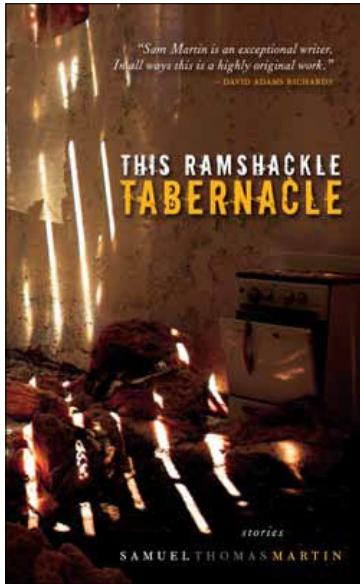


Reviews

# God meets the broken in their own Ramshackle Tabernacle



Ben whether they know it or not.

This camouflaged God, “shrouding himself in the tent of darkness, veiling his approach with dark rain clouds,” (Ps. 18:11) has not abandoned his creatures. He is a hunter, tracking and claiming his own. In the guise of perky lifeguard, Krysta, he offers Doug a redemptive gift of hope. God is also cloaked in the matronly neighbour who grandly welcomes a misfit kid with a black eye into her home as “Mr. Harold Witaker.” Years later, no one cares to know his name. On the street he is “guy,” “dude” and “princess.” Moments before he bashes in the head of the only other

Here’s a word of advice. Don’t read this book while on vacation in Cape Cod, scenic cottage country of the rich and famous. These linked stories by Samuel Thomas Martin kept forcing me to look elsewhere – at the ragged lives of the sexually abused, the drug-addicted, and the throwaways. They haunted me as I cruised Hyannis Harbour and viewed the Kennedy compound through binoculars.

Martin’s characters also come from cottage country, northern Ontario, but they are not rich or famous. Some are Christian, some are not. And some are the outcast, neighbours you see only if you steel yourself not to turn your face away, scabby lepers living banished lives among us.

Doug, a failed camp counsellor, wears his rage openly, but tucks his shame away. Drug addict Harold commits murder. Ben leBou stabs his abusive father. Upon his release from prison, he gets mauled by a grizzly, survives, sort of, and finally, calling out to God, tries to shoot himself in an agony of multiplied pain.

After you blink to reduce the intensity of this magnified focus on the sordid and horrific, you begin to discern that a heart of glory glimmers in the midst of all this darkness. God dwells here. Just as he did in the Old Testament, lodged in a portable temple among a stiff-necked and stubborn people, God has pitched his tent with these tainted characters from the Muskokas. His holiness is a tarp hanging over Doug and Harold and

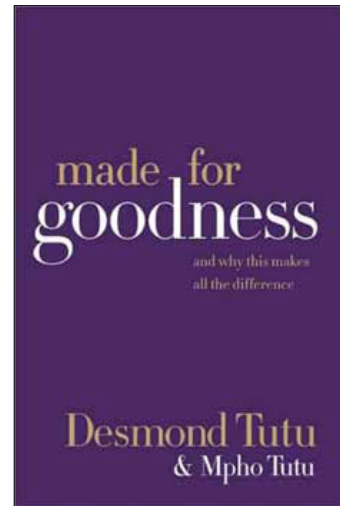
person who addresses him by his real name, Harold sees a great blue “God’s Eye” stained glass window. Its sad gaze pierces him, but he is finally seen and known once more. The baptism of tenderness he experienced as a child splashing around in the lake with a woman named Vicky has been confirmed.

The organic wholeness of these stories is shaped by this deft crafting of relationships and imagery. Ben does not suffer alone. God is in the devotionals that he uses to roll smokes. God is in the room: “The unfinished walls warped and sagging like the damp nylon walls of a tent in the rain.” Divine immanence tabernacles with him even in his despair. Such dovetailed details lend a patient hand-rubbed lustre to the book. It is decidedly not, as I heard Angela Antle say in a CBC interview with Martin, a “sort of a lazy man’s novel.”

In *Shekinah*, the defiant Ziggy, who crosses himself and gives God the finger in the same gesture, mutters, “Show yourself then.” In



Samuel Thomas Martin



# Desmond Tutu explains that we are Made for Goodness (and why it makes all the difference)

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

As the title of their book suggests, Desmond Tutu and his daughter, Mpho Tutu, claim that we are made for goodness. Renowned on the international stage as chair of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate apartheid’s horrors, the elder Tutu has obviously been used by God to accomplish much good.



Desmond Tutu

point readers to Genesis and conclude, “In the creation in a tidal wave of wrongness. It comes in drip, until the earth is flooded” (pg. 89). This “drip itself in evil deeds. However, the Tutus claim, “God does not acquiesce in sin. Dame Julian calls it a ‘divine will’ that resides in us. That divine will cannot and never will sin” (pg. 134). They add, “In spite of the evil we do, there is a goodness in us that is unstained by sin” (pg. 136).

The Apostle Paul argues for the truth that is radically opposed to the Tutus’ theology. Quoting from the Old Testament, he wrote, “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; **there is no one who does good, not even one**” (Romans 3:10-12). Paul recognized that reality in his own life as well when he wrote, “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature” (Romans 7:18a).

The authors claim that “the practices of goodness . . . are not hard disciplines to learn” (pg. 92). However, they don’t emphasize a foundational truth that Jesus expounded on, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). First, we are only righteous because of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice for us: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Second, only through the power of the resurrected Christ and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit can we “do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10b).

In their theology, the Tutus seem to have focused only on God’s loving nature and not on his just character. Perhaps this has led them to the following conclusion: “Ultimately, the reality of heaven cannot tolerate the existence of hell. Even our worst enemies are God’s beloved children. What kind of God could endure the sight of God’s own children screaming in eternal pain? If we believe in the good God, we must believe that we are all made to inhabit heaven” (pp. 134-135).

Jesus, however, warned about the reality of hell: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both body and soul in hell” (Matthew 10:28). Despite the many fundamental ways this reader disagreed with the Tutus, *Made for Goodness* was worthwhile reading. The authors’ stories of courage, faith, and forgiveness in the post-apartheid era made for inspirational reading. Those of us who have lived in freedom have much to learn from those who opposed racism and claimed astounding victories. ➤



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*The Killing Tree*, his nephew Bill had also asked for a sign. They are granted their wish. Ziggy and Bill are visited with a bewildering glimpse of resurrection glory in the powerful prayer of their friend Dan, “the old prophet who dwells in the wrinkled tabernacle of his eighty-five-year old body.” What’s left is whether they will believe this “lacerating certainty of a miracle.”

Sam Martin’s stories are not for everyone. Although the first and last story bookend the whole with hope, not every reader will recognize the salvific embrace of

the structure. The violent conflicts and raw language are intended to be disturbing. The edginess of a story like *Becoming Maria*, for example, where a sexually confused teen meets Jesus as her lover in a dream, is a risky business that will hinder the acceptance of this book in some Christian circles.

I, too, tend to prefer a safe, inoffensive neighbourhood, my own sanctified Cape Cod, where no one confronts me with abuse, sexual aberration, stark raving loneliness, or naked human need. But God’s heart is bigger. He resides with the

fallen. He summons me out into the streets and into the wilderness, to believe with Dan “that not one bird is shot from the sky that God doesn’t know about.” These stories invite me look my neighbour in the eye, and see God looking back at me. ➤

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