

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

**W**hat is your position on the following:

- ◇ abortion,
- ◇ women's ordination,
- ◇ sexual addiction,
- ◇ social justice,
- ◇ white privilege, and
- ◇ intersectionality,
- ◇ Marxism,
- ◇ women in the military,
- ◇ gnosticism,
- ◇ singleness,
- ◇ church security
- ◇ gun control,
- ◇ dreamers and political asylum,
- ◇ global warming and ecology,
- ◇ racism,
- ◇ cultural appropriation,
- ◇ #MeToo movement,
- ◇ rapid onset gender dysphoria,
- ◇ gender fluidity,
- ◇ joblessness,
- ◇ homelessness?

Do you have a position on these? Why do you have that position; on what is it based? And if you don't, why not? Some of these will rank less or more important on your individual scale; but these all have something to do with the morality of our culture and the morality of YOU!

Let's be real! How can we have highly informed and well-developed positions on all these things? It's overwhelming, confusing, demanding, and not always fact-based. Some

are immediately practical. Some are more philosophical. All have implications.

Yet, as important as these topics can be, St. John's should not become an issues-based church. What would it mean to be issues-based?

With the understanding that the gospel is primarily the message "follow Jesus", being issues-based can mean mixing the gospel with issues. While the gospel has a voice for each of these topics (and many others!), the dangerous tendency is to let the issues drown out the gospel. The danger is in letting the gospel become about issues. Rather than being the foundation on which our answers to the world's problems are proclaimed, the gospel can become the servant of an issue. That's idolatry.



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That's the first problem. The second is the danger of becoming schismatic. Suppose for a moment that I'm pro-life and I think that this is the most — perhaps the only — important issue for the church to address. Suppose you are concerned about homelessness and feel as strongly. While we otherwise might agree about the essential truths, we now have two parties. I could say you don't care about life; you could

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say I don't care about orphans and widows.

To counter these dangers, we have spent a couple of months now in our adult Christian Education class looking at multisyllabic words like "epistemology" and "presuppositions". More importantly, we have been learning what it means to "think Christianly".

The goal is to understand both what and how the Bible teaches us to think and to compare that framework with what and how our culture thinks. We've discovered that there is quite a gulf fixed between those two worlds!

Ultimately, as we work through a variety of issues, we will strengthen our foundations for how we think, what we believe, and how to communicate those things. From there, we will move to evangelism and how to reach out to the world around us on an individual and practical level.

While Sunday the 26<sup>th</sup> of May was the last Sunday this season, having addressed some of the basic ideas that govern biblical thinking about end of life issues, when the new season begins in the fall, we will continue this series.

## *Baker Book Brief*

*By Ken Cook*

After writing Book Briefs for the St. John's newsletter for more than thirty years, I suppose that it should come as no surprise that one of them would be published more than once. The following Book Brief first saw light of day last year, that is, May, 2018. But now, given the release of the *Unplanned* motion picture, it seems appropriate for us to consider the article and the issues it raises

again. The *Unplanned* story and the film to which it has given birth chronicles one woman's movement from Planned Parenthood executive to pro-life advocate and the mother of eight children. The revised article which follows reflects ongoing developments.

Because St. John's Anglican Church has a long history of commitment to being under the authority of Holy Scripture, it seems quite appropriate that Abby Johnson's *Unplanned: The Dramatic True Story of a Former Planned Parenthood Leader's Eye-Opening Journey Across the Life Line* (2010) and *The Walls Are Talking: Former Abortion Clinic Workers Tell Their Stories* (2016) should make their way into our congregation's library for your reading. [I had wanted to review Abby's first book since the day I originally heard of it in 2012; somehow or the other, we never managed to add a copy to the library until Spring, 2018. But it is with great satisfaction that I commend both it and her second publication to you now.]

Abby Johnson was raised in a pro-life family (Southern Baptist), but became a volunteer at a Planned Parenthood abortion facility during her first year in college (2001). Later she became a college intern, and then was employed full-time by Planned Parenthood as a community services director. In 2005 she was promoted to the position of director of the Planned Parenthood facility in Bryan, Texas. Unexpectedly summoned to leave her desk and its paperwork in order to assist with an ultrasound-guided abortion of a 13-week-old child in the womb, she found herself confronted with the undeniable realization that

"the fetus" was a vulnerable human being. She left Planned Parenthood less than two weeks later, after having talked with some of the pro-lifers who had cared enough to forge a personal relationship with her as they showed up day after day to pray at her busy abortion clinic. Among them was Shawn Carney, the leader of a local pro-life organization, which has become the national "40 Days for Life" movement. Soon afterwards, she became a volunteer once again, this time serving alongside other pro-life demonstrators outside the abortion mill which she had only recently directed.

Her stark reversal was not well-received by Planned Parenthood and by those who are invested in support of abortion as a culturally-accepted norm. Planned Parenthood sued their former employee, but had their case thrown out of court. As one might expect, our author has continued to suffer attempts to smear her reputation and accuracy to this very day as articles and reviews of *Unplanned* continue to be published in printed literature and online. Nonetheless, this has seemed to foster only continuing "public relations" problems for the giant government-supported abortion provider.

Abby married and she and her husband Doug soon managed to have their first child, a daughter. The couple initially attended an Episcopal congregation early in their marriage, but, given that church's pro-abortion stance, found themselves to be increasingly unwelcome; finally they were encouraged to leave. They converted to Roman Catholicism in 2012. It has taken a great deal of

courage to write these two insider volumes, and Abby is to be commended. It ought to be noted that the very nature of the subject matter of these two



books guarantees a challenging reading experience. The same can be said for the film, which after running at the Warrington Regal and many other screens across the nation, can now be accessed online. There is a lot here on just about every page that proves to be difficult to "inwardly digest." (As I viewed the film, I found that I had to avert my eyes away from the screen in three different sequences for a total of more than a minute.) Although there is clear evidence of appropriate authorial discretion in these publications - deliberate sensationalism is avoided - the extremities of life and death within the day-in-and-day-out practice of a Planned Parenthood abortion mill are conveyed in a straight-forward and honest fashion throughout both volumes, and by means of the film.

The cultural relevance of Abby Johnson's Christian testimony in the face of the murderous "spirit of the age" was seen as recently as May 10th when our author was flown into the Philadelphia area to join a thousand others at a public demonstration at the Center City Planned Parenthood facility after state representative Brian Sims (182nd district) had placed videos online of himself berating pro-life advocates who were praying on the sidewalk at the site. If anyone at St. John's is undecided about the need to be actively involved in promoting a pro-life stance - to the

detriment of the abortion industry in the secular culture around us - a perusal of either of these books or a viewing of the film will likely serve to change your mind. (For anyone taking notes, let us recall that a Planned Parenthood abortion mill is as near at hand as 610 Louis Drive, Warminster, just off Street Road; also, let us be aware of the increasing drive to legalize abortions up to the day of delivery or the legal infanticide of those children who are safely delivered, i.e.: New York state's Reproductive Health Act of January 22nd!) Should you see the film? I suppose that viewing the film will have the effect of deepening one's resolve to oppose an "American Holocaust" which has claimed many more defenseless victims than anything perpetrated during World War II. May Almighty God have mercy upon our nation by granting us the fear of the LORD and repentance, and by emboldening the Church of Christ at large to bear continuing witness to the sanctity of human life while taking organized and decisive action to secure the safety of those endangered within the womb! "Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, 'Behold, we did not know this,' does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work?" (Proverbs 24:11,12).



## *Glimpses of Paradise* *By Tom Bathgate*

Our paradise is destination heaven and our eternal existence with God. We all need glimpses of this paradise from time to time. Our glimpses:

- Remind us of the purpose of our existence on this earth;
- Refresh us when we're depressed, stressed, and downtrodden;
- Strengthen us to withstand the trials, recognizing it is a short duration of "training";
- And, certainly help us cope with death, not only those we love, but our own.
- Why just a glimpse? The richness of paradise is very hard for us to comprehend, as creatures of this earth. In fact, it may be too rich for us to handle.

The Bible does have wonderful passages giving us glimpses of heaven. However, we are also taught that there are prerequisites necessary to fully appreciate these glimpses:

- Reinforcing our belief to the point of certainty;
- Through certainty, inviting and permitting the Holy Spirit to enter our life and existence;
- With and through the Holy Spirit, discarding the limitations and bonds of this world to understand the spiritual world—the real world.

I do ask that you indulge me in reviewing these preparatory measures, so that you can fully appreciate the wonder and richness of the Bible's glimpses of paradise.

### **Being Certain**

There is much about God and our paradise that require not just "belief", but "certainty" to appreciate. I believe that we all recognize that there are degrees of belief. The deeper we believe, the richer is the experience. The NIV translation of Hebrews 11:1 states, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." The use of the word "certain" rather than simply our "belief of" implies a very strong belief—an absolute level. It is a belief that is without doubt, without question, and as absolutely sure as anything in the universe.

When I was taught multiplication, I was forced to memorize the multiplication tables. I did, and I simply took the tables to be the truth. My belief in the multiplication tables came from direction by my teacher, and the repeatability of my memory. I didn't doubt the results of the use of the tables, but I didn't completely appreciate nor feel the workings of the math. However, as I used the multiplication, my belief and confidence in the tables grew.  $3 \times 4 = 12$ , while originally a bit of a poem to me, eventually became three rows of four apples, and I could feel and visualize the multiplication working. As the math became instinctive and manipulative for problem solving, my certainty of the results became possible. So it is with faith, as I can personally testify.

When I accepted Christ as my Savior, I believed. Some might refer to my belief as blind and simple. As I spent more time in prayer and in Bible reading, the strength and understanding of my belief grew. While I might think that I have grown to be "certain", I do believe that I have much more to learn. I also believe that I will continue to strengthen my belief.

"Doubt" has no place in one's faith. James 1:2-8 shares with us the perils of "doubt". Certainty is critical in all aspects of our faith. God demands our certainty, and how close we are to certainty is a measure of our spiritual growth.

### **The Spirit**

Our certainty leads to an absolute love of God—a love that includes our heart, mind and soul. The "chains of our resistance" break, admitting God into our lives and souls. With this love, we can now permit our existence to be filled with the Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit, we now have the ability to comprehend and understand not only the spiritual world, but also our paradise.

It is a step-by-step recipe, as explained in I Corinthians 2:9-16. We must first believe, our belief must grow to certainty, and with certainty, we will receive the Holy Spirit in our lives. With the Holy Spirit, we will "understand what God has freely given us." With the Holy Spirit, we will appreciate and understand "glimpses of our paradise". Those glimpses will come to life, full of promise and richness.

In Acts 7: 55-56, we learn of Stephen's certainty, as he is about to be the first Christian martyr. He is filled with the Holy Spirit, permitting him to "glimpse heaven", while facing execution. Stephen's faith had reached a level of certainty, which gave him extraordinary courage, similar to many other Christian martyrs.

In fact, I'm not sure that it is possible to appreciate a glimpse of paradise without the Holy Spirit in our lives. In I Corinthians 2:9-10, St. Paul alludes to our limitations without God's Spirit. Let's all invite the Holy Spirit into our lives.

### **The Real World**

We live in a world of dimensions, senses, and those things, which we can see. We've identified the "repeatable" and "predictable" actions of God's natural world, and we've called it technology. Please recognize that we creatures of the world are taught to understand the world using these senses, dimensions and laws of physics. It is very difficult for us to accept or comprehend the spiritual world. The things of the spiritual world are so foreign to the limitations of this world.

However, with the Holy Spirit, we quickly realize that our physical world may not be reality in the universe. The limits and physical laws of our world may simply be the "rules" for this stage of our soul's maturity and development. With the Holy Spirit, we can begin to comprehend and appreciate the spiritual world—the real world. Some good examples include:

- Colossians 2:20-22, which promotes God focused thinking rather than human-based thinking;
- John 6:61-63, in which Christ is describing that life is in the Spirit, not in the flesh;
- Psalm 90:5-12, which provides us with a worldly perspective on our lives, from the universal perspective.

Let us discard the limitations of this world, invite the Holy Spirit into our lives, and begin to glimpse the wonders of the paradise that awaits us.

### **Glimpses**

**How wonderful will it be?** As a friend mentioned to me recently, read John 14:1-4, in which Christ is comforting us, and informing us of His preparations for our future. As my friend says, "If God can create the universe and all that is in it in seven days, imagine the "room" that Christ is preparing for us in 2000 years."

In II Corinthians 12:2-4, St. Paul tells us how rare glimpses of Heaven and Paradise are. The glimpses are precious and rich, requiring us to be filled with certainty and the Holy Spirit to fully appreciate the glimpses.

**What can we expect when we arrive in Paradise?** Hebrews 12:22-24 tells us to expect "thousands of angels in joyful assembly". I can only guess that the joyful assembly will be singing praises to God. Since

reading and meditating on these verses, I've found clearer meaning each time I join my brothers and sisters in singing the Doxology. I imagine myself amongst thousands of angels, singing God's praises. It makes me sing with gusto, excitement and joyful tears. Try it, and join me in this great expectation.

**How will we feel when we arrive in Paradise?** In Matthew 19:14, our Savior tells us that "the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these"—children. Do you recall your own excitement as a child in anticipation of Christmas, during a birthday party, or at the commencement of your summer vacation? The excitement, enthusiasm nearly carried you away, did they not? I suspect that Christ was giving us a glimpse at how we might feel when we arrive, if not after.

Within the week that I became born again, I had a very powerful dream. In the dream, I was visited by some loved ancestors—mother, grandparents and others. While they were not cloaked in the earthly bodies that I remembered, they existed in the form of an indescribable energy source—the term "orb" comes to bear. However, I immediately recognized them, by their love, compassion, and the characteristics of their communications (although it was not a voice). The scene was that of a party, celebrating my "salvation". There was significant celebration, singing, games, and embracing. As I told my wife about the dream later, I told her that I had not felt that level of excitement since my sixth birthday. That birthday included a surprise party put on by my mother who died within a few months unexpectedly. In fact, I told her that I had not had that level of joy since that point in my life, and it was so unusual for me to even remember those feelings as a

child. I do look forward to that level of excitement and joy in the future.

**What will be our physical existence when we reach Paradise?** In Philippians 3:21-22, St. Paul relates to us that we will be "transformed" from our aged and damaged bodies to be more like that of our Savior. As I grow older, the aches, pains and limitations of my body become greater. Frankly, I couldn't imagine having to carry this body for an eternity. I do believe that motion, transportation, and communication will be effortless and beyond our comprehension. I would not be surprised if gravity is no longer a limitation, and our mobility will have no boundaries.

**Will we have to maintain schedules in Paradise?** I'm not sure, but II Peter 3:8 provides us with a glimpse of how we will measure time. Time, and its measurement, will be quite different. With eternity as our duration in Paradise, what will be the purpose of measuring time? What is time anyway, but a manmade invention? In this world, time is used for scheduling, coordinating the activities of many, and for measuring our years of existence. Psalm 103:15-16 provides us with a universal perspective on the man's "time". It also illustrates the futility and limits of our life. Our life is not the end in itself; it is merely the preparation for an eternity with God.

Of all of the books of the Bible, Revelation provides us with the greatest glimpses of Heaven and Paradise. In Revelation, Chapter 21, St. John provides us with a collective description of Paradise that to me is the most comprehensive that I've found.

In verses 1-4, we learn that the world as we know it, will not be part of our existence. Most importantly, God will be with us, on His throne, but with us. Wow! What an existence? To be with God for an eternity, with all of His Grace, Love, Compassion, Wisdom, and Omnipotence. "There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." I am expecting that should we care to remember such bad experiences on earth, we'll probably find them silly. We'll laugh at our worldly hardships, our pains, and even the deaths of loved ones. I'm expecting that we'll finally comprehend God's complex doings, methods and purposes, and spend our existence in wonder, amazement and praise for God and His Son.

**Will we have to worry about others in Heaven?** In verses 5-8, we learn that there will be no one in Heaven to fear but God. Folks of disreputable character will not exist in Heaven. Perhaps it is for this reason that St. Peter in II Peter 1:5-8 outlines the developmental stages needed by our souls on this earth. With the levels of love and discipline outlined in these verses, and the maturing of the souls, we will be qualified for the limitless mobility, interaction and love to be expected in Paradise. If we are not to be self-controlled, disciplined, humble, and loving, I can't imagine the "order of Heaven".

**What will we see when we arrive in Heaven?** Verses 9-11 give us a glimpse of what we might expect as we approach our Paradise. John compares the appearance to the richest of jewels on earth. As another friend has suggested, John's use of the rich gems in de-

scribing his glimpses may have been simply a comparison to the "richness" of his expectations. "Richness" in this case may be an explosion of the senses, along with an all-encompassing experience of the spirit. In verses 18-21, he continues with his rich descriptions of his glimpses.

A few years ago, I was interested in "Near Death Experiences", and spent a few years reading the documented experiences of many hundred such experiences. For those that had good experiences (not everyone had a positive experience), nearly all were swept to a "bright light", which in most instances was our Savior. After an indescribable, "life like" review of their lives, many were admitted to Paradise. They describe a richness of color and feeling too advanced for we humans to comprehend. And to a soul, all of those folks were reluctant to return to life. Unfortunately, they were advised that they had more work to do—a mission to complete. Their time was not at hand.

**What will our existence be like in Heaven?** Verses 22-27 provide us with the most vivid and comforting glimpse of our existence in Heaven. We will be with God and His Son, Jesus Christ, who will be our temple and the focus of our existence—as they should be on earth. But finally, we'll be with the angels, praising and co-existing for eternity with our Father and His Son. It will be an exclusive group with which we'll share Heaven. It will be a pure and full of the light of God. There will be no fear, no darkness, and no deceit to fear. And, it will be eternal.

**What is the source of Heaven, and why?** Please read Ephesians 2:1-10, where you'll find the answers as well spoken as I've ever heard or read. St. Paul's grasp of our future existence with God, through our Savior is incomparable.

I personally find it important and refreshing (re-charging), to often think of heaven. Like traveling to a foreign country, the true learning is to give us a better perspective on our present existence. It permits us to see our lives and ourselves more clearly. We are not yet pure. We are still shameful and deceitful, which means that we are not yet ready for Paradise. We are yet to mature, under and with fire. It is our mission, and the purpose of our existence.

We all need to face our shortcomings, and do something about them. Scripture provides us with direction and hope. Christ has assured us of the chance, through and by Him, to succeed. In the God-breathed words of St. Peter (II Peter 1:10-11), "Therefore my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fail, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

### *What's New at 1150 Bristol Road*

By now, you may have noticed we have surveillance cameras surrounding our building. The Medleycott Foundation has had these cameras installed to discourage vandalism, keep us safe and protect our property.

We now can see who is coming and going from the building either from the Church Office or remotely when we are off-site. Additionally, we are keeping the entrance to the building locked during the week.

In the future, you will hear more about our plans to keep our parish family and the property safe. Stay tuned!

### *Your Clergy & Staff*

