

# *A story or two*

TRINITY CANTON'S CHURCH AND MISSIONAL LIFE NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2021



In this edition of *A story or two*, we reflect on God's faithfulness in our COx groups and how God is authoring within TC a "script-story"!



## **The greatest gift, and how to make the most of it at Christmas**

by Pat Schnieders, TC's director of spiritual formation

Over the last two years we have talked a lot within Trinity Canton Church about the importance of attention. The most valuable resource we have at our disposal and greatest gift to offer another is our attention. Our core practices as a community, particularly within the COx groups, are what we call the Rhythms of Attention. I trust that many could testify as to how their lives have been changed by learning how to better pay attention (to themselves, to one another, and to God) and by experiencing life within a truly attentive, loving community. We are grateful for how the Lord is at work among us! I would now ask us to consider how our practices outside of our COx groups might be seen in reference to the principle of *paying attention*.

As we approach Christmas 2021, what is the purpose of Advent? Why do holidays (*holy days*) matter? After all, scholars agree that the birth of Christ didn't take place in December, let alone on the 25th. But you see, the date is not the point. The purpose of Advent is to turn our attention to Christ's coming, to remember the extraordinary event of God taking on flesh, the incredible miracle of the incarnation. Our hearts, our souls *need* to remember. We need to pay attention to the true significance of Christmas, to relive and retell the story of God's love in an act of such extreme humility and vulnerability. If we fail to pay attention to the true story how easily we become shaped by the cultural narrative of consumerism and materialism. Give your attention to the Christmas story and allow it to shape your understanding of God and his radical love for you. We could say the same thing next spring when the season of Lent arrives in preparation for Easter. I have come to appreciate the Church Calendar as it provides seasons of remembrance, calling our attention back to God's faithfulness, just as the nation of Israel had their appointed feasts, reminding them of the covenantal faithfulness of Yahweh. To remember is to pay attention to the past so that we may look to the future with assurance. As a worshipping community our aim is to help one another *pay attention* to God's story as we learn to inhabit our place within it.

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My hope is, as a community in our small gatherings and in our worship, we are learning to become radical attention-payers. But what about us individually, as we go about our day to day lives? How would you describe your own devotional life? By that I mean, what sort of daily practices do you incorporate into your life that help you connect with, or pay attention to, God? If things are going well, then great! If not, maybe now is a good time to evaluate what might need to change. I'm not talking about having a "quiet time" so that I can feel better about myself for having done my religious duty and check a box for having done a good deed. The spiritual habits or practices we engage in are not so we can feel better about ourselves or appease a God who we perceive to be frustrated with us. They really should be exercises in attention, not obligation. Maybe what works best is a solitary walk in the woods, maybe it is sitting in silence with a lighted candle, maybe it is going over and over a parable spoken by Jesus in the gospels, maybe it is slowly, thoughtfully praying a psalm as your own prayer, maybe it is taking out a notebook and creating a journal in which you dialogue with God, maybe it is staring at a work of art or singing a favorite hymn. You see, its not about religious legalism, duty, or obligation. It matters less what you do than if whatever it is you do is helping you to connect with and pay *attention* to the Spirit of the living God.

So why do I harp so much on attention? Because the curse of this generation is SADD: Spiritual Attention Deficit Disorder. We have super computers that fit into our pocket and are with us around the clock. The powers and principalities of this world are using the technology at our fingertips, working to manipulate and coerce the masses to subscribe to their narratives and to buy their products. There is a thief at work, and he is stealing people's attention. But we can get it back. In our worshipping community, in our small groups and in our individual habits, we can and must be *intentional* with our *attention*. It is your most valuable asset; the greatest gift you have to offer. Protect it and direct it to what matters most.

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas, may we not be washed away in the cultural stream. Rather, as we continue to learn to pay attention to our hearts, to one another's hearts, and to the still, small voice of God, may we become a people in tune with the Great Composer, celebrating and singing his song of love, faithfulness and redemption, and in so doing providing much needed light to a distracted world.

### **To hear more and get involved in what Pat wrote about:**

- To hear more about TC's COx groups and Rhythms of Attention, visit:  
<https://trinitycantonchurch.org/church-of-two-co2-groups/>
- To get involved in a COx group, be encouraged to contact Pat Schnieders:  
patrick@trinitycantonchurch.org 785-564-1610

## Embracing and adapting to God's script for a changed world:

How the Holy Spirit's craftsmanship has enabled TC to play her part in God's script

*Featuring testimonies, insights, and commentary from members of the TC community*

Ken Costa, church warden for Holy Trinity Brompton and author of *Know Your Why* and *God at Work*, writes, "If we want to be written into God's script for the world, we need to be prepared to change" (Costa, *God at Work*, Alpha International, 2007, p. 186). This assertion, authored over a decade before our pandemic, has proved to be relevant to our current up-ended world.

Of course, many people would agree that change in this pandemic has been a key to moving forward, making life work. But what—or who—can bring the *right* kind of change?

The Holy Spirit, in cooperation with us, brings change and has been doing this throughout the history of the church. As individuals and as a community, many connected to Trinity Canton Church have "dared to change" during the last two change-filled years, clinging to the timeless Gospel-truth of God's faithfulness in Christ while also embracing innovation in how we "do church."

From meeting weekly in hybrid (in-person or online) COx groups, to combining scripture memorization with biblical archaeology, to hand-delivering Ash Wednesday and communion supplies last winter, to now meeting monthly in person, Trinity Canton has sought to stay true to our values while contenting ourselves that we are, indeed, a church *crafted by the Holy Spirit*.

As several webposted interviews showcase, TC's weekly COx groups have proven not only a logistically simple but a meaningfully healthy way for small-sized groups of people in Manhattan, and across Kansas and the country, to connect with each other and with Jesus.

Earlier this year, several COx participants were interviewed by Susan Schnieders (TC's director of ministry operations) regarding the impact of the COx group routine of paying attention to our hearts, to others, to God. "We look forward to our [weekly COx] nights...to check-in and to listen and pay attention to others," Nicky shared.

The COx group format—truly an innovative and healthy way to do church—has been used by the Holy Spirit to foster gratitude in our hearts through the sharing of so-called "appreciation stories." Susie explains: "We have been able to reflect back on our appreciation stories...[which] make you actually sit back and really think, 'What am I thankful for?' To think of specifics and describe the feelings...even the sensations...makes you more appreciative."

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As Trinity Canton has embraced changed, we have discovered the joy of getting to play a part in God's ongoing script for the world. But, it seems, God has given our community an even deeper appreciation for what it means to be involved in a "script," as several in our midst have during the last two years assumed script-related roles and responsibilities in actual films, plays, commercials, and movies!

This group includes COx group participant Emmanuel who, after re-engaging with acting lessons in the middle of the pandemic, is now involved in a constellation of television, short-film, commercial, and other media. He explains what a "script" is all about:

"The script acts as the guide. It will give you the given circumstances (the facts). As the actor, you bring the color to the text. Still you must listen—to the director, to your partner, etc. In a scene, no matter how much you work on your own delivery, you don't know what energy your scene partner will bring to their interpretation of the text. *Adaptability is a key ability*," Emmanuel explains.

Sally, who in the last half-year has taken on roles in a Harry Potter parody (playing Hermione—and in this comical musical, pronounced "Her-mee-own") and another recent play at the Manhattan Arts Center, talks about the joy of expressing the words in a script. "I really enjoy performing because you start off at the beginning not knowing what's going on, and then at the end, you've memorized your lines and *met so many great people who will play a big factor in your life*," she says.

Ian, who served as editor-in-chief for a recent Kansas State Fair filmmaking competition, shares his insight on the essential value of a "story" in filmmaking. "The thing about making films and scripts is that people over-exaggerate the requirements for making something that's 'good.' People say you need this much money, or this camera, or this crew to make something good. But the truth is those are just tools to make what's going to be good *great*. A wise man once said, 'Story is king.' If you've got a good story, *that's what keeps people intrigued and longing for more*."

Bridgett, who appears in the Sermon on the Mount scene of *The Chosen*, shares her insights into the experience of arriving on the set for this faith-based film and letting the Holy Spirit craft her experience. "When I arrived at the set for *The Chosen*, I decided to give the day to the Holy Spirit. It was a long day and very overwhelming to the senses (in a good way). I let Him guide me in where to go and where to sit for each scene. It was beautiful. I had a very small role as an extra—no lines and barely even in the camera shot. But...I got to sit at the feet of Jesus during the Sermon on the Mount! And while I knew of course that the man giving the sermon wasn't Jesus, *the real Jesus was with me, and enjoying every moment with me*. And it's like that every day!"

Not unlike their experiences and insights, God's story-script—for TC and for the world—is one that invites our adaptability (Emmanuel's point), impacts our lives (Sally's experience), makes us long for more (Ian's insight), and (as Bridgett notes) involves Jesus's joyful presence with us.



### Connect with us!

- To get involved in a COx group, email [patrick@trinitycantonchurch.org](mailto:patrick@trinitycantonchurch.org)
- To access audio previews of sermons or our podcast, "Voices of TC" visit: <https://trinitycantonchurch.org/category/podcast/>
- To receive notices of our monthly meetings (Second Sunday of the month at Danforth chapel), email [susan@trinitycantonchurch.org](mailto:susan@trinitycantonchurch.org)
- To financially support our operations or benevolence funds, please visit: <https://trinitycantonchurch.org/giving/>

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