

“Park Bench Theology: Being Extra-Dependent”

Sermon Notes by the Rev. Arnold A. Bush, 2.26.2012

Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, Tallassee, AL 36078, First Sunday in Lent

Texts: Baptism and Temptation of Jesus, Mark 1:9-15: “He saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved: with you I am will pleased.”

Background on Grubb Oscillation theory of “regression and reversion is in Erickson’s *Identity: Youth and Crisis*; Parens H. & Saul L.J., *Dependence in Man: A Psycho-Analytical Study*; Powlby, *Attachment and Loss*.

Purpose: To use the Lenten season as a time for making sacred space and entering the mode of extra-dependence, hearing the voice of God, as Jesus heard God’s voice at his Baptism and on the Mount of Transfiguration. “You are my beloved Son....” Can we hear God say to us “You are my beloved daughter...my beloved son”?

The Park Bench in Tallassee or Montgomery

You are in a park with your preschooler, grandchild, or the child of someone you are watching. As you sit on the bench with the parents, you notice the cycle of how the children keep coming back to the parents as they use the swings, with older children pushing the younger. There are slides for younger and older. On the carousel older children caused a younger to fall off, so he returns to his parent for a “kiss to make it well.” The children are climbing the platforms and rocking cars and jungle gym. They come hold their parent’s hand or sit in their lap. The parent says “I love you,” gives them a hug and a kiss, and then they look at another piece of equipment on which to play. A few of the children are frightened of the older children in the park, but the parent says to go on over. I will be right here. In this story *the bench* is a symbol of security, a well-known voice of affirmation and encouragement. A place where you do not have to perform, just sit in the lap receptive of the mother’s love, maybe a kiss on a bruise.

The equipment in the park is a symbol of risk taking, where you can get a scratch, hurt, or bruised knee. The laws of competition are involved with swinging higher or turning faster on the carousel. This is a natural oscillation going on to and from the parent on the park. This happens in any park where there are children with their parents. This parable has been called the Grubb Theory of Oscillation about religious behavior.

(e.g., while in Niceville the very elaborate Children’s Park was adjacent to St. Jude’s, where I lived for 14 years.)

In the parable or allegory, the gathered congregation in worship is the Park Bench, and Jesus is here as the Good Shepherd saying you are loved. As we kneel or stand here, the Holy Spirit is kissing some of our bruises and hurts. It may be a small group in the church.

Mode of	-----	Mode of
Extra-Dependence	-----	Intra-Dependence
Interdependent		Independent behaviors

The Grubb social theory of oscillation regarding human religious behavior:

For most of us our situation is that often the *inner world* is disorganized, confused, overbearing, lost, and sometimes burned out. We may be lacking in focus. How can I regain focus and reorder my life to where there is a sense of peace, serenity? We may be saying we have too much stress, too much pressure to perform, too many demands on us.

We have a need for a deeper religious experience that can rearrange our internal switchboard, an experience like Jesus had at this Baptism or as mentioned last Sunday where Jesus and his disciples has a mountain-top experience. We want to hear the *gentle whisper (I Kings 19:12, p. 326 RSV sheer silence, JB gentle breeze)* of God in the caves of our lives as Elijah heard in the cave. We need the **Still Small Voice** or **listening to the voice of Jesus**. In the Gospel lesson on his baptism God said, “This is my beloved son, in whom I a well pleased.”

The key understanding in seeing this oscillation is moving back to an **Extra-Dependence**.

In the Adult Forum, in the text on “Discovering our giftedness, our God-given passion and way to serve God in the Body of Christ” you will see on pages 36 and 37 the section on young children being dependent on their parents. Then according to our culture there is independence where we are not relying on the emotional needs of others. Our workbook states that God calls us to be interdependent, a condition wherein we are mutually dependent.

In sharing his Park Bench Parable I want to introduce a concept called EXTRA DEPENDENCE. As a parent we say we want our child to become more independent and less dependent on us.

We need the discipline to open ourselves up to the Holy Spirit, to gain our freedom.

Having this dependence on someone or something EXTRA is backed up by many respected psychologists. Just to name a few: This reversion or regression is found in Erickson’s *Identity -Youth and Crisis*, Parens H. and Saul L.J.’s *Dependence in Man: A Psycho-Analytical Study*, and Bowlby’s *Attachment and Loss*.

E.g., In my family of origin in Laurel, MS, I think my parents taught me to be self reliant, an independent thinker, to work hard, and to be independent. If you just try

hard enough your WILL POWER can overcome any problem. I do not recall leaning the concept of depending on God or EXTRA-DEPENDENT MODE. It was always use your will power.

The Mode of being

Extra-Dependence

A Posture of Receptivity

(Intimacy with parent at bench)

Church gives us EMPOWERMENT

Help beyond ourselves

Accepting Grace that is beyond me

Being filled in prayer

H.C.fills us with spiritual food

Coming together week by week
for corporate worship

Sabbath time

Nurturing the religious experiences (MK9:2)
energy

Mode of Intra-Dependence

Movement or strong independence

Self - reliance

(Expending energy playing)

WEARY AND FATIGUED, TIRED

Depending upon our skills/abilities

Law and action

Pouring out our energy,
Going forth

Send us out to do the work
you have given us to do (BoCP 366)

To work... give for the
spread of his kingdom. (P 856)

Energy expended in work/leisure

Live without God, only my

Citizens of Elmore and Tallapoosa Counties: Many may be good honest citizens, but they are living a lifestyle oblivious to the workbook INTERDEPENDENT NOR EXTRA-DEPENDENT LIFE. Let us invite them to be part of Park Bench, 2602 Gilmer Ave.

Some of the pitfalls of being in only one mode:

Personal piety without compassion

Excessive taking of spiritual temperature

OT-Temple sacrifice without justice

Faith without works (James 1:17)

Fastidious about ways of worshipping

The Christian unconnected to everyday life

A suffocating compassion

Excessive action without
renewing actions or moments

Justice based on man, not God

Works without faith or grace
(Ephesians 2:6)

Fixation only on good behavior in
the world

The tired, burned-out Christian

What am I to do this Lent? What actions is God calling me to take on or renounce this Lent? This is good Park Bench Theology. A poster in the 12-step movement of AA, NA, Overeaters A, and Over spenders, A. says, “Nothing changes if nothing changes.”