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Finding a dwelling place

Pat Marrin | Jun. 19, 2009 NCR Today

"May Christ find a dwelling place" Eph 3:8.

I was up past midnight watching an old Will Ferrell movie, "Talledega Nights," and woke up this morning with a spiritual hangover. Lord knows we need our comedians, but someone ought to remind them of Molly Ivins rule that comedy is a tool for poking fun at the powerful, not trashing the underdog. The jokes are lame and crude, the hillbilly caricatures wear you down. And every time I laughed I dug myself in deeper, displacing what sense of fairness and sympathy I try to maintain toward real people, life's ongoing comedy, myself included. And I woke up this morning feeling trashed.

It was only a movie. NASCAR can take it and the fans loved it. The general culture extends its reach by going for the lowest common denominator, and it's really only about selling images, desires, cars, clothing and feeling OK about ourselves. There is something for everyone, even the pseudos and weirdos at the high end who are uplifted by book clubs and foreign-language films. It's all culture, that pervasive envelope we live inside of, following its instructions without really knowing whose voices we are obeying. The examined life is just another caricature for people who observe others more than live their own lives. We are all trapped in the same collective consciousness, and it serves our needs, gets us through the day.

Grammar aside, the question "Where are you at?" is a good one. Where do we live, and with whom? Who provides true north to our personal compasses, holds us on course when the horizon is flat and endlessly the same, time passing, the patterns of work and play, life stages, family and friends, concentric circles of habit and thought, are revealed as just small comfort zones. Who shows us how to go beyond ourselves, for depth and distance, or how to see differently, be surprised, even shocked by what we didn't know and could not imagine?

A knock at the door of the heart, maybe after lying awake in the middle of the night or another morning coming to and feeling trashed. Someone asks if they might dwell with us, and we say yes, why not? This mysterious voice is a whole different culture, a way of seeing and thinking and feeling. A Spirit alights within us like a songbird in a tree. We learn how not to frighten it away, and it stays with us, and the dimensions of our heart are revealed as infinite, having a future we already know because we dreamed it once long ago at the very beginning.

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