October 22, 2025

MESSENGER

QUOTE FOR TODAY

"The Prophet Isaiah said, 'The trees of the field clap their hands.' The Webb space telescope proclaims, 'The stars of the vast universe clap their hands.' The nanotechnology microscope adds, 'The quarks in the tiniest molecule also clap their hands.' All in praise of our awesome God!"

Pastor George in this week's sermon

INFO

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SWEET MOLLY MALONE

Molly Malone is the subject of a song that seems to capture something unique about the Irish spirit.[1] First published in 1878, it doesn't appear to refer to any actual person, but rather to the sad journey of many poor young women eking out a living in a typical inner city during the Industrial Revolution.

Molly is a fishmonger, pushing her cart through the streets, doing her best to get a few dollars from her family's daily catch. In the chorus of the song, she's crying out: *"Cockles and mussels, Alive! Alive Oh!"* We all know about *mussels, those brown, crinkly-shelled bottom-feeders. Cockles aren't as familiar to us, but they're clam-like bivalves with ribbed shells that live alongside mussels. Molly announces loudly that her products are "Alive! Alive Oh!" as a way of guaranteeing their freshness. She can't afford to buy ice to preserve her catch, so she keeps them alive as long as possible in containers of sea water.*

The song's verses tell us about the male singer's fascination with Molly:

In Dublin's fair city, where the girls are so pretty,
I first set my eyes on sweet Molly Malone
As she wheeled her wheel-barrow, through streets broad and narrow,
Crying, "Cockles and mussels, alive, alive, oh!"

She was a fishmonger, but sure 'twas no wonder
For so were her father and mother before;
They each wheel'd their barrow, through streets broad and narrow,
Crying "Cockles and mussels alive, alive oh!"

Those who have studied the awful living conditions of low-income people during her time have suggested that Molly may have been forced to supplement her fishmonger income with money earned in the evenings at a brothel.[2] So this song is not a romantic ditty about an innocent girl, as the first two lines suggest ("pretty," "sweet"); it's a tragic story about a life-scarred young woman. Her early death is described in the sad last verse:

She died of a fever, and no one could save her,
And that was the end of sweet Molly Malone
But her ghost wheels her barrow, through streets broad and narrow,
Crying, "Cockles and mussels, alive, alive, oh!

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Dublin, Ireland, has adopted the song “Molly Malone” as a kind of unofficial anthem. This was demonstrated with the 1988 installation of a bronze statue of her at the center of the city.[3] You may notice in the image above that Molly’s breasts are ample, and they even seem to have a different sheen than the rest of her statue. That’s because it’s become a thing for tourists (presumably, mostly of the male persuasion) to think it’s clever to give them a rub. The word is that a little rub brings you good luck. The constant polishing has served to exaggerate that part of the statue. Local and international groups have been pointing out that allowing this to go on continues the demeaning and objectifying of women in modern society. “Stewards” have been assigned to stand near the statue to prevent handsy men from touching it, flower beds have been planted around her to discourage people to coming too close, and plans are underway to lift Molly and her cart onto a pedestal where she will be out of reach.[4]

Look closely at Molly’s face in the image above: Sadly, the cockles and mussels may be more alive than she is. Wake up, men!

Pastor George Van Alstine

[1] Listen and sing along at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_XSsrMQYLM&list=RDH_XSsrMQYLM&start_radio=1

[2] Some have disparaged her with nicknames like “The Tart with a Cart” “or “The Dsh with Fish.”

[3] Created by Dublin artist Jeanne Rynhart for the 1988 Dublin Millenium celebration.

[4] See this BBC online article: https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvgnex2zy7qo