

A Sermon on the Fragility and Resilience of Good Faith
Sermon by Rev. Minister Angela Smith of COPE for January 1st, 2023 (and beyond)

I hope everyone enjoyed John Wycliffe Day and wish everyone a happy new year! This sermon provides three hypothetical scenarios followed by meditative questions to help you practice, sustain, and maintain good faith. Initially I was going to use the word “trust” rather than “good faith” and you are welcome to use them interchangeably for this sermon.

Scenario #1: #TaoFu Metaphor

There is a wooden footbridge you cross on regular walks or hikes that you’ve used for many years. The footbridge is made of rope and wood crossing over a rushing river or stream. The footbridge has been neglected and some of the wood is warped and weakened. You continue to use it because years of finding it reliable resulted in your having faith it will remain so without any maintenance from you whether in-kind or financing repairs. You step on a weakened board and fall through.

Meditative Questions:

1. Do you blame the footbridge for being unreliable? (Was there a sign that said “use at your own risk”? Would that make a difference in how you answer this question?)
2. Do you blame yourself for taking the footbridge for granted, neglecting it, or failing to recognize it as a growing hazard due to neglect while using it anyway?
3. Do you shake it off and think “shit happens” while deciding not to go that route again until someone fixes the footbridge?
4. Of the above questions, what do your answers say about you?

Scenario #2: Absurd Hypothesis in Dialogue Format

Party #1: You can’t trust anyone nor anything. Everything is unreliable. It’s all over the news. Haven’t you heard? Education is a big fraud. Healthcare is a big fraud. Religion is a big fraud. Government is one big fraud. Respective Sources: <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oig/newsroom.html>, <https://www.fbi.gov/how-we-can-help-you/safety-resources/scams-and-safety/common-scams-and-crimes/health-care-fraud>, <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/09/06/religious-based-financial-fraud-is-rampant-heres-how-to-fight-it.html>, <https://www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/pr/2022/dojpr-041122-former-department-homeland-security-employee-convicted-scheme-defraud-united-states.pdf>, and so you really can’t trust anything nor anyone.

Party #2: I don’t trust you. I do trust my own judgment and that the ground is sure beneath my feet most of the time while recognizing I need to be aware that sometimes

I'm not walking on solid ground and/or I am in an area prone to earthquakes which can change the landscape where scientists can't even predict them years in advance and can only alert after the fact as of now. I have a hard time believing everything would be as convenient and efficient as it is in full context and when compared to history if the majority weren't acting in good faith/a trustworthy manner most, if not all, of the time.

Party #1: You shouldn't trust me nor anyone else. Even where I believe I can be trusted, I don't expect you to trust me. I don't trust you either.

Party #2: You cited a lot of sources for your claims. But, it seems theft by deception otherwise known as fraud is illegal and all of those sources show the guilty being penalized in some way including government officials who abused their office. In this democracy it seems the majority disapprove of fraud and those proven guilty of it are penalized which suggests the majority disapproves of crimes including those involving deceit, which means most people can be trusted.

Meditative Questions:

1. Are you a person of good faith and/or do you trust yourself?
2. What is Party #1's biggest problem?
 - a. Dishonesty (Party #1 trusts the media but no one else though claims to trust no one.)
 - b. Willful blindness (Party #1 intentionally avoids examining own confidence in media.)
 - c. Delusional (Party #1 is truly unaware of the discrepancy and denies it exists.)
 - d. Failure to Consider Full Context/Ignorance
3. To what extent do you trust others?
 - a. To the extent you trust yourself
 - b. More than you trust yourself or would trust yourself if in the other party's position
 - c. Less than you trust yourself or would trust yourself if in the other party's position
 - d. Too many variables and sometimes prejudices apply on either or both sides.
4. What of the options would you choose to eat if starving and those were your only options?

- a. Pre-packaged food with a clear expiration date that has not passed yet from a well established company such as Campbell's Soup that has not been opened and has no sign of tampering.
 - b. Leftovers in someone's refrigerator that has no date and no ingredients listed.
 - c. A discarded bag of fruit left on a city sidewalk near a dumpster.
 - d. Herbal/Dietary supplements.
5. If you or anyone chose herbal/dietary supplements and were sincere in that choice for your/their answer of #4, are you/they?
- a. A victim of fraud because you trust totally unregulated products over minimally or robustly regulated products. Most don't even contain what they claim on the label.
 - b. Smart because herbal/dietary supplements have the longest shelf-life.
 - c. Stupid because such supplements are not really bio-available and destroy the liver and kidneys. Source: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5502701/>
 - d. Special because you went to a special health seminar and met someone charismatic and so convincing that now you are sold on their merchandise and anything in the same category.

Scenario #3: Once Bitten, Twice Shy

You've been hurt and/or harmed so are reluctant to engage in activities similar to the ones in which you were hurt and/or harmed. Your survival depends on your ability to engage in similar activities and the internal struggle is between competing interests where one is to avoid risking your life and the other wishes to avoid all discomfort.

Meditative Questions:

- 1. Are all lives always at risk due to the nature of life itself when speaking of corporeal forms?
- 2. Do you find scenario #3 is less than, greater, or equal in addressing both the fragility and resilience of good faith when compared to the other two scenarios?
- 3. If you truly believed you couldn't trust anyone or anything, how soon would you actually die as a result of avoiding everything including getting your basic needs met unless you also don't trust that you have any needs to address?
- 4. Does rejecting and/or avoiding victims who still have trust issues and traumatic stress make them more vulnerable to being exploited by criminals such as frauds, and after

discovering that just compound their trauma and trust issues until they ultimately die alone still wishing someone would help but not using the scientific method to reason out truth or falsity of any claims by anyone thereby becoming a victim of their own laziness more so than not because a little due diligence reinforces good faith and trust the majority of the time while also revealing where bad faith actors lie?

END

Final Thought: I personally lose trust where someone or something is found unreliable. This can be a result of a misrepresentation on their part or an assumption on my part. Sometimes it is both where there is a misrepresentation on their part that I initially assume to be true that later is revealed to be false. Unfortunately for some, the scenario involves being raped where the deceit or misrepresentation was a trick to isolate the victim through false pretenses and then commit the crime. So, where something like that is one's first experience with misrepresentation leading to serious harm, a vigilant response from the victim to any deception may be a lifetime condition related to traumatic stress resulting from the first victimization. If someone's first experience with that is finding out Santa Claus is just a theatrical way to enjoy holiday gift exchanges or give credit where credit is arguably not due for the gifts under the tree, then they are likely to still see surprises or the theater of holidays as a cherished memory and not a reason to respond to all hints at deception as meaning the deceiver is a potential rapist. But, religiously all deception is work of the devil. John 8:44. Differentiating is necessary and depending on environmental factors and major social influences, one can learn to enjoy theater that identifies as such while still condemning crimes of all sorts including those involving deceit. It would be nice if everyone were honest, trustworthy, and always acting in good faith. However, that's up to each individual and where anyone is proven guilty of criminal misconduct beyond a reasonable doubt, there is a penalty for that. For those who think the dream-state of fetuses is preferable, remember those fetuses started out as sperm in testes and waited 10 weeks to reach maturity before even being ready to try to fertilize any eggs. Those sperm spend 10 weeks growing to full maturity and then race against millions of their sisters (all sperm are female) trying to get to the egg first so they can gestate until ready for their big debut unless ripped apart when aborted or lost due to unplanned and unwanted miscarriage. We all started out in some guy's testes and really wanted out of there, which is why we won the race. But, that was only the first of life's challenges where winning is based on skill, chance, and basic instincts. That alone should be why we are humble and respect each other enough to be honest exhibiting good faith to the extent we expect of others to avoid hypocrisy and expand comfort and joy to all.

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.