

ALL IN THE FAMILY

A kind of a sermon

My text might be any of the readings you have already heard, but you know the Bible well enough for yourselves, and I really want to hurry on to tell you what happened to me just recently.

You see, just a few weeks ago I met Jesus—so all you good folk holding your breath, waiting for the Rapture and the Last Judgement, and taking up your rightful reserved place in Heaven and all that kind of stuff, are going to be disappointed. It's happened. I mean, he's back again already. Just part of the family.

Actually when I opened the door, responding to a very timid knock, it wasn't Jesus I first noticed. It was the two large, friendly dogs she was trying to hold back on their leads. Not that there was any trouble from the dogs. They were just curious to know who this new person was in a doorway they had never previously visited. I gave them a pat and got a warm, wet lick; then I looked at the small bespectacled woman behind them. She apologised for interrupting my afternoon, then explained that she had been taking them for her usual walk (I thought they had probably taken her, rather than the other way round). I have never had trouble with dogs and told her not to worry. I asked if I could help in any way, and in a small, embarrassed voice she told me that they had been unusually free with their motions and she had run out of plastic bags to pick up their poo, and could I possibly give her a bag or two to see her safely home. I congratulated her on her concern for public health and retrieved three or four bags from the pile in the kitchen. She went gratefully on her way, hauling on the dogs, and I saw her no more.

Much more recently, Jesus rang me up on the phone. This time he or she was a solitary transgendered person, still subject to the epileptic fits that have plagued her since childhood, and with a withered arm, that meant she couldn't climb a footstool to change the clocks back and replace a light bulb in her lounge ceiling. Would I mind calling in some time, but just when it was convenient? She had already purchased a new bulb, so it was only a matter of a few minutes of my time. And there was the printer, too heavy to carry from one room to the other, and would I mind doing that, too? O, and the filters on the heat-pump really needed to be taken out and dusted, and her home help had told her she wasn't allowed to reach so high off a stepladder. And she was so sorry to bother me.

Yes, I did go round later, and did the decent, and again she was embarrassingly grateful. So, so sorry to bother me.

That same afternoon, there was a further knock on the door. A bold, confident knock. In came Jesus, this time pretending to be a large merry woman carrying some cakes which she explained she had picked up at a local bakery. Would we—my wife and I—have time for a cup of tea and a chat? Just to catch up on our families' various doings, and share some photos of her two lovely grandchildren. Would we mind if she put the kettle on (she knew where the kitchen was) and brought us coffee or tea? I left her to talk with Jeanette—they had much more to catch up on than I did—and when I came back into the lounge there she was, Jesus, sharing stories and laughing a lot and

beaming at both of us. When she left about an hour later, we were feeling really good. She was a breath of fresh air—just the kind of person they say in the gospels went about feeding people, spreading affection and sheer happiness.

I suppose that these visits didn't go unnoticed. Because not long after I had seen our cheerful cake-bearing visitor to the door I sat down to relax, before getting the evening meal under way. I must have unconsciously noticed the shadow drifting across the window, because before my wife could tell me there was somebody coming to pay us a visit I had got up and was already on my way. I beat him to the knocker, so when I opened the door I caught him by surprise. Still, he smiled a warm friendly smile and asked whether I had had a pleasant afternoon. He was dressed in a smart black suit so he sort of looked like a visiting minister, but he certainly wasn't either of ours. He carried a small pouch at his side and pulled out what was obviously a pamphlet. And when he next asked me if I had ever wondered where people go when they die and held out his pamphlet, I knew that behind the smile he was yearning to tell me the answer. I also knew straight away that he was the Other One. So I boldly explained that I was Methodist (which was true) and that I had already given much thought to his question (which was a lie) and politely wished him good afternoon.

I firmly shut the door on him and his smile. I knew that Jesus wouldn't have come knocking on my door like that, would he.

But by the way, I did see the *real* Jesus again, very recently— though it was on a television screen, so I can't claim that I actually met him. This time he appeared as an elderly man in a wheelchair, who had seen his wife shot to death, together with about 50 others. He was being interviewed by reporters, and I heard him telling them he had forgiven the gunman. I still remember his very words. 'I don't want a heart that is boiling like a volcano', he said. 'A volcano is full of anger, and fury and rage. It doesn't have peace, it has hatred. I want a heart that will be full of love and care, and mercy, and will forgive lavishly...I have chosen peace, I have chosen love, I have forgiven.' The reporters gave his name as Farid Ahmid, and said he was just an ordinary Muslim family man, worshipping at the Al Noor mosque when the Christchurch massacre took place. But I knew he was really Jesus, because that's just the sort of thing he would have said.

You know, you can never tell where he will turn up next. He's such a family sort of person.

Amen.