

REFLECTIONS ALONG THE WAY

Dear friends,

For decades, it seemed as if Beth Moore was the perfect Southern Baptist woman.

An eloquent ambassador for her evangelical tradition, Moore wrote devotionals and Bible studies read by millions. She lectured in stadiums across the country, developed radio and video ministries, and built up hundreds of thousands of Twitter followers.

But when Moore dared to speak out about sexism, abuse, and political hypocrisy in her tradition, she faced blistering criticism from her own church, from accusations of heresy to dismissive sexist rebukes.



photo by Jennifer McKinney

Though she'd been Baptist all her life, Moore left the denomination last spring. "At the end of the day, there comes a time when you have to say, this is not who I am," she told Religion News Service.

Where does a hurting former Baptist go to church on Sunday? For Moore, the answer came in a surprising place: an Anglican Church in North America congregation. "I was so out of my normal world, I had no idea when to stand or sit or speak or shut up," she wrote on Twitter. "I held my bulletin, shaking, and kept up best I could. I said that creed and those prayers and hung onto every word of three solid chapters read from the Scriptures. All this time I'd believed that only my denomination really loved the Scriptures ... When it came time for communion, Keith and I shot to that altar like starving people begging for bread."

God can take our fractured church and use it for good. As we enter our Lenten walk, may you too be reminded that all that is broken can yet be redeemed.

Moore writes that those who have been hurt by church might consider finding "a church of a style different enough to not be such a reminder of the pain you've endured ... If enormous pain had come to us in this liturgical world, I would have found respite in a world like that of my heritage. My simple point is, consider a different way of doing the same thing: of worshipping Jesus, of hearing the gospel, of coming under the Scriptures, even if just for a while. But don't give up on church."

As we prepare for the Lenten season, we wrestle with our brokenness, and the brokenness of our institutions. There is no Christian tradition that has not harbored unkindness. There is no church immune to the deep sins of abuse, racism, and greed. Christians, the old quip says, are like porcupines: *whenever we huddle together, we cannot help but stab one another with our quills.*

Sometimes our wounds go so deep that we must abandon our tradition entirely, leaving like refugees with broken hearts and grieving spirits. But Moore's story reminds us that we need not leave the church altogether. In such moments, the very brokenness of the church becomes a unexpected blessing:

- In a tradition unlike our own, we can find a place to heal.
- When others are hurting, our churches can give shelter.
- And when our own people have been hurt, we can take some comfort in knowing they can find a safe place for retreat.

I dream of the day when the church is one. And yet, in the meantime, I'm grateful that God can take our fractured church and use it for good. As we enter our Lenten walk, may you too be reminded that all that is broken can yet be redeemed.

Your sister in Christ,

The Rev. Liddy Barlow
Executive Minister
Christian Associates of Southwest PA

