



SO WHAT'S WITH THE CATS?

So, were you wondering about the kittens dressed in togas on the cover of the Sunday Page this morning? Were you wondering if this is just one more piece of evidence that things are getting just a bit ... shall we say *unorthodox* around here? Well ... your right. They are getting a little kinda' crazy, but this week you can't blame me. This week it was Beth. I was all set to dig into the scripture some more on Monday morning and I get this email with the subject heading, "So....Do you think I could get away with putting

this on the cover of the Sunday Page?" I open it up and there is this lovely painting of The Transfiguration ... the only catch is that Jesus, Moses, Elijah, Peter, John, James, the disciples and the crowd are all *CATS!*

As I opened the picture up on my computer screen I started giggling. Then I headed downstairs, still giggling, to talk it over with Beth. Pretty soon we are both laughing and wondering out loud. Is it appropriate? Will anyone be offended? Should we use it? We could err on the side of not offending anyone. We could pick a tamer, safer picture. But I couldn't help it. I just love cats and I love the picture. I wanted to use this picture!

Now, you need to know that the reason this picture is on the Sunday Page isn't JUST because it made Beth and I laugh. And, it isn't JUST because I'm a cat lover. The most important reason for using this picture is that by its very nature it makes us see a very familiar Bible story in an entirely different way. It pushes us out of a "ho hum I've heard that story once every church year and I know what it is about" complacency.

Now ... You should know that lay people aren't the only ones who can get a little complacent and in a rut with the study and interpretation of scripture. Pastors and Biblical Scholars get that way too. In fact, collective complacency in the church with regard to scriptural interpretation had a great deal to do with fueling the Protestant Reformation. By the 1520's when Rev. Martin Luther and the reformers started shaking things up, the wider institution of the church was heavily invested in looking at scripture in the same old way. The lively wrestling with and arguing about Hebrew scriptures and quarreling about the teachings and way of Christ Jesus ... the great debates and down and dirty disagreements that took place as the Christian church was being formed ... all that lively engagement had devolved into official interpretations and genteel discussions about minute details. That is ... until someone named Martin Luther had the audacity to see things a little differently and say it in 95 or so succinct thesis statements.



HERDING CATS

So ... a lot of things could be said about the lessons and the gospel reading for today. I could delve deeply with you into all sorts of minute details about the original languages and the historical backgrounds and connections. (In fact, I have 8 pages of typed up and color coded language study and translation notes that *I'm going to share/shared with* the high schoolers during Education Hour.) I could show you all sorts of ways that this story *could* fit neatly into the Lutheran doctrine that has been handed down for the last 500 years. But I'm not sure that any of that fun scholarly stuff will make a big difference insofar as your experience of God and your commitment to follow Christ Jesus goes. In fact, I'm pretty sure it wouldn't make much of a difference to most of you because that's what mainline Lutheran pastors have been doing for a lot of years. We preachers tend to either get scholarly or get entertaining. Neither approach has been especially effective in forming enduring culture-challenging faith.

When I look around most of us are still pretty much going whichever way the culture goes whether or not that's the way Christ is going. When it comes to shepherding the flock, I expect that Jesus would compare us all to a herd of cats instead of a flock of sheep. We aren't all that different than the disciples who frustrated Jesus in their inability to heal the boy with a demon ... the ones who Jesus called a "faithless and perverse generation." We don't so much lose our way, as a sheep would; we are more inclined to give a little disdainful sniff, turn tail and go our own way as a cat would.

Putting it a little more gently, in the words of St. Paul, words that we heard in the second lesson today, many of us have *lost a heart* for the *radical life altering* substance of Christ Jesus' teachings and way. Out of the freedom of the *Doctrine Of Justification By Grace Through Faith* we've constructed a comfortable denominational dwelling, a temple of sound doctrine that neither challenges nor inspires us to *be the miracle*. Most of us are more prone to want to be the *beneficiary* of miracles in this world and the *recipients* of eternal life than we are prone to want to be a *pipeline* through which eternal life flows and a conduit through which miracles are delivered into the world. Just like Peter, we are inclined to want to get Jesus to settle down in a place of comfortable glory in the company of prophets from the past.



GOD HAS NO PATIENCE FOR CAT NAPPING

In that respect we are really quite a lot like house cats that have it pretty good. I remember watching my two cats, after a rich meal of extra gravy Fancy Feast. Tummies full they would find a nice warm patch of sunshine on the floor or on the bed – sometimes on the kitchen counter or dining room table even. They would settle in and bask in the sunshine, purring contentedly, oblivious to the world around them. Woe to anyone who dared wake them from their comfortable cat napping. How napping catlike we can be when we close our eyes to and can't

be bothered with rising up and speaking out against poverty, violence, oppression and injustice running rampant here and abroad.

You know ... God will have none of our complacent desire to rest on our laurels in sun warmed satisfaction. When we fail to challenge ourselves to remove the veil from our eyes and see the injustice in the world When we fail to face the world exposed, unprotected, unhindered, by priorities that just don't matter to God ... When we choose to cover ourselves with worldly wisdom and expedient ethics instead of emerging dripping naked and unashamed from the waters of baptism ...When we fail to see and fail to act ...

Clouds come over us ...

Clouds overshadow us.

Bad times fall upon us and the first thing we feel is fear ... just like Peter, James and John up on the mountain. We need to reign in that fear with trust. We need to let the clouds remind us that God speaks and we have just not been listening as carefully as we should be. We need to stop and prick up our little pointy cat ears so that we can hear ... above the roaring clatter and clamor of daily life ... hear Christ's call to *love mercy, walk in this world with humility and do justice.*



THE LION OF JUDAH IS NOT A KITTEN

One thing you need to know about all of this, though, is that it is about something deeper and more demanding than doing some good things – a occasional or even regular acts of chairity - in the world. Doing justice is far more than simply donating items to Goodwill, working at the food bank or serving hot meals at Salvation Army. Not that those are bad things, but they are simply not enough to satisfy God's burning desire that all the

world should be clothed, fed, housed, educated and live in peace. Yes, charity work and service in the community are the kinds of things that make the world and us feel warm and fuzzy. Charity and service are the kinds of things that don't create a fuss and no one argues about. People applaud us for doing acts of charity. They look at us as say that we Christians aren't so bad because we do nice things. But these are cuddly kitten kinds of things ... Good things no doubt ... but not really truly courageous acts of faith in Christ. Not the kinds of things that got Christ Jesus into trouble. They are the kinds of things he did when everyone applauded him not the kinds of things he went to the cross for us for.

Christ, you see, is not a cuddly kitten. He is the Lion of Judah and his call for justice is a glorious roar that shakes the very foundations of the world and all that is in it. Reconciling justice is what he calls us into and nowhere in scripture is that more apparent than it is in the reading from 2 Corinthians (that is Second Corinthians not Two Corinthians). In this brief reading the word "glory" is spoken 13 times.

Without going into details in which the point would be lost, I can tell you that in my studies of the complex term "glory" ... it became clear beyond a shadow of doubt that the Glory of God is:

completely inseparable from

the perfect, strong, beautiful balance

of a world that radiates *love perfected in justice*.

The Glory of God is fulfilled and manifest in:

what St. Paul calls the Ministry of Righteousness

what may also be called the Ministry of Right Relationships

or

the Ministry of Reconciliation.

To put it another way ... The Lion of Judah roars us into right relationship with God and with others. Christ, the Lion of Judah roars us into caring deeply - not just in sentiment but in action. Christ Jesus, the Lion of Judah, roars us into caring action on behalf of *all* people even and especially if they aren't "like us."



BACK TO THE CAT PAINTING

Now, that brings me back to the cat painting. The artist by the way is a woman named Susan Herbert. She has a whole series of Biblical cat paintings. All of them are delightful. There is just one problem with her painting based on our lesson today from Second Corinthians. The problem is that in her pictures there are only cats. There are no dogs just cats. Those cats, it seems, need a lesson or two on reconciliation in Christ. I guess we humans, even us Christians, could use a few lessons too.

AMEN