

A Sermon on "A Sermon on Compassion" Originally Delivered 3/1/20
Sermon by Rev. Minister Angela Smith of COPE for May 7th, 2023 (and beyond)

Periodically, I revisit previously delivered sermons through reference and/or in review. This week's sermon is a review of "A Sermon on Compassion" which I originally delivered on March 1st, 2020. The full text of the original sermon is provided below this review for easy reference and your convenience.

The first paragraph is clearly a personal anecdote that may inspire empathy from those who've shared a similar experience and potentially compassion from those who have not had a similar experience. The purpose of sharing my experience with Calliope was to provide an example of my own compassion where unable to fully empathize with Calliope because my mother didn't reject me nor did I have the challenges Calliope faced so early in life. I did have my own challenges, but hers were of a different kind. I like to think she lived as long as she did, even though only 4 months, because I loved her and not that she died early because I didn't love her enough. Apparently, without my help she would have died in the first 5 weeks of life. I felt she enjoyed her life as long as she lived and when asked if I feel it would have been more natural, if not more humane, to accept the inevitable without intervening to prolong her arguable suffering, I say she lived a short and happy life even overcoming some of her challenges. She just required a little patience and good faith. And, according to some sources those 4 kitten months are the equivalent of 6 human years. Source: <https://www.litter-robot.com/blog/how-to-convert-your-cats-age-to-human-years/> But, maybe that's nothing and not worth it to some. It was worth it to me and I believe to Calliope too.

I'm laughing because since I delivered that sermon, I revealed in a few others that death is illusory and that reincarnation is likely based on the first law of thermodynamics, the fact that atoms never die, and that matter forms, dissolves, and then forms again with always the same amount of matter throughout the universe. So, I'm sure Calliope's been here the whole time too along with Jesus who I pray enjoys wine still and is not a vampire nor deluded into believing so.

I like to consider and explore multiple perspectives, which is one of the reasons I welcome honest disagreement. Some do feel death is permanent and you only live once. But, maybe life is the cessation of death and not the other way around. For an anomaly/oopsy of nature, I still feel I learned a lot from my time with Calliope and that she enjoyed the time she spent as Calliope. I witnessed it and experienced it.

I also believe one needs a sense of humor and also to appreciate a number of comedic influences on my communication style at times of delivery. Some of what I said makes me uncomfortable too, but when there is an elephant in the room I tend to state the obvious just in case there are any blind men from a story by Jain Monks whom likely still won't get it even if effectively conveyed and described. See: <https://jainworld.com/education/jain-education-material/jain-stories/elephant-and-the-blind-men/>

When it comes to the injured, their natural response in feeling particularly vulnerable after being injured can result in a vigilant defensive posture when approached though in civilized people that's mostly a grouch or an unpleasant tone without bearing any teeth or becoming violent towards any who may seek to exploit their vulnerability. Some people are sensitive to that and don't take it personally. Others take the tones personally out of ignorance, narcissism, or some combination of that. This at times results in those with complex/multiple-injury traumas attempting to explain their vulnerability so others understand any defensive postures taken which some consider over-sharing. But, society in general isn't looking to understand and is focused on itself. For profit businesses are not charities and not set up to provide for special needs nor to even tolerate it which is why the disabled at times have asked me "Are they going to go from labor camps to death camps?" And, I understand from the perspective of disabled and traumatized people, that have been enrolled or placed in labor or sex trafficking fronts that claim to offer hope to them in the name of charity often with some government funding before properly reported for violating the laws and shut down; that the closure of said storefronts resulting in lack of available beds or "therapeutic"/long-term care options, where families have compassion fatigue and prefer to hope an institutional setting will be better which it never is for the institutionalized which anyone would know who asked themselves if they'd want that if roles were reversed, that with so much rejection it would seem death was on the horizon. That's what happens when nobody is willing to do the work and people, who as a result of actual disability need to focus on self-care to the extent they literally can't be of much if any service to others, still need assistance or support.

At some point everyone feels they are doing their best and all they can while believing the rest is up to everyone else who often just want to let go and let God or let Gov. To "let go and let God" may mean changing forms or dying depending on one's point of view. And, to "let go and let Gov" often means some form of institutionalization which at times may be emergency shelter in the nearest prison or psychiatric hospital while they hope a better option opens up but have other people to place where newly available potentially better options go to those in most immediate need who don't even have the temporary shelter because they're just now getting any assistance. Compassion fatigue takes a toll and sometimes nature still clearly trumps nurture in practice if not in policy.

And, that's my review of the whole sermon delivered March 1st, 2020. I'm still meditating on the issues and problems evidenced above. Praying for solutions doesn't appear to be the answer and I know Calliope would have died more swiftly if that's all I'd done for her. But, I actively stepped in where everyone else was willing to just let her die or even expedite it. Such reminds me of the apocryphal Chinese proverb "Whenever someone saves another's life, he's responsible for him forever." Some say it was just a line from the 1970s television series "Kung Fu". Most just want to accept responsibility for themselves and very limited responsibility for others and only when legally obligated to do so for the most part. So, where more is needed, the inevitable is simply accepted as an individual challenge that may be overcome, rather than taking any action to expedite the inevitable finding that too pessimistic or even fascist. The most common sentiment representing the last sentence is often phrased as "Sink or swim". Some jokers will add "I'm all out of life rafts, good luck." That's the feeling at the center of every Calliope

who succumbed to nature rather than being nurtured graciously. It's a feeling that no one understands. That's false. People understand and just feel it is more polite to tolerate those like me who would share resources with a Calliope rather than join them in shrugging it off as "shit happens" while knowing full abandonment will expedite the inevitable. That's when one has to decide whether one will accept full responsibility for a life they save, without resentment and with full selflessness that never expires, regardless of whether anyone else is willing or able to help. What would you do? Selflessness cannot be sustained forever without the tolerance and generosity of others.

For those interested in starting #TaoFu Self-Defense Exercises, please see <https://www.cope.church/taofu.htm> and begin at any time.

There are opportunities to send messages, receive mystery bonus blessings, and more with or without donating available now on our "Pass the Basket" page at <https://www.cope.church/basket.htm> . Thank You.

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32 KJV Willful blindness is an abomination.

COPE accepts Feedback, critical and complimentary. Learn more at <https://www.cope.church/feedback.htm> . For the sake of keeping myself and others humble, a sense of humor is welcome on all sides.

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A Sermon on Compassion

Sermon by Minister Angela Smith of COPE for March 1st, 2020 (and beyond)

Years ago I had a cat named Sophie who was pregnant and gave birth to kittens. There were four kittens total. One of the kittens was deformed with a misshapen head and elongated neck and scrunched up face and ears (these were tabby cats). Sophie rejected that one. I named the deformed one Calliope and I took care of her because Sophie rejected her. I believe Calliope imprinted on me as a result of the rejection by Sophie and my attention and kindness towards her. And, if not near me for any reason if I called her she would run into the room I was in with kind of a Hunchback of Notre Dame type movement in running at times and climb furniture to reach me. It was very sweet and also quite sad. I think I was the only compassion or kindness she knew. The other people said because of her deformity and disability as well as being rejected by her mother that meant she would likely die. I understood that too. I just hoped she wouldn't because I loved her anyway. But, not everyone feels that way about the different and it does require a level of compassion and patience many seem to lack even when dealing with far less obvious challenges. Calliope did die before she reached 4 months old. I'm crying about that as I write this sermon and that was about 15 years ago now.

My point with this is that those of us who are able to care for the Calliopes of the world, do our best with very limited resources and support. And, we do it because we see the innocence and joy of which the Calliopes are capable. But, it would seem nature overall including sometimes birth mothers just reject their offspring and a consensus about just letting such individuals die as they'd be killed in a totally feral environment surfaces where examples in nature exist such as wild horses killing disabled foals even when the mother protests of the same herd. So, there is debate and protest among the animals too and the controversy isn't limited to humankind so the matter is not yet settled though the majority seem okay with the death as inevitable, some wish to expedite it, and some wish to save the innocent or at least make sure they are comfortable and have some joyful moments even if short-lived. Death is inevitable for all carbon-based life forms including humans. And, there is no reason to expedite when enough people are willing to show compassion and acceptance while fully integrating all the different who pose no threat to society and simply were born that way. Calliope remains in my heart and helps me keep my heart soft when I find my patience wear thin in responding to cries for help.

As long as it is a controversy, I'd like very much if we could all discuss it as calmly as possible or accept it is going to be a heated debated because even in the nonhuman realms there is discussion. Ants perform triage and try to heal their wounded and always carry them back home in some colonies. Baboons have been known to wait to avenge another member of their troop who was run down by a vehicle and then stone the vehicle when it drives by again. Horses will kill disabled foals that are unable to stand on their own in a timely fashion. And, cats reject their deformed babies at times. So, we've got a lot of arguments going on how to handle this from many species including our own. We seem to be voicing in our own human languages a controversy that crosses a lot of boundaries. But, individually, I'm happy for my time with Calliope and would do it all over again in caring for her. It was a pleasure and I still think Sophie's a bitch. But, also recognize in nature with a natural predator as your mother you might expect to be rejected if you look more like dinner than a fellow hunter in training. And, I know for Calliope, I was the conduit of grace that showed her love when no one else would and that's still bittersweet. If you have a glass of wine after reading this, consider that something other than drinking Jesus' blood please. I believe Jesus thinks that's gross and likely insulting unless you are calling Jesus a drunk and say he drank so much wine his blood is alcoholic in content. Even so, are you a vampire? That's gross. He turned water into wine, not his blood. You want some water after service rather than wine? Go ahead. But, don't call that blood either. It's water. Wine is wine. Blood is not for drinking. Some people take things very literally and some people are quite artful and require understanding nuance. But, if you do have a glass of wine after this one, please, if with another, say something nice about Calliope or send her a prayer that should she return through rapture, revelation, or reincarnation, that she is surrounded by the love she deserves.

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