

## Evotional

**Sermon title: “Gremlins.”**

**Speaker: Neil Durling.**

**Bible passage: Matthew 2:1-18.**

**Date: 15.12.13.**

### **Message:**

**Gremlins:** While searching for a Christmas present for his teenage son, Randall Peltzer discovers a small, furry creature called a Mogwai in an antique store in Chinatown. The store owner refuses to sell the Mogwai on the grounds that owning one is too great a responsibility. However, as Randall is leaving the store, the owner's grandson sells Randall the creature, stating his family needs the money. The boy gives Randall three specific instructions in caring for the Mogwai: never expose it to bright light (especially sunlight, which will kill it); never get it wet (which will make it multiply); and, most importantly, never, ever feed it after midnight. Randall takes the Mogwai to his family in the town of Kingston Falls. Being an inventor, he names the creature "Gizmo".

You can watch the film trailer on imdb (<http://www.imdb.com/video/screenplay/vi1706295833/>) which finishes with the line: “Gremlins: They’ll be expecting you.” Many of us think that the cute, fluffy creatures are called Gremlins but they’re not! They are the evil, destructive mutations. The cute ones are the Mugwais. The danger for Randall in the “dark comedy” was not knowing who he was dealing with.

That is also danger in the “dark” part of the nativity story in **Matthew 2:1-18**. The Magi don’t know who they’re dealing with in King Herod and he certainly wasn’t expecting them. Nevertheless, he puts on a nice, pious guy act for the Magi. Aren’t you glad we never do that when coming to church? No “Sunday face” from me!

**The real Herod** from the history books is a little different... He had ten wives and at least fourteen children (he executed one of his wives – Mariamne - and had three sons executed by strangulation for plotting against him – which they didn’t do. He also imprisoned another son). There was friction between his female relatives and his wives and between the children of his wives. He wrote six wills, playing his children off against one another, eventually dividing the kingdom into three parts so that none of the sons would be as powerful as he’d been. I wonder if Herod knew who he was...

Whilst on Sabbatical I read **Listen to your life** by Parker Palmer. Well worth a read! He says that the two most important questions in life are:

1. Who am I?
2. Whose am I?

**Who am I?** The Liberation Wrapper helps maintain eating etiquette in Japan. Scoffing a calorific hamburger the size of your mouth can be difficult while maintaining good table manners. It’s even trickier for women in Japan where small and modest mouths, or ochobo, are considered attractive and the opposite not so much. Social etiquette in the East Asian country also dictates that women should never open their mouth wide in public places. In a bid to free women from the curse of ochobo and flagging sales, Japanese hamburger chain Freshness Burger has launched a new so-called Liberation Wrapper. The paper napkin features a picture of an immaculate smiling woman diners can hide behind when they eat. Sales of the chain’s Classic Burger have gone through the roof since the Liberation launch, reportedly up 213%. ‘Their largest and best-tasting Classic Burger was amongst the least chosen by their female customers,’ explained a spokesman for the firm that created the wrapper. ‘One of the major reasons seems to relate to Japanese manners... It is good manners to cover their mouth when they have to largely open up their mouth. ‘Our female customers had a frustration of not being able to do it. ‘Freshness Burger decided to challenge convention, freeing women from the spell of ochobo mouth.’

Now we all know that despite the pressures we face, who we are is not dictated by what we look like. We know this don’t we... It’s about who we are inside. It’s a soul thing. We get a glimpse of Paul’s inner workings in **Romans 7:14-25**. Please read the passage out loud...

**Where did he lose you!?** Imagine being the person writing down Paul’s confused dictation here! But what I get from one of the greatest theologians of the Church is this: He didn’t have it all together. He lived with inconsistencies that he didn’t understand or really annoyed him. Why have we bought into Western culture’s self-improvement plan and shrink-wrapped it around our faith. We’ve ended up with a faith where we have to keep it all together whilst Jesus and his redeeming cross stand at the side of the stage of our lives. The Good News is that I don’t have to have it all together. BUT I do have to be honest about who I am.

Whilst on Martha’s Vineyard I spent some time reflecting on **Psalms 139:23-24** asking God to search me and reveal any unhelpful thing in me. Nineteen showed up! I am asking him to help me with them so that I can become more like Jesus in my life. One of them is being a “people pleaser.” It is a habit I am trying to kick, not in order to impress God and have it all together, but just so that I can enjoy the gift of life that God has given me more.

**Whose am I?** We know the answer is: “God’s”. But the reality is that many people don’t know who they’re dealing with when it comes to God. I’m not talking here in a mysterious way either, about the vast God none of us have actually seen or touched. I’m talking about the basics and I’m talking about Christians! So many of us think God is a grumpy entity waiting to zap us with a

lightening bolt. You don't believe me? Why is there so much guilt then, futile attempts to earn our salvation, etc.? Then there are those who have a warped view of God because Bible verses are ripped out of context, used and abused. We should always view God through the lens of Jesus. So: Whose am I? I'm God's, a God who comes to meet me where I am, in my mess and giftedness, with my tragedies and triumphs and journeys with me through this life and on into the next.

**Questions:**

1. How do you deal with this dark part of the nativity story with any children you have the pleasure of sharing the Christmas story with?
2. In what ways do you feel pressure to act and look a certain way by our culture?
3. Do you think you have "bought into Western culture's self-improvement plan and shrink-wrapped it around your faith" at all?
4. Who am I? Please take a moment to write this down and, if appropriate, share it with the rest of the group.
5. Whose am I? How would I describe God?

**Prayer:**

Father God, please remind us of who and whose we are. Amen.