

Thursday Theology: The Gospel at E. 93rd and Kinsman

Co-Missioners,

Today's writer is Margaret M. Schauer, Ph.D., of Fairview Park, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland. Most of us who know Peggy—so she invites people to call her—first met her at the Crossings Conference of 2018, where she stunned the audience with a brief report on her work as a Christ-conscious urban educator. Bruce Modahl summarized her remarks in one of last year's newsletters. For almost all the background you'll need on what she offers today, [we refer you to that summary](#).

A note on geography, physical and cultural: Greater Cleveland is organized by the Cuyahoga River, running south to north, and by major thoroughfares that run from the banks of the Cuyahoga to points west or east, with west-siders oriented toward Chicago and east-siders toward New York. Another river to the west and a rise in elevation to the east, the so-called "Heights," help to separate the city proper from its suburbs. As ever, the poor fill the city while the wealthy hug the suburbs. Ironically, just as east-side suburbs have been richer than west-side suburbs, so the city's east-side has been poorer than the city's west-side, though of late both these tendencies have flattened out as the rich everywhere get richer and the poor everywhere get poorer.

Kinsman Road is one of the main east-side thoroughfares. Poverty's bite cuts especially deep when it reaches East 93rd Street, which is just before it leaves the city and rolls up the slope into Shaker Heights, once renowned as America's toniest suburb and still plenty rich. On reaching Shaker (as the

locals say) Kinsman gets a new designation: Chagrin Boulevard. There's a searing bit of theological truth packed inside that name—not that anyone in Greater Cleveland comes close to getting it.

So much by way of preamble. We give you Peggy.

*Peace and Joy,
The Crossing Community*

The Gospel at E. 93rd and Kinsman

By Peggy Schauer



Somewhere in the middle of scooping out the 7,000th cabbage roll at our annual Messiah Shrove Fest, my pastor, your editor, asked

me if I would consider writing a piece along the lines of “What would the Gospel sound like on E. 93rd and Kinsman?” And since it’s hard to leap mentally from cabbage rolls to the most impoverished neighborhoods of Cleveland, I agreed without giving the question at hand much serious thought. But once the cabbage was gone and I was back at home, the question kept me up much of the night. What *does* the Gospel in the poorest and most violent parts of the city of Cleveland sound like? In places where everything is louder, everything moves faster and every decision could make the difference between getting shot, going to jail or ending up with teddy bears tied to a pole in your memory, how does the Gospel message cry out louder than the cries of everyday life?

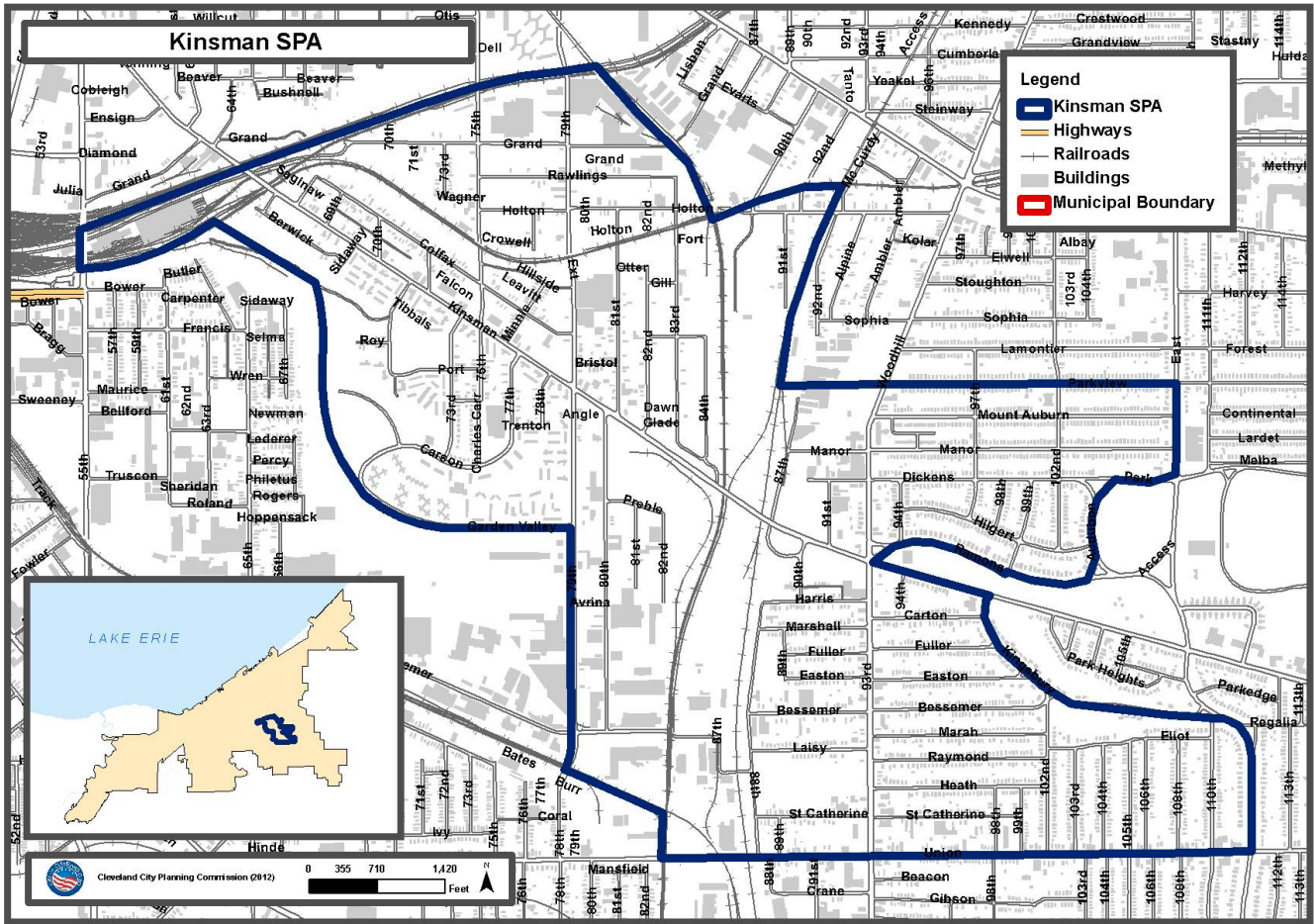
And then in the quiet of my home, I realized that the Gospel moments I was remembering were not ones where I, the child, or even the Holy Spirit shouted louder than the noise of the situation. Instead they were moments where the Holy Spirit emptied the room of all sound. They were “Be still and know that I am God” moments; and it was in these powerful moments of silence that the Gospel was distinctly heard by me and each of the three boys I will describe. To Marquise it said, “I love you.” To Jaylin it said, “I forgive you.” To Preston, it said, “I go now to prepare a place for you.”

“For God so loved the world that he gave up his only Son...

Marquise showed up somewhere around late August. As a year-round school, this meant he had just missed the first six weeks of school. I think he was brought in by his parole officer, but details like this get crowded out by other noise when you are the principal at John F. Kennedy High School in Cleveland. Marquise has a smile that lights up a room and for those first few weeks, he really tried hard to battle the voices pulling him back into trouble. He told me wanted to graduate and become a

truck driver. In October, we went to the “big campus” (we were housed off-site with just the 9th graders that first year) for the Homecoming Pep Rally. After the rally, in a sea of school busses and security guards, a huge fight broke out between the Harvard kids and the Kinsman kids. It’s all on video on YouTube and you can even catch a glimpse of me in my red coat getting swept up in the melee and slammed against one of the yellow school buses. We somehow pushed the kids on buses—the closest one was good enough—and got the hell out of there. Back at our campus, I did a head count and realized I was missing one. Marquise. I called up to the main campus, I called our security division and I called his mom. He was missing for over two weeks.

I don’t remember the circumstances that led to his return to school—again, details my brain snips out as irrelevant—but one day, there he was in the main office asking to go back to class. I was overjoyed to see him; but of course, the mom in me had to cuss and fuss at him for taking off after the fight. To his credit, he just stood there and listened. In the midst of my lecture I told him, “In eighteen years, I’ve never lost a kid on a field trip. You just messed up my record. I’m too old for this! See this gray hair, it has YOUR name on it, Marquise!” To which he replied, “Aw, Ms. Schauer, you don’t look half as old as us kids must make you feel”. Pause. “I love you, Marquise”. “I love you too, Ms. Schauer”. Silence.



The buzz of the main office ceased as the forty year old white woman and the sixteen year old ninth grader searched the eyes of the other and found Christ's love staring back at us.

Weeks later the Shaker Heights police would come to my office looking for Marquise. He was accused of stealing a cell phone and injuring the owner, an elderly woman. He was to be arrested at school. The police offered to arrest him in class and parade him through the cafeteria so other kids could see what happens when you steal from old ladies. Um, no thanks, officers. I told them I was going to go get Marquise from class, tell him what was happening, and they could read him his rights in my office and then take him out through the custodian's exit. They didn't like this plan at all; but it became clear their uniforms, guns

and handcuffs were not going to win against a principal with the nickname, "Mama bear". Marquise took it all well. I held it together as they handcuffed him in my office and led him away. We looked at each other again, and I remembered the Gospel moment we shared a few weeks back—maybe he did as well, but chances are better it got lost in the noise of getting arrested. A judge later saw Marquise for who he is—a sixteen year old ninth grader who roughed up and stole a cell phone from an old lady. And in that same moment of sentencing, Christ also saw Marquise for who he is—a kid He loves so much he was willing to die for him. I can only dare to trust that Marquise knows this love from a few moments of silence shared in our school office.

...so that everyone who believes in him may not perish...

Jaylin was one of the first kids I met as the new principal of JFK. He came to the rec center to play in a three-on-three basketball tournament organized by me and my partner principal to get to know our founding class. I have a picture from that day with the boys wearing their red JFK Eagle Academy shirts. There are seven kids in the picture, and I'm pictured as well—smiles all around. To date, four of the seven have been shot in the streets and one is dead. Jaylin survived.

My second picture of Jaylin is from the first day of school. He is working on an experiment in science class with Darnell, the kid in the picture who would not survive getting shot at his grade school playground two years later. Jaylin claimed a street sign that said Harvard. Darnell claimed Kinsman. I used to say, "Harvard is a college in Massachusetts not a street sign in Cleveland"; but Ivy League institutions get swallowed up in the noise of whizzing bullets even faster than hints of the Gospel.

Jaylin tried harder than most to bridge the expanse between Harvard the college and Harvard the street. He was a bright student, good-looking and played on the football team. He

frequently wore dress shirts and bow ties to school. The girls swooned. But Jaylin was also a fighter for Harvard the street sign. Fights at the bus stop. Fights in the cafeteria. Fights pretty much everywhere. Others were always involved, but Jaylin was a common denominator. He got suspended often and if I'm being honest, I sometimes put him out to give myself a chance to catch my breath from all the chaos. I know the research—suspensions don't improve student behavior—but they often help the principal show up for another day of work.

It was in one of those fight-suspend-return cycles that Jaylin and I felt the world around us go on mute just long enough to hear the Gospel. He was getting suspended and we were waiting for his grandpa to pick him up. It was taking a little longer than usual and Jaylin seemed to become aware of the time I was spending away from all the work I should have been doing to deal with his nonsense. He asked me about it and I'm sure I said something to the effect that he was worth it, because I have yet to meet a kid who isn't worth it. I didn't intend it to be some profound moment, but he started to cry—tears streaming down his face. He asked if I would forgive him for all the trouble he had caused. I've never had a student prior to or since that day ask me for forgiveness. His vulnerability was so raw and real. "Don't you go to church with your grandpa?" was my response. He nodded. "Then way better than me, Jesus forgives you". He visibly exhaled and we sat in the silence of our Gospel moment until his grandpa arrived.

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, Jaylin took a bullet to his leg in the parking lot of the Burger King across the street from the school. Some say it was a drive-by in retaliation for Darnell. The music teacher, also a trained EMT, applied pressure until the ambulance arrived. Jaylin and all the other Harvard kids would be involuntarily transferred to other schools in the district. I heard he graduated. I don't know anything else. I cling to the moment where his brokenness was made whole and new in Christ's forgiveness. I pray he does as well.

...but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Preston was not as easy to like as Marquise and Jaevon. He wasn't a good student and didn't have even a hint that he wanted to become one. The other kids gave him space in the hallways on the days his parole officer made him appear at school. Marquise and Jaylin had glimmers of little boy in them. They still wanted to please others and sometimes that extended to the crazy principal. Preston was a shell from day one. His eyes were void of hope. He couldn't read and that fact didn't bother him in the least. School was a waste of his time.

One afternoon, Preston and I were sitting together at one of the high-top tables in the cafeteria. He was cutting class and I was banging my head against the wall, spinning lies about how he needed to get back to class. We eventually formed a truce and

sat in silence for a bit. It should have been an uncomfortable silence since we didn't have a strong relationship; but for some reason, on that day, maybe we both just needed a break. When it was getting close to the class change, I asked Preston, "What are we going to do about all of this? What are you going to do with your life?" He looked at me and said, "I'm not going to live past 17." I was stunned; but I also knew he was right. Something had flickered briefly in his eyes; he was resigned to his fate and expectant for his future all in the same moment. Preston, at age 16, was tired and wanted to go Home. I didn't say another word to him. What was there to say? I sat there at that high-top table and prayed that he would keep this one shred of hope that comes only and certainly from trusting that Jesus has gone on to prepare a place for each of us. The classes changed and he went on his way.

In early August of my first year at Cleveland State, Preston's English teacher texted me to tell me to say he was working on a research project and was actually asking for information. We were thrilled. Maybe this year would be different for Preston. Two weeks later I received another text that told me Preston had been shot and killed. The new principal and kids were asking me to come up to school. I arrived just in time for lunch to give and receive hugs from my kids. The cafeteria was not silent, but it wasn't the usual laughter and rowdiness of a typical day. There was obvious Holy Spirit work going on.

In the following three years, eight more JFK kids would die from gun violence. I've attended a vigil on a playground and learned to open my local news app with a realization that a headline that says, "Man killed on Kinsman" could really mean another one of my teenage kids from JFK is dead. When will we get serious about helping our kids in the city? What would it take for people to see Marquise, Jaylin and Preston as kids precious to our Lord? What would it take to cut down the noise, slow the

pace and make schools places where learning is even possible? And if the Gospel is best heard in moments of calm and silence, then don't we have a responsibility as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to collectively quiet the noise on E. 93rd and Kinsman?

Heavenly Father, the noise is deafening, the cries unceasing. Lord, have mercy. Allow your Holy Spirit to pierce through the chaos and be ever-present with those who live and serve in the city through Gospel moments of love, forgiveness and the promise of life eternal with you and your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Thursday Theology: that the benefits of Christ be put to use
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