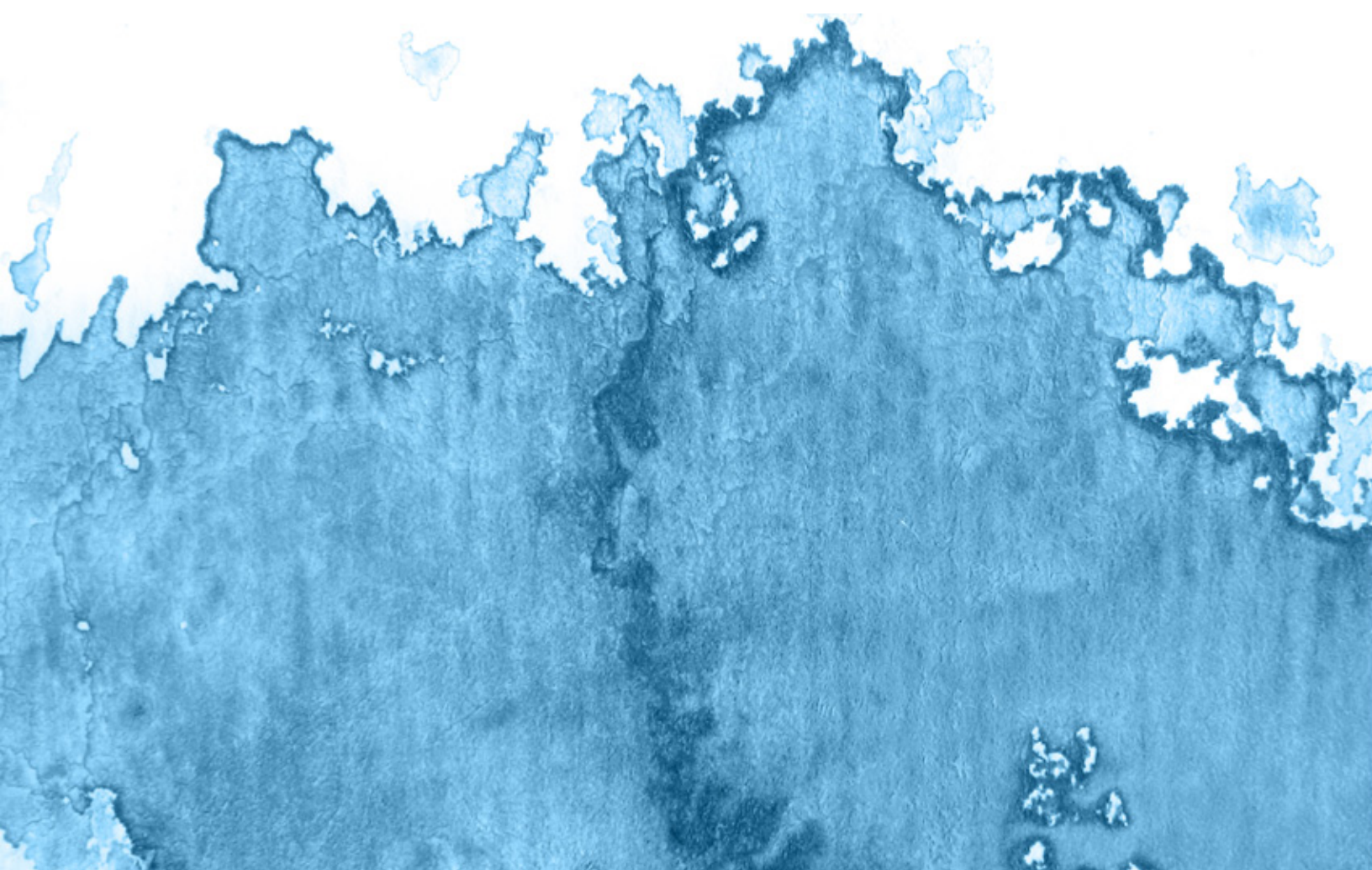
hope there. I still struggle with doubt, confusion and many questions but I know I see some things differently now. If I saw [*Les Misérables*] about a month ago I would have left angry, depressed and confused. I would not have been able to see past the suffering that I could not solve, past all the pain that is for no reason and that there were all these people that I could not save. While I still look at this incredible film and see sadness, deep injustice and struggle, I am also able to see

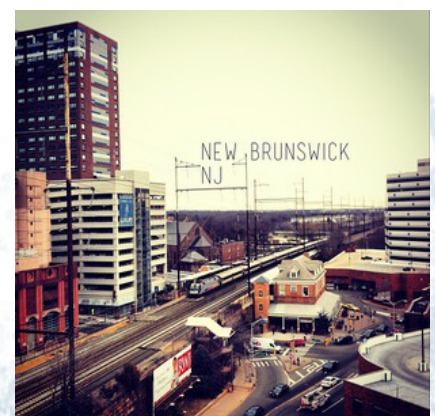
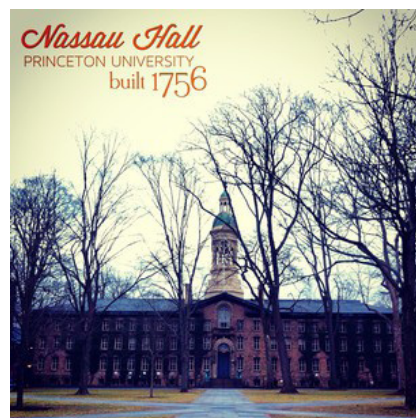
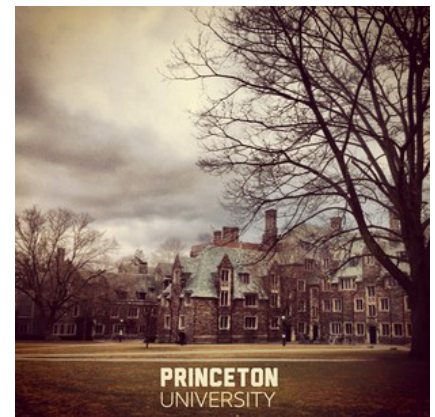
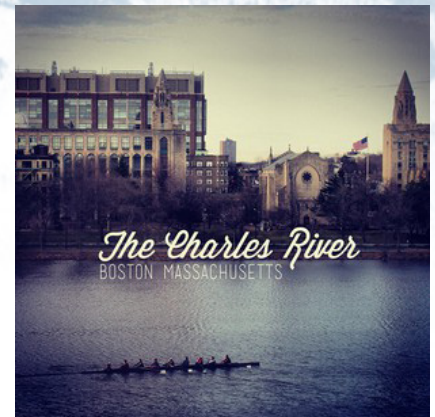
redemption and grace..."

For me, the performances and music were plenty entertaining. But what ultimately set it apart, and puts it with the ranks of my favorites, is that the narrative of grace and redemption is ultimately what I desire for myself and others. What we see in *Les Misérables* is the redemption, in an imperfect world, that we can help bring to others. **WT**



Nick Godwin - Nick works as a Communication Specialist for a large IT company. He moved to New Jersey in December 2010, after living in San Diego, CA, where he was raised and attended San Diego Christian College. Each Saturday morning he makes pancakes for himself and his wife, Stephanie.





Photos by Ross Priddy (<http://instagram.com/rosspriddy>)



Painting by Adel Stemen

Wise Plans by Mark D. Twombly

'But the noble man devises noble plans; And by noble plans he stands (Isaiah 32:8).'

"The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry." -Robert Burns, To A Mouse

Plans. Goals. Dreams. Expectations. Whatever you may call them, we all have them. They reflect our deepest desires. When achieved, they bring us great joy, energy, and motivation; when not, they can bring depression, deplete our energy, and can even plunge us into despair. We associate our success and even our personal sense of worth with the realization of our goals and plans.

As a professional project manager (and a guy with somewhat of a bent for perfectionism) I think about plans a lot, and have from my early childhood. From daily disciplines to New Years resolutions, to 5-10 year or lifetime plans, I've thought about and explored many of them. During a brief period in college I even toyed with a time management system that planned my entire week in 5 minute increments. Needless to say, it didn't work out. (I did mention 'brief', didn't I)? Like early explorers I have been in search of the planning equivalent of the 'fountain of youth' – that elusive perfect plan that will bring everything together for me. Does such a plan even exist?

It does; it's just that it's not my

plan, nor does it revolve around me. More on that later.

Let's reflect for a few moments on the overall success rate of the plans we create as people. Stephen Pile, in the introduction to his book *The Incomplete Book of Failures* (it's out of print), explains: "Success is overrated. Everyone craves it despite daily proof that man's real genius lies in quite the opposite direction. Incompetence is what we are good at: it is the quality that marks us off from animals and we should learn to revere it." While overstated for effect, I believe we all recognize the truth of this statement.

On the other hand, we do marvel at some incredible human accomplishments in history. From the Seven Wonders of the World to modern architectural marvels from modern flight to incredible technical inventions (some of them in your pocket), there are some really impressive human inventions. Yet, we know that for every success, there are hundreds if not thousands of failures that preceded it. On the invention of the light bulb, Thomas Edison said, "I have not failed.

I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work."

Say what you will about it, but failure follows us everywhere, and hopefully teaches us something along the way.

Then there's the issue of success. Albert Einstein is quoted as saying, 'Perfection of means and confusion of ends seem to characterize our age.' In other words, even if we accomplish our goals, are they the right goals? Are they accomplishing the right things? How would we know? Einstein was deeply concerned about this, writing about "kindness, beauty, and truth" as ideals which motivated him.

So we could go on about our successes and failures and what they teach us – but let's change our focus to Someone who really knows what they're doing.

God created everything out of nothing. His plans have a 100% success rate; not only this, but He has the right goals, the perfect plans. Consider:

- God's plans are eternal. His plans were "formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness (Is 25:1)." The Bible tells us that God's plans extend to eternity past, and that the Gospel, God's plan of salvation, is not a contingency plan, not a 'plan B' in case man messed up the original.
- God's plans are accomplished. "I have planned it, surely I will do it (Is 46:9-11).," says the Lord. Who of us can say this with a straight face? As my 9 year old son Lee observed after we read a passage together, "Dad, God says what's going to happen because He causes it to happen." Indeed. In addition, God accomplishes His purposes both in the heavens and among the people of the earth; these plans cannot be thwarted, nor should we, as His creation, question His purposes. This is a difficult, but ultimately comforting truth that we must grapple with.
- God's plans are perfect. We read of "perfect faithfulness (Is 25:1)," and that "every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above (Js 1:17)." In any and every circumstance God is working the perfect means toward a perfect end, one that has its source, fulfillment, and destiny in the person of Jesus. The Scriptures tell us that God is working in all circumstances so that people who don't know Him will seek Him, and that those who love Him would grow to be more like Him in their character. His plans of loving commitment to His creation are total and awesome.
- God's plans are inscrutable. This means that they are beyond our complete understanding and comprehension. While we can confirm God's good plans and purposes, we cannot always discern them. He tells us that His ways and thoughts are higher than ours "as the heavens are higher than the earth," so much so that we should forsake our own ways and thoughts in favor of His (Is 55:6-11). The Apostle Paul in the first century reminds us that, rather than a cause of frustration, this should be a cause of great rejoicing and worship: "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ... For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever (Rom 11:33,36)."

- God intentionally frustrates our plans for His glory and our good. “The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples (Ps 33:10).” From the Tower of Babel to the story of Israel, to nations on earth, and to us as individuals, those who pursue plans that deviate from His glory and purposes must have their plans thwarted, either in this life or the next. If we understand the nature of God and man properly, we see that this is a very good thing.

What are we to do with all of this? We have a tension between acknowledging that our plans and goals apart from God are destined for failure and that God’s plans, often in opposition to ours, are perfect and destined for ultimate success. Consider:

- God affirms the value of planning and our diligence in it. As those created in the image of God, we might expect this. I love the book of Proverbs, and chapter 16 gives us some insight regarding the kinds of planning that we are to pursue. Consider:
 - o Our hearts make plans, but the ultimate outcome is the Lord’s (v.1)
 - o If we commit our work to the Lord, our plans will be established (v. 3, see also Psalm 37:4-5)
 - o We plan our way, but it is God who establishes our steps (v. 9)

We see such principles are given to us in the context of God’s perfect character and our attitude of humility toward Him. Regardless of our plans, it is God’s purposes that will ultimately stand.

- The keys to successful planning lie in alignment with God and humility before Him. If we read Isaiah 55 properly, I believe we can learn some key truths that will help us here:
 - o The key to our satisfaction lies not in our own ideas, but in what God speaks into our lives (vv. 1-2)
 - o Our eternal destiny lies in our forsaking our own thoughts and ways for His (vv. 6-7)
 - o His thoughts, words, and ways are infinitely better than ours, effective in accomplishing their perfect intent (vv. 8-11)

I have had some profound and painful disappointments with some of the plans in my life, some in very recent memory. The goals seemed God-centered and good, the planning diligent, the effort substantial, and the relationships with people wonderfully encouraging along the way – and yet, they crumbled. This happens to all of us and on many levels, from the mundane of daily life to the most devastating of tragedies. As I’ve gotten older and a bit more reflective, I see that life has progressed in a far different way than I had imagined or planned.

Why? Was all of that a waste of time? I trust you have asked yourself such questions from time to time.

The plans you and I create can be thwarted, but God’s can’t. How does this reality impact you? If I am honest, my proud and sinful heart can resist this and react with anger. We need grace from God to change our hearts so that we humble ourselves, and are wonderfully aligned with the thoughts, words, and ways of God, not only in the planning, but in the outcome of those plans.

If I can trust God’s eternal plans, why do I have so much trouble trusting Him with everything that is smaller? I believe the issue is one of control. We don’t like to give it up. But when you think of it, does it make sense on any level for the Creator of the universe to

relinquish this to any of His creation? Have we shown the ability to handle such power? No! Our response must be humble repentance and faith to the One who perfectly plans and graciously acts for His glory and our good. As He reminded His ancient people Israel:

‘For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope (Jer 29:11).’ **WT**



Mark D. Twombly - Mark is a follower of Jesus Christ, a Program Manager in the telecommunications industry, and loves things to be planned and organized! A graduate of Rutgers College with a B.A. in Mathematics, his interests range from sports (from football to disc golf) to history, politics, and philosophy. He and his wife Betty and their six children have attended Jacob’s Well since the fall of 2009.

Disaster

by Simon Clark

We all have a few words that mean more to us than others. It could be a particular song, or a poem, or something a friend once told us. Words are powerful, and the ones we choose to remember, to commit to memory and to share with others, can define us. Quotations from movies bring groups together, and words that make no sense only lead to confusion. Trust me on that last part. I'm British, living in the U.S. I only learned a few months ago that Festivus isn't actually a thing here.

I earn my living as a writer, incidentally. So words matter a lot. They keep the power running and the fridge full. I put a lot of stock in words. But I also put a lot of stock in being alive.

For me, there's one particular passage from the Bible that means a lot more than other parts. It's not one of the classics - the 'for God so loved the world..' or 'In the beginning...' It's not one I'd expect most people to know - even most Christians. Not off the tops of their heads. It's a verse I might have read a few times growing up - I have no idea - but which came to life on March 11, 2011. That was the date of the Great Tohoku Earthquake in Japan.

The quake killed some 18,000 people, and started the Fukushima nuclear crisis that's still going on today. I was living in Japan at the time, and a lot of things changed very quickly. First, though, the Bible passage. It's Psalm 46 : 1 - 4, and goes like this:

- 1 *God is our refuge and strength a very present help in trouble.*
- 2 *Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,*
- 3 *though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.*
- 4 *There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.*

The reason I remember these words is simple. News got back to family in England of the quake. Contact was made, and this verse shared. I began

reading it aloud to my housemate when an aftershock hit, forcing us back out of the house, as more things fell apart. My roof, for one. Fires raged. Whirlpools formed. Entire towns were taken by the tsunami. Lives, as well.

Though the earth gives way? Got that right. Though the mountains tremble? Sure. The quake was the third largest in recorded history. A lot of things trembled that day.

Therefore we will not fear.

Ah. That's a bit more difficult. Yes, I'm afraid, we will fear. We will fear very much when the world seems to be ending. God might be a refuge but what good's a refuge when what you really need right now is for the world to stop breaking and screaming?

Since Japan I've moved to New Jersey, a place that's known a lot about disaster in the last two years. Irene and Sandy have made themselves felt. There's no reason to think it won't happen again. Where's the present help in trouble, now? Where's the strength and the comfort?

There's no easy answer. Of course there isn't. Bad things happen. The world is broken and people suffer from disasters. How does the church answer that? How do we, as people, live through these things and keep going?

Faith. Hope. Love. Does it sound trite? It's not. Jesus' love was anything but trite. To save us from a broken world He died even though He was innocent and He was God. There's a disaster for you. Christians put their faith in Jesus exactly because this world is failing. We hope for better things because we know God has promised them and that He keeps

His Word. The holy habitation of the Most High in the Psalm is free from destruction and loss, and it's open to us because of Jesus. That's not meaningless. That's what gives meaning. Christian hope doesn't mean thinking and dreaming something might happen, either. It's a much stronger thing than that. Hope in God means looking beyond the world we're in to the kingdom that's yet to come.

How Christians deal with disaster is up to them. People deal with things in different ways. Crying and grieving is right and good. Working to recover is the proper thing to do. The difference is that through the man Jesus, there's a way out, a solution, that means we can carry on. Grief doesn't mean despair, and loss doesn't mean an end to fighting. To find God in disasters is a hard thing to do, but perhaps it's in looking forward and offering God our trust that we can find some strength to keep on fighting the good fight, as the apostle Paul once wrote.

On that day two years ago I picked up my Bible - I think it was under a broken plant - and I read the Psalm my mother had e-mailed once she knew I was all right. The words did give me strength. Earthquakes are big. God is bigger. Sandy took a lot from us. Jesus has more than that to give. I might be scared when windows shatter, but the fear God saves me from is a deeper one, one of bleakness and hopelessness and having to face a crumbling world with nothing to hold on to. I have Jesus, and his sacrifice, and his life. That will continue long after this world's gone. That is something to hold on to. **WT**



Simon Clark - Simon has been living in New Jersey for almost two years now, after he moved here from Britain, via Japan. He currently lives in Old Bridge and works as a writer in Warren. You can read more things by him, including short stories and various thoughts about writing, on his website - www.simonpclark.com

Francis Grimké Pastor, Preacher, Activist

by Reid Monaghan

There are some stories that are simply neglected in the history of America, and the story of the Grimké family is certainly one of them. A southern, white family of Charleston aristocrats flowered into a group of people dedicated to the abolition of slavery and civil rights in America. One member of the family—Francis Grimké—became an influential scholar and pastor and helped shape the struggle for civil rights in the early 20th century.

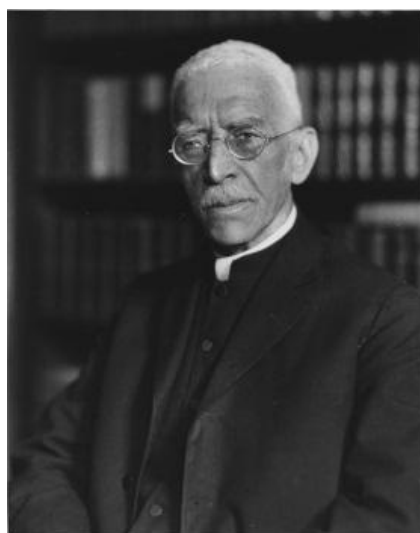
The Grimké family was of German origin but chose and adopted a French spelling for their name in order to have a better chance of success in America. The first Grimké in America, John Paul, was an influential silversmith who became a leader in Charleston, SC in the 1700s and became a leading citizen and patriot in the revolutionary era.¹ His grandson, John Faucheraud Grimké, was an Oxford graduate, lawyer, judge, revolutionary and constitutionalist who was a man of immense political influence and leadership in post-war Charleston.² Two of John Faucheraud's daughters, Sarah and Angelina, made a firm break with South Carolina's slave holding past. Their brother, Henry, fathered two boys with a slave named Nancy Weston.³ Sarah and Angelina were deeply involved in the education of the boys, Francis and Archibald. It was Francis who would become an influential pastor and civil rights leader.

Francis Grimké (1850-1937) lived through truly tumultuous times. He lived in pre-Civil War south, served in the confederacy, went north to be educated after Emancipation, and served as a pastor for some six decades in Washington, DC. His family was a unique intersection of black and white, slave and free in the American experience.

Francis and his brother Archibald moved north to Massachusetts with the help of their aunts, who made every effort to fund their education. Francis graduated in 1870 as Valedictorian of Lincoln University, the first-degree granting historically black university. Early on he studied medicine but this interest soon gave way to law, which he spent two years studying at Howard University. In 1874 he went on to study theology at Princeton Theological Seminary during the days of the erudite evangelical scholar Charles Hodge.⁴

Christian faith was a constant in the lives of the Grimké family, and their work for abolition and equality flowed from biblical convictions. Francis became a Presbyterian minister after completing his seminary studies

in 1878. He became pastor of 15th Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC and was the pastor there for almost six decades.⁵ He was married to Charlotte Forten, a woman thirteen years his senior. The two had one daughter who died as a baby. Even though he is rightly remembered today as a civil rights activist, he was first and always a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ.



There are several things we can learn today from Grimké's life and witness:

Gospel and Cultural Engagement

Many times leaders can focus on the gospel but not really address social issues and concerns of the day. There are other times when leaders can focus on social concerns and use the church or the title "Reverend" as a mere platform from which to pursue social activism. Grimké was a man who heartily embraced gospel ministry and through this conviction was active for issues of justice in the world. Two things demonstrate this. First, he was not just a pastor in name but his work was gospel work. His sermons illustrate this clearly.⁶ He was a gospel preaching man. His sermon "Christ's Program for Saving the World" is illustrative:

"1. To call attention specifically to Christ's program for saving the

world, for bringing about changes for the better in individuals and in communities—in the whole structure of society, in all human relationships.

a. It is by preaching the gospel—the gospel of the grace of God in Christ Jesus

b. It is by teaching—teaching not philosophy or science or any special department of human knowledge, but teaching what is written in the Scriptures, the Word of God, given by holy men as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. It is making known the contents of the Bible that Jesus here links up with the work of saving the world, of bringing about changes for the better in all human relations and conditions."⁷

His devotion to the transformation of society was never a gospel-less or gospel-lite endeavor but rather grounded quite firmly in gospel convictions. Two things stand out in his legacy. First, his commitment to education and training is reflected in his service as a trustee for the prestigious Howard University. He worked hard to secure the right leadership for the institution, leadership that would avoid the parochialism, condescension and outright racism of prior administrations.⁸ Second, Francis and his brother Archibald were part of the community that helped found and give early shape to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The organization was a light of hope for unity and influence during times when there was much infighting between national black leaders.⁹

Humility in Ministry

Grimké was ever aware of the temptation for men to use the influence of church leadership for self-promotion. He would have nothing of it:

"He never preached what he did not earnestly try to practice. For the hypocrite he had the greatest contempt. He had not use for the minister who selfishly advanced himself at the expense of the church, or who used the

pulpit to advertise himself before the world.”¹⁰

Furthermore, he had a steadiness of life and ministry. His routine was to go before the Lord and go over his sermon each day. This practice was maintained even as he was brought into the spotlight and center of the civil rights movement.¹¹ He remained focused to prepare to teach and lead his people in the work of God.

Elevation of Oppressed People and Multiethnic Church

As a man of mixed racial background and a proponent of black equality he had strong convictions about how to elevate Americans of African descent. He was convinced that the gospel needed to shape the virtue and character of individuals, families and communities as well as work for institutional justice. Advancement included being a godly people shaping godly families.¹² In addition to his exhortation of people in the African

American community, he also had no tolerance for the twisted racism of many white church people. Yes, he exhorted his people in virtue, but he also called out white Christians who twisted their biblical confession with racial hatred and hypocrisy. He was discouraged by how little the gospel seemed to affect white “Christians” own racial prejudice saying:

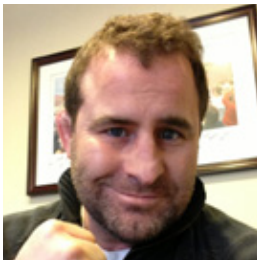
“Race prejudice is not the monopoly of the infidel, of the atheist, of the man of the world. It is shared by so-called professing Christians.”¹³

He fought against unification of northern Presbyterian churches with the racist Presbyterians of the south¹⁴ and believed that the gospel allowed black and white to be joined together as the church in a community that shared a common language.¹⁵ His idea of equality and commonality in the gospel is a legacy we rejoice in at Jacob's Well. The truth that God brings people of various backgrounds together in the gospel is a great blessing to our lives. (Ephesians 2:14-16, Revelation 7:9-12)

Primary Mission of the Church

In all our serving, loving our communities, working for justice, and showing mercy, Grimké's example reminds us we must never neglect, leave out or cease preaching the cross of Jesus Christ, the salvation of sinners and the truth of the Word of God. This sentiment comes forth in a journal entry he wrote as a seminary student training for a life of ministry ahead:

“I accept, and accept without reservation, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as God's Word, sent to Adam's sinful race and pointing out the only way by which it can be saved. Without the Holy Scriptures and what they reveal, there is no hope for humanity. To build on anything else is to build on the sand.” **WT**



Reid Monaghan - Reid spent years in campus ministry with athletes and then in local church ministry with young adults before sensing a call to help plant a missional movement of churches. He and his family moved to central New Jersey with a small group of friends to establish Jacob's Well, which launched in the fall of 2009. In addition to serving the Jacob's Well community, Reid's passion is to help others plant gospel-centered churches that are theologically driven and culturally engaged. He has been married to Kasey for 17 years and they have two girls and a boy rounding out the family.

¹ Mark Perry, *Lift up Thy Voice : The Grimké Family's Journey from Slaveholders to Civil Rights Leaders* (New York: Viking, 2001), 17.

² More on John Grimké *ibid.*, 17-20.

³ Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *The Faithful Preacher : Recapturing the Vision of Three Pioneering African-American Pastors* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2007), 113.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 114. Hodge is still discussed today in areas of systematic theology and theological method as his approach has been described as a science of induction with the revelation of God in Scripture as the main source of data. This has drawn both fans and ire over the years. His theology is available for free online and remains well-read today – check it out and enjoy <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/hodge/theology1.toc.html>

⁵ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 135-182. Three of Grimké's sermons are reprinted for us in Anyabwile's work.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 325.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 332-336.

¹⁰ Anyabwile, 117.

¹¹ Perry, 340.

¹² Anyabwile, 119.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁴ Perry, 324.

¹⁵ Anyabwile, 120.

Well Told

Rushina's Story
by Becky Garcia

Everyone loves a good story. Our lives are filled with stories—from breaking news to popular books to blockbuster movies, humans innately respond to compelling narratives. The Bible tells the story of God through the story of God's people. In our Well Told section, we want to continue telling the story of God through His people. We're starting with Rushina Patel, a member of Jacob's Well. Rushina and I sat down one night over falafel sandwiches and she shared with me the story of her life and how a young woman raised as a Hindu found herself following Christ.

Rushina Patel has been taking swimming lessons. No one ever taught her to swim when she was a child. As a result, water has always been frightening. On the eve of her thirtieth birthday she's been conquering the fear head-on at the Mercer County Community College pool.

I think I do a pretty good job of hiding my surprise when she tells me this. As someone who grew up loving to swim, it's hard to imagine what it must feel like to be afraid of the water. I'm surprised by her courage; I try to remember the last time I faced one of my fears so directly, and I come up short. But given her story, Rushina's resolve shouldn't surprise me.

Most people's initial impression of her is likely that of a quiet and reserved woman; I've been privileged to learn that her quietness belies eloquence and strength. She grew up in Union, NJ, the daughter of a Hindu father and Jain mother. I ask her what it was like to grow up with parents of two different religions. *"Certain things didn't always make sense. Hinduism and Jainism are opposite in a lot of ways—Hinduism there's many gods and Jainism they don't believe in a creator God."* Her mother attended Hindu temple with the family, but Rushina was still bothered by the incongruities she felt within her parents' faith traditions.

She and I spend a bit of time talking about our childhoods, and how we were both well-behaved daughters who did well in school; but when we jump back

to our discussion of religion I realize that Rushina's backbone was stronger than mine even when she was young. She explains that the Hindu practice of idol worship never sat well with her, so while every room in her childhood home had an idol, she decided she wasn't comfortable having one in her bedroom.



"I never felt like that was God. I would pray Hindu prayers and then I would pray my thoughts to God, and I always felt closer to God at those times." She also felt a tug of discomfort when she

considered how focused her parents' religions were on ritual and tradition. She cited poor people in the streets of India who couldn't attend temple because of physical deformities – *"God still cares about them, they're there for a reason. Just because they can't go to temple doesn't mean God doesn't care for them."* The more she studied the tenets of Hinduism, the more she found herself unsatisfied with the answers it provided.

Eventually her questioning led her to the place we all go when we want answers: the internet. She laughs as she tells me that three years ago, during a difficult emotional period, she started searching the web for the truth about life and God. *"Like, I googled 'What is the purpose of life?'"* she says with a giggle. She came across some odd websites, but Christianity kept popping up. At first, she was wary of the Christian gospel—she had heard some stories and had her doubts: *"If God is really forgiving how come He kicked Adam and Eve out?"* But since Christianity kept appearing in her searches, she read more and more about it and tried to piece together a fuller understanding of what it meant to be a Christian.

If we were watching a movie of Rushina's life, this is where the perfect character conveniently shows up to help her story along. In this case it was one of Rushina's coworkers, a man who said he was a pastor. To Rushina this meant he was potentially someone "holy" with



whom she could ask questions and get answers. So, in yet another courageous act, she decided to approach him and explain what she had been learning. He patiently listened, answered many of her questions, and gifted her a Bible. She returned to him with more questions and slowly developed a fuller understanding of the Christian gospel and how it applied to her life. Eventually, she felt that her questions and struggles with Hinduism and the other faiths she had studied had led her to Truth, to Christ.

In the couple of years that I have known her, Rushina's faith has blossomed into something truly

beautiful. Though her quietness often means other voices are heard before hers, when she does speak it is with wisdom and understanding far beyond the few years she has walked with Christ. She's honest that at times it's been a trying transition for her. Having grown up with the idea of karma and the notion that she should strive to never do bad, accepting the idea of being a sinner was scary. And sharing her decision with her parents was also difficult, though their reaction has been better than she feared. When I ask Rushina whether the God she knows now feels like the same God she would secretly pray to when she was younger,

she tells me: *"Now it's more like a two-way thing. There's reciprocation."*

One Sunday last June, with just a few swimming lessons under her belt, Rushina stood on the edge of the Round Valley Reservoir in Clinton, New Jersey. On that day, Rushina Patel was baptized. Rushina's name was called and she carefully waded out into deeper waters. It was a fitting image of a story characterized by such unrelenting strength. As if symbolizing the last few years of her life, Rushina calmly faced her fears and emerged with the smile of someone who's found new life. **WT**



Becky Garcia – *Becky is a New Jersey native who runs her own creative business from home. She thinks every day should include comfy jeans, delicious food, bright colors, and a podcast or two. She's been attending Jacob's Well since the fall of 2009.*

AND IT WAS STILL HOT.

AND IT WAS SOMETHING OF A CONFIRMATION OF THEIR NEW DREAMS AND GOOD INTENTIONS WHEN AT THE END OF THEIR JOURNEY THEIR DAUGHTER STOOD UP FIRST AND STRETCHED HER YOUNG BODY

I'M GOING TO HAVE A LOT OF FUN WITH DUDLEY THIS SUMMER

HE LOVED BIG BROTHER WHEN MARGARET GROWS UP SHE WILL HAVE A DAUGHTER, WHO IS TO BE PETER'S MOTHER IN TURN; AND THUS IT WILL GO ON, SO LONG AS CHILDREN ARE GAY AND INNOCENT HEARTLESS

ONE BIRD SAID TO BILLY PILGRIM, "POO-TEE-WEET?"

THERE'S ONLY THE LAST PAGE TO WRITE ON. I'LL FILL IT WITH WORDS OF JUST ONE SYLLABLE. I LOVE. I HAVE LOVED. I WILL LOVE. I LOVE YOU, I LOVE YOU, I LOVE YOU.

AND SO THEY CROSSED THE BRIDGE AND PASSED THE MILL BY THE RIVER AND CAME RIGHT BACK TO BILBO'S OWN DOOR.

HE WAS STILL SLEEPING ON HIS FACE AND THE BOY WAS SITTING BY HIM WATCHING HIM. THE OLD MAN WAS DREAMING ABOUT THE LIONS CHILDREN

THE OTHER IS THAT BACK IN OUR OWN WORLD EVERYONE SOON STARTED SAYING HOW EUSTACE HAD IMPROVED, AND HOW YOU'D NEVER KNOWN HIM FOR THE SAME BOY": EVERYONE EXCEPT AUNT ALBERTA, WHO SAID HE BECAME VERY COMMONPLACE AND TIRESOME AND IT MUST HAVE BEEN THE INFLUENCE OF THOSE PEVENSIE CHILDREN

AND SO, AS TINY TIM OBSERVED, GOD BLESS US, EVERY ONE!

'IT IS A FAR, FAR BETTER THING THAT I DO, THAN I HAVE EVER DONE; IT IS A FAR, FAR BETTER REST THAT I GO TO THAN I HAVE EVER KNOWN'