

Where's the Milk?

As you know, I'm not a big fan of happy clappy music ... nor am I one from here in the pulpit to ask you to raise your hands ever!

After all, we are Episcopalians!

But today, I'd like to break with tradition and do a little show of hands please.

Like, how many of us have stood in front of the open refrigerator looking for the milk, and yelled to our spouse, sibling or parent:

"Where's the milk?!"

Raise your hands please.

Then, when they yell out that it's right next to the mayonnaise, why, that previously invisible milk ... suddenly appears?!

And if your family is like mine, they'll then feel obligated to say something helpful like:

"If it had teeth, it woulda bit ya!"

Sound familiar?

Something right before our eyes, but which we haven't been able to see, suddenly appears!

And that's what's going on in today's gospel.

It was only eight days ago that Jesus took the disciples aside and asked:

"Who do people say that I am?"

And they reply:

“Some say a prophet, some say John the Baptist raised from the dead.”

“But who do you say that I am?”

And Peter famously confesses that Jesus is the Messiah.

But when Jesus tells him what’s in store for the Messiah – the arrest and torture, the suffering and death – Peter can’t stand it!

He scolds Jesus for saying such things, only to be denounced by Jesus himself for being so blind to the way things are, to the way things must be.

Peter and the others that day are standing in front of the refrigerator, looking for the Messiah, but they can’t actually see him for who he is.

Today, we are given a second chance to see who Jesus really is, this day which we call Transfiguration Sunday.

The day when Jesus and his inner circle walk up a mountain and Jesus is changed – his face changes – his clothes shine like the whitest snow.

Today is the day when God, taking on the role of our spouse, sibling or parent, says:

“Here’s the Messiah – right in front of your eyes – only you can’t miss him now... because he’s shining!”

And see him they do, and they are terrified!

But the seeing is only half the journey.

The other half comes with what the voice from the clouds tells them they must do:

“Listen to him!”

And that really is the hardest part.

Listening to Jesus means taking seriously what he’s saying to us, and not reducing the magnificent strangeness of his way of life to a Hallmark card.

It’s like the old rich woman who prattles on to her priest about her dreams of serving the poor, not because her heart overflows with compassion, but because she craves the praise she will receive.

Realizing her motives, the priest reminds her that

“Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared to love in dreams.” Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*.

The way of Jesus is the way of love, not in dreams, but in action.

Which brings us to why we do what we do every week here at St Elizabeth’s.

We get together, every week, week-in and week-out, because not only is it easy to lose sight of Jesus in the midst of our money-obsessed, celebrity-obsessed, self-obsessed world, the fact is, it’s even harder to listen to him.

Last Sunday sort of drove this all home in a way that only God, with her wry sense of humor, can do.

Last week, as you will recall, our gospel was one of the hardest teachings Jesus ever delivers: love the enemy, be kind to the undeserving, give to the unworthy...

Which usually rolls off my back, and maybe yours, as sweet but totally foolish nonsense, that I, and perhaps you, have no intention whatsoever to practice.

Except that last week God sends us a houseless woman, totally drunk, who's fast asleep in the last pew.

Efforts to wake her go nowhere.

So the question becomes: do we call the cops and have them haul her away, or, do we put into practice that very tough gospel lesson, and let this drunk daughter of God sleep it off in God's house while the holy mass goes on around her?

Do we stand in front of the refrigerator and finally see the milk?

In other words, can we see in this struggling woman the face of Jesus himself, since he tells us to look for him in the least, the lost and the left behind, or do we only see the irritating spectacle of a drunk, passed out in the pew?

It's not easy for anyone to see Jesus in the least, the lost and the left behind.

And yet isn't the truth of our faith that next to each and every human person (even drunk ones sleeping on church pews) is an angel proclaiming:

"Behold, the image of God!"

It is easy to forget who we are, we are so easily distracted.

"Listen to him!" commands the voice of the Father ... yes but, I'd rather go to the movies.

"Listen to him!" okaaaay! — uh, hand me the newspaper please?

"Listen to him..." what?! — you think Jesus wants us to take all that love stuff ... literally??!!

In Jesus, God is determined to unclench our cherished grip on our notions of good and evil, to expand our minds when it comes to defining what is just and proper.

And so, God takes us by the hand and whispers something like this:

"If you can manage not to be ashamed or embarrassed or offended at what the world dismisses as despicable, if you can find it in yourself to be gentle with the losers, kind to the insecure, peaceful with the warlike, then, when Jesus and his heavenly host at long last appear, you, in the company of every human being who has ever lived, will hear the words you have longed to hear: 'That's right, little one, that's what I wanted; I like what you've done'". James Alison, *Raising Abel*, p. 182. Modified.

How do we bend ourselves so that we too may hear those longed for words?

What daily path can we walk so that we become molded into Kingdom people?

Perhaps something like this is a start ...

"Love the earth and sun and the animals,
despise riches,
give alms to every one that asks,
stand up for the stupid and crazy,
devote your income and labor to others,
oppose tyrants,
argue not concerning God,
have patience toward people,

bow down to no man,
go freely with uneducated persons and with the young and with the
mothers of families, ...
re-examine all you have been told at school or church or in any book,
dismiss whatever insults your own soul,
do these things and your very flesh shall become a poem..." Walt
Whitman, modified.

The good news of Jesus Christ is that our destiny is to shine!

Not because we have seen God, but because God has seen us.

And so, if we can speak with each other in ways that foster humility, if
we can be awake to life's marvelous complexity, if we can say "yes" to
bettering the lives of others, especially the despairing and despised, if
we can resist easy answers, half-truths and superficial relationships,
then, with the poet, we too might come to see that, by the grace of this
odd Messiah,

"Earth is crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God..."
Elizabeth Barrett Browning; Tracy Smith modified.

+amen

