



Proper 16, Year C – July 18, 2010

“Jesus is in the House”

A Homily preached by the Rev'd James Popham

Let me say just a couple of things about Martha and Mary. Because, mainly, I want to speak to Eli and Levi and Jaxon. This is, after all, their big day. But I would hate for anyone to come away from today's Gospel with the wrong impression. If you have invited Jesus to dinner, it's okay to clean the house, polish the silver, set out the family china, and be sure the knives, forks, and spoons are in the right place. It's just fine to roast a prime rib, make your special cheese sauce for the broccoli, and conjure up the perfect trifle. Jesus would be honored. But Jesus will not sweat dust on the mantle, fingerprints on the tureen, or a knife turned blade out. If the roast is overdone or the cheese sauce is lumpy, Jesus would not mind. What would put Jesus off your trifle is your being anxious about any of it. Never a need to get in a dither about the details. In fact, if Jesus is in the house, then never a need to get in a dither at all. And Jesus is always in the house.

And that is what I want to talk to Eli and Levi and Jaxon about. You see as human beings we have developed a vision of God as a person – presumably because relating to God as a newt or a salamander would be a bit problematic. And, let's face it. We are best at relating to persons. God knew this in coming to walk among us as the fully divine, but also fully human Jesus Christ.

So you will hear us talk a lot about Jesus. Jesus shows us how God wants us to be. And how God wants us to act. We are the only major religion that understands that another human being, just like us, was and is divine, as fully God and fully human. So if we want to know God, we need to know Jesus. How do we learn about Jesus? The foundation of our knowledge of Jesus is the Bible. The New Testament provides us the earliest impressions of Jesus and his life – the closest thing we have to a first-hand knowledge and understanding of Jesus. We also study the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament because that was the Bible Jesus' read and studied as he grew up as a young Jewish boy. And if there is a theme that is central to the entire Bible and reflected in the life of Jesus, it is to love God and love your neighbour as yourself. Jesus in his life healed and fed and taught and exhorted. He was compassionate. Sometimes, his love was like a mom's or dad's love for you. It was tough love. Jesus called the religious leaders of his day on their hypocrisy. He challenged the power of the dominant Romans. But he never resorted to violence against another human being. Even when faced with execution – crucifixion – because he insisted that God was the true king, not Caesar, even then he never raised a hand in anger to resist his fate. To the contrary, loving to the very end, he asked that his torturers be forgiven. So, my young friends, read the Bible. Hear the stories read to you now. When you get older, get a good study Bible, the kind where the footnotes take up half the page. Read the stories of God and humanity from creation to Revelation, the last book of the Bible. And don't worry if you do not understand Revelation. Just understand that it reminds us that our only true hope comes in trusting in the love of God and God's kingdom on earth and into eternity.

Now the Bible is a great source for coming to know God, but we also understand as Christians that God is everywhere. In a manifestation of God we call “the Holy Spirit,” God is in the world, right now, everywhere, among us, in the midst of God's great creation. How do we connect with this God who is everywhere?

We look for God in what the Celts 15 centuries ago called "thin places." These are places where whatever separates us from God becomes very thin. In those thin places God's presence – and God always is present – in those thin places God's presence becomes palpable. Opps. Sorry Eli, Levi, and Jaxon. That's a big word. What I mean is we can feel God's presence. At these times, God connects with us and communicates with us, perhaps, more directly than usual. It may be a moment of new understanding or insight. Or in silence God may speak words to our hearts that we do not even hear. But we'll notice that in some small way – or maybe a very large way – we have become better, more Godly, if you will. Those around us may notice. I can tell you my dogs notice.

Great, you might be thinking, but how do I find these thin places? After all, I'm too young to read or load an Ipod or drive myself to church. In the embrace of your mom's and dad's arms, when they are hugging and loving you, comforting you when you hurt, or feeding you something tasty and nourishing. Those will be thin places for you. As you get older, you will discover where the thin places are for you. I hope a church or our beautiful liturgy or music will be. Or in receiving the bread and wine of Communion. But it might just as well be a stunning sunrise or sunset, a majestic mountain, or the reflection of stars on still water. But may be in a poem or a novel or a movie. It may be in an act of kindness from an unexpected source. It may be in a homily or sermon, unless, of course, it is too long. Uh OH!

So, I will mention only one more thin place that you will experience in just a few minutes. Baptism. In our outward signs of water and chrism, in the love of your families and sponsors and the entire community, in some special way, God's grace will flow and surround you and touch you. You will feel God's love and mercy and sense God's unceasing forgiveness. You will enter a new life in Christ and be marked as Christ's own forever. That's a long time, and today is just the beginning. The first of many thin places where you will be so very close to God and encounter God in a particularly powerful and compelling way.

Yes, Jesus is in the house. Jesus is always in the house. God will be there with you. But do not be anxious. Don't fret. God is there whether we know it or not. Just keep an eye out or an ear cocked and always a heart open to those thin places where God will be so close you can feel it.

Amen.