

Luke 10:30-32

Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.'

Luke 4:1-15

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.' Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone."'

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.' Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."'

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you", and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone."' Jesus answered him, 'It is said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."' When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time. Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

“What Jump Started Jesus?”**Rev. Charles Schuster****August 16, 2009**

At a picnic among strangers on Wednesday night, by a lake, the brats soaked in beer burning on the grill, at the home of some very nice folk I had never met before, somewhere under a maple tree, swatting gnats and telling lies, a man named Bob Phillips, who had been an astronaut, a veterinary scientist, a gentle soul, put in front of me a paper that he wrote. Title of the paper: "Religious Revelations and Bovine Ketosis: A Non-Sacred Cow." Premise of the paper: when someone goes without food, or fasts, there are increased levels of isopropyl alcohol in the brain, and that can lead to mystical encounters with the supernatural. And what do you think about that, Reverend?

Halfway through my brat, I thought of the census taker who hiked fifteen miles into the mountains of West Virginia, came to a shack, knocked on the door. An old woman came to the door. She'd never had a visitor before, and said, "What are you doing here? And he said to her, "Every ten years the government tries to find out how many people are living in the United States." And she said to him, "I sure would like to help you, Sonny, but I'm afraid I don't know either."

What do you think about that, Reverend? Fasting? Isopropyl alcohol, visions, mystical encounters, the supernatural? God? I said, "I'd sure like to help you, Sir, but I don't know either." I thought about it since. Do you suppose Jesus in the wilderness, fasting, speaking to the devil, promised political power, the power of magic, turning rocks into bread, jumping down from the temple and not getting hurt because God will save him, looking over the world, "all this can be yours," do you suppose that's what it was? The fasting, the vision, the words "You can't live by bread alone. Don't tempt the Lord your God..." Is that what jump-started Jesus? Thirty years of his life, nothing. Didn't he hear God speak before? Did he ignore God speaking when God spoke? Did God not speak? Was it his mother who set him loose, having him turn the water into wine when the drinks ran out at the wedding? Was it at the lake, when his cousin dipped him in the drink, and the Holy Spirit descended, and he got religion and baptized at the same time? Was it when the Baptist lost his head in that controversial accusation that put John the Baptist on the short list of Herod, who had married his brother's wife? What got Jesus going? What awakened him to that it's one thing to know the ten commandments, it's quite another thing to live them? What broke through to him that the law and the prophets can be broken down to two things, love the lord your God with all your heart, with all you got, and your neighbor as yourself? Was it water into wine? Or baptism into the water? Or vision in the desert, or was it a crisis?

Often it is a crisis that gets us jump-started, that sets us off, that turns us on, that flips us around. Often it's a crisis. You know, for most of us, it takes a crisis to jump-start our lives. It takes a crisis, a low point, to make us want to climb. Or a dark night of the soul, to make us want to look for light. Sometimes we've got to fail in order to find ourselves.

It's a story. Tom Burns, on a cruise, shared a table with a French man who spoke no English, and Burns spoke no French, and the meals were enjoyed in silence. The only time they spoke, at the beginning of each meal the Frenchman would nod and say "Bon appetit" and Burns, who didn't know what to say, would nod back and reply, and say "Tom Burns." This went on for three days. One day a friend took Burns aside and said, "You idiot, that French guy you eat dinner with is not telling you his name. 'Bon appetit' is French for 'good appetite,' that means, 'Enjoy the meal.' That's what he's saying to you." Well, Burns got it. He felt really stupid, and so the next meal, when the Frenchman entered the dining hall, Burns stood and nodded to him and said "Bon appetit" and the Frenchman smiled and said, "Tom Burns." That began a friendship. Sometimes you've got to flounder, to find yourself. When you do, it's a crisis.

Karen Armstrong had to fail. She had to see herself as a failure before she could know who she was. My sister has been at Chautauqua. Amy is her name, she's been at Chautauqua. That's in New York, and they bring in all these speakers and symphony orchestras... She's been at Chautauqua, telling me I ought to be at Chautauqua. She heard Tony Campolo preach, and she heard him say, "You know you're old when you go to a wedding and you're more interested in the grandmother of the bride than you are the bride." And last week, she got to hear Karen Armstrong, who is now famous, world-famous, author of several books. *The History of God* is one of them. She is lifted up as an

expert on the world's religions. She's in great demand as a speaker, has written books about Islam and Christianity and Judaism. 9/11 kind of put her up. She's famous, she's somebody. She found herself. As a teenager, she studied to be a nun, but she couldn't live the lifestyle of the cloistered walk, and so she gave it up and felt like a failure. And then she studied at Oxford, English Literature PhD. They told her her scholarship wasn't good enough, and she left school, felt like a failure. She tried teaching, but she failed. She suffers from epilepsy. She couldn't win. She failed. She couldn't handle the secular world, nor could she live in the sacred sphere of all the religious rules. She had to fail before she found herself, and it was in solitude and silence "I started to attend to its strange and beautiful texture. I discovered I was at home and alive in the silence. Joseph Campbell said, 'You've got to follow your bliss.' My bliss has been to study theology. I mount my staircase, I go up step by step, turning again round and round, covering little ground, climbing upward, I hope, toward the light." She found herself. She failed, and then she found herself.

When someone asks the question, "What do I do with what has happened to me now?" there needs to be the next question, "What do I do with what will get to happen to me next?" If the present page of life writes a sad story, we've got to move to the next chapter. If someone determines we're not up to the job, that doesn't mean there isn't a job we're up to. When we fail, there's faith. We can find ourselves. A crisis can lead to a catharsis. Sometimes, we have to fail to find ourselves. And sometimes it isn't failure, it's just bad luck. Sometimes it's a curse. Dick Evans tells his story, Pastor Goodfriend, it's his story, but I'll tell it. A man at a banquet sitting beside an attractive woman who had the most incredible diamond pendant he had ever seen. It sparkled and shone, it took in all the light in the room and dazzled the scene with a diamond prism of color and magic. He couldn't keep his eyes off the diamond nor the person who was wearing it, and finally he had to ask, "That's the most beautiful diamond I have ever seen. It's amazing. Could it be, is it the Hope Diamond?" "No," she said, "It's not the Hope Diamond, it's the Kopenhaver Diamond. The Hope Diamond is actually bigger, but in terms of brilliance and clarity, the Kopenhaver Diamond is really more beautiful." She went on, "Like the Hope Diamond, the Kopenhaver Diamond also comes with a curse." "What is the curse, that's interesting?" She looked at him and after a long pause, she said, "The curse is Mr. Kopenhaver."

Sometimes our crisis is a curse. What is your curse? Some of us are cursed by bad luck. For some of us, our curse is good looks. It gets us in trouble. Not many of us, but some of us. Some people are cursed by being at the wrong place at the wrong time, or saying the wrong thing all the time. What is your curse? Is there something about your life that seems to get in the way of living it? Is there a problem that arises, that blocks every attempt to find a solution? Is there something in your past or something in your future? There are some people who seem to have a curse. The Kennedys, for example. Eunice Kennedy Shriver died this week. Eunice Kennedy Shriver. Her brother, who was the pride and joy of the family, would have run, would have been elected, but, handsome and smart, pilot, war hero, shot down in the second world war, Joseph Kennedy, his death had a tremendous influence on her. And there was John who ran and won. What must it be, to be the sister of the president? Killed by an assassin's bullet, that had a profound effect on

Eunice. And then there was Bobby, who probably would have been elected, but sometimes some things are just not to be, and he was shot and killed in a kitchen in a hotel in Los Angeles, Sirhan Sirhan waiting for him in the kitchen. If they had just gone out a different way, it wouldn't have happened.

Was there a curse on this family? Teddy Kennedy could have been president, but his life seems to have been filled with bad choices and a lack of common sense, and now he's dying of brain cancer. She married the founder of the Peace Corps, who himself once upon a time ran for vice president. Now Sargent Shriver suffers from Alzheimer's. Eunice Kennedy Shriver has lived in the shadows of her parents, her brothers, her husband, and her crisis was her curse. And she came to a catharsis with a cause. It was a cause that had nothing to do with her famous brothers. What got her life moving was Rosemary. Rosemary, mildly retarded, they said, at a time when families didn't talk about those things. They never spoke of Rosemary. Someone told them that a lobotomy might help, and enable Rosemary to live a normal life, and so they agreed, but electric shock treatment went horribly wrong, and she became violent and had to spend the rest of her days in a mental institution. The family told people Rosemary was in a convent and lived in the seclusion of being a nun. That was Eunice's cause. Enough of the pretense. In my family, and for all of us. This was the crisis that led to the catharsis that led to the cause. Special Olympics, a place for people with handicapping conditions to be put front and center. She spoke at one of the first Special Olympics that she helped organize. "You are the stars of the world," she said. "By your presence, in every village, in every nation, you are sending a message. The right to play on any field, you've earned it. The right to study in any school, you've earned it. The right to hold any job, you've earned it. The right to be anyone's neighbor, you've earned it." If we have a crisis, if we feel a curse, then we find a cause, and there's catharsis.

Next week we're going to hear Bill Cavanaugh. He points us, as Christians, to the cause, when he writes, "We tell a story of the conquest of violence, not by inflicting more violence, but by absorbing it, and we will have to tell this story of liberation not just in words, but also in our witness." Eunice Kennedy Shriver told it and witnessed it. Maybe our cause is homelessness and we work to build a Habitat house or prevent homelessness in our day. Maybe our cause is hope, and we find a way to be a voice that says, "Wherever there is life, there is a chance for something better, and wherever there is a chance for something better, then there is a chance for something great." Maybe our cause is peace, and we discover in our day how to soften the rhetoric that often resorts to name-calling and violence on the topic of health care in our nation. Maybe that's our cause. William Renfro said it: "Consider all the accomplishments done in the last hundred years. The establishment of governments based on the consent of the governed. How many? We discovered science and developed medicine and we have created universities. We have proved that the world is round and discovered new worlds beyond our horizons. We have split the atom, tapped the power of the stars, mastered flight, moved toward the stars and rushed to the edge of time and the universe with our minds. If we can't find a cause at a time like this, then our curse will be the verse they scratch on our pathetic tombstones. But there is a cause for everyone. If we're young, we'll have several to choose from. If we're middle-aged, we can look back and revisit the road less

traveled by to find it. And if we're old, we have a chance to make a statement that those who follow us will never forget.

What got Jesus started? What got him going? Was it the devil in the wilderness? Was it fantasy? Was it isopropyl alcohol in his brain? He told a story, probably his best story, about a man beaten and left by the side of the road. The priest came by and walked on the other side, but a Samaritan, a hated Samaritan, picked this man up and took him to safety and cared for him and paid for his room and came back and checked on him. The Samaritan, the good neighbor, lived the values of the law - Love your neighbor as yourself. The Samaritan, the good Samaritan. Just a story. Or could it have been Jesus unconscious, beaten, by the side of the road? In crisis? His life jump-started by the kindness of a stranger?