

JOEL SCANDRETT – SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

LIFE, FAMILY AND FAITH JOURNEY

I was born the fourth of six children to Dr. Vernon and Ruth Scandrett, who were Free Methodist missionaries in Colombia from the mid-50s to mid-60s. We lived on the campus of the Seminario Biblico de Colombia in Medellin, where my mother taught missionary children and my father taught Bible and led medical missions to tribal people. I was still a child when we returned to the US, but the experience of serving in global mission profoundly shaped our family ethos—and me with it. It instilled in me a love for the beauty and diversity of human peoples and cultures, and planted in me the seeds of a multiethnic vision of the people of God, united in the love of Christ and the mission of God. That vision of the church has grown through the years and is a fundamental commitment of mine today.

I have no memory of a time when I wasn't a Christian. My mother says that at the age of three I told her I wanted Jesus to live in my heart, and she led me in a simple prayer of faith. My parents loved the Lord and raised us to be students of Scripture and people of prayer. Every weekday morning, my father would lead us in family devotions in our living room after breakfast. We would read one chapter from the Old Testament, one from the New, and a Psalm if we had time. My siblings and I would take turns reading aloud, after which my father would offer a brief teaching. Then we would kneel for prayer, praying silently or aloud what was on our hearts, and conclude by praying the Lord's Prayer together. When I became an Anglican years later, I realized that this pattern of daily devotion was essentially that of the Daily Office inherited through the Methodist tradition. That simple spiritual habit, begun as a child and now using the Daily Office, has continued throughout my life and is a great source of spiritual comfort and strength. Karen and I have also made it our family discipline, though we do it in the evening, not at 6AM!

I will always be grateful for my upbringing in the Wesleyan tradition and consider myself a Wesleyan Anglican. But by the time I came of age in the 1970's, much of the Wesleyan Holiness movement had devolved into pharisaical moralism. Unlike their nineteenth-century forbears—who were at the forefront of abolition, women's suffrage, temperance, and ministries in urban slums—many twentieth-century Holiness Methodists had retreated into a sectarian fortress. The message I received from my Free Methodist church (intended or otherwise) was that a "real" Christian would live a sinless life apart from the culture, and wouldn't "dance, drink, chew, or go with girls who do." As an earnest middle-schooler, this moralism led me into a painful period of questioning my salvation. I thought I must not be a Christian if I continued to struggle with sin. Realizing my distress, my father took me aside one Sunday, having watched me "give my life to Jesus" for the umpteenth time, and spoke these words: "Joel, if Jesus died for your sins two thousand years ago, then he died for ALL your sins, past, present, and future." My father's words came as a profound comfort and liberation to me, and I have lived ever since

under the promise of God's love and forgiveness given to me through the cross of Jesus Christ. Years later in college, I discovered Luther's great battle cry of "justification by grace through faith," but I learned it first through the lovingkindness of my father.

Painful as it was, God used that time from my youth to convince me of several related truths over the years. First, to be holy is first and foremost to abide in the holiness that is *already* ours through our union with Christ, and to seek to emulate him out love, not fear, in gratitude for all that he has done (1 John 4:18). Yes, we are called to holiness of life, and this is a constant theme of the Anglican tradition. But no matter how nor how often we may fail, the grace of God in Christ ever surrounds and upholds us, forgiving and freeing us from shame and guilt, and empowering us to get up, dust ourselves off, and continue to follow him. That reality of our union with Christ is a spiritual rock and refuge that has sustained me throughout my life.

Second, while holiness does indeed mean to keep ourselves "unstained from the world" (James 1:27), it does not mean to abandon the world, but to be a loving and redemptive presence as Christ's Body in the world. As the church of Jesus Christ, we are not permitted to adopt a strategy either of accommodation to culture or withdrawal from culture, but are called to be the loving, redeeming, and transforming presence of Christ in the midst of culture.

Third, both unchurched adults and children raised in the church necessarily go through a *series* of "conversions" as they grow to Christian maturity. While a dramatic, one-time conversion might be an appropriate way to think about adults coming to faith, it is less appropriate for children raised in church and can actually do harm—as it did to me. However, for the same reason, we can't presume that children who have been baptized and raised in Anglican families will automatically come to mature faith without intentional discipleship. These convictions were instrumental in leading me to join the ACNA Catechesis Committee in the 2010s, which led to my work editing and producing our Catechism. The catechesis and discipleship of Anglican children and adults will continue to be a primary focus of my ministry.

Still, I continued to struggle with unwarranted guilt throughout my teenage years. Thankfully, two Christian men, both of whom happened to be Wheaton College (IL) graduates, took interest in mentoring me in high school. One of them was the pastor of a Presbyterian youth group near our home in Iowa City. It was on a mission trip with this youth group that I had a life-changing experience. We were helping to build a church for a congregation in one of the *barrios* outside Mexico City. I don't remember if the congregation was Presbyterian or Pentecostal (or both!), but their elderly pastor was filled with the joy of the Lord. When Sunday came, we joined the congregation in morning worship under a rustic wooden shelter. Though we couldn't follow their Spanish, the service was going normally enough until the elderly pastor began to preach. As he preached, I became overwhelmed by a profound awareness of the immense presence and love of God. Nothing dramatic happened to me such as speaking in tongues or the like, but I was overcome and began to weep for joy. For weeks after we returned home I was continually filled with that same joy. Those feelings eventually faded, but the experience instilled in me an awareness of the Holy Spirit I hadn't known before. As I've grown

in faith and maturity, I've come to rest in and rely on the presence and leading of the Holy Spirit in my decisions and my ministry. While I wouldn't call myself Charismatic per se, I rely every day on the Holy Spirit to empower and guide me.

As I mentioned above, the two men that mentored me in high school were both Wheaton College graduates. As a result of their influence, I decided not to attend the Free Methodist college that my siblings had, but to go to Wheaton. Too much of my youth had been plagued by pietistic legalism and I needed to find another way to be a Christian. Since I was a boy, I had been interested in questions of theology and apologetics, and my discerning father had fed me a steady diet of CS Lewis (which I supplemented with JRR Tolkien). At Wheaton, I discovered that one could be a Christian and yet, like Lewis, fully engage one's reason and critical thinking in seeking to understand the things of God and the world from a Christian perspective. I discovered the truth of St. Anselm's famous dictum, "I believe that I may understand" (*credo ut intelligam*). Unlike the pietistic tradition of my youth, which often pitted faith against reason, I discovered the ancient tradition of Christian theology and philosophy that undergirds the great intellectual and cultural achievements of Western society. And I began to notice that many of my favorite theologians and Christian thinkers were *Anglican*. I began to read contemporary Anglicans like Lewis, Stott, and Packer, but also earlier figures like Hooker and Herbert, and other modern Anglicans like Oliver O'Donovan. It was at Wheaton that I also encountered the late Robert Webber as one of my professors. It was Bob who introduced me to the church fathers and the ecumenical movement, but also to his own journey on "the Canterbury Trail" into Anglicanism. And it was through Bob that I was introduced to Anglican *worship*, which ultimately sealed the deal for me. Though I wouldn't be confirmed until years later, my journey into Anglicanism had begun.

However, all that I was learning during these years was eclipsed by a cataclysmic and traumatic event that would change me forever. The fall of my senior year at Wheaton, I met a freshman woman named Sheryl Nystrom who would become my first wife. What began as a friendship working in the college cafeteria blossomed into a romance. We began dating in the spring of 1984, were engaged in June of 1985, and were married in May of 1986. I was 23 and she was 20. I took a part-time job to support us and worked on my MA in theological studies while Sheri completed her bachelor's in music education. We also co-led the youth group of her family's Presbyterian church in Wheaton. In March of 1988, we learned we were pregnant—due date: Christmas Day. In June of 1988 we graduated from our respective degree programs and I began looking for work to support our new family. But on July 12, 1988, Sheri and our unborn baby died in a car accident. And all my dreams of the life we had begun together died with them.

Words fail to capture what that experience did to me. To say that I was utterly broken, devastated, lost, and in greater anguish than I had known possible only begins to describe it. I prayed every day that the Lord would take me. I wanted nothing more than to die and be with Sheri and our baby in heaven. I dreamt of her constantly and would wake only to realize again that she was gone. It was tortuous. I cried myself to sleep every night and cried myself awake

every morning. And yet . . . and yet, somehow, in the midst of my grief and desolation, THE LORD WAS WITH ME. He was there, holding my hand as I walked through the valley of the shadow of death. How can I describe it? To this day, I really can't except to say that he was *with* me. I know it as I live and breathe. Into that bottomless void of grief and loss left by her passing came MY LORD JESUS to take me into his arms and raise me to life again. Even now, writing these words thirty-four years later, I'm overcome by tears of gratitude. "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." Yes, he has. He has borne *my* grief and carried *my* sorrows, just as he has borne *all* our griefs and sorrows on his Cross. This is what I learned in the midst of grief and loss: that our God has taken flesh and entered into our lostness and brokenness on the Cross in order to gather us up and restore us to life in him. Yes, the Cross is God's great promise of forgiveness, but it is also God's answer, once and for all, to the reality of suffering and death in this world. There is no answer to the "problem" of evil apart from the Cross of Jesus Christ. In the passion and death of our Lord, God has taken ownership of evil and death and made them his instruments of compassion and hope.

So began a long period of recovery from trauma. We never "move on" from trauma, we learn to incorporate it into our lives and—by God's grace—grow through it. And that has been my experience over the many years since Sheri's death. As crushingly painful as those first years were, they were also years that the Lord used powerfully to grow and change me in ways that have made me who I am today. What follows are those most significant changes for the purposes of this autobiography.

First, I discovered a love for the Lord that I hadn't known before. While I had known and loved Jesus my whole life, that love had been compartmentalized in a way that separated my relationship with Christ from other aspects of my life. My interest in theology was more intellectual than personal, and I had little interest in Christian ministry. That all changed when I lost Sheri. I had lost everything, but the one thing that remained was JESUS. Jesus became the one reality that made my life worth living, and I wanted to spend the rest of my life living for him. Thirty-four years later that has not changed. Everything I have done in the intervening years has been an aspect of seeking to love and serve my Lord Jesus, and I will continue to do that for the rest of my life.

Second, I discovered a love for Jesus' church. God's chief means of grace in my life at that time was the simple, constant, unconditional love with which our church surrounded me. I would come to church and weep through the service, and people would quietly let me grieve. A gentle touch on the shoulder, a brief hug, a quiet word of greeting: these tender evidences of love were a balm to my broken heart. Meals appeared on my doorstep and an unsolicited job offer came my way. In the two years between losing Sheri and going to seminary, the Body of Christ embraced me and loved me back to life. For the first time in my life, I saw the beauty and reality of the church as God's chosen means of grace and healing in this world. And just as I determined to spend my life serving him, so I determined to spend my life caring for his Body.

Third, and related to the preceding two, I discovered the Eucharist. It was while grieving Sheri's death that I first began attending an Anglican church. It was a little Episcopal church in West Chicago, Church of the Resurrection, which has since grown to a megachurch located in Wheaton. But then it was a quiet, unassuming church that my housemate invited me to attend. I wept a lot in those days, but I wept through my first Holy Eucharist because I knew I had come *home*: home to a tradition of which I had never been a part yet to which I nonetheless belonged, and home to the reality of feeding on Christ in my heart by faith in the Eucharist. All my life, I'd heard people talk about a "personal relationship with Jesus." That phrase took on a new depth of meaning for me now in the context of the Eucharist. I continued to attend Episcopal/Anglican churches from that point on.

All of these elements together contributed to a powerful sense of a call to ministry that grew increasingly strong over those two years after Sheri's death. Following that call, I moved to Boston in 1990 to undertake an MDiv at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. I was still single and recovering, and though I dated I couldn't bring myself to remarry. I attended Christ Church Hamilton, immersed myself in my studies, and took a job for two years as a psychiatric crisis worker. That job was a remarkable experience in its own right and I learned an immense amount working with mentally ill people in crisis which I don't have space to discuss here. Suffice it to say that I learned how to be present to people in the midst of profound mental confusion and distress, which has been an invaluable asset in pastoral care.

Throughout my time at Gordon-Conwell, I found myself consistently drawn both to pastoral ministry and theological education. While I knew I was called to ministry, I also knew that part of that call was to be a teacher of the church. My study of Scripture and church history taught me that the church in every age is in need of sound teaching. As my time at GCTS drew to a close, I questioned whether I should go on for further study or directly into full-time ministry. Uncertain of which way to go, I put a "fleece" before the Lord. If I was accepted to a PhD program with full funding, I would go; if not, I would pursue pastoral ministry. I applied to a number of PhD programs, was accepted by several, and was given full funding by one: Drew University, where I would study theology with Thomas Oden.

At Drew, I plunged into doctoral studies focusing on the church fathers and their twentieth century retrieval by the ecumenical movement and by key evangelical theologians. I also began attending All Angels' Episcopal Church in Manhattan. I was very involved at All Angels' and my sense of a call to ministry was growing, but I still hadn't given thought to ordination. Then I took Tom Oden's seminar in the theology of John Wesley. I discovered that Wesley was not only a devout evangelical, he was a devout Anglican and churchman, and remained an Anglican priest to the day he died. The penny finally dropped, and I realized two things I'd already known but hadn't yet acknowledged: I *was* an Anglican, and I was called to ordained ministry in the Anglican tradition. Soon after that I was confirmed at All Angels' and began the discernment process. I'll talk more about that process below.

Another important personal discovery occurred during my time at Drew. At Tom Oden's invitation, I had become involved in the development of his 28-volume Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (ACCS), published by Intervarsity Press. It was in that context that I discovered I had significant strategic, administrative, and organizational leadership gifts. Originally hired as a student researcher, Tom soon appointed me as Research Director, which meant managing the operations of our \$1M grant that employed fifteen graduate researchers in patristic Latin and Greek. Once the English edition was on sound footing, I was appointed Translations Director and managed an additional \$2M grant that funded the translation and publication of the ACCS in multiple foreign languages. This position entailed extensive international travel, communication, and negotiations with non-English scholars and publishers in each language. These gifts of strategic organization and communication were of great use in my later development of the Robert E. Webber Center at Trinity School for Ministry, and the development and production of ACNA Catechism.

It was through my work on the ACCS that I also became involved in ecumenical relations and developed ecumenical friendships that have continued to this day. I worked closely with Roman Catholic scholars based in Rome and Spain, and Orthodox scholars (Antiochian, Greek, and Russian) in the US and Russia. (This work also afforded me the privilege of meeting one of my personal heroes, Pope John Paul II, in 2003.) Through these connections, I have been able to get to know Pittsburgh's Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Savas and Archbishop Melchizedek of the Orthodox Church in America. My desire for the ADP is that we would establish and cultivate strong ties of friendship and cooperation for joint mission and witness with Christians from these and other traditions in the Pittsburgh region.

On a different note, it was also during my time at Drew that I started dating Karen Glasser, the woman who would become my second wife. I had known of Karen for years through my former in-laws. I was reluctant at first, but eventually made contact and we began dating long distance: she in Boston studying medicine and I in New Jersey studying theology. We started dating in 1998, ten years after I had been widowed, but it was still difficult for me. We broke up and got back together several times. I finally got into therapy to deal with my fears, and we were eventually engaged and married in 2000. We have now been very happily married for twenty-one years, have three wonderful daughters, and are very grateful to be living in Pittsburgh, the city we have come to love and call home. Karen is Associate Professor of Geriatric Medicine and Director of the Geriatric Fellowship Program at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine—and I am immensely proud to be her husband!

Following the completion of my doctoral thesis, I was hired in 2004 by InterVarsity Press as an academic editor. We moved from Boston to Downers Grove, IL, where we lived for the next eight years. Editing was good work, but it wasn't for me. I was ordained to the diaconate in 2007 and the priesthood in 2008, and I resigned from IVP that same year. I knew I needed either to be teaching or pastoring, or some combination of the two. After three years of adjunct teaching, interim pastoring, and church planting, I was offered a position in 2012 at Trinity

School for Ministry. There I began to do the work of forming Anglican pastors. In addition to teaching theology, I have had the privilege of mentoring, counseling, and pastoring men and women preparing for pastoral ministry for the last ten years.

CALL TO ORAINED MINISTRY

As mentioned above, I received a call to ministry during the years following my first wife's death. I had been involved in missions and youth ministry before that, but did not have a clear sense of calling. From 1989, that changed. I began to pursue active involvement in ministry, though, in typical evangelical fashion, the question of ordination had not yet occurred to me. At Gordon-Conwell, I joined the student Spiritual Life committee and was active in my local church, teaching adult Sunday school and co-leading the college and career group with our associate pastor. My two years in psychiatric crisis work were also very much a ministry, even if not explicitly Christian. During my PhD program, I co-led a local college and career group, assisted for a time with the English-speaking congregation of a Korean church, and later led a community group of about 30 young adults at All Angels' Church in Manhattan. The point here is that I was already following a call to ministry even though it wasn't ordained ministry.

What changed in 1997 were two things: a growing conviction of the need to be ordained, and the realization that I *was* an Anglican and had been for some time. Why the change? Honestly, I can't say. It simply became clear that this was the next thing I should do. I knew I was called to ordained ministry and I knew that I was committed to the Anglican tradition. The obvious conclusion was to be ordained as an Anglican priest. Following that realization, I approached my rector, Colin Goode, who gently pointed out that it would be good to be confirmed first. So I was confirmed in September of 1997. Colin left All Angels' not long after, and was succeeded by an interim, Paul Perini from the Diocese of Melbourne. It was under Paul that I began the ordination process and had my initial meeting with the Canon to the Ordinary of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, the late Rev. Anne Richards. That meeting went sufficiently well and I began my parish discernment at All Angels'. However, shortly after that phase was completed, it became clear that I would be moving to Boston to marry Karen. At that point, my process in the Diocese of New York came to an end.

Arriving in Boston, Karen and I scouted around for Episcopal churches to attend, hoping to find a church like All Angels', but to no avail. Other than the Anglo-Catholic Church of the Advent on Beacon Hill, which was not our cup of tea, the only church we found in the city that preached the Gospel was Church of the Holy Spirit Mattapan—a vibrant Afro-Caribbean Episcopal church that had experienced dramatic renewal in the 1970s and 80s through the ministry of John Perkins. We became very involved at Holy Spirit and the rector, the Rev. Zanetta Armstrong, went out of her way to train me as a liturgical deacon and have me serve with her at the Table every Sunday. Unfortunately, my dealings with the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts did not go so well. When I approached them about continuing the ordination process they told me that

I would need to start the entire process over, return to seminary for a year of Anglican studies, and make a five-year commitment to serve their Diocese. While I could understand the logic of these stipulations, they weren't feasible given that Karen and I planned to leave Boston when she finished her medical residency.

What to do? Fortunately, my connections through All Angels' had put me in touch with the Rev. Hillary Bercovici, and I learned through him that it would be possible to pursue ordination through the American Anglican Council. In short, that is what happened. However, there is a wonderfully providential end to the story: through the AAC, I was made a postulant under Bishop Robert Duncan of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh! Not only that, but I was assigned to Church of the Ascension Oakland as my sponsoring parish, the same church that we now attend and which I serve as assisting clergy. Looking back, it's hard not to conclude that God had plans for us to come to Pittsburgh long before we or anyone else had thought of it.

As for my ordination itself, when we moved to Chicago in 2004, we began attending Church of the Resurrection in Wheaton, the church where my Anglican journey had originally begun. Resurrection had since joined the Anglican Mission in the Americas. I remained canonically resident in Pittsburgh in order to complete the process for diaconal ordination, which I received from +Bob Duncan at Trinity Cathedral in 2007, with Ken Bailey and Jean DeVaty (the only two people I knew in Pittsburgh) serving as my sponsors. I then requested letters dimissory at +Bob's recommendation and I was ordained to the priesthood in 2008 at Resurrection in Wheaton by Bishop Sandy Greene of the AMIA. However, Resurrection did not offer me many opportunities for ministry. So in 2010, we left Resurrection to assist in planting Church of the Ascension, Elmhurst, IL, where I served as priest and celebrant for two years before accepting the call to Trinity School for Ministry. Over the last ten years, Trinity has provided a wonderful opportunity for me to preach and celebrate, and to mentor and pastor men and women also following God's call to ordained ministry.

As I hope this autobiography demonstrates, the Lord has faithfully led me at each new phase and turning point of my life into new areas and seasons of ministry. Over the past two years, I have increasingly sensed that he was preparing me for a new season of leadership. I believe my past experience in life, education, and ministry, as well as my work at TSM, the Diocese of Pittsburgh, and at the ACNA provincial level, have all been part of that preparation. I believe I would be a good and strong bishop, able to build, nurture, and lead the diocese of Pittsburgh into new fields of the Gospel and to strongly represent our diocese to the ACNA. Regardless of the outcome, I am excited to see what the Lord has in store!

Joel Scandrett