

Rev. Kim K. Crawford Harvie
 Arlington Street Church
 7 June, 2015

Children's Letters to G*d

Stoo Hample¹ was a cartoonist and children's book author who came up with the fabulous idea of inviting kids to write letters to G*d. In addition to the texts our choir is singing this morning, they say things like,

“Dear God, Did you mean for giraffe to look like that or was it an accident?”²

“Dear God, Thank you for the baby brother but what I prayed for was a puppy”³

“Dear God, If you watch in church on Sunday I will show you my new shoes.”⁴

and

Dear G*d, “We read [that] Thos. Edison made light. But in Sun. school they said you did it. So I bet he stold your idea.”⁵⁶

¹ Stuart E. Hample (1926-2010)

² Norma

³ Joyce

⁴ Mickey D.

⁵ Sincerely, Donna (that's stold, *sic!*)

⁶ Please see beliefnet.com/Faiths/Facebook-Galleries/Dear-God-Hilarious-Prayers-From-Kids.aspx?p=2 And – bonus – three more of my very favorites:

Dear G*d, My turtle died. Is she there with you? If so, she likes lettuce. Susie

Dear G*d, My brother told me about being born, but it doesn't sound right. They're just kidding, aren't they? Marsha.

Dear G*d, In school they told us what You do. Who does it when You are on vacation?
 Jane

I love these every time I rediscover them. I'm always humbled by the reminder that my theology is often not much more sophisticated than that; and reminded that this kind of primitive theology is enough to be a really good person. It is more than enough to begin a letter, To Whom It May Concern, and to chat away with what President Lincoln called "the better angels of our nature,"⁷ or some version of a higher power, or whatever we might conceive G*d to be, and listen for a response. I commend us to it.

Author Anne Lamott is a master of this stripped-down call and response, and all the angst that fills the space in between. Here's a snapshot from her book *Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith*.

"Last week on my ... birthday," she writes, "I decided that it's all hopeless, and I would eat myself to death.... However, after I had a second cup of coffee, I realized that I couldn't kill myself that morning – not because it was my birthday, but because ... there was no food in the house...."

"Everyone I know is devastated by ... our heroic military activities overseas. I can usually manage a crabby hope that there is meaning in mess and pain, that more will be revealed, and that truth and beauty will somehow win out in the end. But I'd been struggling as my birthday approached.... I wake up some mornings pinned to the bed by centrifugal sadness and frustration...."

"While I was thinking about all this," she says, "my priest friend Tom called to wish me a happy birthday."

"How are we going to get through this craziness?" I asked....

"Left foot, right foot, left foot, breathe,' he said. 'Right foot, left foot, right foot, breathe....'

"How do we help? How do we not lose our minds?'

"You take care of the suffering.'

"I can't get to Iraq.'

⁷ This is from President Abraham Lincoln's first inaugural address; this phrase is widely attributed, including to Shakespeare! Anyone have a definitive source? *Thank you!*

“‘There are people who are miserable here.’

“After we got off the phone,” she continues, “I ate a few birthday chocolates. Then I asked G*d to help me to be useful.... I tried to cooperate with grace, which is to say, I did not turn on the TV. Instead, I drove to the market.... The problem with G*d – or at any rate, one of the top five most annoying things about G*d – is that he or she rarely answers right away.... Some people seem to understand this – that life and change take time – but I am not one of those people....

“But I prayed: help me.

“I flirted with everyone in the store,” Anne Lamott continues, “especially the old people, and I lightened up. When the checker finished ringing up my items, she looked at my receipt and cried, ‘Hey, you’ve won a ham!’

“I felt blindsided by the news. I had asked for help, not a ham. It was very disturbing. What on earth was I going to do with ten pounds of salty pink eraser?....

“‘Wow,’ I said. The checker was so excited about giving it to me that I pretended I was, too.

“‘How great!’

“A bagger was dispatched to the back of the store to get my ham. I stood waiting anxiously. I wanted to get home, so I could start caring for suffering people, or turn on CNN.... But for some reason, I waited. If G*d was giving me a ham, I’d be crazy not to receive it. Maybe it was the ham of G*d, who takes away the sins of the world.

“.... I put it with feigned cheer into my grocery cart, and walked to the car, trying to figure out who might need it. I thought about chucking it out the window near a field. I was so distracted that I crashed my cart smack into a slow-moving car in the parking lot.

“I started to apologize, when I noticed that the car was a rusty wreck, and that an old friend was at the wheel. We got sober together a long time ago, and each had a son at the same time....

“She opened her window. ‘Hey,’ I said, ‘How are you? It’s my birthday!’

“‘Happy birthday,’ she said, and started crying. She looked drained and pinched, and after a moment, she pointed to the gas gauge of her car. ‘I don’t have money for gas, or food. I’ve never asked for help from a friend since I got sober, but I’m asking you to help me.’

“‘[I have] money you can have,’ I said.

“‘No, no, I just need gas,’ she said. ‘I’ve never asked ... for a handout.’

“‘It’s not a handout,’ I told her. ‘It’s my birthday present.’ I thrust a bunch of money into her hand, all the money I had. Then I reached into my shopping cart and held out the ham to her like a clown doffing flowers. ‘Hey!’ I said. ‘Do you and your kids like ham?’

“‘We love it,’ she said. ‘We love it for every meal.’

“She put it in the seat beside her, firmly, lovingly, as if she [were] about to strap it in. And she cried some more.”⁸

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Beloved spiritual companions,

When we fear that a giraffe is an accident,
When what we prayed for was a puppy,
When we hope that someone important will notice our new shoes,
It’s time for a little chat with
To Whom It May Concern.

Especially on the days we begin feeling
“pinned to the bed by centrifugal sadness and frustration,”
it’s “left foot, right foot, left foot, breathe.”

⁸ Anne Lamott, “Ham of God” in *Plan B: Further Thoughts on Faith*

Ask to be useful.
 Cooperate with grace.
 And remember, if you win a ham,
 it just may be the ham of G*d.
 Give it away.

Dear G*d, “We read [that Thomas]⁹ Edison made light.
 But in Sun. school they said you did it.”

In church today, I say *we do it.*¹⁰
Let it shine!

⁹ Thos.

¹⁰ And for the benediction:

Jane writes,
 Dear G*d,
 In [Sunday] school,
 they told us what You do.
 Who does it
 when You are on vacation?

*

That would be ...
 over to us!