

## Living the Lectionary

From our distance of two thousand years since the New Testament was written we tend to read its Gospels and other narrative contents as “records” of what happened back then. Because after all it’s a history of Jesus and the early church, isn’t it? – a sometimes loose collection of facts that includes miracles which prove that Jesus came from and was indeed God?

Well, yes, they do inform us of actual events and people, but the writings do more than that. They don’t just *inform* us, they *proclaim* the life of Jesus and the early church. And as *proclamations* they enlarge their subject matter so that they not only inform us but *move* us, indeed are designed to *awaken* something in us – cast a spell on us – as in Godspell.

The Irish poet Seamus Heaney presents us with an illustration of how a Gospel passage helped him experience - in something as prosaic as the remodeling of his house - a sense of wonder, an awakening to what life is all about. His poem has to do with a family decision to place a skylight in their roof. Heaney didn’t like the idea:

*You were the one for skylights. I opposed / Cutting into the seasoned tongue-and-groove / Of pitch pine. I liked it low and closed, / Its claustrophobic, . . . / Effect, I liked the snuff-dry feeling, / The perfect, trunk-lid fit of the old ceiling. / Under there, it was all hutch and hatch, . . .*

*But when the slates came off, extravagant / Sky entered and held surprise wide open. / For days I felt like an inhabitant / Of that house where the man sick of the palsy / Was lowered through the roof, had his sins forgiven, / Was healed, took up his bed and walked away.*

What is he doing? After opposing the idea, he is now taking delight in the placing of a skylight in his home’s roof. But to express how it made him feel once it was done, as a Christian he falls back into that story in the Gospel of Mark of which you are all familiar – of a roof opened and a man’s recovery from paralysis.

But more than that: he hints that it felt like he had exited a casket – a resurrection. But more than that: it was like experiencing that immense relief that comes from one’s discovery that God is all about grace, forgiveness, mercy – that experience that gets us up off our backs, out of our doubts and despondency – and moving again.

And more than that: it makes of something as practical as remodeling one’s house a metaphor! A sacrament, not just a job to be done but a miracle to be enjoyed – which can be true of any ordinary event if we allow the power of the Gospel story to influence our sense of everything.