

December 6, 2023 | Waynesboro, Virginia | *a newsletter supplement*

Dad, will you be in *the Nutcracker*?

By Matthew Rich - "They are having dads again in the party scene this year."

My mind started spinning ... I had been a band chaperone and a volunteer cross-country coach for her older brothers. Could I really say no to my 15-year-old ballet-dancing daughter? How many more opportunities would I have to do something unique like this with her? I am not a dancer, much less a ballet dancer. However, I have seen "The Nutcracker" before, many times in fact, and a party dad might be doable. A few walks across the stage, a bow here and there, some quiet golf claps for the real dancers, and some simple turns and steps. I probably could do that. Plus, what else does a pastor have to do during the month of December?

"Yes, Bekah, I can be a party dad in 'The Nutcracker.'"

Six weeks later, casting was posted. Beside my name, it said: "Drosselmeyer." What? For those unfamiliar with "The Nutcracker," Drosselmeyer is not a party dad. Drosselmeyer wears an eyepatch and a cape! Drosselmeyer is the crazy uncle or magician or toymaker or someone who arrives with gifts for the children at the party. Drosselmeyer passes out trumpets and swords to the boys, and he brings dolls and uses magic to make them dance.

Drosselmeyer also produces a nutcracker as a gift for Clara. When Clara and her brother Fritz fight over the gift and it breaks in the process, Drosselmeyer tries to mediate and then to repair the broken nutcracker. After Clara goes to sleep, Drosselmeyer reappears and causes the Christmas tree to grow as a battle begins between mice and toy soldiers. When the Mouse King and the Nutcracker both are wounded, Drosselmeyer turns the Nutcracker into a Prince. After the snow falls,

Drosselmeyer returns with a sled to take Clara and the Nutcracker/Prince to the Land of Sweets. While Drosselmeyer does not do much dancing, he orchestrates the entire first act of the show with appearances in almost every scene. I had not signed up to be Drosselmeyer.

But as it is true in life and in ministry, the role you think you are going to play might not be the role you get. And you might learn some things along the way. *continued*



Rich, as Drosselmeyer and his daughter

Nutcracker, cont.

Trust the process. On the first night of rehearsal, all the dads and coerced older brothers were clueless. Yet each week, we picked up a few steps, added turns, heard the music a little clearer and walked with more confidence. When we finally reached the auditorium stage for dress rehearsal, it felt like starting over. There was a whole entrance scene we had never practiced. Huge packages for the dancing dolls descended from the ceiling. The lights were blinding. Barely avoiding a true disaster, with my eye patch and the glare, I pushed the sled and Clara directly into the stage lights at the end of the first act. And yet, by the performance, everything worked. For four shows the music played, the dancers danced, the audience clapped, and there was joy.

It takes a village. The Ballet of York County production of “The Nutcracker” included 125 ballet dancers from age 4 to 18, plus the dads and brothers, the Nutcracker/Prince and the Cavalier. Add the artistic director, the stage manager, the stage assistants, the costumes, the backstage volunteers, the ticket takers and the souvenir sellers. Everyone had a part to play. The teenage dancers playing Clara and Fritz helped me figure out what in the world I was supposed to be doing. The dads sat in the hallway backstage between scenes and discussed the best place to get wings. We helped a few of the brothers navigate their first tuxedos. The youngest girls admired the older dancers. The older dancers were kind and encouraging to the youngest. A community of care, support, and appreciation developed. By closing night there were more than a few tears.

Time well spent. We all have 86,400 seconds a day and the challenge is to use them with intention. As a pastor of a large, growing, busy congregation, I had more than a few things to do in December but would be hard-pressed to say any of my time was better spent than with my daughter in “*The Nutcracker.*”

There are limited moments to spend with your teenage daughter, especially when she wants her dad to be there. Driving to and from rehearsals was filled with laughs about something said or a missed entrance or a confusing instruction. I actually got the inside jokes. I witnessed the strength, dedication and athleticism it takes to dance several hours a day, four or five days a week, to prepare for a show. It was a gift, and the memories are engraved in my mind and in my heart.

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So, this year when I heard, “Dad, will you be in ‘The Nutcracker?’ Mrs. Cooper wants you to be Drosselmeyer again ... ”

“Absolutely, Bekah, I would love to.”



Matthew A. Rich is a husband, father of three, author, Drosselmeyer in a local ballet company, and, by the grace of God, the pastor/head of staff of Unity Presbyterian Church in Fort Mill, South Carolina.

Music Notes for the First Sunday of Advent

One of the joys of the holiday season is singing hymns that have been around for centuries. *Comfort, Comfort Now My People* dates back to the 16th century. Louis Bourgeois (c. 1510-1559) adapted the tune and published it in The Genevan Psalter. This collection of 126 melodies was composed and collected between 1539 and 1562 at the request of John Calvin for the Reformed churches in Geneva, Switzerland. The English version was translated by Catherine Winkworth (1827-1878) and published in 1863 in the Chorale Book for England.

The anthem, *Creator of the Stars of Night*, was written in the seventh century, known as *Conditor Alme Siderum*. It spans time, from the moment of creation to the end days when all will be united through the Trinity. John Mason Neale (1818-1866) translated the text into English in 1852.

The closing hymn, *Bereden väg för Herran (Make Way for the Lord)*, is a Swedish tune that was first published in 1697 in a collection called Then Svenska Psalmboken (The Swedish Psalm Book). Franz Michael Franzén (1772-1847) paired the popular Swedish tune with the Advent text, which was translated into English by Augustus Nelson (1863-1949), a Swedish immigrant who settled in Minnesota in 1883 and was ordained as a Lutheran minister in 1898.

WORSHIP THIS WEEK

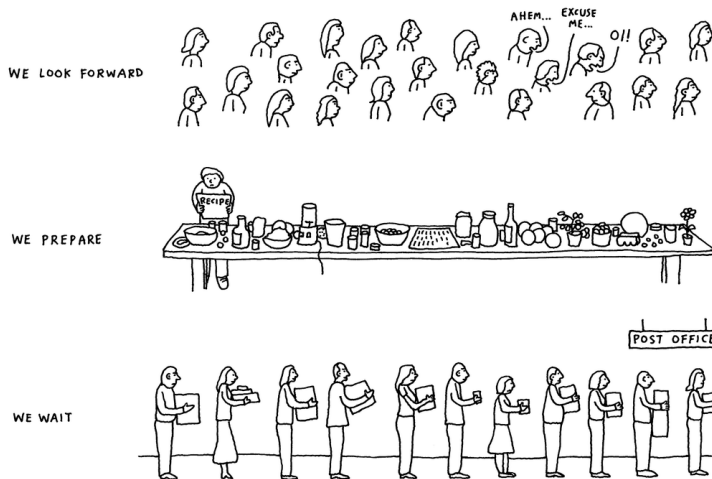
ISAIAH 40:1-11

MARK 1:1-8

SERMON: BY WATER, AND THE SPIRIT.



ADVENT



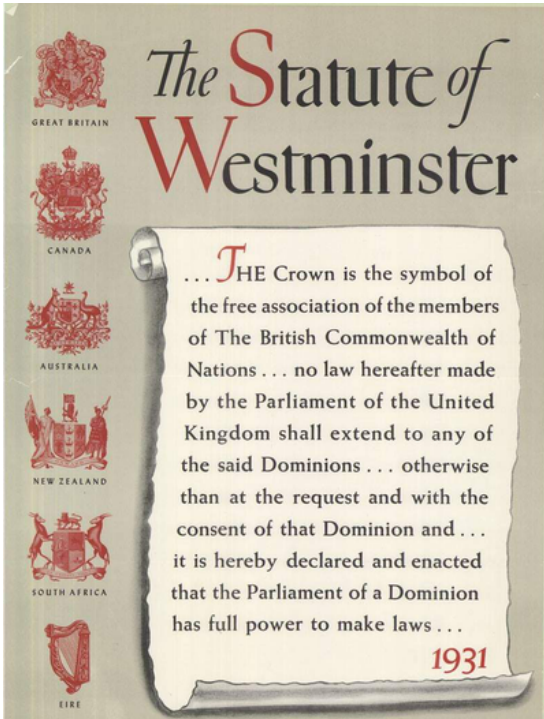
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CLICK ON THE LOGOS



This Week in History.



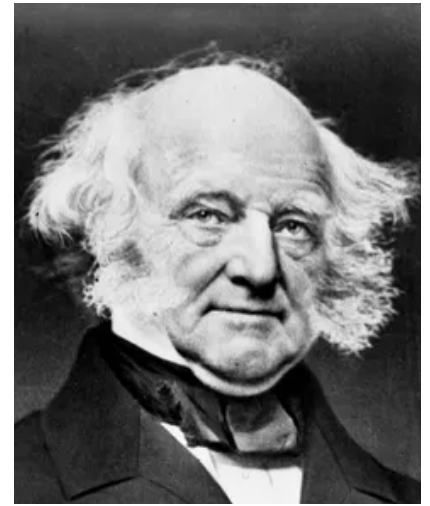
The Statute of Westminster grants legislative independence to the British dominions of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and the Irish Free State. Each would receive equal status Great Britain as well.

DECEMBER 3, 1931



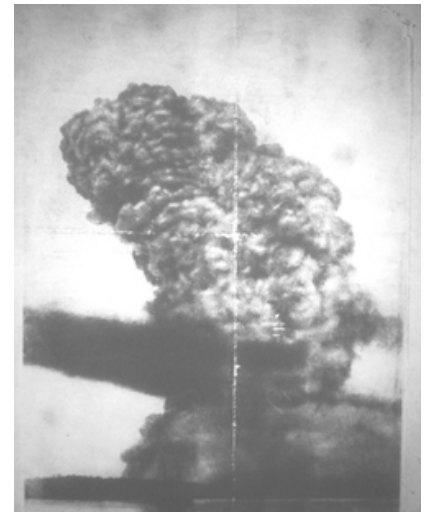
British Colonial officials ban the practice of Sati (Suttee) in India, the tradition whereby wives burned themselves to death on their late husband's funeral pyre.

DECEMBER 4, 1829



Martin van Buren (1782-1862) is born in Kinderhook, NY. He was the eighth President of the United States, and the first to be born a citizen of the United States.

DECEMBER 5, 1782



The Norwegian ship *Imo* collides with the French munitions ship *Mont Blanc* at Halifax, Nova Scotia, resulting in the explosion of 5000 tons of TNT. More than 1,500 persons were killed, and injured 8,000. A tidal wave caused by the explosion destroyed much of the city.

DECEMBER 6, 1917



Delaware is the first state to adopt the new constitution of the United States of America.

DECEMBER 7, 1941



Ann L. Richmond is born in Lakewood, OH, to Jean Marie and Van Richmond. She would attend Allegheny College and the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, where she would meet Patrick Pettit; they would be married at the seminary in 1989. She would served pastorates in New York, Pennsylvania and Virginia, and is currently the Co-Pastor of Massanutten Presbyterian Church.

DECEMBER 9, 1965



The United States Congress declares war on the Empire of Japan following the Japanese naval attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

DECEMBER 8, 1941