

October 1, 2017  
2017 Day School Sunday  
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St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, New Haven, CT

Ezekiel 11: 17-21  
Psalm 111  
Romans 12:1-20  
Luke 10:38-42

Do you all know the comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes*? As described by Wikipedia, "*Calvin and Hobbes* follows the humorous antics of Calvin, a precocious, mischievous and adventurous six-year-old boy, and Hobbes, his sardonic stuffed tiger."<sup>1</sup> Everyone else may experience Hobbes as a stuffed tiger, but to Calvin, Hobbes is quite real.

On Facebook recently, I happened upon a particular *Calvin and Hobbes* four-panel strip. Calvin is at school, in a classroom. He is sitting at his desk and having an exchange with his teacher. It goes like this:

Teacher: If there are no questions, we'll move on to the next chapter.

Calvin: (*with raised hand*) I have a question.

Teacher: Certainly, Calvin. What is it?

Calvin: What's the point of human existence?

Teacher: I meant any questions about the subject at hand.

Calvin: Oh. Frankly, I'd like to have the issue resolved before I expend any more energy on this.<sup>2</sup>

Something similar is going on in today's Gospel reading from Luke. Siblings Mary and Martha have a simple choice: to be distracted by tasks, or to sit and listen. It's the choice between small tasks and large themes. Mary chooses to sit while Martha chooses to work—and to work herself into a lather of self-righteous resentment. She probably feels she doesn't have a choice; after all, somebody has to do it. Martha takes her resentment to Jesus, apparently expecting him to take her side. Instead, citing Martha's worry and distraction, Jesus sides with Mary.

When I imagine Martha's reaction, I see her surprised and disappointed and maybe more than a little annoyed. That may say less about Martha and more about me. Yes, Martha is someone with whom I can identify. Maybe you can, too. She expects a lot from herself; she expects a lot from others. The "Martha cycle" basically goes like this: expectation, overfunction, resentment, and repeat.

At the end of the Gospel reading, Jesus says, "Mary has chosen the better part." But he doesn't go on to explain what that means. He can't possibly mean sitting forever; that's *not* what he and his disciples do. Realistically, no one can be a full-time Mary. But neither can anyone be a full-time Martha. Life *must* be about more than worry and distraction and resentment. For life *to* be about more than that, there has to be room for the big questions, questions like Calvin's: What is the point of human existence? By pausing, and sitting, and listening, we make space to explore those questions.

There are lots of places and ways to do that. I think it's what we do here at St. Thomas's Church on Sunday mornings. It's also what we do here at St. Thomas's Day School at the start of every school day.

Today is the Sunday of the annual Episcopal Schools Celebration. The theme of this year's celebration is, "Be transformed by the renewing of your minds." The *Calvin and Hobbes* strip well illumines the educational "transformation of minds" that sets apart Episcopal Schools. It's about LEARNING writ large. At St. Thomas's, we have begun to describe it this way: "An Episcopal School is an academic community that offers a substantive education while instilling lifelong values of courage, integrity, kindness, justice, responsibility, and curiosity." Today we combine the voices of Day School and Church to give thanks for *all* Episcopal schools and especially for *our* Episcopal school, St. Thomas's Day School.

We're together today, but as you know, while Church and Day School are housed under one roof, their people are seldom together. Except for our ever-present Dorothy, the people I see on weekdays are generally not the people I see on Sundays. But we're together today ... and it's a little odd. Have you ever been at a social event during which it felt like your worlds were colliding? When this happens, the people who occupy those usually separate worlds get tossed together, shaken up, and poured out again. They land mixed up in ways you never imagined. It can be disconcerting. Both worlds are important to you, so you want everything to go well. You want everyone to like one another, or at least to get along. It can be anxiety provoking.

Today feels a little like that for me. At this very moment, the world of Church and the world of Day School are colliding. I have the best clergy job ever, exactly because I get to be part of both worlds. But right now, you're all mixed up. It's disconcerting and I'm a little anxious. I don't want you just to get along; I don't want you just to like one another. I know, appreciate, and love both worlds; I want you to know, appreciate, and love each other. My Martha wants to take charge and *make* it happen. But, of course, I can't.

As I have so often said from this pulpit, regarding so much of church and life, it's all about relationship. Head of School Gina Panza and I spend a lot of time thinking and talking about the relationship between the Day School and the Church. We talk about the past, the present, and the future. We talk about how the Day School and the Church share similar values and commitments. Most of all we talk about how both worlds are located within a much larger world.

Which brings us to the core of what the Day School and Church hold in common: our call is to make that larger world a better place. There are several other independent schools in the area; there are plenty of other churches. Each of us arrived here by a different path and for a different reason. But I believe that the goal of making the world a better place is the core of our shared ethos. For the most part, we even agree on *how* to make the world a better place. In all of this, Gina and I remain convinced that the Day School and the Church are each other's best asset.

I suspect that Gina and I are both are inclined to overfunction. Our default patterns are much more Martha than Mary. We both want the very best for St. Thomas’s Day School and Church, and we are willing to fight for it. But we can’t do it all, so we’re trying to bring forth our inner Marys. That will make us better leaders, because, in the end, what happens is really up to you. The world is always changing. But St. Thomas’s remains abundantly blessed. Through mutual engagement, we will discern how to offer those blessings to the world in ways that are always new and fresh.

I often use this pulpit to urge parishioners to be goodness in the world. I less often remind parishioners that one of the things important things that St. Thomas’s does is simply *exist*. Our dual Church–Day School community exists, not of necessity, but by choice. Here we look both deep within and far beyond ourselves. On Sundays, we are mostly Christians; on weekdays, not so much. Some call it prayer, some call it karmic intention, some all it sending positive vibes to the Universe. Whatever you all it, whenever it happens, and whoever is present, the simple act of gathering makes a difference, personally and universally.

One of the situations in which it can feel as if worlds are colliding is at a wedding. At a wedding, the world of family members suddenly crashes hard against the world of friends. In a way, the Day School and Church are something like the two parties to a marriage, and today we’re crashing together. But our marriage has already lasted more than 60 years. So today is less like a wedding and more like a renewal of vows.

For most couples, staying married requires hard work and persistence. Like good wine, the taste of love gets better and more complex as a marriage ages. The renewal of vows is both an acknowledgment of the past and a recommitment to the future. For a marriage to last, the couple has to renew those vows every day. As the people who *are* the Day School and the Church, the marriage vows are ours to renew. After we pause today, I hope we renew them with gusto.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “*Calvin and Hobbes*,” Wikipedia, available online at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calvin\\_and\\_Hobbes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calvin_and_Hobbes) (accessed September 30, 2017)

<sup>2</sup> I saved the cartoon some time ago, copied from an unknown source online. It’s pasted below.

