

*What I Want the Most*

**Celtic Reflection / St. Stephen's Episcopal Church / Palm Sunday, 4.14.19**

My son Ezra is 17 months old this week. They have been 17 difficult, delicious months and I am lucky in 17 million ways. One way is that I have my devoted parents living a couple miles away, a sister next door, kind and forgiving friends, some of whom are in this very space tonight and all of the above have offered to babysit Ezra for an evening, or take him for a weekend, so perfect is he and so generous are you.

I know that my husband and I need to remember what it's like to eat grown-up food in a real restaurant, and have an uninterrupted conversation about something other than Elmo and Cookie Monster but the truth is, we've tried it a couple times and it was... okay; mostly all we did was miss our baby and wonder how we'd made it so long without him. We agree that we're boring at best, at worst maybe pathetic, but perhaps one gift of being older first-time parents is knowing with confidence exactly what we've given up, knowing exactly what we're missing and not actually missing it at all. I will take the life we have made now over any other life I could possibly have led.

Still, I know we ought to get a babysitter sometime. I know it is important to feed my marriage. But I've just had a hard time being away if I haven't had to be.

And an even harder time lately. Several weeks ago, I had a serious health scare—I'd fainted at home, had a seizure, and wound up spending my first night ever away from Ezra not in some luxurious hotel out of town on a romantic getaway, but in an emergency room after suffering some as yet unexplained cardiac arrest.

I will spare you the details of that trauma—there are not many anyway— but I do wish to say something of that experience because for anyone who has woken bewildered from unconsciousness to the voice of strangers shouting, for anyone who has emerged from some depth only to surface gasping and afraid, searching face to face, eye to eye, for one you might know— for anyone who has felt wholly exiled from one's own self, you know there is no fear like that fear and no mercy like the mercy of recognition.

I had been flailing and I woke in terror. I moved wildly face to face, seeking, and then moments later, realized it was he—my own husband—cradling my head, holding my hand, shushing me as a mother shushes her child as a nightmare recedes: I'm here, I'm here and everything is all right.

Help was already on the way and there are 17 million miracles arising from that episode I will never describe well. One miracle is that I was shocked back to life and with a new clarity — the human body is miraculously resilient and also incredibly, frighteningly fragile. So much of our lives is just sound and fury, so much of what we worry about does not matter, so much of what we take for granted is in fact a matter of life and death. It is one thing to know this intellectually, and quite another to re-learn it, to know it by heart.

I lay hour after hour in that hospital room, attached to so much machinery I felt I too was part-machine, recovering from an emergency I do not understand, while the world went on without me. Even Ezra, who in so many ways is entirely dependent on me, was fine, had stayed napping right through the ambulance coming with its army of help. Even now he is wholly unaware (as far as I know) that for a brief window of time, his mother's heart had stopped beating, and we were separated in a way we had never been before.

I will tell him some version of this story. I will tell him that the first night I ever spent away was an adventure like no other. I will tell him that his father was a hero that day, and that when I was alone in the dark and feeling afraid I could close my eyes and picture our home, my baby asleep in his crib. And if I stayed very still I could almost smell the apple-sweetness of his hair, could feel the perfect softness of his face. If I stayed very still I knew I was knowing God.

One day I will tell him that there are all kinds of ways to learn what you need to be taught. And that his mother learned a lesson that night about what it means to *know*, and what it means to love what she has.

If I never go out to dinner again, if Josh and I spend the rest of our lives making ourselves ridiculous, if we never again get to sleep late, if we never get to finish the sentence we started, if we never afford a vacation, if we never become social adults again, I want Ezra to know it was all exactly right. I wanted every minute I could get, every difficult, delicious minute.

Love makes such short work of time. Thanks be to God, what I want the most is exactly what I already have.

Allison Seay