

**Sermon Preached by The Reverend Jonathon Jensen**  
**Honoring The Reverend Arthur F. McNulty, Jr.**  
**Calvary Episcopal Church**  
**Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**  
**on the Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**September 14, 2014**

What do you *see* when you look around the church? In a literal sense. Stone. Wood. Stained glass. People. This community and this church building were created to remind us of God's presence everywhere we look. Much of what we see depends on our perspective. Every angle, every nook and cranny, reveals something new or old pointing us to God.

Some facets of Calvary you might not ever have noticed. Did you know there is a turtle in a stained glass window? Did you know George Washington, Ben Franklin, and Johnny Appleseed are in windows too? Did you know we have a processional cross with a unicorn on it? There is a picture of the cross hanging right down the hallway from here. Did you know there are small, carved faces of angels looking down on you as you walk to communion? Your homework assignment is to figure out where all these treasures, hidden in plain sight, are located.

Those are parts of this place that we don't normally notice. But what **DO** you see week after week? Being Episcopalians, we are creatures of ritual and, to some degree, creatures of habit. We sit in the same place around the same people offering the same prayers. Those can all be very good. It is often the case that God works on us over time in the familiar. Familiarity can breed comfort and security in a world sorely lacking those things.

We might notice from our pew the migration of light through the windows during the year. We might intimately know the back of someone's head, from weekly viewing, but forgot his name long ago and it's far too embarrassing to ask. You have permission to introduce yourself again. You might have counted each piece of glass in your favorite window or memorized the inscription above the door from the chapel. You may have your favorite little piece of Heaven at Calvary that belongs to everyone but especially belongs to you. We experience a glimpse of Heaven in here so we can recognize it out there. That's what this entire building is for- to point us to the church and to point us to God- and sometimes- they are right in front of us.

What do you see when you look around the church? What I see each week reminds me I belong to something much larger than myself. What I see reminds me to give and receive love and enjoy who we are every moment. Right in front of where I sit, partially obscured, carved in stone in the side of the platform are these words, "The crossing platform dedicated in memory of Arthur F. McNulty, Jr. 1995" He is always right there.

Arthur McNulty was the 14th rector of Calvary Church. He died twenty years ago on September 5th. He had been the rector for nine years. I never had the pleasure of meeting him. But I have heard lots of stories, read his books, and listened to some of his sermons. It is not *what* is said that conveys the most truth about him- it is *how* people talk about Arthur. I know two things that matter most about him. Arthur loved and he was loved. That's about the best thing you could say about a human being, let alone a priest.

Every time I hear a story about him, the person telling it is smiling. Arthur wrote about how he tried to deal with his father's death. He said, "We told lots of funny stories about him, and attempted to drown our grief. Grief can never be completely drowned. But being able to laugh helps." Laughing can be a part of grieving, of remembering, of giving thanks.

My favorite line of his says much about the man and priest. He wrote that he had a "... chronic failure of distinguishing the sacred from the secular." The holy is everywhere we look- and even where we don't. Let me share two stories in which the sacred and secular are joined.

On a Thanksgiving Day, the Altar was decorated with a cornucopia filled with fruits and vegetables. Pam Foster, the Associate Rector, decided to play a joke on Arthur. It speaks to colleagues who respected and complemented one another and had fun doing it. Before the service. Pam sneaked in and placed a Brussels sprout in the wine chalice. Arthur prepared the table, poured wine in the chalice, and carried on consecrating the elements never noticing. It was only when the sprout began to bob up and down in the chalice during communion that he caught on. He hoped the parishioners thought it was a special Thanksgiving Day ceremony.

Fr. Woodward, Arthur's good friend and seminary roommate, preached at his institution here, at his 25th anniversary of ordination, and at his funeral. He told a story about how Arthur had been his guest in New Hampshire. At his departure, his host found a gift on his porch table. It was a piece of extra material from a suit Arthur had tailored when he visited. Arthur attached a note that read, "So you might be able to touch the hem of my garment."

I wonder what Arthur would have said about today's reading. Thanks to a miracle of modern technology, a book, we don't have to wonder. We know exactly what he said about the reading from Romans from a sermon he preached at Calvary on September 13, 1987. Like all his sermons I have read, it's insightful, practical, funny, faithful, unpretentious, and, while brief, is as long as it needs to be to get the point.

This part of the letter to church in Rome focuses on the futility of judging one another. There were differences of opinion among Jewish and Gentile Christians about how strictly to observe the Law. It should come as no surprise that good Christian people can and do disagree about who is in and who is out. It didn't do any good then and it certainly doesn't do any good now- but that doesn't stop people from judging one another anyway.

Arthur wrote, “I think there is no doubt about it, passing judgment on others is one of the worst faults of the religious community.” It only tears the body down rather than building up everyone. He gave three reasons why we should always leave the judging to God. First, We never know all the facts. Second, There are always extenuating circumstances of which we can never be fully aware. Third, we tend to see the faults of others and ignore the positives.

He provided an excellent illustration. In your bulletin is an insert with a letter from the former Associate Rector, Pam Foster. Look on the other side of her letter. What do you see? A black dot? Does anyone see a large white rectangle? Why do we notice the speck in our brother’s eye and pass judgment rather than see the whole picture- the whole person?

He concluded his sermon with these words... “I think that if we train ourselves to leave the judging of our fellow human beings to God, we will not only be theologically sound, but save ourselves a lot of grey hair.” That about sums it up.

Arthur knew that being a priest, being a Christian, being Church- was not about him at all. We always point to what the holy God is already doing through the holy people in the world. I wish we all could develop a “chronic failure of distinguishing the sacred from the secular.” We experience a glimpse of Heaven in here so we can recognize it out there. The holy presence of God is always right in front of us.

Brussels Sprout story told on page 73 of On Our Way Rejoicing: A Series of Stories from Three Decades as a Priest by the Rev. Arthur F. McNulty, Jr.



## The Reverend Arthur F. McNulty, Jr.

January 19, 1941 - September 5, 1994

*Two mornings before he died, Arthur McNulty and I took a walk along a Massachusetts beach. We spoke of this and that, church talk, but really we were watching a pair of loons gliding along in the water, talking to one another in loon language. Arthur said, "I've read that their little feet paddle like crazy. Their glide is an illusion. They're actually working harder than you can imagine."*

*When I learned of Arthur's death, my memory called up his comments about the loons. Arthur was like that... in everything he undertook, he looked as though he was gliding. In reality he paddled like crazy, worked harder than you can imagine. He crafted a sermon, for example, with careful research, thoughtful reflection and several edits. Then he practiced his delivery... every week he followed this practice. He often said that he considered preaching to be one of the most presumptuous acts there is. Believing this, Arthur desired that evidence of his deep affection and sincere respect for people sitting in the pews show forth in each sermon.*



*To friendship, to community involvement, to diocesan and parish committees and commissions, Arthur brought the same dedication, the same preparedness, the same willingness to speak out, and the same respect and affection for others that distinguished his approach to sermon writing. As one of his many friends wrote to me, "...he was vigorous, boisterous, warm, assuring, daring, honest -- providing a sense of security, a sense of purpose and mission..."*

*As trustee and friend of the Pittsburgh Oratorio Society, Arthur was all that and more. And... if we might return for a moment to the beach on a summer morning... he was a loon in the best sense of the word. He loved God, the Creation, life, people, parties, good food, music and song, jokes, laughter and zaniness.*

*What a contribution he made! How much he taught us! What fun we all had! How much we miss him! And how grateful we are to have traveled in his company for the time we were given!*

Pamela L. Foster 10 • 15 • 94

