Anna Howard Shaw Center

NEWSLETTER

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Message from the Director: "From the Seed"

Mark 4:1-9 Again he began to teach beside the lake. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the lake and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the lake on the land. He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.' And he said, 'Let anyone with ears to hear listen!'

By Reverend Dr. Choi Hee An

When I read the Bible, I always have so many questions. This story is no exception.

First I thought about the sower. Why did this person not give more attention to sowing? Why did she or he spread seeds all over the place? Was this person on their cell phone while they sowed? Did this person drink too much the night before? Or did this person, a daily worker, not have a good relationship with the owner so they wanted to get revenge on the owner? Why did she or he waste the seeds by throwing them in bad places like on the path, on rocky ground, and among thorns?

Not a good worker, I guess.

Second, I thought about circumstances. Maybe even though the sower did a good job, the weather was terrible. Maybe hurricane or flood came to that town. Or maybe snows, rains and winds came everyday like Boston winter weather.

Third, I thought about the seed. From the seed, this incident was critical. Whether it is because of lazy, inefficient sower, or because of a terrible weather condition. it was the seed that had all the troubles. For whatever reasons, the seed was dropped on the path. The seed died before the seed even knew what it was and what it could be. It was unbelievablely unjust. The seed was squashed by feet, wheels and eaten by birds. Without any words, the seed was dead.

How about the seed on the rocky ground? That seed fought everyday with rocks whether that seed would be dead the next day or not. Without putting its roots in the soil, the seed struggled with rocks. When the seed met the Sun who could have been its long awaited supporter, the seed was so exhausted and was not ready to meet the sun. The seed dried itself out and died.

How about the seed among thorns? The seed tried so hard to grow up despite all the bad conditions like thorns and snows but saw the other seed that fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold. Maybe the seed would think, "If I fell into that soil, I would make more, but I am here and struggle more than anyone could imagine."

Now I stop the story and offer some different views. When I go to the mountain or state forest, I see flowers or trees near the highway or even in the middle of the highway. Between the small chasm, unknown wild flowers smile at me. Sometimes I also see the small trees on

A Word from Anna Howard Shaw

"To be bound by outworn customs and traditions, and to be hampered by every known obstacle which could be put in one's path, and then to have the world calmly look on and tell you it was no use it was the divine will, was growing too absurd to be longer tolerated with dignity or accepted with selfrespect. The soul within me refused to beat out its life against barred doors, and I rebelled."

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Allowing God and Questions to Guide My Path...

By Karen L. Hernandez

Karen is an officer in the BU School of Theology Admissions Office, as well as a Master of Sacred Theology student.

Did you ever have a pressing question? A question that literally changed your life's path? I did. "Why did 9/11 happen?"

When I first had my calling, besides thinking that God had a really good sense of humor to call me, I thought it was to be a pastor. I didn't even have my Bachelor's degree-not even an Associate's degree. In fact, I was a high school drop out with a GED. I remember thinking, "Oh my...that must have hit the wrong pew. God is NOT calling me." That was back in 1997. I struggled with my calling for two years and finally decided to go for it. The road ahead seemed unattainable and overwhelming. I had to get back into school. I had to get my B.A., *then*, I had to go to seminary.

I humbly started at Middlesex Community College in 1999. It was at Middlesex that I realized I was smart. I never had pegged myself as a thinker, but I loved being back in school! I was awarded a two-week fellowship to Spain in 2001 to study the art and culture of the country and it was there that I was introduced to Moorish architecture. It was my first time in what was a mosque when I was in Cordoba. It was an introduction to a people and history that would eventually become my passion.

Wellesley College and the Davis Scholar program came along and I thrived in the environment there. I started at Wellesley in the Fall of

2002. A year after 9/11, I was still asking, "How and why would people do such a horrible thing to their fellow human beings?" I had a great need to understand. My first paper for my Peace and Justice Studies

class was on Amina Lawal, a Muslim woman from Nigeria who was sentenced to stoning for "adultery." This was my introduction to Islam. I remember sitting across from Victor Kazanjian, my professor and my mentor, and he had to explain to me the difference between a Muslim and how that related to Islam. I was *that* ignorant. It was because of that paper and my need to understand why 9/11 occurred that I

Karen and her Muslim

friend, Zubada, in the

Mumbai Slums

decided to concentrate in Islam within my Peace and Justice Studies major. For three years I studied the history of Islam, *Shari'a*, the *Qur'an*, women in Islam and I wrote my Senior Honor's Thesis on *Al Qaeda* and how they misuse religion for political gain. I also went to India for my first time and my personal work surrounded researching Hindu-Muslim relations.

In all of my work at Wellesley, I answered my pressing question—I understood why 9/11 occurred. It was 2005, and I had even more questions than before, but the one thing I did know—I was not going to be a pastor. God had something else in mind for me.

I landed next at Andover Newton Theological School in the Fall of 2005 where, after two years, I received a Master of Theological Research in Christian-Muslim Understanding ('07). It was at Andover Newton where I delved into the theological commonalities as well as the differences between Islam and Christianity. In 2006, I went to India again and in the thick of the Varanasi Summer, I researched

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The Truth About Youth: Women's Struggle for Ageless Beauty

By Michelle Cher LeBlanc

Michelle is a wife, catmother, Classicist, Biblical theorist, novelist (well, writer of anything, really), and a first year MDiv student.



The other day, a woman in a department store stopped me and offered me a sample of "micro-refining skin serum." I blinked at her. "Why?" I asked.

"For prevention, of course." She looked at me critically. "You're, what, twenty?"

"Twenty-three."

"Oh, my dear!" she cried, pressing

two extra tubes into my hand. "That's almost twenty-five!"

Almost *thirty*. She didn't have to say it. That night I went home and carefully applied the cream to where my crows' feet, laugh lines and brow creases will eventually be. But I thought about it as I did: *I'm twenty-three and I wear wrinkle cream*.

The obsession with combating the evidence of aging has become a contagion in our society, especially among women. Twenty-five is the new thirty; thirty is the new forty. And it can't be all about the fact that our wrinkles remind us of our mortality or that our culture undervalues its older members. The concept is that youth is beauty, and beauty, youth. The beautiful have always been prized but now, it is the look of youth that defines our standard of beauty, the images we are shown. The lithe seventeen year-old girl stretched out indolently in the sun; the smiling, fresh -faced girlfriends playing volleyball; the sultry collegiate holding a drink in one hand and a handsome young man on the other. The appeal of these images can't just be skin-deep. It can't.

Look at what those pictures are telling us. These young women are

"Eminem's Been Reading My Bible!" A Sermon for Women with No Names

By Amanda Norris

Amanda is currently in the STM program with a concentration in Practical Theology here at Boston University. She received a B.A. in Christian Ethics from Union University in 2007 and completed her MDiv here at STH in May with a concentration in Hebrew Bible.

This summer I was driving around in Mississippi with the windows down listening to the radio and I heard this beautiful heartbreaking melody. I recognized Rhianna's voice immediately. I thought I have to buy it as soon as I am anywhere near iTunes; it was so beautiful. And then I recognized another voice—Eminem's. Having never been a huge fan of Eminem this gave me pause. So I sat back and listened carefully to the rest of the These are the closing song. words-

"Now I know we said things, did things, that we didn't mean. And we fall back into the same patterns, same routine. But your temper's just as bad as mine is; you're the same as me. When it comes to love you're just as blinded. Baby, please come back it wasn't you, Baby, it was me. Maybe our relationship isn't as crazy as it seems. Maybe that's what happens when a tornado meets a volcano, all I know is I love you too much to walk away though. Come inside, pick up your bags off the sidewalk. Don't you hear sincerity in my voice when I talk? Told you this is my fault. Look me in the eyeball. Next time I'm pissed I'll aim my fist at the dry wall. Next time? There will be no next time. I apologize even though I know its lies. I'm tired of the games; I just want her back. I know I'm a liar if she ever tries to leave again I'm 'na tie her to the bed and set the house on fire."

I turned off the radio and sat in silence for a while. I thought about the woman in this song. Who is she? What is her name? What would she say if she could write the lyrics to her own song? I have dedicated this sermon to women with no names. The woman in this song is just the latest in a long history of women who have no names and no voices. I want to tell you about another woman with no name and no voice—one whose violent suffering was eternalized, not in a pop song, but in a sacred book.

Our story begins in Judges 19, when a nameless concubine leaves her husband. Her husband, a Levite, journeys to her father's house to retrieve her and sets out to take her home again. On their way home, they stop in Gibeah where an old man takes them in for the night. As the party is dining that evening the men of the town come banging on the door demanding that the old host send out his Levite guest so that they can rape him. Starting in verse 23 the Bible reads-

"The owner of the house went out and said to them, "Please, my friends, do not commit such a wrong.



Since this man has entered my house, do not perpetrate this outrage. Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. Let me bring them out to you. Have your pleasure of them, do what you like with them; but do not do that outrageous thing to this man." But the men would not listen to him, so the man seized his concubine and pushed her out to them. Thev raped her and abused her all night long until morning; and they let her go when dawn broke. Toward morning the woman came back; and as it was growing light, she collapsed at the entrance of the man's house where her husband was. When her husband arose in the morning, he opened the door of the house and went out to continue his journey; and there was the woman, his concubine, lying at the entrance of the house, with her hands on the threshold. "Get up," he said to her, "let's go." But there was no reply. So the man placed her on the donkey and set out for home. When he came home, he picked up a knife, and took hold of his concubine and cut her up limb by limb into twelve parts. He sent them throughout the territory of Israel. And everyone who saw it cried out, "Never has such a thing happened or been seen from the day the Israelites came out of the land of Egypt to this day! Consider it, take counsel and speak."

When confronted with this passage we ask the same questions raised by Eminem's song: Who is this woman? What is her name? What would she say if she wrote her own story? The answers to these questions are not provided for us. Their absence begs other questions: How do we name those whose names have been hidden? How do we hear those whose voices have been silenced? Whether in a popular song or in a sacred text, when confronted with this kind of violence how do we respond?

I want to suggest that this text actually gives us some important advice regarding that last question advice, ironically, that the men of Israel do not actually heed. Verse 30 states—"And everyone who saw it (that is this woman's dismembered body) cried out, "Never has such a thing happened or been seen from the day the Israelites came out of the land of Egypt to this day! Consider it, take counsel, and speak."

That last line is translated in various ways depending on which version of the Bible you have. The Hebrew literally says, "put/place/set your heart upon her, take counsel and speak."

What does it mean to "set our hearts" on the broken body of this woman? What would it mean to take counsel from her? Of what should we speak?

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Eminem's Been Reading My Bible, continued from page 3

In answering these questions, the men of Israel help us by offering a negative example. They show us what not to do. When confronted with this woman's broken body, the Israelites take action and in the following chapters. Eleven of the twelve tribes declare war on the Benjamintes, decimating their towns leaving no women alive. Then, the Israelite men take an oath not to give their daughters to marry the Benjaminites only to realize they're facing the extinction of one of the twelve tribes of Israel! That is unacceptable. Rather than break their oath, these Israelite men attack two more towns killing every man, every woman who is not a virgin and stealing a total of 600 virgin girls to offer to the Benjaminites as wives.

To recap: the Israelites' response to a woman's brutalized body is to perpetrate the same violence a thousand times over by killing, stealing and sexually dominating hundreds upon hundreds of other women.

These men did not set their hearts upon this unnamed concubine. They did not allow the violence she experienced seep into their bones. They did not allow themselves to be broken with her. They did not allow her experience of terror to inform their decisions or their understanding of the world and they did not, did you notice, they did *not* speak about her again.

Let us be very clear about this: the violent behavior of these men is in direct contradiction with the heart of God.

Let's read another text.

"But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits herself to

you; you are the helper of the orphan. Break the arm of the wicked and evil man; call him to account for his wickedness that would not be found out. The LORD is Ruler forever and ever. You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the orphan

and the oppressed, in order that the men of earth, may terrify no more."

These words come from Psalm 10:14-18 and they help us to understand what it means to set our hearts upon this unnamed, voiceless woman, take counsel and speak. The Psalmist says—"But you, O Lord, you do see trouble and grief." To set our hearts on this woman's broken body is to open our eyes literally and metaphorically—to see the trouble and grief she's experienced. We have to hold her in our internal sight; study her with the eyes of our hearts. These are poetic ways to speak about empathy and compassion. We must listen to her story and allow ourselves to be affected, to be moved, to be broken

with her.

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broken with her.

But it doesn't end there. We must also take counsel. Perhaps we should finish the thought—take counsel... that this may never happen again. The Psalmist says, "You consider it to take it in hand." Meaning God not only sees trouble and grief, but also takes on the cause of the suffering.

In the face of suffering, we cannot remain idle. This woman's suffering must make us wiser; it must put us on guard. It is not enough to hear the story, not enough to open the eyes of our hearts to see this violence if we do not take counsel.

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The Truth About Youth: Women's Struggle for Ageless Beauty, continued from page 2

relaxed, surrounded by friends, free to party. The snapshot captures them in an instant that suggests a life

without responsibility, without worries. Someone else pays the bills. Someone else cleans up after their mistakes, holds their hair back if they get sick. They are well-rested, joyful, energized; they have no concern that their bodies will break down and betray them, that they could live

out their lives harried and lonely once their friends have moved away and they have become independent of their families. They are oblivious, untouched by what it really means to have "grown up." I would be lying if I said that I did not want that for myself-- to be eighteen again, to have someone

else do my laundry. I am still young but I have tasted adulthood. I know what it feels like to be tired, to feel forty, eighty years older than I am. Youth is light; youth is innocence. I would give anything to be that little girl again, dancing naked in the rain. I miss the sim-

ple delight of discovering the world, of not judging it. The five year-old in her bathing suit pats her pudgy belly lovingly and rolls in the sand. I was her, twenty years ago. And I realize: it is not the young body I want-- it is the spirit.

There are a myriad industries devoted to convincing women that they need to look young. They do not need to put in much effort because we already want this youth they sell so effectively-- and the only way to regain some part of what we've lost is to look the part. We have lost sight of the ideal of aging gracefully; we refuse to age at all. But our bodies know otherwise. So we cut into ourselves, inject ourselves, and lift our faces, all in the chase for ageless beauty, when what we really need is not a face lift but a spirit lift. In all of this scrabbling and scrambling, we are actu-

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I miss the

simple delight of

discovering the

world, of not

judging it.

Eminem's Been Reading My Bible, continued from page 4

Her body cries out to us, "Do you know how this happened to me? What forces create the violent environment that ripped me apart? No? Educate yourself. Do you understand the dynamics of abuse? The lies, the terror, the physical pain that keeps me locked down? No? Study up. Do you know how many women there are like me? How many female bodies are being violated and brutalized this very hour? No? Find out. Would your church be a safe place for me? Not sure? Make sure." We must allow this woman's story to move us to action. That is what it means to take counsel.

And still it does not end there. We must also speak. The Psalmist says, "You hear, O Lord, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them and you listen to their cry." Imagine this woman was sitting in your congregation. Would she be encouraged? Would she hear that God hears her cries? Would she hear that the violence she experienced was not God's will for her life? Would she hear the stories of women like her? Would she hear the violence done to them decried? Would she be assured that your church is a safe place to seek refuge? When we keep silent, we keep others silent too. If this woman were in your congregation, would she be encouraged to speak? Would it be safe for her to tell her story? We *must* speak, so that others might find the courage to speak as well.

I have given this nameless woman a name. I call her Ahuva, meaning beloved. And what should we call the woman Eminem sings about? Her name is Ahuva as well. In fact our society is littered with Ahuvas; our culture is strewn with their broken bodies. Ahuva, beloved, is everywhere. You hear about her on the news. You passed her on the street this morning. She lives in your apartment building. She appears in films and television shows. She sits next to you on the bus from time to time. You hear rumors about her in magazines and newspapers; she eats at your favorite And make no misrestaurant. take—she *is* in your congregation. She sits in your pew every Sunday-right next to her Levite.

Set your heart upon her.

Take counsel.

And speak.



God we confess, we walk through life with a narrow vision which 🛪 allows us to ignore the suffering around us. Open our eyes wide to see the broken bodies and broken spirits in our midst. God we confess that we harden our hearts so that we don't have to feel the pain and terror of those who suffer. Make our hearts strong but not brittle; tender and yet sturdy so that we may carry the burdens of the broken within them. God we confess that we have shut our mouths and kept silent and by doing so we have encouraged others to keep silent in their suffering. Part our lips and embolden our tongues that we may speak difficult truths with grace and passion. God we confess that we have let our hands hang idly, too busy or too timid to do the hard work of justice. Invigorate our hands, God, so that we may faithfully defend the afflicted, in order that the men of earth may terrify no more. We pray all these things in your compassionate Spirit, Amen.



The Truth About Youth: Women's Struggle for Ageless Beauty, continued from page 4

ally making ourselves older, dis-

tancing ourselves from the five year-old we were. The daily beautification, the cost of cosmetics, all



of this adds to the weight of what it means to have left childhood behind. The toll of the fight, the anxiety over what we cannot prevent, is ultimately making us older.

So what is the answer? I don't know; I'm only twenty-three. But I have ideas. I believe that we should be allowed to mourn the loss of our childhoods and rediscover them. I believe that, instead of applying wrinkle cream, we should apply ourselves to finding ways of looking at the world with new eyes, of marveling at it and at ourselves. We should sleep-- we *really* need to sleep. We should stop-- stop working so hard, stop being the epic Super-mothers, Super-wives, Supergrad students, Super-professional Superwomen that we have demanded that we be. We should read books. We should eat freshlybaked bread with real butter. We should find the divine in the mundane-- in dark chocolate, in dishwashing. And we should allow ourselves to wear the evidence of our age, to wear the proof of a life wellspent, if we want to. There is no harm in wanting our bodies to be beautiful; indeed, they are our temples and the temples of the Lord, but there is danger in believing we

are not beautiful as we are.

So... I will keep using the serum until the tubes run out. They were free, so hey, why not? Will I buy more when they are empty? I don't know. In a way, I hope not. I hope that I will not be afraid to grow into the body and the person God designed, wrinkles and all. But I know that if I do decide to try and prevent the evidence of life's wear and tear on my body, I will never escape the knowledge that it is not the youthful beauty of magazines that I desire, not really. At the root of it all is the little girl stamping her feet in a puddle, wanting to see herself in the mirror through my eyes. That is how youth is beauty.

Allowing God and Questions..., continued from page 2

Christian-Muslim relations in the Hindu Holy City. Traipsing around in a heat index of 135 degrees as well as monsoons, I met with and listened to the Mufti of Banaras, with young Wahhabist Muslims at an all men's Wahhabi Madrasa called Jamiah Salafiah, and with the Bishop of Varanasito name only some. This experience helped me understand what theology means on the ground, how

theology instantiates itself on the ground, and how religious differences are viewed in a different culture. Τ value that experience as one of my most profound to date.

It is by divine intervention. I believe, that I got a job at BU School is in the middle. of Theology in 2008. It

was my position at BU STH that allowed me to apply to a peace delegation in 2009 with Christian Peacemaker Teams and travel to Israel and Palestine to witness the conditions there first hand. I saw oppression and religious fanaticism

at its worst. So many Israeli's and Palestinian's live with hate, they live with fear, they live with anger, and they



Karen (left) with some of the Christian leaders in Varanasi

live with God. My trip left me feeling that I must do a bit more schoolwork and since I work at BU STH, what better place to get my next and last degree? I am now doing my Master of Sacred Theology in Religion and Conflict Transformation (RCT) and will graduate in May 2011. I also traveled once again to India this last Summer for mv RCT Practicum, where I researched Muslim women's lives in the slums of Mumbai. This degree program is allowing me to hone in on and develop a theory as to how we, as a world, can theologically coexist, while recognizing and valuing each individual's religionrealizing that regardless of what religion we carry in our hearts and minds, we are human beings first and foremost.

As a Christian, I have found there is a great need to share my knowledge in any way I can about what I

> have learned. Our religiously charged world is blazing right now with misunderstanding and a whole lot of questions. I spoke at Parliament of World Religions in Melbourne last vear: I lecture and teach at churches,

schools, and organizations; and I write-on everything from Islamophobia, to women in Islam, to Christian-Muslim relations worldwide, to Al Qaeda, to theological responses to terrorism. I have been accused of being a "Bad Christian,"

of being "poorly misinformed," and someone wrote that I should, "Put a gun in my mouth and fire." These comments only make me want to work harder. They help me understand that we have a very long way to go in creating understanding and moving beyond a sense of just tolerance. Our identifying marker should not be our religion, but our identifying marker should be our humanity. We must seek understanding. This is what drives

me and my work. It is imperative that we, as Christians, do all that we can do to cross those boundaries we set upon ourselves and embrace

all of our brothers and sisters, not just those who are like us.

My most pressing question right now? Won't you join me?



A Selection of Poems by Lourey Middlecamp

Humble gardener Taking his tea at high noon Rain loosens the weeds

Oats

We drove to the paddock to admire the pure creatures, legendary and rare

So many of us crowded the harrier we held out our hands. wealthy and indiscriminate

> One kept a distance admiring the blowing clover wild and fine

No more cosmic than chance but when at last you chose my palm I knew a Mother's piety and príde.

5:45

The bell on the cat's collar is jangling Too early for talking Hungry morning Alarum





At the Dome of the Rock. Karen

Anna Howard Shaw Center Donors

October 2009-October 2010

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From the Seed, continued from cover

rocky ground or even in the rocky walls. The small seed penetrates the heavy rock and stretches its small roots. Its roots entangle in the rock, sometimes breaking the rock, and often times, becoming one with the rock.

I also see trees and flowers among thorns. Sometimes they all grew up together, entangled in each other. And sometimes in different places like farms, if the owner or manager sees it and thinks that the flowers or trees are more important, maybe she or he will cut the thorns, not a tree or a flower.

How about the seed on the good ground? Even if it was nourished and nurtured with good soil and good conditions, sometimes, it does not produce the grain thirty more times. Maybe only double or triple maximum.

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I thought about Jesus in this story. Where is Jesus? I believe Jesus sees all those seeds and meets them in the middle of the path, rocky ground, and live among the thorns. I imagine that Jesus is worried about those seeds. I believe Jesus is there in those struggles watching and worrying about the seed that is in danger of being eaten by birds or in struggle with heavy rocks. I believe all the seeds struggle to survive and grow up wherever they are. And wherever they are, Jesus is there struggling together.

And amidst this struggle, the path, rocky ground, and thorns make the seed stronger and even became good soil.

How many of us feel that we fell into the good soil and produced the fruits and grains thirty, sixty and a hundredfold? I think most of us feel

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that we live in the path, rocky ground, and struggle among the thorns. In the middle of those, we cry and struggle and we change our rocky environments and try to create a good soil environment. Through this process, we bear our cross with Jesus everyday and hope to produce our dreams and hopes thirty, sixty, a hundredfold and more.

Jesus is carrying the cross still now. And I hope Jesus does not do it alone.

Let us pray.

God, sometimes it seems that our cross is heavier and bigger than others. Sometimes we feel that we are the only ones who bear the cross. However, now we realize that you are the one who bears the cross alone and we are the ones who let you carry the cross alone. Please forgive our cowardness and give us courage to share the cross with you. And be with you. Amen.



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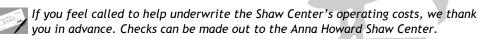
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ANNA HOWARD SHAW CENTER NEWSLETTER

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