

Mike Leary's Sermon: August 1, 2010

Children Story

King Balak and Balaam in Numbers 22:2

The children of Israel were exiled and trampling through the countryside taking over the different groups. Now we're talking over half a million people. Balak was worried his country was next. He sent some runners over to his neighbor, king Balaam asking; if they pooled their forces, they could probably hold the Israelites off.

Balaam slept on it that night, and God came to him in a dream and said: "They're my people, I've bless them, leave them alone" So Balaam told the runner "No!"

So Balak sent a prince to get him to come to his place to try and persuade him to help. That night, in a dream, God told him once more, "You heard what I said, go to Balak and tell him yourself."

Balaam got on his donkey, and while he's riding through a pass, the donkey starts jumping up and down. Balaam starts hitting the donkey yelling at it to get back on the trail. The donkey suddenly says: "why are you hitting me, haven't I been a good donkey?" And without missing a beat, Balaam says "I don't care get back on the trail!"

At that moment, Balaam's eyes are opened and he sees a giant Angel with a sword slicing through the place they would've been. Balaam says "good donkey and pats him."

The angel points his sword at Balaam and says, "you heard what the Lord said, now go tell King Balak."

So when Balaam gets there he tells Balak what God said, but the next day Balak convinces him to go through a sacred ritual to really see if it's *really* what God meant.

Balaam has them make seven altars and he does the ceremony. God, like a frustrated parent with a slow child tells him, "You heard what I said; *now* I want you to bless the Israelites too."

Balak is real upset when he hears that and says; "You've got to understand how serious this is!" So he takes Balaam up on a mountain and shows him the 600,000 Israelites. "Now do you understand?"

So Balaam once again asked for seven altars and makes a burnt offering ritual.

God said; "Now I want you to tell Balak That the Israelites are going to be like a lion and destroy his people."

Balak was really distressed and tried one more time to get his friend to ask God if this was so."

In those days people were really dense. I like comedian Lewis Black's comment that they were ten hairs away from a baboon back then.

So Balak took Balaam to a sacred mountain top and built the seven altars again and once more. Balaam did the burnt offering ritual. This time he added in the blessing of the Israelites and any people that would be against them, would be cursed.

Balak was real upset and sent Balaam home.

What is important about this story? Do you have some ideas?

God spoke to Balaam, *not* just his chosen people.

God told Balaam again and again, just like our parents, until he accepted the message. Sometimes doing the right thing is very hard.

Reading

From Billy Edd Wheeler Sung by the Kingston Trio---

I was travelin' west of Buckskin on my way to a cattle run, 'cross a little cactus desert under a hot, blisterin' sun. Thirsty down to my toenails, I stopped to rest me on a stump, but I tell you I just couldn't believe it when I saw that water pump. I took it to be a mirage at first. It'll fool a thirsty man. Then I saw a note stuck in a bakin' powder can. "This pump is old," the note began, "but she works. So give'er a try. I put a new sucker washer in

'er. You may find the leather dry.

(Chorus)

Yeah, you'll have to prime the pump, work that handle like there's a fire. Under the rock you'll find some water left there in a bitter's jar. Now there's just enough to prime it with, so don't you go drinkin' first. Just pour it in and pump like mad and, buddy, you'll quench your thirst.

(Chorus)

Well, I found the jar, and I tell you, nothin' was ever prettier to my eye and I was tempted strong to drink it because that pump looked mighty dry, but the note went on, "Have faith, my friend, there's water down below. You've got to give to really get. I'm the one who ought to know."

So I poured in the jar and started pumpin' and I heard a beautiful sound of water bubblin' 'n' splashin' up out of that hole in the ground. Then I took off my shoes and drunk my fill of that cold refreshin' treat. Then I thanked the Lord, and I thanked the pump, and I thanked old Desert Pete.

Chorus:

You've got to prime the pump. You must have faith and believe. You've got to give of yourself 'fore you're worthy to receive.

Drink all the water you can hold. Wash your face cool your feet. Leave the bottle full for others. Thank you kindly, Desert Pete.

Sermon

Sermon July 1, 2010

Washin' Babies.

I'm a therapist, so I take things from that point of view. But I do include people's faith systems because it effects their reality. Also, because I'm a spiritual inclusivist, I don't use Biblical platitudes to prescribe behavior, or as having answers such as thou shalt or shalt not. I don't care what your belief is; I want to know, does it work for you to be a more decent loving person and how do you use it to guide your life.

In the movie the life of Brian by Monte Python, one scene opens with Jesus on the Mount, telling the group "the Beatitudes". The camera pulls way back where we see Brian and his mother. They are standing on the fringes with some others and we now can barely make out what's being said, so his mother yells out: "speak up"

Brian shushes her.

"Well I can't hear a thing."

A man having trouble hearing Jesus says to his wife: "What was that?"

"I think it was 'Blessed are the cheesemakers.'"

"What's so special about the cheesemakers?"

"Well, obviously, it's not meant to be taken literally. It refers to any manufacturers of dairy products."

The Bible can be a dangerous book, It depends, largely, on how you read it with what prejudices and with what intellectual background. Regarded as sacred and authoritative, such a complex collection of histories, legends, allegories and images becomes a monstrous Rorschach blot in which you can picture almost anything you want to discover. Just as one can see animals in the clouds or faces in the fire, fundamentalists "prove" the truth of the Bible by trying to show how the words of the prophets have foretold events that have come to pass in relatively recent times. But scholars of ancient history find the remarks of the prophets entirely relevant to events of their own time, in the ancient Near East. The Biblical prophets were not so much predictors as social

commentators. As one of our members remarked not to long ago. I want information on how to live my life now, Not some model for two thousand years ago.

For many centuries the Roman Catholic Church was opposed to translating the Holy Scriptures into the "vulgar tongue." The Catholic hierarchy included subtle theologians and scholars who knew very well that such a difficult and diverse collection of ancient writings, taken as the literal Word of God, would be wildly and dangerously interpreted if put into the hands of ignorant and uneducated peasants.

Until the Protestant Reformation in the 16th Century, the Scriptures were not understood exclusively in a narrow literal sense. Much of the Old Testament was regarded as "puerile" if taken literally. The great theologians and scholars recognize four ways of interpreting the Scriptures: the literal or historical; the moral; the allegorical; and the mystical/ spiritual. They were overwhelmingly interested in the last three. It was regarded that most of the Old Testament would be disastrous if taken literally. Concern over the historical truth of the Bible is relatively modern, whether in the form of fundamentalism or of scientific research. Jewish theologians were likewise preoccupied with finding hidden meanings in the Scriptures. The concern of all these theologians was to interpret the Biblical texts in such a way as to make the Bible intellectually respectable and philosophically interesting.

But when the Bible was translated and widely distributed as a result of the invention of printing, it fell into the hands of people who were mostly uneducated who needed the security of a right answer to guide them. Problem was, they used more of the Old Testament to guide them than the new, and not having scholars, looked at it in a concrete way. The superstition would have been relatively harmless if the religion had been something tolerant and specific, such as Taoism or Buddhism. But the religion of the literally understood Bible is chauvinistic and militant. It is on the march to conquer the world and to establish itself as the one and only true belief.

This I think is one of the main problems we seem to be facing today. "Literalism" in all the holy books. Certainly in the Christian tradition, but we're now seeing it at a new level in the Koran, the Torah, the Hindu Bhagavad-Gita, and even in Buddhism. Orthodoxy or fundamentalism seems to be rampant.

How is it that people have come to the opinion that the Bible, literally understood, is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Usually because one's parents and elders, or an impressively large group of ones peers, have this opinion and told us *not* to question them. In the west, we are told the Christian bible is true. In the Middle East, the New Testament is held to be false and the Jews endorse only the Old Testament. If you are Islamic, the Koran is the only true bible. Other religions have their own sacred writings. Which book you believe depends predominantly on where you were born. You believe what your parents tell you, just like they believe what their parents told them, and so on, since the book was written. For the most part, you are a Protestant, Catholic, Jew, Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist because your parents were. But this is to go along with the Bandar-log, or monkey tribe, in Rudyard Kipling's Jungle Books, who periodically get together and shout, "We all say so, so it must be true!" Or in animal farm where the "sheeple" repeat what is put on the wall of the barn every day.

This is okay if you are trying to find out the appropriate thing as a child. But when one reaches the age of maturity between 20 and 25, one ought to question everything they were taught. The problem is, many people never grow up. They stay all their lives with a passionate need for external authority and guidance; they really don't trust their own judgment. I saw this happen when I was a probation officer for the District Court. There were people that simply traded in their parents, who had provided them structure, for the structure of prison. Again they had somebody to tell them when to get up, when to eat, what to do, when to go to bed. Their housing, clothing, food, and bills were all done for them.

Nevertheless, it is peoples own judgment, that there exists some authority greater than their own. The fervent fundamentalist whether Protestant or Catholic, Jew or Moslem is closed to reason and even communication for fear of losing the security of that childish dependence. They would suffer extreme emotional anxiety if they didn't have the feeling there was some external and infallible guide in which they could trust absolutely and without which, their very identity would dissolve.

The authority of the Bible, the church, the state, or of any spiritual or political leader, is derived from the individual followers and believers, since it is the believers' judgment that such leaders and institutions speak with a greater wisdom than their own. I don't see this attitude as faith. It is more along the lines of pure idolatry. As Allen Watts said; "The more deceptive idols are not images of wood and stone, but are constructed of words and ideas and mental images of God."

In much of the English-speaking world, the King James Bible and now the New International Version, is a rigid idol. All this is taken as the literal Word and counsel of God, as it is by fundamentalist, Jesus freaks, Jehovah's Witnesses and comparable sects, which by and large know nothing of the history of the Bible, of how it was edited and put together.

The 6000 year old world idea came from Bishop Usher who was a Church of Ireland Archbishop in the 1650's. He calculated the date of the Creation to have been at 9 p.m. on the 23 October 4004 BC.

In the mid 1800's John Nelson Darby and the Brethren Movement, came up with the concept of dispensationalism. It's an evangelical tradition based on a belief that God relates to human beings in different ways under different Biblical covenants or "dispensations". There are 7. It is where the Rapture was invented.

Then in 1909, an American bible student by the name of Cyrus I. Scofield published The Scofield Reference Bible. It was a study Bible he edited and annotated. It had commentary on the biblical text and contained a cross-referencing system that allowed a reader to follow biblical themes from one chapter and book to another. Scofield's notes on the Book of Revelation are the source for various timetables, judgments, and plagues elaborated by such popular religious writers as Hal Lindsey and more recently the "Left Behind" series.

It is also why you have conservative Christians wanting the God of the Old Testament and really not liking that wimpy Jesus in the New Testament. They can't wait for what they believe is the rapture so all the heathens can burn in hell. The militaristic vengeful God will be back. The one that tells them what to do exactly.

And speaking of the left behind series; How can people that promote the living Christ, revel in other peoples pain and suffering. The Germans have a word for this, Schadenfreude. It is German word that means; pleasure derived from the misfortunes of others.

I've taken to challenging Christians who use the Old Testament as justification. I want them to get a Rabbi to validate their opinion. The Torah really is Jewish sacred writings and they're the experts. Christians would be up in arms if some Jews translated the New Testament. There aren't 10 Commandments. There are 613. Ask any Jew.

In Oklahoma, they recently passed a law saying English would be the only acceptable language and that they could violate the separation of church and state by erecting a replica of the 10 Commandments on capital grounds. The newspaper had a political cartoon that depicted the governor being arrested by a state patrolman because the 10 Commandments were in Hebrew.

I also like the political satirist Louis Black, who describes in his routine the problem with Christians using the Old testament.

"The *old* testament, which is the book of my people, the Jewish people, that book wasn't good enough for you Christians. Was it?"

"Noooo. You say 'we've got a better book with a better character.' And you called your book "*new*."

"And yet, every Sunday, I turn on the television set, and there's a priest or a pastor reading from *my* book and interpreting it, and their interpretations, I have to tell you, are usually wrong."

"It's not their fault, because it's not their book."

"You never see a Rabbi on TV Interpreting the *new* testament, do you?"

"If you want to truly understand the *Old* Testament, if there's something you don't quite get, ask a Rabbi."

When Leigh and I were visiting friends in Kansas City, I once had a Rabbi tell me, "We have the only group in the world in which someone stole our God, and then hate us."

There also is another interesting phenomena in this arena. I tell patients; “if I were to put you in a trance and hypnotize you, then as we were talking, gave you the suggestion: ‘Every time I put my hand up to my tie you will get up and leave. And every time I put my hand down... You will sit back down. So hand up, you get up, and hand down, you sit down. But you are not going to remember I said this. When you wake up you will forget I had this suggestion. It will fade in your memory like a dream. Even so, each time I put my hand up, you will get up to leave and each time I put it down you will sit down. So...5,-4,-3,-2,-1, bam! Wake up!”

So, we were talking about your mother....And after a bit I put my hand up to my tie. You would give me something like; “Oh, It would take too long to go through it, I’ve got something I need to take care of.” “Okay, see the secretary on the way out to set up your next appointment” as I slide my hand down to the chair arm.

“Well there is this one thing that I can share.”

“Yes, what is it?” As I place my hand back up on my tie.

“Well, I really think it will take too long to detail it out properly”

“Okay, makes sense, See you next week.” As I put my hand down once more.

“There is this one thing!”

“Yes!”

And so it would go until you caught it because it was happening rapidly enough you saw the pattern and would say, “Hey! What’s going on here!”

But if I only did it once,... Or maybe twice,... you wouldn’t have caught it.

That’s not even what is important. What is important is, every time you got up,... and every time you sat down,... you would instantly come up with a perfectly logical reason for doing what you are doing. That’s the way our minds are set up. To rationalize every movement we make. Our explanations come after the fact. Humans tend to think; “If I am reasonable then I must be right.” That goes hand in hand. In addition they think; “If I’m right, it must be the truth. And if it is true, then it is a *fact*.”

How do we refrain from throwing the whole Bible out; bathwater and baby, when much of it obviously isn’t reasonable or even factual. What is useful in the Bible if you’re not a literalist? What kind of guidance can it be used for?

Faith is an openness and trusting attitude to truth and reality, whatever it may turn out to be. This is a risky and adventurous state of mind. When I see religious control freaks, I tell them they have no faith. They generally get upset because they truly believe they do, but it is in the *idea* of faith not *true* faith. Real faith is the opposite of control. More control, less faith. More faith, less control. That's the way it works. Belief, in the religious sense, is the opposite of faith because it is the idea that the universe is arranged and governed in such and such a way. Belief is holding to a rock not letting go; faith is learning how to swim just as this whole universe swims in boundless space. In 1633 the Catholic Church Tried Galileo, as a heretic and forced him to recant his view we were in a helio or sun-centered solar system. He recanted to get a life sentence of imprisonment. How long did it take the Church to admit he was correct? When they discovered the earth was round? When the mechanical age started? When we sent men to the moon? No! In 1992, Pope John Paul II declared that the ruling against Galileo was an error resulting from "tragic mutual incomprehension." This is faith?

Man’s basic desire to communicate with the divine source is the common thread that connects most of the world’s major religions. The main aim of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, and Islam is to unite with the creator. The Hindus call this union Nirvana. The Buddhists speak of an awakening, becoming enlightened, or satori in Zen. Taoists discover the Way. Christians receive the Holy Spirit. Muslims completely surrender.

The method each religion developed to achieve or sustain paradise (a direct union with God) shaped the distinct beliefs described in their sacred writings. All the world’s major religions emphasize a body of ethical laws that remind men how they should treat each other and encompass principles of honesty, truth, justice, decency, and high morals.

What makes the Bible relevant today for sophisticated, well educated people is very much like what happens when we experience a baby. The mystery awe, soul touching wonder so many of you have experienced

through your own or grandchildren. In that infant we see the wonder the world offers, the promise the future can hold. The exploration of the *essence* of the Bible is very complicated if you don't take it literally. We have to sort through what our parents taught us to do vs what we learn ourselves. We have to sort out the baby from the bathwater.

In the movie "Four Chapters" Sachish says:
Once I depended on reason but reason is not enough
and then I depended on hope but hope is bottomless.
Reason or unreason: nothing has worked
I have realized we depend on others for everything, but not religion.
If the Idea is not your own, It kills the soul
Why take God from others? I have to find him myself.

Here are a few of the Biblical stories that have shaped or helped me in my life.

Jonah and the whale. Jonah 1:17

Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

When I was a boy of seven in the early 50's, With my Catholic background I had the Jonah in the whale story as an incredible one of being trapped and needing to do what your supposed to. I was a sad little boy and in my family, pleasing my parents and trying to do the right thing was virtually impossible. The popular monsters of the day were dinosaurs. I had nightmares almost every night where they chased me. I now know it was an extension of my dad who spanked me and my brothers almost every night. As terrified as I was in the dream, I finally got tired of running and decided to let the dinosaur catch and eat me. I was chewed on and went down his throat ending up in his stomach. Even though I was standing in water and looking at a cavern of ribs ala Geppetto in Pinocchio it was light enough to see. I remember walking through this large cavern of ribs toward the tail which got smaller. Then with a suddenly burst of seven year old insight, decided; "I don't need this anymore!" I turned to the left and walked right through the side of the beast. I never had a dinosaur nightmare again. I carried forth a belief that even in a helpless situation; I had some power and could believe in myself.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

In the summer of 1969, I had been separated from my wife and child. I had lost my faith, my purpose, my grounding, my religion, and was suicidal. I didn't care about anything including my life. By a series of events, I connected up my second younger hippy brother who had been fairly estranged from the family. We went out to the coast in Washington State and he gave me LSD. Without realizing it, I ended up taking enough for eight people and overdosed. My first experience with drugs. I was thrown into a bleak desert planet where a process started which can only be called a life review. Every single event came parading before me like shirts on a laundry line. I was the judge of each one and could clearly see how the choices I made were ruining my life. It was very difficult watching myself in that context. One mess-up after another. When it got to the present time, a question formed in my mind, "have I messed up my life so bad I can't fix it?" I was 24 at the time. I asked a shadowy figure a few more questions in the grief of my despair. Through the struggle, I finally came to the conclusion; I still had time to be a decent person. With that, I was instantly transported back to my van overlooking the ocean. I was never the same from that point on and vowed to be thoughtful, kind, and decent. It was redemption.

Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Genesis 3:24

After he drove them out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden, a cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

They are put out of Eden because they learned something and can't be ignorant anymore. The place of peace is blocked by "An angel with a fiery sword. In order for us to get back to "the place of peace", one must pass through the burning. No asbestos suits allowed. You must go through a gut wrenching situation and come out the other side.

Back in the mid 70's I co-founded a drug program and named it Parallax. I wanted a name that reflected my philosophy of therapy; a change in the position of the observer, changes what is seen as well as the observer. I nurtured it for four years, and finally got it to the point the city Commission gave us hundreds of thousands of dollars to take it full time 24/7. I was director of counseling, setting up the process to help these lost souls find themselves and make something of their life. Then my partner started betraying me and undercut what I was doing. After a year I was a mess, being sabotaged at every turn. The full impact came when He, his wife and kids, as well as Leigh and I were all out to dinner at a restaurant. His wife scolded one of the kids. When she wasn't looking, he let the boy get away with what the young one had just been scolded for and had the boy hide it from his mother. It hit me like a bullet. I'm his wife at work! I finally realized it would never be my dream again. I wrote up my resignation the next week. I was leaving my baby. I had to go through that fire to get to the place of peace. I moved on to what became my real calling.

The garden at Gethsemane Luke 22:44).

Jesus is praying and finalizing his life. He has tried to make the three disciples be careful of temptation but they succumbed. He is praying and gets to the point his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground." The clinical term is "hematohidrosis. Does this sound like it's something he wants to. "No-daddy-daddy I don't wanna do this! But it is the truth of his life... and he moves on and deals with it. There is the saying: Unless you can sweat blood sometimes, you will never keep a commitment..., in marriage, in priesthood,... or in anything else. That's what it takes to be faithful!"

When Leigh and I had been married 5 years, We got into one of those pressure places where she was wanting me to do a lot of things and feeling put upon, started avoiding telling her what was going on with me. It reached the point where I was saying to myself: "she doesn't know who I am or what I'm about, I'm alone." "So what am I doing this for?"

The answer that came back was; I got married because I didn't want to be alone. But now I'm feeling alone.

"Well that's because I don't tell her anything anymore. So she doesn't know who I am if I'm hiding myself."

"If I keep deceiving her, how she supposed to know who I am?" "She'll never know who I am."

"So, the only way for her to know who I am, is to tell her."

"But then I have to expose myself and tell her everything."

"You mean like be honest?" "Yes!"

"If my marriage is going to fail, at least it's going to fail because of honesty as to who I am and not because of some fantasy. If she doesn't like who I really am, then at least we'll split up honestly."

And that is when I discovered something. Marriage wasn't a commitment to the *other person*. The real commitment is to *abject honesty*. I had to sweat blood to be 100% honest which was something my mother taught me never to do. It was a new era and created a new depth in our relationship. Later Leigh confided she'd known about the lying and had been patient in waiting for me to get there. That was faith.

A few years ago we saw Martin Sheen on the Graham Norton show talking about his relationship and this very thing.

Gram was remarking on the length of Martin's marriage and asked how he kept the romance going.

Martin said: "The idea of romance changes once you get older.

"The ideal kind of way to get into a marriage is that you'll promise that person that you will help them become themselves at all costs."

"So you will tell them the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth at all times."

"You have to love each other enough to risk telling the truth, and... risk their wrath by telling that truth.

"And most of the time you'll be the only person that will."

"There is another level to it as well."

"People talk about happiness-"oh I'm happy with Larry", "she makes me happy", but they rarely talk about Joy."

"That's the thing that transcends the whole relationship, the element of Joy."

“Realizing with gratitude and appreciation, the other person has allowed you to experience Joy.”

The Lost sheep parable; Luke 15:4

"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶and goes home.

The prodigal son parable; Luke 15:32

But it was appropriate to celebrate and be glad, for this, your brother, was dead, and is alive again. He was lost, and is found."

In the summer of 1973 I was working for a ranch in Napa Valley at a children's camp called the Bar-49. There was one Hispanic 6 year old that was living in foster homes that stole my heart. Mike Munoz. He had two half brothers that were black, also in foster homes. What an incredible kid with nothing but hardship facing him. We connected well and he impressed me with his curiosity, intelligence, and sensitiveness. We were in touch by mail for a short while when I came back to Kansas after the summer. Then he went to another foster home and the connection was broken. One of my regrets in life was not going back to California and adopting him. That fall I had to take my ex-wife back to court once more trying to spend time with my two daughters, lost again, and then met Leigh that spring. I didn't get back to the bay area for five more years.

I have tried to find Mike over the years and had a lot of dead ends. I started using the internet which I thought would make it easier but the Bar-49 camp had closed, the contacts were lost, and the boy had a somewhat common Hispanic name I was probably misspelling. Six years ago I asked a Hispanic cleaning lady at our office about the spelling possibilities. I used what she suggested and ended up with over 350 names in California. Too many.

Five months ago I stumbled on to one of my old address books and tried again. I put his name with San Francisco in the Google search engine on the internet and up popped a guy who was the top chef at a major private club that was the right age now (41). The site had his email so I left a message asking if he'd ever spent time at the Bar-49 camp as a kid. He wrote back the next day; he had, many times, and was curious who I was. The day after that I sent pictures of him and me from back then as well as copies of the letters he had written, one of which he'd put his birthday . He got so excited he called me the following night.

He is as wonderful as I remember him. He managed to fight through all the things I was worried about for him; Abandonment, loneliness, gangs, and drugs. 4 foster homes and 3 group homes and no pictures of his childhood. His half sister, whom I didn't know about, has 7 kids and is a prostitute. One brother is institutionalized with mental problems and the other in prison. He was taking care of other foster kids when he was 10 and by 17 got himself emancipated. In the taking care of others he got interested in food and in a group home, one of the adults had him go to market with them so he learned about food. He decided to go to culinary school but found he couldn't afford to do that and live. So it got put off for a decade. A woman took him to Holland at 18 and opened up a whole new world to him as he traveled Europe. A lot of jobs later, he finally got the money and loans to go to culinary school and now is the top chef at an exclusive private club in downtown San Francisco. He also has a personal fitness business with his wife that is going well.

He has his first child that just celebrated his 1st birthday. Two days before I emailed, Michael was lamenting he didn't have any childhood pictures of himself. Then I sent ones of him and me at the Bar-49 along with a photo of his brother. He said he was reeling as he wondered why someone would care about him and keep mementos of his life. He said he didn't have any mentors in his life growing up. No one has really cared about him, so he was stunned I had him in my thoughts all these years.

He has had quite a life. He has been married a few years now and has a 10 year old step son he likes a lot. Michael and I are getting to know each other. We are talking on the phone every other week and emailing. He called again last Thursday to tell me about his day. Wonderful! A month ago I mailed a box load of books and toys for his sons one year birthday. Ann Dora and her friend Will, went to San Francisco on vacation a couple of weeks ago and got to meet him. Michael treated them Royalty at his restaurant and prepared a special gourmet lunch just for them. Ann said, He's wonderful; He's everything you hoped he was. Leigh and I are looking at how we can get back out to the bay area to visit with him and his family.

These have been a few of my adventures that resonate for me with some of the inspiring stories in the Bible. What are some of yours? How can you use them to bring solace or inspiration?

A few reminders to get you started:

David and Goliath,
The Shepherd's Psalm (The Lord is my shepherd...),
To Everything is a Season
Daniel in the Lion's Den,
Sermon on the Mount (Blessed are they...),
The Good Samaritan,
The Betrayal of Jesus,
The Beatitudes.

But the choices are endless. You'll know when one speaks to you personally.
And hopefully, the Donkey won't have to dance on the road.

Amen!

Pastoral Blessing

This is a story I found recently:

A wise woman who was traveling in the mountains found a precious stone in a stream. The next day she met another traveler who was hungry, and the wise woman opened her bag to share her food. The hungry traveler saw the precious stone and asked the woman to give it to him, She did so without hesitation.

The traveler left, rejoicing in his good fortune. He knew the stone was worth enough to give him security for a lifetime.

But a few days later, he came back to return the stone to the wise woman.

"I've been thinking," he said. "I know how valuable this stone is, but I give it back in the hope that you can give me something even more precious. Give me what you have within that enabled you to give me this stone."

We all are searching for what she had within. May we use the wisdom of the bible and our shared journey to find it.

Amen.