



## In Memoriam-Richard Andersen – TouchPoint for June 5, 2019

*Genesis 1:1-2 [NRSV] In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the earth, the Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters.*

*Genesis 2:7 [NRSV] ... then the Lord God formed a human from the dust of the earth, and breathed into its nostrils the spirit of life, and the human became a living being.*

*Revelation 21:6 [NRSV] I am the Alpha and the Omega. The beginning and the end.*

We call, whatever it is I do here on Wednesday, a “Touchpoint.” It is to be a reflection on how God’s story has touched my life’s story. Well, this past week, there has been only one thing that has touched my life’s story. It was the sudden hospitalization and death of my good friend, mentor, and co-worker, Richard Andersen, Executive Director at Spirit in the Desert.

And so if I may, I would like to reflect briefly and inadequately, on how God’s story came through Richard’s story to touch my life’s story.



***Grace and Peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.***

**Richard Andersen was grace to me. He was gospel.**

It isn’t any one thing he ever said. It isn’t any one thing he ever did. It is simply who he was. When I try to tell people what Richard means to this place and the transformation that took place under his leadership, I would say it was his force of will or his persona.

But none of those words seemed to capture it. I finally concluded that what it was his spirit. It was Richard’s spirit that infused this place. His spirit of hospitality. His spirit of kindness. His spirit of openness. And so, if I could sum it up in one very clear and very concise statement: ***It is Richard’s spirit, that gives spirit, to the spirit that is the Spirit in the Desert’s, spirit.*** Sorry, but that’s about as clear and concise as I can get these days because, to paraphrase a line from my oldest son Gareth, who is a writer: ***“I never knew feeling so deeply, could leave me feeling so numb.”***

Richard Andersen was gospel to me. When I saw his car in the parking lot it was good news. When I saw the lights on in his office it was good news. When I saw the door to his office open it was good news. Richard’s spirit was gospel—good news to all who met and knew him.

Richard’s spirit was grace.

Richard’s spirit simply was.



In the first chapter of Genesis, God’s spirit sweeps over the waters and chaos of the earth, and in that moment, God spirit pushes back the chaos, and muck and yuck of existence. And in that space, God’s spirit creates a place for life, in all its forms, to bloom, and flourish, and blossom.

In chapter two of Genesis, God breathes God’s spirit into a human being, into humanity, and life takes hold in all its richness, and depth, and beauty. That is God’s story to humanity, but it is also Richard’s story to me.

Almost 3 years ago, in the midst of the chaos of a life change, a career change, and all the muck and yuck that goes with it, I met Richard. And in that moment, he cleared out a little space for me, Room 21 at Spirit in the Desert. And in that space, he cleared out some time for me, 3pm on Wednesdays. And in that space, and in that time, Richard said, *“Bloom in this place. Flourish and blossom here—**be who you are and do who you are and share the fruits of your labor with us, so that we can flourish and blossom as well with you.**”*

And it is here in this place that THE SPIRIT that is Spirit in the Desert and Richard’s spirit, breathed life into this old soul, and a life of richness, and depth, and beauty took hold. And God’s story, and Richard’s story became a touchpoint and touchstone in my life’s story.

I want to conclude with a final story now, because I want to make this a short touchpoint today so that we can all share a story about Richard. And to those of you who are reading this or listening to this and knew Richard, share a story of Richard with a friend today or in the days ahead. And to those of you who never knew him, share a story with a friend about someone in your life who was God’s story to you. How has someone in your life brought God’s spirit, through their spirit, to lift and enliven your spirit? For this was Richard’s spirit.

My last long conversation with Richard was about 5 days before his hospitalization. I went into his office to ask him a simple question and we ended up talking for about 30-45 minutes, which was often the case. But this time was extra special, because we talked about how absolutely exciting our life of faith was at this point in our lives. I can’t remember the words exactly, but this is pretty close: *“Jim, I can’t tell you how much fun and joy and excitement I am experiencing in my faith journey. 73 years old and I am discovering new things and being stretched in ways I never have been before. I am seeing and experiencing Christ in others and the world like I never imagined. I don’t think I could have appreciated it 30 years ago like I am now. I don’t know if I was ready then, but this — this — this is amazing.”*

And I agreed with him and said the same. That this place has brought me to a place in my journey that is more than I could have imagined. And we looked at each other and laughed. Like two giddy little school girls, or as much as two old farts can laugh like little school girls—and that’s not a knock against little school girls, because I can’t tell you what I wouldn’t give to laugh like a little school girl with Richard—just one more time.



And now, finally, to Richard, my good friend and partner in ministry:

*May the Spirit that was your Alpha, that breathed life into you and called you into existence 73 years ago,  
and the Spirit that was with you and flowed through you all of your life,  
May that Spirit now be your Omega ... and may you rest in its loving and gracious embrace.*

***“I am your Alpha and your Omega, your beginning and your end.”***

Amen.