



Mary and Bob often find themselves sharing common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry. When approaching ministerial concerns from different angles, He Said - She Said is a venue to share differing perspectives.

A Seinfeld-esque Blog!

Mary's Perspective:

I recognize that, although my livelihood is connected to being a church minister, not everyone who reads our writing is as mired in all things Church. As such, I try to write about things relevant to (as I call them) real people who have real jobs. Today's musings cross over between both of these worlds... akin to Seinfeld, which aired 180 episodes as "a show about nothing." (Some lead-in, huh?)

In a seemingly unconnected string of observations, I find myself reflecting on words of wisdom offered by several priest friends, and also some decidedly secular technological developments. First, the ministry reflections:

As this blog is published, we are almost exactly at the half-way point of Lent. A few weeks ago, we committed to being more mindful about prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. So, how's it going? If you have successfully made some changes that have stuck, congratulations! If not, remember that every moment we get an opportunity to make a decision that cooperates with God's plan for us – to make it a holy moment. And when we don't make the best decisions, it's a moment. Another moment will present itself, offering the opportunity to do better. I was reminded recently that Lent isn't about changing ourselves; it's about allowing God to accomplish in us what we can't. Work with him!

Not long ago, our pastor reflected that Lent – and, indeed, life – can be a time of wandering or preparing. He proposed that it should be both: as we wander through this life, we are preparing for the next. We need to have the courage to wander, trusting the Lord to lead. But we also need to be mindful of preparing, whether it's preparing our hearts during this holy season, or preparing to meet our Maker when we pass from this world to the next. We are encouraged to succeed with greater humility and fail with greater joy.

The last bit of theological wisdom was actually an observation that Bob and I have noticed over and over recently. In preparing for a Lent Mission that we presented, we dug deeper into the Cycle A gospels of Lent. One of the recurring themes is that Jesus inserted himself into lives, even when those involved weren't seeking him. Consider the woman at the well, who was intentionally avoiding people – yet, Jesus made it a point to have an encounter with her. The disciples weren't looking for a Messiah; he met them where they were and changed the trajectory of their lives. Often times, we are not consciously seeking, yet God inserts himself into our lives, with far-reaching impact.



Finally, I was pondering some technology. Now, I am the first to admit, I am old. Like, really old. I've never owned a social media account. All of the apps on my phone fit on one screen. I still use email as a primary means of communication. Sidebar – my son and daughter-in-law just celebrated their first wedding anniversary. I called to sing them the “Happy Anniversary” song ala the *Flintstones*. He laughed and remembered when he had put “that ringtone” on my phone to celebrate our wedding anniversary a number of years back. I reflected that I'm so old, I remember watching the actual *Flintstones* episode when Fred and Barney sang that song – before it ever was a ringtone! (Pretty sure Chris needed to go look that up on YouTube.) That old.

Anyway, a professional organization to which I belong unveiled their great technological advancement this week. They have created a “room” specifically for pastoral musicians who are members of the organization, to make it easier to connect and have access to things like formational programs and forums for sharing ideas. Somehow, I wasn't as enamored with that “room” as perhaps others might have been. To me, ministry is a relational business, and authentic relationships take actual live interaction, face to face. I suppose technology is helpful for touching base quickly, or maybe to facilitate the logistics of registering for a conference, but that's not how true relationships grow. What's next? An app to text God my prayer?

Finally, I spent some time this week pondering TikTok. For those of a certain generation, TikTok is nothing more than a name of something those younger folks use. For others (of a younger generation), TikTok is a means of generating “followers” and developing your own “brand” and a way to see, rapid-fire, what others are doing. It is a source of communication and entertainment and furthering yourself, all in one convenient app. As this has been explained to me, I have tried very hard not to roll my eyes. I'm just not sure why anyone would care that I ate broccoli on Friday, or that I am going to the gym before I go to work. As for followers, I don't think I can live up to my own ideal of someone I would want to follow. And if I'm promoting my own brand, I'm old-school enough to think there ought to be a logo and a message to support that branding in every post, which is not my experience of what my kids view on TikTok.

So, what does this all have to do with anything? I guess my message today is one of encouragement. If you've faltered a bit on your Lenten intentions, use today as a reset and just take one small step to right the ship. Perhaps spend 10 minutes in quiet prayer, or choose to read something nourishing. This step will lead to the next step. If you're mired in technology and can use it to make life better, then great! (And please teach me.) But if you really believe that “chat rooms” and “followers” are a replacement for relationship, then please call a friend and actually meet them in person, for coffee or a walk or dinner. And while you are together, commit to both of you putting aside the technology and being present to the moment. You won't regret it. Whether you are wandering through apps or preparing for holy week,



do one positive thing today that will have an impact tomorrow. And don't be surprised when God inserts himself into the process, giving you an opportunity to make it a holy moment!

Bob's Perspective:

Each year, as I prepare myself for the seasons of Lent and Easter, I focus on some aspect of the Gospel that I find challenging or intriguing. I have always been a fan of Ignatian Spirituality, which helps to bring things to light and life for me. Mary and I have discussed the concept of "wandering versus preparing" many times. Obviously, if a liturgy is to be beautiful and impactful, it needs to be well prepared. However, regarding my personal Lenten journey, I lean more toward wandering. Sometimes I wish that the song, "I Wonder as I Wander" had Lenten verses. (Maybe a project for another day, eh?)

This year, after much self-resistance, I decided to binge watch two seasons of a television show called *The Chosen*. It's an ongoing series, soon to begin its fourth season (I think), that dramatically depicts the life of Jesus and those around him. While I'm sure we all realize that the Gospels give us a concise picture of Jesus' teachings, even the writers of the Gospel (John in particular) admit that there is a lot left out. "There are also many other things that Jesus did, but if these were to be described individually, I do not think the whole world would contain the books that would be written." (John 21:25)

In this series, the writers supply us with a number of "back-stories" about some of the Apostles and other relevant characters. Although I think that the first two seasons are very well done and many of the back-stories are plausible, I would say that care is needed to remember that they are just stories. On the other hand, in my estimation, some of the back-stories did bring the characters to life in a way that many movie depictions have fallen short. Thinking about those who surrounded Jesus as real people with real problems and concerns can help to give insight to our own lives and our relationship with him.

One of the areas of focus for myself this year is that Jesus inserts himself into our lives. Experience has shown me the presence of our Lord in life events, whether I've asked him or not. Mary and I recently gave a Lenten Mission, at which I shared the following:

At one point, Dad became ill with pneumonia and was hospitalized. While Mom and I were visiting him one day (he wasn't in very good shape), the doctor came in to talk. He told us that Dad had blood clots on his lungs, and we should be prepared for the worst – death could possibly happen at any moment. Needless to say, it seemed that all of the air had been



sucked out of the room. However, at that very moment, an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion came into the room (seemingly unaware) and asked if we'd like to receive Communion. I couldn't speak, but I looked at her and nodded. As she took a host from her pyx, she held it up and began, "Behold, the Lamb of God..." Before she could say another word, I looked at the host, teared up and blurted out, "God, am I glad to see you." As we then received Communion, you could just feel a sense of calm and peace permeate the room. As it turned out, within a few days, Dad was out of danger. To this day, I'm convinced that this event was not a coincidence.

Back to the characters coming to life in *The Chosen*, there was a particular scene when Jesus and the Apostles were walking along, and they happened upon someone who needed healing. Jesus broke away from them to talk to the individual. As he did so, one of the Apostles quipped (in a quite surrendered tone), "Oh, there he goes again." That actually caused me to laugh out loud. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus inserted himself into the lives of people, the Woman at the Well and the Man Born Blind being two of them. It's only a matter of recognizing him when it happens. Sometimes, there are things in our lives that we can't change, but God can change them for us, if we're willing to let go and take a leap of faith.

My hope for all of us in this Lenten Season to be given the strength and/or insight to let go of something that keeps us away, and allow God to once again insert himself into our hearts.