

Good morning! An honor to be with you – to serve as your interim rector. Thank you.

I'm a single dad -- raising two great kids. My daughter, Tilly, is in eighth grade, and my son, Tate, is a senior. The three of us run a bit of zoo: two dogs, one cat, and one hamster. Actually, we just gave Houdini, the hamster, away to some friends.

Olive is our lab puppy, weighing-in at almost 70 pounds, and Pepper is our tabby cat.

But it is Katie, I want to tell you about. Katie is our ten year-old terrier mix. She looks like a border terrier (not border collie), with a keen face and hunched, linebacker shoulders. She is without a doubt, the best dog I've ever had – sensitive, intuitive, intelligent. Katie actually smiles at you.

Before moving to California five years ago, I served as the rector of Old St. Paul's Parish near Chestertown, Maryland. We lived in the rectory, at the center of St. Paul's 20 acre cemetery. Katie roamed free, in those days, chasing Canadian geese by the pond behind the cemetery, and greeting people coming to church on Sunday mornings.

Every week, or two, there would be a funeral at the old churchyard, and invariably, Katie would amble over to the graveside tent. She would figure out who the widow was – always a widow, it seemed – and Katie would ease up to the distraught and bereft woman and place her chin kindly on the woman's knee, looking up at her with – and I tell you the truth – the complete compassion of Christ.

We all called Katie, “the churchyard dog.”

When we moved to Sausalito, Katie, who was by then used to roaming 20 acres, became the escape artist. She found inventive ways to get out of the fenced back yard so she could roam the neighborhood, just like she had roamed the churchyard.

One day, I was talking to Toni Boynton. Toni was the head of the altar guild. A very stately and proper woman, Toni also spoke her mind. Regardless of what thought entered it.

While we were talking, an irate neighbor approached us wagging her finger officiously at me. Katie, I noticed, was tethered by leash at her side. Obviously, Katie had escaped.

The neighbor lectured me on the proper care for dogs, and how could I let Katie run free?

I started to protest, to tell her Katie escaped, but she would have none of it. Finally, she handed Katie over to me, and walked away.

I looked sheepishly at Toni, who looked back at me. She said simply, “I remember the time when dogs were dogs.”

In Jesus’ day, dogs were dogs.

Dogs weren’t coiffed or pampered, they didn’t have beds or days at the doggie spa.

Dogs scrapped for food, in alleyways, along country roads, and beneath tables.

The men -- and it was pretty much just the men at the table – would eat heartily with their hands, filling bellies with meat and corn and bread, slopping wine, they lived and dined ferociously,

When they were full, they would grab whatever bread was left to wipe their greasy hands, and throw it under the table to the dogs. The dogs scrapped for that bread – No Ijams dogfood, or Fancy Feast Gourmet (I know, catfood).

The dogs were bags of bones. You can see the same dogs today, in Africa, where life is still lived close to the earth, the dogs are rail thin and dirty.

Dogs, and Lazarus, the only character in all of Jesus’ parables actually named, lives worse than a dog, begging for scraps. Even the dogs lick his sores.

He is skinny and dirty, a bag of bones, and his eyes are vacant as he sits day after day at the end of the rich man’s drive.

But the rich man never sees him. He passes Lazarus every single day, but he doesn’t even know Lazarus exists. Day after day, year after year --

Until, at last, both die, and the rich man finds himself in torment. I rather think his torment is his own isolation. He let his wealth isolate him from Lazarus and others, and his afterlife is a mere extension of the life he has built for himself here, in this world.

But even now, he still thinks Lazarus is his lackey, the man to run his errands --

“Please, Abraham, send Lazarus
to give me water;”

“Please, Abraham, send Lazarus
to warn my brothers.”

It would be two-dimensional to treat this story as a mere polemic against wealth. Personally, I doubt Jesus hates wealth for wealth's sake. No, wealth is the red herring.

Rather, it is the life lived, and does wealth isolate or does it build bridges? Indeed, Jesus seems to be concerned less about wealth than he is about seeing.

The rich man, you see, drove past Lazarus daily and never actually saw him. As a human being.

A great story I heard once -- about a homeless man who spent his days outside an office tower in San Francisco, begging. Every day a lawyer pass the beggar by on his way into the tower. Every day, the lawyer would put a dollar into the man's cup.

But the lawyer was always in a hurry and never actually spoke to the poor man. One day, though, he hesitated. He couldn't find a dollar in his pocket. The homeless man used the opportunity to ask the lawyer something he'd wanted to ask for years.

"I ... I ... could you tell me, I've always wanted to know something."

Startled, the lawyer looked at the homeless man, seeing his eyes for the first time. They were blue, and stood out. The lawyer asked, "What is it?"

"You -- I mean -- I've always wanted to know, you work up top, right?"

The lawyer answered, "uh - huh."

"Well, I'm just wondering, you people way up there -- can you see us way down here? From way up there, can you see me?"

Who do you see? One of the prayers in Eucharistic Prayer C in the prayer book invokes God to "open our eyes to see God's hand at work in the world about us."

This story of Lazarus and the rich man invites us to open our eyes to see God's hand at work in those people around us.

Did you watch the movie, Avatar? The earthling Jack Sully falls in love with one of the Na'vi women on the distant planet. Jack learns their rituals from her, including one of intimacy:

When a man and woman connect emotionally and spiritually, and each looks deeply into the soul of the other, and says simply,

"I see you."

I see you, as in you are real, a person, not an object, not just one of the others, and not just some mass of protoplasm or DNA.

I see you, and it is this intimacy and vulnerability that are missing from the rich man. He did not use his wealth for good, but for his own narcissistic purposes. As I said, his wealth had isolated him.

He lived alone, and he died alone, and in his after-death, he existed alone.

And isn't that "hell," anyway?

I see you – and that above all else is the call of the Christian, for God in Christ sees you, and simply asks of you one thing, and that is that you see the person next to you.

Which is why we offer peace to one another,

“The peace of the Lord be always with you.”

It means, I see you.