

“Get Out of the Way!”
2 Kings 5:1-14; Luke 10:1-11; Galatians 6:1-10
Salem United Methodist Church; July 7, 2019
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When we hear someone say, “Get out of the way!” someone is in this person’s way of going somewhere or doing something. It is often said in haste if the person is in a hurry. Sometimes it is said out of anger because the person who is in the way is a bother. Today’s scriptures show us how we can get in the way of God’s providential care and love for humanity.

There is a children’s story from the Frog and Toad series about a garden. Frog has a beautiful flower garden. Toad would like a garden so Frog gives Toad some flower seeds to plant. He warns Toad that gardening is hard work. Frog plants his seeds, waters them, and waits and waits and waits. Nothing happens. He begins to yell repeatedly at his seeds, “Now, seeds, start growing!” Each time he yells a little louder. Frog comes to visit Toad and informs him that the seeds might be afraid from all the noise, so Toad stops yelling. Frog tells Toad to leave the seeds alone. The sun will shine on them and the rain will fall. They will begin growing. But Toad doesn’t leave them alone. At night Toad reads a story to the seeds so they won’t be afraid of the dark. Each day Toad entertains his seeds with singing, poetry reading, and music. The seeds still do not grow. Toad thought they must be the most frightened seeds in the whole world. He falls asleep caring for his seeds. When he wakes up in the next morning, little green plants have come up. Toad says, “My seeds have stopped being afraid to grow!” Then he says to Frog, “You were right. Gardening is hard work!”

Yes, gardening is hard work. But Toad had to get out of his own way. The seeds would germinate and grow when they were intended to do so. No amount of reading or singing would cause his seeds to grow. Toad’s behavior is an example of a psychological term called fundamental attribution error (FAE) which is attributing or judging another or a situation without having all the information. The dictionary definition is the tendency for people to over-emphasize personal characteristics and ignore situational factors in judging others’ behavior. We ignore situational factors when something bad happens and blame the person involved without having all the information. For instance, a driver in front of you slams on the brakes suddenly and you rear end him. You say to the driver, “You *****!” until you realize this person slammed their breaks to avoid hitting a child. Or in the case of Toad who assumed fear to be the cause for the seeds not to grow rather than understanding the fact that seeds need time to germinate.

Fundamental attribution error (FAE) shows up in the story of Naaman. He is a commander of the Aramean Army, a position of great power. Aram, which is known as Syria today, and Israel were enemies and still are. Naaman has leprosy. At that time leprosy, a skin disease that destroys tissue, was highly contagious and untreatable. This powerful leader would no longer be able to command the army with this skin infection. He probably consulted with the most prestigious healers in his nation. Nothing helped. Then the lowliest of the low, a girl who was captured during a battle with Israel and taken as a slave, offers hope. She knows of a healer from her country, Israel, who now lives in Samaria. He can heal Naaman. What does Naaman do? Does he go directly to Samaria and seek healing? No, he makes a fundamental attribution error. He assumes that the Israelite king would have some authority in Samaria. Naaman follows political protocol. He goes to his king and asks for him to write a letter to the king of Israel asking for help from this prophet. Notice the king’s names are not mentioned because they are not important to the story. What does Naaman take for the journey? A display of his wealth: a whole lot of money and many changes of clothing. Is he expecting to pay for his healing? Money speaks even back then. Those with money can pay for healing. Those without can’t. Also, still true today. What is the King of Israel’s reaction? He also makes a fundamental attribution error (FAE). He assumes the request is a political maneuver. Perhaps the Arameans are trying to start a war. The king judged and ignored Naaman’s true purpose- seeking healing for himself from leprosy.

When Elisha hears about Naaman, he sends word for Naaman to come to him. Naaman and his entourage show up at Elisha’s house. There is no grand welcome, no marching bands, no people lining the streets, no fireworks to welcome Naaman. In fact, Elisha doesn’t even come out and greet him, but sends a servant to deliver a message, “Go and take seven dips in the Jordan River.” Naaman is insulted. He is expecting to be the center of Elisha’s attention. His ego is bruised. His wealth and power are meaningless. Naaman, too, is suffering from fundamental attribution error (FAE). He has inflated his importance and judged Elisha’s simple solution for healing. Why the Jordan River? Aren’t the waters of his country greater than the waters of the Jordan River? Naaman is as angry as we

are when the car in front of us slams on their brakes for no apparent reason. Did you notice who convinces him to dip in the Jordan River? Not the king, but his servants. Give it a try. What do you have to lose? In this story twice the lowliest people, the servant girl and now these servants have wisdom that they share with the rich and powerful. God often calls the lowliest for God's purposes. Naaman does listen to his servants, dips in the river 7 times, and is healed. Naaman was expecting his healing to be filled with pomp and circumstance, instead, it happened quietly in a little river. Naaman had to set aside his power and wealth, even his arrogance for God to act. He had to get out of God's way for God to work in him. He had to simply trust without reservation in God's healing power.

Jesus basically told his followers the same thing. They had to simply trust in God without reservation. As they went out to prepare the way for Jesus' arrival, they were not to take any money with them. There was no room for power, money, or arrogance. There was no room for fundamental attribution error (FAE). They could not judge those to whom they were being sent. They were to go and ask humbly to share the news about Jesus. They were to trust in God without reservation. They were to get out of God's way so God could work in them and through them. Then, they could offer peace, teach, and heal. However, they were also to leave respectfully where they were not welcomed. How many times do we get in our own way, get in God's way? How many times do we make the fundamental attribution error (FAE), assuming something without having all the information? How many times do we not trust God without reservation?

The churches in Galatia were making one fundamental attribution error (FAE) after another. People were creating divisions among them by assuming things about the other and judging each other. They did not see themselves as one in Christ, but saw only their diverse backgrounds and beliefs which created divisions among them. In his letter, Paul strives to help these churches understand the other's point of view, to help them understand their situation, to help them recover from fundamental attribution errors (FAE), to help them see themselves as Christ sees them. This last chapter in Galatians is a summary of Paul's entire letter. What were they to strive to do? They were to get out of their way and make room for God. They were to use their power to restore those who did wrong and not reject them. They were to be careful not to do wrong yourselves. They were to be there for each other. They were to support one another. They were to know that they were no more important to God than someone else. There was no room for arrogance. They were not to compare themselves to another. All of their work is important to God and each of them is important to God. They were not to be selfish. There was no room for fundamental attribution errors (FAE). They were to find out about the situation and not put themselves or their needs first. They were to get out of the way so God could work in them and through them!

We still need to hear these words today. Our world is full of fundamental attribution errors. We make these errors all the time. We assume one thing when we don't know the whole situation. We need to get our egos, our arrogance, our self-importance out of the way and offer peace. We need to get out of the way so God can work in us and through us! Both the sacrament of Baptism and Holy Communion offer us opportunities to recover from fundamental attribution error (FAE). At our baptism we promise to renounce wickedness and reject evil power. We accept the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil, injustice and oppression. Fundamental attribution errors (FAE) can be wicked and evil, especially when our assumptions about a situation are told as fact. These assumptions can destroy people's lives, create divisions, and even start wars. Holy Communion offers us opportunities to confess yet again, our selfish assumptions that lead us to reject those that God loves and ignore those in need. We confess that we get in God's way and God's response to us is, "I love you. You are forgiven. I will give you another opportunity. Go with my love and create a world of love and peace. This is my body given for you. This is my blood of the new covenant that I make with you for the forgiveness of your sins." Holy Communion is God's way of saying, "If you get out of my way, we can work together to bring peace, love, and harmony to my kingdom on earth." Receiving a piece of bread and dipping it into some grape juice is not a mid-morning snack, but a gift of Christ's love, a fresh start in the recovery from our fundamental attribution errors.

Reflection Questions: When have you made assumptions without knowing all the facts? Did these assumptions create harm to others? How did you remedy the situation? How can you keep from creating more fundamental attribution errors?

Resources: *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol.3* Bartlett & Taylor, ed.; *Frog and Toad Together* by Arnold Lobel

