

July 4, 2021  
The Rev. Paula Jefferson  
The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

*Number 4, Privet Drive*

At Number 4, Privet Drive, the Dursley's lived a quiet, *normal* life .... until...they awoke one morning to find a child at their doorstep. It was their nephew. Harry Potter.

Harry's aunt and uncle treated him poorly. He wore oversized hand-me-downs, taped-together glasses, and he lived in a cupboard under the stairwell. Harry served the family as if he was hired help. He was not included in family gatherings; he was acknowledged only when he failed their expectations.

Even before Harry knew his own calling, the Dursley's feared it. If Harry was like his parents, he would have unusual abilities...*very* unusual.

Pause

In our Gospel reading, Jesus returns to his hometown. He's been moving about the countryside of Galilea preaching, teaching, healing. His reputation is growing; crowds are gathering to listen and be near him.

Mark tells us this is not how things will be in Jesus' hometown.

The hometown folk are astonished at his teaching and the healing he does. Yet, they can make no sense of it. Jesus is a carpenter. They have known him all his life. They knew Joseph. They know his mom, Mary, and his siblings. They had seen no signs of Jesus being different than any other child. How could he be so different than them, now?

Pause

During the first tax season that I was a married person, I prepared our first Married Filing Joint tax return. As a CPA, I had filed a lot of tax returns...and I knew that the tax code had an embedded “marriage penalty” ... filing as a married couple cost more tax dollars than two single persons filing independently. But my husband did not know this. When I presented him with a Form 1040 that had a balance due, something he had not experienced as a single person, he said, “I’ll just take this to H&R Block...”.

Pause

Jesus’ neighbors knew him before he was called into his ministry. Now, when he returns to read and teach in the local synagogue, they are amazed. Yet, they fear this change. Where did Jesus get this wisdom? Who has given it to him? How is he able to do these works of power?

The reading says, “they took offense at him”...they recoil with fear.

Pause

The Dursley’s fear Harry Potter. They know all too well that his parents, and their kind, had unusual powers. At Number 4 Privet Drive, Harry merely exists. They make no investment in learning about this child. Instead, like the folks in Jesus’ hometown, they write the narrative of Harry’s life based upon their logic. He will stay in the cupboard under the stairwell, out of sight...out of mind.

In his hometown, Jesus will always be *just* a carpenter. That is the “cupboard” that his neighbors create for him.

Harry's life changes when he arrives at Hogwarts...and discovers his calling. He is gifted. He meets people who will become his family: people who do not fear his gifts, people who love him unconditionally. They trust him, and follow him.

The Dursley's will never know this part of Harry's life. They will not be part of his chosen family, they will not know the amazing things Harry will do, the sacrifice that Harry will make for their world. He is just a boy in a cupboard under the stairwell.

Pause

A couple of weeks ago, Paul explained that we are "Co-operators with God"... each of us is able to use the grace God has already given us. But, when the people of Jesus' hometown demonstrate a lack of faith, the work Jesus is able to do with them is limited. They are not able to fully *co-operate* with Jesus...and they will not fully experience his extraordinary gift until, by grace, their faith is awakened.

Mark McIntosh wrote about the "Mysteries of Faith". He describes theology like it was a verb: "*Theology is walking up to the edge and noticing the mystery before you*"<sup>1</sup>. Theology isn't a thing that we see...it is what we are able to apprehend through faith.

Faith allows us to see differently..."*to ponder the deep meaning of everyday life by seeing our lives as taking place within God's life*". When we think about our lives in this way, our meaning and purpose are reshaped.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark McIntosh; *Mysteries of Faith*; p 1

Developing our faith, our theology, requires intentional energy. McIntosh describes theology as a “*Habit of Life*”...it is a process of life-long Christian formation. Prayer, worship, service, learning: all of these are openings through which the Spirit transforms us and our ability to apprehend God. That is the very tug that Jesus’ neighbors resist. To see Jesus not only as a carpenter, but also as Divine Mystery enfleshed, requires them to exercise faith.

God invites us to co-operate in God’s work in this world. God plants within us the gift of grace. We grow in our awareness of God as we grow in our Christian formation.

Discipleship, or Christian Formation, is a choice. It is your choice. It is my choice. It was the Dursley’s choice...

The Dursley’s opened their door one morning and found Harry Potter at their doorstep. They could have closed the door and left the child outside. They chose to bring Harry inside. He lived apart from them, in the cupboard under the stairwell. He served their meals, but was not invited to join them at their table. Harry was invited into their house. But not their home.

I was asked, recently, how in the world will we connect Harry Potter with Christianity?

The Dursley’s opened their door one morning and found Christ at their doorstep. They could have closed the door and left Christ outside. They chose to bring Christ inside. He lived apart from them, in the cupboard under the stairwell. Christ served their meals, but was not invited to join them at their table. Christ was invited into their house. But not their home.

The world in front of the text:

At 9:15 a.m. on August 22, 2021, the people of St. Martin-in-the-Fields Episcopal Church will open their doors and find Christian formation...for all ages...at their doorstep....

