

Weaving the Web
The Lady and the Spider
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Matthew 21:38-32

This is my favorite spider web story. I found it in Robert Fulghum's classic, All I Really Need to Know I learned in Kindergarten. (Villard Books, 1988) pp. 15-18)

This is how he tells it.

1. The Lady Leaves the House:

One morning this week I saw my next door neighbor leave her house. She was in her full power mode, business suit with luggage for the day: briefcase, laptop, gym bag with her clothes for the fitness center after work, designer lunch bag, and the garbage to take out.

She locks the door, turns and calls "Good morning," to me across the driveway takes three steps and then screams, "AaaaaaGGGGGHHHH!!!"

Spider Web! She has walked full force into a spider web, fighting off the sticky goo, swatting every which way, all the time wondering, "Where is the spider *now*?"

So she flings the bags in all directions, going into a high kicking, flapping, unidentifiable dance, sort of like a sand hill crane mating ritual. She swats her hair and runs back to the door. Breaks the key in the lock. Runs to the back door, repeating the "AAAAAAGGGGGHHHaah!" that drifts off with a sort of Doppler Effect as she rounds the house.

The lady thinks this spider is about the size of a lobster and has big poisonous lips and fangs. She'll probably jump in the shower just to make sure no trace of the spider or its web is left with her.

2. From the spider's perspective

Now here's a different view of the scene, that of the spider. It's a perfect late summer morning for a spider spinning a web. Just the right level of humidity. Our spider has been up since dawn, checking all the connections, throwing out a few new lines, thinking of all the nice little gnats she'll have for breakfast.

She is feeling good.

All of a sudden chaos breaks loose – it's an earthquake, tornado, and hurricane thrown together in a blender. Her web is torn loose and wrapped around a moving haystack. This huge hunk of raw, running, painted, sprayed meat is making a sound the spider has never heard before, "AAAAGGGGGHHHHH!!!" It's too big to wrap up and eat later. It's moving too much to hold down. "What do I do?" the spider wonders. "Do I jump, hang on and hope, dig in?"

Our spider has caught a human being. The big question for the spider is where is this human going and what will it do when it gets there?

3. What will the spider do?

If she survives she will really have something to talk about – the one that got away that was THIS BIG. “And you should have seen the JAWS on that thing!”

Now spiders are amazing creatures. Spiders, by rough estimate, have been around 350 million years. There are roughly sixty to seventy thousand per neighborhood acre. Spiders are survivors, and no matter how many webs you and I have swatted down, they keep coming back.

There is an archetypal universal truth to be learned from the persistence of spiders. It is embodied in a song I know, and you know, and your children and your parents know. In fact without a minute of instruction we can all sing it together, and most of us can do the motions as well.

The itty bitsy spider, went up the water spout.

Down came the rain and washed the spider out.

Out came the sun and dried up all the rain.

And the itty bitsy spider climbed up the spout again.

What is it with this song? Why do we all know it? Why do we keep passing it along to each new generation, especially when it is so pro spider?

It's because life is like the story of the song. Every new day there's a new drainpipe to climb. And all of us have been knocked down a drainpipe, or two or ten or more.

How many of you have at one time had your heart broken, lost or been turned down for a job, been disillusioned in a life's dream? That would be everybody.

What do we do? We climb that drainpipe again, ideally, a little wiser. This time we check the clouds, or look for better ways to hang on the drain pipe. We might even have had a plan B just in case we get knocked down yet another time. But we all do it again. We climb back up the drainpipes of life over and over again.

The Web of Life

We begin a new theme “The Web of Life” today. The web is a cycle, of creating, breaking down, and renewing. In the rainforest, the greatest webs are spun in community, not by individual spiders, but by many spiders cooperating. And remarkably, the food caught in the web is shared communally. The web as community will be an ongoing lesson of this theme.

First, today, in a town largely ruled by the academic cycle, this is truly our New Year. School re-opens, church is in full swing with two services, church school, adult programs, and youth groups. Everything starts over again. Even the Gators are ready to go.

We're like the itchy bitsy spider, climbing that drainpipe again, and creating a new web of life. The simple reality of starting over is biblical. The bible's epic stories of the Garden of Eden, the Tower of Babel, Cain and Abel, and Noah and the Ark, and of course the death and resurrection of Jesus are not so much stories about disasters as they are about second chances.

Therefore, look at what web you weave again in the cycle of life. What rain washed you out last year that you will overcome this year?

Second, when we're part of the web as community, what affects one, affects all. And I'm going to talk about one very concrete example of how this works today.

A crucial element of our faith is that caring for and comforting the sick is something that God calls all of us to do for one another on this earth. If God's will is for the healing of every person, then we are called to be agents of that healing. And that brings me to health care reform.

Let me tell you four stories of how we have struggled with the web of health care through our saga of trying to be a compassionate church to our own ministers. The United Church of Christ has a health insurance plan available to all clergy and lay church workers. This coverage typically costs twice that of a conventional Blue Cross, Blue Shield of Florida PPO policy. So years ago UCCG opted out of the national UCC plan and entered Blue Cross Blue Shield through what we thought was as group policy by joining the Florida Farm Bureau.

All was fine until we called Kristi Button to be the minister to youth and children ten years ago. Her husband Rob had childhood onset diabetes II. The Farm Bureau then informed us that our plan with them was not really a group plan. They were just our insurance agents for our individual plans, and our Blue Cross Blue Shield denied Rob coverage. We managed to cover Kristi and Rob through the UCC plan until he got a job where true group health insurance was available.

Second, we thought we were clear with Andy, but it turns out his doctor prescribed Nexium one time for indigestion, that counted as a pre existing condition, and he's had to keep his insurance with his previous provider in Illinois.

Here's a third story, which Rachele and Vince Amlin gave me permission to share. Rachele was pregnant last year. Their baby was born prematurely in February at twenty-one weeks. The little boy, whom they named Simon, died after eight hours. Then and now, I keep Vince and Rachele in my heart and prayers for this life changing loss that they have had to bear.

If that were not tragic enough, when we sought to add Vince and Rachele to our Blue Cross Blue Shield plan, BC/BS told us that because of Rachele's premature delivery, she was uninsurable for five years. This was not simply uninsurable for maternity coverage; it was for all health insurance for 5 years.

Repeating these words, “uninsurable for five years” still shakes me to the core of my being. How in anyone’s definition of morality could an insurance company compound their heartbreaking loss with this decision?

We were committed in this church to making sure that somehow Rachelle would receive health insurance. The United Church of Christ health plan would cover them. The cost? Seventeen thousand dollars a year, which we would have done if we had to.

Ultimately through the intense efforts of Hal Smith from UCG Board of Business and a new BC/BS agent we were able to find a way to develop a group health insurance plan for our employees that would insure Rachelle and Vince. And thankfully, Rachelle has been hired as a manager of social services at Oak Hammock which also gives her the option of health insurance. But without all this effort she easily could have become one of those forty six million Americans without health insurance, through no fault of her own.

The fourth example addresses the opposition to the government managing health care in any way. It’s a well organized opposition that has existed since FDR proposed Social Security.

I actually remember that the essay I was assigned for my final typing test in ninth grade was a rant against socialized medicine. That’s how thoroughly the indoctrination was spread.

I’ve got two government health stories to share that both relate to UCG member Jack Hauptman. First, a couple of years ago, Jack was part of a UCG group that travelled to Scotland. He caught a terrible cold, which got worse and worse. Finally in a small town he called the doctor, was given an immediate appointment, diagnosed with a bronchial infection and given a prescription. The cost for this? Nothing. They were building a new clinic, and they told Jack he could put a few pounds in the jar on the table, which he did.

Second, Jack is a retired professional from the National Park Service, covered now by Medicare. He has had five bouts with cancer and four cancer surgeries. He says to those who oppose government health care that without Medicare he would be dead or destitute.

Each of you, I’m sure, could tell similar stories about yourselves, your family, your friends and neighbors.

I’ve often said that each era of history has its blind spot which when revealed shocks us with its utter immorality. Slavery, child labor, the anti-Semitism that led to the holocaust, the exclusion of women from basic rights in America, and the discrimination against gay, lesbian and bi-sexual people are just a few of those blind spots that we have become aware of in our history.

I share these health care stories in a sermon because it is becoming apparent that the fact that forty six million people in our country do not have health insurance is one of those blind spots to which God is painfully opening our eyes in our time. We’re all in this web

of life together, and if we are going to be re-weavers of this broken web, I believe that this is one current call to act in faith.

Jesus tells an interesting, and rather harsh parable in the gospel of Matthew chapter 21. It takes place during the week following Palm Sunday, after Jesus throws the money changers out of the temple and curses the fig tree. This is Jesus in his “Don’t mess with me!” period. In a moment of exasperation, Jesus says: “What do you think? A man has two sons; he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ The son answered, ‘I will not’; but later changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, ‘I go, sir’; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus goes on to describe the harsh judgment for those who say yes to the call of God but don’t show up to do the work.

There are many complex ways of understanding this story, beyond how to get your teenage son to mow the lawn. (Notice, no one tries to universalize the gender in this story. They leave this one to men.) By joining this church, we in a multitude of ways, have said yes to God’s call to be caring people. Yet often, when a crucial moment like this one comes, we don’t do anything. We don’t go to work in the vineyard.

I know health care reform is complex, and the multitude of ways the health care problem can be addressed let alone solved, is mind boggling. But I do believe that we are in a possible Kairos moment, when the God’s love can break into human time. We are called to take this opportunity to make sure that one way or another, affordable health care will be available everyone in this country as a basic, inalienable human right.

The names and contact information of our legislators are printed below. According to your conscience, contact these people with your thoughts and commitments. Let us not say in this crucial moment in American history that we did nothing. (The poet Dante once said that the hottest places in hell are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in time of crisis. Doing nothing always contributes to the status quo. And the status quo right of our health care system now is immoral.)

Here we are on this day of a new theme, a new school year, a new season in our lives and church with Andy, Vince, Sandy and me and all of you weaving a new web of ministry together. This is what the resurrection is all about, rising again to the call of each new challenge, to re weave the web of life at all levels. It is a call to live our faith as we have in the past when we stood for equal treatment for people of color, for children, for Jews, for women, and for people of all sexual orientation. We are called today to act by standing for the rights of all to health and healing. And to this call, I for one say – Let it be so. Amen!

Our Representatives

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