

Column

In the not-too-distant past, waste of anything was a sin. In the home, women would save pieces of cloth both from garments and from leftover scraps of new material. These remnants would be saved and then brought out to make quilts and even rag rugs.

I have a quilt in a chest that has pieces of material from uniforms from the first World War. It doesn't get brought out and used that much, but it is interesting to examine these remnants which – in the language of today – were 'repurposed'.

'Remnant' can refer to things other than scraps of cloth. In the Bible, the word is frequently used of people. The prophet Isaiah, for example, uses it to refer to a small group of God's people who will survive the invasion of the Assyrian army (10:20-22): "The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God" (Isaiah 10:21).

Though the word is not used, the concept is present in the story of Elijah, the 9th century B.C. prophet of Israel. As the story is written up in 1

Kings 19, after scoring a great victory over the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, the prophet seems to have had a crisis of faith. When he hears that wicked Queen Jezebel is seeking his life, he flees and hides and cries out: “I, even I only, am left.”

But was that in fact the case? No, God had reserved to Himself a remnant of the faithful. His answer to the depressed prophet is: “I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal.”

In Romans in the New Testament, Paul likewise picks up this concept of remnant, using it to describe a small group out of a larger who remains faithful. “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace,” he writes (11:5).

This concept that God, even in the most desperate times, has a band of faithful should be a source of comfort to us today. Various polls show that the number in the US who identify themselves as Christians is declining while the number of those who profess no religious identity (the so-called

‘nones’) is on the increase. A remnant, however, remains. God is not finished, nor is He without witnesses even in the most secular parts of the nation. Take heart. Resolve to be a part of this remnant.

Likewise, it is discouraging to see the light of the gospel go out in a number of denominations and churches. In some, social issues have become the *only* focus, while in others entertainment has become centre-stage. Places of faithful proclamation have become spiritual wastelands. The good news is that God remains in control and always has a remnant. His reign of justice and truth is coming. Human faithlessness (including our own) is no match for His faithfulness.

Remnants of sewing material and remnants of people . . . neither should be overlooked or despised. Dare to step out of the crowd.

ALMIGHTY God, who showest to them that are in error the light of thy truth, to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness; Grant unto all those who are admitted into the fellowship

of Christ's Religion, that they may avoid those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Collect or Third Sunday after Easter, Book of Common Prayer)*

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