

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

Welcome to the with Generous Hearts podcast where stories and spirit meet.

On today's episode you will hear the story of Mary and Fletcher Gregory. This story is shaped by the loss of their daughter Salem in 2020. And yet, a day at a time they keep showing up as part of this place knowing that they are held in community and held in God's love.

I am honored to sit down with Mary and Fletcher Gregory today to hear more about your story. I'm glad to welcome you to the podcast. I'm getting to meet you for the first time, but I know you've been around Christchurch a really long time. So I wonder if you'll just start by telling us a little bit about yourself, your connection to Christ Church, how long you've been here, things like that. Sure.

Speaker 2 ([00:30](#)):

We moved to Charlotte in 1988 and did some church hunting, but we quickly came. Christ Church had a lot of people that we knew already, but I think the big thing, we had a three and a 1-year-old and the Sunday school program was very, very attractive to us at that point. And then as over time in regular attendance, we got hooked in different ways and it's been our spiritual home. It really has been for almost 40 years now. And the more we are here, the more it's home and it's a real community for us.

Speaker 1 ([01:17](#)):

Oh, I love that. I love that. My family came to one of the Sunday school days and when they called it Sunday Fun day, my daughter was hooked. She was like, I could show up if we're going to have fun and do that. So I appreciate that. What are some of the things that you've been involved in here that have been a blessing to you?

Speaker 3 ([01:38](#)):

Well, I must say when we moved here, I was working full time and not quite that time, but a little bit later. And the fact that they had a Women's Evening Bible study was very nice. They had a lot of programming for non-working mothers,

([01:54](#)):

But I could always go to that and that helped a lot. I've been involved in a lot as one is when they've been here for so long. Gosh, right now I'm working with the Mahjong Ministry that we started to bring in people, and that's been a lot of fun. Through the ECW years ago, I was a liaison to the grants committee when I was a vest year member assigned to the ECW board and was able to see how the funds we raised went out to the women and children of the community. And of course for years I taught first grade fun-day school with Bo Thomas, which was a lot of fun. And right now I'm doing the foundation, and vestry and just junior warden once, which was really fun when a piece of plaster fell on one of our steam parishioner's head on the left side of the church on the left, and he turned around to let me know.

([03:13](#)):

But other

Speaker 1 ([03:15](#)):

Duties as a sign, a vestry member,

Speaker 3 ([03:18](#)):

That was quite a time, but lots of memories in each piece of the church. But yeah, it was very fulfilling.

Speaker 1 ([03:28](#)):

Well, this particular podcast series is looking at how perseverance and generosity weave together. And so often when we have difficult times, people can hunker down and shut off and say, okay, I don't need people, I don't need God. Or they can lean in. And one of the things that we're going to be talking about this fall and thinking about is when both generosity and perseverance have been true.

Speaker 4 ([03:54](#)):

And

Speaker 1 ([03:54](#)):

I wonder for the both of you, when has that been true in your story?

Speaker 3 ([03:59](#)):

Good question. To use both those words. Let's see. Perseverance can be done alone. It can be done, but it is not as growth producing as when you can do it in a community, especially when there's such a bedrock of belief and a higher power in a spiritual being. And of course we were given everything from the church and the community through our hard time. So when I go through that, I don't know about other people's stories, but it makes one want to return the favor to others.

Speaker 4 ([04:46](#)):

And

Speaker 3 ([04:47](#)):

That's being the generosity of people to us has just come in. So we hopefully can be generous to other people who have had hard times and celebrate the good times.

Speaker 2 ([05:03](#)):

Yeah, I think when you think of generosity, particularly in a institution that is dependent on gifts To operate, you think of fundraising and the generosity of its members. But to us, I think the other side of that generosity coin is what we've been given and the generosity of the church that came to our rescue really when we lost our daughter in 2020 and without the church and all the support that we received, it would've been a very much more difficult time to persevere through. The church is so, so supportive of us through that. Chip was there from the beginning. She died in Indiana and we had a funeral there and we had a funeral back here in Charlotte during COVID, it was 2020 and the arrangements that he made were very, very special. And he created a support team for me and one for Mary of parishioners that Mary still meets with weekly five years later. And the Center for Wellbeing was not in existence, but the counseling people were. And Molly Res was our counselor through that, although albeit virtual, it worked and she was very, very helpful. So we owe the church a lot in getting us through our most difficult days.

Speaker 3 ([06:52](#)):

So at the beginning when Salem died in Indianapolis, it was a shock. It was a surprise. And we were in Indianapolis not knowing anybody, and I was lost. And the first call I made was to Patty Rhyne, who was a clergy here. And I said, I can't, let's see. I said, I can't find God. And Patty said to me, God is in the love of the people around you. That's what she said. That's all she said. That's beautiful. So then I could relax a little bit and see that. And then after that, and we were out there for about a week, I called Chip, I said, please tell me that saying you say about God is in front of you. God is behind you. God is next to you. It was just something that I held onto. And he said that. And then in order to get through the service in Indianapolis, I called several people and said, could you just give me some verses I can put in there? Because the funeral wasn't really defined. We had to make it in Indianapolis. And then one thing Chip said on the phone, I always believe what he said, he said, you will have a home when you come back here. Everybody is here waiting for you. Because when we were there, we were displaced.

(08:11):

I was just floating. And when he said that, I trusted that. So then 2020 came back and he called the bishop and they made it so that Christ Church could open three rooms and have more people come in each room, what they did. So we had to have a certain number of people in each room, had to decide who to invite for each room. That whole piece.

Speaker 4 (08:39):

Then

Speaker 3 (08:39):

Met with Lisa Saunders who helped do the eulogy and asked us great questions. So in that point, without the church, it was just there and not only there institutionally, but there in a bedrock of we were going to be able to do this. And then Chip came over and gave us communion on our deck, got through the funeral and all that happened. And then five years, hence now somebody still donates flowers on the altar, a anonymously on her birthday. I can sit in the church on the pew side on the right, and she's right there in the garden and I never want to leave Charlotte right there. And then that's, we got the most beautiful letters from people. It just showed me the generosity of people's hearts, the goodness of people's hearts.

Speaker 1 (09:44):

Well, and one of the things, Fletcher, you mentioned this before, is I think people tend to just think generosity can only be a dollar bill and an offering plate. And what you're describing is it became embodied in encouraging words of faith. And I'm sure there were meals on your doorstep and communion on your deck. I mean, those are beautiful images of the body of Christ saying, we have you

Speaker 3 (10:07):

And God is love and the people around you.

Speaker 1 (10:09):

Yeah, that's a beautiful reminder and a reminder too that when we are in places where we say, God, where are you? Right, we don't know where you are, that there's people who believe on our behalf until we're ready to say it ourselves. Right,

Speaker 3 (10:26):

Exactly.

Speaker 1 ([10:26](#)):

That. And then we can offer that to others, which I think you both have shared too that that's part of what you want to be is generosity in the world. Now, how has that experience shaped how you show up for people now?

Speaker 2 ([10:41](#)):

Gratitude, I think would be the first way to describe what we're grateful for, what we were given and just want to be a part of the place that gave it to us and share it with whomever we come into contact with, whether there's a tragic need or whether it's just every day

Speaker 4 ([11:02](#)):

Living

Speaker 2 ([11:04](#)):

And doing. And we've always wanted to make Christ Church the best place it could be because it's done so much for us. And so we continue to stay involved and I'm away from home.

Speaker 3 ([11:21](#)):

The other part about gratefulness, as Fletcher said, is having gone through the experience, being there for people to talk to me about their grief and easily access that and not hide from it. And some people compare griefs, my dog died. I feel bad because I feel so bad about my dog and your daughter died. Grief is grief regardless. And we're easy to access like that and just accept it and be there.

Speaker 1 ([11:52](#)):

Well, I think even as you share about Salem and you talk about that experience, so many people carry that as shame. They're not supposed to talk about things. They're not supposed to share that widely. They're supposed to deal with it in their own home and pull yourself up by your bootstraps. That's such a cultural sort of understanding of grief.

Speaker 4 ([12:11](#)):

And

Speaker 1 ([12:11](#)):

What you all are sharing is there's another option. It's more vulnerable obviously, to say, Hey, can people come alongside? But what you're describing is it's also lifesaving.

Speaker 3 ([12:21](#)):

Right. And that was really helpful with, well, once you're over the shock, we have Molly, we would do Molly once a week on Zoom. And we just got so much from that. The tools, the understanding

Speaker 1 ([12:40](#)):

To receive that help, and I think you're right when you can talk about it like a church, is that it's a sign of strength.

Speaker 3 ([12:47](#)):

That's

Speaker 1 ([12:48](#)):

Such a different message

Speaker 3 ([12:51](#)):

Than

Speaker 1 ([12:52](#)):

So many people hear it in some levels. You're saying therapy is part of our generosity that to

Speaker 3 ([12:58](#)):

Keep

Speaker 1 ([12:59](#)):

Therapy free and accessible is generosity in this community.

Speaker 3 ([13:04](#)):

And generosity can be, it's hard to express. The financial is necessary to keep this institution going and to keep all these things going. And there's some folks that do give their gifts, their gifts, they consider their certain gift and talent that they give to the church and they consider that part of their generosity. But we still need the financial, otherwise we don't have this. And as long as the message has been out that the littlest amounts you can give is perfect, it's \$10 20.

Speaker 1 ([13:50](#)):

I love to tell people that whether it's \$5 or \$10, it's pregnant with possibility because God's in it. Right. So you never know. My young kids often when we're driving to church and they've got their dollar bill or their \$5 bills for the offering plate, we'll ask the question, what do you think God's going to do with that \$5 bill? And I love it because they'll say, well, they're going to buy goldfish for the nursery or they're going to these kind of things. But it's helping them understand that God has a purpose for this.

Speaker 3 ([14:24](#)):

That's right. That's right.

Speaker 1 ([14:25](#)):

And not a, sometimes I'll be like, it's probably turning on the lights today. There are those realities I had. Exactly. And salaries doing, all those kind of things. I wonder for you, when you think about what you've been through, I mean 2020 for most people was already traumatic and you've added that. How has it changed your faith?

Speaker 3 ([14:49](#)):

Oh my gosh, it's huge for me.

Speaker 2 ([14:52](#)):

Well, it was a setback for a while for you. It really was. Yeah. For you, the Lord's prayer will be done. You accept God's plan and I live that way. And then this happened and I was saying, this is a pretty crappy plan. I don't get it. And so I had an extended period months where I didn't pray and I didn't feel God and I wasn't angry. I was just stunned I guess in a way that I just couldn't sort it out. And

Speaker 4 ([15:42](#)):

Okay,

Speaker 2 ([15:45](#)):

The way I reconciled that was to realize that God lost a child and in that context, you understand it wasn't his work, it was the way it was to be. And so that's how when you get into that depth of feeling and thought and it really does deepen your faith and we're working hard to be grateful for the time we had, not what we don't have. And that's the only way to go forward is to appreciate the life and not mourn the death all the time. It's sad, but we try to go forward.

Speaker 1 ([16:40](#)):

It's remarkable thinking about how grief and gratitude, they feel like they're two different paths, but they actually to move forward through it, you have to find some spaces where you can say, let's focus on what that looks like. Part of what you're sharing was God lost a child and then were you able to forward into stronger faith foundation for you.

Speaker 2 ([17:08](#)):

The spiritual life is important to both of us. And you have to work at it and is like physically you have to exercise, you have to work at it. And we both tried to, it's a work in progress, as always will be and always has been.

Speaker 1 ([17:35](#)):

I am a cancer survivor. And when I was diagnosed, I remember telling people I didn't pray for six months after it happened and people wouldn't be like, I'm praying for you. I'm like, good, I'm not right. I appreciate that, but I can't bring myself to that space. And I also wasn't in a space to be fake. People are praying for you. You don't feel it. You don't Exactly. You don't feel it. And someone had shared with me about a verse in Chronicle is about standing in the gap for you. And I just said to the spirit, I'm going to stay here but you're going to have to work on my behalf and I'm going to trust that we're going to get back to a place together. And I think that's such a real response to tragedy, to plans that seem so unfair and not being able to understand them. And I think it's so true to say what you just described, I will be done. Those are hard words to say when you think that

Speaker 2 ([18:43](#)):

Bad stuff.

Speaker 1 ([18:43](#)):

Yeah. And Mary, to your point earlier, you were making phone calls to community. I think when you can't say it for yourself, you need those other people to speak that over you.

Speaker 3 ([18:58](#)):

I had to different than Fletcher, I had just double down hard and find God.

([19:08](#)):

I didn't have any option. I was in such a chasm of despair and loss that one night I just came home. I would always hit me on a Thursday night and I came home from work and just got out. Someone sent me an excellent book and I got a lot of books that weren't speaking but a really good book from someone who had survived a hard tragedy. And she said, I've thrown away a lot of books and this one helped. And then I got out John o' Donahue's space between us on Thursday night. We go to the bed and I just read it. I had to have a bedrock and that got my faith really strong. I had no other option. And through that and it was authentic. It wasn't to help me get over it, it was just God's always here. Things happened to everybody. I'm no different than anyone else, but I want to honor Salem by trying to be the best I can. And so that really did it where his words, his poetry, I like to read and understand. So it was through the readings and the poetry that made me take it out of myself and see it as a universal experience.

Speaker 1 ([20:25](#)):

Part of what you two are describing when I hear about Christ Church, the phrase spiritual home for all that is you're describing that's been true for us, but you're also sharing and that doesn't mean you're in your Sunday best and you have your whole life together for all. Doesn't mean for all that have it together or have it together on Sunday morning for an hour or something like that. Right. I wonder, we've got a new building going up. We've got potential of new ministry and what that looks like. What are you excited about for Christ Church? What do you hope if somebody else were to have a difficult experience similar to yours or just a grief, what do you hope this place is for them?

Speaker 3 ([21:16](#)):

What I hope what excites me about the future is a continuation of this acceptance for all. I was on the vestry when the gay marriage proposal came around And I was able to read, we asked all the parishioners old and young to send letters about what they thought about that. And I was privileged to be able to read all the letters and the older generation. Yes, it was so heartening to hear the love of so many people. So what I hope for the future as we continue to have a diverse congregation, hospitality is open. Everybody's welcome. We have room to expand and especially the youth group and that we have the financial resources to keep the staff strong and to keep the programming going. And that 20 and 30 year olds that are coming by the droves now can continue to, once they get out of the busy world, can continue to find their place here. And it's just really exciting.

Speaker 2 ([22:17](#)):

This is a very dynamic time in the life of the church. And so we are in this amazing time in the life of this church. But also as you know in the world where churches are getting smaller, we are getting more vibrant. And that's exciting. This is one of the most dynamic churches in America in my opinion. And we're proud to be a part of that visioning and now execution piece because we can touch a lot of people that way.

Speaker 3 ([23:22](#)):

And it's not only on our internal footprint, it's in the community, of course, all the needs in the community as well as through our money to the World Church, how we distribute funds nationally and internationally. There's never a doubt when you think about it. You can go to the chapel anytime and sit and have that choir to talk to God. That side door is always open. That's like a cornerstone of this church.

Speaker 1 ([23:52](#)):

A statement of inclusivity and accessibility and God in and talk to God. Yeah.

Speaker 2 ([23:59](#)):

When we came in 88, outreach was important to the church. It was talked about a lot. And that 10% to the community was there. It is still there. And what work that can be done through our vision and our campaign, 10% is going to outreach. And it's a big number for us to help where the need is. And there's plenty of need in this world. So I think we're a part of supporting those people in need through our involvement at the church.

Speaker 1 ([24:53](#)):

Well, and I think that lends itself to this idea of wellbeing for all. Not just wellbeing for people who can walk in our building or wellbeing, who can show up on a Sunday morning, but wellbeing that the whole community is noticed and seen and responded. My very first day at work, here was the day y'all signed the beam for the building. It was a great day. We had all of the CCK kids on the lawn and watching this beam go up into place. And I've often thought there's so many names on there that are going to be embedded in the history and thinking, what's it going to look like 20 years from now? Because the dream is we could sign 20 more beams with people's whose stories are impacted by young people who are like, man, I have a cozy couch to have a conversation with Alice or Savannah Jane. Or I can imagine in a coffee shop someone who's lost a kid being like, can you meet me there? I don't know how to show up anywhere else.

Speaker 3 ([25:53](#)):

It's easier to do it there then you're right. That's going to be an area that we can immediately say, let's go there instead of somewhere else.

Speaker 1 ([26:00](#)):

That'll

Speaker 3 ([26:01](#)):

Be great.

Speaker 1 ([26:01](#)):

And I can have a tear in my eye and it's not going to be a shame. It's going to be

Speaker 3 ([26:04](#)):

We just connect with somebody when you feel like seeing 'em and you're too rushed coming out of church to talk.

Speaker 1 ([26:10](#)):

Absolutely. So as I look at that beam, I continue to think like, oh, there's so many more names that will be part of that story. That's so good.

Speaker 2 ([26:22](#)):

And what we're excited about with the new building is that it will become the hub of the campus. It will be. And now we have that intentional gathering space that both an indoor and an outdoor space that will be a so helpful that we can meet at church or you can meet friends at church.

Speaker 1 ([27:17](#)):

Well, and I think just kind of wrapping up that thought, one of the things that is happening in our culture is there's a loneliness epidemic all over the place. 2020 was real and traumatic for lots of people and it set people back from relationships and just said, okay, I can do this. And so I think to build a gathering space is also a statement of you don't have to be alone. That's so true. God wants to be with you. We want to be with you. And what does that look like?

Speaker 3 ([27:49](#)):

Well, I think about just last Sunday at church, when we were walking out, I knew that a friend of mine who was a little older sort of had a hard time and I wanted to say, you want to get, let's just sit down. And I couldn't do that. There was no place to go. But now I said, let's go over there. What's going on? Just tell me about your trip. That kind of thing. That's beautiful.

Speaker 1 ([28:12](#)):

That's

Speaker 3 ([28:13](#)):

Beautiful.

Speaker 1 ([28:14](#)):

I love that. Do you have been great? I so appreciate the wisdom. Thank you so much. And your longstanding this. I've got two questions I'm going to ask everybody at the end. Two final questions. And I didn't put these on my little cheat sheet, so just give me your gut reaction. But I know that when life gets tough, we turn to God, but sometimes people turn to snacks. So I want to know, what's your go-to comfort food that you have? You got it, Mary?

Speaker 3 ([28:40](#)):

Yeah.

Speaker 2 ([28:40](#)):

Ice cream.

Speaker 1 ([28:40](#)):

Yeah.

Speaker 3 ([28:42](#)):

Inman's snack cakes individually wrapped. Really change the recipe so they're not as good.

Speaker 1 ([28:48](#)):

That's awesome. That's what you're regret. That's right. All of that plu. You got a favorite kind of ice cream.

Speaker 2 ([28:54](#)):

I like 'em all.

Speaker 1 ([28:55](#)):

You 'em all can handle that.

Speaker 2 ([28:57](#)):

Chocolate is always,

Speaker 1 ([28:59](#)):

Always hits. Always good. That's good. And what are you grateful for today?

Speaker 2 ([29:06](#)):

Each other, Christchurch. Yeah. I'm grateful for to have the church and one day at a time and I'm just grateful to have this day and to do the best.

Speaker 3 ([29:18](#)):

This is the day the Lord have made. Let us let bless

Speaker 2 ([29:22](#)):

Your joy and be glad.

Speaker 3 ([29:23](#)):

Amen.

Speaker 1 ([29:24](#)):

Amen.

I hope that vulnerability shared by Fletcher and Mary inspired you. I know for me, I'm going to hold on to that phrase that God is showing up and present in the ways that people are loving you right now. I pray that you feel God's love. We know that there are so many more stories and more yet to be written. We want to invite you to share those stories with us. There is a link in the shownotes, you can leave us a voice memo or email telling us how God is showing up in your world. And it is probably now surprise to you because I am the Director of Annual Giving that I want to invite you to be part of this movement of

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