

Building with the Three Little Pigs

For Holy Humor Sunday

April 15, 2007

Cynthia Lapp

Psalm 94:14-19

Hebrews 10:23-25

Matthew 7:24-28

Once upon a time there were three little pigs.

“Once upon a time.” This short phrase attracts our attention. It is this axiom that puts us on notice. Look for the deep meaning that is contained in this story. It may not be factual but it is true.

The three little pigs lived with their parents and now as they had gotten older they knew it was time to go out and seek their fortune. As they readied themselves, their mother whispered under her breath, “Watch out for the wolf.”

Why did they need to go away from where they had grown up? What was wrong with staying in their hometown? O little pigs, what was it about that community that raised you that felt so restrictive? Why must you venture so far away into new and unfamiliar terrain.

The first little pig found a farmer right off who sold him some straw and he commenced to build himself a house.

This was not a fancy, new, environmentally sound straw bale house that takes forethought and lots of time to build. No, this was just a heap of straw and as the first little pig was in a hurry to begin his new life he bought the first thing that he found. Now we know that straw is not enough to protect one from the storms of life, from the rainy season or the strong winds. But the first little pig, as is sometimes the case with first children, felt that he could do no wrong. He built his house quickly and was just settling down to enjoy his newfound independence when there was a knock at the door.

“Little pig, little pig, let me come in.”

The first little pig was not impressed by the manners of this new neighbor. And not knowing who was at the door the first little pig answered

“Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin.”

Being a young pig he hardly had any hairs on his chinny chin chin but he felt the need to make himself sound older. He hoped this would trick whoever was banging on the door. But the neighbor was persistent.

“Then I’ll huff and I’ll puff and I’ll blow your house in.”

The first little pig was quite frightened. He had not prepared for such an event. He huddled in the corner as the house of straw came blowing down around him. He only just escaped and could feel the wolf, yes you heard me - the wolf, chasing after him.

The second little pig was now ready to seek her fortune.

She kissed her parents goodbye and set out, prepared for adventure. She too was in a hurry to get away from the family, to start anew in her own place. ***She met someone hauling sticks.***

And it seemed to the second little pig that this might be just the material she needed for building a house. Buying the sticks she found a small plot of land and began to build her house.

The second little pig had not heard about the misfortune of her older brother. He was so very determined to be independent he had not bothered to stay in touch with his family or community. But it was for her as it was for her brother before her.

And as soon as she had finished building her house of sticks there came a knock at the door. “ Little pig, little pig let me come in.”

“Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin.”

Let’s pause here for a moment to contemplate why neither of these pigs thought to answer the door and invite the wolf into their home. The wolf does not say immediately that he will blow down the house. There is some risk in opening the door to the wolf, we have all been told that. But I wonder - Is it possible that the wolf is provoked by the arrogance of these young pigs and their own bad manners? Is this merely a cultural communication problem that the pigs and the wolf are not able to overcome? Is the wolf really as evil as we have been led to believe? What is a young pig to do in a situation like this, with evil personified lurking at the door?

“Then I’ll huff and I’ll puff and I’ll blow your house in.”

As her house fell down around her the second little pig wondered about her older brother. Where had he gone? Had he been eaten by this wolf? Perhaps getting as far away as possible from the homestead was not such a good idea after all.

By now, the third little pig was prepared to go out to seek her fortune.

The third little pig waited a while, making architectural plans. Her research led her to believe that bricks would be the best choice for her home. More expensive yes, but in the long run it was sure to pay off. Here it is as so often in the biblical text - the youngest is lifted up. We would logically expect the older pigs to be the wise ones. But it is the least among them that leads the way.

As the third pig is finishing the porch on her house she sees in the distance two pigs running toward her. Her older brother and sister. They look distressed, horrified. They begin to tell their stories of the big bad wolf. Their fear is palpable, they are nearly in shock from their encounters with this wolf and his predictable ways. As they talk they work together to finish the third little pig's house, carefully spreading mortar and laying bricks together. They experience a contentment they have not known. The first and second little pigs had experienced the dangers of the world. Now laying brick with family seems almost fun.

The work is completed and the three little pigs go into the house together. They are just sitting down for tea when there is a knock at the door.

“Little pig, little pig, let me come in.”

By now all three pigs know who is at the door. Who is it? *The big, bad wolf.* The third little pig knows she has built her house of bricks, it is a strong house. She knows she is not alone, her brother and sister are with her. She knows that she need not be afraid, on this solid foundation.

The third pig wonders, “Should I let him in? Perhaps invite him in for a spot of tea? What could be the harm? He probably just needs a friend. There are three of us and only one of him. But it is foolish to let the wolf in. By all indications he is a terrorist. Better to keep the wolf locked out.” So she replies as pigs throughout history have done,

“Not by the hair on my chinny chin chin.”

But what of the wolf? This poor dysfunctional creature seems unable to ask politely to come in and become part of the community. He is left in the cold because of his poor manners and his abusive attitude. Will there ever come a time when there is room for him? Will anyone ever take the risk to interact with him, even to show love and hospitality toward him, to help him get over his bullying?

There is at least one person in history that understood wolves. The story is told of St. Francis, who understood and loved all the animals. Gubbio, a small village in Italy, was terrorized by a wolf that was eating the livestock and people. St.

Francis talked to the wolf, forgiving it for its past crimes and then convinced the town that the people should feed the wolf since it would no longer harm them. Is not this the way to deal with wolves who come to the door?

Or does the wolf rather represent the more sinister part of the human experience? Is the wolf the evil in the world that we would rather deny?

“Then I’ll huff and I’ll puff and I’ll blow your house down.”

The three little pigs sit at tea. They have newfound community and comfort together, the house is strongly made of bricks. Outside the wolf blows and blows but he cannot blow the house down. Finally in frustration the wolf runs away, embarrassed.

Some texts would have us believe that the wolf is actually eaten by the pigs. In his anger he climbs onto the roof and down the chimney landing in a boiling pot of soup. Other ancient manuscripts give us an extended ending with continual trickery by the third pig, the first two pigs having been eaten by the wolf.

In the text we read today the wolf runs away while the pigs live happily ever after. But what of the wolf? We are soon to meet him again - in Little Red Riding Hood. The wolf still lurks, in disguise. Beware the wolf.

It is in times such as these, with the wolf on the loose, that we reach for a companion text like we read in Hebrews 10.

Hebrews 10: 23-25

Let us keep firm in the hope we profess because the One who made the promise is faithful. Let us always think how we can stimulate each other to love and good works. Don't stay away from the meetings of the community as some do but encourage one another; and do this all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

(May we hold these words and this hope in our hearts.)

Psalm 94: 14-19

Our God will not abandon the faithful and will not desert those who belong to the covenant.

The tribunal of justice will restore equity and all who are upright in heart will follow it. I said, "Who will take my side against the corrupt? Who will stand by me against the violent?" If our God had not helped me, I would have gone quickly to the land of silence. I said, "I am falling," but your constant love, O God, upheld me. When I am anxious and worried you comfort me and bring me joy.

Hebrews 10: 23-25

Let us keep firm in the hope we profess because the One who made the promise is faithful. Let us always think how we can stimulate each other to love and good works. Don't stay away from the meetings of the community as some do but encourage one another; and do this all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Matthew 7:24-28

"Anyone who hears my words and puts them into practice is like the sage who built a house on rock. When the rainy season set in, the torrents came and the winds blew and buffeted the house. It didn't collapse because it had been set solidly on rock. Anyone who hears my words but does not put them into practice is like the fool who built a house on sandy ground. The rains fell, the torrents came, the winds blew and lashed against the house. And it collapsed and was completely ruined.

Jesus finished speaking and left the crowds spellbound at his teaching because he taught with an authority that was unlike their religious scholars."