

## Plenty to Give Away

The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, Year B, RCL. Isaiah 40:21-31. Psalm 147:1-12, 21c. 1 Corinthians 9:16-23. Mark 1:29-39. February 5, 2012. The Episcopal Shared Ministry of Our Saviour, Salem and Trinity, Alliance in the Diocese of Ohio. The Rev'd Jerome H. (Kip) Colegrove.

Pay close attention, because I'm about to tell you what you *really* need to know about the grace of God and evangelism.

It was back in the Bronze Age, the autumn of 1982. Julie and I had not been married very long. I was out shopping at a supermarket in Charlottesville, Virginia. We did not have much money and I was used to shopping on the cheap, getting just what we needed and no more. Imagine my surprise when the manager of the dairy department told me he had just put out some gallon jugs of milk whose sell-by date was about to expire. He said I could take as many as I wanted—for free!

I was overwhelmed, even giddy, and a bit concerned. What could Julie and I do, just the two of us, with a huge amount of milk? Well, I said to myself, we'll think of something. So I brought home four gallons.

We got in the spirit of the thing. It was exciting and challenging to have so much more than we needed, and we couldn't let it sit around. We made cream soups. We baked bread. We ate a lot of cereal with milk. We gave milk and soup baked goods away—to the girls who rented the upstairs part of the house we lived in, to friends who lived near and far. We went nuts with milk.

Suppose you could go nuts with something exciting, challenging, nourishing, sociable—something you had plenty

of, something that never ran out, that everybody can take into their life and appreciate, like that batch of milk only more so?

But wait—then there were the roses. Julie and I were still newly married. It was February, and, as we all know, Valentine's Day comes in February— it's coming round again in nine days. The weather can be iffy in mid-February, even in Virginia. That year a storm hit on Valentine's Day. A day or two later Julie and I were shopping in a supermarket—maybe the same one where the milk came from; I don't remember for certain. Anyway, as we were passing the flower department, the lady who ran it asked us if we would take some roses—for free. She had ordered too many and with the storm keeping customers away she was overwhelmed with them. So we left with armloads of roses. Again, we were stunned, giddy, a bit concerned. Another unlooked for abundance of perishables! We had roses all over the house (no cats, in those days) and we gave them away to friends and neighbors.

What if you were drenched in wonder and beauty and fragrant delight? What if it would never fade, never go bad, never have to be discarded? What if it went on forever, armloads and armloads and armloads, plenty to enjoy, plenty to give away, spreading delight on all sides?

Then there was the ice cream. Julie was in seminary—still in Virginia, but years later. She was up in northern Virginia, I was still in Charlottesville, so she lived in a dormitory as if she were single. One day someone came down the hall of her dormitory knocking on all the doors, full of excitement, spreading the word: at the nearby Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream store they were running a promotion. Free ice cream, not just a teensy taste but big servings!

What if we could all spread the word about joy and delight, excitement and satisfaction, challenge and fulfillment, refreshment and hope, all of it in big servings, plenty for everyone to enjoy and to share?

The grace of God and evangelism.

[The collect for today, with emphasis added:]

Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins, and give us the *liberty* of that *abundant life* which you have made known to us in your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.