

A Reflection from Our Rector, The Rev. Ben Robertson

July 6, 2023

When my family and I lived in Memphis, we lived in the High Point Terrace neighborhood. A community of post-World War II bungalows, High Point is in the middle of everything, east of Midtown, west of East Memphis, and north of the University. The center of High Point was the High Point Grocery Store, an establishment not unlike the Westbury Apothecary or the Buford Road Pharmacy: a beloved portal to a bygone era.

In High Point, we lived on Aurora Circle, an simple street with a variety of neighbors: long-time residents, Tennessee medical students, and young families. However, one day a year (unbeknownst to us when we rented the house), Aurora Circle became the center of Memphis. On Independence Day, Aurora hosted the cutest, homegrown parade you've ever seen. Folks festooned their homes with flags and bunting, kids decorated their bikes with streamers, and every local TV station sent a reporter. The parade itself included fire trucks, scouts, tiny cars, and great throng of red wagons and strollers. It was unassuming, darling, and certainly all-American.

The Independence Day parade was Aurora Circle's "thing," a cherished tradition that utilized our gifts and abilities. There wasn't an ulterior motive or obligation behind the parade, we just did it because we loved it. The parade was a joyous, unironic offering to our city. Many communities and institutions have "things." It doesn't have to be grandiose or self-aggrandizing, but the best are focused, well executed, and self-aware.

As Christians, we have gifts and talents we bestow to our neighbors, the Church, and the world. Maybe you arrange flowers for the altar or make casseroles for the sick or volunteer for Vacation Bible School. You don't have to do everything, but everybody has something to offer. St. Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth, "to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." Or, as the Isley Brothers once sang, "it's your thing, do what you wanna do."

For some, these summer months offer moments for reflection: at the beach, by the "rivah," or while the kids are at camp (and for some, summer is just as busy as other seasons, if not more so!). Perhaps we can reflect on our gifts and our mission, as individuals, and as a parish. Do they need evaluating or editing? Do we need a new thing, or has our thing *gasp* changed? In all the turmoil of recent years, have we lost our thing? Do we need to own our thing and celebrate it? Maybe a new thing is emerging. I'd love to hear your thoughts, personally and for All Saints. I am prayerfully pondering these questions myself and I invite you to pray and ponder with me.