

Be a Berean!

The Bereans ... received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day. (Acts 17:11)

["Be a Berean" will regularly cover topics that arise during the "Acts 29" and "Lifted Up" Bible classes. Contact Franklyn Pfeil--liftedup@lockportalliance.org--with questions or comments.]

.....

"Out in the tool shed, thinkin' 'bout Evelyn, with 'The Old Rugged Cross' on the radio..."

We call it 'the garage,' but no car has ever been in it. It's really just a tool shed. A long time ago Shelley painted "Fort Pfeil" in green on one of the crossbeams, so Fort Pfeil it's been ever since. It's my domain.

There's one of those stereos out there with mismatched speakers that you can get from any Salvation Army Thrift Store for around 10 bucks. I've never heard a radio that sounds better. There's nothing to read out there but maintenance manuals and a paperback Bible--an old RSV, still one of my absolute fave Bible translations, despite some iffy word choices in the prophets. Anyone who reads scripture habitually will admit that while some days the readings soar, there are other days when the words seem shapeless as they escape you. But just as honestly I can tell you that out there--as the long summer days wane and the fireflies spark the hayfields which surround our house for a half mile in every direction--out there under the shop light, that old RSV has never failed to deliver scripture in all its color and texture.

I was out there the evening of the day Evelyn was buried, thinking about what a giant she was--and is, somewhere, still. That's when "I Shall Cling to the Old Rugged Cross" came through the radio, sung by a chorus. Evelyn would have liked it, I thought. She would have been in her element out there, with the twilight lingering, the day and night clinging to each other until one, or the other, has to go away.

I like gospel music sung by a chorus of voices. Just like scripture, I don't think gospel music should be "of any private interpretation!" And I like old songs, the ones not heard much anymore. Shelley and Frankie and Eddy have introduced me to some utterly fantastic songs--"In Christ Alone," "Give Me Jesus," even "(What Will People Say When They Find Out I'm A) Jesus Freak." Give me Jesus, indeed; and who gives a fig for what they'll say--let your freak flag fly. But while you're at it, could you play some "How Great Thou Art" and some "How Firm a Foundation." Now that's what I call gospel!

Other than my old RSV, there's only one other thing out there that's got Jesus written all over it. Above the workbench, there's a flimsy "cross" that someone fashioned out of those palm reeds given out at Palm Sunday services. How it got there I don't know.

I felt that I should mark the moment, denote the day. So I decided on a way to dedicate "I Shall Cling to the Old Rugged Cross" to Evelyn, like we used to dedicate songs on the radio to a sweetheart. I looked at that flimsy cross and then I looked around the shed at the odds and ends of wood that are there. I found a piece that would do, cut it, chiseled out the section where the cross-piece meets the post, glued them together, then affixed a square shard of wood to resemble the one where Pontius Pilate had written a title for the King who wore so sadistic a crown.

Amongst the 289,443 reasons why no one will ever mistake me for Jesus is my (lack of) carpentry skill. But when I replaced the palm reed cross with the wooden one, I was pleased with how it looked up there.

Just then the first flicker of a firefly caught my eye. They always remind me of when we were kids and we used to catch them and put them in applesauce jars. Even as a boy, the fireflies brought a Camp Kenan song to my mind, the last song we sang at the campfire the night before we went home:

*Now the day is over.
Night is drawing nigh.
Shadows of the evening
Steal across the sky.*

Grant to little children

*Visions bright of Thee;
Guard the sailors tossing
On the deep blue sea.*

*When the morning wakens
Then may I arise
Pure and fresh and sinless
In Thy holy eyes.*

It was time to go inside to sleep. I'd be getting up well before the sun to go fishing in the morning with my boys. I went over to the corner where the fishing things are and I took three life jackets and the net and placed them together with the fishing poles in the middle of the floor, because I am forever forgetting life vests or the net, but I have never forgotten the poles.

Amidst fireflies and fishing poles and a real wooden cross and the sailors tossing on the deep blue sea, I was reluctant to let this day go away. I'd been happy today, to hear how she had been guarding so many of us with her prayers. It made me smile to hear about the guys from our church who fixed her house, and about how the church helped her out here and there when her meager income fell short. It made me laugh to think about her finishing the Super Grand Slam breakfast!

But when I walked out of the sanctuary, I must not have been smiling because Howard Bruning, a little misty-eyed himself, met me there and said it's not right to cry.

"Why not, Howard?"

"It's not right to cry at a warrior's funeral."

I agreed. So on behalf of Howard and so many others who have been shielded from the forces of darkness by her prayers, I'd like to dedicate another song to Evelyn, a song for a soldier:

*Day is done, gone the sun
From the lake, from the hill, from the sky.
All is well, safely rest.
God is nigh.*

I will cling to the old rugged cross, and exchange it some day for a crown. I and my crown will pretty much blend in up there, but keep on looking and eventually we'll connect. Evelyn won't be that hard to find. She'll need the Super Grand Slam breakfast to cast her 443 crowns each day at the feet of Jesus.

.....
It is our fervent hope that you will 'be a Berean' by attending one or more of these Bible-based classes this week! —

“Acts 29” Bible Class—Sunday at 9:45

“Everyday Wisdom for the Average Joe”—Sunday at 9:45

"The Lord's Prayer"--Sunday at 9:45

“Lifted Up” Continuous Bible Class—Thursday at 6:00 p.m.