

“We’ll Jump and We’ll See”

There is a movie that I absolutely adore, and I know that I stand pretty much alone in my adoration of it, but nevertheless I’d like to mention it now: the movie is *Joe Versus the Volcano*. It’s about a man who suffers from a crippling fear of the unknown. In particular, his own future. At the end of the film, Joe is staring into the mouth of an active volcano, a volcano he is now expected to jump into, and he describes his life as an unexpected journey on a crooked road, leading him to this moment. To this volcano. To this leap of faith. It’s his moment of decision. Will he jump? His better angel offers this piece of advice: “Nobody knows anything, Joe. We’ll jump and we’ll see.”

When I was a kid, my family didn’t attend church. My mother explained that you don’t need to go to church to have a relationship with God. But my mother did teach me to be a Christian. She spoke to me about Jesus, and read to me from a children’s book entitled, “The Greatest Bible Stories Ever Told.” She taught me to be patient and kind, to accept others for who they are and not what I want them to be, and to respect everyone. All wonderful things to learn, but as I got older, it ruined me in terms of finding a church home. I shunned organized religion. I thought

that all the rules, rites, and regulations got in the way of the pure experience of loving God, so I stayed away. Then God gave me my wife, Claire, and my two daughters, and I learned that that pure experience of loving God that I had kept locked inside myself, like a fine wine, needs to breathe, and is best when shared.

I began attending services here at Saint Luke's on the first Sunday of Advent in 2007. I came with a very specific purpose. I wanted my girls to learn that Christmas was about more than tinsel and getting presents. I had an agenda. I was here for the girls. Surely, I had nothing to learn about God, the universe, myself, the world around me... We would attend through Christmas, and the girls would have a touchstone when we talked about God and religion. Check, please.

But Sally Hagwood wouldn't let us go that easily. She began right in by welcoming us, and treating our girls like her own. Right from the start, she always greeted the girls with a smile and a hug, and often with a little extra something that said, "I've been thinking of you." I will forever be in your debt, Sally. And Claire and I were moved beyond words when Father Tom, kneeling down to speak with Charlotte and Maggie as they were preparing to receive Communion for the first time, assured them that they

were family now, and if they ever had any questions or concerns about ANYTHING, he would always be there for them.

I was already beginning to recognize that there was something special about Saint Luke's. I felt that I was getting so much – much more than I had ever anticipated, and I wanted to do something in return. That summer, I began volunteering for God's Love We Deliver. I met Carol and Dennis Khare, two of the friendliest and most generous people I know. And I began taking classes in preparation for my confirmation, where I met Sal and Florence Amato, and had the distinct pleasure of watching three generations of Amatos taking the next step in their respective faith journeys together. Everywhere I turned, I came across loving and caring people who always had a kind word, and carried the light of God within them, shining for all to see. Anne and Velma. Jonathan and Joe. Jean, Jane, Joyce. Karen, Barbara – the list goes on and on. Suddenly, I wasn't coming just for the girls anymore. I was coming for me.

Who is Saint Luke's? We are. Those of us present today, those who have sat here before us, and those who will sit here after we're gone. We are all Saint Luke's. God invited us here. Our invitations may have had different envelopes, but they all came from the same host. And there is still plenty of room at the table, so bring a friend.

God inspires us. And at Saint Luke's, he inspires us through each other. I started making a list of the people and examples of the work I see done around here that inspire me, and I had to stop, because I would have left out too many people, or kept you all here until Wednesday. That's just who you are. You inspire me.

And when we stand together to do the work of Saint Luke's, we are transformed.

To me, being a Christian is about answering Christ's call to Love. He teaches us that in order to find salvation, we must love God and one another. But what is love and how do we express it? To paraphrase the Oxford English Dictionary, to love someone is to delight in their presence and possess an earnest concern for their welfare. I like this definition. And love is expressed through service— we help those we love; we sacrifice for them. We don't think twice about going out of our way for a family member in need. In fact, in our heart of hearts, we welcome moments when we can help because it's an opportunity to show loved ones how much we truly care. Christ's challenge to us is not an easy one. To care for everyone in that same way, to see the Christ in everyone, requires faith and sacrifice. I know that I fail more than I succeed. But when we try, when we open our

minds and our hearts to others, we are answering Christ's call. When we love each other, we show our love for God.

It isn't simply a matter of donating more, or pledging more money, but rather pledging ourselves to the success of Saint Luke's. We need to jump into the volcano, and believe that we'll come out better on the other side. Even when the route is unclear.

Let's jump. And we'll see.