

## A heart broken open

When the teenager stepped into the pulpit, her IV pump slung over her shoulder, the congregation grew quiet.

by [Peter W. Marty](#) in the [June 2025](#) issue

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You never know what to expect when a church puts a group of teenagers in charge of leading worship. Any combination of fun, awkwardness, careful planning, microphone issues, proud parents, timidity about public speaking, and smiling eyes in the pews is possible. In the service I attended recently, I noticed the congregation growing particularly quiet when the fourth of five teen preachers climbed into the pulpit.

“My name is Eden Murphy, and I’m a senior at East High School. I’m going to try not to cry today about my journey that began a long time ago.” She then told of being born with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, a condition in which the walls of that amazing four-room house inside each of us (with genius architecture and intricate plumbing) become strangely thick and stiff. The small circular exit doors (better known as valves) cruelly constrict and rob the body of fresh, clean, joyous oxygen.

“I received my first heart transplant at age two,” said Eden. I later learned from her that this was a gift from a little boy who died from choking on a hamburger. This young woman deals with the realities of life and death every day. She knows the anguish of someone else having to die in order for her to live. Adding to her own family’s burden, one of her siblings has the same heart condition she has.

“A year and a half ago, I was placed back on the transplant list since this second-chance heart of mine has now failed,” she told the congregation. “The wait is agonizing. Each day feels like a grain of sand slipping away. My future hangs in the balance, totally dependent on a new heart. This journey is the hardest I’ve ever faced. My heart is ready to give up, but I am not.” She went on to quote Taylor Swift: “I cry a lot, but I’m so productive, it’s an art. / You know you’re good when you can even do it with a broken heart.”

In Eden’s case, her attitude toward life seems shaped more by what Parker Palmer describes as a heart that breaks open rather than one that breaks apart. She seems to know that when God says to the Hebrew people, “I will give you a new heart” (Ezek. 36:26, NIV), the promise has nothing to do with the muscle that moves 2,000 gallons of blood a day and beats, under good circumstances, 3 billion times in a lifespan. It’s rather that strong spiritual center that can transform us, that place where feeling and emotion, joy and sorrow, character and resolve all gain their footing. Eden leans into faith, crediting it with allowing her to open up and love life, make friends, appreciate amazing parents, and trust in hope.

“I believe in resurrection,” she declared. “Not just physically, but spiritually. I have to keep going, for I have no luxury of stopping. So, I press on in hope.”

Her IV pump, slung across her shoulder, accompanied her into the pulpit. “This keeps me alive,” she said of the cumbersome device. “But it also keeps me from so much: Dancing. Holding a job. Dreaming of college away from home. Being able to have a little independence from my mom. Wearing long-sleeved dresses.” The

pump's medicine literally powers her heart, meaning that she can't disconnect even to dress, shower, or sleep.

A famous line from Helen Keller—"The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched; they must be felt with the heart"—helps me understand Eden. When this teen's head spends too much energy manufacturing anxiety, fear, or fresh problems, she feels her way forward with her broken-open heart. I have a hunch it's also why she's determined to become a cardiologist. "I want to be a cardiologist who can say what none of my good doctors are able to say to me," she said: "I get it. I know exactly what you're feeling."