

UPPER RIGHT TO LOWER LEFT*
A short readers skit by Pete Peterson and Sermon Rev. Janet Scott
First Congregational United Church of Christ
Eugene, Oregon
Matthew 7:7
September 13, 2015

CAST: Narrator: Pastor Janet Scott. The Visitor: Jennifer Sellers. CIC Readers (*in order, right to left*): John Luhman, Chris Cunningham, Susan Stafford, Mary Otten (who also plays the Native American flute), Suzanne Congdon, and Pete Peterson.

STAGING: Janet is in the pulpit as Jennifer enters up the center aisle. Cast members stand as a group, beginning in the Upper Right Room (upstage left), and moving to the other three *rooms* as the skit progresses. Pete moves stationary microphone to each room.

SIMPLE COSTUMING: Each cast member carries costume accessories— such as a scarf, or shawl – that he/she can easily put on and take off when arriving in each *room*, so as to indicate a *new* group of people.

THEME: PROS AND CONS OF THE FOUR SPIRITUAL TYPES IN CARINNE WARE'S MODEL

- 1. UPPER RIGHT ROOM: Revelation/Mind:** People in this sector prefer to examine the content of Christian faith for answers. Potential problem -- tend to engage in excessive theological discussion of the spiritual life:
- 2. LOWER RIGHT ROOM: Revelation/Heart:** These people tend to have a more charismatic spirituality. Their way to God is not the rational mind, but the experience of the heart. Their gift includes warmth, enthusiasm and energy in religious expression. Potential problem is dismissing theological reflection as irrelevant.
- 3. UPPER LEFT ROOM: Mystery/Mind:** This group is composed of people who lean to more idealist and possibly radical practices. They have a passion for transforming society. For them, prayer and action are one: A potential problem; they are intellectual visionaries, and their gift is precisely their vision of the ideal and their commitment to it. Their temptation is to an extreme moralistic vision. They can dismiss those
- 4. LOWER LEFT ROOM: Mystery/Heart:** These worshipers desire union with God, the Holy One. Their gift is an uplifting spirituality that challenges others to be totally open to God. The danger is that this type of spirituality may become overly passive or retreat from reality.

(JANET WALKS TO THE LECTERN, READS THE TEXT – MATHEW 7:7 – AS THE GROUP OF SIX READERS FORMS A SEMI-CIRCLE AROUND THE MICROPHONE IN THE UPPER RIGHT OF THE CHANCEL. AS JANET ADDRESSES THE CONGREGATION, GROUP MEMBERS MIME A CONVERSATION.)

JANET: Our scripture this morning says, “Ask and you shall receive, seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened for you.” I have noticed that we do a lot of asking here. Questions are welcomed and pondered. We are a people of many questions, that is for sure.

But who are we asking? To whom are we directing our questions? We often ask ourselves or one another when maybe we should be asking God. Often the answers are within when we learn to listen to that still, small voice.

And then the scripture says, “Seek and you will find!” That is really reassuring, isn’t it? Or is it? Do you believe it? Maybe a better question is, have you tried it? Because I have found in all of our Spiritual Formation classes, those who truly seek do find. I think all of the Companions can give testimony to that, in fact.

We all realize that people are different and seek God in different ways. There is no one way that is right for everyone. If that were so, I would draw up a plan for you right now, but we know the spiritual life does not work that way. Yes, God seeks us, but we have a part, too; we need to be seekers

Corrine Ware, an Episcopal seminary professor, was one of many theologians who have reviewed and analyzed the ways people seek God’s through a *house of worship* -- a Church, temple, mosque, or a religious community--places where they bond together to seek.

On the back of this morning’s bulletin is a model that Ware developed in an attempt to generalize the different ways that people seek God. It’s a circle divided into four parts. Since we’re a Christian community, we’ve adapted her model by placing Christ at the center.

From Upper Right to Lower left, she identifies people who say they seek God primarily through study; those who seek through the experience of their hearts; those who feel God’s presence primarily through action; and those who say God’s presence is revealed to them when they are still and open.

Some churches may emphasize practices that fit into one, maybe two, of the categories.

When it comes to applying Corrine Ware's circle, FCC seems unusual in accommodating people's different seeking preferences.

Let me tell you a story to illustrate (*pause*) One weekday afternoon a Visitor appeared.

(JENNIFER WALKS UP THE CENTER AISLE AND KNOCKS AT THE LECTERN)

I asked her, “May I help you?”

JENNIFER (*looking around*): I’ve heard some unusual things about this church. It’s like, *establishment*, right?

JANET: (*to Jennifer*) We’ve been in Eugene for 127 years. We’re the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ.

JENNIFER: But I’ve heard you’re not really a *mainline* church, and that a lot of your people are, well, they’re *religious refugees* from other religions.

JANET (*to congregation*): I told her we respect all faith traditions, and that all seekers are welcome here. (*to Jennifer*): We're *Christ*-centered; centered on the words and examples of Jesus, whom we believe reflects the ways that God loves us.

JENNIFER: Well, come on -- all Christian churches say that. (*pausing*) I'd really like to see your Creed.

JANET: We don't use a Creed here.

JENNIFER (*aghast*): Come on! Rules? Doctrine? Expectations? I mean, how do you operate?

JANET: (*to congregation*) As we walked down the hall for a copy of the FCC Mission Statement, and to look at the Eight Points of Progressive Christianity, the Visitor stopped at the rooms on the Upper Right side.

JENNIFER: What are those people up to?

(*READERS LOOK UP*)

JOHN: Good morning. We're studying scripture.

CHRIS (*to Jennifer*) Jesus' words, his audience, and his stories.

JENNIFER: You mean, through traditional Protestant doctrine.

SUSAN: From many perspectives, a lot of the time, we question traditional teachings.

JENNIFER: Oh, really? You *question* the Crucifixion and Resurrection stories? Or, Jesus' sermons?

MARY: Actually, Jesus asked more questions than he gave answers.

SUZANNE: He often spoke in ironic parables, intended to make us question and discuss his ideas.

JENNIFER: But (*pause*) it's all accurate, and factual. You believe that, don't you?

PETE: Jesus used metaphors in his teaching – Water. Light. Breath. Vines.

JOHN: . . . Sheep. Leavening. Mustard seeds. . .

CHRIS: But metaphors aren't factual.

JENNIFER (*slyly*): Soooooo, you take apart his stories and words because?

SUSAN: Because we yearn to understand. Don't you? To experience the meaning of his words and stories.

MARY: . . . which is quite different than studying facts, or simply memorizing the Bible . . .

JENNIFER (*impressed, to Janet*): You know To tell you the honest truth . . . I'm actually gunshy around people who quote chapter-and-verse until it all sounds like (*pause*) like a lot of *Bible-Babble*.

JANET (*to Jennifer*): We don't have a fixed doctrine. We say, "God is still speaking." If a person takes Christian faith seriously, it means regular study, on-going discussions with other people, and personal discernment. We try to honor God in our midst as we seek. We have Sunday School classes and adult forums on Sunday mornings, other Bible studies throughout the week and some that require daily homework and reflection. We try to provide a wide range of seeking opportunities.

JENNIFER (*to Janet, pausing*) Okay, okay . . . But, study groups can get overly intellectual and wrap themselves in brainy theology.

JANET (*to the congregation*): Then she left.

(JENNIFER WALKS A FEW STEPS DOWN THE AISLE -- TO SIGNIFY LEAVING.)

(THE READERS MOVE TO THE LOWER RIGHT ROOM. MEMBERS CHANGE CLOTHING ACCESSORIES AND MIMIC A CONVERSATION.)

JANET (*continuing*): The next time I saw our Visitor . . .

(JENNIFER RETURNS TO THE STEPS)

.she seemed drawn to the voices and activities in the LOWER RIGHT ROOMS.

JENNIFER (*to Janet, pointing*): What's going on down there? Looks pretty busy.

JANET (*to congregation*): I was happy to introduce her to more of our FCC people. So we peeked into some of the rooms.

JOHN: This is a coffee group called, *We Are Family*. A group for parents.

JANET (*pointing*): And in this room, a luncheon of the Elder Council is underway.

CHRIS (*in confidence to Jennifer*): Some of us don't care for the title, *Elder Council*.

JENNIFER: To me, you look like the *Wise Ones*.

SUSAN: And you are quite perceptive, my dear.

JANET (*to congregation*): We overheard the Joyful Noise choir practicing, the kids chatting in Sunday School rooms, and excited conversations in a Peace Village activity . . .

MARY: We're helping kids from all over the community respect many religious traditions . . .

SUZANNE: In Peace Village today we're studying Islam, tomorrow, Judaism, then, Buddhism

JANET: (*pointing*) And over there; that's a class we call, Our Whole Lives – O.W.L. – it's for teens talking about sexual relationships . . .

JENNIFER: (*wide-eyed, turning to the congregation*): Your teenagers are allowed to talk about S-E-X in church!!

JANET: (*to the congregation, smiling*) Yup. S-E-X. I started to explain that we believe *S.E.X.* is a gift from God. But then some choir members passed by and invited the Visitor into a rehearsal.

PETE: Hey! You sound like a soprano! Join us for our Christmas Bach Cantata.
(*JENNIFER TRIES TO SING A HIGH NOTE*)

Wow! Our music director would love to have you join us!

JOHN: Or the FCC House Band -- folk, jazz, and soul. We had a hootenanny this month. Is that cool, or what?!

JENNIFER (*amazed*): A church house band! Yes, you guys rock!

JANET We have lots of fun here, that is for sure. That is a wonderful thing about church— you have community, a family, and others who like to do the things you do! Fellowship Hour, Dinners for Eight, Youth Groups, Game Night, Sunday Strolls... we are welcoming and inclusive.

JENNIFER (*abruptly changing her attitude*): So, okay. Lots of Christian Fellowship, I get all that. (*pausing*) But you know, if church people get too cozy with coffees, entertainment, and special support groups, and they're not examining the way they're living their faith. . . . Well, they could be closing their eyes to the tough issues in the world, and in their own community.

(*READERS MOVE TO UPPER LEFT, BUT DO NOT CHANGE ACCESSORIES*)

(*JENNIFER EXITS UP THE AISLE. BUT STOPS TO LISTEN*)

JANET (*calling loudly to Jennifer as she exits*) Oh. If you're interested in social justice issues we have other groups . . .

(*LOOKING TO UPPER LEFT, JANET NOTICES THE READERS FORGOT TO SWAP ACCESSORIES, SO SHE REPEATS HERSELF LOUDER*)

We have other groups in the UPPER ROOMS that might interest you . . .

(*GROUP MEMBERS CATCH THEIR MISTAKE, LOOKS EMBARRASSED, AND QUICKLY CHANGE ACCESSORIES*)

JANET (*to congregation*): And you know, the next evening I saw the Visitor eavesdropping outside the Upper Left rooms.

(*READERS ENGAGE IN QUICK, ANIMATED DIALOG*)

JOHN: We have responsibilities to the homeless.

CHRIS: (*counting*) Look at Matthew 25: First, feed them. Second, quench their thirst. And third, take them in.

SUSAN: Isn't it just common sense to house them first? Which means build more Conestoga Huts. . .

MARY: But while you're building, they have to eat, don't they!

JENNIFER (*turning to Janet*): Am I hearing Jesus Activists here?! Now that's so very cool. So out there!

SUZANNE: What about the Good Samaritan Parable? A stranger rescuing a man left on the roadside -- and getting him medical care.

PETE: Exactly! Our money should go to local street clinics, and to the clinic in El Salvador.

MARY: But we can't abandon our efforts to reverse global warming?

JOHN: Nothing will get solved without first addressing economic inequality, and social injustice.

JENNIFER (*to Janet*): Wow! They're talking about more than a one-day canned food drive.

JANET Yes, hunger issues are real and it is a year round effort here, and so is housing for the homeless, and literacy, and education both locally and with our world neighbors.

MARY MOVES TO A CHAIR BEHIND THE LECTERN TO PREPARE TO PLAY HER FLUTE)

JENNIFER: (*to Janet, but changing her tone*) But on the other-hand . . . socially active churches can burn-out if they take-on too many quests. And if parts of the congregation get really political, the whole church can fracture.

JANET (*to congregation*): I told her, (*to Jennifer*) "Our decisions and actions don't have to be, This-not-That. We try to be, Yes-and-Also."

(READERS MOVE TO LOWER LEFT, FORMING A "HUDDLE" AROUND THE MIC. AT THIS POINT THEY DON'T WEAR COSTUME ACCESSORIES.

MARY BEGINS TO PLAY A SOLEMN NATIVE AMERICAN MELODY, WHICH SHE CONTINUES THROUGHOUT THE NEXT SEQUENCE.)

JANET: She nodded as she prepared to leave. But then she slowed when she heard a mix sounds coming from several LOWER LEFT rooms.

JOHN (*barely audible*): "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures".

JENNIFER (*moving close to the "room"*): What's all that I'm hearing?

CHRIS and SUSAN (*barely audible*): "He leads me beside the still waters."

SUZANNE and PETE: “He restores my soul: he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.” *(fade)*

JENNIFER *(to Janet)*: What are they doing?

JANET *(to congregation)*: Meditating.

JOHN and CHRIS: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

JENNIFER: Oh, the Beatitudes?

JANET *(nodding)*: Some of our people in the Companions in Christ Group.

SUZANNE: “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,

SUSAN: “Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon.”

JENNIFER *(to Janet)*: Ah! Saint Frances of Assisi.

JANET *(again, nodding)*: The Contemplative Prayer group.

ALL READERS *(chanting quietly)*: “Oh. Lord hear my prayer, Lord hear my prayer, when I call, answer me. Oh Lord hear my prayer, Lord hear my prayer, when I call, listen to me.” *(fade)*

JANET We have many groups and experiences for mystical seekers as well. Prayer groups, spiritual direction, day retreats and overnight retreats.

SUZANNE *(very quietly)*: “Abwoon d’bwashmaya, Teytey malkuthakh” (which is phonetically pronounced here)

Avoon dish maya –

Mic dud dish simoo --Teh teh ma schoot-to” . . .

JANET: Ah, Listen.

PETE and SUZANNE *(very quietly)*: “Avoon dish maya –
Mic dud dish simoo -- Teh teh ma schoot-to” *(fade out)*

JANET: That’s a new gathering. People learning the Lord’s Prayer -- in the original Aramaic.

(MARY STOPS PLAYING THE FLUTE)

JENNIFER *(turning away, surveying the sanctuary, shaking her head)*: Really? You now. I just don’t get this place.

ALL READERS: *(signing very quietly)*: “Bless be the tie that binds, our hearts in Christian love . . .”
(then humming the rest of the verse quietly)

JENNIFER: Up on the right room -- lay people immersed in biblical passages. Downstairs, people celebrating birthdays together, sipping coffee; telling their kids about . . .

JANET (*smiling, nodding*): Yup. *S-E-X*.

JENNIFER (*shrugging*): In the upper left – the far left, of course – (*pausing*) activists debating the world’s most complicated issues. And here, in the lower left rooms, mystical people, invested in spiritual practices (*breaking off, nodding her head, sighing, and then smiling*)

JANET (*to the congregation*): I returned her smile, and nodded, and acknowledged her observation.

JENNIFER (*to JANET*): What I’m saying is . . .
(*moving down the steps*) all these people just can’t possibly belong in the same church! I mean, when they all get together for potlucks, they must get into some really. . . crazy. . . big-time food-fights!

JANET (*smiling*): Actually, it’s all good. We’re all ‘seekers’ in different ways. We try our best to respect a variety of approaches to Christianity. Come this Sunday. See for yourself.

(*MARY RETURNS TO THE CIRCLE, WITH HER FLUTE*)

JENNIFER: But you have no Creed! You don’t have membership rules to hold you together.

(*GROUP MEMBERS EXRWNS THEIR CIRCLE IN THE CANCEL, AND HOLD HANDS*).

(*MARY PLAYS THE NATIVE AMERICAN MELODY ONCE AGAIN*)

JANET: (*to the congregation*) I nodded, “Yes -- no creed.”

But then I asked her to keep something in mind: “Jesus said there are two rules – two great commandments, ‘The first -- to ‘Love God.’
And the second, ‘to love one another as God loves us.’”

This house has many rooms where we can listen to the words of Jesus. Speak with and feel the presence of the Divine One. Do our best to care for all God’s people and God’s creation. And to love and support and heal one another.

(*JENNIFER TURNS TO LOOK AT EACH ROOM, THEN EXITS DOWN THE CENTER AISLE*)

The Visitor nodded and grinned slightly, thinking about these ideas as she walked down the hallway, pausing to look back at the rooms, upper right to lower left.

I called to her, “Believe me, you are always welcome here.” She turned and waved as she passed through the front doors. And I think we’ll see her again.

(*MARY STOPS PLAYING FLUTE. GROUP MEMBERS SMILE AND WAVE TO THE VISITOR*)

Today, my friends, you are invited to explore these rooms for yourself— There are more than four, so just choose two for today. Throughout the building you may seek and try on one of the ministry groups or classes being offered here this year.

May God guide you in your seeking.

For those who ask shall receive and those who seek shall find. May it be so.

END

*c. 2015 Pete Peterson

based on CorinneWare's "Four Types of Spirituality"

<https://johnfisk.wordpress.com/2015/03/03/the-four-spiritual-types-part-2/>