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Poem Explication

God came to the world to do good. In the beginning He created the earth to be completely pure and free of evil. As humans today we know the world isn't pure. It is far from it. And evil seems more abundant than good most days. Humans first messed up in the Garden of Eden. They also messed up big time right before God flooded the earth. God needed a way to fix His precious creation's mess ups. "God Went to Beauty School" by Cynthia Rylant is a poem depicting God's part into making the world a more beautiful place.

Cynthia Rylant starts out her poem with reasoning for why God came to this beauty shop --- "He went there to learn how / to give a good perm" (line 2). God's original intention for the planet was to primp it. Most people's intention when they get a perm is to end up with a beautiful result. One that makes you sit back and enjoy the view. God tried to do this, but I guess you can say this perm turned out to be bad.

The next line in the poem states what God becomes crazy about after perms: nails ("and ended up just crazy / about nails" (line 3, 4)). His world had turned out to be a crazy place. This started with Adam and Eve in the garden. They disobey God by eating the fruit. This made God very crazy and He kicked the two out of the garden. Again, the world made God crazy when he decided to flood the earth. He couldn't take his created

beings anymore and killed all but a select few. Throughout the years God saw how sin was eating his people. So God moved on from perms to nails. Why the author chose nails is interesting and could mean a lot of things. She could have chosen them because they are another service of a beauty shop. Figuratively, nails were chosen because of the Christians' beliefs in Jesus's crucifixion. Nails were God's new way to save the world. Even though the poem never relates anything up front to Christ's crucifixion, it implies it. The author uses the word "nails" and it is assumed the readers will make the correlation.

The next part of the poem tells more about God's new fascination with nails. God opens up his own shop. "Nails by Jim" He called it. / He was afraid to call it / Nails by God" (lines 6-8). God's new nail shop brings on more questions. Why did the author choose the name of "Nails by Jim" vs. calling it "Nails by God?" The choosing of the name Jim is because the name is well-known. Jim is a fairly common name. It is also down-to-earth therefore making this shop open to anyone. Think if the author would have chosen a name such as Jasmine. This name is more uncommon and not as comfortable as the name Jim. The line goes on about how God was afraid to name it after himself. The word "afraid" could throw off even the most devote Christians reading the poem. The all-powerful God was afraid? How could this be? I believe Rylant wrote this line to get the readers questions brewing. Try to put yourself in God's place. Wouldn't you be scared if your precious creation was filled with vile? He was trying this new thing with the nail shop, and perhaps He wasn't 100% sure it was going to work.

"He was sure people would / think / He was being disrespectful and / using His own name in vain / and nobody would tip" (lines 9-13). I think the author was trying to

point out God was scared of contradicting himself. People put so much blame on God, and I understand why the author added the line about using His own name in vain. God was being cautious about the opening of His new store. He was afraid if He gave it the wrong name nobody would come. This is true for a real barber/beauty shop. How many people are going to become customers in a shop named “the ugly beauty salon.” God needed a name where customers wouldn’t question the quality of service. Somewhere comfortable. He chose “Jim” because it welcomed all the regular Joes.

God then goes into reasoning on why he picked a nail shop. “He got into nails, of course, / because He’d always loved / hands---” (14-16). Hands were what His human beings used to do His work. He loved them. Instead of the author putting the word “hands” on the same line following the word “loved,” she puts “hands” down a line. This was to keep the audience in suspense. What has God always loved? The author uses hands again. Are hands some of the best things in God’s life? Are hands some of the best things a human could ask for? Are hands one of the best things God has ever done? No, “hands were some of the best things / He’d ever done” (17, 18). Line 18 answers the audience’s question. Hands were one of the best things God ever did. It makes a person examine on how important one’s hands really are. How often do we take them for granted? We use them to communicate, to drive a car, to eat our food, and flip pages in a book. No wonder God says they are some of the best things He ever created.

By opening this nail shop it allowed God to do something he loved --- “and this way He could just / hold one in His” (19, 20). With Christ’s crucifixion on the cross, this allowed God to do what he loved the most: hold his created beings. Jesus was the liaison between humans and God. With his death (the opening of the nail shop), it allowed God

and humans to be together once more. His continued love continues---“and admire those delicate / bones just about the knuckles, / delicate as birds’ wings” (21-23). These lines are showing how fragile and vulnerable humans are. He is admiring them with His power and is awe-struck with the dependency they show. Those coming to His shop are showing their dependency on God. They are choosing to come to Him for help.

God continues on---“and after He’d done that / awhile, / He could paint all the nails” (lines 24-26). Now that the Lord had his customers literally “in the palm of His hands” He could shape them. Line 26 and 27 states: “He could paint all the nails / any color he wanted” (26, 27). Figuratively, this line means molding His creation into what He originally intended them to become. God can’t mold just any human being though. The human must be one that is willing to give them self to God. An example of this would be clay. Clay can’t be molded into something beautiful if it is dried up and uncooperative. It must be willing to be molded---same goes for humans.

God’s new plan to save the world from their sin was to sacrifice His Son to die on the cross. Only after this, the opening of this idea (the nail shop) could God become truly happy with His creation. His humans were now allowed to come to Him because of His Son’s sacrifice. He calls this new occasion “beautiful” (29). It is a beautiful idea. No matter what ugly sins we have committed there is a way to make everything right again. Up until people give themselves to God (customers coming to His nail shop) the dirtiness of human sin (nails) makes us ugly. Only after coming to Him (His nail shop) can we become beautiful in His eyes. Only then can He call us “beautiful / and mean it” (line 29, 30).

The author capitalizing “He” throughout the entire poem reiterates she is talking about a higher power (because obviously in the English language we don’t capitalize this pronoun constantly). She chose to use “He” at the beginning of lines. This was emphasizing on putting God first. The author also uses another pattern with the word “He.” Whenever used in the poem, it is followed by God doing something. “He went there, He was afraid, He could paint” (1, 7, 26). This makes the poem simpler to understand and reiterate the author’s point---the simplicity of God’s love.

His love is not complicated and He doesn’t love us only certain days of the week. He loves us no matter what. But it is only through our willingness to love Him back can He make us into the person He designed us to be. This is also another reason why the author chose nails (besides Christ’s death). Nails are often dirty, broken, and misshapen. But with the right pedicurist (God) they can become clean, together, and beautiful.

Work Cited

Rylant, Cynthia. "God Went to Beauty School." 01 Nov. 2006

<<http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/16484>>.

God Went to Beauty School (Cynthia Rylant)

Appendix

1 He went there to learn how
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5 so He opened up His own shop.
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