

Sunday, March 4, 2007

This novel, *The Law of Dreams*, chronicles the life of a 15 year old named Fergus who is driven from his home in Ireland by the famine of 1846. He eventually ends up on a sailing ship bound for America. There is a hierarchy on the ship – the captain, the officers, the sailors, the passengers in cabins and the passengers crammed together down below deck in the hold. Fergus is at the bottom, down in the hold.

Among the sailors classes also exist, and highest among them are the men who set the sails at the top of the main mast – the tip of the skinny they call it, the high. To get to the very top was called capping the royal mast, and many had plunged to their death trying to do it.

As this ship full of immigrants approaches Newfoundland, one the of rich passengers remarks that the Captain ought to send a lookout up to get first sight of land. Young Fergus says, "I'll go." "You'll fall and break your head," warns a sailor. But Fergus is off, climbing towards the top. And as he makes his way up, the novelist, Peter Behrens, puts this thought in his mind:

Is courage just the awareness that gestures, journeys, lives have intrinsic shape, and must, one way or another, be completed? That there is a path to be followed, literally to the death? Awareness is harsh but better than being unaware, never sensing a path. Better than a life of stunts, false starts, dead ends. Better than the irredeemable ugliness of the halfhearted. Better than felling there is no shape to anything – there is. The world knows itself.

The idea that each life has a shape, that there is a path before us we must sense and follow, literally to the death, is very much evident in the Gospel lesson this morning from Luke.

Luke 13:31-35 :At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, 'Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.' He said to them, 'Go and tell that fox for me, "Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed away from Jerusalem."

Are there times when you feel your life has a shape that must be completed? I'm not talking about desires that you want to fulfill – I think this is different. There's a lot of buzz at the moment over the so-called Secret, the Law of Attraction – supposedly a path to fulfilling your destiny. I haven't paid much attention to it because what I've seen seems like Pinocchio repackaged – you know, When you wish upon a star, makes no difference who you are, anything your heart desires will come to you.

The shape of life, the destiny, we see in Bible stories is quite different and often unexpected. These men and women of faith didn't envision the arc of their life; they didn't even choose it directly. Their destiny begins more as a diversion from their chosen

path, a diversion caused by events beyond their control, but events that demand a moral choice. They have the vision to see that choice, a choice that demands a decision.

You could list many such people from Moses and Miriam to Joseph and Mary, or even George and Mary for that matter. I know, George Bailey is not in the Bible, he's in the movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*, but perhaps his story is a little closer to ours. George grows up in a small town and all he wants is to leave that little place far behind. His destiny, or so he thinks, is to travel the world and see all the marvelous sights he's read about in books. But then the events of life and the moral decisions they demand put him on a different path.— his father dies and George is the only one who can keep the Savings and Loan from falling into the hands of Old Man Potter – a loan shark and slumlord.

It's one thing after another for George - all sorts of decisions that require a mind of righteousness and a heart willing to make a sacrifice. He can't believe he's missed his destiny, and finally feels all is lost when the fragile structure of his life- his business, his security, his ability to provide for his family – when all that is threatened by a simple mistake.

But, as you know, he finds out he just didn't understand where the shape and security of his life were to be found. His necessary path was there all the time, right in the small town he so desperately wanted to leave behind.

For Moses, the shape of his life took some real twists and turns, starting out being set adrift from his Jewish family into the Egyptian royal household, turning his back on his status and privilege while defending a helpless laborer from a beating, and finally leading the people of Israel out of slavery into a forty year trek through the wilderness.

At one point on their path through the wilderness, the people of Israeli are complain against God and Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water.” : (Numbers 21:5) So God sends deadly snakes to bite them and many die. They cry out for an antidote, a cure, and God tells Moses to put a bronze servant on a staff and raise it up, so all who look upon it will be healed and saved.

Later, Jesus repeats this story when talking about the reason he has come, the shape of his life, his destiny to die on the cross:

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (John 3:14-16)

The cross is the cure for our moral blindness, for our lack of awareness; for a life of stunts, false starts, dead ends, for the irredeemable ugliness of the halfhearted. What are the moral questions we must answer to bring our lives to their proper shape? Perhaps they are as simple as putting our own dreams aside and caring for a sick spouse, parent or

child. Perhaps they are as close to home as a night at the homeless shelter, or as unexpected as an ocean journey that leads to a new land. No one can say.

All we can say is that when we see Christ on the cross and recognize the presence of God in the suffering of this world, when we accept what God so loved and what God did - our eyes are opened, our lives are transformed, our destiny is redefined, and we too are called to a moment of decision.

Communion is a call to remember Christ on the cross, to look upon Christ lifted up, to believe and not perish but have eternal life. We celebrate an open communion. This sacrament is for all who wish to know the presence of Christ and to share in the community of God's people. Christ welcomes you. Christ recognizes you. Christ invites you into the circle of fellowship in his name.