

Are you home today?

Today's Gospel reading presents us with a parable in which the master of a house is very strict about closing time. He required that his residents return home by – let's say – 7 pm. Arrive a minute later and go find someplace else to stay for the night. And no amount of chatter about it –like: but I was delayed by traffic or saw something in a shop window . . . Time's up, door's closed. This is one way Jesus had of impressing upon his audiences (and us) the urgency of his message, to change their lives, to stop finding excuses to remain half-baked in their belief in – say – his Sermon on the Mount, his call to extravagant caring for others, caring for all the created world that lies around us. Don't waste your time delaying your commitment to gracious, authentic being.

But the New Testament contains reversals of such divine sternness – other parables in which it is *Jesus* who arrives at *your* door and expects access to the deepest levels of your lives and minds. Like in the Book of Revelation where we read: *Behold I stand at the door and knock, if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and dine with him and he with me.* In such cases it is *we* who are expected to *open up* to Christ's arrival – whatever the hour of the day or night that may be.

One poet who died a half century ago – Walter de la Mare – wrote of such an occasion. The title is "The Listeners". In it we are the householders – holed up in our familiar, closed environments, and a Traveller arrives – to persistently knock on our locked doors. *"Is there anybody there?" said the Traveller, / Knocking on the moonlit door;/ And his horse in the silence champed the grasses / of the forest's ferny floor.* No answer. So a second time the Traveller asks: *"Is there anybody there?" / But no one descended, / No head from the leaf-fringed sill / Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes, / Where he stood perplexed and still.*

Now the Traveller knew very well that the house was full of silent listeners *thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair, / That goes down to the empty hall, / Harkening in an air stirred and shaken / By the lonely Traveller's call.* So the Traveller finally smote upon the door even louder: *"Tell them I came, and no one answered, / That I kept my word,"* he said. But still to no avail. *Never the least stir made the listeners, / Though every word he spake / Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house / From the one man left awake.*

*From the one man left awake!* What an appropriate description of the Risen Christ himself. This Risen Christ comes to us from beyond the shadow of death; beyond the grip of this nightmare we call "the news"; beyond the narcotic effect of things we call "entertainment"! He comes to us as the one man who has ever been fully awake in this world and who would invite us, even as he invited doubting Thomas, to touch him and discover how much more real he is (and all that he stands for) compared to what a weary, godless version of the world has to offer.

Nor do his invitations ever really cease. The Traveller of de la Mare's poem rides off never to be seen again but that can never be said of Christ. Christ stands perpetually

at our door and knocks - be it by way of a friend's concern or a good homily or a blue sky or a gentle rain or the chalice of his blood or those California poppies waving to us from a roadside ditch. In infinite ways Christ is never late for an appointment with us.