

Jeff's Jottings

Mallory, Part III

October 26, 2018

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Mallory was never one to give up easily. Never had been, never will be. All she had gone through in the past few years — the divorce, the “downsizing” (such a nice word for taking a person’s livelihood away from them), and all the personal and financial stress of that — hadn’t stopped her, and neither would a church for someone else.

Well, okay, she’d taken a few weeks off. But the first Sunday of the next month, there was Mallory again in her good jeans, poised to open another door. Just like at the first church, she was greeted warmly when she walked in; the friendly woman even gestured toward where Mallory should sit. Mallory liked the feel of the place. The organ music that was playing created a mood of reverence, of spirituality, that resonated deep inside her. The bulletin she was given helped her to be a little less confused about how the program — oh right, the worship service — progressed, though she was startled a couple of times at how quickly people stood or sat down. But that was okay; they knew the routine, and she didn’t.

She also liked the fact that men and women shared in leadership. In fact, it was a woman who gave the sermon. Mallory had never experienced that before. And what she said connected deeply with Mallory — both in the personal conviction and in the compassionate view of life Mallory heard in the words. There was talk of justice and inclusion, and an insistence on taking practical steps to achieve them.

The words of inclusion and generosity were a welcome balm for Mallory. In the preacher’s words, she thought she heard affirmation for her own spiritual doubt and wrestling. But Mallory also got the distinct impression that,

personal faith aside, if you didn't agree with everything else being said — if you didn't see inclusion and generosity, and political issues, exactly as they did — you were on the wrong side of history, harming others, and would suffer yourself.

Mallory left confused, uncertain. She could certainly "fit in" to this church, she thought — the music, the sermons, the feeling of sacred space she'd found. But could she be seen for who she really was and where she was in life, a somewhat confused and isolated person without all the answers looking for something that would give her guidance and comfort? Could she really find a sense of "belonging" here? Was this a place where — at least for a while — she could just be Mallory?

These are not meant to be questions of blame or shame, or suggestions that you should change "what's wrong" with your church. They are wondering questions, ones that invite you to think about the practices of your congregation .. and how the next generation might not just "fit in," but actually come to belong. Thanks for reading, and pondering, and wondering how the Spirit of God may be at work in your church, and in the people who come.