

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

**5th Sunday in Pentecost**  
**July 4, 2004**  
**Fr. Bill McGinty**

**"Our Faith Story"**

Last week we talked about the Old Testament and God's involvement in the lives of the people of Israel. We compared that great patchwork quilt of Old Testament stories to the story of our own lives and God's dialogue with each of us in the day to day patches of our own story.

At the Diocesan Convention last year the Convention called for all of us, individually and as parish communities, to share our faith story. Don Muller and others who proposed the motion did so because they believed that it is in the sharing of faith stories that the gospel is passed on to inspire others. In a sense, a faith story is the gospel story lived and touching our lives, sewing us into the fabric of God's plan of salvation.

It is difficult in the business of the everyday to identify that interaction between ourselves and God. It is only when we look back through time and across the years that God's involvement in our journey becomes apparent and clear. And if God is the director of our faith story, then prayer is the song that accompanies it.

In 1955 I had a very settled life. We lived in a quiet pretty town in a large house. Christmas had come and gone and all of us rug rats had returned to school in the New Year. After the first week of school, I returned home one day at 4:30 to find two ambulance men carrying my mother, Pegg, down the stairs on a stretcher. I cannot remember seeing her face; all I can recall is the bright red blanket that they had placed over her. Two weeks later she died. Uncles and aunts, and her mother flew in to be with the family. A week later we buried her in the hill above her home town in Ireland. I wasn't supposed to even be at the funeral, but I got all dressed up in my new coat and was allowed to go at the last minute. All of us kids were in one car. Everyone wore black and it rained; a heavy relentless rain. Halfway to the cemetery we saw a cousin, Rita, returning to work after her lunch break. She had been our babysitter for years and she climbed into the car, unaware that our mother had died. At the graveside the crowd of black silhouettes seemed to huddle against the wind and rain. I wasn't allowed out of the car, so I could only look from a distance. That image of black silhouettes against the skyline stayed with me for the rest of my life.

In 1980, on the 28th of June, almost the same group of people, maybe as many as two hundred of them, gathered at my college chapel on another hill in England. My father, six sisters, my brother, aunts, my mother's sisters, nieces and nephews were all there. It was the day of my ordination. Twenty-five years had passed, but in all that time I seemed to be aware the Pegg had walked that journey with me. On that day so many people mentioned her name, and on that day I realized what a big part of my faith story she had been. Through school days and many an exam, to leaving home for boarding school at twelve, she had been with me. She had been my guardian angel. She found me jobs, paid bills, and somehow put me through college. Today, Pegg has 16 grandchildren, 17 great-

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector  
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337  
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383

# Church of the Good Shepherd

and

## St. John the Evangelist

grandchildren, and one great-great-grandchild. Her faith story was so short, dying at 37, but the story she wrote on the pages of her life continue to have a ripple effect on the rest of us and our world.

Today, look back and see your own faith story. Take some time to reflect on it. Look at the road you have traveled and what influenced the important decisions of your life. There was a time when you had a dream, or maybe several dreams. Did they come about? Are you still striving after them? Did other people impact your faith story too, and are you indebted to them because your faith story and theirs touched at some point? Have you ever considered writing your faith story down, or did you think it too unimportant?

Pegg would have laughed at the idea that anyone would write her story down. She was a little girl who grew up under the shadow of a cathedral. She crossed the road to attend the cathedral school. At sixteen, her mother bought her a convenience store because she believed she was too frail to go out to work.

If you write your faith story down, you will be surprised at the moments when a lighthouse appeared in your story. They appear at a moment of crisis or decision. You may have been at a crossroad in your life, and then suddenly there is a person, a guide, an advisor, someone who helps you. I call them a lighthouse. They seem to have the ability to move you along to the next phase of your life. You may think of them as your friend, or a relative, but looking back, you can now recall that really they were only crossing your path for a very short time. In fact, your meeting was almost like a coincidence. Except, of course, that we Christians don't believe in that; we believe that our God placed them there just as God placed me here and you here, in this place and in this time, for however long or short that may be.

Today, our faith stories have crossed and touched. Because we are a church, the ripple affect of that interaction may go on for many years. In the faith story of this parish, you are desperately important to God's plan of salvation for this place and the people of this area. God did not place you here because you needed a church; God placed you here because he needed you.

He needed you because your faith story has grown the talent and ability to impact the faith story of this church and parish now, here and with these people! Today you have a vocation, a calling, and a mission.

Each of you is called to be disciple, apostle, priest, and preacher in this place because God has placed your story right here where so many stories converge. Are you ready to be a lighthouse? Are you ready to be an apostle of the gospel to others? You are a priest because you share in this Eucharist, and you share in the priesthood of Christ. That in itself makes you an apostle – one who serves!

Your lighthouses, the people that you can look back on in your faith story, served before you. In many ways, you are only continuing their way of serving the gospel. Was one of

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector  
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337  
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383

# Church of the Good Shepherd

and

## St. John the Evangelist

your lighthouses a parent too? Do you not see the beauty in the idea that your parents' life, his or her service of the gospel did not end with death; it continues through you? Your faith story and theirs has dovetailed and in all you now do and will do, the star of their salvation gets brighter.

Today, if there are dreams we need to resurrect, let us resurrect them. If there are enthusiasms we had for the church, in the past, which have slowed or lapsed, let us re-new them. We are involved in something wonderful here in Milford. I can feel it! God is at work and somehow, despite our many shortcomings, God wants us to be a part of this moment in his plan of salvation. So today let us re-new our commitment, fill ourselves with the joy of the Spirit and turn once more to those whose strength and love brought our faith story to this moment in time. Let us ask them to give us the faith to build on to the great faith story of our parish.

In 1981, a year after ordination, I returned to my mother's hometown to do a funeral. As we stood in the cemetery on that hill high above the town, a woman, a total stranger came up to me. I was still dressed in my vestments. She looked at me and said, "if only Peggy could see you now."

Looking across the hillside to where her grave lay, I replied "But I think she can!"

Amen +

The Rev. William J. McGinty, Rector  
110 West Catharine Street, Milford, Pennsylvania 18337  
Phone: (570) 296-8123 ♦ Fax: (570) 296-4383