Lately, I've been wondering about the difficulty of the preacher's task. I'll admit to some hesitation in interpreting Holy Scripture for you at all - for fear it could be a disservice to your own interpretation. You see, I often think it would be far better to stay mostly quiet, to leave space for your own attempts to pick the appropriate words, weigh them in your palm, let this phrase or that question linger on the tongue.

I can't help but wonder what images of yours I might usurp with my own, images born of and necessary to your unfolding that can only be measured in your interiority - to even speak such intimacies aloud risks reducing them to nought, intruding upon holy ground. It is a perilous path we must take together - trusting in God to order us.

Today's Gospel is somewhat uncomfortable, as it reminds those of us tasked with its interpretation of just how transient and fragile our ideas about God are. It is work that must be done with all available softness - with shaking hands, I think.

We see that the chief priests and elders are deeply concerned with authority. Jesus, on the other hand, is once again deeply concerned with grapes. This probably comes as no surprise to us, given His attachment to wine.

The people ask, "Who gave you the authority?" Jesus instead wonders, "What do you think you know?" The learned do not seem pleased to hear this. Perhaps this is why Jesus directs His sharpest words toward the presumed experts.

I don't believe that Jesus wants to ridicule the chief priests and elders. Rather, He is exposing the peculiar danger of certainty. I imagine that Christ knew something of certainty's terrible cost and was hoping to stir up some reflection on the subject - to the crowd's general annoyance.

In this story, Jesus has entered the Temple, and the elders come to Him with what appears to be a reasonable curiosity - the question of credentials. Who authorized You? Who ordained You? Who endorsed You? How can we be certain?

Indeed, we live in a world of credentials. We want to know who has the authority to speak, who has been properly trained, who belongs to which institution, who has the appropriate letters after their name. In the Church, we have our orders and offices, our committees. These roles shape our relationships and determine our social context.

But Jesus, ever so gently, suggests another layer. Without entertaining the crowd's scrutiny, He offers an entry-point into *unknowing*. He graciously does so in their language of fluency: rationality. They cannot readily admit to John's vocation, nor can they deny it. The chief priests and elders have reasoned that their only option is to claim ignorance. Their lips form the words and their breath animates them: "We do not know."

There is spectacular wisdom in this phrase. It is soon revealed to us that they are being dishonest, although this seems to be of little consequence: they do not think that

John's baptism comes from heaven at all. Nevertheless, for fear of popular opinion, they are required to contort themselves into a new posture of uncertainty: they claim not to know. We may suspect that there is some somatic benefit to going through these motions - to forming the sentence, regardless of whether they truly accept it. Somehow, they do end up arriving at the truth by way of a lie.

Perhaps the chief priests and elders realize that they have been asked something much more dangerous than whether Jesus possesses the proper credentials. They are asked to pay the price of certainty - or to relinquish it entirely.

I sometimes feel that we've enshrined the Truth as in a museum. We're precious with it. We are almost burdened with reverence; if we actually were to touch it, we'd probably end up violating some regulation. I have wondered what we're so afraid of - that a thousand passing hands could caress the mystery into dust? The threat of erosion then becomes a looming benefactor: it absolves us of the realization that we are strangers to the light until we feel its warmth on our skin.

However, our tradition suggests a different approach. God is anything but static. Why should the Word Made Manifest be any different? Erosion itself evokes the Greek, to desire, and the Latin, to consume. Each week, lest we forget, we're invited into the direct experience of God's dynamism through the Eucharist. We *desire* communion and *consume* God's very being. God is eternally poured out and remade, never to be

exhausted. We are asked to steward this possibility of abundance. It is no idle or empty promise - its ember enlivens us.

Still, much is asked of us in our frail state. But might we consider that, in Christ, there is no creation so beholden to frailty as to be bereft of warmth? Such is God's perpetual subversion of our expectations. What we seek to preserve, God weeps for and raises again. This is hard to accept. Possibility and abundance often are.

We would surely do well to cultivate fewer illusions about our own righteousness. We would be wise to trust the intricacies of our own contemplation without needing to justify them beyond their somatic intimacy with Christ. Above all, we might benefit from a new approach to unknowing. I envision us shouting with joy: "We do not know!" My God, what a relief, really.

Only the Lord knows our frame, croons the psalmist. St. Therese of Lisieux echoed his sentiment: she urges us to trust that God has compassion with our frailty. Therese shared how, falling asleep while praying her rosary, she had no fear of imperfection but rested in the cradle of grace.

We do not know - but I'm almost certain she was right.