

CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

Sermon by Minister Angela Smith of COPE for February 9th, 2020 (and beyond)

I've been an activist and victim's advocate for over 20 years and an ordained minister since 2001, so nearly 20 years. I'm passionately opposed to injustice and vice, while recognizing at times injustice seemingly not addressed often results in the vice of wrath although that's the one everyone gets whether virtuously or viciously inclined. A lot of wars and disputes could be resolved through honest and open communication. However, that requires all sides being willing to admit imperfection and/or fault and reasonably working through honest (including intellectually honest) and open communication to resolve differences peaceably. And, the issue I've found is with trust and then determining who started it in regards to any conflict.

Let's start small. While many variables were involved, I was a minor and being abused at home. I attempted suicide. I got voluntary treatment for the suicide attempt and then was about to be sent home when I asked for an alternative, but, couldn't provide a suggestion nor was I asked about extended family options in response to my request for an alternative. I was told two boys on my unit were going to a college preparatory therapeutic boarding school in Utah called Provo Canyon School and that I could focus on school and get therapy away from the abuse. I opted to go to Provo Canyon rather than return home and learned upon arrival that it was a private prison that accepted adjudicated youth, foster care placements, and trauma victims which isn't a good combination in any environment (and yes, most foster kids are also trauma victims). I was treated like a criminal and the environment at Provo Canyon School was atrocious and there is plenty of documentation of the conditions via lawsuits and more at <http://www.heal-online.org/provocases.htm> and <http://www.heal-online.org/healsuit.htm>. So, my mail was censored and I wasn't permitted to call home or speak to anyone because I was held incommunicado and treated like a prisoner in a private prison. I did get some letters out to my maternal grandmother and mother, I had to re-write them because I included specific incidents of abuse and named names. So, I had to exclude such details from my letters home per program rules. And, my grandmother, who dabbled in handwriting analysis, said she could tell by the changes to my penmanship that I was distressed and she convinced my mother to come rescue me from Provo Canyon. In comparison, home was better than Provo Canyon, but, far from perfect. As a result of the abuser still living with my mother, I opted to live with my maternal grandmother until that matter was resolved. And, my trauma was compounded by all of it, not alleviated. Comedy helps though. This all happened in the late 1980s and early 1990s, before the internet. I didn't know where or how to pursue justice and was a minor so my family decided what to pursue or not based on advice from therapists who said going to court may trigger my trauma and so advised against it. And, I assumed Provo Canyon School would be exposed and closed because my family did complain to Rep. Jim McDermott asking something be done at the time. But, instead of suggesting a lawsuit or pressing criminal charges, McDermott said he'd support legislation to regulate programs like Provo Canyon and he did that. Now, Senator Rand Paul's office actually told me what proverbial tree to bark up to address the issues where I needed assistance where his office

couldn't assist but knew the proper resources for redress. The point is there was no internet at the time in the late 1980s.

In the late 1990s, the internet became available. And, I assumed Provo Canyon School would've been closed. I searched for it online and saw it was still open and some of the same staff that abused me directly were still running it. I was also involved with animal rights at the time and suffering undue influence to an extent as a result of co-dependent tendencies and my alleged "rescuer" complex according to some professionals. I personally do not think wanting to protect and rescue people is a mental illness of any sort and I totally support Search and Rescue, the FTC, the Fire Department, and Law Enforcement too. So, I ran it by some of my friends who felt PETA and the local animal rights people were extremists and we started Human Earth Animal Liberation as a registered student organization at the University of Washington which has since been continued as the official mission for COPE Ministries. And, Provo Canyon School remains on our watch-list and could not effectively silence us by filing a SLAPP suit which is described at <http://www.heal-online.org/healsuit.htm>. Why? Because I'm honest as is our content with reliably cited sources. However, UHS, Inc, (Provo Canyon School's current parent company) was being investigated and prosecuted by the Department of Justice for fraud and falsifying patient records at the time they sued me for telling the truth and assisting regulatory bodies and law enforcement though they said it was for "libel". So, objectively I feel like with Provo Canyon School I walked into the wrong room by choice, saw and experienced some ugly things, got out, and believed reporting it to the extent it was reported would get it investigated and shut down. But, I was deceived by Provo Canyon School's marketing and they held me against my will and didn't let me communicate with anyone outside the facility by phone and mail was censored. However, if they or any others like them were completely honest and transparent about what they do (they wouldn't go to jail or be prosecuted for fraud and falsifying records ever for one, might for false imprisonment, rape, torture, battery, and potentially kidnapping though), then I'd remove them from the watch-list and place them at <http://www.churchofphilosophicalexploration.church/standards.htm> instead.

So, for peace between me, the mission, the church, the ministry, AND those populating the mission watch-list at <http://www.heal-online.org/thelist.htm>, I've responded to their requests to create a minimum standard they can all easily meet that will result in their being removed from the watch-list. That standard is complete honesty and transparency in marketing and is described at <http://www.churchofphilosophicalexploration.church/programoffer.pdf>. I'm not requiring they even change their methods to get off the watch-list, simply to be totally honest and transparent about conditions at their facility/program/etc in their marketing materials online. And, where that's not done, I feel any continued discontent between us is on their part for choosing to be deceptive rather than meeting the honesty in marketing standard which is aligned with the good faith principles of the UCC and legal requirements for honesty and fair dealing in matters of contract for goods and services.

Now, justice requires we all try to be as objective and reasonable as possible. And, I've thoroughly examined and continue to examine my own actions and intentions as well as

communication style and purpose of that. It's natural and normal to feel very outraged and angry when you've been criminally harmed and didn't get justice. It's also natural and normal to feel someone who approaches you passionately with a forceful or angry tone that you feel a bit threatened by it. But, if you did something criminal against the angry person, then, you don't get to bitch about their tone or communication style, because you have it coming and as long as everyone is using honest words and not resorting to torts and crimes, learn to cope and take a look at yourself and remember what you did rather than play stupid unless you want everyone to believe you are incompetent which could result in your being institutionalized having been deemed developmentally disabled because you either feigned stupidity or are actually that stupid. And, if you didn't do anything criminal or tortious to anyone and are approached by someone who is clearly angry and justifiably so about something, don't take it personally and hopefully they won't take you personally either if you choose to #WalkAway because you feel threatened.

On a larger scale, it would help if pundits and talking heads actually did more than hear or read a sound-bite before running with it for the sake of sensationalizing polarizing content instead of encouraging peaceful resolution of international conflicts. Leave activism to the activists. We all have our own perspectives, experiences, and understanding of available facts. We have to be willing to consider additional facts and accept we're not privy to all the information and no one but God is capable of omniscience. So, we have to be patient and honest with each other for the sake of truth, justice, and peace. The courts get that and require it of everyone. But, often we all participate in injustice to the extent we refuse to consider the honest (including intellectually honest) perspectives, experiences, and information provided by others. And, to the extent we refuse to listen, we remain unheard.

When surrounded by deception, be the truth and stay honest. The Truth is the Light, the rest is nothing and #TaoFu is how to mindfully tell the difference and act accordingly.