

Church of the Good Shepherd
and
St. John the Evangelist

13 Pentecost
September 3, 2006
Fr. Bill McGinty

“The Shoes of the Gospel!”

As we gather to celebrate our Eucharist we welcome Julia Beecher Jacobus and her family, as they welcome her and present her today for Baptism. Through this sacrament, she is initiated into the family of God and the Christian Community. Anytime we celebrate new life is special, but I think it becomes most special the older we become. For then we really begin to appreciate the gift that children bring.

I have been thinking a lot this week about story. It plays an enormous part in our lives. Whether we are reading the newspaper, a book or watching a movie, we are all interested in story. We all wish to know the answer to the question: “What happens next?”

Its every newspaperman’s favorite question: “What’s the story?” So you won’t be surprised then to learn just where newspapers began in England in the early seventeenth century. They began in the coffee shops and public houses of Fleet St, where the owners circulated a new sheet to keep lorded gentlemen up with news, stories and events in London that week.

As ever curious, I decided to look up what news and stories were circulating in the London of 1606, exactly four hundred years ago. This is what I found:

In 1606 “Severe storm cause widespread damage in Scotland”

 “Torrential rain causes flooding n Somerset.”

 “King James orders a new flag to be created combining the crosses of St Andrew and St George of England and Scotland to be known as the Union flag.”

 “In London the Jesuit Garnett was executed for trying to blow up the House of Parliament.”

 “More than 100 people set out from England to build a new town in Virginia. It is to be called Jamestown in honor of his majesty the King.”

Or this:

 “Since King James arrived from Scotland last year, he has brought a new game with him the Scots call ‘golf.’ The purpose seems to be to

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hit a small ball with a stick and then chase after it. The general view seems to be that it will not catch on.”

“An authorized version of the Bible is to be published to be called the King James.”

“The Book of Common Prayer is to be translated into Gaelic, if they can find any Irish who can read or write.”

So you can see that not too much has changed, when it comes to the stories that interest people. Birth, death, marriage, government, new inventions, weather and war filled the pages of 17th century news sheets just as they do our papers today.

When we pause to think of our own life as story, we are faced with the same questions: “Where are we going? What happens next? How is this going to end?”

Quantum physics tells us today that our story is not predetermined or set, but that what goes on in our head, our thoughts, vision, dreams and resolve, can so alter that story, that we become the authors of our own destiny.

In today’s scripture readings the writers of the Book of Deuteronomy have the same lesson to teach the people of Israel. “Do not,” they say, “allow your lives to be determined by other people; rather create your own lives by observing the protections we have put in place so that you live in freedom. Those protections are your laws. Keep them and you will live in wisdom and your children’s children will reap the benefits.”

As we prepare to baptize Julia today the words of the ancient ceremony are very much about passing on the wisdom and values that as a family we have learned from the past.

In the Book of I Samuel, we read that “Eli was a noble and holy man, with a great reverence for God and his law.” In every way he sought to serve God by being a servant to his people, seeking to minister to their every need.

The great sadness of Eli the prophet’s life is found in the very next line of I Samuel. “Yet although Eli loved God and served his people as a good and holy man, his sons did not walk in his ways.”

Today’s Baptismal Rite inspires us to think that Julia Beecher Jacobus’ story will be build on the values and wisdom of those who went before her who left to her a legacy of service, love and human kindness. This is why we gather and pray today, that God our heavenly father will send his Spirit to guide and protect this child long after we have run our course.

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The 2nd reading today, from Paul writing to the Ephesians, could have been written for this baptismal occasion. Would that all our own stories were prefaced by these words like a “Declaration of Independence” for our lives.

“Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist; and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet, put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the Gospel of peace. With all of these take the shield of Faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.”

And that is the way we feel when it comes to our children, is it not? The belt of truth, the shoes of the Gospel, the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit, these are the gifts we would bestow on little Julia today. These are the gifts we would leave, before contented, we depart into that “Good night.”

Yet, to leave those gifts we know in our hearts’ heart that they must have found a place in our lives first.

We too, have to have fastened on that belt of truth first, before we can raise it up as important to our children as a community. The words of Jesus have to be the shoes on our feet that guide our steps along his way. The shield of faith can not lay left dusty in the store room of our life, where our children will never find it. The sword of the Spirit must cut our way through the jungle of life and point us to what is truly important.

Israel as a nation was forever being reminded by prophets and Old Testament writers to walk in the ways of her ancestors, that in turn her children might walk in her ways.

Coded and written into the stories of the great heroes in the Old Testament is the whole idea that we can relive the past by adhering to its values. In the Baptismal Ceremony we have much the same idea. Just as Israel crossed the waters of the Red Sea to begin a new life free from slavery, so the water of Baptism crosses us over to belong to Christ’s Kingdom.

Baptism in a very great sense is a celebration of faith and family. We celebrate today the gift of this new life and at the same time we remind ourselves that we have our own faith story to take care of. We too must walk in the shoes of the Gospel wherever that might lead us.

Two thousand years ago Jesus approached men and women on the shores of the Sea of Galilee and said: “Follow me.” Two thousand years later men and women are still

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responding to that invitation. It does not mean to leave everything and embrace a life of hardship and ministry. It means to become all that you can be as a human person. Housewife, mother, doctor, parent, partner, friend, Jesus' invitation is an invitation to be fully human. When you and I meet someone like that we fall in love with them, because they touch a place in us that seeks the divine.

Today in baptizing Julia her parents call upon her God to fulfill in her the wonder of Creation that her story may shine long into the future.

In renewing our own Baptism vows today we join Julia in once again hearing Christ's words: "Follow me."

It is an invitation to come and see. Come and see the next phase in God's plan for us, the next stage in our Faith Story. The next steps we can take in the shoes of the Gospel.

Amen+