

Way back when I was thinking about coming to St. Thomas', I had an interview set up to meet with all the movers and shakers and decision makers here at this church. I came up for a few days, and every interaction I had was better than the last. You folks charmed me, and the spell was cast. Everything and everyone I saw made me want to come here more. But there was one red flag: that organist.

A quick side bar: I don't know why it is, but there's a behind the scenes history of clergy and musicians not always getting along all that well. Couldn't tell ya why, I just know that I've had a string of good luck. In Newport, Arkansas, I had the pleasure of working with a Eudora Welty character and a child prodigy in the same little church. In Little Rock, the organist was a delightful soul who loved music as much as he loved his church. Apparently I'm lucky in my lack of musician-clergy drama.

Anyway, I knew about that drama in the back of my mind, and I knew it was just a stereotype of relationships that doesn't really mean anything, but also, there was something off about that organist. You all know her, so I want to try to explain what I saw from the outside. Here's what you people said about her:

First off, she's the best musician that's ever walked this earth.

Second, she's done work on Broadway, and has a Tony to show for it.

Third, she's the sweetest person you'll ever meet.

Fourth, even her family is wonderful.

Fifth, you could never imagine a kinder, more generous soul.

Sixth, at that point she'd been here for over twenty years, which meant she'd had a longer tenure than all but one of the clergy in this church's long history.

And seventh, everyone of you said the same thing: She's a saint.

You could not've painted a clearer picture of "too good to be true." Oh, and there was one more thing. I met all those other movers and shakers, but the one person I'd be working with that I did not get to meet was that same too-good-to-be-true beatified organist! I mean, y'all. Alarm bells. Red flags. Flames on the side of my face. But everything else went so well that I took that leap of faith and up we moved. And one day, finally, I met Dianne. And I was skeptical. She was really kind. And she asked questions. And she laughed and made me laugh. And then she went on her merry way, and I stewed in my office wondering just how and what she was plotting and when the real diva would finally come out.

I know, it cracks me up to remember now, but that's how it all started with Dianne and me. It did not take long for me to realize just how silly those alarm bells had been, but I think that actually paints a helpful picture. Her reputation came off as too-good-to-be-true because I'm just so jaded by the entire rest of the human population. There's no way someone like her could be a real person. Dianne, you're probably mortified right about now. I promise, I'll ease up a little on talking about how amazing you are. Maybe.

In the Episcopal Church, when we talk about saints, we don't mean perfect people. Those don't exist, and with one rather notable exception in Jesus, they never have. Saints for us, simply, are all the folks who ever have been, are, or ever will be a part of this Body. But once in a while, someone comes along and does something really special. So, we can say someone like Martin Luther King, Jr. or Thomas Becket or even Copernicus are those kinds of saints (and yes, those three are all in our calendar, even Copernicus). It doesn't mean they're perfect, it just means they really showed up for God and God's people in ways that still inspire us. Dianne absolutely is a saint of the first kind. She's a part of this Body, just like all of us. Saints, every one. But she's also a saint of the second kind. Everytime she sits behind that organ or at that piano, she does something really special. She's not perfect (though if I'm honest, a flaw is hard to find), but she shows up for God and

God's people week after week, year after year, decade after decade after decade. And I feel confident in speaking for all of us here, Dianne, when you show up, you show up in countless ways that inspire us. Thank you.

You know, it's unusual, very unusual to use readings on a Sunday morning that don't follow the lectionary, those pre-assigned scripture passages we use each week. But today is an unusual day, so we asked the bishop's permission to grant an exception, one she joyfully made. These readings today were handpicked for this occasion, and Dianne had no idea we were gonna do any of this. Surprise! We chose these readings because they position this day in the very long tradition of sacred music, going back well before the days of Christ himself. With cymbals and harps and pipes and trumpets and tambourines and voice and heart, our souls long to honor the sacred with a joyful noise, and occasionally with a joyful chorus so great the stones of the earth and the priests of the church can't even stand it. I have yet to hear anything of Dianne's that makes it difficult to minister at God's altar because it's no good. But like those old ministers in the house of the Lord, I have lost count of the number of times it's been difficult to do my job in this place because of the beauty she brings here. Anthems delicately sung, compositions labored over and borne into our souls, guests made welcome with their own song, and the best pulled from each of us to lay before God as our gift.

There's something even deeper in that last bit. It's not just about the music itself, which we all know Dianne is amazing with. There's something more. Because what happens when we join together as this sacred Body in song has a mystical side to it. Listening, the sound washes over us, waves pulsing through our ears and echoing in our chests, connecting us in the hearing of the thing. And then when we sing together, that oneness only grows. Our breath inspired and respired, some of us breathing as one, some holding space for a neighbor to breathe while the song carries on. The music in this place pulls something from the depths of us that we didn't always know was there, and out comes whatever's in us, named or unnamed but voiced here. Chills rise on our arms and the back of our neck, and God's praise fills the air to the rafters and out the doors into a cacophonous world. Harmonies weave our communal beauty, dissonance highlights our discomforts, and finally, we resolve back at home, here, before God. What a thing music is. Nothing touches our souls quite like it. And what a gift it is to have a saint to guide us in that ancient way of worship.

When Jesus and his disciples make their way into Jerusalem for that fateful and triumphant arrival, they can't help but holler about how amazing it is to be near to him. Blessings and peace and glory! They're singing an old song! And later on, as the disciples and Jesus move from the Last Supper to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus'll sing with them! Hey, if it was good enough for them, it's probably good enough for us. But look again at what Jesus says when their singing on the road to Jerusalem starts to make folks nervous: you can't stop it. If you tried, the land itself would erupt in song. I'm not sure if the Episcopal Church will ever put your crown of glory on display, Dianne, but we know what you are here. Saint? Yeah, it's getting kind of obvious by now. But I think you're more than a saint. I think you're our stone. There's something about you that just has to make music. At the risk of armchair psychologizing, I think that might be why you have such a hard time seeing in your own self what we all see in you. It's so natural for you to make music and so unnatural not to, that you can't see how stones breaking out in song could be a miracle! It's down in the marrow of your bones, and it just has to come out one way or another. I don't think you could make it stop if you tried. Everyone else may fall silent, but there you'd be, our singing stone filling the road before Christ with sacred song.

Thinking back to that interview I had up here when I did not meet Dianne, seven years later and now on the occasion of her 30th year at St. Thomas', never in my life have I ever been so happy to be such a bad judge of character. You are a treasure, a joy, and a wonder to behold. May your song never end and may your joy be always in this place.