

LETTING GO ... AND GRABBING HOLD

Hebrews 12:1 – 3 Let us cast off the sin that clings so closely ...

Philippians 3:12 – 14 I press on toward the goal, to take hold of that for which Christ has taken hold of me.

On Labor Day 2004, Mark and I were sitting outside on our patio, chatting about this and that while Gabriel played in his sandbox. Suddenly Mark said, “There’s a position open in my area at Michigan Industrial Engineering.” I stared at him. “You need to apply,” I said, simultaneously noticing a sinking feeling in my stomach. Four years prior, there had been a similar position open at Michigan. Mark had applied, received an offer, and turned it down, partly because the offer didn’t include tenure, but mostly because *I didn’t want to go*.

I still didn’t want to move. I loved Chicago. I had already moved across the country twice for Mark’s jobs, compromising my own career. I was Music Director in a big church with a thriving music program. We had recently installed a new pipe organ that I helped design, and which was featured on the cover of two national organ journals. Why not hold on to all of that?

With my reluctant blessing, Mark sent his resume to the U of M. Over Christmas break, we made a jaunt to Ann Arbor, had lunch at Zingerman’s and talked. He interviewed in January, and we waited. I knew what was coming. I had even made a solo trip to look at houses in Ann Arbor, but nearly three excruciating months went by without any news from U of M.

On a Sunday in April, I was at the piano, leading the congregation in singing, “Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness.” During the song, I heard a voice, as distinctively as if someone had leaned in close and whispered in my ear, “You can do this wherever you are.” Somehow I didn’t miss a beat of the song. I was filled with a tremendous sense of peace. The Voice understood. It seemed to say, “You can do it. You can worship Me wherever you are, without these people in this sanctuary with this big pipe organ. It’s okay to let go. There will be a place for you.” A few days later, Mark received a job offer with tenure.

Two months later, my farewell letter to my congregation included these thoughts:

“Being a church musician is about more than musical skills. It is about being a vessel, a vessel that is filled by watching and listening and sensing and letting God in, and is poured out in service and sacrifice and celebration. It’s about letting experiences and people shape you, broaden your perspective and invade your heart. It’s about learning how to stay in step with other leaders in the dance of worship. It’s about unselfconsciously offering your efforts to God, and helping others do that, too. It’s about wanting to keep making music with no one but God there to hear it.

Wherever I am, with whatever I have, and with whoever God puts in my path, I can continue to lead and follow and grow as a church musician and worshipper.”

And He will lead me to the right place.

Prayer

Thank you, Jesus, for never giving up on me, even when I want to hold on to my own ideas rather than place my destiny in Your hands. Thank you for continuing to beckon me, persistently and gently, to follow You. Make me a willing servant. Amen.