

Along the track

My Autobiography

Years ago, in a course on Mark's Gospel, the lecturer reminded us of the importance of choosing words carefully. Mark's Gospel was brief, straight to the point, showing great economy with words, he said. Why? The lecturer explained that writing materials were scarce and expensive so writers in those days had to choose wisely what they wrote, which sayings, stories, events and words were to be included.

Today it is also difficult to get a book published, unless you are famous or have a proven track record as an author. Just as in Mark's day, it is an expensive undertaking.

So, given those restrictions, if you were writing your autobiography, what would you choose to include? What key events or people from your life would you want to write about, what accomplishments would you include? What are you most proud of, to whom would you give credit for being supportive or mentors in your life? What have been the turning points in your life? What would you choose to leave out?

Not many of us will write our autobiography but, if we were tempted to do so and reflect on our life journey, we would be reminded that every life story is precious. Even when it appears to be rather ordinary, it is in our life journey that we encounter the quiet presence of a loving God, an always-present God. Every life is sacred – and so is every life journey. That's where we find God and God finds us.

Why quiet presence? God's presence in our lives and in our world is rarely, if ever dramatic. God is not like someone with a bullhorn or a megaphone. We have to listen, we have to attune ourselves to it. God's invitation to friendship always respects our freedom, never overpowers us; but God also never goes away, even if there may be times when we feel like such is the case. God is always gently beckoning us.

Nothing illustrates this more graphically than the call of the prophet Elijah:

"So He said, "Go forth and stand on the mountain before the Lord." And behold, the Lord was passing by! And a great and strong wind was rending the mountains and breaking in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of a gentle breeze. I Kings 19 11-12

God comes, not on earthquakes or in a loud, showy, flashy sort of a way but in the sound of a gentle breeze. It is sometimes translated as 'the sound of gentle silence'. So we have to prepare ourselves to hear it! Jesus described the persistent presence of God in a number of ways too – he said that it was like a plant growing silently as we sleep, or like yeast leavening dough, or in the quiet way a person goes into a room to pray and shuts the door. He reminded us how God is present when someone visits the lonely, feeds the hungry, cares for the sick and the poor. God, it seems, works in ways that are not dramatic and showy but in ways that are quiet and hidden and we have to take the time to look.

So why not think about your autobiography, what it might contain, what you might choose to leave out, what photos you might include. One way to discover the presence of God is to look back and reflect on what has been and discover the presence and action of God in what has happened to us, in the miracle of our birth, in the events of our life and in the people who have encouraged and perhaps challenged us to be who we are today. The highs and the lows, successes and failures, the frustrations and joys, the angers and disappointments all have their place, they all have their message. The autobiography could be our own way of tracing where God's grace has been at work.

For some, life has been difficult and it can be a struggle to believe in a loving God. Some people may feel as if the Church has not been supportive or welcoming while for others faith has been a rock, giving meaning and direction to their lives. Whatever our experience may have been, God loves us dearly and is present to us, come what may.

In the words of the Apostle Paul who was reflecting on a very difficult time in his life and in his ministry:

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8: 38-39

Regards
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