The readings seemed to build an impregnable wall around themselves to me this week. It’s not that there’s nothing there. They are wonderful passages from Holy Scripture, so I can’t claim “lack of material” as I have sometimes done in the past. Nope, this time, it’s just lack of vision on my part to say something new. Or even something old in a new way. After settling down a bit, I don’t even feel guilty about it. It’s bound to happen sometimes. I know that from experience over these 49 years since I went to seminary. So, as I do from time to time, I’ve invited a guest preacher. He’s not new to you—or in any other way, because he’s even older than I am, by about 20 years—I’ve quoted him frequently and gratefully. Today, it’s just a full-on reading of an article by him, the Revd. Dr. Frederick Buechner, Presbyterian minister, author, and scholar. It’s called “The Jesus Who Was and Who Is.” You’ll see why I selected it, about halfway through.

So far as I can tell, this piece appears only on a website—thewords.com—and I’ve been unable to find any other source to authenticate it. But it certainly sounds like him. That’s it for me (unless I add my two-cents’ worth at the end); this is all Buechner, again, as far as I can tell. Thank you, Frederick.

The Jesus who was is that fathomless, elusive, unpredictable, haunting, and finally unknowable figure who moves through the homely landscapes of the Synoptics and the twilit dreamscapes of John like a figure in an old newsreel. The film is scratched and faded. Some patches are almost blindingly light-struck and others all but totally dark. The sound track crackles and now and then cuts out. The editing is erratic. Yet for just that reason we treasure all the more each flickering glimpse of him that we are given as he stops at a well for water, or lies asleep in the stern of a boat with a pillow under his head, or tells his strange, off-beat stories to the people who have gathered to gawk at him.

We all have the Gospel moments that mean most to us, and i[f] we happen to be preachers, those are of course the ones we tend to preach about. As for me, I have always particularly treasured that moment when Pilate asks him, "What is the truth?" and he stands there in silence presumably because nothing he might answer could be as eloquent as just the silence, just his standing there. I treasure the moment on the cross when the good thief turns to him and, speaking for all of us, says, "Jesus, remember me," and we know as surely as we know anything that Jesus remembers him and will always remember him. And the moment, after the resurrection, when just at dawn, on the beach, he is waiting by a charcoal fire and calls out to his fishermen friends, "Come and have breakfast." And in that first, fresh light, they come and have it. And have it from his hands. Have it from him.

The danger is that we hold on only to the moments that one way or another heal us and bless us and neglect the others. I think of his cursing the fig tree for not bearing fruit out of season and telling the Canaanite woman who come[s] to him for help that it was not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs. I think of his saying, "I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me" and of his terrible question, "Are you able to drink of the cup that I am to drink?" and of his terrible warning, "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets." Woe to the preachers and to all of us who stay only in the bright uplands of the Gospels and avoid like death, avoid like life, the dark ravines, the cave under the hill.

It is the Jesus who was who said, "Come unto me, all [ye] that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give [you] rest," and it is the Jesus who says it now—he unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hid—and says it almost unbearably to every last one of us, the young as well as the old, the lucky as well as the unlucky, the victimized as well as the victim, because there is not one of us who is not in some way heavy laden and in need of what it is that he brings. Perhaps it is by what he brings that we know best the Jesus who is. To the blinded he brings vision. To the deafened the sound of a voice unlike all other voices. To the deadened the breath of life. Rest.

The Jesus who is is the one whom we search for even when we do not know that we are searching and hide from even when we do not know that we are hiding. "Come, Lord Jesus" is the way the Bible ends, and as The One who Comes we know him most truly. No one I’m aware of has described it more movingly than Albert Schweitzer:

"He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, He came to those who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: ‘Follow thou me!’ and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands, and to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toil, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is." - F. B.

The Schweitzer quote is from his book *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, which I read years ago, and I’m thankful that his words conclude Buechner’s article.

The woman in today’s gospel didn’t concern herself with origins or authentications or pedigrees. She had heard that Jesus could heal people, and she brazenly, though still humbly, somehow, argued Jesus into helping her. Without knowing it, she did something for all of us that day, not just for her daughter. She revealed Jesus, God incarnate, to be a complex son of the time in which he lived and someone whose compassion knew no bounds of time or place or ethnicity, and called him beyond the limitations of human opinions, even his own. + + +