

I give you the end of a golden string . . .

We often use the metaphor of a thread as in “I was able to follow his thread of thought.” I mean, often a lecturer will meander his way through a presentation; it’s like working your way through a maze, a labyrinth; you get lost. But amid the congestion there may be a theme, which, if you catch hold of it, can unravel the whole thing and leave you enlightened after all. You’ve caught his train of thought.

The metaphor of thread is found often in literature. There is the old Greek legend of Theseus, King of Athens, who, in order to rescue young captives from the meandering cave of a devouring monster, uses a ball of thread to work his way into the cave, kill the monster, release the captives and then by winding the thread back into a ball, finding his way out again. Then there is Mark Twain’s story of Tom Sawyer and his friend Becky lost in a Missouri cave and his leaving Becky to seek an outlet – unraveling his kite line until he found daylight and then rewinding the line back to Becky and her rescue.

Often the experts who put together our lectionary readings work a thread into the selections. At first sight the three readings seem randomly chosen – a clip from the Old Testament, a fragment from an Epistle, a Gospel isolated from its original context – a seeming hodgepodge of verbiage. Often it makes it tough on a preacher to sort it out. But if you look closely at the texts you may see the end of a filament peeping out which, if you yank it a bit, can turn the liturgical readings inside out.

For instance the thread that runs through this third Sunday of Lent’s readings has to do with striking water in an otherwise arid environment and thereby quenching one’s thirst for understanding what life is all about. In the first reading Moses, using his magic wand, strikes a rock in a desert and out flows fresh water to keep Israel’s hopes alive. Then there follows a selection from Psalm 95 where the hardness isn’t that of a rock but of the hearts of God’s people – and instead of a magic wand it is the very voice of God that gets things flowing again.

Then comes St. Paul’s *Letter to the Romans* with that key passage where he speaks of the access we have to the grace in which we stand, which grace he identifies with *the love of God [which] has been poured into our hearts* – as none other than *the Holy Spirit who has been given to us*. And finally we hear the Gospel about the meeting at Jacob’s stagnant well. Jesus teases the Samaritan woman to fetch him some water. She vacillates, let’s say: she stonewalls him. Then he offers her a spring of water that will never go dry, emanating from within her very being as graced by God.

Can you follow the thread? It’s more than a thread. The readings are more like the magic wand of Moses: they are designed to help you *experience* rather than just read about how graced you are by your Creator.

And so by way of these remarks, as William Blake once wrote, *I give you the end of a golden string. Only wind it into a ball: it will lead you in at Heavens gate, Built in Jerusalem’s wall.*

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