

A woman takes her five-year-old son, Billy, with her one day while she delivers MEALS ON WHEELS. Each time the little guy tags along he is fascinated by the various *appliances* of the senior citizens that they visit, especially the canes, walkers and wheelchairs. Billy's Mom, on this particular day, happens to look at her son who is staring absolutely wide-eyed at a pair of false teeth soaking in a glass. As his mom braces herself for the usual avalanche of questions; Billy turns to her and whispers, 'Mom, I don't think tooth fairy is ever gonna believe this one!'

Sometimes Moms are the recipients of the most **unexpected** wisdom. This **happens** too with **God**, we often are just **not prepared** for the ways that **God** manifests **God's love** for us. A good example can be found in our first reading this weekend from **The Acts of the Apostles**.

Peter and the other **disciples** of **Jesus** are **adamant** that certain **requirements** be fulfilled **BEFORE** people are **free** to know that **God loves** them. **Limited** - unknowingly - by **culture, society, and religion**, the **disciples** just **assume** that everyone must **first** submit to the **practices** of the **Jewish Religion** **BEFORE** they can know **God's love** as it is demonstrated by **Jesus'** death and resurrection. Then, **without** any of the **requirements** being fulfilled the **Gentile** family of **Cornelius** experiences the **freedom** to know that **God loves** them. (The story in **The Acts of the Apostles** says that the *'Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening.'*)

Peter and those who are with him are **dumbfounded!** **James**, and the community living in **Jerusalem**, who hear about the event however, are **irate** and **berate** **Peter** for entering the house of a **Gentile**; and then for his **willingness** to **acknowledge** (by choosing to baptize them, the institutional sign that they are accepted) that **God does love** them **BEFORE** they **fulfill** the necessary **requirements!**

All at once the **clarity** with which they have been merrily living their lives disappears. Their whole world is turned **upside down**. They feel themselves being **drawn** beyond the **limits** which they feel **protect** them and give them **comfort**. They no longer **understand** what is **expected** of them, and **cringe** when they suspect that **God** has **no expectations** of them. **God's love** now feels **cheap**, and **anger** erupts within them.

Judging seeks to **limit** and **prevent** **God** from loving us as **God** desires to **love** us. **Judging** gives us a feeling of **clarity** and **superiority**. **Judging** assures us that **God's love** isn't **cheap**. When we know what is **expected**, we know our **reward** (if we fulfill all **expectations**), and we also know our **punishment** (if we don't fulfill all **expectations**). **Judging**, then, gives us a feeling that we are **more in control** of our lives... and the lives of others.

Love, however, is quite **different** than the **limitations** imposed by **judgment**. **Love** doesn't cause us to feel as good (sometimes). It invites us to live **as a friend**, and **practicing** a **willingness** not to **judge** prepares the way for us to experience - with some chagrin - **God** loving us and others in **unexpected** (and sometimes **undesired**) ways.