

“It’s what you’re afraid of that separates us all”

Luke 10:25-37 The Good Samaritan

On video at:

<http://vimeo.com/13265702>

7/11/2010 ~ Philip Siddons

A sage and philosopher, in our time, Father Guito Sarduchi,¹ once pointed out that for all our years and financial expense of our education, we actually remember precious little. For instance, take that entire course on economics. What do we remember? Two things. Guns and button and supply and demand.

Why not, he wisely suggested, go to college for just 5 minutes and get only what we’ll remember? Just get a level one pass-through of the handful of things we’ll remember in the years ahead?

Imagine religion. What would be a level one understanding of Jesus’ story about the good guy from Samaria? That’s easy, you say. When you stumble across someone in need, do good things. Let’s go home.

But you came here today and are paying your dues so you want more for your money. You want to go to at least level two, no matter how many times you’ve heard this story. You already know the characters.

The main guy is the lawyer but he wasn’t a real estate, torts, corporate or patent attorney. He was a religion specialist in Jewish law. And being a 1st century Jewish scholar he learned and taught by asking and answering questions. – a conversational exchange.

“Teacher,” he said with respect to Jesus, “what do we got to do to inherit eternal life.” And Jesus was a brilliant judge of human character and tossed it right back to him, saying, “How does the law read on this?”

And the religion specialist, as easy as falling off a long, spouts the catechism answer: ‘love God with your heart, soul, strength and mind and your neighbor as yourself. And Jesus, essentially, says “bingo” so just do it.

But he was, like, Busted, . . . and certainly embarrassed that he was caught asking a question for which he already had the answer, he tried to justify himself.

“Yea, but how do you, technically, define who is

one’s “neighbor?”

And then Jesus tells a neat story about a man who got mugged.

A priest, then a Levite (*kind of like a religious brother*) both pass the dying guy by. Then comes the Samaritan – who happened to be in what Jews (like the lawyer, the priest and the Levite) thought of as the underclass. He does the right thing.

So with tongue in cheek and possibly a smirk on His face, Jesus ends the story by posing a question back to the lawyer. Who did the right thing?

And there was so much prejudice on the part of the lawyer against Samaritan people, that he couldn’t even bring himself to say the obvious.

You see, a while back, the Samaritan Jews (just north of them) had been taken over by foreigners and after a while, ended up inter-marrying with their captors. And when the Jews had always been on the minority end of things, they always seemed to be very conscious of the uniqueness of being a Jew – trying to preserve their identity. So besides all the legal and ritual things they felt they had to do to keep Judaism surviving, they were into this trying to keep the race “pure.” (Yea, 3 fingers.)

In radical contrast to 1st century Judaism, Jesus befriended the very people who were shunned by His culture. This is one of Luke’s personal interests because only he had this Good Samaritan teaching story. Only Luke included the many stories of Jesus’ time spent with various women (who were largely 2nd and 3rd class citizens then.

Then there were Luke’s unique stories on Jesus’ healing presence with diseased individuals, untouchables; lepers, the poor, tax collectors, hookers and foreigners.

Stepping back a second, recall Luke’s perspective and why he took a special interest in Jesus’ dealing with this man’s prejudice. Mark hurriedly scribbled the first gospel in the 60s, 30 years after Jesus. Mark saw the Romans were performing a holocaust of their own, killing the Jews, leveling their magnificent Jerusalem

¹ A character Of Saturday Night Live by comedian Don Novello

temple at 70 –scattering them all over Palestine.

Matthew wrote his gospel in the 70s, primarily to the early churches trying to establish a new organized religion and set of rituals. Matthew had Mark's (and an unknown author's) story of Jesus' life on his desk. Luke had the same two biographies of Jesus' life (as Matthew) on his desk but he didn't write his version until the 80's. John wrote his in the 90s or well beyond.

But Luke saw these threatening evils happen to the Jews and probably saw their even more desperate attempt to keep defining their existence and preserve their. There was a pervasive fear of losing their identity and worth if their religion got swallowed up and forgotten in the surrounding culture. So Luke really picked up on this religious lawyer acting out of fear.

The now embarrassed lawyer said, very quietly, "I suppose it was the one, in your story, who did the right thing."

We'll hello! Mr. Esquire, . . . repeat after me, so everyone in the crowd around us can hear you and quote your answer "Samaritan." Come on, . . . work with me.

OK, so a level two understanding of what happened here is about fear. It would probably increase our understanding about anyone by trying to see where human fear is present. You and I (and everyone, for that matter), make most of our mistakes (and do most all of our wrong) because of fear.

Even though they were fictional characters in Jesus' story, the priest and Levite were afraid of ritual contamination. You know, the dying person. Probably also afraid of the possibility of the nearby robbers coming back to get them

The religious lawyer in the conversation was fearful of probably a lot of things. Maybe he was afraid of not being respected as the town specialist in religion. You know, if you're the neighborhood earth mother, sage and grand poo-bah of folksy conservative wisdom, and you're used to dishing out what is considered authoritative pronouncements on religion, you're always in competition with yourself.

He was certainly afraid of being quoted as saying that the member of the hated minority, (who happened to be the star of the story), was a hero. He could lose credibility in agreeing that the minority guy was a hero? He could just hear them talking about him at the

Synagogue as some sort of "Samaritan lover."

But go back to the story and notice that the Samaritan guy wasn't afraid. He went the extra mile or two and helped him physically, economically and emotionally. In contrast, the lawyer was so afraid of risking his image that he couldn't even say the word 'Samaritan.' Pathetic, wasn't it?

But not so fast.

It's easy for us, a couple thousand years later, when maybe all we've got to worry about this morning is whether we can get back and cut the lawn in time to watch the game. It's easy for us to think the disciples were the dumbest drones who ever walked the earth -- to spend three years in the actual presence of Jesus the Miracle Worker and still not get it. To us, we sometimes look at these Biblical characters (running around with their bathrobes and sandals) like extras in a low-budget grade B (black and white) 1950's Bible story movie.

That's where a level 3 understanding suddenly arrives. The lawyer, the Priest, the Levite and the disciples were no different than us.

What are you afraid of in your life? Try this.

What percentage of your life are you in now? Are you in your last 5th or 6th of your life? I am.

If this was your last month of life, how many apologies would you be making? Since you probably have more than 30 days to go, why aren't you apologizing now?

How about control? We hate losing anything. That's why we insure everything so that if we lose anything, we can, in a controlled way, replace it. The coffee maker dies, we buy a new one for \$150. Crack up a car, we replace it. House burns down . . . We take the insurance money, live in an apartment and make do.

Technology gives you the creeps? I'm sure it true for Andrew, as it is for Mike as it is for me or any of us who are in technology. To give technical support these days you have to be a gentle pastoral therapist and tell people, at least 10 times, that it's not their fault they don't know how to do something. You have to remind folks that the only reason they don't know something is because the company hasn't invested in training them (in the software) in a way that is conducive to their learning style (and relevant to their job responsibilities). You have to make people feel safe.

But despite all you do, people still feel stupid about the constantly changing technology in front of them. So people are afraid of feeling stupid.

Take your dentist office.

At ours . . . there's a giant room-sized porcelain octopus appliance – Water fountain, sink, TV, drills.

1st time – I was shown a hand-held camera tour of my mouth on the screen. Then movie showing how my old silver fillings will crack and cave – (like the icebergs coming apart from global climate change).

This porcelain furniture had everything: A sink with a fountain to spit my drool in. A blender to mix and bake cavity-filling glue. A hockey net (on the other side) for his kids to shoot some goals.

The hygienist asked me – “What TV show?”

“Me, none.” Is said.

She turned it on anyway.

Oprah (I hate daytime TV)

Now the day's show's guest was a surgeon, specializing in gender reassignment. So I'm there gaping with my mouth open and nothing is happening. I look over and the Hygienist is staring at the show, transfixed by this guest surgeon, . . . holding in her hand what looks like a 10 blade surgical scalpel. And I'm getting a little nervous.

We lie when we are afraid. The hygienist says “Do you floss every day?”

“Oh yes” I say. “Four to six times a day. And I use pharmacy-grade organic-free-range floss, home grown in Montana. In fact, I'm so thorough, that I go back and forth down the side, then underneath and completely over to the other side . I do this on every tooth.

And you know, the Dentists know we are afraid so they talk in hushed tones and short sentences.

“Glad to see you.” they say. “It's been a while.”

They never look in your mouth and say: “Uh O. . . I was afraid of that!

“Say Sharon – stay by your phone in case we have to call 911. I think I need help on this one!”

So you can see why I was surprised. My dentist comes in and starts raving about how well I have been flossing and brushing my teeth, like I'm some kind of 3

year old who finally keeps the crayon drawing within the lines.

I figure that they must have taught dentists that we are fearful creatures who are never praised for anything in our life so when we come for our check-up, we feel good about doing something right.

Good marketing! If I'm having a bad day at work, I often call my dentist's office and say “tell me again how good I'm doing with my flossing.”

Maybe we're afraid they'll hire our junior-higher grandchild to replace us at work because they clearly know stuff we don't.

Then we're afraid of our Healthcare expenses. Our inability to get healthcare if we lose our jobs?

Our son-in-law is afraid that if they moved back here from LA, he'll have to take a job where he says “do you want fries with that?” all day.

We're afraid that if we moved to LA to be with them, we'd have to learn to say that all day in Spanish.

¿Quiere papas fritas con eso?

Ok, so level 3 religion gets us to think about fear. Our fears drive us to God. Fortunately many other things do but that's one of them. About what are you afraid?

Level 3 religion compels us to trust in God. Perhaps God will send a Good Samaritan to help us? Perhaps God will send us to be a Good Samaritan to help someone else?

But this level of looking at why Jesus was telling this story (to the Lawyer) was to teach him about his fears.

Lawyer . . . if you can't even utter the name for the minority people you detest because of your fears of being thought of as a “Samaritan lover, . . .” It's your fear that is keeping you from the very people who are your neighbors. It's your fear that is keeping you from obeying that grand summary of the religious commandments to love God with everything (about you) AND other people around you. Because the other people around you are your neighbors.

But here comes level 4 and it's the difference between us being in a religion and being engaged in true spirituality.

Level 4 asks us: “When we face what we fear,

where is God?"

Is it that God and Jesus are just in the pages of the Bible that was just read? Is God's Spirit in the person sitting near you in the pew? Touch someone near you. Really. They are indwelled with the Spirit of the Living God. When you are back home and all by yourself . . . is God there?

In a way, we are afraid about God. Remember when we were kids we saw the cartoon Mickey Mouse or Big Bird on the television but when we went to the mall and saw those furry life-size characters coming at us – it freaked us out and our parents almost had to have us committed. We don't want anyone to make God sound too real because we can't handle it.

Every time God or some angel showed up and spoke to anyone it almost destroyed them. The first celestial words were usually "Relax. Chill out! Don't be afraid."

Today, we pretend God is some belief, a philosophy, a tradition. A collection of laws about doing good and not doing bad. A collection of levels of understanding.

But here's one of the bridges from religion to spirituality. There are others, but here's just one. Look for the reality of the actual presence of God when you're afraid.

The makers of the old TV show Joan of Arcadia knew this. Right when we are besides ourselves, poof! There's (mysteriously) a caring and compassionate person beside us. Go figure.

It is when we are afraid that we are not ignoring reality. When we are frightened, we are not thinking about how the person (who treats our lawn with weed-preventing chemicals) hasn't come. We're thinking about how vulnerable we are. We are thinking about maybe not having enough. We're thinking about how time is running out. We're thinking about how heart-broken we are (or might be) if we were left alone. We're thinking how we might not be good enough.

Not competitive enough. Not smart enough. We're frightened and coming up short.

Then, when you face your fear, look, a little, out of the corner of your eyes, and you'll catch the fact that God's presence is right next to you. Maybe we should start a blog on our website – stories of how we have come to know God is real in our lives. Blessed are

those who know they need God. They shall find God.

The cool thing about walking out of here (in a few minutes) is that God goes with you. You'll totally forget about everything that has just been said until, say, Thursday, but God will have been with you every second. Bidden or unbidden, God is present.²

So don't be afraid. You and I only have a little time left, in our lives, to be that fearless presence in the experience of our neighbors. When you and I are truly and compassionately present with others, like Jesus showed us, they will find the Presence of God's Spirit themselves. And it will bring them healing.

Bingo – just do it! ■



² Carl Jung