

There's a little bit of heaven in tales of Garrison Keillor

Garrison Keillor begins with that low, mellifluous voice drawing you in, closer and closer to the radio, until you are almost mesmerized. With hushed tones, bordering on a whisper, he spins a tale about real life in a mythical town of Lake Wobegon.

I don't catch "A Prairie Home Companion" all that often, but when I do, it is news from Lake Wobegon I anticipate.

Perhaps, because I was raised in a small town, the characters and sketches seem so familiar. Sometimes in his monologues, though, I pick up a whiff of nostalgia bordering on homesickness. It's as though he wants to go back, maybe just to visit, or set things right.

This idea of being away from home captures our imaginations in other ways. Some suggest much of our artwork is a reflection of this yearning.

We paint and draw images that try to capture an ideal hinted at by the less-than-perfect world around us. Call it paradise, or heaven, we have this inherent notion that we came from someplace for which we were perfectly suited, we have lost our way, and now, in various ways, we are trying to find our way back.

People may act out this yearning in some pretty bizarre ways — witness the Heaven's Gate cult — but that doesn't invalidate what C.S. Lewis calls this "inconsolable longing." He puts it bluntly, "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."

In our adult minds we may think we are too sophisticated to believe in anything so childish as paradise or heaven. But we



VIEWPOINT

The Rev. Tim Barber
Grace Fellowship Church

still respond to a story or song or a painting, or a Garrison Keillor monologue and a hint of heaven, or a better place somewhere breaks through.

This, of course, doesn't prove there is a heaven. Wishing something were true doesn't make it so. But it's a beginning, a first step that leads to a second, and then a third. If something is there to see, we won't see it unless we are looking in the right direction.

Every time I hear Handel's "Messiah" and listen again to the story of how God came to us while we were wandering in the darkness — how we were hopeless until he came in the person of Christ and gave his life for us, how he defeated death and made it possible for us to defeat death too — I think, even if people find it difficult to believe this is true, they ought to wish it were true.

Maybe for me, this is what lies behind the attraction of Garrison Keillor's stories.

As art, they have the ring of truth about our true condition. They also hint at the hope we have something to look forward to that is so much better than this.

Believing in heaven, we need not apologize for preferring beauty to ugliness, a garden to a concrete jungle, or the simple exhilaration of joy and hope. For, as Christians, that does describe our final reality and our ultimate home.