

St. Paul's Episcopal Church
Sermon by Freya Gilbert
Sunday, August 11, 2024

I have a cat named Humphrey. Well, nobody actually has cats. If anything, the cats have you. In any case...every morning around nine, Humphrey sits at the edge of my bed waiting for me. If I come close enough, he throws himself at me and climbs up to my shoulders and hugs me for dear life. I've learned to be proactive and sweep him up (Claws, Humphrey, Claws!!!) Humphrey stays there hugging and face bumping and purring until he's done, and if I put him down before he's ready...well that's just wasting his time and mine. His thirst for affection needs to be quenched, his hunger for must be filled before the day can progress.

There's another cat in my life, though. Actually two of them. One lives with me and I'm bringing her up because if I don't and she finds out that I talked about Humphrey without talking about her too her little heart will be so sad. Love you Anna Livia!

The third cat is a neighborhood cat that regularly is sitting, or wandering around in my front yard. My heart goes out to him, because he's a younger, less chunky version of Humphrey. Black, with a sweet little tuft of white hair on his chest. He doesn't seem to be hungry or sick, but he is fearful. If I even get up, or start to move in his direction, he runs away as fast as he can. I'd like to think that as time goes on, he is drawn closer and closer to me, and that maybe one day he will not run away in terror. Until that day, I wait and I love.

This morning we heard about a God who waits and loves and ever so slowly, ever so patiently draws us in. A God who stands there with water and bread waiting for us to come quench our thirst and fill our hungry souls. A God who understands our fear and our longing, a God who doesn't control or compel, but allures and invites and draws us in so gently and tenderly.

A couple things about the phrasing of a line in this morning's text need to be said as we journey together this morning. The line reads: No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father... That's a negative framing which needs to be balanced by the rest of John's Gospel. Over and over

again in John we find Jesus' knowledge of being one with the Father, being in the Father, and his assurance to us that we are one with Jesus and that we are in Jesus and therefore drawn into the Divine Life of mutual love and abundance. So we can confidently see this text as an assurance that all of us, each last one of us are being drawn toward a loving God.

I don't know why my neighborhood cat is so afraid of me. Is it instinct? Is it a trauma that he himself suffers from? How and where did he lose his trust? In so many ways, he is the mirror image of Humphrey. After I first adopted Humphrey, he would literally cling to my ankle if he saw that I was leaving him. He had to be able to trust that I would come back for him.

Both of them have been so afraid to love, to be loved. Afraid to draw near, afraid to be abandoned. So frightened to trust again when trust has been lost and been misplaced.

But also so hungry, so thirsty.

Dear ones, the world around us is full of people who are afraid of love and being loved, people who are so hungry, so thirsty. Some of them might be sitting in our pews, standing in our pulpit.

I don't know the end of the story of my neighborhood cat. I hope that one day, if I'm quiet enough and still enough, and if my heart is open enough, that he will come to me. I don't know that, I can only long for that. I can long that he comes to see that trust in me would not be misplaced.

I do know the end of my story and the end of the story for each of us who are hungry and thirsty and yet so afraid, so afraid. So scarred by misplaced trust. Mahayana Buddhists tell of the Bodhisattva, the Bodhisattvas. Beings who achieve enlightenment and therefore can leave behind suffering. They don't, though. They vow to stay, to come back over and over again, until all beings are enlightened and until all beings have been freed from suffering. Bodhisattvas leave no one behind.

And neither does our God. Our God will stand there all night long with bread and water. And the next morning, and the next day, and the day after that and and the

night after that and the day after that. God will earn our trust and show that our trust is not misplaced.

God will wait as long as it takes. God will do what it takes to regain our trust and show that it is not misplaced. God will leave no one alone to hunger and thirst and fear, unable to trust. Not you, not me, not anyone, anywhere. God stands there, water and bread in hand, longing, waiting for you and I and everyone to be drawn in.

For as long as it takes...