2015

Saint Anne's Episcopal Church

Alexander M. Dutchak

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/rels108

Part of the Religion Commons

© The Author

Downloaded from
https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/rels108/9

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of World Studies at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in RELS 108 Human Spirituality by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.
On Sunday, November 29, I attended the 9 AM service at Saint Anne’s Episcopal Church at 1700 Wainwright Drive, Reston, Virginia 20190. At Saint Anne’s, everyone is welcome to come celebrate the Christian faith through Protestant Episcopalian practice, and is encouraged to “come alive” to make the world a better place. Saint Anne’s was recommended to me by an old friend named Matt, who’s family has attended their services regularly for many years. The presiding official at the 9 AM service was Father Jim Papile.

I pulled into the parking lot of Saint Anne’s around 8:50 AM and the first thing I noticed was a group of children running around playing a game of tag on a colorful playground next to the main building. The lot that the church stood on was devoid of trees, which saddened the nature lover inside of me, but the premise was surrounded by densely packed trees clearly marking the end of the property. I walked over to the playground because I naturally get excited when I see metal play sets. I love doing pull-ups and handstands on high objects, so I could not resist a pre-service exercise. After performing a handstand on top of the monkey bars, I walked into the church, with it’s steeple topped with a white cross and large windows along the side with cross frames.

As I entered the main building I was greeted by an elderly couple who asked if I had attended a service at Saint Anne’s before. I told them I had never been before, and they kindly welcomed me and gave me a name tag to write my name on and place on my chest. Another gentleman then handed me a pamphlet that had the information for the service and pointed me in the direction of the main hall. There were many people finding their seats in the main hall. Among the wooden pews with blue cushions I saw people of all different ethnicities, and ages. There were kids running in and out of the pews chasing one another, adults chatting and robed officials greeting people. The stage at the front of the hall was much larger than that of the UUCF that I attended last month. In fact, the entire hall was much larger than I had expected. They clearly expected large groups at every service.

I looked around trying to decide where I would sit, and apparently looked quite disoriented because an elderly man approached me and asked if I would like to sit with him and keep him company. He had a laminated badge that read “Jim,” so I figured he must be a regular at the services there. I agreed and we made our way to the center of the hall and sat along the main path to the stage. He was very kind and asked me about myself and what brought me to the church. I told him about my assignment and my interest in Religious studies and saw a look of intrigue upon his face. He wanted to know much more and we talked intensely for the next few minutes before the service began.

The service began with a short segment of
announcements from one of the presiding officials, a woman with an enormous smile whose joy seemed to radiate throughout the hall. She was very encouraging to the visitors and asked that we do what makes us feel comfortable; there was no pressure to sing along to the hymns or to put any money in the donation basket. She also briefly mentioned the passing of two regulars at the church and prayed for them as well as promised memorial services for each one in the future. After she finished, everyone stood to sing a hymn. I don’t like to sing in public so I simply stood and listened whilst looking around and taking in the beauty of the architecture and sunlight radiating in through the vast windows.

When we sat, Father Jim stood and addressed the congregation. He told us a story that really struck a chord with me. It was a beautiful story about a grandfather teaching his granddaughter a delightful life lesson. The story was called “My Grandfather’s Blessings” by Dr. Rachel Naomi Remen. In the story, the narrator recalled her childhood and spoke of how she remembered her grandfather’s gifts more than any toys or treats she ever received, because they spoke to her in a way no other’s could, and they were timeless. One year he gave her a cup filled with dirt. She wasn’t allowed to play with dirt, and was disappointed by the gift at first. Her grandfather made her promise to water it everyday, and if she did then something would happen. She promised, and watered it everyday, but as the days went by and nothing changed, she began to wonder why and grew weary from expectation. She tried to give the cup back to her grandfather after three weeks, but he refused and said “everyday.” Eventually two green leaves sprouted from the dirt and she was amazed and astonished. When she told her grandfather, he told her that life will always be there if you remain faithful. This story really touched my heart.

After another few hymns and prayers, a guest speaker presented her sermon. She touched on the importance of ancestry. She spoke about building on foundations that we did not build. Our forefathers shaped the world that we live in, and paying respects to them is extremely important. The world we live in is in turmoil everyday, but there is also insurmountable beauty all around us at any given moment, and for that we must thank our ancestors for bringing change upon the world and breaking social norms to make life better for people of all ages, genders, ethnicities and religions. The service was beautiful and I felt very peaceful afterwards. I spent some time in the entrance hall chatting with some folks who wanted to know what I thought and if they could help me in any way. We talked about Thanksgiving and family, which was extremely important to me because I had a rough experience with mine on the day after Thanksgiving. Family can be tough, but there will always be friends to remind you that families argue, and that is natural. All we can do is love each other and pray for each other. That made me smile before I went home.

Overall I thoroughly enjoyed the service at Saint Anne’s Episcopal Church. The people were wonderful, the service was touching, and I left with a sense of peace and comfort knowing that all will be well, no matter what pains me. I am thankful to have had such encouraging people introduce themselves to me and push me further on my journey in this world. •

Written Fall 2015. © Alexander M Dutchak.