

**“Love Your Neighbor – Lessons
from Satin Horse”**

Pentecost 3, Matthew 10:24-32

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Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO

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Matthew 10:24-39

²⁴ “A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; ²⁵ it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

Whom to Fear

²⁶ “So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷ What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸ Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.^[a] ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹ So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

³² “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; ³³ but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

SATIN HORSE – BE NOT AFRAID

I have a horse name Satin, an “old gray mare” as the song goes. She’s 22, which sounds *really* old for a horse, but if you know Arabs—well—different story. In the discussions we’ve had lately about “what’s essential,” I would say Satin is one of the most essential parts of my life and my family.

We learn from her every day—about life and living in community; about riding and romping and enjoying God’s beautiful creation and other creatures’ company. Today, we learned that she is experiencing some symptoms of aging, and needs her Geritol and a little extra TLC in the coming years. But, that she also needs to still be ridden, to stretch out her legs and move out into life and loving for as long as possible. Something we all need, I’d say!

Satin Horse and I have a sweet connection—a deep, spiritual bond, and I have ridden her for about 13 years. She was Clarke’s horse before that. I have never, once, put her in a scary situation. Well, unless you call those “horse-eating-large-rocks-that-look-like-mountain-lions” scary. I talk to her *all* the time, sing to her, groom and massage her, give her night-night treats on beautiful nights under the moonlight when it’s not too cold.

Yet. When a new situation arises, and she starts to feel just a *little* afraid, her natural instincts kick-in and she seems to forget all those years of trusting me and believing what I say. She quickly becomes nervous, anxious, fearful. She might even *argue* a little! Or a lot.

Even if I just ask her to stay out a few more minutes to ride *without* her buddy pal—which I’ve done a hundred times.

Even if I don’t let her go straight back to the barn and we take a few extra minutes for some training—say around the blocks, where we do figure eights.

Even if she’s done these things many, many times and the story *always* ends happily with her being home, brushed, unsaddled, given treats and turned loose to romp and roll and reunite with her buddy pal.

Even though this has happened more times than she can count in this 22-year life of hers.

TRUST & OBEY

Still, she isn’t sure. Not quite sure about that **trust** business. Whether to follow my lead or go her own direction and preference. Not quite sure she *really* remembers all those other times I led her in **safety**. This totally, non-argumentative, go-with-the-program-horse can get pretty darn **stubborn** when she’s unsure of things ahead, and her head and butt conspire to turn all of a sudden, and butt heads with me! She’s never even *tried* to buck me off, but she does express her opinion with her whole body! And it’s a good thing I’m

sitting securely in the saddle when she does.

WALK WITH GOD

And, in those moments—after my heart has stopped racing, she’s decided to trust me again, and I’m thinking about what we all **learn** from each other at these times, I think about our relationship with the Divine. Our walk with God through the many riding seasons of life.

How often do we—no matter how long and faithful and close our relationship has been; no matter how much singing and soothing and reassuring we’ve heard—forget **everything** in that moment of fear and anxiety? You know—that split second, when all our memory of protection and care *vanishes* and only “fear memory” takes over and reigns supreme.

Can we listen to the still, small voice, saying:

"Whoa....easy...just walk. Remember who’s got ya! Remember Who is with you, as close as a rider, holding the guiding reigns and leading you where it is best for you to go."

It takes a few times for Satin. A few gentle reminders that she can trust my guidance. Follow my lead and all the learnings we’ve had, that are good for her and always, always done out of love and care. And then she calms down—a little, anyway—and lets me lead her through some good steps, practicing a few routines for the next time she’s afraid—soothing her fears, reminding her we are in this together and I can be trusted.

These are fearful and anxious times. We are led into situations that we're not sure we've been in before. If we *have* made it safely through in the past, following the lead of our Maker, we might forget, many times, that we were brought safely through. That the One who promises to never leave us or forsake us; who promises never to take us where it is not good for us to go, is *faithful*.

Our memory is short. But God's memory is not. The one who "knitted us together in our mother's womb" and knows the "count" for the very hairs on our heads, has been with us our whole life long and is with us still—singing and soothing and reminding us to trust. Trust and obey.

WHEN THE ISSUE IS NOT THE ISSUE

So, I have learned about fear, about trust, about reminding ourselves who and Whose we are, from my Satin Horse. I have also learned about the complexities of life, and people and situations. How things are never just one thing or another; how life's challenges rarely have just one simple answer.

One day about a month ago, we were out riding, and she started acting in ways she NEVER had before. She was shaking her head so hard I thought she would shake me right off her back! This was a little scary! Okay, not just a little!

I have ridden that horse more times than I can count, with the same kind of tack. We could *not* figure it out—I kept looking from the saddle at her right ear that kept coming back toward me, and trying to free itself from the annoying strap.

I hopped off countless times, checking straps and mane hair to see if they were playing nicely together. Looking at her eyes and ears; looking for biting flies or anything that might be irritating her.

We tried *everything*—telling her to stop! (Scolding always helps bad behavior, right?!) Adjusting the strap, putting a hair tie around it to hold it in place; racking our brains for what was *different* on this day than numerous other days.

Finally, Clarke realized that a water bottle holder I had attached in a *whole* different place on her body, on a whole different strap, was tugging on her shoulder and putting things out of *balance*.

She didn't know that the head stall strap was NOT the problem! She just knew something wasn't **right**. Out of kilter, out of balance, and she was out of sorts! Thankfully, when we put the water bottle on Clarke's horse instead, all was fine with Satin and she never shook her head or pinned her ear back again.

How many times are we like that horse? Not just having a "mare day" but something is just **wrong**. Askew. Catawampus in our "git together" and affecting our git along?! Shaking our heads, we try to shake *off* what's bothering us—hopefully not the rider on our back—but maybe—if *that's* what's called for!

But—the true source of the problem cannot be found. What's really causing us discomfort—even pain—eludes us, and we try to find solutions that don't

address the real problem at its source, and we don't solve a thing.

Until finally, we keep asking ourselves—what's *different* now? What is the actual source of our discomfort? What's rubbing us the wrong way? Tugging on us somewhere that's upsetting our spiritual and physical balance, both?

My friend says her horse is forever scratching the wrong leg to try to get at an itch! She'll bite away at her back leg, when the biting fly is on the front leg! And she rarely seems to clue into this!

Hmm.....we have much to learn from these creatures. Next time something is "off" and making me shake my head in one place, I'm going to give some thought to "what's different today?" "What might be the true source of my angst or pain?" What adaptation might need to be made? What burden shared with another to ease my load, so that we can all move forward together in peace and harmony?

FACE THE FEAR HEAD-ON

A final, vital lesson we can learn from a horse is this. When something is frightful, new or disturbing, a horse needs to face it head on. To give it a sniff, touch noses, check it out for themselves. We've always had to let Satin sniff the fly spray bottle before she'd let us spray her. As long as she "met" the new thing face forward, she was okay with it.

If you see a horse put their tail toward something—watch out! They might be getting ready to run! And if

you're on its back, you'd better be ready to hold on! Tight.

In our times and in our world, there are a lot of fearful things happening, and we are often afraid. Afraid of the "other"—of people we don't understand; of religions and life paths that seem so different from ours. What if we faced our fears head on, sought to "touch noses" and reach out in a friendly gesture toward that which frightens us?

LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR & ALL CREATION

"Do not be afraid," Jesus reminds us. "Remember who you are and who's got ya." "And then, extend that same love, care and trust to everyone you encounter—near and far."

Remember your lifelong relationship with your Creator. Remember who made you and who values you and all of creation so much, that the very hairs on your head are counter. That no sparrow can even fall to the ground without the Creator knowing, and scooping it up in loving arms.

We love our neighbor best—2-legged and 4-legged, winged, and finned—when we remember all this, in every moment.

And, when we occasionally forget, feel fearful and anxious, God scoops us up like the sparrow, or adjusts our gear like the horse, spreads out the load, brings us back to the herd, and leads us gently on. Amen.