

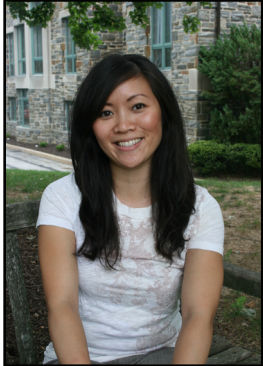
Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church

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Automatic Drive?

By the Rev. Joanne Fong



When my friend and I were driving home the other day, my dog sitting on my lap accidentally hit the shift gear and pushed it from automatic-drive to manual-drive. I didn't know what a sudden gearshift did to the car while in drive. So I quickly looked for the instruction manual in the glove compartment while my friend looked for a shoulder to pull over. No sooner after I found it, I got frustrated with the manual. All I wanted was a one sentence, quick fix it phrase that can explain to me how the car could shift gears while gassing. Instead several pages and pages of instructions for the use of manual-drive unrelated to "shifting" glared at me while the manual offered a one-paragraph explanation for all the other gears!

This relatively ordinary event reveals a pattern that emerges when we deal with crises big and small, particularly when they weave their way into the fabric of our spiritual lives. Most of the time we think, act and run on automatic-drive, unaware of God's guidance (or of our need thereof) until we break down. Then we remember that God is the designer and engineer of this whole thing we call life. When the automatic and uneventful ebb and flow of our ordinary days is interrupted and suddenly things are shifted without warning into high gear, we begin to frantically search for answers. We may turn to sacred texts like the Bible or to other devotional classics, or try to quickly engage in a familiar spiritual practice. There's nothing wrong with such things. But all too often what we want to find in them is something that God can do for us, quickly and now, a quick fix that will solve things in an instant and get us back on the road. Sometimes when we turn to familiar streams of living water we get frustrated. We find more questions than answers, questions that don't seem immediately relevant to the struggle of the moment.

There's a story about a guy who's walking down a street when he falls in a hole. The walls are so steep he can't get out. A doctor passes by and the guy shouts up, "Hey you! Can you help me out?" The doctor writes a prescription, throws it down in the hole, and moves on. Then a priest comes along and the guy shouts up, "Father, I'm down in this hole; can you help me out?" The priest writes out a prayer, throws it down in the hole and moves on. Then a friend walks by. "Hey, Joe, it's me. Can ya help me out?" And the friend jumps in the hole. The guy says, "Are ya stupid? Now we're both down here." The friend says, "Yeah, but I've been down here before and I know the way out."

This Sunday we celebrate baptism of the Lord Sunday, and may very well find ourselves asking why was Jesus baptized anyway? Jesus was baptized because God doesn't just throw answers at us when we are in the hole. God gets in the midst of the pits we fall in and gets dirty. God gets wet when we find ourselves drowning. It's because God is with us that we can trust God is for us, and that God will lead us out of darkness into the place of everlasting light and life.

Prayer

O God of light and peace,
whose glory, shining in the child of Bethlehem,
still draws the nations to yourself:
dispel the darkness that shrouds our path,
that we may come

to kneel before Christ in true worship,
offer him our hearts and souls,
and return from his presence to live as he has taught.
Amen.