

Sermon for the 2nd Wednesday of Lent, 13.ii.08, 19.30
Saint Paul-Lebanon Ev. Luth. Church / Felton, Penna.
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 1; John 13:1-15
“The Gospel According to Forrest”

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was
and Who is to come! ✠ Amen.

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord--and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

– John 13:12-15

Since our Scripture this evening began with one of the funniest stories in the whole Bible—the one about the clever snake who made fools out of the first humans who were supposed to be in charge of things for God—I thought

I would begin, as a way of getting us from Genesis 2 to John 13, with a story that comes to us courtesy of Rabbi Gordon Gladstone, D.D., of Bayonne, New Jersey. A story about one of the most beloved characters in American film, that simple, honest, hard-working, sweet and compassionate soul, Forrest Gump. The story goes like this:

The day finally arrived. Forrest Gump dies and goes to Heaven. He is at the Pearly Gates, met by St. Peter himself. However, the gates are closed, and Forrest approaches the gatekeeper.

St. Peter said, "Well, Forrest, it is certainly good to see you. We have heard a lot about you. I must tell you, though, that the place is filling up fast, and we have been administering an entrance examination for everyone. The test is short, but you have to pass it before you can get into Heaven."

Forrest responds, "It sure is good to be here, St. Peter, sir. But nobody ever told me about any entrance exam. I sure hope that the test ain't too hard. Life was a big enough test as it was."

St. Peter continued, "Yes, I know, Forrest, but the test is only three questions."

First: What two days of the week begin with the letter T?

Second: How many seconds are there in a year?

Third: "What is God's first name?"

Forrest leaves to think the questions over. He returns the next day and sees St. Peter, who waves him up, and says, "Now that you have had a chance to think the questions over, tell me your answers."

Forrest replied, "Well, the first one -- which two days in the week begins with the letter "T"? Shucks, that one is easy. That would be today and tomorrow."

The Saint's eyes opened wide and he exclaimed, "Forrest, that is not what I was thinking, but you do have a point, and I guess I did not specify, so I will give you credit for that answer."

How about the next one?" asked St. Peter? "How many seconds in a year?"

Now that one is harder," replied Forrest, but I think and think about that, and I guess the only answer can be twelve."

Astounded, St. Peter said, "Twelve? Twelve? Forrest, how in Heaven's name could you come up with twelve seconds in a year?"

Forrest replied, "Shucks, there's got to be twelve: January 2nd, February 2nd, March 2nd..."

"Hold it," interrupts St. Peter. "I see where you are going with this, and I see your point, though that was not quite what I had in mind....but I will have to give you credit for that one, too. Let us go on with the third and final question. Can you tell me God's first name?"

"Sure," Forrest replied, "it's Andy."

"Andy?" exclaimed an exasperated and frustrated St Peter.

"Ok, I can understand how you came up with your answers to my first two questions, but just how in the world did you come up with the name Andy as the first name of God?"

"Shucks, that was the easiest one of all," Forrest replied. "I learnt it from the song, "ANDY WALKS WITH ME, ANDY TALKS WITH ME, ANDY TELLS ME I AM HIS OWN."

St. Peter opened the Pearly Gates, and said: "Run Forrest, run!"

Our fictional Forrest Gump, and all who know and love the hymn, "In the Garden," and also all who, though they may not love that hymn nevertheless believe what it teaches, possess an insight that is not to be taken for granted. The God Who created the whole universe and humankind, the God Who is not only greater than the sum total of all that is but Who is *infinitely* greater and of a completely different order of being from all creation, is also the God Who becomes one of us in Christ Jesus. In Jesus, He reveals Himself to be God Who speaks to us in human language, the language He learned at His Mother's knee. He is the God Who is among us as Teacher and Master, as we read in tonight's Gospel, but, as we also read there, He is the God Who chooses to be among us as our friend and even as our servant. Taking off His robe and taking up a

towel and a basin of water, Jesus performs the most basic act of hospitality usually reserved for slaves, washing His Disciples' feet at the Last Supper.

In the novel and film, *Forrest Gump*, our hero is exactly *that* sort of hero. He is derided by the world as, in his own words, 'an idiot,' yet he has the knack of speaking wisdom, though not according to all the rules of formal logic, and, whether in sports or in business, he prospers in all he does, as the Psalmist describes the righteous in Psalm 1. He is absolutely selfless in his devotion to those he loves and respects, whether that is his own mother or his best buddy in the Vietnam War, and his dead friend's family, or their lieutenant, whose body survives the war but whose soul is shattered, or his beloved Jenny whom he cherishes unconditionally and finally their son, to whom he devotes himself completely.

He is the son of land-poor Southern gentry, but he is completely color-blind in the segregated South, worshipping in the Black Church, singing in their choir, having their minister witness his marriage vows and, only a short time later, asking him to hold the funeral service for Jenny. All of that is to say, *Forrest Gump* is the literary depiction of Him Who stands among us as One Who serves, first rate humor and pathos and first rate theology as well.

If we are touched by a story like that, and say to ourselves, 'I've known someone like Forrest Gump' or 'I'd like to *believe* that there are really people like that, people who instinctively know the right path to take and who take it, people in whose humility the greatest nobility is evident,' then consider this: This is not fiction, but reality, and that reality has a name, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of

God. There *is* One Who stands among us as One Who serves, and we can sense His presence when we do to one another as He taught, when we do to one another as He *did*, serving without asking to be served, but also accepting the help, concern and care of others when we find ourselves in need. That, too, belongs to the grace of belonging to Christ. ✠Amen.



Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit. ✠Amen.



S. D. G.!