

**Proverbs 20: 5-7**

The purposes in the human mind are like deep water,  
but the intelligent will draw them out.  
Many proclaim themselves loyal,  
but who can find one worthy of trust?  
The righteous walk in integrity—  
happy are the children who follow them!

**Matthew 7: 21-23**

‘Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord”, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?” Then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.”

**The Mysterious Case of Slippery Elm****Rev. David Dalke****February 3, 2008**

A few weeks ago in the *Coloradoan* there was a headline, and the headline read, “Widespread Panic Comes to Loveland.” Now, I read that again, “Widespread Panic Comes to Loveland,” and I wondered, “What’s going on over there? It sounds like they’re having some problem.” And I went to my spouse, who works in the health department, and I said, “Cheryl, is there a flu epidemic going on in Loveland, or what is happening, because look at this headline.” And then I read further, and I realized that Widespread Panic is the name of a rock band. And they’ve been around for twenty-four years. They’re from Athens, Georgia, and I thought, “Where have I been? How did I ever miss it? Have I been in a cave for twenty-four years? Widespread Panic – now if that headline would have read, “Chicago Comes to Loveland,” or if that would have read, “Blood, Sweat and Tears Come to Loveland” or “Peter, Paul and Mary Come to Loveland,” I would have had no problem with that, and you wouldn’t be hearing about it.

Have you ever thought something was true, only to find out later that it wasn’t? You know, you kind of lived out of the truth of it, and later on you found out it wasn’t true at all? Dad’s second language was English, his first language was German, Plattdeutsch, Low German, and so he would call me “Doft”. I grew up being called “Doft.” I thought it was great. “Doft, would you mind.....Doft, let’s go play....Doft, have you done your music.....” It wasn’t too long ago that Cheryl and I went to a wedding, and the groom was from Germany, so his parents came over. I was conversing with them and I said, “My Dad was from there, he spoke Plattdeutsch.” He said, “Oh?” I said, “Yes, he used to call me Doft all the time,” and he said, “Really?” I said, “Oh, it was really something, Doft, Doft.” She said, “Dear boy, I don’t want to disappoint you, but Doft in Plattdeutch means “Dummy.” And I want to think that was a sound and a word of endearment, and I hope it was, but I thought all these years....

Have you ever thought something was true, only to find out later that it really wasn't, that it wasn't at all? Now, Proverbs says, watch out, because there are some people that appear to be loyal, but they're not very trustworthy. That was true with Patrick. Now, Patrick is a man that I've been involved with in Phoenix, Arizona, doing workshops for him, and meeting with him once every three months. He would pick me up from the airport, we would talk about what we were going to do with his leadership team We would meet, and he and I became the best of friends, and not too long ago I got an email from the president of the company, who said Patrick has been relieved of his duties without pay because he has been embezzling money for years in this company, and he had an elaborate scheme. I did not know that, and I trusted him immensely. Matthew says watch out for people in sheep's clothing, when inside themselves they're kind of like ravenous wolves. We don't always know that. You know, we get fooled sometimes. I mean," I thought we married, because we made a commitment, I thought you were true to me, and all of a sudden our marriage is scarred by infidelity and abuse, and I didn't know that that was going to happen to me. And you know what else? I thought that friend of mine was the best friend that I've ever had in my life, and I entrusted my life to that person, and I shared all my deepest feelings, and they went out and told everybody. I was told I'd get a promotion at work, I'd get a raise, and it never happened."

Sometimes we don't know what the truth is. I think that's true for me with Hertz Rent-a-Car. I arrived in Dallas, Texas late at night to get my car, and they said, "We're out." I said, "You're out?" "We don't have any cars." I said, "Check my name." They said, "Yeah, your name's on there, but we don't have any cars. Sorry." I said, "It's eleven o'clock at night? What do you think I should do?" They said, "Well, just a minute." They get back in there working. All of a sudden he says, "You know what? I think we can give you an upgrade." And I said, "Anything is okay with me. It's eleven o'clock. An upgrade's fine." He said, "We have the last vehicle, it's a 150." I said, "A 150? I don't know anything about cars. I thought it was a sports car. A 150 sports car. Doesn't it sound like it to you? He said, "It's out in Stall 141." I went out there, and I tell you, friends, out there in stall 141, all by itself, sat this bright red 150, but it was an F-150, extended cab, it must have stretched from there to there, pickup truck. I could barely get in it, and when I did get in it and took off, I'm here to tell you I ran over every curb in Dallas, Texas, making right-hand turns. I never once made a good right-hand turn. Remember we had that message on "No Left Turns" one time? Well, this was No Right Turns, and I don't know what the next one will be. Maybe No Turns, I don't know.

Did you ever think something was true, only to find out later that it wasn't? So, it was going to be a Saturday morning, and it was a workshop in Long's Peak United Methodist Church over in Longmont, and I had a bad cold and a bad throat all day, and all week, and I could not get my throat cleared, and I didn't know what to do. I knew that it was getting close to the Saturday when I was going to have to be there and work all day and use my voice, and I thought, "I don't know what to do." And so I came to choir on Thursday night with no voice and I said to somebody in the soprano section, "What do you do when you don't have a voice?" And she said, "Go get some slippery elm. Slippery elm." I said, "Slippery elm? Where do I get it?" She said, "Not at Safeway, and not at King Sooper's. You've got to go to Whole Foods or you've got to go to the co-op

downtown. But get slippery elm. It's in tea bags, and it's in lozenges, so do both. Drink the tea, suck on the lozenges, and hopefully by Saturday, you'll have a voice." I said, "Well, okay." Now, somebody this week put something in my box here at the church. It was a little history about slippery elm. No one signed that, so if any of you did that, confess it later. It was a statement about slippery elm, and they say the people, the mountain folks in the Daniel Boone National Forest in Kentucky go in there, sometimes late at night and get into these trees, and they strip the bark, and then inside the bark there's this gummy substance, and that's what they take and sell to all the herbal companies to make a lot of money, because there's a lot of money in those herbs, and it's from slippery elm, and I'm glad I went and bought that stuff. I found it on the very bottom shelf at the store, and I started Thursday night sipping tea and sucking on those lozenges, and all day Friday I did it, hoping my voice was going to come back. It was getting a little better, but it was getting close, and then Friday night I put more tea out there and all night long I started drinking tea. Friday night till Saturday morning I was drinking tea, and sucking on those lozenges. I got in my car at seven o'clock in the morning because it was to start at eight, and I'm tearing down the road to go to Longmont and I get this call on my cell phone and it's the pastor from there and he said, "David, I'm just calling because I know your voice has been bad, How are you doing, how are you doing, I want to know you've got a voice." I said, "Steve, I think I'm better." He said, "Good, I hope so." I said, "Well, I ought to be. I've been drinking since four o'clock this morning." He said, "What are you drinking?" I said, "Slippery elm." He said, "Slippery elm?" He didn't know any more about it than I did. When I got there, he's the only one I've ever known that looked at me in my eyes when I got there. He watched how I walked. He listened to my voice. Did I slur my words? He didn't know the whole story.

Isn't that interesting, how we make these judgments when we don't really know all the facts, we don't always know all the truth? It happened to Michael Gerard. Michael Gerard is the leading character in the movie *The Eye of the Beholder*. It's an old, old movie, and he's an old movie star who is probably not even alive any more, Richard Conti, and he played the role of Michael Gerard. Michael Gerard is sitting in a restaurant, and he's waiting for a certain woman to walk in, because he's been told that this woman will fulfill his dreams, it's the one he's been looking for, and he notices all these people walking in, and pretty soon he spots her. Yes, that is the woman. She's with another man, and they go sit at a table, and Michael Gerard goes up and says to the nosey guy there that's waiting on the tables, the waiter, and he says, "Do you know who that woman is?" and he says, "No, I don't, but she comes in here every night." So he goes over and introduces himself, and the waiter kind of goes up and listens a little bit and pretty soon he hears the woman say, "I'll see you tomorrow morning at ten o'clock. And the waiter looks at the camera and says, "That Michael Gerard, that Michael Gerard, he's a ladies' man. Did you see how smooth he was?" He goes home and he's so happy. He lives with his mother, and he comes downstairs and his mother says, "Michael, I've got our food ready for the breakfast," and Michael Gerard says, "Mom, I don't have time to eat. I'm feeling so good I've got to get down to the office," and she looks at the camera and says, "Michael Gerard, my son, he's a good boy, but he's always in a hurry." Now he's two different things. And he goes out and gets into the cab and the driver is sitting there relaxed and Michael says, "Please hurry, I have to get down to my office." And the driver

says, "Okay, just take it easy, will ya? Take it easy." They're going down the road and they hit a bump and the cab driver says, "You know these roads are rough. The city council needs to fix these roads." and Michael Gerard says, "Please, please be quiet, I need to think." And the cab driver looks at the camera and says, "See that guy in the back? Look, he's got this big, wide brim hat on. He's got that overcoat on. He's got a bulge right here. I know what that is. He's like a hood, he's a gangster." He gets out of the car and he's in front of his office, and the landlord Koppelmeyer is there. Koppelmeyer says, "Michael! Good morning!" and Michael Gerard says, "Good morning. Koppelmeyer, let me tell you how good a morning it is." And Koppelmeyer looks at the camera and says, "That Michael Gerard. I look at him and I just say Good Morning, and he says, Let me tell you how good a morning it is. He's crazy." He's crazy – now he's four different things. He goes upstairs to his room, he goes up a kind of winding staircase, and the nosey cleaning lady is working on the floor, and she watches him go up, and pretty soon the woman comes in that he met last night at the restaurant, and she walks in, and she kind of moseys up there to the room, and the cleaning lady is watching. Pretty soon she hears a ruckus in the room. There's a loud noise, and there's a scream, and the cleaning lady runs up the stairs and throws open the door and she sees the woman lying on the couch and Michael Gerard with kind of a knife in his hand, and she shouts "Murder! He's a murderer, look what he did." He's five different things. Well, who is he? Who is Michael Gerard?

He's an artist, and Michael Gerard for years has wanted to paint the twentieth-century Madonna, the mother of Jesus, and someone said, "I think I know who that is for you. Go to this restaurant." He watches, and soon she walks in and he spots her, and he says, "There she is," and he is ecstatic, and she agrees to meet him at ten o'clock for the sitting and the painting. He is so excited, and of course the waiter says "Look at him, he's just a ladies' man." And his mother says he's a good boy, but he's always in a hurry. And the cab driver says, look at him, I know those kind, he's just a hood. And Koppelmeyer says he's crazy. And the cleaning lady, the cleaning lady. Because when the woman has walked up the stairs, and has sat down in his studio, and Michael says "Here, sit on this stool, turn your head like this, we've got to get the lighting just right, and we've got to get the shading." He says, "Now, let me go pull the curtains." He looks over at her, and she's kind of doing this, and he looks at her and says, "If you don't mind, just sit a little still." She says, "I'll just do whatever you want," and he looks at her and realizes his twentieth-century Madonna is drunk. And in his frustration, he pushes her and she falls on the couch. The cleaning lady opens the door and says, "Murder."

Peter Senge in his book *The Fifth Discipline* says to us, that what we do is, we take snippets of each others' lives and we judge the whole life by it. He says we take little pieces of data and we kind of go up what he calls a ladder, and it's a ladder where we have this little bit of data and then we build stories on it. We tell stories about each other. And then we make these assumptions that the stories are true, and then we make our assumptions here, and then we draw conclusions over our assumptions, and then we get our belief system in it and, you know what, folks? When you start to believe something about somebody, it's pretty hard to unearth that. So we go up the ladder, and we take action – we gossip, or we go tell somebody else, or we decide we're not going to like that

person any more, because we've gone up this ladder. That's what happened to Jesus, I'm convinced of that. He came in the midst of a time with the Roman Empire when he said, "I'm going to tackle the culture of the day." Culture. How you do business. Culture. How you relate to each other. He came and he said, "You know what? You've got to do it differently." He said, "I want to show you another way to live and love." And so he wasn't a threat, but they saw him as a threat, because they didn't understand his message. When he said, "Don't argue, I'm not trying to argue with you." He said, "I just want you to understand that I'm going to challenge your belief system a little bit. I want you to look inside and see if this is really true for you." They missed that, and you know what? When he said you've got to love your enemies, you've got to be pure in heart, watch your angers, when he went through all that, and it sounded so impossible that people were having trouble believing that, then all of a sudden they'd realize the rest of the message. The rest of the message was, "You're not in it alone. There's a God who loves you, there's a God who comforts you, amidst all the things that seem so impossible." And when he came and he said, "I didn't come just to save the world, I came to save you from yourself, so that you in turn can make the world a better place to be." And that's where people miss it. And so what did they do? They killed him.

So what do we do? How do we get at the truth? How do we get at the truth of relationships? How do we get at the truth of the Bible? How do we get at the truth of the church? You know, there's a word the Methodists use, it's called discernment. Discernment is word that when a pastor comes to a church, they'll say, the pastor will say, "I need to have some discernment of whether I'm going to come here or not." Or the SPR committee will say, "We're going to discern whether we think you're a good match for this church." Discernment. For me, it's another way of saying, "Trust this part of you. Trust your intuition. You see, we think up here with our heads, we feel with our hearts, but folks, your intuition may be the truth. This is the piece we really need to pay attention to. It's exactly what Bill Miller did when he stood on the steps of a large United Methodist church on a Saturday morning and people were flocking to his wedding, and he stood up there as they all came in, and he said, "There will be no wedding. Carolyn and I have thought long and hard and prayed and prayed about this, and there will be no wedding because it just doesn't feel right. It's not right, down here," he said. "We will return your gifts." It's the same thing that Solomon – you know, he was thrust into the throne because his dad died. David died. King David died in Israel and Solomon now was there to run the country and all of a sudden he said, "God, I don't know how to do that, and I am scared." And he heard in a dream, God said, "I will be with you, and together we will be wise and discerning." Pay attention to this. It's the same thing I think Mary must have felt. My goodness she had no idea, she had a pregnancy and she's young, and she said "This is impossible," and someone said, "But you're going to bear the son of God." And she said, "There's something about this I don't understand, but it feels like I need to do this." She said, "So be it." It's the same thing that Andrew and James and John and that doubter of all doubters, Thomas, felt when they were throwing nets out into the water and all of a sudden Jesus said, "If you're willing, consider not throwing those nets any more. Follow me. The way, the truth, the light. Come with me. We've got work to do." And I have a feeling that they said down here, "You know, we don't always understand all this, but it's something that says we need to do it. It's that intuitive part of us. It's the same

thing that happened to Pilate. He's washing his hands. You know why he washed his hands while people were shouting "Save Barabbas, kill Jesus."? He's washing his hands because he said it doesn't feel right. The man is innocent. It doesn't feel right, here. It's not right, down here. The same thing those soldiers felt below the cross. They're pounding those nails into the feet and the hands, and all of a sudden they said, "This isn't right. It's not right. He's innocent. It's the son of God." Folks, we've got to pay attention to this part of us.

Now, we may not always know the full truth about Widespread Panic. I don't know, we may finally learn the truth of Widespread Panic, and we might learn finally the truth about Michael Gerard, and we might finally learn the truth about slippery elm, or Jesus, but I'll tell you, when you come to this railing this morning, I just want you to remember, we can't quit living, we just can't quit living, and we're going to do the best we can. Sure, we're going to make some judgments, and we may miss is, and people may miss it about us, but we've got to just keep hanging in there till we find the truth. Maybe those elements that we take this morning will just be a piece of that. I invite you to come to this railing, and the reason is because intuitively, intuitively, I think we all know it's the right thing to do. Amen