

Allen Gibae 7/9/2017

RESPECTING DIVERSITY BY ACKNOWLEDGING EQUALITY

Every year I tell the children I teach that the one lesson they need to remember from our time together is this:

There is that of God in each individual.

I tell them that because the idea that there is that of God in each person is the foundation of the Quaker concept of equality. God made all humans equal – not equal in terms of standing, privilege, intelligence, talent or opportunity – but in terms value or importance in the eyes of God. God loves each one of us equally – without favor, exception or limitation.

If we recognize that there is that of God in each one of us, then that recognition leads us to a number of natural but important consequences:

- The presence of God in each of us means that no matter how different or separate we may think we are or no matter how diverse we may appear to be, we actually have something very important in common with each other – that of God in us: our common humanity, with all its awesomeness and all its fragility
- The presence of God in each of us means that we can relate to and connect with that of God in each other
- The presence of God in each of us means that if we work at it, we can problem-solve with each other
- The presence of God in each of us means that we need not fear each other

I can tell you that my biggest obstacle to understanding, respecting and accepting the diversity of other people is my fear. We now know from our understanding of human evolution that “fear” is what the sympathetic nervous system and the adrenal-cortical system does when we are triggered by that which is unknown or unfamiliar. When our fear is triggered, we at least momentarily forget that there is that of God in the unfamiliar, the stranger – the “other.”

But responding with “fear” is not the only option we have when we face the unfamiliar. I would like to share with you two stories about how someone else handled the unfamiliar in a way that I would like to emulate. The first story is a contemporary story about a bus driver in Buffalo, NY. The second story is essentially the same story, but it is taken from the Bible: the story of the Good Samaritan.

First Story: Darnell Barton was driving a city bus in Buffalo NY in 2013. His bus was carrying a number of high school students and a number of other paying passengers. His bus had a security camera mounted in it so that the camera documented what was visible to Darnell Barton as he drove his bus. Darnell Barton was driving along a city street with four lanes and that part of the street was on a bridge over an Interstate Highway – somewhat like Park and Portland Avenues are as they overpass Interstate 35W and Interstate 94 near downtown Minneapolis.

As he was proceeding across the bridge, Darnell Barton noticed a woman who was motionless and precariously positioned on the wrong side of the guardrail of the bridge overpassing the Interstate Highway. A person on foot walked past this woman as she stood on the wrong side of the guardrail. He did not stop or pause to assist her. Somewhat behind the man on foot was a man on a bicycle. He, too, did not stop or pause to assist her. As Darnell Barton's bus approached the woman, she still didn't react. So, Darnell Barton stopped the bus, opened the door and said, "Ma'am, you OK?" Darnell Barton is a large and imposing man, known affectionately among his bus driving colleagues as "Big Country."

The woman was obviously distraught but barely responded, so he called his office and reported the situation. He then hung up the phone and again said, "Ma'am, you OK?" As he said this, he got up from his seat, headed for the door, paused at the door and then stepped out of the bus, slowly and silently approaching the woman. When he was in arms-length of the woman, he gently grabbed one of her arms and put his other arm around the woman, and then asked her, "Do you want to come to this side of the guardrail?" She said, "Yes." He assisted her over the guardrail and then sat down next to her on the sidewalk and talked to her, assuring her that no matter what was going on everything would be OK. After a while, assistance arrived and took the woman for help. Darnell Barton got back of the bus, and the passengers clapped. Afterwards he said, "I did what I was supposed to do."

Would I have seen that of God in this suffering woman and stopped to do "what I was supposed to do?" I do not know. But Darnell Burton saw the humanity of this distressed person – that of God in her – and he summoned the courage to do what the individual on foot and the individual on the bicycle had not seen fit to do – to reach out to another human being and offer comfort and support.

Second Story: The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37 New International Version)

Read Biblical Verse

Seeing that of God in another human being is not really "taking pity" on that person or "having mercy" on that person. It is, paraphrasing the words of Darnell Burton, "Doing what I am supposed to do." It is, in the words of Scripture, "Loving the Lord my God with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my strength and with all my mind, and loving my neighbor as myself.

I pray that God will assist me in overcoming my fear of the unfamiliar and unknown, so that I can always see that of God in a stranger, so that I can freely "Do what I am supposed to do."



Luke 10:25-37 New International Version (NIV)

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

27 He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'^[a]; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'^[b]"

28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

30 In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. **31** A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. **32** So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. **33** But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. **34** He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. **35** The next day he took out two denarii^[c] and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Footnotes:

a. Luke 10:27 Deut. 6:5

b. Luke 10:27 Lev. 19:18

c. Luke 10:35 A denarius was the usual daily wage of a day laborer (see Matt. 20:2).