

The Voice that is within

15th Sunday of Ordinary Time

July 14, 2019

Those of you who are over 40 will remember the Seinfeld show. In its final Episode, which aired at the end of the 1998 TV season, the main characters (Jerry, George, Elaine, and Kramer) receive a one year sentence for failing to help someone who was being robbed.

What happens is this: Their plane encounters problems and they are stuck in Lakeland Massachusetts. Killing time wondering around on the sidewalks in this quaint New England town, they become innocent bystanders and witnesses of a carjacking.

Being New Yorkers and the kind of people they are they make fun of the guy who is being robbed. Kramer, who has a camcorder in his hands, this was before the days of sophisticated cell phones, films the incident as a curiosity. They never lift a hand, never shout out; they are 10 yards away, and could care less. They just stand there and casually watch! The robber speeds off with the car and the police arrive late on the scene. With the excitement over, and the poor victim standing dazed in the street, Jerry turns to his friends and suggest they go get something to eat.

As they walk off the officer stops them and says, "Alright, hold it right there."

Jerry: Wha'?

Officer: You're under arrest.

Jerry: Under arrest, What for?

Officer: Article 223 dash 7 of the Lakeland county penal code.

Elaine: What, we didn't do anything.

Officer: That's exactly right. The law requires you to help or assist anyone in danger as long as its reasonable to do so.

George: I never heard of that.

Officer: It's new, its called the Good Samaritan Law, Let's go.

The series ends with them serving their time. As one critic wrote:

There was a redeeming quality to that last episode. For nine years Seinfeld's characters used, ridiculed, and made fun of everyone they met. The four of them were the Priest and the Levites of our modern world. We climb the ladder of success and FedEx gives you the world on time. This is our attitude. Stopping to help someone crimps our style and requires too much of our time.¹

¹ <https://sermons.com/sermon/the-good-samaritan/1339117>

What the four friends had suppressed over the course of nine seasons was the voice within, what we call the conscience. John Henry Newman, the 19th century English convert from Anglicanism to Catholicism maintained that the conscience is our keen awareness of the moral law, what he called the Aboriginal Vicar of Christ. That is, the conscience is the representative of Christ deep within each person; the divine voice whispering to us and urging us on. ²

Let's unpack the moral law some more. C.S. Lewis in his classic *Mere Christianity* refers to the moral law as the Law of Human Nature. Listen to how he describes it:

Human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it. Secondly, that they do not in fact behave in that way. They know the Law of Human Nature; they break it. These two facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in.³

It has been said that "If you break law of human nature, it will break YOU!" It had so broken Jerry and his friends, that their consciences were, careless and dead.

The Law of Human Nature is like that. We can choose to ignore and we think nothing happens. Listen again to Lewis:

Each person is at every moment subjected to several different sets of law but there is only one of these which he is free to disobey. As a body, he is subjected to gravitation and cannot disobey it; if you leave him unsupported in mid-air, he has no more choice about falling than a stone has. As an organism, he is subjected to various biological laws which he cannot disobey any more than an animal can. That is, he cannot disobey those laws which he shares with other things; but the law which is peculiar to his human nature, the law he does not share with animals or vegetables or inorganic things, is the one he can disobey if he chooses.

So here is the question that comes from this: So where does this law of human nature come from?

How do we account for the universality of this moral law, which we can, like Jerry and friends, ignore?

For you see the moral law is an objective law, that the Lakeland County penal code understood, and therefore the writers of Seinfeld's final episode.

Lewis stands in a long tradition that recognizes this law comes from a universal personal and intelligent law giver. That is, it comes from the mind of God. Our sense of moral obligation is as it were the voice of God within us, also what we call the conscience, the aboriginal vicar of Christ.

With all this in mind listen again to our reading from Deuteronomy:

² See: <https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/homily/hearing-the-voice-of-god/892/>

³ Ibid: Kindle Locations 535-537

Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. ¹² It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” ¹³ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” ¹⁴ No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.⁴

The conscience is like a traffic light. It wants us to slow down and stop when we are aware of a course we are taking is unhelpful and hurtful. Similarly the conscience wants us to look for the green lights that allows us to navigate life caringly and purposefully.

That is part of what Jesus is getting at in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The Jericho road was a very long serpentine road starting at Jerusalem, the highest point, 754 metres above sea level, and going straight down to Jericho, nearly 258 metres below Sea Level. The lowest place on the face of the earth not covered by water--the deepest city in the world.

The Jericho Road was a notoriously thief-infested stretch of rocky mountain road, a long, lonely 27 kilometres crowded with caves and danger. Since the road was so often traveled by religious pilgrims and businessmen and because it was so crooked, robbers frequented the road often. In fact, the route was so ripe for pillage that it had been nicknamed “The Bloody Pass”. By the time you rounded a bend the bandits were there and you really had no chance to escape.

It’s like the Seinfeld story. Along the road come two people whose consciences should’ve been alive, one was a priest and the other a Levite. The Levites were those who served the altar and the priests offered the sacrifice. They were like a modern day priest and deacon. Their consciences were careless and dead. Indeed it is the one that the hearers would have thought heartless, the Samaritan, who ends up listening to the voice within and shows compassion to the one in need. He listened to the Aboriginal Vicar of Christ.

Oh by the way, many of the bandits on the road would have been Samaritans, who intentionally attacked Jewish travelers. We know this from the 1st century Jewish historian, Josephus.⁵

May I invite you this summer to be attentive in a special way to the voice within as you determine how you spend your time, the conversations you engage, how you notice and show care for others, as you take time think about the gift we have been given, the gift of our conscience.

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Dt 30:11–14). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

⁵ https://cdn.shopify.com/s/files/1/1202/2816/files/15th_Sunday_of_OT_Year_C_Transcript_c47ad75b-69bb-4687-a43a-f7f83c380bfb.pdf?6396