

Watching, Always Watching

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Steve the Cat

We have this cat named Steve. He's named that because of my inability to remember some people's names and call them Steve. This is my family picking on me, I think. I happen to know a lot of Steve's—five that I can think of right now. I once worked for a guy who called me Steve because that was the name of the person who had worked prior to my time. No doubt, the next person to work at the tree nursery after me? That guy probably called him Ernie.

But this is not about Steve's in general, but more about the cat. If you have a cat in your house, then maybe you have observed their uncanny ability to just appear in the room. Transmorgiphly is a good term. It's as if my cat Steve just beams in from wherever. I first notice this because I feel a presence watching me. Usually when I'm preparing food. He just stands there staring, blinking once every ten minutes or so, watching me quizzically. Cats may be space alien celestial anthropologists that watch over humans. But then any thoughts of high intelligence goes away when they suddenly go berserk over some invisible hoodoo leaping around and bouncing off walls. Maybe instead of being space aliens, cats are really the eyes and ears of God. Maybe Steve is just curious about what we are doing at the time. Still, his ability to appear out of thin air, especially for a cat of such bulk, is a little unnerving.

“I'm watching you, Wicowski. Always watching.”

In the movie *Monsters Inc*, a character called Roz turns out to be a special agent who helps limit spillover from the monster world to the human world, thus causing issues—especially as pertains to being contaminated by children. Her catchphrase is “I'm watching you, Wicowski. Always watching.” She knows the green eyeball creature Mike Wicowski is up to something, but she hasn't figured it out yet. She's kind of like a schoolteacher who is keeping a tight rein on any hijinks.

When Cindy sent me the scripture readings from the lectionary for this week, all I could think was God saying to us, “I'm watching you. Always watching you.” Yet even if that is so, we seem to be given a lot of leash as a people, before God finally steps in to get us back on the right path.

Of temples and redemption

In chapters 24 and 25 of Second Kings, in the Old Testament, we learn of the siege of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple built by King Solomon, and the taking into captivity of the Jewish

nation to Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar and his descendants for nearly five hundred years. Eventually, King Cyrus of Persia releases the Jewish people and gives them permission to return to Jerusalem, where they begin building a second temple for the glory of God. This is a tale of the Jewish people losing their way, beginning to sin by worshiping false idols even during the reign of wise King Solomon, and ignoring warnings from several prophets. They even had these prophets killed to avoid being told they were on the wrong path. Finally, God stepped aside from his protection of the nation and allowed outside forces to take the city, kill many people, and take away several important treasures to Babylon. Eventually, the Jewish people repented and atoned for their behavior. King Cyrus eventually released the Jews to return home, and a new temple was constructed by a more reverent nation.

These events can serve as allegory for several nations throughout history. Nations grow and prosper by sticking to a course and following the guidelines set forth by the moral compass. But eventually leaders move away from guiding principles set forth in the same faith they profess to follow, and nations fall or change. It is not my intention to be an alarmist or a “bullfrog” in relaying this tale. Not today. Christ came to us to perform a course correction for the Jewish Nation and save the world, and as Christians we try to follow those teachings as relayed in the New Testament. Unfortunately, since His time on earth, his own followers have corrupted the message. It’s sad, really.

But this is not about nations or morality—it’s about people. God watches us. God cares for us. God cries for us, because we ignore the guidelines laid out for us to have a full and meaningful life. Simple things like “Treat others as you would have them treat you,” or as chapter 13 of First Corinthians says, “There are three things that remain, faith, hope, and love (charity), and the greatest of these is love.” When we remember this, our lives are fulfilled. When our nations remember this, we are prosperous.

Forgiveness and second chances

I was recently reminded of the events surrounding the fall of the temple that King Solomon built and how after a time of reflection and repentance, the Jewish nation was permitted to build a second temple. As I was reflecting on this story, it occurred to me that the story is not about a physical building. It’s about a person. For example, our bodies are spiritual temples. What we choose to put in them makes us who we are and is what shines out for the world to see. We can make mistakes or cause harm to someone, which slowly degrades our personal temples. But we can also ask for forgiveness, both of ourselves and those we wronged. This helps us build a second temple that may be stronger than before—all the while knowing that God is there watching and acting. He’s sometimes challenging, sometimes assisting, whether we know it or not, and at other times just sitting by, “Watching, always watching.” Then his creations work together and prosper.