



## **Making Known**

Sermon preached by the Reverend Carol Cole Flanagan on the 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, June 22, 2008 at Christ Church, Detroit. RCL Readings: Genesis 21:8-21; Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17; Romans 6:1b-11; and Matthew 10:24-39.

Jesus tells us when the time comes and all is revealed, we disciples are to shout from the rooftops that which Jesus has revealed to us in secret. What had Jesus made known to his first disciples? He was the Son of God. What had Jesus shared with his first disciples? The Good News of the gospel. What had Jesus revealed to his disciples? The miracle of his resurrection. Jesus calls us to shout the good news.

Sometimes we Christians can look as if we are suffering from terminal earnestness. Christians are not supposed to have “poker faces.” If anything, we should all go around looking like “the cat that swallowed the canary.” Jesus suggests that if we sit dour and quiet about God's miraculous work in our lives, there may come a day when God will respond in kind. Garrison Keillor says you know you're an Episcopalian when you hear something really funny during the sermon and smile as loudly as you can. It puts me in mind of something I once read concerning the liturgical responses we make before and after the gospel. As you know, the deacon announces, “The Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew.” And the congregation responds, “Glory to you, Lord Christ,” and afterwards, “Praise to you, Lord Christ.” Originally, when worship was still extemporaneous, those responses of the people were entirely spontaneous. They originated with the people. Someone once said that if we actually believed those words we would change the world.

Sometimes in the church, it becomes easy to fixate on the organization instead of the organism. As good institutional managers, conscientious churchgoing Christians spend hours making check-lists about what the church itself needs -- supplies, repairs, facilities, more members, more dollars and fewer expenses. We also expend enormous energy trying to improve our churches by focusing

on perpetual trouble spots: institutional insensitivities, no sense of mission, committees that malfunction or seemingly have no function, personality conflicts, power struggles, theological disagreements, liturgical preferences, mangled music and restless youth. But after a three-hour meeting about such challenges sometimes the only thing any sane person feels like shouting is “Boy, am I glad to be out of there!” I was telling someone the other day about a poster that hangs in some parish halls and read, “God so loved the world he didn’t send a committee.”

It is easy to forget or become blind to the things that give our lives meaning. Too many of us have forgotten to think about, much less talk about why we are here in the first place. For some it has been a while since they considered some “favorite things” about life and faith. We might begin with a ready-made list we all know.

Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens  
Bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens  
Brown paper packages tied up with strings  
These are a few of my favorite things

Cream colored ponies and crisp apple streudels  
Doorbells and sleigh bells and schnitzel with noodles  
Wild geese that fly with the moon on their wings  
These are a few of my favorite things

Girls in white dresses with blue satin sashes  
Snowflakes that stay on my nose and eyelashes  
Silver white winters that melt into springs  
These are a few of my favorite things

One father made up a stanza for his son Adam (b.1986) and daughter Caitlin (b.1989). He wrote:

"Adam and Caitlin and baseball and hot dogs,  
Flames dancing brightly on the rough bark of oak logs,  
Cats in the window perched regal as kings;  
These are a few of my favorite things."

(American Way, September 1995, 38-41).

Columnist Jim Shahin asked readers to send him a list of their “favorite things,” which he defined as “those things that make life worth living.” Some responses Shahin received were fascinating. People thanked him for helping

them regain perspective.

One person from Albuquerque, New Mexico, wrote back; “Old cement sidewalks buckled with tree roots.” Some others included “reading garden catalogs with a highlighter”; “James Dickey's poems”; “robins singing early in the morning when you're still half-asleep”; “Manhattan, seen from the air by the light of the rising sun”; “waltzing with grandpa”; “dipping sourdough bread in balsamic vinegar”; “having my grown-up daughters as friends”; “company not coming”; “my children saying, ‘You know, Dad, you were right after all!’”; “the smell of bacon frying, wood being sawed, fresh-cut grass, coffee being ground, baby powder”; “lemon meringue pie”; “barbecued ribs”; “Mexican green chile”; “having it snow on Christmas day”; “getting the person I'm calling on the phone instead of voice mail or a secretary” (American Way, September 1995, 38-41). When I have tried this, certain things keep cropping up: sunsets, sunrises, clean sheets, naps, the smell of a campfire, the Sunday paper, the roar of the ocean, snowcapped mountains, falling in love, and surprise phone calls from old friends.

What are our favorite things about Christ Church? What is it that brings us here? Who can name some? (This particular community of people, our iconic presence in the city, our diversity, our music and liturgy, the mix of ages, the way the light shines in through the stained glass windows, this parish's historical capacity to adapt to a changing community within and a changing city around us)

And what are our favorite things about God? About the Holy Spirit? About the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church? About being a Christian? If you were to stand on your rooftop and shout what would your message be? God's constant presence, God's endless capacity for forgiveness, the whimsy of the Holy Spirit who blows where she will and never ceases to surprise us, the ceaseless work of the Spirit in bringing good out of evil and life out of death, being surrounded by that great cloud of witnesses, the communion of saints, knowing that somewhere in the world at any time of day are night, there are brothers and sisters in the faith offering prayer for us and for the work of the church in the world)

Sometimes we don't take time to look and then sometimes we are just blind. Here are some historical examples of people's inability to “see.”

I confess that my imagination refuses to see any sort of submarine doing anything but suffocating its crew and floundering at sea.

--H. G. Wells, British sci-fi author, 1901.

While theoretically and technically television may be feasible, commercially and financially I consider it an impossibility, a development of which we need waste little time dreaming.

--Lee De Forest, U.S. inventor, "Father of the Radio," 1926.

A Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor is a strategic impossibility.

--George Fielding Eliot, "The Impossible War With Japan," American Mercury, 1938.

[Television] won't be able to hold onto any market it captures after the first six months. People will soon get tired of staring at a plywood box every night.

--Darryl F. Zanuck, head of 20th Century Fox, 1946.

The war in Vietnam is going well and will succeed.

--Robert McNamara, U. S. Secretary of Defense, 1963.

(Excerpted from David Wallechinsky, *The People's Almanac Presents the Complete Idiosyncratic Compendium of the Twentieth Century* [New York: Little, Brown and Co., 1995]).

Three apprentice devils were preparing to come to Earth to finish their apprenticeship. Satan, the Prince of Darkness, appeared before them and questioned them about their plans to tempt and ruin people.

The first said, "I will tell people that there is no God." Satan answered, "You will deceive only a few that way because deep down, people sense that there must be a God." The second apprentice spoke, "I will tell them that there is no hell," "You will fool only a few that way," replied Satan, "because deep down people know one day they will have to answer for their misdeeds."

Finally, the third apprentice declared, "I will tell people that there is no hurry." With that, Satan laughed with delight and predicted, "You will ruin them by the millions."

--As quoted in Paul J. Wharton, *Stories and Parables for Preachers and Teachers* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press), 48.