



I want to tell you about a man named “Tim Dean.” “Tim” had a voice that I didn’t know was possible in the small town where I grew up. He always sounded like he should be living in the big city, where he could do voiceovers for car dealership commercials or be the play-by-play announcer for a baseball team on the radio. And yet, his full-time job was at a bank on the main street of our town. But he still managed to belt out his vocal talents in other ways: on high school football Friday nights, he would make the trek up to

the press box just before halftime, when his bass range would rattle the stands as he introduced the “pride of the marching Rams band!” During the week, he would often be rehearsing for an upcoming play or musical at the local theater. For some of us, though, we knew him more for where he was on a Sunday morning, as he stood in the middle of the back row, right in front of the altar, to sing in the choir.

Now, even though I started in the junior level of it at the church, I by no means had perfect pitch. Soon enough, I started taking voice lessons from the director of music at the church to make myself sound not quite as dreadful from my perspective, at least. And then for some reason beyond any comprehension, she encouraged me to join the big-kid choir. And then I still remember her suggestion that didn’t seem like much at first, but ended up making an impact for the long run: that for the Wednesday evening rehearsals, I should sit beside the most talented and most illustrious “Tim Dean.” I must admit, it was rather intimidating, at first, being beside this towering figure with a voice that could rival James Earl Jones, himself. I did not have much confidence, to say the least, in my comparatively next-to-nothing vocal talent. I shouldn’t have been in the same choir as “Tim Dean,” let alone be right next to him in the off chance my voice would severely cramp his style.

Honestly, I was even worried how he would act around me: if he would be one of those stereotypical church pew people, who were masters at giving the most penetrating glares to other pew occupiers, who were not acting or speaking or even singing up to their obviously God-level perfect standards. Nevertheless, good ‘ole “Tim” had a kindness and understanding almost as impressive as his musical artistry. He never pulled a split-second glance over his shoulder at me whenever I sang off-key. He never took time after rehearsals to put me in my place, as he certainly could have often. Instead, he would extend an appreciation that I was there, and just sing by example. I knew I would never have the voice of “Tim Dean,” but sitting beside him gave me the needed comforting foundation to sing out as best as I could, as if even my weak and struggling but just curious enough to try voice might be able to be included in the broken but beautiful body of Christ.

That broken but beautiful body of Christ that includes these little pockets of individual parts that we call churches, who are masters at saying out loud, at least that everyone has something to offer, everyone is blessed by God, that the Holy Spirit has bestowed some gifts on every member of this body; but far too many continue to struggle believing it. And it’s not just about them believing that they do have something to offer, but they wonder if the rest of the body truly wants them. Because sometimes it appears to such outsiders that you have to be in perfect pitch of Ten Commandments-following and you have to be in harmony with our organized religion protocols and expectations and just the way we have always done things. You just have to be that good to get into this choir of illustrious and talented Christians.

And yet, today, we hear from the one who might just be the second most important individual in shaping the church from the beginning, whose impact continues to shape our understanding of God;

second only to Jesus Christ himself in Paul, a pillar of pillars built on the foundation of the Lord: but Paul assures us today of his weakness, of his fear, even of his own trembling at the thought of God wanting even him to share the Gospel with the supposed outsiders. That somehow, somehow, God can work with all the trembling at the thought of it. That somehow, somehow, God insists on working in those who aren't so sure they have what it takes. God insists on believing in those who aren't so sure they can be included in any set of churchy voices. God insists that in those who feel they are struggling and supposedly weak in faith, that in those still precious children of God are masterpieces. Yes, sometimes it takes the supposedly illustrious "Tim Deans" among us to help us believe it: to help us believe there's just as much Holy Spirit living in us as in anyone else. That there's just as much God in your voice, in your life, in your wrestling with it all. And that long ago, God decided to take a seat right beside you through all the rehearsing and performing of your gifts to benefit this broken but beautiful body, and will never, ever leave. So, for that Greatest News for all of us, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!