

The boys had two days off from school this week because of the snow and were beside themselves with joy. **They spent Tuesday sledding and Wednesday digging out a snow fort in the mound of snow the snowplow driver had piled in Libby Eddy's side yard.** If you're a kid and you have a snow day, your life opens up to all sorts of delicious possibilities. **I was rather envious of them.**

Then on Tuesday afternoon my computer crashed. Which is kind of a snow day for adults. **I had a lot of work to do that couldn't be done, because I couldn't get to it.** It was all inside my dead computer. I unplugged my computer, hoping the next morning when I plugged it in, it would work. **I'm this way about a lot of things—believing if we give someone or something enough time and understanding, they will heal themselves.** But the next morning when I plugged my computer in, it was still dead.

I wasn't sure what to do then, but decided the cheapest thing to do would be to pray for it. So I laid my hands on it, closed my eyes and asked God to fix it, but God was apparently busy with other matters. **When I opened my eyes, it was still broken.**

By then I was desperate, so I did what men do when all else has failed—I asked my wife for her advice. **She said, "Call Steve Broderick. He fixes computers."** So I phoned Steve, and a half hour later he was at my house, looking at my computer. I don't think he would have gotten there so quickly if the weather had been nice, but we men have to test our mettle when the conditions are bad. **We have to get out there and inspect the roads.** So he came in his four-wheel drive, got my computer, and took it back to his house.

I worried about it all that evening, sitting by the woodstove. Then I heard someone in my driveway and I thought, "Steve's back with my computer." **But it was our neighbor Jim, who'd come over with his front-end loader to dig us out.** It was a kind gesture and made me think well of the human race, reaffirming my conviction that people are generally good and can be trusted. **The composer George Gershwin once said of his songwriting brother Ira, "Ira thinks everyone will be honest with him, and they are. I think everyone will cheat me, and they do."**

So I decided to trust Steve, and it turned out well. He fixed my computer, brought it back to the house the next morning, hooked it up, charged me a modest price, and I'm good to go. **If my next book is bad, it won't be my computer's fault.**

George Gershwin wasn't a theologian or philosopher, but his comment about his brother Ira is about the finest summation of human nature I've ever read—that folks have a way of living up to or down to the expectations place on them. **There was a young man in my former meeting who ended up going to prison.** I went and sat with his mother at his sentencing and afterwards she turned to me and said, "I always told him he'd end up in jail."

Now that doesn't surprise us, does it? We've all heard stories of just the opposite happening, too. **Stories of people overcoming great odds, really making a difference, and when they're asked how they did it, they invariably say, "My parents believed in me. They told me I could be anything I wanted to be."**

We have a way of living up to or down to expectations.

Now, let's think about this in terms of the Church. **What's one of the first things the Church told you about yourself?** When you were born, of course, the Church told your parents you were a gift from God. **But as you grew older, you were told you were born into original sin, that you had fallen short of the glory of God, that you deserved hell, that if it weren't for Jesus, you would go there.** If you're a woman, you were taught that your gender is responsible for humanity's downfall.

It reminds me of what George Carlin said. "Think about it. Religion has actually convinced people that there's an invisible man, living in the sky, who watches everything you do, every minute of every day. And the invisible man has a special list of ten things he does not want you to do. And if you do any of these ten things, he has a special place, full of fire and smoke and burning and torture and anguish, where he will send you to live and suffer and burn and choke and scream and cry forever and ever 'til the end of time! But He loves you."

This is the duality we've lived in. **The Church has taught us contrasting views of God, and contrasting views of ourselves.** We were taught that God is loving. But you better watch it! We were told we were created in the image of God. But you were born a sinner!

It is as if there are two Christianities. One Christianity has at its center a Punitive Inscrutable Father who demands our worship, who deals in fear, who withholds his blessing for even the slightest infraction. **That Christianity demands we follow every utterance of the Bible or church fathers, no matter how cruel, thoughtless, or archaic it is.** That Christianity shuns those who violate its rules. It insists its way is the only way to God and consigns billions of people who believe differently to hell. **That Christianity's deepest need is to control and command and coerce.**

In that Christianity, women are second-class citizens, minorities were scorned. **Gay people were, and are, denied the most basic human freedom—the right to choose whom they can love.** Unfortunately, this Christianity is still with us. The presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church in America, Katharine Jefferts Schori, will travel to Africa this week for an Anglican World Conference, where a number of bishops will refuse to be in the same room as her. She's not killed anyone. She's not harmed anyone. **She is, according to everyone who knows her well, a bright, gracious, caring person.** But she is a woman serving in a role they believe should be held only by men. And she had the audacity, three years ago, to say that a gay man, Gene Robinson, could be a bishop. **So Katharine Jefferts Schori is seen by some as unfit to lead.**

But there is another Christianity. This Christianity has at its heart a Loving Creator, who is at work in all lives everywhere. **That God's greatest joy is not our cowering obedience, but our growth in freedom, wisdom, compassion, and love.** This Christianity was embodied in Jesus of Nazareth, but not limited to him, so has never confined itself to the boundaries of one religion. Wherever love is present, wherever justice prevails, wherever and whenever the outcasts are welcomed, that Christianity is in full bloom.

In his book, A New Reformation, the Dominican priest, Matthew Fox describes these two Christianities. One is pessimistic, the other optimistic. One values control. The other values creativity. One is war-like, the other peaceful. One is sad and angry, the other joyful and forgiving. One is punishing and scolding, full of shame and guilt, the other is compassionate.

In the weeks ahead, I'm going to be talking about these two Christianities. I'm not going to be dwelling too much on the first one. **We've all been down that road and know it well.** What I hope to do is describe an emerging understanding of Christianity that more accurately reflects the character of God, a faith more healthy and helpful to the human spirit.

For I believe we live up to or down to the expectations placed upon us—that when we are told we are wretched, broken sinners, we will live like wretched, broken sinners. **But if we believe we are made in the image of God, put here to live fully, love wastefully, with the courage to be who we were created to be, then we will not only change ourselves, we will transform our friendships, our families, our nations, and our world.**