



A FAILED ADOPTION AND THE GOSPEL

BY KELSEY JURKOVICH

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It was one of the worst days of my life. As my wife and I drove the hour-ride home, only a few words were spoken between us. Our hearts were as hollow as the backseat; we were in complete shock. After a long labor and a long two days, the little girl we had set our hearts on, months ago, was not coming home with us. The birth mother decided to parent.

There were so many layers of pain in this whole event that words cannot adequately convey the emotions I felt. One moment my wife and I were basking in the glory of bonding with this beautiful little baby, and the next we were mourning the loss of her.

As we returned to our hotel and began to pack our things, the tears streaming down my wife's face cut to my heart. Not only was I bearing the weight of my own loss, but the weight of my wife's as well. As a husband, I had failed to provide what my wife and I so longed for. As we left, we drove by the hospital that only hours ago brought us so much joy, but now only struck a chord of emptiness and failure.

We are confident that just as we were waiting on the other side of the pain of the cross, so too, our child is waiting for us on the other side of the pain of a failed adoption.

On the endless drive home, I didn't think that the emotions I felt could be any worse than at that moment. But the small part of me that was still thinking rationally knew that this moment was not the climax of pain; more would have to be endured. The peak of our pain was waiting for us to get home: our 4-year-old and 2-year-old sons. We knew that we would have to explain to them why we had returned the same way we left—empty-handed. Our youngest we were not so worried about, but our oldest son was prepared for and fully expecting us to return with a baby sister in hand.

Though there was great pain in experiencing my own loss and watching my wife mourn as well, the apex was when I sat clinging to my weeping 4-year-old. It was at this moment that God graciously allowed me to *feel* the cost that comes with adoption.

When the pain was deepest, and the cost greatest, God began to reveal gospel grace to our hearts. As I held my son, feeling the cost of adoption, my mind began to think about the cost that was necessary for God to adopt me into his family. The Father did not have to explain the cost of adoption to his Son, he had to have him crucified. The Father did not have to watch his Son mourn loss, he had to watch him die. The Father did not have to hold his weeping Son, he had to turn away from him. All of this and much more were endured to adopt me.

Recognizing this has done two important things for us. First, through revealing the gospel to us, God is giving us grace as we walk the road he has laid down for us, and this gives us much joy. We know that this event could have led us to despair and bitterness, but God allowed it to deepen our understanding and appreciation of the gospel.

Second, God has given us much hope for the future. By allowing us to realize what it cost him to adopt us, God showed us that we should expect the road to bringing our child home to be costly as well. We are confident that just as we were waiting on the other side of the pain of the cross, so too, our child is waiting for us on the other side of the pain of a failed adoption.

Recognizing that our adoption by God was costly for him has confirmed to us his promise that he is with us through it all. It is in this promise that our souls find rest and peace. 🕊️



Kelsey is associate pastor of Fairlawn Mennonite Church in Apple Creek, Ohio. He and his wife Abbie have three sons.



Because They Went

BY PHIL SWARTZENTRUBER

In Luke 10:2 Jesus told his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (NIV). Going into God’s harvest field is equally valuable to those who go and to those to whom they go. As we go, people are transformed from the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of God. And as we go, we are transformed into the likeness of Jesus, sent by his Father into the harvest field we call earth. Those who go and those to whom they go, together become the church which “rises to become a holy temple...in which God lives by his Spirit” (Eph. 2:21-22).

Two recent deaths in Eastern Kentucky have prompted my thinking about why we go to the harvest field. On August 8, 2021, Mattie Ruth Riley entered heaven. On August 26, 2021, less than three weeks later, Masty Blank also entered heaven. They each finished their earthly race and are in the presence of Jesus.

Seventy-five years ago, God moved in the hearts of CMC ministers prompting them to send a team of three ministers to the south to find a place to do mission work. After a couple days of praying, traveling, and following the leading of the Holy Spirit they were in Breathitt County, Kentucky, at a small community called Turners Creek. Following a summer Bible School on Turners Creek in the fall of 1946, Alvin Swartz moved with his family to Turners Creek and a church was planted there. One of the people who accepted Christ, was gloriously transformed, and became a faithful worker in the church at Turners Creek was John C. Turner, Mattie Ruth’s grandfather. Mattie Ruth grew up in the church and became a follower of Jesus, serving the church as Sunday School and Bible School teacher and treasurer. She had a powerful singing ministry. In her career as a public-school teacher, she impacted countless young lives for Jesus.

Soon after the start of the Turners Creek church, another church was planted ten miles away on Bowlings Creek, but just a couple miles walk through the hills (which is how they traveled in 1948). This church was born out of a concern the Turners Creek people had for their relatives on Bowlings Creek. In 1960, 27-year-old Masty Blank moved with his young family

from Pennsylvania to help with the mission at Bowlings Creek. He was a teacher and song leader, witnessing for Jesus as he supported his family as a carpenter. He impacted many young people in his ministry at Bethel Camp, combining his love for nature, photography, and the Word of God.

Mattie Ruth’s nephew David Turner (John C’s great-grandson) is presently serving as associate pastor at Turners Creek Mennonite Church. David is also a great-grandson of Eli Swartzentruber, one of the three men from CMC who came to visit Turners Creek in 1946.

Presently, there is a movement in CMC, a stirring of the Spirit of the Lord. People are praying that God will send laborers into the harvest. There is a weekly zoom prayer meeting asking that God will lead us as a conference to plant churches. When phone alarms sound at 10:02, we pause to pray the Luke 10:2 prayer.

I don’t profess to know all about heaven, what it’s like and what kind of conversations and reflections are happening there. But allow me to wonder. I wonder if John C. and Eli have talked about their mutual great-grandson who is a pastor at Turners Creek or their mutual great-great granddaughter who was recently baptized in the river, which Eli crossed to get to Turners Creek in 1946. I wonder whether Masty, Mattie Ruth, and others have discussed the 1946 CMC decision that led to church planting in Eastern KY, and I wonder how many people are or will be in heaven because of that decision.

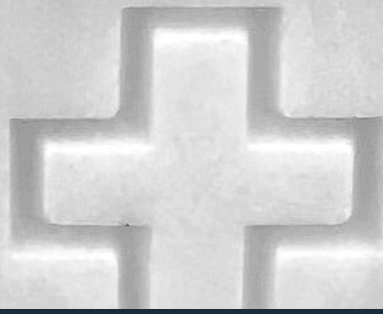


And I wonder if in 75 years people will be asking “How many are in heaven because of the 2021 CMC passion to ‘Mature and Multiply,’ to share the gospel with the unreached in our communities, in our nation, and around the world? And how many thriving, Christ-centered, disciple making churches will have been birthed from this commitment?

As we pray the 10:2 prayer, may we also pray Isaiah 6:8 “Here am I. Send me!”



Phil is pastor of Turners Creek Mennonite Church in Jackson, Kentucky and moderator of CMC. He is a retired high school teacher. He and his wife Rosie enjoy time spent with children and grandchildren.



A Darker Cross

BY MATTHEW CORDELLA-BONTRAGER

1.

I am sitting in my grandparents' pew at St. Isidore Roman Catholic Church in Riverhead, N.Y. I have missed the prompt to kneel. The kneeler flips down onto my small foot as a row of parishioners lowers its pious weight. My shout erupts into the sanctuary like a trumpet blast; I will never forget my grandfather's face — scandalized, incredulous — as he looks sideways down the pew at me.

I have never doubted my grandfather's love. Nor, as a consequence of that disrupted reverence, did I begin to harbor any doubts. But his indignation asserted, as loving words never could, the conviction that an event of surpassing importance occurred in the Mass: Jesus Christ had come to be with his people.

All creation, even my pain, was changed by this light. No older than five, I began to understand that the coming of Christ was the bedrock upon which my life must be built.

2.

I am at Rosedale Bible College, standing behind a simple wooden lectern. No longer do I believe what my grandfather believes (or believed) about the Mass. He has dementia; his condition has deteriorated sharply. We have never been able to speak about how my church has no kneelers.

I read aloud: "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18 NIV).

I have stumbled over the cross. But when Christ came to be with his people, he set his face toward Jerusalem. The cross, too, belongs to the bedrock of my life; no one can lay another foundation. So must Christ — and he, crucified — determine the shape of my life, built together with all the church.

3.


I am at Calverton National Cemetery early on Memorial Day, visiting my grandfather's grave for the first time. He died toward the start of the COVID-19 pandemic; I was not able to attend his funeral. He is buried in a long row of white tombstones, like perfect teeth sticking up from the lower jaw of creation. Yesterday, the Boy Scouts came and picked each tooth with a little flag.

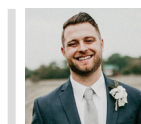
As I draw near, my grandfather's name and rank become visible, carved into the smooth white stone. So, too, is the simple cross above his name; the Star of David for the sergeant behind him; unblemished blankness for the captain at his left. Up close and squinting, these distinctions are discernible; step back, and they melt into reflected brightness. In the panorama, uniformity prevails. The wages of sin are paid to each, whether to a Star of David, a sergeant, a captain, or a cross. All are equal in death, united in this graveyard by little flags and white tombstones.

When I die, I hope the stonecutter forebears every stroke of the chisel allotted for name and rank. I want him to work at darkening the cross, so mourners can see it a long way off. I know that my grandfather wanted to be buried at Calverton, but I trust that the man who glared at me during Mass would likewise have appreciated a darker cross. By the light of that cross, even my grandfather's death is changed.

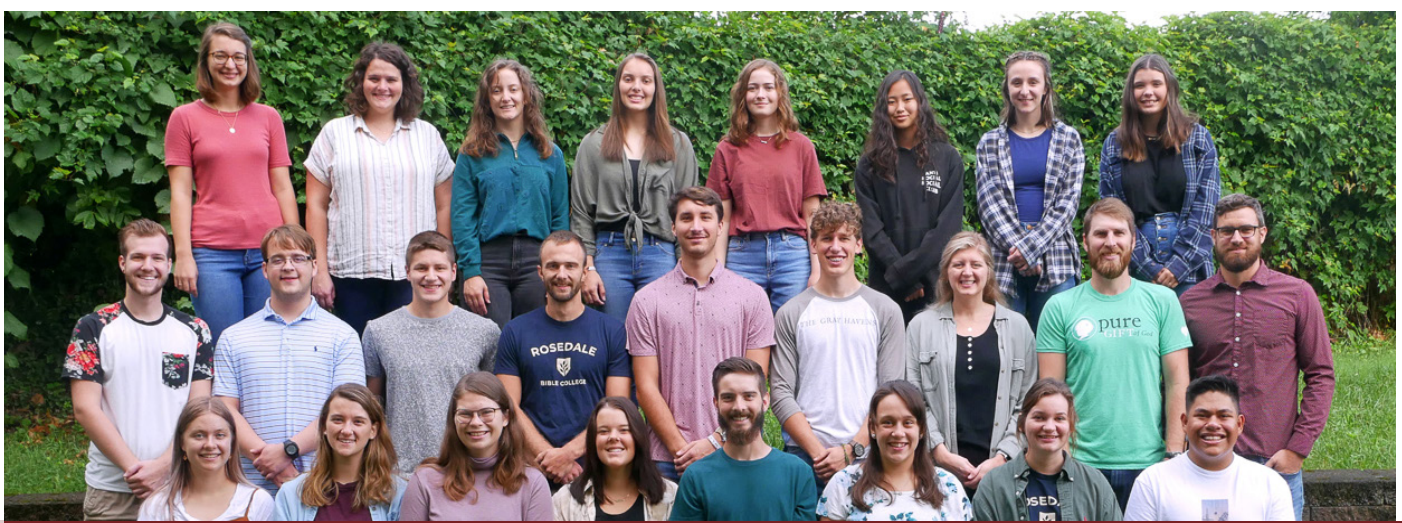
The cross proclaims a better hope than flags and white tombstones. It declares that Jesus Christ has purchased us at the price of his blood. It assures us that the new covenant in his blood will endure forever, long past the day when creation's teeth are worn to stubs. It holds forth a life that no graveyard can deliver; it promises fellowship and peace that cannot be found among the dead. God has certified these promises to us with an empty tomb. Its former occupant lives today, enthroned in glory.

I walk back to the car, straining to keep silent under the pious weight of an awareness that I, too, stand in need of the cross. The distinctions between soldiers and nonresistant Christians have sometimes obscured this fact, which unites all our mortal clay in the equality of death. My salvation — any salvation — rests on Jesus Christ, and not what I have done (or left undone) in his name.

My hope is in him alone, and so I set my face to follow him from Calverton to Jerusalem. This is the shape and significance of my life, together with all the church. More than any tombstone, my living body must bear a dark cross gladly into the world. 



Matthew worships with Shiloh Mennonite Church and serves on the faculty at Rosedale Bible College. A Ph.D. student in systematic theology and Reformation studies, he lives in Mechanicsburg, Ohio, with his wife Rachel and two children.



In Their Midst: REACH 2021

BY MADALYN

As summer drew to a close, Rosedale International (RI) began returning to familiar fall rhythms. Young men and women from all corners of the country and beyond the border converged on the Rosedale International Center (RIC), excited for what the remainder of this year and beyond could hold. This is REACH 2021: three teams of young believers eager to learn about Jesus and teach others about his love.

In many ways, REACH 2021 marks a return to normal for Rosedale International’s Short-Term Programs (STP). While REACH 2020 operated mostly within an on-site bubble, this year looks more like programs from times past. Once again, participants are learning from outside speakers, attending local churches, and serving the community through outreach programs and prayer walks.

These young men and women have followed the call of Christ into an intense season of spiritual learning and growth. Already in the three short weeks since their arrival, they have dug deep into sessions about spiritual warfare, expecting and accepting the Holy Spirit, and intimacy with God. “I’ve been really encouraged by the REACHers’ openness, vulnerability, and willingness to allow the Spirit to work through them,” shared Phil, Short-Term Programs Facilitator. In response to this openness, God has begun to move in their midst, lifting fears and pouring out his love and presence.

Leading the REACH teams are Javan (IN), Olivia (IN), and Kurt (OH). Each has a unique journey to REACH—three examples of trusting God’s guidance over their lives.

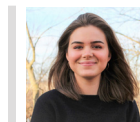
Olivia joined RI staff in January 2021 as Community Outreach intern. When Paige asked her to lead a REACH team, however, Olivia wasn’t surprised. “When I accepted the intern position [in June of 2020], I had a sense that they would ask me to become a team leader.” Although she was sad to leave internship early, Olivia trusted God’s leading. She is excited to lead Anna (SC), Danae (IA), Ellen (OH), and Sophia (OH) to Albuquerque, New Mexico.

In contrast, Javan knew nothing about REACH until July of this year. He had returned home in June from serving in South Africa when plans for another outreach suddenly fell through. At a loss for his next steps, Javan fasted, prayed, and waited for direction that seemed never to come.

As he waited, STP Directors Isaac and Paige stepped out in faith, asking God to provide a third team leader. And when Javan called RI to make a connection, they offered him the position. “I called out of the blue, not knowing about REACH. But immediately I knew—this is why I don’t have direction. I felt like God had ordained it.” Javan will lead Dylan (NM), Reid (OH), Sierra (IN), and Aimee (ON, Canada) as they serve in Phoenix, Arizona.

Kurt, a REACH alum, traveled to Greece and Cyprus with his team in 2016. Earlier this year, during his final semester of Bible college, Isaac and Paige reached out to ask if he had interest in leading a REACH team. Kurt felt initially unsure about accepting the position—but after spending time in prayer, felt strongly called to do so. Now, he is following that call to Albania and leading Cameron (MO), Lizzy (MD), and Grace (OH) in their callings to do the same.

The REACH class of 2021 is walking together as they grow in faith and surrender to God’s guidance over their lives. As they continue to learn in the rich greenhouse environment that REACH provides, we ask you to walk with them in prayer. Pray that God would pour his blessing over each participant as they seek him. Pray that they would remain open to the work of the Spirit. Pray that they would have the courage and boldness to step out in faith, to ask questions, and constantly strive for closeness to Christ. 🙏



Madalyn lives in Rosedale, Ohio. She recently graduated from Grace College & Seminary and serves as Media Coordinator at Rosedale International.