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Narrative
Paintings

Lettering
Arts

“Family Blessings”

38” X 54”

1999 Acrylic on Canvas

(*as published in the May/June issue of Somerset Studio Magazine)

This project came about as a result of a request by my sister in law Lauren to do a painting containing certain scriptures that were meaningful to the family. During the construction of their new home, a bible verse or verses were chosen specifically for each room, and then written inside the wall of that room before the drywall was applied. She had kept a record of these verses, and they numbered over 25.

In asking her what she wanted the feeling of the canvas to be, she articulated to me that the feeling of the room where the painting would hang (the family room) was one of “passion”. In addition, much of the content had to do with “new beginnings”, as coming to the new house would represent a new chapter in the families’ life.

My overall goal, besides wanting to get as many of the scriptures on the canvas as possible, was to create something with depth and meaning. I wanted this depth to be created on a threefold level: 1) depth of the actual painting itself with a layered look, letters over letters and coming through letters and illustrations; 2) depth of the scriptures themselves in that I wanted there to be new discoveries for the viewer as time passed, so sometimes sacrificing legibility but trying to make sure of not sacrificing readability; 3) and finally a depth in the symbolism of the composition itself.

The symbolism I tried to convey is as follows:

Stability: *The structure of the composition lies in the 3 (2 vertical and 1 horizontal) main scriptures. Each of these taken separately will divide the canvas into a ratio of approximately 2/3 : 1/3. The theme of “The Lord Our God, the Lord is One” is not only represented in words but symbolically by having these three texts intersect to indicate The Trinity. This theme is also placed as the baseline, upon which all the other elements of the composition rest on or are connected to.*

These three scriptures form the foundation of the Christian (as well as the Hebrew) faith, and are therefore the foundation of the composition. They are taken from the Old Testament books of the Law...“Love the Lord your God and serve him with all your heart...”, “they will be My people and I will be their God...I will rejoice in doing them good...”, “these commands I am giving you today are to be upon your hearts...write them on your doorposts...”.

Peace and completeness: The circle symbolizes not only peace, but also completeness, and is therefore used to symbolize not only the peace of God but also the perfection of His will. Again, three intersecting arcs are used to symbolize the Holy Trinity, and the content of these arcs echo the theme. “I know the plans I have for you...”, “Surely the Lord has done great things...”, “His banner over me is Love...”.

New Beginnings: A new start, a new home, a new place of refuge: these are symbolized by the recurrence of three gates; one literal and two figurative. The “gate” on the left symbolizes the entrance into “a land flowing with milk and honey...”, and a place to partake of the “Living Water”. The middle gate represents the passing from an old place to a new place with the hope of “peace within your walls...”. The third “gate” in the upper right of the composition symbolizes entering into a place of companionship with God, leaving fear behind and taking refuge in His shadow.

Visual Images: 1) The stream, representing Living Water, which is God being symbolized through scripture as that element in our lives which is essential for life, growth, and abundance. “Come all you who are thirsty...”, “for I will pour water on the thirsty land...I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring...”, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, oh God...”, “Come, all you who are thirsty...”. 2) The gate(s), representing the new beginning, a new land, a secure and peaceful place. “I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten...you will have plenty...”, “I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land...”, “Lord, you have made my lot secure...”. 3) The Libyan Sybil (after Michaelangelo’s image on the Sistine ceiling) represents prophecy and future blessings. “I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper and not to harm you...”. In Greek mythology, the Libyan Sybil was credited for the prophecy of the virgin birth, about the 4th century B. C. On the Sistine ceiling, Michaelangelo has her pictured opposite the biblical prophet Jeremiah, from which the scripture “I know the plans I have for you...” is taken. I sometimes wonder if Michaelangelo intended for this to be an allegory of the scripture “every knee shall bow...”.

Passion: When one is passionate about something, feelings are not usually sedentary. A continuous feeling of movement throughout the composition indicates this. (This also is the personality of the family the painting is intended for.) Yet I have tried to include resting and seeking places as well...sitting by a stream, or under the shade of a wall, or at the feet of a learned individual. “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God...”, “...His banner over me is love...the season of singing has come...”, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength...”.