

"I give you the end of a golden string . . ."

I never knew that when we say "somebody doesn't have a clue" it basically means "somebody doesn't have a ball of thread". Look up clue (or clew) on your computer's Merriam-Webster dictionary and you'll find that's what it once meant: a ball of thread.

They say it all goes back to a Greek myth in which the hero Theseus (when he and other youth were confined deep within a twisting cave to serve as a monster's dessert) attached the end of a ball of thread (a clue) to the portal of the cave. Thus, having unwound the ball on his descent into the monster's den and having then slain the monster, he was able to rewind the thread (the clue) and lead his companions back into the light of day.

Tom Sawyer used the same device when he and Becky became lost in a cave. Their candles had gone out, so what to do? Tom had a spool of kite line in his pocket. So tying the end of it to a projection of rock near Becky, he unwound the spool to its full length down a couple of corridors in search of some outlet. Eventually he "glimpsed a far off speck that looked like daylight". Tom groped toward the speck and eventually "pushed his head and shoulders through a small opening and saw the broad Mississippi rolling by!"

So a clue becomes the thread of a spool that, if wound up (or unwound), can lead one out of darkness. In detective stories it leads us to the motive of the crime or to the perpetrator. It could be the handwriting on a cancelled check or a fingerprint on a weapon. At any rate, it points to more than the check or fingerprint. It clears up a mystery. The Gospels are full of clues – images that are but a thread, which if you roll it up will lead you to your true self, beyond the clueless self you are and have been.

Today Jesus uses salt. Tells you to pick it up, taste it – and begin to discover how you can pass from something, someone tasteless, bland, hardly good for anything but to be trampled underfoot (even in your own self estimate) to acquiring a saltiness, an ability to flavor the world, the lives of people around you. (I once knew an elderly woman whose name was Salty Allen! I assumed then that there was something pert, mischievous, engaging, flavorful about her – and there was!)

Then today's Gospel speaks of a lamp. That's another clue as to who you are or could be, if you but reel in the metaphor. It reveals that you are or could be the light of the world, someone able to illuminate rather than darken the lives of people around you. There is so much darkness in our world today, invectives, braggadocio, people cowed into wearing lampshades for hats. When all the while we should be singing that old time hymn: *This little light of mine / I'm gonna let it shine . . . All around the neighborhood / I'm gonna let it shine . . . Hide it under a bushel? No! / I'm gonna let it shine . . .*

So try to acquire this knack of sensing the Gospels to be full of clues – be it only a mustard seed or five loaves and two fishes or bread and wine or the whole story of the healing of a paralytic. Indeed the world we live in is full of clues, tips of thread that can lead you out of whatever cave you may inhabit. So thought that great English mystic William Blake who says of the very poems he writes: *I give you the end of a golden string; / Only wind it into a ball: / It will lead you in at Heaven's gate, / Built in Jerusalem's wall.*