

“I Smell Bread”  
Luke 10:1-11, 16-20  
July 4, 2010

The Wizarding World of Harry Potter has now opened at Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida, and I would love to go. Supposedly it has things to see and things to do and things to ride that all bring the adventures of Harry Potter and his friends to life. For instance, you can be fitted for a wand. You can drink butter beer. You can pick out a broomstick – you can walk through the hallowed halls of Hogwarts. Total fun. You can enter into Harry’s world where, according to the website, magic is real and excitement knows no bounds.

If Jesus could have tapped into the charisma and charm of cute little Harry Potter, just think of the theme park we muggles could have by now. But, alas, a Magic Kingdom Come is no Florida vacation, because Jesus is no Walt Disney. But, what if? What if his disciples were Happy and Dopey and Grumpy and Sleepy...not a bad description, really. What if, for our inspiration and amusement, Jesus built a theme park? It’s a holiday weekend, so let’s play with that for a minute. If he used the scripture we just read as his blueprint, the park brochures might read something like this: We operate on the buddy system. Find a buddy and pick your destination from the following list of exciting towns: PaganPoint, SinnerSquare, Heavenly Frontier. Stroll down the streets in all of the places where the Good Lord intends to go, and your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to prepare the way. Your secret entrance to the park is cleverly located right where you are – it’s a small world after all - and it is called the Grand Harvest. It is quite spectacular, but be warned. Hold on to your buddy, because workers keep disappearing, and just when you think you’ve done everything you can do in Grand Harvest you come to another twisting turn and crops pop up just like magic right on into eternity. So, do your best, have some fun especially in the beginning. Because as you continue on through Grand Harvest, you will need to turn over your purse, your bag, and your shoes and then you will see IT snaking up to the sky: the wild and wooly Lamb-inator. (That’s a play on words...wolves and LAMBS). I will thrust you like lambs into the dark world of the wolves – some with big teeth and bad breath and others that fool you with their sheepish looks – the Lamb-inator is the scariest part of Grand Harvest, and please read the fine print. Magic Kingdom Come is not responsible for injury or death that may occur to your person as a result of the Lamb-inator.

It’s at this point that I’m considering another vacation destination. Even with a buddy, that sounds threatening. “I’ll send you out like lambs among wolves.” Can’t you hear a lonely howl in the background? It stops you in your tracks. Do I really want to go on because it does not sound like I stand a chance? This would be a great opportunity for Jesus to give a little pep talk – oh, it will be all right, honey. Don’t you worry about a thing. But, instead, we learn that our chance of successful survival is not our decision to make. It’s not about our bravery or our glory. It’s not even about the crops or the take. It’s about preparing Grand Harvest for Jesus. That’s what it says – he commissioned them, and he sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go.

Preparing the way for Jesus would seem to require a little more advance planning. Some written goals and objectives and measurements for success, but Jesus keeps it simple. Deliver the message that the Kingdom of God has come near to you. That’s it. But, it is an odd little message, if you think about it. The Kingdom of God has come near, and YET, Jesus – in the flesh - had NOT gone near those villages. Nor has Jesus in the flesh gone near Wilson’s Mills or Clayton or Smithfield. But by way of his followers, the Kingdom of God was near...is near.

Makes our work, the work of the disciples, seem a little more important now, doesn't it? We are personalities of the story, little castles in the Kingdom of God. We're like the characters that walk around Disney World –the Poohs and the Piglets– carrying the creativity and imagination and plans of our creator. If you are lucky enough to pose for a picture with us and we are having a good day, you've gotten a picture of the kingdom.

Today, on the secular calendar, we celebrate the Fourth of July – our independence – our citizenship in this great country. If you take a picture with us, you have a picture of a slice of Americana. If we watch fireworks tonight, chances are that we will feel great pride. If we listen to a patriotic medley with the Boston Pops, chances are that our hearts will beat a little faster. If we watch the flag raised high into the sky, chances are that we might feel a lump in our throat. We do pledge allegiance and our patriotism is a good point of reference for us, because when Jesus sent out those 70, and when he sends out us, he wants more. He wants an even greater allegiance – full citizenship in the kingdom of Heaven. And, our primary civic duty here is to prepare this church, this county, this state, this country, this world for HIM. When we walk out the church doors and into our homes, our workplaces, our shopping centers – does anyone we encounter believe that the Kingdom of Heaven has come near? They should. Our presence should make this world look more and more like the Kingdom of Heaven. Our words should make this world sound more and more like the Kingdom of Heaven. Our actions should make this world feel more and more like the Kingdom of Heaven. We carry the fragrance of God from sea to shining sea.

How many of you remember the popular sitcom of the 1970's called MASH? It was about a group of doctors and nurses trying to make sense of their assignment in a MASH unit during the Korean War. In one particular episode, Major Winchester is depressed and he is trying to find some answers to life's most perplexing problem . . . death. He comes into contact with a dying soldier who cries out, 'Hold my hand.' The Major grabs his hand and says, "Can you see anything? Can you feel anything? I have to know." But the soldier doesn't answer any of those questions. Instead, all he manages is "I smell bread."

Isn't that odd? "Can you see anything? Can you feel anything? I have to know." At least in the world of MASH, as this soldier enters into the full Kingdom of Heaven, the answer is a fragrance, a symbol, an experience – it is almost magic. For, all the soldier can say in the midst of his own suffering is, 'I smell bread.' That's it. "I smell bread."

I know that TV is not the place for religious studies, but that episode – I smell bread – is theologically sound. Jesus himself said that the kingdom of heaven is like a woman baking bread – that has a comforting smell which as aromatherapy makes the Lambinator a little less threatening – because it is not our job to DEFEAT it. We don't have to have to wave a magic wand or cast a spell to get it to leave. We just have to soak ourselves in God– let his fragrance seep into our clothes and get under our skin and float all the way into our hearts. Then, notice what happens when the lambinator shakes us up here and drops us down over there. The sacred fragrance is carried even further here and there. And, it can change the world. That ought to be good news. Ought to be well received, because everybody likes bread, right? Everybody likes the way bread smells and tastes – the way it fills you up on the inside. Not everybody.

Well, according to Jesus, bread drives the wolves crazy. They don't like it, and they are out for blood. I think this is one of the hardest things for Christians to deal with. For starters, we have something in common with the rest of the world. We want people to like us and to accept us. When we travel through GrandHarvest and we do the things we believe God wants us to do, our hearts are just soft enough that we can be hurt. A friend of mine remembers pastoring a

church while he finished seminary. He was a self-proclaimed Pollyanna. Lots of youthful enthusiasm! One Sunday, he stood in the back shaking hands after the service. An usher came through and gave him a note that was left in a pew. It was in a little envelope that made it look like a thank-you note – his mind immediately went to the best case scenario – someone is thanking me! He opened it right then, and the anonymous note said, “Why don’t you shave your beard and go back to being the nice young man you were when you came?” He put the note in his pocket and hoped that no one noticed how much it hurt his feelings. And, for the next several weeks, he couldn’t help but stand in the pulpit looking out at the congregation wondering who had written such a thing. Who was more concerned with his beard than the good news?

Jesus knew that these little stings – and sometimes big stings – would happen to his followers. They happened to him ALL the time. The difference is that Jesus did not pay a whole lot of attention to them... and his disciples obsessed over them. Should we wipe out those who are against us? Should we defend ourselves, Lord? Should we stand at the gateway to GrandHarvest and prevent them from leaving the park? No. Our calling is not to convince anybody of anything – that is beyond our abilities. Our calling is to carry the sacred fragrance and wish the sacred peace wherever we go. If someone turns that away, so be it. If someone says, ‘your peace is not welcome here,’ so be it. We’ve all been places like amusement parks with people who do not want to be there but were convinced to come along for the ride, and it is miserable for everybody! Gripping. Complaining. Checking watches to see when we can leave. That does so much more harm than good. So, bear the message and if you are rejected, it is ok. Take off your shoes, shake off the dust, and move on.

What Jesus gives us is really a sacrament of rejection – a plan for when we get thrown off the lamb-inator. He says to shake off the dust and go on. The truth is that rejection and failure sometimes prepares us for better things. The failure of the caterpillar is the birth of the butterfly. The passing of the bud is the blooming of the rose. The death of the seed is the prelude to its resurrection as wheat. Only we don’t know it at the time. We just do the work, and we have no control over how it is received or any other outcome for that matter. I’ll tell you, that is a HUGE relief– that we are not called to be successful, only faithful. You see, it is in our faithfulness and nothing else, that the world meets the character of Christ. And, Lord knows, what we need more than anything else, what the world needs from us more than anything else, is that experience – the taste and the smell and the feel – of the Risen Christ. I think we can do it, because I just got a whiff of it. I smell bread!