

**The Daily Dose of the Good (and Not So Good) Words:
Ring around the Stinky Cheese Man
From Bishop Bishop**

This is the fourth Daily Dose of the Good (and Not So Good) Words. I hold to my intention to do write these daily. I fail and flail, but I keep going.

Today, I have a loose plan, an almost improvisational performance in mind. I want to take a little Badiou with a dash of children's lore and a snippet of overheard conversation and blend them together into a lumpy porridge of scriptural study. I'm not sure what it will taste like, and it might take a dump truck of sugar to help it go down, probably even then not in the most delightful way. Let's just move on.

First, the snippet. Two car salesmen- I know, I know, it sounds like the beginning of a bad joke and in some ways it is- sat at a table near me at Sonny's, a local BBQ restaurant. The older man was imparting wisdom about mice and cheese in relation to the dismal economy. For those of my readers who are not in the know about the best selling pop business books from the past few years, I'll just tell you straight out that he was referring to *Who Moved My Cheese?* by Spencer Johnson, a god awful "parable" about how to not get trapped drilling for oil where the wells have all dried up, so you can be free to shake (the tree of) the next money maker.

Now the older, wiser car salesman was not faithfully recounting the parable as told by Spencer, thank the god I may or may not believe in. No, he was relating it from memory, and trust me, his version was way better than Spencer's book. In the car salesman's super short re-telling, and my version of his re-telling is way longer than his delivery, mice go through a maze and find cheese. They eat and enjoy cheese. They go away, probably to sleep. They come back the next day, and horror of horrors, the cheese is gone. Most of the mice keep going back day after day, over and over, to where they want the cheese to be. A few bright mice put their noses to the "grind stone" of the maze and sniff out where the cheese now stands alone.

The car salesman version went more like this: the mice keep going back to where they think the cheese is. They don't search for where the cheese has now stands, so they starve. He was connecting this unfaithful re-telling of Spencer's parable to the current economic crisis, specifically the possible collapse of one or all of the Big Three automakers. (He was a salesman for the local Toyota dealership). He seemed to be implying that the Big Three were looking for cheese in all the wrong places.

What I find interesting about the parable, his re-telling or the original tale by Spencer (which I will not recount because it a truly horrible piece of HR propaganda), is that we are suppose to sympathize with the mice that go and search for where the cheese now stands. Those go getter mice that do not let their expectations stand in the way of finding the next pot of gold at the end of the consumer rainbow. We are supposed to feel sorry for the mice that stay gathered around the void of where the cheese used to be.

Now to blend some Badiou into this batter of blather. I'd like to suggest that gathering around the void of where we thought the cheese stood, peering in, might not be a waste of our time. We never really tasted the cheese. It never really stood there. All we ever get to do is to sniff its lingering fragrance; our cheeses usually are some sort of stinky cheese that smells to high heaven.

We gather around where we think the cheese used to be. In Badiou's version of *Who Moved My Cheese?* we can either encircle the place where we thought the cheese stood or following the scent trail of the Stinky Cheese Man that dashes out of it. In Badiou's version, we can never catch the Stinky Cheese Man.

"It means that at the heart of every situation, as the foundation of its being, there is a 'situated' void, around which is organized the plenitude (or the stable multiples) of the situation in question." Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*

We find instead of the truth, ring-a-round-the-rosie circles. Circles that last until we all fall down. Then we release our hands, and race each other to find the next spot to encircle. We join hands and dance around another empty space that we thought was a center for something. It is a dance, often awkward and arrhythmic, sometimes graceful and on the beat. We can't get too caught up in our dance. Or perhaps the circle that spins and breaks up and re-forms is all we can get caught up in. We name what we think is in the circle, but really we've circled around another absence out of which another name arises.

We circle and spin and fall and race and re-circle and spin and fall and race and re-circle, again and again, around the hint of a sniff of a smell of a trace of the Stinky Cheese Man, who always races ahead of us.