

Welcome to a Work in Progress

December - 2008

Prepare the Way – in Church and at Home

Fifty years ago this month, my parents sent out an Advent/Christmas greeting card that had been hand-crafted by my mother—block printed on a random piece of battleship linoleum left over from our kitchen floor. The message was clear. She wanted to honor Christ by honoring her church—not as if it was perfect but because, for her, it was a repository of good news she had heard and shared there and wanted to share with others.

Lydia was a folk artist. Random scraps of almost anything were redeemable given her imaginative eye and creative hands. Bits and pieces of things others would long since have discarded were gathered to render our house a home and extend its range for the blessing of others. Beer cans she sent my father out in the alley to gather at night were cut open and reshaped into angels, candleholders, and other ornaments—all resplendent with the gold and silver hidden inside—unseen by those like me who never thought to look within. Rugs, curtains, drapes, and antependia for the North Park Seminary Chapel were coaxed out of threads—old and new—joined either to pieces of burlap or woven on one of her looms. Clothes were designed and sewn and hats crafted, mostly without patterns, on her Singer Sewing Machine or model forms for body and head she had gathered at yard and other sales. One year she spray painted tumbleweeds white and hung them from ceilings all over the house, adding little ornaments of differing hues and shades to highlight their presence. And food was always deliciously prepared and artfully served from her modest kitchen. “Make everything a party,” was her advice to my wife when asked the secret of good cooking and homemaking. And that’s what she did. Even plain old Campbell’s Tomato Soup deserved at least a spring or two of cut-up parsley.

Our cabin in Wisconsin is filled with her folk art, all the way from painted roofing tar lids to wall lamps, trays, old trunks, and a Dutch door hand-crafted by my father from random scraps of left over roofing lumber. That door, once the entrance to our cabin, built in 1949, is graced with three messages that remain for all who enter. “*Welcome to Hembygden*” is the first. The second, in the handwriting of my father, is a Swedish inscription from a historian he was studying, which translated says “*May its memory be as a sunshine in my breast.*” The third, added to the lower half one day while dad was in Chicago, is her loving tribute to him: “*This is the door that Eric made.*”

Our greeting card this year is mother’s and dad’s fifty years ago—replete with the blessing of memories they and we hold together-- enriched as God’s people from the time of Abraham to our time and times yet to come. We are all held in Christ and his

body by the grace of the message our churches proclaim, even if, as yet, some are not aware of it. God is both with and within us. It is not what we offer him that matters, but all we offer of ourselves in response to him. Praise God as you read this for all you have received from him through others, and let your praise set you free to be the grateful witness to him that all the saints in light have been and still are to you.

(signature)