

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

4th Sunday of Pentecost

June 27, 2004

Fr. Bill McGinty

"A Coat of Many Colors"

Dolly Parton has a song she wrote herself called "A Coat of Many Colors." It tells the story of her childhood in West Virginia when her mother made her a coat from off-cuts and scraps she saved as a seamstress. Although her coat was made of scraps and many colors, Dolly loved it from the start. When she went to school the other children teased her and made fun of her coat because they recognized her poor origins and background. Years later Dolly told audiences that the teasing never stopped her from wearing the coat, and instead made her prouder still of her mother and her efforts in that little old house in the West Virginia hills. Recently, Dolly repeated this story in a documentary for biography. She had gone back and bought her parents' old house and renovated it. Now she goes there for two weeks a year just to pray - a sort of spiritual renewal or retreat; she finds it brings her back in touch with her roots and with God.

As nice a story as that is, it is not the reason why I mention it to you today. The reason I mention "A Coat of Many Colors" to you is that every time I hear that song I think of the Old Testament!

You see in 1968 I was studying scripture at college and one of the first books I read on the Old Testament was "The Living World of the Old Testament" by Bernard Anderson, an American Scholar. One of the first things Anderson wants to convince you of is that the Old Testament is not one book, but many books! And within those books are many stories, thousands and thousands of stories, told and retold - perhaps on long journeys, or while working in the fields or around campfires at night. For 1400 years Hebrew Jewish people repeated and retold their stories till at least around the year 1000 BC. They began to write them down. What emerged was a patchwork quilt of story, history, song, legend, saga - literature and prayer. It was spun and woven in such a way, that it came alive and was lived and relived in the lives of Hebrew people who saw, and heard in it God's voice speaking to them and God's revelation being daily written on their hearts! The Old Testament is the lived daily experiences of a people who believed that God lived among them and affected all they did, said and dreamed.

If you waited outside most churches 100 years ago and asked exiting churchgoers the question "Who wrote the Old Testament?" they would have told you, without hesitation, "Moses wrote the Old Testament."

We smile at such a simplistic answer today because we know that poor Moses was long dead before one word was written on paper. The truth, of course, is so magical, so wonderful, so complex, and so brilliantly executed that we Christians see in it the hand of the Holy Spirit. How else could you take the stories of millions of voices, the experience and history of hundreds of generations and diversity of four great Jewish schools of learning and produce a work that is so uniform in its tale of God and His Salvation, man and his ultimate destiny.

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The patchwork quilt, that Anderson speaks of, where each patch and its story comes alive in the reader's mind, speaks to us not of an old tired Book, but of a God who continuously speaks to us, both in these words, which we need to read on a daily basis, and in the patchwork story – that is our own lives.

Close your eyes and reflect back on your own life! Can you see the patches in your story that belonged to your grandmother, or your old teacher? Do you remember your best school friend or the person who introduced you to your partner? Can you look back and see your life as a journey, and can you see God guiding your way? Maybe not with angels or road signs, but certainly with friends, family, and wise people He placed in your way!

If you can look back like this and see God in your life, then maybe today you will also close your eyes and see God in your life today. If you are a Christian you have to have God in your life and you have to be able to see him! Right?!

You see, “God does not live in Heaven!” – He lives down here, He lives amongst us. It was not me who first said that – it was Bishop Robinson, an Anglican bishop in England in 1968. He wrote it in a book entitled, “Honest to God.”

He said, “God is not out there beyond the stars! And He certainly is not up there!” “God,” said Robinson, “cannot be anywhere unless he is first right here in our midst!”

And that is what links the patchwork quilt of the history and story of the Old Testament – with the history and story of Beth Grosso, or Nancy Holleran, Sandy Beecher, or Richard Rogers! When God stitches together the stories and patches of our lives, he sews himself into the very fabric of our day. He intertwines his story with ours to bring about the ending that he wants.

In a word: God cannot keep his nose out of our business or our affairs! He is a “busy body God” who is into everything and refuses to shut up. He will wake you up in the night with an idea – He will tweek your interest with an unusual happening. God will make your best-laid plans go awry! He will frustrate you just when you thought you had all your ducks in a row! He will teach you with the gentle words of a child or the smiling face of your dying mother! God will find you that job when the Internet and the newspapers have failed you. He will place you in the path of despair when someone tells you they are suicidal.

For our God there are no little stories or little people. Little is what we do to God when we exclude him from our lives and believe that we can solve all the problems, come up with all the solutions, and answer all the questions.

A wise man once wrote, “all prayer begins with humility because God is God and we are merely his creatures!” Does that mean if we do not pray we are not humble? Or does it just mean we have a magical quilt that we never use?

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“Our God is a chattering God!” the old man told his grandson. “But Grandpa, I can’t hear him!” said the little boy. “When does God speak?”

God is speaking to you all the time said the old man. Can you hear that blue jay singing in the tree? Or that butterfly flit across the garden? The sun will shine today – grass will grow – children will squeal and laugh and play. It’s all God saying something. And when you grow up He’ll say more important stuff to you like “take the pain,” “feed my sheep,” “bring love and peace to this person,” “reach out and touch that life.”

The simple truth is God needs us! He doesn’t just need us; He wants us! Maybe he had nowhere else to go. Have you ever thought of that? Maybe God is homeless. Maybe he needs a home and he chooses to dwell with us. A creator needs his creation. Creation is God’s way of painting us into his life and if your God wants you in his life, do not exclude him from yours.

Homework:

This week select and read one Psalm. Read it slow. Read it again. Dedicate it to God. Say: God this one is for you. Thank you for letting me into your life. Remain always in my life. Patch me together that the quilt of love you sew may warm the hearts of others.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus says “Foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no where to lay His head. It is **our** “yes” to Christ’s command “come follow me” that He waits to hear! Let me make that yes a resounding yes. Let us not tire and not hesitate because we **are** on a mission from God. The work that we do is God’s work and you know he will give us no peace till it is accomplished.

“Let us make room for God that he may room with us.”

Amen +

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