

Rebecca Amy Reeder Martin

Twenty-one years ago Amy came to my office with an agenda. She was dressed for business, equipped with a clip-board, and well organized. She launched into a review of our Sunday School, its strengths and weaknesses. She described what we needed to do to improve, including finding a person to oversee the children's ministry. Then came the punchline: "I'm that person."

Frankie Daniell tells the story about an incident at the end of one of his middle school football games. Time-out had been called. The ball was on the one-yard line with seconds remaining; time for one play and one only. As the team huddled up, one of the boys was looking at Frankie, pointing at himself as if to say, "Give the ball to me." Frankie thought to himself, alright then, if he's eager for the responsibility that goes with winning or losing the game, I'll give it to him. He scored and they won.

Amy wanted the ball. I was impressed. It's yours, I said.

For 21 years she carried the ball. Cohort after cohort of our children have loved "Miss Amy" and been loved by her. She "loved on them" as she made the rounds on Sunday mornings. They recited their catechisms to her. She organized their Sunday School program. No one has been more beloved in our church than Amy.

Amy was the fun one on our church staff, ever colorful, ever spirited. On a weekly basis at Tuesday morning staff meetings, she brought me to tears, doubled-over with laughter. Our procedure is to go around the room, each staff member providing updates. When Amy had her turn, heaven help the person who interrupted her. Her glare could melt steel. If anyone else was getting too much attention or too much praise (not that we ever hand out an abundance of that), she would protest, "Okay, we've heard enough about him." Periodically, she would show up wearing her tiara, letting us all know that she was queen, just in case anyone forgot. When I announced that I would be away on a given Sunday, she would volunteer to fill the pulpit. "I've got a thing or two to say," she would declare. On at least one occasion, I found her name initialed into the preaching schedule! Whenever I contradicted her about something, she would mumble, "I'm going to hate him until 6:00 tonight."

I leaned heavily on Amy over the years. She always had her finger on the pulse of the church. She would come to me with insight into what was happening behind the scenes about which I needed to be aware. She was loyal. Her concerns were not only for her area of responsibility, but for the whole life and health of the church. Her sense of the needs of the church led to her initiating the pancake breakfast and egg hunt (I insisted it not be called an "Easter" egg hunt, which earned me an Amy glare and roll of her eyes), and the Fall Family Night (I insisted it not be called a "Halloween" event, earning another glare and roll of her eyes). I am indebted to her for helping keep the good ship IPC upright for the past three decades.

I must also say that Amy was not just a co-worker. She was a friend. She loved my children as if they were her own. She regularly reached out to Emily, understanding what can often be a lonely life for the pastor's wife. Pastors don't have close friends, deferring intimate friendships in the congregation in favor of the impartial care for all the members of the church. Yet I must admit, the Martins have been among our closest friends. Our children grew up together. Charlie and Amy always took an interest in the athletic careers of our children. We didn't get together often, but when we did, it was rich.

The passing of Amy is a blow to our church. Ordinarily we might have expected to have her around for a few more decades. The will of God was otherwise and we trust His providence. Nevertheless we will miss her profoundly.

Amy's gradual decline began with her diagnosis in March and provided time for her to reflect on her life. Repeatedly she lamented to us that she had squandered her life. She insisted that she had not been a good Christian. Time had been wasted, opportunities lost. She had many regrets. She wanted to live her life over again.

Ponder this. These are the end-of-life reflections of one who was utterly devoted to Christ and His church. She was a part-time employee as director of the children's Sunday School. Yet her service went far beyond her official duties. She and Charlie were involved in every aspect of the life of the church, pitching in here, there, and everywhere as needed. By any standard of comparison, Amy was among the most committed and most used of disciples. Yet upon reflection, her service seemed to her as nothing as compared to what might have been and should have been.

There is a lesson in this for us. Life is brief and uncertain. Like the grass of the field, we are here one moment and then we are gone (Ps 90:5, 6). "O Lord," David cries, "make me to know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am!" (Ps 39:4, 5). When our life draws to a close our souls will not be comforted by the beauty of our house, the extent of our wardrobe, the number and newness of our cars, and the size of our bank accounts. We will instead be asking ourselves, did my life count? Did I make a difference? Did I do anything that is lasting and eternal? Or did I squander my life, consuming all my time with the temporal, the petty, and the unworthy?

Nothing impressed more of the depth of Amy's love for Christ than her end-of-life laments. Amy's end-of-life laments were misplaced. She did make lasting contributions to God's eternal kingdom. Her impact is felt throughout our congregation, her family, and beyond. May the same be true of each one of us.

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