Life in Deep Ellum

By Jeremy Closs

With over 2,000 churches in the DFW area, it is easy to forget that each local congregation brings something unique to the body of Christ. Every so often, though, a church’s approach to living out the gospel helps it stand out from the crowd. One such body is found at Life in Deep Ellum (LiDE), a congregation that meets just five minutes from the DTS Dallas campus. Named for its integration into the surrounding neighborhood, this church has embraced the idea of living out the message of Jesus in a way that works with the strengths of local culture.

It’s unlikely someone would guess this warehouse, decorated with an emblematic umbrella man, houses a church. This is an intentional choice on the leadership’s part; they recognize that the traditional church building style—and the culture it represents—would present a significant turn-off for many of the Deep Ellum locals. The building is also painted with a sign inviting everyone into their coffee bar, Mokah, for a great cup of coffee.

The day-to-day ministry of the organization also does not fit the typical Dallas church mold. Very little of what happens in the building from Monday to Saturday matches what most churches categorize as ministry. Instead, the focus is on helping facilitate the strengths of the Deep Ellum community. The first thing someone will see when they walk through the front doors is the art gallery, which hosts local artists throughout the year. These displays are always free to the public, and most often culminate in an open house where the artist is on-hand to discuss the art with anyone who is interested.

In addition, the LiDE building houses a few permanent businesses, including a photography studio and yoga studio, and also provides space for other local companies to do business. The building’s main space, The Venue, also plays host to many musical and artistic groups that hold events for the community.

This willingness to engage the Deep Ellum community in a way that touches all their strengths has paid off. There is a real connection between LiDE and their neighbors. This is perhaps best seen each spring during the Deep Ellum Arts Festival, a chance for artists, musicians, and restaurants from the community to show off their wares. The festival takes place over a weekend, and on Sunday morning the festival invites LiDE to hold a full-blown worship service on their main stage, proclaiming the gospel to people who may never step near another Christian event.

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From the Editor

Hello again!

Once a semester or so, I get together with the Journal team, and we brainstorm about the next issue of the paper. In those meetings (invariably powered by some sugary treat) we try to figure out what might be of interest to DTS students. This time around we are featuring a short fiction contest where the guidelines were wide open, as well as an insightful look at a nearby church in Deep Ellum.

What would you like to see in the next issue of the Journal? Reviews? Professor profiles? Recipes for cheese? We would love to have your feedback and suggestions. Please drop us a line at studentpaper@dts.edu.

Thanks,
Greg Rhodea

Hitched to the Cross
by Brandon Giella

“There lives more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds.”
— Alfred, Lord Tennyson

My favorite writer is an atheist. Or perhaps was an atheist—death does a funny thing to one’s verbs. His name is Christopher Hitchens, the cheeky Oxford charmer whose prose makes you feel as if he is addressing you personally while stretching back during some late-night conversation about Life. Most noted as the author of god Is Not Great, and as a member of the New Atheists—including Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, and Richard Dawkins, Hitch burned down most of his life as a journalist for The Nation, The Atlantic, Slate, and Vanity Fair. His one hope was that he was “never offensive by accident.” He was often “wreathed in blue-grey smoke” with an alcohol consumption that would “kill or stun the average mule,” though after being turned up all night he was still able to type out an error-free, thousand-word column due by morning. Most of us are unable to do that sober and on the uppity.

But that is not what fascinates me about him. Non-believers can be the most honest humans around, and he was no exception. Those like Hitch reorient my life like the human around, and he was no exception. Those like Hitch reorient my life like the dark room of a photographer’s negatives, that relief from which my faith is forged. Out of the negative I see its colors. In his oppositionism—and he would certainly stare a bit narrowly at me to know this—there is a compulsion for me toward the cross, through questioning and contrarian ideals, to better know myself and the Lord.

When I became a Christian about four years ago, it was discovering debates of Hitch that led me to Jesus. His unashamed authenticity in his questioning provoked in me another look at Scripture. I saw him in Lamentations when I read, “I have forgotten what happiness is; so I say, ‘My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the Lord.’” In Psalm 13 I heard his oily British undulations: “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?” (I’ll admit I didn’t understand the context of these passages at the time.) Often while going through his books I sigh. “Yes, Hitch, yes. Me too.” In these times I knew I did not have to cover up my faith in what I ought to be. People know when they are being lied to, and he was one who never made me feel as if he were lying to me—even if his conclusions were wrong or stupid, they were his, and they were honest. Hitchens’ face was before me as I read; everyone else was so sure, but he and I were not. Before him I could think aloud. Even now, while writing papers for class, I will turn the leaves of his volumes to bring back that boozy writer who provoked my coming to seminary. Still my forehead tightens while reading the tributes from his friends.

The point of all this is to say that unbelievers can sometimes inspire more faith than the room-temperature Christian literature that fills so many of our shelves. His memoir Hitch-22, with its grease-stained edges and ravenous pen marks on every page, has taught me that “the unlived life is not worth examining,” for “the one unforgivable sin is to be boring.”

The DTS Student Journal is:
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Isaiah 40
S. E. Frase

Liddell lifted up his head the last hundred yards
take up your spade dig out the blocks
hold steady
wait

I am an eagle
none of my clothes fit
my wings are grown wider now than the strength of will or wit

the streets become smaller as I stand on the ground
I catch my head turning up when none stand around

tendons stretch nerves burn the deepest fear
that sky I must learn

there are things which are too wonderful for me yes, two which I do not understand
the way of an eagle in the air
and Eric handing his running shoes away to the barefoot kid behind barbed wire before winter comes
and winter comes

let me not be as one who beats the air hold steady
wait
wait
lift up your eyes on high
to live the paradox of resting upon wide air
First Place: Epic Fall

by J. Daniel Mosher

“Who do you think will need us today?” asked the salt shaker.

Syrup shrugged while the pastel sugars began bickering in their tray about who would get picked first. White Sugar remained serene and silent.

Pepper cleared his throat. “I hope we see Ketchup again today. We don’t get to visit with her much anymore.”

Salt shook her cap. “We saw her twice this week. And you forget that not too long ago the waiter left her at our table for the whole—”

“No! What would qualify as enough?” Pepper thought. “Why put a limit on it?” “I don’t know what you see in her. When they bring her, we get the shaft.” “You mean you get the shaft.” “Salt looked annoyed. “Yes. People who want her don’t need me.”

The Owner flipped the sign on the door. Salt began to rock back and forth in excitement, which caused their table to wobble on its uneven leg. “Here we go, Pepper. A good day for sure—I can feel it.”

“See the sun? Who doesn’t want breakfast with a sunrise?” Pepper looked outside where the sun was beginning to peek over the hill. “Yes, indeed.”

Moments later the bell on the door jingled. A young couple approached the table and sat. “I love having a window.” Salt inched past the napkin holder to get a better look at what the woman was wearing. “That’s why they choose us, you know.”

Pepper saw the frown on the woman’s face. “Probably has more to do with our corner.”

The waiter approached and took the couple’s order. Eggs. Bacon. Decaf coffee for him. “Probably has more to do with our corner.”

Salt scowled. “They might like Ketchup too.”

Salt frowned. With no pancakes coming, Syrup decided to take a nap. The pastels’ debate grew heated in anticipation of the coffee.


The waiter set a steaming cup of coffee in front of the man, and the bump got the table rocking again. Salt danced along with it, chirping. “Not long before the order comes.”

The man reached for sugar. “Okay, here goes.”

As he chose White Sugar, the pastels groaned and began shouting sweetened curses.

The man stirred the sugar into his coffee. “You know how that pastor on the radio talked about God choosing us? Well, I’ve realized why he chooses us. He needs us.”

Light from the sun came glaring in through the window. Salt admired her shadow. “Look at all I am!”


“Anyway, think about it. Why would God choose us unless he couldn’t accomplish what he wanted without us? He chooses us because he needs us to live perfect lives before the world.” The man brought his cup to his mouth, but almost dropped it as the scalding liquid touched his lips. Some of the coffee splattered in front of Salt.

The woman looked at the spill and shook her head. “So you think God needs you, and—”

Second Place: Tomatoes

by Jeremy Closs

Derek’s stomach growled, but he was used to the hunger. He couldn’t afford the distraction now, not with so much at stake. He stared at the can on the porch.

“So who gets it?” Reggie was younger than Derek, almost ten.

Grandpa Scoots cocked his head, and the glow from the bug zapper turned his eyes blue. “Whoever I say gets it, that’s who.”

He spat over the bushes, out into the darkness of the woods. “I know you boys are slow like your father, but you oughta be smart enough to figure this out. Fight. Whoever wins gets the tomatoes.”

Derek tore his eyes away from the can and looked at Reggie. He saw the same things he was feeling: disbelief, fear—and hunger. “Can’t we just share it?”

Scoots’ cane shot out and struck Derek in the ribs. “You stupid, boy? I got the food, I say who gets it, and I say fight for it.”

Reggie flinched. “But we haven’t had nothing to eat in two days.”

The cane lashed out again, too fast for Reggie’s step back. “You stupid, boy! I got the food, I say who gets it, and I say fight for it.”

Reggie put one hand up to his ear and began crying.

Scoots shook his head. “Don’t act like that hurt, you ain’t using it anyway.”

“Look, don’t blame me for you not eating. I ain’t the one who took your sisters away. I didn’t scamper off to hide in a bottle somewhere down south. So don’t you go blaming me for anything.”

Scoots had a point. Mom had run off and landed another blow to his back.

What followed was quick and brutal. Derek didn’t understand how it happened. Reggie was two years younger than he was. Derek should have whooped him no problem, but something crazy had gotten inside his brother. Before long Derek was lying on the grass, wrapped into a ball, trying to shield his head and stomach from Scoots’ kicks.

“All right, leave him be.” Scoots sounded bored. “Come get your food.”

Derek stayed where he was. He must’ve fallen asleep, maybe fainted, because the next thing he knew, at least a dozen mosquitoes were sucking away at his outstretched arms. He jerked his arms to shoo them away, and pain shot through his body. His head throbbed. His spine screamed. As he
Life in Deep Ellum from page 1

What does the explicitly church-related aspects of LiDE look like? Officially, their only doctrinal statement is an affirmation of the Apostles’ Creed and the inspiration and authority of the Bible. Though strict cessationists and complementarians could not feel comfortable for long, most other Christians should not find any significant doctrinal disagreements here. The Sunday morning liturgy is a familiar one, but the way these familiar elements are presented may be different from what many are used to. The leadership at LiDE is not afraid to abandon the trappings of cultural Christianity and reshape the biblical, Christ-centric core into a communal experience that is tailored to fit the needs of the Deep Ellum community.

Joel Triska, one half of the husband-and-wife team that serves as head pastors, has made it clear on multiple occasions that this style is not an attempt to be hip, edgy, or cool. Instead, it comes from a desire to communicate to people where they are, in a way that speaks to them. As he has put it, if they were leading a church in west Texas, they would have rodeos instead of art shows.

This perhaps best expresses the ideology of Life in Deep Ellum. They recognize that the gospel is not tied to any cultural moorings. The transformative work of Jesus can, and will, take place wherever those who love him work to further his kingdom, regardless of whether or not the nuances of Bible-belt Christian culture are reflected in church practices. LiDE is pushing the boundaries of what it means to minister in the post-modern world, and any DTS student who expects to minister in an urban setting owes it to themselves to check it out and see what works, what does not, and how a fresh approach to forming a church community can impact the world for Jesus.

Follow the link for more info: www.lifeindeepellum.com

Epic Fall from page 3

he needs you to be perfect?”
   Bitting his lip from the burn, the man thought for a moment, raised his eyebrows, and nodded.
   Pepper laughed. “Did you hear that, Salt? God needs man.”
   When Salt didn’t answer, Pepper turned to see her scooting little by little into the coffee spill. “Salt?”
   “I know what he needs,” she said. “Seems like a salt kinda guy.”
   “Come on, you know better. Nobody needs us—they choose us, remember?”
   “Didn’t you hear what he said? Choice means need. And I know that he needs me.” Salt edged through the spill.
   “Salt, I wouldn’t—”
   “And the eggs arrive.” Salt nearly toppled with joy as the waiter placed the food in front of the couple. Before Pepper could stop her, Salt lurch ed with the rocking table, sliding through the coffee and clinking against the man’s plate. She fell forward and let her lid fly, pouring out all over the eggs.
   The man cursed.
   “Woah,” The waiter said. “Sorry. Here, let me get you a new one.” He grabbed the ruined platter and walked away.
   The woman glared at the man. “Does a perfect man curse?”
   “Excuse me?”
   “You heard me. Does a perfect man curse?”
   The man picked up his napkin and began folding it. “I don’t know that I like your tone.”
   “And I don’t like yours.” She crossed her arms. “Since when does perfect describe you?”
   The man stopped folding, pursed his lips, and stared at her.
   “You don’t sound very submissive right now.”
   “And you don’t sound very loving. What happened to husbands love your wives?”
   “As you love yourself. If I don’t love myself—”
   The woman snorted. “Trust me, you love yourself.”
   He crumpled up the napkin in his hand. “Enough.”
   “Yes,” she said as she stood and grabbed her purse.
   “Enough.”
   The woman stormed out of the diner, nearly jolting the bell off the door as she left.
   Pepper looked over at the spilled coffee, where Salt had left a trail through the liquid. “What a mess.”
   The waiter returned with a fresh plate.
   “Thank you,” the man said through clenched teeth.
   The waiter studied his feet. “Need anything else?”
   The man shook his head.
   As the waiter turned to go, the man looked down at his food. “Wait—I did want some ketchup.”
stood up, he went slow to keep most of the pain at bay.

Grandpa's house was dark, and the bug zapper was cold. Both Scoots and Reggie were gone. The can of tomatoes too.

Derek was glad that it was a full moon that night. Though hurt and hungry, he would at least have enough light for the walk home.

He had never walked a longer seven miles in his life. When he got home, all the lights were off. Derek figured Reggie must've eaten the tomatoes and gone straight to bed. As Derek climbed the sagging wooden steps to the porch, he saw something gleaming there—the can of tomatoes, pried open, and almost full.

Derek didn't think. He jumped forward, ignoring his yowling limbs, and grabbed the can. After he'd eaten half the tomatoes, he saw the note that had been under the can. Derek picked up the note:

derek im so so sorry i didnt meen it i was just to hungry but when i got home i got so sad i left them for you i hope you know how sorry i am. im going to steel a car and the cops will arest me and get me food in jail. i love you and mom and sisses and dad

Derek sat on the porch and cried.

After a while he wiped his face, smearing tomato juice all over. Reggie had been a jerk beating him up, but in the end Reggie had left him the tomatoes.

Plus, Reggie was his brother.

One kid by himself might get picked up and sent home, but two? That would get them sent to jail for sure. Lots of food in jail. And who knows? Maybe they would manage to lift a car, really get out of here. Either way, they would stick together.

Derek would make sure they were never hungry again.

Derek looked down at the can. They'd both done so much to get it. Now, though, he knew he didn't need it. He kicked it over, spilling the tomatoes on the porch. Derek set off down the road to find his brother.
I love a good salsa. I mean a good ole mouth-burning, beg-for-sweet-mercy, snot-running-down-your-nose kind of concoction.

So when my waiter, Joe, set the chips and salsa on my table, I could hardly wait to try it. After taking my order of lunch fajitas with a Coke, Joe left me alone with the aroma of cilantro and tomatoes.

The blend of warm chip and cool salsa finished with a mild spiciness at the back of my throat. Good sauce, not enough heat, I thought. As I kept munching, I glanced around the room.

As that restaurant sound of conversation and silverware drifted around me, a wall hanging caught my eye. The painting featured a mixture of famous actors and local celebrities.

As I silently played “Name that Celebrity,” I noticed something. My tongue burned, my eyes watered, and liquid trickled from my nose. I guess it took a few dozen bites before that salsa’s real taste kicked in.

Joe returned with my order, and my eyes went wide as he placed a heaping plate before me.

“Um…I think you made a mistake. I ordered the lunch fajitas.”

He smiled. “No mistake.”

Green peppers and onions topped a mound of beef steak strips. Melted cheese pooled on a side of beans and rice. A soft tortilla shell stayed warm in a separate container. All for only eight bucks.

Finally halfway through my plate, I begged Joe to put me out of my misery. He grinned and handed me a to-go container. After paying for my order, I waddled out of Matt’s, promising the hostess that I would return.

After a month of Zumba, of course.

Matt’s Rancho Martinez is located at the corner of Skillman and Live Oak, about a ten-minute drive from DTS. On Tuesdays they offer their lunch menu (and prices) all day.

Follow the link to check out their menu:

www.mattstexmex.com
Campus Fall Photos

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