

## A Sermon on Suspicion

Sermon by Rev. Minister Angela Smith of COPE for June 11th, 2023 (and beyond)

I wrote this sermon in May when comparison-shopping on a potential tattoo to honor true love and the memory of Calliope referenced in the March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020 and May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023 sermons. I want a permanent reminder to carry with me of the lessons taken from my time with Calliope including the values of patience, love, life, and compassion. It seemed like a tattoo would be one way to do that without weighing myself down. However, this sermon is about suspicion and hopefully helpful in terms of consumer advocacy and/or law enforcement. The reason I was shopping at all provides the context, not the purpose of this sermon.

I found the nearest piercing and tattoo studio. The first two things I noticed were that they didn't have photos of any of their work up in the shop nor any jewelry for piercings. One of them came out of a room to say they needed matches and went back in which I thought odd because most shops use disposable tattoo needles and piercing equipment for hygienic reasons. In addition, if tattoo ink has coagulated, it is best to throw it out because it could be a sign of bacteria, which could cause an infection. I did not report these concerns to the health department, which is the only regulatory body I could find with any jurisdiction over piercing and tattoo studios. I e-mailed them in May to get a quote on a 1" x 3/4" tattoo of a kitten reaching for a star. I got an almost immediate response of \$150+tax. It was monotone and 1" x 3/4". Here's what I found online:

The screenshot shows a Google search results page for the query "average cost of tattoo in WA State". The search results show approximately 18,000,000 results in 0.44 seconds. The top result is from "spokanetattooingshop.com" with the title "Spokane Tattoo Pricing: Average Tattoo Cost in Spokane". Below this, there is a "People also ask" section with four questions: "How big is a \$500 tattoo?", "Is \$150 a lot for a tattoo?", "Is \$100 an hour expensive for a tattoo?", and "How much would a sleeve tattoo cost in WA?". The second result is from "CostHelper" with the title "How Much Does a Tattoo Cost?". The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the time as 8:59 PM on 5/15/2023.

The median income in my area and the area of the shop referenced is comparable to that of Spokane, WA. In checking other pricing, I found nationally the range for the tattoo as described is typically \$35-\$75 with openness to tipping. Then, they said they wanted to enlarge and change my design too. All of this seemed off to me. But, none of it is evidence of a crime because price-gouging isn't illegal in WA State at this time even though Attorney General Ferguson has asked the legislature to make that the case. Price-gouging is illegal in other states.

As I'm prone to do like a consumer and victim's advocate as part of my mission work at the church, I e-mailed my concerns about some of the red flags referenced above while restating I want the tattoo as shown, not enlarged or changed. After stating in their first reply that the date I was considering was wide open for appointments, they declined to schedule. I likely would have cancelled anyway, I just thought I'd give them the benefit of the doubt up until I was so sure I could report it. I could find no reviews of the shop on any review sites like Yelp and Google Reviews. It seemed to me they were flying under the radar.

The issue here though, is what I've stated about that shop at this time might be totally suspicious, but it isn't evidence of a crime. Law enforcement can't get a warrant on that. They could agree all day that it is highly suspect that a body piercing shop has no jewelry on display for piercing. Usually shops that offer piercing have a wide selection of jewelry on display. Here's an example:

COPE MINISTRIES (@heal247) / T x Silver Safari Body Piercing x +

Not secure | silver-safari.com

We also carry a huge selection of:

- Natural stone jewelry set in Sterling Silver (Pendants, Rings, Earrings and Bracelets)
- Steel and Sterling Silver Earrings
- RINGS! Tungsten, Titanium, Steel, and Sterling Silver
- African and Indonesian wood carvings
- Wild Berry Incense and Incense Burners

**NORTHTOWN MALL**  
**4750 N Division Street**  
**Spokane, Washington**  
**(509) 482-3435**

**ALDERWOOD MALL (North Seattle)**  
**3000 184th Street, SW**  
**Lynnwood, Washington**  
**(425) 673-7878**

Silver Safari has been locally owned and operated since 1996. Specializing in Body Piercing and Ear Piercing, we have done extensive research and training and we are proud to be at the top in our industry. We are conveniently located in the mall providing a safe, comfortable environment to be pierced. All our piercers are licensed in Washington state and use proper sterilization methods. Silver Safari offers many choices in jewelry including titanium and surgical steel. And we carry a large selection of jewelry in our area!

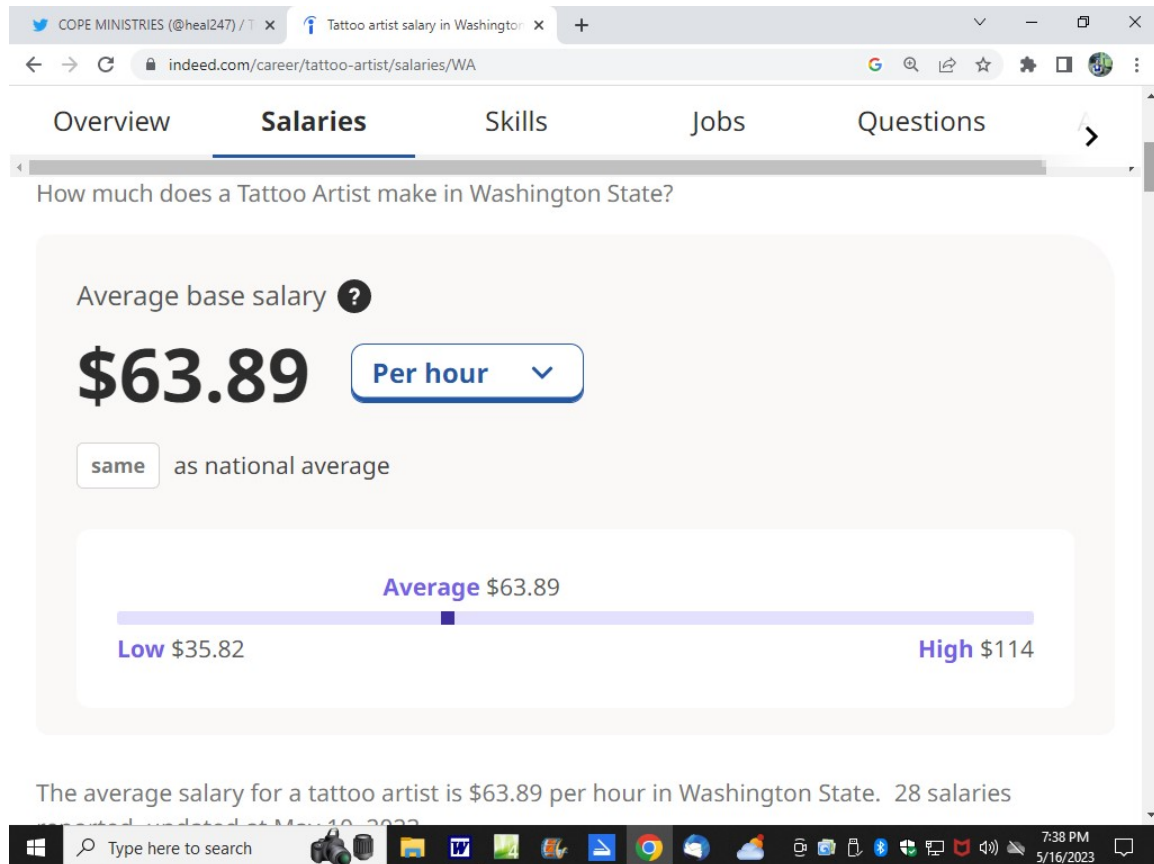
Hi there, have a question? Text us here.

Safe, Comfortable, Friendly Environment! Text us

We strive to feature what we believe is the Largest Selection of Body Jewelry in...

We're told to report suspicious activity to the police. Overcharging could be a sign of fraud or money-laundering, but I've no evidence of that. I'm not a victim anyway because I exercise due diligence and didn't get a chance to gather more evidence. Is this a result of too much time on my hands? You decide.

Here's what tattoo artists reportedly make per hour in WA State:



I'm an artist too and I sketched/drew two of the design I wanted added using a black 0.5mm Uni-ball pen and totally filled it in as I wanted the tattoo to be. I drew the exact size I wanted as well without using a stencil or temporary tattoo template like they do at many tattoo parlors. It took me less than 10 minutes to complete both. And, in the similar industry of make-up artist or hairdresser, even at the high end they charge about \$2/minute in 15-minute intervals. The cost of materials on the tattoo of Calliope is between \$1.28-\$5 (for disposable tattoo needle and ink). Based on my understanding, that tattoo would take no more than 30 minutes, likely closer to 15 or even 10 minutes. But, even if an hour, way more than is considered the high rate in the above screenshot.

Are you thinking "Just go somewhere else, they sound sketchy"? The thing is they are licensed by the state as an LLC. Just because something is licensed, doesn't mean they are not sketchy. Here's why I don't report suspicions like this:

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL [king5.com/article/news/crime/snohomish-county-sheriff-office-deputies-reassigned-to-patrol-sp...](http://king5.com/article/news/crime/snohomish-county-sheriff-office-deputies-reassigned-to-patrol-sp...). The page features the King5 logo and navigation tabs for News, Weather, Sports, and VERIFY. The article text reads: "SNOHOMISH COUNTY, Wash — In the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office, these days, there are only 98 deputies to respond to the 911 calls of about 350,000 people. And the numbers are not getting any better. 'I've never seen anything like we're facing in 2022 in my 25 years,' said Sheriff Adam Fortney. The office has lost 30 deputies in the first six months of this year alone, which is 50% more than average, according to statistics provided by the sheriff's office. There are currently 27 vacancies and 16 deputies in training who won't be available for many more months." Below the text is a sponsored video player showing a man in a blue shirt presenting a line graph to an audience in a meeting room. The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows the time as 7:53 PM on 5/16/2023.

So, if you worked for the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office and were responding to reports of violent crime, burglaries, and robberies, how would you feel receiving a call from me to report my suspicions about the tattoo shop? Would you think "Sounds suspicious, not enough evidence for a warrant. Thanks for wasting our time."? You'd be polite and acknowledge the validity of the suspicion while saying to avoid doing business there while praying the free market will do its job because consumers will exercise due diligence to avoid becoming a victim? Maybe both?

If you were raped and/or a loved one was murdered in Snohomish County, would you want my call to be prioritized over the investigation, apprehension, and/or prosecution of the perpetrator? I tend to agree with their priorities on that and also understand that there are a lot of suspicious people likely doing very bad things who will get away with it until there's enough evidence for a warrant. This is why we all need to exercise due diligence and at least understand evidence beyond a reasonable doubt is what they need and enough for a warrant to get started.

I'm uncomfortable with suspicious activity. But, my discomfort alone isn't evidence. For all anyone knows, the jewelry is stored and only taken out for customers. The shop is fairly new so just doesn't have any online reviews yet. And, they are overcharging, but may be true artists who insist on creative license when tattooing anyone regardless of what the customers may want as their tattoo while feeling their originality is worth the freedom and the price. Maybe their customers prefer privacy or they feel displaying

examples of their work in-store would be tacky. Either way, the Mark of Cain was a branding by slaveholders in the form of a tattoo, which is why the Holy Bible prohibits it. It is how slaveholders identified their property. Now, we choose our tattoos and we pay for them at free market prices as long as we go to a real tattoo shop. It's not a real one, is it? It really does seem like a criminal storefront.

I didn't call about the tattoo shop. I think you know why. But, all the law enforcement and regulatory bodies often agree things sound suspicious, but can't do anything without enough evidence for a warrant or other court order because of due process because no one should be locked up for failing to display their jewelry in a high crime area. A lot of their stuff could have a reasonable explanation as shown. And, I'm not getting ink done there.

I hope this encourages you to exercise due diligence and avoid becoming a victim. Amen.

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.