

I want to tell you about a woman named Alice. She was a member of the first congregation I served with after seminary, and my first memory of her was from the question-and-answer session I had with many from the church during the interview process. Now, there is meant to be certain protocol when it comes to specific questions you are not supposed to ask the interviewing candidate. You're not supposed to get too personal, to make it seem as if it is an in-depth investigation of the potential pastor's entire life. But, of course, Alice had more than reached the point in *her life* where shame had been left behind long, *long* before that day.

The congregation knew about Sarah, then: we had been dating for about nine months, by that point. For most church folk, that alone, was nice and cute enough to know. For, Alice, however, that was not nearly enough. So, Alice was not scared, whatsoever, in spite of any kind of church-proper-protocol, to flat-out ask in front of all those gathered in the fellowship hall that morning after worship: if I was going to be man enough to ask that girl to marry me. I can't even remember how I answered the question, as church-proper-politically-correct as I could be;

instead, the rather unique member of the body of Christ, known as Alice, is much more etched into my memory of that day.

It also didn't help that Alice was a die-hard bleed green-and-white Michigan State Spartan fan. Anytime they took care of business against the scarlet and gray on the football field or the basketball court, there Alice would be sitting on that pew in the narthex area outside the sanctuary on Sunday morning; just to make sure I didn't forget the final score. However, that was, by no means, her ultimate contribution to the body of Christ.

Instead, it would happen about every other month downstairs in the fellowship hall, where the church hosted a blood drive. Every time, Alice would be sitting in her same spot at the end of the rows of tables with a clipboard tightly gripped by her very determined hands. She would be the one you go see after you made your...donation, so to speak. For fifteen minutes you would have to sit there in Alice's controlled-sector, as the standard medical precaution prescribed. You would have to sign your name, have some snacks and drinks to somewhat offset what you had just donated, and then, just as

importantly: you had to talk with Alice. If she hadn't met you before, you used those fifteen minutes to tell your whole life story. If it only took fourteen minutes and thirty seconds, you better believe you still had to sit there for the last thirty seconds for that standard medical precaution that Alice absolutely refused to back off of throughout her entire ministry to those donors.

Such individual members of the body of Christ, as we so call them as church-proper and politically-and-theologically-correct as we can be; such people can drive us nuts, to put it mildly. And yet, such people do make the church go 'round: serving that pivotal tendon of the body that it simply cannot operate otherwise. Someone had to make sure those donors would be okay after they just gave a pivotal part of their very selves for the sake of others. Someone had to make sure those donors were fine enough to go on about their day, to their jobs, to their families. And yet, it's not just the physical actions of certain individual members of the body of Christ that we remember; it's the things they say that give a glimpse into how they see their God at work in the world.

One of those things that Alice said, like an undeniably broken record: “The sun is shining, and God is in his heavens” (her own way of saying that it just couldn’t get any better than that particular day). Now, I never had the guts to say this to Alice’s face, but she was wrong.

Granted, it was just that one thing, but she was wrong, nonetheless.

Because, God does not stay in the heavens (and I do not mean just the time when God showed up in Jesus Christ and walked about earth for a few decades). I’m talking about now: God does not stay in the heavens.

God is down here with us, still. God is down here in the Alice’s of the world, the ones who may make us cringe and roll our eyes uncontrollably, and still manage to serve a pivotal role to the united body of Christ and beyond.

Alice not only served in the blood drives: she was the first call on the prayer chain. She was the one who made absolutely certain that anyone in the hospital, or even doing a short rehab stint, would get a prayer quilt. She was stubborn beyond comprehension, she was arrogant, but she was loved beyond compare.

Alice died five years ago last month. The body of Christ isn't quite the same without her, but God still keeps on showing up in new additions all over the world; many we will never know about, but God most certainly does, being a part of them all first-hand. Another thing Alice always used to say, as many in the entire body of Christ is trained to say as well: "God loves you and so do I." And, quite frankly, *that* is our ultimate mission to the world: to make absolutely certain with all the stubbornness and arrogance we have to muster, that no one in this life goes without hearing those very words of the Gospel itself. As if, no matter what, no matter what happens in this life: God loves you and so do we. Because the entire body of Christ and beyond has been saved, nurtured, and set free by that very love of Jesus Christ, Alice's Lord, our Lord, now and forevermore. And for the Alice's of the world who will never let us forget that Great News, we give thanks to God indeed!

Amen.