

**“It is to Such as These...”**  
**Proper 22, Year B – Mark 10:2-16**

*preached by the Rector at St. Paul’s, Henderson October 7, 2012*

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

This past Thursday was an important day. For one thing, October 4 in the Church Calendar is the Feast of Francis of Assisi, Friar, who died in 1226, but only after a life of radical imitation of Christ and reminding us all of the goodness of *all* of God’s creation. We celebrated St. Francis at our mid-week Eucharist on Wednesday, and again yesterday with the Blessing of Animals.

Thursday was important in another way, though, that may have escaped your notice. Some of you already know that I try to live rather simply at our apartment over on Powell St. – not St. Francis simple, mind you, but still... For example, I do without cable TV – gasp! Instead, I make do with the network coverage I am able to pull in with an antenna. Actually, that’s not *quite* accurate. Since I have internet coverage, I supplement my TV watching habit (a better description *might* be addiction) with the impressive library of movies and TV episodes available from the online service, *Netflix*. In the last several months, I have developed a particular fondness for some of the black-and-white classics of *early* television, having watched every episode of both the *Andy Griffith Show* and the *Dick Van Dyke Show*.

October 4, 1957, just a couple of months after my *own* debut, was the premier of my current favorite series, *Leave it to Beaver*, the adventures of Theodore “Beaver” Cleaver and his family. The series is *very* black-and-white, you will probably remember, both cinematically and ideologically. For six full seasons, America watched the Beaver grow up in the fictional town of Mayfield, with his parents, Ward and June Cleaver and his older brother, Wally.

By the third season, the Cleavers have moved across town, from 485 Mapleton Drive to their *new* home at 211 Pine Street. In episode 8 of that season, Beaver’s fourth grade class is assigned to memorize a portion of the schmaltzy nineteenth century poem, “The Heart of a Tree.” They don’t do a particularly good job. Finally the class is impressed by the reading given by their teacher, Miss Landers, no one *more* so than Beaver, who has a bit of a crush on her. It seems the family once planted a tree in honor of Beaver’s birthday, but it had been left behind in the family’s recent move. Miss Landers tries to reassure the boy that his tree was being well cared for by the new owner, but you know the Beaver...

Reasoning that the tree was his because it had been a birthday present, he enlists the help of his best buddy, the always hungry Larry Mondello, and goes to his old neighborhood, digs up the tree, and carries it home in his wagon. Beaver gets into the predictable amount of trouble when, while still on the phone with the new owner of the old house, his parents see a tree moving past the patio window, seemingly under its own power. June demands an explanation for the boy’s arboreal larceny. “Dad’ll laugh at me,” tells his mother. “I took the tree because I love it.” The next week, Beaver again recites the poem, but this time with feeling that greatly impresses our Miss Landers. He explains his newfound appreciation with the look of wonder still shining in his eyes, “I guess I got to know trees a lot better... since Friday.”

A poem is also the driving feature in the first episode of season two, when Beaver suddenly remembers that he has one due for school the *next* morning. With his plans for a night out with June suddenly in shambles, and exasperated by his son’s procrastination with the three-week-old assignment, Ward Cleaver sits down with the Beaver to write the epic work, “The Bear.” Their collaboration goes about as well as you might expect, until, one of them tired, and the other frustrated, Ward tells the boy to just go on to bed. In the morning, Beaver “writes” his poem by copying the composition that his father had completed after *he* had gone to bed. No harm done, the chagrined Ward reasons to his wife – and besides, Beaver really thinks he *did* write the poem.

All well and good, until the next day when the poem is chosen to be read at an assembly, and to be given a *prize*. That's where things begin their usual long, downhill slide from bad to worse. Of course, eventually Dad fixes things with Beaver's principal, Mrs. Rayburn, and he is allowed to submit a new poem – "The Duck." But not before things come to their usual climax of social and moral dilemma. Wally finds the Beaver in their bathroom crying. "What're you crying for, Beave?" asks the experience wizened fourteen-year-old. The younger boy sobs, "Sometimes things get so messed up, there's nothin' else you *can* do."

Concerned that the boys are spending too much of their time in the movies rather than getting fresh air and sunshine, in episode 29 of the first season, Ward sets up a weekend of camping and fishing at Friends Lake. When the boys start spreading the word about their plans, know-it-all Eddie Haskell snidely suggests that their dad will do the same as his dad always does, and back out his promise. His prediction, if not his assessment of parental fidelity, comes true the night before the big trip when Fred Rutherford shows up to say that work will demand Ward's time over the weekend.

When he gives them the bad news the next morning, Wally and the Beaver seem to understand their father's change of plans. When Ward finally gets home late that evening, he finds that the boys have, by themselves, pitched their camp in the back yard. He is impressed by their resourcefulness, but during the night, a storm front moves in and the boys' campsite becomes a quagmire. Eventually they sneak their sleeping bags in through the kitchen and spend the remainder of the night dry in their room, returning to their "camp" early the next morning, in time to cook their breakfast of "eagle eggs". When they tell Eddie of their adventure the next day, he smirks, Eddie *always* smirks, "My dad would have come out and dragged me into the house. I wish I had a dad that didn't care what happened to me." When Eddie's gone, Beaver turns to his big brother, "Dad does *too* care what happens to us, doesn't he Wally?" "Sure, Beav. Who do you think left the back door open?"

One day, after Jesus had talked to some Pharisees about marriage and divorce, the brokenness of this world and perfect world of God's plan for us (one of these years when we know each other better, I'll get around to preaching on *that* portion of the text) one day when the disciples got a little self-important and got in the way, Jesus said, "Don't stop children from coming to me – it's really all about *them*." And to make sure everybody understood – *again* – Jesus added, "Unless you come to the kingdom of God like a child, you won't *ever* be part of it."

I don't think he meant that you need to come to the Kingdom with tears in your eyes, a cry on the edge of your lips, and despair in your heart, like my white-knuckled eleven-year-old response to the "evangelist" I told you about last week. I think he meant that we need to come to the Kingdom with the wonder that sees the work of God writ large in the world around us, on every sunset, on every child's smile, on every beloved tree, and the openness to see his work writ intimately and indelibly on every breath we take. I think he meant that we should understand the limitations of our mortal and broken nature, and come to him when we once again find ourselves in over our heads, when there's nothin' else we can do but cry. I think Jesus meant that we need to trust in our forgiving and sustain Father who time and time again leaves the door open for us when we have wandered far from home.

This past Thursday was an important day. It was the feast day of a couple of saints, one of them a very real Friar with the marks of Christ from the thirteenth century, and one of them a fictional little boy with freckles from the mid-twentieth. Perhaps we can learn a little something from them both.