

LAUNDROMAT GUY



by Dr. Gerald Driskill

A three-year-old elfin princess holds her light blue pacifier in her right hand. With her left hand, she offers her mother a piece of gum. “No thank you, baby. You are so thoughtful.”

Her mother continues placing clothes in the front-loading washing machine. Coins are inserted, and the dirty clothes begin their tumble through the suds. The elfin princess’s thin, sandy-blond hair reveals slightly pointed ears, which in my imagination suggests elfin ancestry.

Her attire adds to the impression. She is adorned in a fancy, black “ballroom” dress with sparkles and pink net fabric on the lower half. On her princess feet, she sports purple, sparkling plastic slippers.

Elfin Princess walks a few feet from the washers. A coin finds its way from her hand into the slot of a magical gum machine that sends a jawbreaker down a clear, three-foot spiral shoot. Her eyes follow the neon yellow gum to the metal door. She opens it and grasps her new prize and shuffles off aimlessly, smiling.

Her big sister, perhaps seven years old, with the same sandy-blond hair, wears a blue-pink paisley jumper. No Elfin Princess fairy-tale clothes for her. She moves toward the rows of gray plastic seats. I move my backpack from the seat next to me to make room. The movement causes unexpected trouble. My open water bottle tips over. Water pours onto the beige

tilled floor. Big Sister glances down, eyes now wide open. No one else seems to notice. I smile at her, and then I walk to the far end of the neon-lit room to find the laundry aid.

“I am sorry to bother you. My water bottle spilled. Might you have a towel?”

She breaks from her folding task and pulls a sky blue hand towel from under an orange plastic gallon detergent bottle and graciously smiles as if glad to serve beyond the isolation of folding clothes.

I thank her and walk back, kneel, and soak up the water off the tile around my chair and then carry the towel back to the aid and say, “Thank you again.” She nods and returns to her small mountain of clothes.

That mundane laundromat moment in

Wheaton, Illinois, while my daughter was at a music camp with both of us far from our home in Arkansas, prompts reflections on my earlier days in and out of laundromats.

Then, some forty years ago in Abilene, Texas, I spent time each week in a laundromat. Now in Wheaton, I found myself learning from Elfin Princess and a laundromat guy.

Laundromat Guy almost caused me to not enter the laundromat due to his cursing rant. Yet, along with

Elfin Princess, he created unanticipated connections. These connections shifted me out of my tendency to miss the beauty and truth found in unexpected places: beauty in what happens when I slow down to listen and see, truth in daring to enter a time-space

portal, which takes me back in time, first to Abilene, Texas, and then to Einstein in the early twentieth century, and even further back to Thomas Aquinas in the middle of the thirteenth century.

About four decades earlier, I called Abilene, Texas, my home. As an older transfer student, I eventually participated in a faith community on the outskirts of the city away from the university hub. I wanted to be with people who were not part of the traditional college scene. In the coming years, two new relationships would form: one with Joan, a widow of about seventy-five; another with Tom, who was closer to my age, then about twenty-four.

Joan’s home, a three-room tiny house before tiny houses were invented, hosted me for leftover prepackaged Meals on Wheels she received from a local agency due to her age and income level. In the west Texas summer heat, which often loomed over 100 degrees, a water-cooler window unit lowered the temperature inside the house to just above bearable.

In the back of her house, her garden thrived in the heat as tomatoes and okra soaked in the relentless rays of the Texas sun.

Our conversations ranged from discussing the weather, her deceased and once-abusive husband, and her efforts to avoid a widower now pursuing her. In time, we shared our common journey of finding home. We sat in her tiny house, she with her swollen legs propped up in a recliner, me sipping cold water as I sat on the worn, lumpy, brown, blanket-covered couch.

If she got to talking too much about trouble in her life, she would pause and say, “Enough about me. Tell me about your parents? Am I remembering right, both you and your father deal with depression just like me? Your mom is on her own now, like me?”

She would collect my responses and then add, “Would you like a tomato or some okra from the garden? I have more than I can use.” And, “Oh, and what do you think of this dress?”

Joan’s slightly hunched back and her sometimes swollen legs, combined with her battles with depression, did not keep her from tossing her matted gray hair back in a moment of laughter. Her blue-gray eyes, framed by prune-like creases from years of hard living, would sparkle.

“Can you believe that the widower wants to date me?”

Her laughter exploded in short, uncontrollable bursts like a tea kettle suddenly singing out when it hit the boiling point.

We never went to the laundromat together, but I believe she would have loved Elfin Princess with her fairy-tale dress. I believe she would have dressed like the princess as a child. I too can see her shaking her head in disbelief when overhearing Laundromat Guy’s rants.

Her laughter exploded in short, uncontrollable bursts like a tea kettle suddenly singing out when it hit the boiling point.

“I can not believe his language and look at the long, gray hair, but he is kinda cute. I wonder how old he is? Did you notice he wobbles when he walks?”

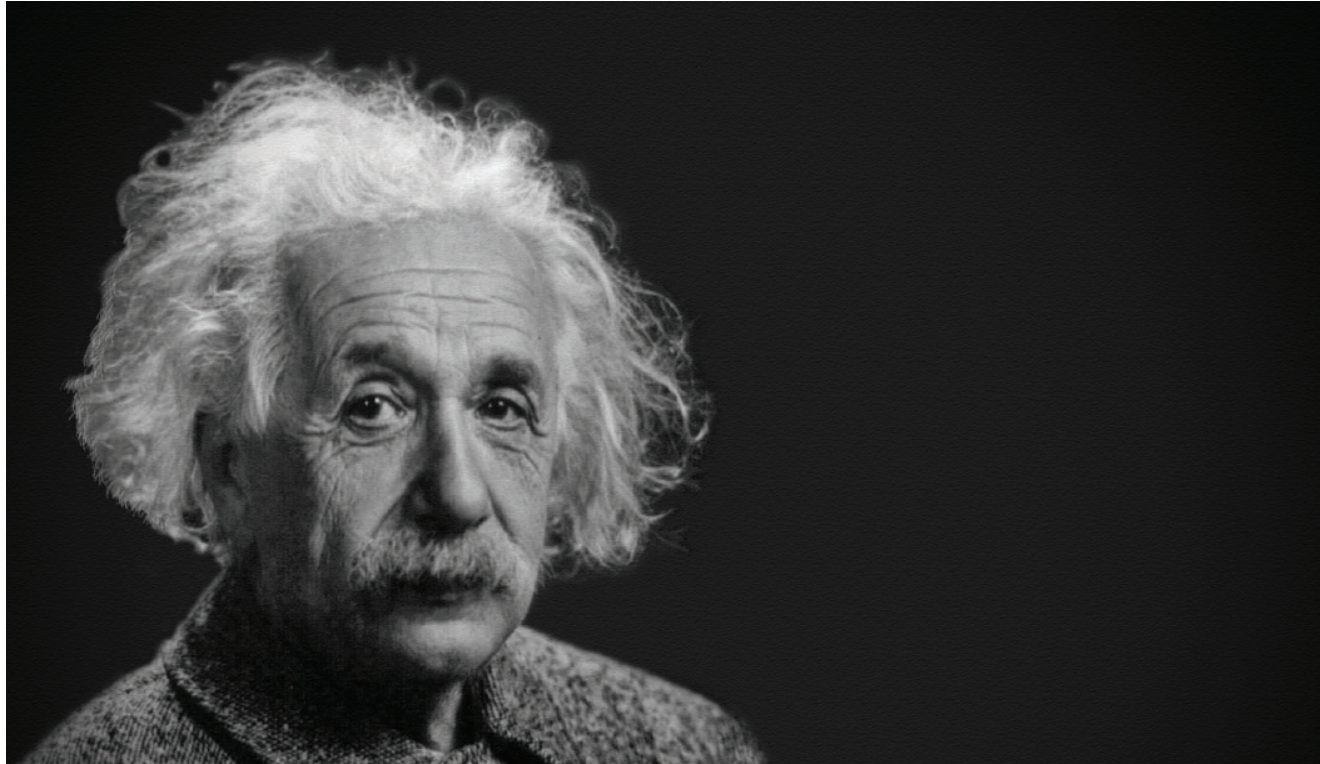
I never went to a laundromat with Joan, but Tom and I did most every week. The alternative laundry option was a washer or two in the basement of the three-story dormitory. As a result of our weekly time together, Tom became an Abilene friend who taught me much about asking questions and finding home.

Tom and I developed a weekly routine of meeting up to do laundry and then have dinner. Tom, a painter by trade, and I, a full-time student working three part-time jobs, would spend a long hour at the laundromat each week, moving clothes from washer to dryer to our baskets and then to his house for dinner.

Tom wore a slightly curly, short mess of medium-brown hair, and on work days, donned a shirt with a smattering of white paint. He easily broke out in a toothy grin despite the brokenness in his life. He was no longer connected to parents, and now lived with an aunt and uncle.

Tom taught me much about being real. As our loads went through wash and rinse cycles, Tom asked big questions. “How do I know what God





wants for me?” “How can I really know God even exists?” “What about [my girlfriend] Samantha? Should we get married?” “How am I to deal with my dad’s addiction?” He would then listen to my own questions about home, family, and life direction, as well as my struggles in the past and present with my family broken by mental illness.

After the dryers tossed us out of the laundromat with clean clothes and no real answers to hard questions, we would dine together in his garage apartment over our favorites: rice and black beans and cabbage and chocolate mint ice cream. Not all mixed together, I might add.

Memories of those West Texas days with Joan and Tom had been buried by the passing of thirty years. After graduating, I moved from Abilene to Wisconsin to Thailand to Kansas before making my way to Arkansas. You might say I was searching for home then, looking for answers to questions about finding home before I had even asked the question.

While a few letters were exchanged with Joan and Tom, the 1980s were well before the world of cell phones and free long-distance calls. I soon lost contact with both Joan and Tom. Nothing had prompted a return to that season in my life until unexpected events at this Wheaton laundromat.

My daughter Abby and I had made the ten-hour road trip from Little Rock to a summer music camp on the campus of Wheaton College in Illinois. It was just before 8 a.m., near the middle of the week of our

stay. With laundry in plastic sacks in the back seat, I dropped her off with a violin case in hand. Her job? Make music. My job? Do laundry. Her morning was planned and predictable. My morning proved to be just the opposite.

Before I stepped out of my car with my plastic grocery bags stuffed with laundry, I never imagined the world would take me back to my Abilene memories of Joan and Tom. Nor did I anticipate that stepping inside this laundry space would send me off to other times, places far beyond Joan and Tom.

Indeed, this laundromat space, a vortex of slow down and speed up, of slow tumble and high spin, created a time-space portal between Elfin Princess and Laundromat Guy with Saint Thomas Aquinas and Einstein.

Perhaps it was the hair worn by Laundromat Guy—reminiscent of Einstein’s classic disheveled look, with too much going on in the mind to care about hair.

And to also be sent back to the thirteenth century? Sent without warning to find Thomas Aquinas? A thirteenth-century Italian-Dominican friar, somewhat bald philosopher, and theologian.

Their contrasting hairstyles alone suggested I would be in trouble: one with hair out of control and the other with too much control.

Both, exploring questions of time, space, and eternity—questions too big for mere mortals. Einstein and Aquinas, bordering on lives as

immortals; I, a mere mortal. Thus, in sharp contrast, like Icarus, knew my wings of wax would melt if I dared to fly with them. Yet, even without a desire to fly, this time-space portal pulled me into their worlds with the gravitational pull of a black hole.

Curse words. Perhaps that is where it began or should have ended. If I had fled then, you would not be reading this story. I would have found a different laundromat. The curse words were heard just after I pulled my bronze Subaru into a slot near the front door of the laundromat in Wheaton. As I opened the car door, a string of curse words jarred my ears.

The front door of the laundromat stood open in the cool, early summer morning. I could see the source of the curse words through the laundromat windows. Tall, lean, and with gray hair in Einstein fashion falling loosely over his ears and neck, Laundromat Guy sported a matching gray mustache and goatee. Through the open front door, his expletives insulted my ears as he called on God to damn some unseen frustration or person or perhaps devil. I took a breath as I closed my car door and spoke to myself.

You could find another place to do laundry, I thought. You were looking forward to a quiet space to read and write. I sighed. Leaving will take more time than you want to take and perhaps, perhaps his loud cursing will be short-lived.

I then added a prayer that I only later recalled

near the end of my time in the laundromat.

My plan had been to work in the midst of the quiet hum of machines. I was wrong both about the quiet and the work that had to be done, as well as how that prayer may be answered.

As I entered, Laundromat Guy made it clear that he was frustrated over more than one issue in life. In the coming minutes, he would let God know about problems with his cell phone, one of the laundry machines, and more that I could not follow. I wonder now how God responded to the injunctions from angry Laundromat Guys, or from anyone for that matter who pray-curses. I wonder if after hearing a request to damn a technical glitch or move a traffic jam, some universal power or God ever surprises the one making the request with a quick fix. I imagine that moment would feel amazing.

As I listened to his rant and wondered if I had made the right decision to stay at this laundromat, I wondered if Laundromat Guy ever thought about the source of his anger or the merits of calling God’s wrath down on some machine or person. Hearing his curses, I was slow to see what we shared in common. But a newcomer to the laundromat soon changed everything.

I place my green water bottle on the floor at the end of the row of gray plastic chairs. My backpack sits next to me. I open a book to read but fail to get more than one sentence down the page when Elfin



Princess in her ballroom clothes, along with her sister and mother, enter. Her attire, her offer of gum to her mom, her joy at watching another gumball drop down, cause me to smile.

Inside my heart and mind, an unexpected shift happens: a shift away from my agenda of working in a quiet place to that of remembering this moment. I put my book aside, dig into my backpack, and find my journal in order to write, to listen, to see, to attempt to be open. Before the entries were over, I found myself taking a few photographs to aid my word pictures of this unanticipated journey.

Laundromat Guy, with gray Einstein hair waving and flip-flops clapping on the tile floor, walks past. He now stands in front of the dryers some fifteen feet from me. His cell phone has finally connected. Perhaps the cursing worked. He wears a headset as if at work at a phone bank serving customers. Yet, unlike in a phone bank where others have headsets on as well, myself and anyone passing by will unavoidably hear one side of this conversation.

“Hey, I hope this is a good time to catch you.”

“Well, I got a few things in the works. I put in a bid on one job and have another one I am hoping for.”

“Let’s see if we can find time for dinner or something.”

He turns his head the other direction and so now, rather than full phrases, I only catch snippets. A few words that prompt questions. Mention is made of a grandchild. I wonder where the child lives, if they are together often, or if they even have a relationship.

The snippets at the end of the conversation do not answer my questions. I continue to wonder if they are on good terms? Does he curse this grandchild when he is angry, the same as the tech issues? My mind moves to a change happening just across from me.

One of the two washers, the ones being used by Elfin Princess’s family, shifts to high-speed rinse mode. White soapy foam smatters the glass door, the clothes blur to an indistinct hue. Next to the washer at high speed is one still in slow-wash mode, with the oranges, reds, grays, blues, and pinks revealing themselves in kaleidoscope fashion.

These two washers build a time machine taking

me to the words and ideas of an ancient writer, Thomas Aquinas. His prolific writing from the early Middle Ages had recently been introduced to me by my daughter and son. I knew that his impact on modern political, philosophical, literary, and theological thinking was immense, and I invited his ideas to make sense of this moment.

Saint Thomas noticed and held to the idea of self-evident truths. In his notion of moderate realism, Aquinas noted that individual distinctives do not negate universals such as our shared humanity. I can hear the ancient thinker as the washers spin.

“Listen now, in slow mode. See how the uniqueness of each color is present. So also, pay attention to how the uniqueness of each person, Joan and Tom and Laundromat Guy and Elfin Princess, is also present. Yet, all blurs in high-speed mode, all can seem to be the same, atoms we all share, our immense universe, all blurred by time and space. The differences seem to exist no longer, but at the same time, they do. Can’t you see that both statements are true? Each tells a different story, both true.”

Aquinas taps me on the shoulder as I watch the clothes spin. He must understand my tendency to be distracted.

“Watch. Listen. Even in the blur mode, the distinctives are present.”

My mind shifts from the washer and Aquinas to faces and places.

Joan’s dismay over being pursued by a widower. Her seeking affirmation about the beauty of her dress. Tom’s toothy grin as he downs beans, rice, and Brussels sprouts, and shares his wounded questions with me. Elfin Princess waiting in anticipation for the jawbreaker to make its way down the spiral runway, twirling as she imagines a ballroom dance in sparkling dresses and shoes. The emotional outbursts of Laundromat Guy and the gentle smile of a laundry aid: all present and real.

“Okay, I think I get it, Thomas. May I call you Thomas? Colors bright and blurred, both universal, all alike, and yet distinctively unique.”

Thomas nods in affirmation.

Laundromat Guy, still with his headset on, reports to his friend.

“About five minutes on this load, perhaps



another twenty on the towels. We will work the time out later. Good to talk to you. Bye now.”

My mind turns to think about Tom and our hours over laundry and dinner: times of friendship on this journey called life, a journey of finding home. I think too about my visits with Joan: moments of shared tears over brokenness in our families, our lives. Then, before my laundromat time was over, I recalled times in my not too distant past when cursing was my response to frustrations that echoed my buried hurts and angers and disappointments.

I smile a crooked, confession-like smile as Aquinas gently confronts my temptation to judge the heart of Laundromat Guy.

Laundromat Guy walks back my way with a slight shuffle to his walk—a stiff knee causes a wobble in his gait. Elfin Princess, along with her sister and mother, have left while their clothes dry. I am still sitting in my gray plastic chair, with the now dry beige floor beneath my summertime sandals.

I gaze back at the washing machines trying to hear more from Saint Thomas. The once high-speed washer has stopped and shifted to slow mode in a final rinse cycle; the other is now in a fast-spin cycle. Distinct colors now seen in one, but blurred in the other. I listen. Thomas whispers. I strain my eyes, my ears—to see, to hear.

Laundromat Guy glances down at me. I glance up and then quickly back at my notes. Laundromat Guy speaks. Yes, he says something. He is not on the phone. *Was he talking to me?* Perhaps yes, a passing comment to me; perhaps to himself and to the God he had earlier asked to damn his cell phone and more. Seven tiny big words fall from his lips.

Image 6: Weeble

Seven distinctive universal words.

“Weebles wobble, but they don’t fall down.”

Yes, you heard right. I did not expect those words either.

Seven simple words.

Words quoted from a marketing tagline about a tiny toy wooden doll with a rounded bottom such that a Weeble would always wobble, but never fall. Perhaps Laundromat Guy is just commenting on his gait, on the chance that I notice the shuffle: the wobble-like movements that cause his Einstein gray hair to flip-flop with his sandals.

Laundromat Guy then sings a few lines of a song. I do not catch all the words. I wonder if, in contrast to his earlier cursing, this song covers or admits to an awareness of his wobble walk and of a nascent insight to the wobble reflected in his cursing.

His words move me into a slow-rinse cycle. I wonder if together we can learn to see how curse words may at times reflect deeper hurts, disappointments, and anger. Along with Laundromat Guy, I am learning that technology or traffic is not the issue, but rather my reaction to situations that seem out of control, spinning too fast. I too wonder if he realizes that we are

not always Weebles: We do fall down. He has fallen. I have fallen. Our legs are not rounded at the bottom like Weebles.

As he moves past me, I do not tell him that his curse words caused me to almost leave, and then pray, when I left my car on the way inside. Yes, I confess that I prayed for him, for me. I know. I know. Such a confession may seem odd, even foreign. Yet, this urge to pray, even for strangers, began decades back.

Somewhere back in time, just before and then eventually during my days with Joan and Tom, I drew the conclusion that all words matter, even prayer words. In alignment with Thomas



Aquinas and his notion of self-evident truths, God is the first mover—the foundational cause and initiator of change in the universe.

As such, he is the source of unity and distinctiveness and commonalities. As first mover, God is also the cause and initiator of the low- and high-speed times.

Regardless of my assumptions about a first mover, I realized I have the freedom to use words to bless and curse, to create relationships and connections, and to destroy them. I too began to accept that, at times, I have been blind to the reality that my words matter. Even my secret words, hidden from others, matter.

In the mystery and wonder of words, I began to accept that words spoken in prayer matter in some way beyond my full comprehension. Prayer words shape, calm, and focus my attention. They can also move me through and past my frustration and anger to see my own heart and confirm a desire to focus on being loving and responsive, not reactive. Yet, there is more to prayer than self-change.

One friend, who is not always so sure about prayer or God, shares an unexpected phrase: “Positive words to the universe sure can’t hurt.”

I ask him what he means by the universe.

“Just the universe,” he replied in an oblique fashion.

I smile, knowing we share in common a sense of mystery about words. I wonder even now if we share a notion of the universe that might be closer to my own than either of us realize.

Perhaps I will ask him, “Does ‘just the universe’ imply the possibility of a personal, present, able and willing to listen and respond Universe?”

So, what prayer words were spoken when I hesitated to enter the laundromat due to the curses being spoken? Here is a paraphrase of those silent words prompted by Laundromat Guy’s outburst.

“May you, may we both know peace and an awareness of how love is bigger than any frustration or setback.”

Even as I write this now decades-old prayer on my computer screen, I think to myself, *Were these words more about my own frustration, my own reaction than his? Perhaps both? Was this prayer more like a meditative pause for me to listen to and not run from the moment?*

If so, the words worked in ways I did not imagine.

My mind leaves Laundromat Guy and races back in time to moments of frustration before my Abilene days, as well as a more recent time. In recalling both moments, I find myself getting to know Laundromat Guy and Thomas Aquinas better.

About four years before Abilene, I commuted thirty minutes to a local college. Before my Meals on

Wheels lunches with Joan or my laundromat days with Tom, I drove from Fort Worth to Arlington, Texas, down I-30. I had an 8 a.m. university class which proved to be a source of cursing on one particular day. Yes, cursing. I can still hear my rant at slow-moving traffic and

a long red light as they conspired to make me late to class.

Pause. Let the washer shift to slow mode. I need the slow mode to see all the colors, even the not-so-clean clothes. Isn’t the slow mode about coming clean? To let water and soap separate the dirt from the clothing? To let water and word cleanse my own heart? To see the distinctiveness we share in common? The light and the dark?

I write now, looking back at more than forty years ago, and still feel the pain of the moment. I had been, before this outburst on my way to class, on a journey to have more control over words, over my anger. I knew, at some level, cursing was not the issue but rather, what was beneath the cursing. On that day, with a red light igniting me, I failed. As curse words fell from my lips, from my heart, somehow, somehow, I hit a wall that turned cursing into confession. At that moment, I was given a gift as confessional words tumbled out of me, slowing my heart.

“I am tired. Too tired. I could and should have left home earlier to allow for traffic. I know other drivers are not the real problem. The light is not the

“I write now, looking back at more than forty years ago, and still feel the pain of the moment.”

problem. I feel like I am failing, falling behind. I am working sixty hours a week and not getting to bed until after midnight. At times, caring for Dad with his mental illness is just too much. I know I need more rest. But right now, I just don't know what to do."

As these words tumbled from my heart, I received a gift. I took a slowdown breath, out of the high-spin mode. I took a step of joining the human race, a step toward accepting our shared journey of finding home. A journey made possible when I accept the

wobbles and the need for tumble-down moments.

Spin forward almost forty years. A few days before I met the Elfin Princess and Laundromat Guy, Abby and I were on our way to Wheaton. I am navigating yet another traffic delay, this time due to nighttime road construction. My grip on the steering wheel tightens. I hunch forward as bright construction lights make it hard to see an exit. I leave the road between a row of traffic cones, only to find that I am on asphalt not yet meant for vehicles. A worker in a yellow jacket waves a flag and guides me



back to the freeway.

I can feel the tension in me rising; my neck and back muscles tighten. Somehow, I know my daughter is feeling my stress, which adds to my own. Another stressor then enters my mind as my blurry eyes try to focus.

I realize we will be late, which means keeping our host up late. In Wheaton, less than an hour from Chicago, in a home we have never visited, our

host waits for us. We have never met our host, but she has opened her home for us to sublet a couple of rooms for the week. I do not want to keep her up late. I am letting her down, too. I am angered by the construction and at myself. No curse words erupt, just a growing pain in my heart and gut.

I finally let out a sigh, a prayer, and then share my heart with Abby.

"I know you are feeling my frustration. I am

sorry. I am feeling bad that I did not have us leave earlier. I feel bad that we might be keeping our host up late."

Abby responds, "It will be okay. She will understand."

She texts our host to let her know of the delays. In just a matter of seconds, Abby speaks up. I can hear her voice now, calling me to calm, to breathe, to rest, to leave the high-spin mode.

"Dad, it's not a problem. She said she will still be up."

I take a breath. I slow down and shift out of high-spin mode. I see the colors again. I see them coming clean.

And so yes, I prayed for Laundromat Guy, who is also me.

I do not grasp the mystery of what happens when any of us speak words, not just to but for others. I do get that words can move me and others out of the high-spin mode, so we can again see the colors and the truth of our common condition.

Perhaps such words to others and in both spoken and unspoken prayers are about accepting what is true: a sort of meditation on what is real. I fall down at times; we all do. Laundromat Guy's reference to wobbles also captures the truth I need to hear, that I too easily miss.

What do I need to hear?

In the Wheaton laundromat, Saint Aquinas rejoins the conversation and comes to aid me in translation and application.

"Listen closely," Thomas whispers from more than 800 years back in time. "Consider learning to see colors both in high- and low-spin mode. You want to find a path home, you say? Find it in the mystery of our shared journey in finding home.

"Home is to be found on a path we share. A path involving cursing and blessing, hope and despair, laughter and tears, life and death, the bitter and the sweet, and yes, the wobble. A path of listening, of being vulnerable, and of seeing beyond ourselves."

I am finally listening to Aquinas. I look outside myself again to the laundromat and to what I had taken for granted. I smile as I place my wet clothes into the dryers.

The dryers do their work. The slow, warm,

melodious tumbling of wet clothes once clumped together, now separate into clean reds, blues, grays, and purples. The barely audible music from the laundromat speakers keeps beat with the tumble. The now-visible colors of my clothes, like all of those in the laundromat, will soon be piled into a basket, folded, and placed in some drawer, on some shelf, to be worn by each of us, a covering of our bodies of muscle, sinew, bone, and heart.

Bodies that share life and death, united as beings who wobble, wondering if we can find a way to not fall down, and when we do, how to get back up or if someone will be there to help us, wondering how to live in light of our slow- and high-speed modes.

The slow spin of the dryer sends me now to a different person—a different and final guide from a more recent century, someone who could have been Laundromat Guy's twin. Albert Einstein, the one whose hair has made its way onto Laundromat Guy's head like a well-worn toupee, has something to say.

"The most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it is comprehensible."

Einstein's words echo our shared journey in space and time. In finding home, we circumnavigate a sun in a solar system among billions of systems that are light-years apart, spinning around the black hole of the Milky Way Galaxy amidst countless other galaxies.

All of us are going both slower and faster than we can imagine.

I wobble and at times fall. Yet even from my tiny, laundromat-sized spot on the blue planet far away from distant galaxies, I am learning to see. I see Laundromat Guy and Elfin Princess in this time and space moment. I see Joan and Tom and myself. I see into the past, to moments of stress and anger, and curses past and present. I take a breath. I see with gratitude all I would have missed had I not been open to what might come from walking into a laundromat with a prayer on my heart.

A vault to the heavens opens.

My imagination soars. I am in awe and wonder.

An ancient Hebrew writer, born thousands of years before Einstein, gives voice to this source of wonder, "When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon, the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of



them . . . that you care for them?”

This writer of this psalm did not know what we now understand about our Milky Way Galaxy. Our solar system is situated between dusty spiral arms that allow us to glimpse not only billions of other star systems spinning near us but also billions of other galaxies sending light, millions of light-years across time and space.

In this unique vista, we can catch the sight and sound of beginnings, echoes of the distant past. If our solar system had been situated nearer to the dusty spiral arms, we would be blind to the wonder and awe of the universe.

Instead, we can see further than we can imagine—beyond what my mind can comprehend. And in the seeing, I am reminded that Elfin Princess, Laundromat Guy, Joan and Tom, and myself are all made of the same stuff of stars.

I wonder if Laundromat Guy, with his Einstein hair, recalls what the scientist noted—that “the most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it is comprehensible.” I wonder, too, if Laundromat Guy has listened to Thomas Aquinas, whose words capture the possibility of seeing the spin and slow-cycles, the colors of the universals and distinctives. Words that paint the possibility of our cursing, our wobbles, our dancing princesses— can be transformed into blessing and to life and to finding home.

Elfin Princess, still dancing, along with her sister and mother return to the laundromat to pick up their dry clothes.

“Mom, I can’t find it,” I hear Elfin Princess’s pleading voice as I fold my now-dry clothes.

I do not hear what she has lost, but her mom soon says, “I found it.”

The threesome gather their dry clothes and depart.



Dr. Gerald Driskill

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His research focused on improving collaboration between congregations and nonprofits. In a previous life he taught at Assumption Business College in Bangkok. This essay and others grew from this and other far from home experiences ranging from Wisconsin to Haiti.

Writing these stories has deepened connections with his wife of thirty-three years, Angela, his son, Eli, and daughter Abby, as well as other family members, students, and friends.

