

THE SPIRITS MOVE US

AN IMAGINARY DIALOGUE BETWEEN

JOSEPH HENRY
AND
MARCIA LUCRETIA AMES

(WITH APOLOGIES TO JOSEPH)

STEWARDSHIP 2007

Presented by Elly Rice and Mike Attwell



JOSEPH: Ahgh! This Tiffany window representation of me makes my blood boil...it's bloody awful. Cast me from my weak side old Louis did.... my noble brow is lost, my gleaming intelligence is muted, oh why must I suffer eternity with this?

LUCRETIA: My dear Sir: why are you talking to yourself in front of the Joseph Henry Tiffany Window? [pause].....Oh my, you very much look like Joseph Henry.... you are dressed like Joseph Henryare you Joseph Henry?

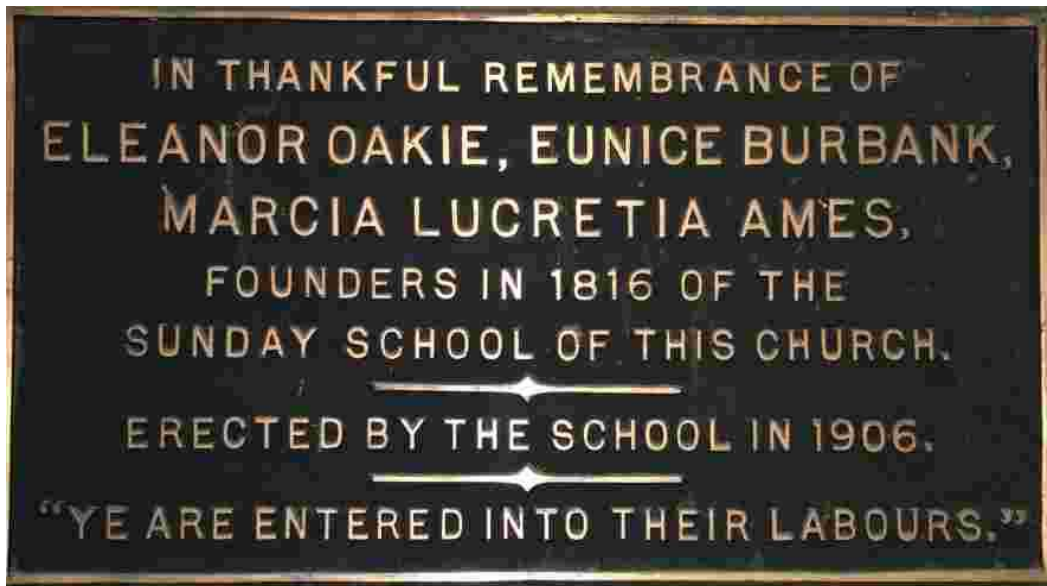
JOSEPH: Madame, one in the same. I am the spirit of Joseph Henry, in point of fact, as you yourself must similarly be from the spirit world, for as my theorem number 5 – published posthumously in the afterlife notes, spirits can be neither seen nor conversed with by mere mortals, only by other spirits. While I fully expect my soul is in heaven, my spirit haunts the places of my life, including this grand old church that I attended as a young man! So my saucy specter, who are you?



LUCRETIA: I am the spirit of Marcia **Lucretia** Ames, and I will ask you to adopt a more gentlemanly tone if we are to continue to talk; I am neither saucy, succulent, savorous or any other adjective men bandy in their talk in their futile attempts to pretend they are superior to women.

JOSEPH: Oh my, Lucretia, do we have the whalebone corset ratcheted a tad too tight? No harm meant, and if I called you saucy, I am glad to have done so since it has provoked a fiery response that I oddly find attractive though I must say novel in a woman. So Lucretia, this is the first time I've run into you in the Spirit world, at First Presbyterian Church no less. I assume you have a connection here?

LUCRETIA: Like you my family and I were parishioners here in the early 1800s....there is a plaque just to the right of the organ in the sanctuary that commemorates my contribution to children's education.....if you had looked elsewhere in the church beyond your fascination with your own stained glass image, you might have seen it....



JOSEPH: Oh you have a plaque do you? Mind you, not quite the same as a stained glass window, but impressive none the less.....children's education eh?.....Not surprised as Sunday School teaching was the sort of thing women did at First Pres in my day, too, along with preparing food for Church events and making sure the vestments and church linens were clean.....thank goodness we could fill your time with worthwhile activities while we men took care of the real business of running the Church and maintaining Presbyterian polity.

LUCRETIA: Well Joseph old chap, if you have had your eyes and ears open while spiriting around this building, you will have noticed that things are very much different today!



JOSEPH: Lucretia, I have and I can't say that I am very happy with a lot of it. For one thing, the children! These little urchins seem to own the place these days! Why, they crawl in the pews on Sundays and after service outright act as if the Great Hall were their own private playground! In my day, we strictly followed the dictum that children were seen but never, never heard!

LUCRETIA: First Pres children are precious and as important to the life of this Church as any other member. They are this Church's future! I am quite proud that the concept of children's religious education that I founded has grown to such a strong tradition, with such parishioners as John Myers, Ellen and Eric Eisenbraun, Garrett DeGraff, Brian Fuss and Laura Sharp now leading the way and nurturing them.

JOSEPH: I know, I know; I happened to be in church a few Sundays ago and there was a woman in the minister's pulpit giving a speech about the inclusion of children in the worship service. Can't say I paid to much attention to what she was saying for I tell you, it startled me to see a female parishioner addressing the congregation from the pulpit....wouldn't have happened in my day!

LUCRETIA: (Sigh) Joseph, my mentally-challenged misogynist. That was no female parishioner in the pulpit, but rather Miriam Leupold, the new head co-pastor who is sharing the pulpit with her minister husband Glenn.

JOSEPH: Lucretia, you...you must be joking. I mean I am aware that the Presbyterian Church over the centuries has loosened its standards and now ordains women, but my goodness, I never dreamt that that would ever occur at the First Presbyterian Church in Albany! It was always a bastion of great civility and rectitude.

LUCRETIA: Not to shock your naïve sensibilities still obviously grounded in primordial ooze and male-oriented solecism, but in recent times First Pres has had its fair share of female associate pastors, and now it has Miriam and Glenn who are EQUALLY responsible as the guiding light of its ministry.

JOSEPH: (harrumph!) Well I trust that Glenn, as the male party of this new-fangled arrangement, will see to it that this situation does not get too out of hand. First Presbyterian Church needs to be reined in on several fronts.

LUCRETIA: Well let's see... the changing role of women... the increased importance and visibility of children, what else could possibly bother you?

JOSEPH: Have you seen what they have done to the sacrament of Holy Communion? In my day, we offered communion once every quarter, it was served in the pews by men only; we wore morning coats and white gloves. Today, women actually handle the elements, communion is served three Sundays a month, and two of those are steeped in the Papist tradition with men, women and children approaching the altar like droves of cattle.

LUCRETIA: Holy Communion is now seen as a precious gift that brings us closer to God each time we partake. First Pres has struggled in the recent past to make this sacrament more relevant in the life of this Church; it's no longer the stiff, infrequent and ritual-oriented event of your day. There are even those parishioners who believe communion should be served every Sunday by coming to the Lord's Table.

JOSEPH: Well, I suppose that would save on the washing up of the communion glasses and reinstall a little patch of the men parishioners' pride. Why, I spirited into the kitchen a couple of Sunday's ago and caught some fellow named Bob Seelye bending over the sink with soap suds up to his elbow. Would be one thing if he was cleaning his knife after skinning a deer, but he was actually washing the communion utensils, poor chap!

LUCRETIA: What else piques your passé Presbyterian principles?

JOSEPH: Women in the choir, another one of my peeves! In my days, we followed the rich Anglican tradition of men only, then men and boys only. In fact, I had quite the mellifluous soprano voice back then myself. Difficult enough to concentrate on the music itself and the Latin and German pronunciation, let alone have females surrounding you with the off-chance of provoking an impure thought or two with their pulchritude.

LUCRETIA: Joseph, take your mind out of the wagon rut, the current First Pres choir is as serious about its music as was the choir in your days and one look at their angelic faces will tell you that their minds are riveted solely on the Service and the Word. Mind you, I do have a suspicion or two about some of members of the tenor section.....there is an Attwell fellow whose eyes sometimes stay closed far beyond what would be deemed acceptable prayerful concentration!



JOSEPH: There is something else that bothers me. Back in my day, First Presbyterian Church was the leading light in the community. Any Presbyterian who was anybody belonged to this Church, the most important voices in the community, even some of the most illustrious in the nation. Why, Alexander Hamilton was often in this Church when he wasn't busy with the Treasury or at target practice. Place was packed and the offering plates overflowed. In the couple of Sundays I've been back, there has been a lot of vacant space in the pews.

LUCRETIA: Well Joseph, First Pres faces the struggle of every urban church whose main source of parishioners has moved beyond the City bounds. And if you have even kept up for one iota with the evolution of Christianity in this country, you will know that the Presbyterian Church at large is a much smaller denomination. First Pres is not the only game in town, and it has been busy reinventing itself.

JOSEPH: Now you are talking! What are they trying to invent? That's a process with which I am very familiar!

LUCRETIA: No silly, not invent from the perspective of playing around with test tubes and Bunsen burners, but reinventing who they are as a Church and a faith community, where they have come from, where they are now, and where they want to be. It's a tall order, but they are pulling together to accomplish this.

JOSEPH: Sounds complicated, and I'm not sure why it has to be so. In my day, we never had to grapple with any weighty issues beyond the need to counsel new parishioners not to sit in pew space allocated by tradition and tithe to older members.....



LUCRETIA: Times have changed, although it did take several generations to ease away from the pew issue. Life is so much more complex than in your day; social issues are more complex; issues of race, gender and human sexuality, war and peace, poverty and injustice are always at the fore. Today's First Pres parishioners are passionate and committed to dealing with these burning questions.

Is there anything about the current First Pres that resonates positively with you, anything at all you can identify with?

JOSEPH: Well this business about being a More Light church may be up my alley since I always considered myself to be one of the brightest lamps in the crowd. Given my repute as a man of substance, science and learning, I embodied the spirit of enlightenment in my day, so I guess that I would gravitate towards the More Light parishioners in the current crowd. Any movement to join the tenets of faith with rationale science gets my vote any day.



LUCRETIA: Joseph, my misguided miscreant, being More Light has nothing to do with science. More Light Presbyterians believe that God continues to open new understandings of scripture and the Word in the life of Christ. Their mission is to seek to make the Church a true community of hospitality and to work for the full participation of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people of faith in the life, ministry and witness of the Presbyterian Church.

JOSEPH: Lucretia, you have my head spinning. I think I'll just go into Church and sit in a back pew and calm myself down by listening to the wonderful talents of the organist and take in the service.

LUCRETIA: That would be the wonderful talents of the *female* organist Nancy Frank.

JOSEPH: (Sighing) Yes, yes I know. Do you know who is preaching today?

LUCRETIA: (Gleefully) It is, in point of fact, Miriam.

JOSEPH: Oh my!

LUCRETIA: Only kidding! It's actually Glenn's turn today, and it is a special day in the life of First Pres. Today commences the Stewardship campaign for next year. Don't you feel that special buzz in the air, the anticipation of a body of faith coming together to pledge their time, talents and monetary resources to support the work of this Church?

JOSEPH: Well I, for one, might find it difficult to pledge to the First Pres of today. So much has changed.

LUCRETIA: Precisely my point, and if you are going to be happy as a spirit in today's world, you had better start changing, too. First Pres' unofficial motto is "A Servant Church In A Changing World"! Just you wait and see how generous these parishioners are as the stewardship pledges come in. I'll wager that each First Pres parishioner will prayerfully and dutifully consider their 2007 Pledge, and where they are able to, will increase their giving over last year!

JOSEPH: I'll take that wager! (Pause and coyly)... Say Lucretia....perhaps you and I should hang out together over the next several weeks to see who wins. There's a nice coffee shop around the corner – the Daily Grind -- that we could slip into after hours for a quiet tete a tete. I've sometimes followed the Thursday morning men's bible guys over there in their quest to evangelize the female population in the neighborhood....I'll treat you to something they call a latte and a pastry!

LUCRETIA: I'm game, although I will warn you that I do not canoodle over a cannoli, especially on a first date. But I am into saving spirits, and you are going to be quite the challenge! See you later Joseph.....

JOSEPH: So long Lucretia, ...of all the churches in all the towns in all the world, I had to find you in mine!

LUCRETIA: Joseph, we'll always have First Pres!

