

The Piece

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It was a gloriously sunny morning in Paris. Our bellies full of hot coffee and fresh, buttery croissants, we walked through the city streets to the cathedral. We had been told that the morning-light hours were the perfect time to view this majestic chapel.

As I crossed the centuries-old tiles to enter the vaulted room, my heart swelled with that particular ache which comes from being in the presence of something beautiful and sacred. All around me, panes

of colored glass soared to the sky, so high that my neck hurt to look at them all. Each infinitesimal, carefully-cut part had been put in its place to create a story, a tapestry of glass that ran the circumference of the building.

We stayed for an hour, circling and re-circling the room, noting story after story told in rainbow colors, marveling at the craftsmanship and the dedication each telling required.

As we exited through the gift shop (because yes, even a sacred spot makes you exit through a gift shop...If Heaven has exits, those will offer up tea-towels and refrigerator magnets depicting golden streets, of that I am confident) we purchased our own piece of glass, a replica to take home. It hangs now in my kitchen window and, each morning, the light from my own side of the world illuminates the panes.

Years ago, someone carefully laid each tiny, colorful piece the glass in the original window. It was work done for a cruel, uncaring king, someone who never knew the worker's name, and who would not have wanted to know a single splinter of information about his life. Yet the artist did his job. He laid the glass. It was more beautiful than it needed to be, more perfect than necessary. And thousands of years later, it still lets the light in, refracting and recasting it in blues and reds and golds and prisms of brilliance. Just so we can look and wonder and marvel.

The worker had no way of knowing that his piece of glass would last for centuries. Anything can be destroyed at the whim of a king. But he laid it anyway.

And when I have my morning coffee, and look at that piece, it reminds me to reconsider...

When everything seems like a failure.

When we can't think of one thing we've done well.

When we wonder why we're still fighting. And why, for that matter, does it so often feel like a fight. Why can't it ever be easy? Why should we keep striving and pushing and moving?

When the good times never seem to last for us.

When the floor wears thin and the bank accounts drain like a popped, hissing balloon.

When the body rebels and the healthy habits don't seem to achieve anything.

When the sky is depressing and the weather feels grim.

When the hope of new life seems extinguished.

When every chore we complete immediately starts to become undone...

I remember that artist. I don't know what my piece of the window is. I don't know if my part of the work of the world will be tucked up in a high corner where no one will ever see it, or hang low and glowing and visible over the altar. But my piece matters. The corner that is my work would be dark without my own offering.

So on the days when not one thing seems to matter, it still does.

My piece matters. Your piece matters, too.