

While On My Way To Church...

By Scott Kalechstein

"If you have an address book, then you have a ministry!"

-Marianne Williamson

One day I was on my way to church to give an inspirational talk and weave a few songs into the mix. Having received a license in the mail a week back that claimed I was now an officially ordained minister, I was excited to be giving my first legal sermon. I had been a ministerial outlaw for many years before going straight.

Driving in my car, I noticed what appeared to be a speck of dirt on my clean white pants. When I went to brush it off, somehow it smeared into a dark streak of oil. I looked down at my lap and, as is the custom of spiritually advanced souls such as myself trained in mystical Christianity, I immediately called on Jesus. "Christ Almighty!" I fumed, "How am I going to stand in front of the congregation with my pants smeared like this?!" My frustrations turned from Jesus towards myself, and a critical voice inside me began a smear campaign of his own. "Scott, how stupid of you not to be more careful. When are you going to learn how to pay attention and stop being such a klutz! What are you going to do now? You can't go to church looking like this!"

The inner critic continued his clothes-minded sermon for a few more moments until a kinder and wiser voice took a turn at the pulpit. "Scott, let's take a breath and remember what's really important. You're on the way to church to express inspiration and love. What do you want to focus on, the stain on your pants or the love in your heart? You'll be there in ten minutes. Do you really want to spend it beating yourself up?" I took a breath, re-established my priorities, and dropped the self-criticism. Just like that, without affirmations, therapy, meditation, colonics, or psychic surgery, I dropped it. Those ten minutes were spent in peace, enjoying the drive and reflecting on the ease of my attitudinal adjustment.

I wondered why it had been so easy, almost effortless, to let go of the self-attack. Other times I have struggled for hours with my inner critic, getting down on myself for what I perceived to be my shortcomings. What could I learn from the ease of this experience that could have transfer value to some of my more challenging lessons in self-loving? I realized that I shifted so quickly in that moment because I knew that I was on my way to church, and that it was part of my job description to be clear, lighthearted and loving with the congregation. I knew that self-judgment would be a heavy weight on my shoulders that

would interfere with my ability to serve. Self-criticism, I recognized, was off-purpose, a luxury I could not afford to indulge in while preparing my consciousness for my talk. I dropped it instantly because I instantly recognized its lack of value.

Then I had an inquiry that stretched me and excited me and truly disturbed my inner critic, which is always a good thing. "Aren't I always on my way to church? Is there ever a moment or a place where the opportunity to express love doesn't exist? In God's eyes, is speaking to a congregation any more important or holy than speaking with a gas station attendant or smiling at a clerk when she hands me my change? Is there really such a thing as a time when self-attack is not a waste of time?"

Inner criticism is a condition of mind that can make a convincing case for the belief that I deserve to be punished for my shortcomings and that I have little of substance to offer humanity. Each time I make my way out of being in that critical condition, I emerge with a story to tell, a gift of hope for those who are also in need of a turn-around. I re-connect with more love to give and more enthusiasm for living. It is becoming obvious to me that self-criticism paralyzes my heart and accomplishes nothing. Is that the kind of sermon I want to practice while on my way to church? Not!

That day at the service I started my talk by mentioning what I went through in the car. Everybody could identify with how I initially made a big deal about the stain, and people were inspired by how I let it go and the insights I shared about my process. I realized that my sermon was far more effective and more fun because of the stain on my pants and what I did with it.

Perhaps there is more wisdom and happiness to be gained from dealing with stains compassionately than from keeping my pants forever white.

Now, whenever I put myself in on the critical list, I can remember the experience of spontaneous remission in my car. I can say to myself, "Hey, let's wake up! We have a ministry of love here. The entire planet is a church/temple/mosque and all people, including myself, are the congregation. What I say to myself in the pulpit of my mind is simultaneously being broadcast to the world, so let's put the sin, fire, and brimstone away and preach some loving kindness and original innocence."

In every moment I am always faced with the opportunity to choose between focusing my attention on the dark spot on my white pants, the inevitable stumblings I make as an evolving human being, or on my unchanging love-ability. I want to remember that just as the dark spot doesn't alter the fact that my pants are white, my mistakes don't change the fact that I am of the light, and that anytime I transmute self-criticism into self-acceptance I am doing my job and living my purpose as a fumbling, human and perfectly imperfect minister of love.

"Be comfortable but not complacent with your imperfections. Your less evolved areas have a right to be. All your faults and imperfections are already known. They are part of the Divine Plan." -Emmanuel, from Emmanuel's Book

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