

Jeff's Jottings

All are welcome in this place?

October 12, 2018

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It was a strange and totally unexpected thought that that fled across Mallory's mind that chilly Sunday morning: that she should go to church. It rather amused her initially, if we're being honest. It had been an awfully long time since Mallory had been in a church, and even back then, she'd never much liked it. Still, as the coffee finished brewing and the *Times* crossword puzzle stared back at her, she pushed that nagging voice aside.

Just another reminder, Mallory thought, of how she'd messed up. Growing up, Mallory was both confident of her abilities and certain of her future. She moved smoothly through high school and a respected college. A good job followed, where she began to advance. The young man she was dating became her husband. It was all just as Mallory had wanted and intended.

Until it wasn't. The happiness she anticipated never really materialized. The marriage failed. The company downsized. Wine bottles became her primary companion.

But the bottle only paused her anxiety, and other pursuits provided few real answers. The more questions about life Mallory asked, the more questions she seemed to find. Was there something she could actually believe in that could give her some stability and rootedness? Was there somewhere who could help her ask these questions? Or was she — was everybody — simply on their own?

That's when the thoughts of church had started. Mallory dismissed them outright at first, remembering only the stern morality and threats of eternal judgment of the perfect people, as she called them, who ran the church of her

youth. Mallory needed answers, real answers, for her real, if somewhat messed up life, not some moralistic lecture. She couldn't imagine church that could offer that.

And yet, here Mallory was, clad in the only pair of non-ripped jeans she owned, hand on the handle of the heavy wood door of the neighborhood church. She'd gotten that far twice before, only to walk away, fearful of what she might find if she actually decided to open that door.

I wonder: What would Mallory find if she opened the door to your congregation? What would she see in you? And what would you see in her, and learn from her? Would your church — the friendly church, as you and 96 percent of all churches describe themselves — have a place in its heart for Mallory and her questions? Would Mallory be welcome in your church? And how would she know?

NEXT WEEK: what Mallory discovered.