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July 8, 2007...12:03 pm

Accepting Help From Unlikely Sources

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There are a couple of stories so cliché that I have always been convinced that I am well above them. They are the type that circulate on the internet, or have been preached a million times and have been told as antidotes so many times that I would internally roll my eyes in disdain. In private I complained to friends saying, "I hate those stories. Why do people tell them? I am too smart for these. The people who tell them must not be curious enough to explore great literature, theologians or art in deducing their life lessons. Instead these simpletons need these terribly simple stories. Plus, I have heard them a million times, just stop!"

So, when told these stories I barely listen and I smile patronizingly and say, "That's nice."

That was until I encountered problems in my life that seemed impossible to overcome. Art, theology and classic literature were not going to bring me out of these problems. I really needed help. So, when I had let the pain get too great to bear any longer I finally, reluctantly, reached out to others for help and I found it. Yet these people that helped me told me stories and over time guess what I heard? It was those same trite, cliché and annoying stories. Yet, this time they sounded different. They were tinged in hope. I clung to those stories and saw the practice of their morals as part of what was going to save me.

So here they are, the two stories that I have heard a hundred times and that now I see in a different light. The first story goes:

A man falls into a hole. It is very deep, and the walls are so steep that he can't get out.

A doctor walks by, and the man calls out. "Can you help me?" The doctor writes a prescription and throws it into the hole.

Then, a priest walks by, and the man yells, "Can you please help me?" The priest writes a prayer and throws it into the hole.

Finally, a friend walks by, and the man in the hole again asks for help. The friend jumps into the hole with him, and the startled man says, "Why did you do that? Now, we are both in this hole."

"Yes, I know," the friend replies. "But I've been in this hole before, and I know the way out."

The second is a joke that I am sure that most of you have heard. It goes:

There was a great rain that caused a river to overflow its banks. As the water rises a very spiritual man named Frank smartly climbed to his roof to save himself. As the water was still rising he fell to his knees and prayed, "God, please save me!"

At that moment someone in an all terrain vehicle drives through the rising water and yells out the window. "Frank, hop in my car and I will take you to higher ground!"

Frank waves him away saying, "That's okay I believe that God is going to save me."

The truck goes away and the rain continues. Now the water begins to lap at Frank's feet. So once again he prays, "God, please save me!"

It is not very long before someone in a canoe paddles by and yells, "Frank, jump in my boat and I will row us to higher ground."

Frank waves him away saying, "That's okay, I believe that God is going to save me."

The boat goes away and the rain continues. Now the water is up to Frank's neck. So once again he prays, "God, please save me!"

Just then a rope ladder dangles in front of his face and looking up a Coast Guard helicopter is hovering over him. One of the women in the helicopter yells, "Frank, reach up and grab the ladder and we will pull you to higher ground!"

Frank waves her away saying, "That's okay, I am confident that God is going to save me."

So, the helicopter flies away and Frank eventually drowns.

When Frank is received into heaven Peter asks him if he has any questions.

Frank replies, "Yeah, why when I asked didn't God save me from the flood?"

Peter looks surprised and says, "Well God did send you a truck, boat and helicopter."

I know we have heard them before, sometimes to the point of groaning. Yet, strangely there is truth contained in these two stories. We must accept help from unlikely sources in our life. We don't necessarily get to choose the form or avenue in which it comes. The solution to our problems may be embarrassing, humiliating, beneath our station or anti-intellectual. Yet, no positive solution to a problem should be shunned.

In II Kings 5 we find a leprous general named Naaman in the position of accepting help from unlikely sources. A mighty commander in the Assyrian army under King Aram, this man has overseen the defeat and subjugation of Israel. He is a powerful man with a terrible disease and he is getting desperate for a cure. He is a man used to court magicians cowering and desperately trying their divine magic at his every whim. Yet, there were a few criteria that he was not used to in his powerful position that he must follow to be whole. First, he must listen to a slave, how unlikely is this in that Near Eastern culture. Then he must ask a favor from a weaker ruler than the one he serves. Next, he is not even given an audience by the prophet Elisha when his chariot arrives. Elisha indifferently sends a messenger to tell him that he must dip seven times in the Jordan river. So, he must humiliated dip in a foreign river (something he could have done quite easily from the comfort of the kingdom that he controls). Then when he becomes angry, rails against the absurdity of the treatment he must take once again he must listen to the logic of one of his defeated servants. He does dip in the river and is completely healed.

Unfortunately, this is the process we must take to receive wholeness. We are required to rely upon others when we want to be alone, we are called to do things that seem absurd and we are forced to listen to other's advice because we can no longer survive on the suggestions of our own minds. Those who bring me wholeness force me to re-examine stories and myths that I think are well beneath me. Yet, in reality they are bringing me back into relationship with others and the God who is in them. These maddening stories (including Elisha and Naaman) are part of my story and I suspect part of most of our stories. When taken seriously they will force us to seek help from the most unlikely of sources.

5 Comments

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5 Comments

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jesse quam

[July 8, 2007 at 5:16 pm](#)

Best wishes from my father who just read your entry. He said he enjoyed it and wants to know if you still wear a trenchcoat like in jr. high school.

You writings on honesty and asking for help remond me to ask for help when I need it- especially as I work in a help giving profession.



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[pastorofdisaster](#)

[July 8, 2007 at 6:47 pm](#)

Yes, I have a trenchcoat, but it was not purchased at a thrift store. Thanks for being such a big part of my help.



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[damewiggy](#)

[July 9, 2007 at 11:44 pm](#)

wow.

just wow.



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[tribalchurch](#)

[July 10, 2007 at 2:41 pm](#)

Okay, so, can I steal this idea for next Sunday? I mean everybody already thinks that we're preaching the same sermon anyways...

Thanks!



[pastorofdisaster](#)
[July 10, 2007 at 4:54 pm](#)

Carol I mean Tribalchurch-

You know that I don't believe that there are any original ideas.

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