

**Joy Cometh in the Morning**  
**Ritual, Art, and Crisis**

by

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## Introduction

I write these words to the glory of the Triune God and for the betterment of The Episcopal Church. This Capstone Project is designed to celebrate the triumph of The Episcopal Church as it moved through the crisis of HIV/AIDS in North America in the last third of the twentieth century. My objective is to tell a story about how the Episcopal Church is capable of implementing the miracles of God for the people. What follows are two essays and an original play that make up the Capstone Project. One essay focuses on the realities of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980's, and the reaction of The Episcopal Church. This first essay looks into the relationship that Christianity has with pandemics, what sets The Episcopal Church apart, and how The Episcopal Church was able to lead in that time. The second essay follows the, often overlapping, twin histories of Christian ritual and theatrical performance. This work is witness to the broad similarities, and crucial differences, between theatre and church services. Both essays bolster, reinforce, and illuminate the third piece of The Capstone project; an original one-act play entitled *Joy Cometh in the Morning*. Together these three elements display the ability of The Episcopal Church to face and overcome crises.

## **AIDS and the Episcopal Church in the 1980's**

The Episcopal Church has the power and responsibility to intervene in the midst of crisis. Despite the teachings, and revolutionary life, of Jesus and the apostles, inertia often grinds the actions of the church to a halt. This will not be overcome with mere words, nor will it be easy to find the fulcrum with which to safely shift the Church from complacency into bold action. This essay will point to the victories and setbacks of the AIDS crisis in the actions of the church in order to show the ability of The Episcopal Church to pivot institution wide. As a church that values tradition, viewing what happened only in the past 40 years may seem like journalism and not history as the ripples of the AIDS crisis of the 1980's is still sending shockwaves through the church. In the second half of the twentieth century The Episcopal Church went through a transformation from calcified conservatism to a message of radical hospitality.

The embrace of our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters by The Episcopal Church over the last few decades, even with great risk, difficulty, and sacrifice, will lead us to view the issue of AIDS as a crucial shift in The Episcopal Church. Of course, HIV/AIDS are not homosexual diseases but the stigmatization of LGBTQ+ individuals and these diseases remain. HIV/AIDS may be transmitted through heterosexual intercourse. Before screenings were implemented it was not uncommon for the disease to be spread through blood transfusion. Further, the Anglican siblings in Nigeria, Sudan, southern Asia, and across the world are all in regions dealing with HIV/AIDS at high levels<sup>1</sup>. This paper will focus on The Episcopal Church's reaction to the AIDS crisis in nineteen eighties America. This paper will show how Episcopalians are able to utilize one of the pillars of the church; reason<sup>2</sup>, to combat the human tendency towards complacency, specifically

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Global AIDS Initiative <https://open.unaids.org/countries>

<sup>2</sup> W. J. Marshal, *Scripture, Tradition and Reason : A Selective View of Anglican Theology through the Centuries*. Blackrock, Co Dublin: Columba Press/APCK, 2010. 12.

in the face of science-based understandings of disease. The cautious manner with which the church may approach crises can not stand when our marginalized siblings are suffering and dying. The church must realize that the issues that face the globe are not removed but that it is the people of Christ that are currently being crushed under the weight of institutional lethargy.

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. There are two varieties, HIV-1 and HIV-2. While distinct the varieties act similarly in that they are constantly changing, which is part of why they are so difficult to fight medically<sup>3</sup>. HIV is transmitted via sexual activity, the mingling of blood, or mother to child through breastfeeding or during pregnancy<sup>4</sup>. Many of those that are at risk are still afraid to be tested, even today, due to the fear of stigmatization<sup>5</sup>. Today the survival rates of those diagnosed with HIV are much higher than they were in the early 80s, in some cases not changing one's life expectancy significantly (given proper drug intervention and healthcare)<sup>6</sup>. AIDS stands for acquired immune deficiency syndrome. The syndrome causes the breakdown of one's immune system. It is usually a separate infection, such as pneumonia, that will lead to further complications and death<sup>7</sup>. One is potentially able to go for years without exhibiting external signs of having AIDS<sup>8</sup>. Despite this reality and a greater understanding of the disease many still grapple with stigmas and fear surrounding the diagnosis. This was even more prevalent when the disease was newly discovered.

In the play "Joy Cometh in the Morning," I explore the tension caused as four individuals struggle with this new disease in the early eighties and their parish struggles to accept them.

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<sup>3</sup>Gideon B. Byamugisha, *Church Communities Confronting Hiv & AIDS*. Spck International Study Guide, 44. London: SPCK, 2010. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Byamugisha, *Confronting* 12.

<sup>5</sup> Byamugisha, *Confronting* 19.

<sup>6</sup> NAM AIDS Map <https://www.aidsmap.com/about-hiv/life-expectancy-people-living-hiv>

<sup>7</sup> Byamugisha, *Confronting* 11.

<sup>8</sup> Byamugisha, *Confronting* 10.

Each of the people suffering from HIV/AIDS will be in a different state of the disease with the inciting incident being the realization that Max, a beloved long-time head of the altar guild, has a lesion, which can be a sign of the illness. At the time of the play, there was much ignorance about the disease. In 1986 a poll indicated that a majority of Americans believed that AIDS could be spread through casual contact, such as shaking hands<sup>9</sup>, though even then the science indicated it did not. This play is based on the actual struggle of The Episcopal Church to open its arms to those with this disease, especially in their struggle to continue the practice of the shared cup. Since the chances of exposure in such a way were extremely slim, the denial of the common cup during communion was an overreaction.

The question of continuing shared communion wine was such an issue throughout The Episcopal Church that many clergy, specifically Bishops, felt called to respond. There was a large amount of misinformation surrounding how HIV/AIDS was transmitted. Bishop Swing, of California, wrote a pastoral letter to alleviate the fears of his church members. The Bishop continued to drink from the shared cup and refused the petitions from the misinformed, or bigoted, population to end the practice of the shared cup<sup>10</sup>. In the play, this misinformation and fear will be overcome through prayer, scripture, and reason.

Looking to the history of post-enlightenment Christianity and its response to disease we are witness to a bizarre estuary of reason and superstition<sup>11</sup>. There existed value judgments not only on the fortunate and shrewd as being inherently “good” people but that the unfortunate masses left to drudgery, poverty, and sickness by circumstances as being somehow evil<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Earl E. Shelp and Ronald Sunderland. *AIDS and the Church*. 1st ed. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987. 22.

<sup>10</sup> “AIDS and Communion.” 1985. *The Christian Century* 102 (30): 888.

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,url,uid&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000950570&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>11</sup> Shelp and Sunderland. *AIDS* 16.

<sup>12</sup> Shelp and Sunderland. *AIDS* 17.

Despite the embrace of science in the 18th-century germ theory had yet to be conceived. Thousands were struck with waterborne illnesses, such as dysentery. The areas of London that were most overpopulated were especially hard struck as access to water was contaminated by sewage<sup>13</sup>. The ancient and medieval mindset of God blessing the “good” with health and long lives had yet to be overthrown by the scientific method. What is further disturbing is that even now, in the modern era there are Christian leaders who will still point to disease, and natural disasters, as a reflection of God’s judgment rather than just another part of existence.

The Anglican tradition stems from the enlightenment. Europe was moving away from the superstitions, and feudal traditions, that had bound it to the post Roman Empirical era known as the medieval ages. The Catholic Church had long been the only Christian denomination in Western Europe, dominating not only religion but all spirituality in politics. This created a rather brittle calcification that shattered upon the rise of Martin Luther and his followers. Originally a stern advocate for Rome, and the Catholic Church, Henry VIII of England eventually formed his own sect of Christianity. Unlike Lutheranism, the Anglican Church was made up of a single state and its monarch was and still is, the center of the church. Eventually, there was a schism in The Church of England as the British controlled colonies in North America, now the first thirteen states of The United States of America, revolted against the crown. The Anglican Church that remained in North America dissolved and reformed as The Episcopal Church, and thus the modern Episcopal Church was created.

In the twentieth century America was witness to several severe health outbreaks. In the nineteen-teens, the “Spanish flu” outbreak, exacerbated by the unprecedented mobilization and concentration of human beings in the first world war, led to the death of millions worldwide.

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<sup>13</sup> Shelp and Sunderland. *AIDS* 16.

Smallpox, polio, mumps, measles, and myriad other diseases have been controlled or eradicated, due to medical leaps forward and the vaccinations that we still utilize today. However, with each major outbreak came a fair amount of doomsayers. At the time of writing the world is in the midst of a global pandemic that has raged for two years. Coronavirus 2019, also known as Covid-19, has to this date killed between one and 3 million people<sup>14</sup>. Many individuals, and political organizations, are split over the issue of how best to treat, or even recognize, the disease.

The AIDS crisis, despite its comparably small rate of infection in developed nations<sup>15</sup>, has been especially heinous because of the bigotry that accompanied the disease itself. At the beginning of the outbreak the most visible groups that became associated with HIV/AIDS were homosexual men and intravenous drug users<sup>16</sup>. The media latched on to the myth that only these marginalized communities were being affected by the disease. Because of the nature of transmission, and incubation of the disease these groups appeared to be the exclusive people afflicted. It was easy for many Christian leaders to disregard the lives, and well-being, of these already ostracized people. Among most Christians in the nineteen-eighties homosexuality was seen as a great and unforgivable sin and AIDS was considered by most to be a scourge on that particular community. Rather than looking to reason, or scientific fact, the superstitions that allowed for comfortable lies were readily received by American Christians. The Episcopal Church in urban areas had a difficult challenge that they faced. Many parishioners were homosexual, open or otherwise, and as this became a political issue there was a call for acceptance.

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<sup>14</sup> WHO Covid-19 <https://www.who.int/data/stories/the-true-death-toll-of-covid-19-estimating-global-excess-mortality>

<sup>15</sup> Byamugisha, *Confronting* 14.

<sup>16</sup> Byamugisha, *Confronting* 18.



The Episcopal Church is not now known for its lockstep unity. Despite the ecclesiastic structure of The Episcopal Church individual parishes have a great deal of autonomy. However, in the early twentieth century there was a perception of uniformity. The Episcopal Church had been described as “the Republican Party at prayer.”<sup>17</sup> The Episcopal Church had a perception of being wealthy, white, and conservative. Despite the appearance of uniformity The Episcopal church responded economically, socially, and politically one parish at a time, through a grassroots interpretation of the Gospel’s direction to care for one another. While The Episcopal Church is a large and unwieldy hierarchical body it does allow for certain freedoms for its clergy. Bishop William E. Swing of California wrote,

When I read about Jesus Christ in Scriptures and try to understand something of the mind of God, I cannot identify even one occasion where he pictures his Father as occasionally becoming displeased and then hurling epidemics on nations. Especially in relation to sexual matters! Rather than hurling wrath when dealing with an adulteress, Jesus said, ‘Whoever is without sin, cast the first stone.’ ... Thus I do not believe in the God who becomes displeased and decides to show his anger by murdering large numbers of people, or in this case homosexual people.<sup>18</sup>

The acceptance of homosexuality in The Episcopal Church was contentious and it was transformative to see any acceptance from the mouths and pens of clergy in the 1980’s. The work of the time seemed to be against the very traditions that had formed the church and motivated the dominant political view. This put on display the lie that the pulpit is not political.

Despite the apostolic tradition of hierarchy within the Episcopal Church, there is a certain amount of fluidity. While a Bishop holds a certain amount of authority over the laity and, more specifically, clergy of their diocese there are other factors at play when it comes to major decisions. Depending on the diocese there are committees made up of clergy and laity that may

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<sup>17</sup> “Anglicans Give Episcopal Church an Ultimatum,” New York Times, Laurie Goodstein New York Times Feb 21, 2007

<sup>18</sup> Shelp and Sunderland. *AIDS* 23.

offer a check on the Bishop's directives. More importantly than the role of committees, it is often up to individual parishes on how they will behave in given situations. Traditionally the more politically sensitive the subject the more autonomy the individual parish will be able to hold. This is another element of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the United States in the nineteen-eighties. The fluidity that allows for each parish to act in their own manner is tempered by the solidarity of a united church. The Episcopal Church is able to be an international presence, and be recognized for the roles of its individual parishes in a movement. Individual parishes were able to open their doors and welcome those affected by HIV/AIDS. As hysteria gave way to reason more congregations became comfortable following the patterns of their sister parishes. Out of this crisis came a new doctrine. The sense of welcome that The Episcopal Church strives for in its ministry of hospitality is, in part, a modern reaction to the events of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Continuing to practice the shared cup in the face of an unknown disease helped the Episcopal Church to live into its commitment to hospitality.

One of the main issues that faced those afflicted with HIV/AIDS, within the church was the sharing of the common cup<sup>19</sup>. In 1986 Robert Hovda wrote an article entitled, "AIDS Hysteria and the Common Cup: Take and Drink." Though he is of a different denomination, his interpretation of the events relates to the Episcopal response, given the similarities in how both denominations practice the Eucharist. Hovda wrote about the "hysteria", that came after Rock Hudson's death<sup>20</sup> and the seriousness with which the disease was then taken by both government authorities and the media. In the concern over the ability to transmit HIV via the common chalice Hovda cited work that William Burrows and Elizabeth S. Hemmers engaged in,

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<sup>19</sup> Robert W. Hovda, "AIDS Hysteria and the Common Cup: Take and Drink." *Worship* 60, no. 1 (January 1986): 67–73.

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000959917&site=ehost-live&scope=site>. 69.

<sup>20</sup> Hovda, *Hysteria* 69.

“William Burrows and Elizabeth S. Hemmers reporting on experiments concerning the survival of harmful bacteria on silver eucharistic cups conclude, ‘Experiments on the transmission of test organisms from one person to another by common use of the chalice showed that approximately 0.001% of the organisms are transferred even under the most favorable conditions; and when conditions approximated those of actual use, no transmission could be detected.’”<sup>21</sup>

Despite the continued assurances of safety it took a lot of effort on the side of the media, government, and church to assuage the fears of the people. The current pandemic of Covid-19 is transmitted differently from HIV/AIDS, and must be viewed differently. While HIV/AIDS is transmitted intravenously, or through contact with other specific bodily fluids, Covid-19 is spread through water droplets from the mouth. From the World Health Organization’s website:

The virus can spread from an infected person’s mouth or nose in small liquid particles when they cough, sneeze, speak, sing or breathe. These particles range from larger respiratory droplets to smaller aerosols. It is important to practice respiratory etiquette, for example by coughing into a flexed elbow, and to stay home and self-isolate until you recover if you feel unwell.<sup>22</sup>

Obviously the two diseases are quite different but it bears recognition that at the time of writing The Episcopal Church is refraining from the practice of the shared cup. This restraint is not like the fear that existed in the world of the 1980’s HIV/AIDS epidemic. It must be realized that there is no intention of bigotry or discrimination attached to the limiting of the cup. The utilization of the eucharist is restricted to all regardless of health and circumstance. It is also important to note that the church is being consistent in its foundational utilization of reason. The Episcopal Church corrected itself when the science came to light that it was acceptable to drink from the same cup with people diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. Now that Covid-19 is the major concern of the day the church is universally restraining itself from the practice.

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<sup>21</sup> Hovda Hysteria 73..

<sup>22</sup> “Corono Virus Disease” [https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1)

At time of writing it is the second year of a global pandemic with millions dead worldwide. Travel and commerce have been altered in a way never before seen. The same element of dread and confusion that was felt during the AIDs epidemic seems to have taken hold today. Over a year ago there was mass confusion, feelings of ill-preparedness, and distrust of authority. For months many were quarantined inside, businesses shut down, and governments balanced the cost of halting business as usual with public safety. In 2022 there is a sense that the virus is controlled, that there is an amount of safety and a new normalcy, however imagined those sensations may prove to be. There are key differences between the Covid-19 epidemic and the situation regarding HIV/AIDS in the 1980's. HIV/AIDS was, in the 1980's, considered to be a death sentence, and there was a severe stigma towards those who contracted the disease. It was in the difficulty of transmission, as HIV/AIDS are bloodborne pathogens and not aerosolized. The very limited spread of the disease helped HIV/AIDS to be sidelined, and ignored. Covid-19 was taken seriously and treated rapidly, in most regions, because of the ease of spread to the pathogen. The difficulty of transmission of HIV/AIDS meant that people could convince themselves more easily that it was only other people that were at risk. The church has approached this disease, and quarantine, in much the same way that The Episcopal Church faces most of its crises, with a variety of responses. By and large, the church has utilized reason and closed in accordance with governmental guidelines. Most Episcopal Churches only reopened their doors based on the advice of healthcare officials.

As illustrated by the AIDS crisis in America the Church is able to embrace a reasoned response in the face of catastrophe. This reason was important in the response of the church to the Covid-19 pandemic as well. When faced with seemingly overwhelming anguish the institution was able to pivot and, largely, embraced the marginalized. The Episcopal Church was

able to live into the call for compassion among the sick, dispossessed, and forgotten as Christ instructed us to do.

## **The Thin Line Between Ritual and Theatre**

Theatre is magic in every sense of the word. It is an illusion that transforms painted wooden flats into castle ramparts, gray wool into a guard's armor, and the darkness of a theatre into the darkness of night. Theatre is magic in the sense that one's mind is transported to a different place, a different time, and even to a different way of thinking. Theatre is transformational, silly, and wicked. It is able to hold all of the emotions of human capability but only by the thinnest thread that suspends our disbelief. Ritual is the mirror of theatre. Not oppositional but the inverse. Where everyone goes into a theatre expecting to be fooled and manipulated, those entering a church hold their belief closely to themselves. The miracle of God is real, and our priests perform the rites to manifest God's blessing before us.

This essay will dissect the razor-thin line that separates the performance of theatre from Western Christianity's rituals. Theatre's history, the roots of theatre in religion, and how Christianity and theatre's paths intertwined up to today will be discussed. While performer and priest share much in common it is intention that fundamentally separates the performance from spiritual ritual.

Theatre requires three things. First, there must be a designated space. In our modern times, this space is most commonly a stage raised above an audience, perhaps with raked or balconied seating, or a "black box" theatre with no stage but raked or riser seating so that the audience has a clear view of the space<sup>23</sup>. However, "the world is a stage", and any space designated as a performance space may become one<sup>24</sup>. For instance, Mett B. Brunn wrote about a medieval sermon that discusses an annual ritualistic performance of the stations of the cross

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<sup>23</sup>Todd E. Johnson, and Dale Savidge. 2009. *Performing the Sacred: Theology and Theatre in Dialogue*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Publishing Group. 21

<sup>24</sup> Bent Holm, Bent F. Nielsen, and Karen Vedel, eds. 2009. *Religion, Ritual, Theatre*. Frankfurt, Germany: Frankfurt am Main. 47.

utilizing the courtyard of the monastery as the performance space<sup>25</sup>. Second, there must be a performer. This is a person with the intention of performing in a particular space, or series of spaces<sup>26</sup>. The last requirement of theatre, and arguably the most important, is an audience<sup>27</sup>.

Theatre must be witnessed in order to be itself. Without an audience, theatre is simply rehearsal.

Christian rites follow similar rules to that of theatre, but Christianity is more specific and more deliberate with its requirements<sup>28</sup>. Robert Smyth in his forward to “Performing the Sacred”, puts the similarities between Christian rites and the theatrical production elegantly, “Incarnation - the story breathed to life, the Word made flesh. Community - the gathering of live artists, live audience. Presence - the sense of holy, the taste of grace. From its beginnings theatre has existed to invoke or examine the transcendent.<sup>29</sup>” Smyth eloquently alludes to the inherent ties between ritual and the performance. Some forms of faith place a heavier emphasis on ritual as a means unto itself Bent F. Nielson writes,

“... Protestant theology, as an outcome of doctrinal thinking, will often describe religion as a rather disembodied, communicative and reflective endeavor whereas Church practice discloses that Protestants also experience the sacred through ritual.<sup>30</sup>”

Nielson is telling us that there is a purposeful separation in the protestant tradition between the spiritual and the physical. However, ritual and theatre both require a physicality manifesting the ideas through meaningful action.

The Episcopal Church recognizes the importance of tradition and sacred rites, but tempers tradition with reason. The Episcopal Church does not blindly follow what came before

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<sup>25</sup> Holm, Nielsen, and Vedel, *Ritual*. 47

<sup>26</sup> Johnson, Savidge, *Dialogue*. 21

<sup>27</sup> Johnson, Savidge, *Dialogue*. 117

<sup>28</sup> Holm, Nielsen, and Vedel, *Ritual*. 41-42

<sup>29</sup> Johnson, Savidge, *Dialogue*. 7

<sup>30</sup> Holm, Nielsen, and Vedel, *Ritual*. 19

but questions aspects of the rites. This, perhaps paradoxically, can strengthen the belief of the faithful and allows for flexibility in the performance of the sacred. Nielsen reminds us that in order to practice religious rites we must be engaged physically and in that physicality, there is an inherent performance<sup>31</sup>. “...in ritual people are still primarily *acting* no matter how they think about their activity...”<sup>32</sup> There is an element of performance to all religious practices. Even if one disagrees with the idea of the inherent action, Nielsen postures that they are still engaging in a sacramental action during a ritual.

“Both ritual and theatre are activities which create privileged contrasts to daily activity. Both the actor on stage and the vicar in church make privileged bodily acts in practice; acts which create contrasts to other acts. This very wide, but also distinctive level. Might be an opening up for a new exchange between ritual. Church and theatre. No doubt, there are still great obstacles to Protestant theology and the theatre as well. However, practice and body open up another level of interplay: ‘[R]itual is an event, a set of activities that does not simply express cultural values or enact symbolic scripts but actually effects changes in people’s perception and interpretations’, Bell says in her latest book. I think the same thing - without erasing important differences - might be said about theatre: *theatre* “is an event, a set of activities that does not simply express cultural values or enact symbolic scripts but actually effects changes in people’s perceptions and interpretations.” Maybe it is time to renew the old relationship between ritual, Church and theatre - at the level of human practice.<sup>33</sup>

What Nielson is alluding to here is the shared nature of ritual and theatre. Performance and religious practice share much in common. Despite the protestant notion of spirituality separated from the body the reality in the Christian tradition is that we are always bodily present and involved in our religious practices. This is true even if we attempt to utilize the rationality of enlightenment thinking. There is no separation of the thought and the physical, the two are intrinsically joined.

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<sup>31</sup> Holm, Nielsen, and Vedel, *Ritual*. 29

<sup>32</sup> Holm, Nielsen, and Vedel, *Ritual*. 30

<sup>33</sup> Holm, Nielsen, and Vedel, *Ritual*. 41-42



Physicality is not merely heightened in the spiritual but as the above quote suggests the theatrical is also a privileged arena. Art is necessary for us to understand the world around us, especially that which we can not see. Theatre, and performance, allow us to experience catharsis<sup>34</sup>. The empathy and sympathy that one feels for fictional characters from a story is taken into our own lives and mingles with our own experience of the world. Art allows people to experience the truth in a way that documentation does not allow for. It is crucial that human beings express themselves creatively, it is part of what makes us human. The ability to sing, to dance, to express emotion in safe spaces allow for our sanity. Aristotle wrote about how the expression of tragedy, in the form of theatre, allows for both the audience and performer to experience difficult emotions in a way that purges them of their own personal difficulties<sup>35</sup>.

Each Sunday The Episcopal faith remembers the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Part of this ritual is the eucharistic rite where through Paschal Mystery the bread and wine become the sacramental body and blood of Jesus. There is a “script” to the rites that are acceptable for this service. Prayers must be intoned, songs may be sung. There are specific requirements of the participants, and parishioners, in their manner and dress. In an Episcopal Church, there is choreography in the genuflection towards the altar, bowing to the cross, kneeling, sitting, and standing at specific times during the service. The ritual of church is a performance, but more than a performance. In *Religion, Ritual, Theatre*, Jean-Marie Pradier discusses, “...the importance of pure praxis (formal action) in ritual over those that put emphasis on doxa (discourse). The whole body is involved in ritual as well as in performing arts...”<sup>36</sup> In

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<sup>34</sup> Aristotle, George Whalley, John Baxter, and Patrick Atherton. 1997. *Aristotle's Poetics*. Montreal Que.: McGill-Queen's University Press. 100

<sup>35</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*. 100

<sup>36</sup> Holm, Nielsen, and Vedel, *Ritual*. 222

the same work Jens Kreinath quotes Clifford Geertz, “[i]n a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world, producing thus that idiosyncratic transformation in one’s sense of reality”<sup>37</sup>. When we attempt to utilize symbols for performance or ritual we often find that we are engaging fully with the world that we are attempting to represent. An altar is just a table, a chalice is only a cup, but these objects are transformed into religious significance through our imagination. . Art and theatre are aware that they are participating in an illusion. Religion and ritual are set in reality, or a reality of belief. In theatre; what is stated by an actor, written ahead of time by a playwright, and actions crafted by a choreographer and director are both real and false simultaneously. Real in the sense that it is happening but false in the sense that it is intended to be performative. Theatre allows for a shared imagination to occur, it allows for a suspension of disbelief which in the modern world is, almost, the same as faith itself. At the altar on Sunday morning when the priest declares that this is the body and that this is the blood we, as Christians, often believe it to be true despite also knowing the molecular reality of these foodstuffs. It is important for us to have experienced the stretching of our minds through imagination in order to more fully experience our faith<sup>38</sup>. It is a tightrope as too far in either direction, towards ritual or performance, can lead to a loss of that faith. If we are to lose the imagining of Christ's presence in that moment then we are only going through the motions of a hollow ritual. If we embrace the “real” physical material presence and then learn of the scientific “impossibility” that may also shatter our faith. It is in a moment with an expectation of divinity and a free embrace of the impossible where one may fully embrace faith. T.P. Kasulis says, “Religious beliefs are

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<sup>37</sup> Holm, Nielsen, and Vedel, *Ritual*. 231

<sup>38</sup> Franc Chamberlain, William S. Haney II, Carl Lavery, Peter Malekin, and Ralph Yarrow. 2007. *Sacred Theatre*. Edited by Ralph Yarrow. Chicago, Illinois: Intellect. 19

embodied through religious practices. In fact, the practices may be said to precede the belief (...) Religious sensitivity, like the appreciation of music or art, for example, is a cultivated mode of relating to the world.<sup>39</sup>” Ultimately theatre and ritual are connected by physicality and the exploration of emotion and metaphysical reality. They are separated, by the thinnest margin but in the strongest terms, by the intention of the “actor”.

To go back to the beginning of these tangled concepts, the origin of western theatre has its deep and ancient roots in religious rites. The oldest western theatre, that we have a record of, goes back to ancient Greece<sup>40</sup>. While theatrical practices connect closely with shamanistic prehistoric rituals, the theatre of ancient Greece is more familiar to our modern sensibilities.<sup>41</sup> Theatre was itself a religious rite as both entertainment and to honor the Gods<sup>42</sup>. This concept of heightened art combined with ritual was, and is, very common throughout the world<sup>43</sup>. One theory of the Biblical oral tradition was that certain pieces would be physically performed as well as spoken<sup>44</sup>. Certainly, anyone who has engaged in storytelling is familiar with the performance that one gives, even if seated and stationary, and all of the world's religious traditions were oral until the advent or adoption of writing. The art of storytelling has in itself a large amount of the theatrical. Remember earlier in this essay as theatre was being defined, theatre requires a space, a performer, and an audience. Storytelling, if it has the intent to, can also be theatre. By the time of the life of Jesus theatre as religious rite and entertainment was commonplace throughout the Roman Empire<sup>45</sup>. Not only were there grand amphitheatres built

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<sup>39</sup> Holm, Nielsen, and Vedel, *Ritual*. 223

<sup>40</sup> Johnson, Savidge, *Dialogue*. 23

<sup>41</sup> Schuman, Mady, and Richard Schechner, eds. 1976. *Ritual, Play, and Performance: Readings in the Social Sciences/theatre*. New York, New York: Seabury Press. xvii

<sup>42</sup> Johnson, Savidge, *Dialogue*. 23

<sup>43</sup> Johnson, Savidge, *Dialogue*. 22

<sup>44</sup> Johnson, Savidge, *Dialogue*. 25

<sup>45</sup> Johnson, Savidge, *Dialogue*. 30-31

but traveling shows were also common. As Christianity was adopted by the Roman Empire, and into the feudal period of the west, theatre continued to have close ties with religion<sup>46</sup>. It is in the medieval period that we see Christianity and theatre mingle in earnest. At the very beginning of his book, Dale Savidge writes, “At no time in history was the relationship between theatre and Christianity warmer than during the medieval period in Europe.<sup>47</sup>” He goes on to cite the mystery cycles of England, the German plays of Hrosvitha, and Spanish theatre that took place in cathedrals surrounding the meaning of the eucharist. This period, from the fall of the Roman Empire till the Renaissance, was when theatre and Christianity were closest. Popular performances were tied directly to Christian rites and themes and they were performed in the holy sanctuaries of the church. With the rise of enlightenment, Protestantism, and a merchant class things changed.

In the early modern era, English speaking theatre became increasingly entertainment focussed. The rise of William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, and other notables during Great Britain's renaissance moved away from direct utilization of Christian rites, passion plays, and the stories of saints. However, Medieval Christian ethics and maintenance of societal norms were still central to the stories being told. Those who disobeyed, or subverted, authority were punished, as seen in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Those who dealt with dark forces risked eternal damnation, as seen in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. Though theatre continued to boast a broad appeal, with both royalty and the masses enjoying these works, the maintenance of the societal status quo was central to the themes of these plays but without the explicit preaching seen in earlier medieval works.

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<sup>46</sup> Johnson, Savidge, *Dialogue*. 19

<sup>47</sup> Johnson, Savidge, *Dialogue*. 19

By the industrial revolution in the English-speaking world, theatre was almost entirely utilized for entertainment purposes. The farce and the melodrama were coming into vogue. The farce harkened back to ancient classical themes that questioned authority, including the authority of the Church. Rather than maintenance of the status quo the works of Oscar Wilde, and his contemporaries, lampooned the elite<sup>48</sup>. Simultaneous to Oscar Wilde in Great Britain, the United States embraced melodrama. Combining loud emotional music with a broad performance style melodrama valued spectacle and high emotion over subtlety<sup>49</sup>. This is where we begin to see the tropes and language that would continue to be familiar to even modern audiences today. Uncomplicated stock characters with thin, repetitive, plot lines backed by expensive technical effects became the norm of American theatre. An emphasis on the “happy ending”, was also a mark of this theatrical period<sup>50</sup>. As exemplified by the melodramatic staged production of Harriette Becher Stowe’s “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” moralism, had replaced direct Christian allegory on the stage. In Uncle Tom’s Cabin, we meet a number of stock characters that were common to see at the time in fiction, but the sins of slavery were exemplified throughout the story. This was done without direct reference to Christian allegory and instead spoke to the ethical issues of the time. Theatre in the West had moved far from its roots in the Christianity.

After the American Civil War, there was a renewed interest in tying Christianity to the stage and performance to the pulpit. In the late 1800’s into the early twentieth-century playwrights engaged in specifically Christian theatrical endeavors<sup>51</sup>. The pendulum continued to swing, however. Modern, post-modern, and current theatre, in the west, does not consider itself

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<sup>48</sup> Richard Foulkes. *Church and Stage in Victorian England*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 202

<sup>49</sup> Johnson, Savidge, *Dialogue*. 123-124

<sup>50</sup> Johnson, Savidge, *Dialogue*. 124

<sup>51</sup> Johnson, Savidge, *Dialogue*. 42

tied to Christianity<sup>52</sup>. In recent years western theatre may not have had its traditionally close ties to religion but it has seen a resurgence in embracing spirituality<sup>53</sup>. Johnson wrote about how people continue to hunger for ritual and how theatre does an excellent job providing a facsimile<sup>54</sup>. With the theater as a temple, the performers, playwrights, and directors celebrated as high priests, and the requirement of the audience to suspend disbelief, one can almost see the appreciation of the arts as a kind of faith.

While Church and theatre are similar, and their histories are closely intertwined, I hope that I have successfully illustrated that the difference between them is intention. The intention behind the theatre is entertainment, aesthetics, and the telling of a story, while the intention behind Christian services are more specific and honest. The Christian service celebrates the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The Christian service praises God. The Christian service holds together the hopes, forgiveness, and service of a community. Theatre can do much to illustrate the importance of a service, and it has room to go into an absurdist space, that might be beyond the intention of a church service. Time and space are fluid in a performance and theatre allows for an expression of emotion and voice that is not often socially acceptable in modern Episcopal services. There is, however, room for art in our Church. There is a need for expression, and understanding of our tradition beyond what is communicated in the earnest honesty of our rites and services. It is in this place of hyper-realism, or exposition, that the down-to-earth realities of our traditional practices may be examined, evaluated, and celebrated.

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<sup>52</sup> Johnson, Savidge, *Dialogue*. 43

<sup>53</sup> Ralph Yarrow, and Franc Chamberlain. *Sacred Theatre*. Theatre & Consciousness. Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2007. 17.

<sup>54</sup> Johnson, Savidge, *Dialogue*. 44

Joy Cometh in the Morning

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A one-act play

By  
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Cast List:

MAXWELL: Older gay man. Fastidious, reserved, and proud. He has AIDS which he is trying to keep secret from the church community.

SARAH: Older wealthy woman. She is conservative and judgmental.

TRIANA: Young woman, 1980s stylish but working. She means well.

FATHER ANTHONY: Young man. He is the new full time rector of Grace. He struggles with the balancing act between caring for the community and making sure that the wealthier parishioners continue to give.

HENRY: Sarah's husband. Older wealthy man. Old money and well established as a member of the church. Conservative and bigoted.

MARGARETTE: Older woman. First wave feminist, former flapper, and TRIANA's great aunt. Well established at Grace. The type of older woman that wears *ALL* of her jewelry. She is a free spirit.

STEPHANIE: Young woman. She is scared as she has been recently diagnosed with HIV from a blood transfusion. She is in attendance with her young son Benjamin. She does not usually attend Grace but felt the need for prayer.

BENJAMIN: A child, Benjamin is well behaved but a kid in church. Stephanie is his mother.

JESUS: An unhoused middle aged man. Loud, but well meaning. Jesus is a regular at Grace but firmly ignored by the regular attendees.

HOLY SPIRIT: An unhoused woman. She is a soprano. She is asleep for most of the production.

Setting:

Grace on the Hill is a neo-gothic Episcopal Church on a small street, in Greenwich Village on the island of Manhattan in New York New York. It is the early 1980's. It is the Easter Sunday service.



"Hallelujah", an excerpt of Handals' Messiah, plays on the organ as the doors to Grace on the Hill open. Ushers hand out playbills/bulletins.

MAXWELL, SARAH, TRIANA, JESUS, and THE HOLY SPIRIT are already in the space.

The Holy Spirit is lying down in a pew near the back almost completely hidden by clean white rags.

STEPHANIE and her son BENJAMIN enter. She has a cough she tries to stifle. She knows that it is walking pneumonia.

Benjamin is playing with a plastic dinosaur his mother pushes him politely to sit.

JESUS is sitting near the back mumble praying a little too loudly.

Maxwell is standing at the altar with Sarah and Triana.

MAXWELL (A well dressed gay man in his early 60's particular, but not unfriendly, and quite ill but attempting to hide it.)  
 TRIANA (Fashionably dressed for the 1980's but still appropriate for church late 20's early 30's)  
 SARAH (Old New York money mid 50's traditionally attired for Easter Sunday)

MAXWELL

(Fusses over the flower arrangement at the base of the altar audibly groaning, we assume, with age as he shifts on his knees.)

I think you've done a wonderful job, ladies, but I really don't think that the lilies should overtake the vesperal cloth.

On the altar, along with the white linen, are the priests' robes, white and gold. They are draped and well pressed.

Enter FR. ANTHONY (young man mid 30s, spectacles bookish and unassuming. There is a confidence with the women or young parishioners but hesitancy around the established parishioners, especially Maxwell)

FR. ANTHONY

Good morning Sarah. Good morning Triana. Maxwell.

SARAH

Good morning Father

TRIANA  
Good morning Anthony

FR. ANTHONY  
(A small pause)  
Maxwell, I appreciate your  
efforts but I'm afraid that we  
must start the service soon.  
People are already gathering.

MAXWELL  
  
Of course, Father, let me just-

SARAH  
Goodness! Max, what happened to  
your hand?

MAXWELL  
(He grabs his hand and she  
notices as he stands.  
Embarrassed, he covers the  
large lesion.)  
Oh just another bruise I'm  
afraid I slipped in the shower.

SARAH  
(Scolding)  
I told you Max that you have  
got to get a new mat for that  
shower. I swear the bruises are  
getting worse and worse.

MAXWELL  
(Nods dutifully)  
Of course, Sarah, you're right.  
With work at the shop, Holy  
week, and all the flowers for  
Easter, I just haven't had the  
time.

TRIANA  
It looks quite serious.

FR. ANTHONY  
(Takes notice of the lesion but  
says nothing to Maxwell but  
clears his throat meaningfully)

MAXWELL

Goodness, ladies, look at the time.  
the Father is right, service is just  
about to begin. Let's make ourselves  
Scarce.

(Maxwell Triana and Sarah go to  
their pews.)

SARAH

(To her husband HENRY,  
Successful and comfortable  
looking man. Austere to the  
point of being cold. He is in  
his late 50's.)  
You should see the ghastly mark on  
poor Max's hand. I don't mean to  
sound disparaging but don't you  
think that he's looked dreadful  
lately?

HENRY

(Grunts)  
I am sure that you are right,  
darling. I had not noticed myself.

SARAH

(Going on as if her husband had  
said nothing.)  
It's none of our business, of  
course, but he says he slipped  
in the shower, no one's  
believing *that* for a minute! I  
just hope we don't know the  
fellow he was with.

HENRY

(A soft church chuckle  
chuckle.)

TRIANA

(Sitting with her aunt,  
MARGARETTE, a garishly dressed  
older woman with all of her  
jewelry on. A flapper in the  
1920's and a member of every  
woman's movement, she is outspoken  
and loud.)  
That poor man seems to be having  
the most dreadful time.

MARGARETTE

Never get old dear, but don't  
be grudge us that have done.

TRIANA

He has the most awful bruise I  
think I have ever seen.

MARGARETTE

We can't know his situation live  
best to let it be especially with  
the company he keeps.

TRIANA

What do you mean?

MARGARETE

Oh, I shouldn't have said  
anything, my big mouth.

MAXWELL

(Sits in the front pew.)

FR. ANTHONY

Please open the blue book, your hymnal,  
to hymn number 174

### **Hymn 1 Processional**

(Hymn 174 from the 1982 hymnal plays.)

ALL SING

At the Lamb's high feast we sing praise  
to our vic-to-rious King, who hath  
washed us in the tide flowing from his  
pierc-ed side; praise we him, whose  
love di-vine gives his sa-cred Blood  
for wine, gives his Body for the fest,  
Christ the vic-tem, Christ the priest.

SARAH and HENRY

A time of darkness is here. AIDS overtakes us with  
fear. Should we drink from the shared cup? This parish  
has giv'n up. Mysterious death descends for which  
medicine has no defence. Is it sin or prudence kept?  
Not Jesus lone Mary wept.

ALL SING

Might-y vic-tim from on high, hell's  
fierce powers be-neath thee lie; thou  
hast con-querred in the fight, thou hast  
brought us life and light; now no more  
can death ap-pall, now no more the  
grave en-thrall; thou hast o-pened par-  
a-dise, and in thee thy saints shall  
rise.

MAXWELL, JESUS, STEPHANIE

This Easter there is no joy, AIDS with suffering destroys. Though we call upon our King, hope and help we pray He brings, New York streets with homeless filled, with sickness our friends are killed. Distrust and suspicion grows, we await our God to show.

FR. ANTHONY

Now robed, he speaks out to the parish.)  
 Good morning, and happy Easter! What a joyful day that I have the extraordinary privilege to come before you, I know that normally we would not begin so informally but with Father Stephen having left us for his calling in Miami, where he will be able to minister to the faithful in Florida and improve his golf game year-round, (polite church laughter) this will be my first Easter Sunday as your interim priest. I would like to personally greet all those who do not normally worship with us here at Grace and hope that we will be able to welcome you as your regular Sunday home. Please fill out a card that you should find located in the wooden shelf on the pew in front of you and I will gladly be in touch after this busy Easter season. With that said, (pause) Almighty God, who through thine only-begotten Son Jesus Christ hast overcome death and opened unto us the gate of everlasting life: Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of the Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by thy life-giving Spirit; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit ever, one God, world without end. *Amen.*

*ALL*

Almighty God,

STEPHANIE

Think of my only son, Benjamin, God.  
 Allow for me to overcome my prognosis.  
 Open the heart of his father and grant that he understands.

*ALL*

Jesus Christ.

STEPHANIE

May we celebrate with joy that my  
doctor got it wrong. May I not have HIV,  
God. May the transfusion that I received  
have been clean and raised from this  
death sentence.

ALL

...thy life-giving Spirit.

STEPHANIE

I pray this for my son, to your son,  
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord,  
worshiped by me, Benjamin, and his father,  
always

ALL

...liveth and reigneth with thee  
forever and ever. (STEPHANIE crosses  
herself.) Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

## Hymn 2

FR. ANTHONY

Please open your hymnals to hymn 207

ALL SING

Jesus Christ is rinen today, Alleluia! Our triumphant  
holy day, Alleluia! Who did once upon the cross, Alleluia!  
Suffer to redeem our loss. Alleluia!

HENRY AND SARAH

This, our church, to us belongs, Alleluia! These four  
walls filled with our songs. Alleluia! Churchyard holds the  
family tree. Alleluia! It's our own lock, stock, and key.  
Alleluia!

FR. ANTHONY

Lord may mass go well, I pray. Alleluia! I can't fail  
on Easter day. Alleluia! This church stands upon the brink,  
Alleluia! With out money it will sink. Alleluia!

ALL

Sing we to our God above, Alleluia! Praise eternal as  
his love, Alleluia! Praise him, all ye heavenly host, Alleluia!  
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Alleluia!

### Canticle

HENRY

(Stands and walks to the  
lectern.)

A reading from the book of Isaiah  
chapter sixty five verses seventeen  
to twenty five. (A pause as he  
adjusts to read and clears his  
throat.) For, behold, I create new  
heavens and a new earth: and the  
former shall not be remembered, nor  
come into mind.

JESUS

Thank God that it's Spring. It was so  
cold this winter. Coldest I remember.  
Been out there for six years and-

HENRY

But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in  
that which I create: for, behold, I  
create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her  
people a joy.

JESUS

This is city gets so cold. Awful cold  
in the winter time. Too cold, you know  
what I'm saying? Not just the weather.  
Try to stay someplace like this  
overnight. Just try it.

HENRY

And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and  
joy in my people: and the voice of  
weeping shall be no more heard in her,  
nor the voice of crying.

JESUS

Greatest city in the world! For shure,  
but awful cold in the winter time. I  
tried the shelter, I tried last night  
but- (Ushers flank Jesus. Jesus speaks  
to the ushers hands raised.) Hey man,

it's OK. It's cool. I'm cool, I'll sit down man.

HENRY

There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.

JESUS

I'll sit down. Just relax. I'm just saying, nice to be inside is all. No need to-

HENRY

And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

JESUS

(Held by the ushers now.) I said I'd sit down. I'm sitting OK? I'm going to sit down. What's your name man, we're friends, OK?

FR. ANTHONY

What seems to be the problem back there? We don't want any trouble today.

HENRY

They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they



call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear.

JESUS

Just back off man. You don't want what I got, you know what I'm saying? (The ushers back down.) Can't a man go to church? Just trying to praise God. Thank God, man.

HENRY

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord. The word of the Lord.

ALL

AMEN!

JESUS

AMEN!

**PSALM**

MAXWELL

Psalm 118: The Lord is my strength and song, and is become my salvation. I can feel my knees giving way. God let me hold it together through this. Just let me get through the reading, Lord. The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous: the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly. They noticed my hand, God. It's impossible to hide it anymore, and the one on my back. I'm so scared. God forgive me. The right hand of the Lord is exalted: the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly. I am a righteous man, God. I have served you. But now I am sick. What am I going to do? I just don't know what I am going to do. I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. I ache all over.

I know I need to go home. Just get through the reading, Maxwell. The Lord hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death. AMEN! Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord: I'll finish and then leave through the side door there, it will be easy I am almost done. Just through the door there. This gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter. Please, God. Who do I tell? Can I trust Father Anthony? He's so young, God. I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. Will he understand? The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. I know that Tom is waiting for me at home. He's been so patient, so loving. He'll admonish me for even coming to Church. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. And it was Easter, almost done. This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. (Faints.)

(Sarah audibly gasps. HENRY and Fr. Anthony rush to help Maxwell.)

TRIANA

He's fallen!

MARGARETTE

Help that man!

SARAH

What is wrong? Oh my goodness!

FR. Anthony

(Leaning over Maxwell)

Maxwell? Are you ok? Are you with us?

HENRY

(To the ushers) Help me get him out of here.

MAXWELL

(Bleary)

I'm fine, everything is fine I just-

HENRY, THE USHERS, AND FR. ANTHONY

(All back away, Henry most, Fr. Anthony least.)

MAXWELL

(Looks down at his arm, realizes that it has ripped and the large lesion on his arm is visible. He makes a tired attempt to cover it.)

FR. ANTHONY

Maxwell, you are-

HENRY

He has it, it's-

FR. ANTHONY

I didn't realize you were unwell. Here, (FR. ANTHONY tries to help Maxwell up and struggles, Jesus has made his way

to the front of the church and, after a pause, FR. Anthony speaks to him.)

Would you mind helping him, sir?

JESUS

No problem, man. You know, we all need some help sometimes. Come on. (They help Maxwell to the bishop's chair.)

MAXWELL

(Blearily) I should have told you father. I should have- Just, I just didn't know how. And then it was Holy week. I have AIDS, I never thought- Father I found out last month. I should have told you. I am so sorry. So sorry.

FR. ANTHONY

Let's not worry about that right now. Just sit tight. Maxwell, it will be alright. Just hold on. (addressing the congregation, ladies and gentlemen I am so sorry for the interruption. Obviously one of our readers is unwell, if you could forgive us and-

MAXWELL

Father please don't. Let the service go on. Please.

FR. ANTHONY

Maxwell, the ambulance is on its way.

MAXWELL

Then the service may as well continue.  
(A pause.) Please, Anthony. (Father  
Anthony nods.) Thank you.

FR. ANTHONY

(Speaking to Jesus)

Sir, would you mind-

JESUS

Jesus, good to meet you.

FR. ANTHONY

(Taken aback, but recovers quickly.)

Jesus, would you mind helping  
Maxwell over to the ummm...  
(Gestures to the pew.)

JESUS

No problem, man. Glad to help.

MAXWELL

Thank you. (To Jesus.) Thank you.

FR. ANTHONY

Margarette, if you could please.

MARGARETTE

(Stands and approaches the lectern.  
She speaks with confidence despite  
the circumstances. She has something  
of an actor's affectation)

A reading from Acts chapter 10  
verses 34-43. Then Peter opened his  
mouth, and said, Of a truth I  
perceive that God is no respecter of  
persons:

SARAH

He didn't touch you. Did he touch you?

HENRY

No, thank God. I had his jacket and  
then I saw his arm.

MARGARETTE

But in every nation he that feareth  
him, and worketh righteousness, is  
accepted with him.

SARAH

He has *it* doesn't he?

HENRY

It certainly seems that way. I can't  
believe that he is out in public, God  
help us all that he doesn't spread  
his... his disease. That vile...

MARGARETTE

The word which God sent unto the  
children of Israel, preaching peace by  
Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)

SARAH

I can't believe that he hasn't gone. So  
inconsiderate.

MARGARETTE

That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached;

SARAH

You were so brave, first that awful bum shouting through your reading, which was expertly done by the way, expertly. And then Maxwell. (She gives an exaggerated shiver.)

MARGARETTE

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.

STEPHANIE

That poor man. Am I going to... Is that going to be me? Benjamin, my son? I feel like we are all in need of a great healing. And certainly the devil is here.

MARGARETTE

And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree:

STEPHANIE

(Crying)

We need a miracle.

MARGARETTE

Him God raised up the third day, and  
shewed him openly;

JESUS

Praise him!

MARGARETTE

Not to all the people, but unto  
witnesses chosen before God, even to  
us, who did eat and drink with him  
after he rose from the dead.

HENRY

Well I will tell you one thing. Father  
Anthony is going to have another thing  
coming if he thinks that we will be  
receiving the eucharist, after that...  
If he thinks that we will be drinking  
wine from the same cup that he just  
drank from then I...

SARAH

You're right of course dear. But Father  
Anthony, despite being so young, has a  
good head on his shoulders, and  
impeccable judgment. I don't think that  
he would put us at risk by being so  
foolish.

MARGARETTE

And he commanded us to preach unto the  
people, and to testify that it is he  
which was ordained of God to be the  
Judge of quick and dead.

HENRY

I hope you're right, dear. I just don't  
want to think about even going near  
anyone with that gay disease. I can't  
imagine how... unclean.

MARGARETTE



To him give all the prophets witness,  
 that through his name whosoever  
 believeth in him shall receive  
 remission of sins.

### GOSPEL HYMN

Hymn 180

All SING

He is risen, he is risen! Tell it out  
 with joyful voice: he has burst his  
 three days' prison; let the whole wide  
 earth rejoice: death is conquered, we  
 are free, Christ has won the victory.

MAXWELL

Here I've fallen exposed and hurt. I  
 just know I've reached the end.

JESUS

Faith and healing is all we ask. For  
 God's sake please hold on friend.

MAXWELL

Darkness fills my waking eye, God above  
 to you I cry.

ALL SING

Come ye sad and fearful hearted, with  
 glad smile and radiant brow! Death's  
 long shadows have departed; Jesus' woes  
 are over now, and the passion that he  
 bore sin and pain can vex no more.

FR. ANTHONY

The Gospel according to John.

ALL

Praise be to him, Lord Christ.

FR. ANTHONY

The first day of the week cometh Mary  
 Magdalene early, when it was yet dark,  
 unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone  
 taken away from the sepulchre.

TRIANA

I'm glad you read, Aunt Margarete.

MARGARETTE

What else was I going to do?

FR. ANTHONY

Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him.

TRIANA

I'm so worried for him. When he fell I couldn't believe it.

MARGARETTE

He's unwell. The ambulance is on its way. It's the best we can do to keep on.

FR. ANTHONY

Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre.

MARGARETTE

You understand that he has AIDS, don't you Triana? You understand what that means?

TRIANA

I understand. (A pause) I think I understand.

FR. ANTHONY

So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre.

MARGARETTE

There will be a very important moment. A crucial moment when we can not hesitate, everyone else will be watching and it is up to us to do what is right.

FR. ANTHONY

And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in.

TRIANA

I'm scared, Aunt Margarete. What if we...? There is no cure.

FR. ANTHONY

Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie,

MARGARETTE

He can't hurt you child, that's not how AIDS works, drinking from the same cup won't hurt you, won't hurt us. And there are others who will be helped by it.

FR. ANTHONY

And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.

TRIANA

What are you talking about? How can you know?

FR. ANTHONY

Then went in also that other disciple,  
which came first to the sepulchre, and  
he saw, and believed.

MARGARETTE

Because AIDS is spread through blood  
and other internal fluids, my heart.  
Drinking some wine together will not  
get either of us sick, not one time not  
ten thousand times. (1980 studies) Your  
Aunt has been fighting fights since  
before your parents were born. Have  
faith. Trust the experts and trust me.

FR. ANTHONY

For as yet they knew not the scripture,  
that he must rise again from the dead.

MARGARETTE

It is important, Triana, that we stand  
up for Maxwell. We must show those who  
are here that our church is not one of  
superstition. Grace is a church of love  
and reason.

FR. ANTHONY

Then the disciples went away again unto  
their own home.

TRIANA

I don't understand you, Aunt. Won't we  
look... I don't know. Won't we look  
like we agree with his... His  
lifestyle?

FR. ANTHONY

But Mary stood without at the sepulchre  
weeping: and as she wept, she stooped  
down, and looked into the sepulchre,

MARGARETTE

Dearest, it is more important that we  
love him, and support him than worry

about who he loves. Let him live his own life and we shall love him through what there is left.

FR. ANTHONY

And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

TRIANA

You're right. Of course.

FR. ANTHONY

And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.

STEPHANIE

(Tears fill her eyes. She is sobbing over her son, holding him close to her.)

I love you. I love you. I love you. Precious boy, special boy. How much I love you. (She holds her son tightly. He is now standing on the pew.)

FR. ANTHONY

And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

BENJAMIN

It's ok momma. It's alright. (He strokes her hair as they hold each other.)

FR. ANTHONY

Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.

STEPHANIE

I'm so afraid. God please help us, help us in our hour of fear. Why have you taken my hope from me? Why have you left me sick, and unable to love my husband?

FR. ANTHONY

Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.

BENJAMIN

It's alright, Mama. Everything's going to be alright. (Benjamin attempts to comfort his mother as only children can in a time of immense grief.)

FR. ANTHONY

Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

BENJAMIN

(Putting his finger to his lips.)

Don't cry, now. Let's pray, OK?

STEPHANIE

(Nods.) OK. (She dries her tears and forces a smile.) Of course my love, my dearest.

FR. ANTHONY

Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her.

BENJAMIN AND STEPHANIE

(They both clasp hands in silent prayer.)

### **Gospel Hymn part 2**

ALL SING

Come with high and holy hymning,  
hail our Lord's triumphant day; not  
one darksome clod is dimming yonder  
glorious morning ray, breaking o'er  
the purple east, symbol of our  
Easter feast.

He is risen, he is risen! He hath  
opened heaven's gate: we are free  
from sin's dark pison, risen to a  
holier state: and a brighter Easter  
beam on our longing eyes shall  
stream.

FR. ANTHONY

The empty tomb did Mary see angels'  
voices comfort brought. I feel small  
and without power, in the middle I  
am caught. Lord high God what's  
right to do? To serve the church and  
serve you.

### **SERMON**

FR. ANTHONY

May these words of my mouth and this  
meditation of my heart be pleasing in  
your sight, LORD, my Rock and my

Redeemer. Amen

ALL

Amen

FR. ANTHONY

Please be seated. (all sit) What a beautiful church we have. These walls hold so much history, so much tradition. Our faith has been passed down to us by generations of believers, and I am grateful. We are blessed to be a church of hope, a church of reason, and this Easter I say proudly that we are a church of resurrection. We are a church of resurrection. Life is a strange... (Father Anthony pauses and tries to start again.) There is only one way to... (Jesus gets a cup of water and guides Maxwell's mouth to the rim of the paper cup to drink. Father Anthony waits and starts fresh.) When the disciples came to the tomb they found there only death because they sought death. That's what they expected to find and they found it. These men who had followed Jesus around for years, who had been raised up from low and difficult stations in life to become fishers of men. They were not expecting the miraculous. Even though that is exactly what they were promised. These men saw their leader crucified, they saw him die, and they saw him buried in the tomb, and then they fled in fear for their own lives. But not everyone left. Because someone believed in the miracles that were promised. She had faith in what Jesus had preached. She believed that there was something beyond the violent death that she had witnessed, because she believed in the resurrection. Two thousand years seems like a long time ago, and yet we are still human beings. We are filled with so much doubt, so much fear, and so much anger. We may think on the barbarity of the roman soldiers as they nailed Christ on the cross, we may think ourselves removed from the people shouting for the release of Barabas as Jesus awaited His death, we might think ourselves different from the apostles: confused,



afraid, doubting. We are not. We live in a time of death and fear, a time of war and pandemic, a time of fear and doubt just as John did. Just as Jesus did, and just as Mary Magdalin did. In today's Gospel John tells us that Mary is the one that announces to the apostles that the body of Jesus is no longer there. She is also the one who stays by the tomb. She is rewarded for that dedication, being visited by angels clad in white, and by Jesus Himself before he ascends to join the father. In this our own time of darkness we must be like Mary. We must trust in God, and we must trust in each other as siblings in Christ. Instead we give in to hysteria, to fear, to doubt. Our newspaper headlines may be filled with cold war, mass homelessness, and AIDS but there is little difference between our modern fears and those of the disciples. There is little difference because at the heart of our actions in this world is not the dedication of Mary Magdalene, or the love of Jesus, but the fear of death. Unfortunately, that fear is justified, the body is frail and one day we will return to dust, but we are a people of resurrection. The only way to God is to follow Jesus. Today is Easter Sunday and we are told, from the Gospel, to believe in the defeat of death, not that we won't succumb to our own eventual demise but understanding that we are to expect the miracle of resurrection. Where is our hope when we ignore the reports of scientists? Where is our faith when we put aside the assurances of our bishops? Where is the love when we ignore our brothers who are afflicted? Today we will not go forward in ignorance. Today we shall be a resurrection people. Amen.

(Father Anthony sits)

ALL

Amen

**Nicean Creed**

## ALL

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

**Prayers of the People.**

FR. ANTHONY

I ask your prayers for God's people throughout the world; for Bishop Moore, for this gathering, and for all ministers and people. Pray for the Church. (pause) I ask your prayers for

peace; for goodwill among nations; and for the well-being of all people. Pray for justice and peace. (pause)

JESUS

For justice and peace, lord!

FR. ANTHONY

I ask your prayers for the poor, the sick, the hungry, the oppressed, and those in prison. Pray for those in any need or trouble.

JESUS

Your people are hurting, lord God!

FR. ANTHONY

I ask your prayers for all who seek God, or a deeper knowledge of him. Pray that they may find and be found by him.

JESUS

We know that you hear us. We know it!

HENRY

We can all hear you. Please have a sense of... place.

FR. ANTHONY

I ask your prayers for the departed. Pray for those who have died. (Pause) Praise God for those in every generation in whom Christ has been honored. Pray that we may have grace to glorify Christ in our own day.

### **Offertory**

FR. ANTHONY

If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your

brother has something against you,  
leave your gift there before the altar  
and go; first be reconciled to your  
brother, and then come and offer your  
gift.

(The organ plays Ave Maria. The Holy  
Spirit joins in a beautiful soprano,  
surprising everyone.)

*(The Ushers pass the plate and  
then bring the people's  
offerings of bread and wine,  
and money or other gifts, to  
FR. Anthony. The people stand  
while the offerings are  
presented and placed on the  
Altar.)*

### **The Great Thanksgiving**

*(The people remain standing.  
Father Anthony faces them and  
speaks.)*

FR. ANTHONY

The Lord be with you.

ALL

And also with you.

FATHER ANTHONY

Lift up your hearts.

ALL

We lift them to the Lord.

FATHER ANTHONY

Let us give thanks to the Lord our  
God.

ALL

It is right to give him thanks and  
praise.

## FATHER ANTHONY

(Father Anthony faces the Holy Table, and proceeds)

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name:

FATHER ANTHONY and ALL  
(SING)

Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

(ALL KNEEL)

## FATHER ANTHONY

Holy and gracious Father: In your infinite love you made us for yourself, and, when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all. He stretched out his arms upon the cross, and offered himself, in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world. At the following words concerning the bread, the Celebrant is to hold it, or to lay a hand upon it; and at the words concerning the cup, to hold or place a hand upon the cup and any other vessel containing wine to be consecrated. On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for

the remembrance of me." After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me." Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith:

FATHER ANTHONY and ALL

Christ has died. Christ is risen.  
Christ will come again.

FR. ANTHONY

We celebrate the memorial of our redemption, O Father, in this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Recalling his death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts. Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him. Sanctify us also that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you in unity, constancy, and peace; and at the last day bring us with all your saints into the joy of your eternal kingdom. All this we ask through your Son Jesus Christ: By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and forever. AMEN.

ALL

Amen.

FR. ANTHONY

And now, as our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to say,

FATHER ANTHONY and ALL

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom  
come, thy will be done, on earth as  
it is in heaven. Give us this day

our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

### **The Breaking of the Bread**

(Father Anthony breaks the consecrated Bread.) (pause)

FR. ANTHONY CHANT

Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;

ALL

Therefore let us keep the feast.  
Alleluia.

FR. ANTHONY

The Gifts of God for the People of God. Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving. (FR. Anthony, with the assistance of Jesus, provides the eucharist to Maxwell. Fr. Anthony and Jesus take communion. Triana and Margarete do not wait for the ushers but rush to be next. The ushers guide the rest of the church to take the eucharist. Sarah and Henry leave without taking communion. The Bread and the Cup are given to the communicants with these words:

FR. ANTHONY

The Body of Christ, the bread of heaven. (the recipient saying: Amen.

The Blood of Christ, the cup of salvation. (the recipient saying: Amen.

SARAH

Where is the church that I grew up in? The church that we were married in? We baptized our children in the font.

Growing up I was taught that the church was a place of scripture. The church was a place of tradition. Now... I do not recognize this place.

FR. ANTHONY

Henry, Sarah, I am sorry to see you go. Yes this is a church of scripture. Yes this is a church of tradition, but we are also a church of reason. As followers of Christ we are called to love one another and to hold the sick close to our hearts. We are taught to care for those in need, as I know that you both have done in your lives here. Please reconsider, this is your brother in Christ. Show him compassion, and know that his illness can not harm you.

HENRY

You should be ashamed. This is a disease for the sinners against God. How dare you profane this holy place? Know that my family will no longer be in attendance and I am sure that you will feel our absence of generosity most severely.

### **COMMUNION HYMN**

to the tune of Hymn 304

ALL

With tradition, scripture, and reason we are unified. But God's unending love is what could never be denied.

We share one cup, one hopeful mission, and in the good news. It is through the love of Christ that we know His truth.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

(Sings Amazing Grace, all join)

MAXWELL



Please help me to stand. Thank you Father Anthony, and thank you friend for helping me. I was glad to be able to share with you this Easter. Please take me now to the hospital.

JESUS

I'll take you, sir. Let's get you some help.

MAXWELL

God bless you.

JESUS

(Laughing) Oh I'm blessed my brother. We are all blessed today.

FR. ANTHONY

Let us pray.

ALL

Eternal God, heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

FR. ANTHONY

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

STEPHANIE

Blessed be God. I will go home, and we will work through this. Despite this terrible fear in my heart I know that I am loved. We will work through this as a family.

ALL

Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia!

The organ plays Handel's  
Maccabeus as a postlude.

JESUS

Friends, thank you for joining us today. Please give a round of applause for our players. (Cast comes out and takes a bow.) Please give a round of applause to our musician(s). And glory to God!

The organ plays "Oh When the  
Saints"

JESUS

Amen brothers and sisters. Again I say amen! I hope that you have enjoyed the show tonight, if you think it was a little preachy... well, I'm not sure what to say. But stay with me for just a moment now because this is important. We are all blessed here today. Not because we are in a church. Not because we have said the right words, and acted in the right way. We are blessed because we are here together. And gathered we have made a joyful noise to the lord. Again I say, Amen!

END

## Conclusion

Joy Cometh in the Morning has much in common with medieval eucharistic plays. The first, and most obvious, is a focus on the eucharist. The second is the element of the education of practical physicality for the audience. The play is designed around an Episcopal Easter service and includes the physical bodily involvement of the audience to participate as a congregation would. Third, the play is designed to be performed in a Church. While Joy Cometh in the Morning could be put on in a more expected modern theatrical space I believe there is great value in having the congregational church or chapel space be utilized outside of the normal service schedule. Further, it is slightly easier to invite a friend to attend a performance than it is

to invite them to Church. However, if the play touches an emotional or spiritual nerve for a member of the audience they may consider attendance for an actual service.

Often what we find in a story is even more true for a piece of theatre. While a story may come from the thoughts of an individual, or a folk tradition told through an individual writer's or orator's mental lens, theatre is inherently collaborative. Joy Cometh in the Morning is only theoretical. The play will not be complete until it is performed. The fact that it takes many minds, hands, and tongues to put on a show means that the playwright, director, and even an unfortunate stage manager may be surprised with each performance from night to night. The audience themselves are participants in the living breathing space of a theatre. Anyone who has ever been on a stage can tell you that the energy from an audience is palpable, and it changes how the story is told. All of this can relate to Sunday morning service.

Intention is crucial. Intention is what separates this creative work from an actual Easter service. The intention of the play is that of performance and, therefore, can never be the ritual itself. However, it is important to note the theological and spiritual importance of Christian art. Christian art in all forms of expression helps us to better understand our own relationship with God, our fellow Christians, and the church.

As the play explores the difficulties of a community wrestling with the realities of a disease that few knew much about and how it affected their religious practices, we are able to in our own time reflect on how we engage with our modern challenges. At the time of writing Covid-19 has claimed the lives of over one million Americans and six million worldwide<sup>55</sup>. Covid-19, as an air-born disease, is much easier to spread but it is not the death sentence that HIV/AIDS was thought to be in the early 1980's. Yet Covid-19 has affected and will continue to

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<sup>55</sup> World Health Organization Covid-19 Deaths <https://covid19.who.int/>

affect the church in ways that we may never be fully realized. It is important for humans to experience stories that show us what we are capable of, even if it seems purely aspirational. This is so that we may imagine a better future. Joy Cometh in the Morning is a play that is meant for Episcopalians to be reminded that they are capable of imaginative, powerful, and resurrective hospitality. The play stretches our creativity so that we may participate in reality more fully.

The play focuses on a congregation in the early nineteen eighties on Easter Sunday and they realize that one of their members suffers from AIDS. The congregation's ideal of welcome is challenged. The question for the priest and congregation becomes: what to do about the common cup? Will all share in the eucharist, or will their sick brother in Christ be denied the blood of Christ? The themes of the play are meant to center around the concept of resurrection.

As The Episcopal Church strives to be a church of welcome for all of God's people we often fall short. We lament the pattern of decline that defines all of North American Christian organizations. The rise of those who are "unchurched", that do not identify with any religious affiliation, must change the expectations of our parish life. Over the past three years the world has faced the crisis of Covid-19 and we have lurched miles ahead in our utilization of technology. Where we had previously been inching forward for decades the church now embraces online worship. We will be uncomfortable. We will make mistakes. We will work together, in love, to bring forth the kingdom of God.

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