

February 21, 2021, the First Sunday in Lent (Year B)  
Spilled Milk

**1 Peter 3:18-22**

<sup>18</sup>For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, <sup>19</sup>in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup>who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight people, were saved through water. <sup>21</sup>And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you — not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup>who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

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Leader: This is the Word of the Lord

**People: Thanks be to God.**

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We all have heard not to cry over spilled milk, but what should you do after the milk spills? Grab a bucket; grab a mop; bring paper towels; call the cat; sponges are handy. Context is important. If the cow kicks the bucket you just let the milk soak into the dirt floor of the barn. If it's your only cow and that's all the milk she gives for the day tears may just come unbidden. We shouldn't overlook that something of value is lost when the container tips. When the Titanic was making like a submarine after hitting the iceberg people lamented that those useless life vests were in such short supply. Those life boats that ruined the clean lines of the ship were far fewer than needed and that became increasingly apparent as the boats hauled away while so many still stood on the deck. Value is a flexible thing so our response to the spilled milk needs to be flexible too.

I've had great fun and immense difficulty explaining to Catholic friends that for us Presbyterians a sin is a sin. We don't divide sin into menial and mortal. Misdemeanor and felony are terms of law, but they aren't in our lexicon when God is our judge. So how can stealing a loaf of bread equal killing another human? I'll admit it does make us look draconian, but sin is not something you do, it's something you are. What you are leads you to do the bad things you do. In the Eastern Orthodox Church sin is treated as

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a symptom of an illness. That illness is separation from God. The source of our life, our creator must be connected like an IV tube in order to counteract the disease. For them the bread and wine of communion are treatments, prescription drugs, for this sinful condition we find ourselves in.

Even with that source of aid some milk will be spilled. It's human nature to be a bit distracted and clumsy so that sin happens. Sometimes it happens without a thought and other times it occurs because you are sick of milk and don't want to have to finish it even though it's good for you. Milk, by the way, is available to many of us of European descent because we have a defective gene that doesn't shut off our ability to tolerate lactose. When visiting New Mexico I discovered we Presbyterians are not held in high regard despite all our efforts to educate and socialize Native American children; a fine example of paving of the road to hell. With little understanding and respect for the parents and children we opened boarding schools that ripped families apart and destroyed whole communities all in the name of "education." Rule number one: first educate yourself. The symbol of this willful ignorance was forcing children to drink their milk because it was good for them. Overlooking the fact that it makes most normal humans sick because we are supposed to grow out of lactose tolerance, but some of us have genes that didn't carry the message.

In the process of cleaning up the spilled milk a few tears may be advised. It lets us acknowledge the value of what was lost and preps us to be more careful and caring in the future. No, the past cannot be undone, but the future does not have to be like the past. Christ suffered from the result of careless human sin. We spilled not milk but blood. The effect of that gruesome treatment of one who did not deserve it should be

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not to let it happen again. Yet we carry on. The remedy according to First Peter involves knowing that as Jesus was spilled out so should we be. We need an emptying of all that eons of evolution put into us. Things that may have made for survival on the African savannah but have no place in the emerging image that God has for all of us. As we pour out those old habits and programming it makes room for Emmanuel, God with us.

We will inevitably spill the milk, but the remedy for spilled milk is to do something about it.

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Closing Prayer: O Lord God, you led your people through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land. So guide us, that, following our Savior, we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.