

3 kinds of Christians: quiet, sneaky, loud



Highland Views

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Columnist

Out for an evening walk we heard a loud, rattling sound in the air as a small bird swooped over our neighborhood pond. I recognized the sound from river-walks past. Across the frog-filled water on a high branch was the chattering belted kingfisher. As naturalist George Ellison says, "Some birds are secretive. Others seem to be deliberately conspicuous. Belted kingfishers fall into the latter category. Their rattling calls reverberate along waterways ... and while taking care of business, they don't mind putting on a little exhibition in the fine art of flying for your benefit." (Literary Excursions in the Southern Highlands).

The next day, while reading about fearfully faithful people rattling on about their fears and their faith, I thought of our little kingfisher. In the world of religion (and here I'm primarily thinking of Christians) there are all kinds of people but as I see it there are mainly three groups that resemble our feathered friends: the quiet, unassuming kind (turkeys and chickadees); the sneaky kind (hawks and owls); and the loud, intrusive kind (kingfishers and crows). Let's swoop over the pond of piety here for a minute.

The quiet kind of believer simply chooses to live their life in a good and decent way without harming anyone. They may have disagreements, but don't judge anyone who thinks or believes differently. These folks are courteous and kind, helpful and generous, just because "it's the right thing to do."

Maybe they are conscious they are being good because of God, that their faith is a fundamental reason they are living in peace with others, or maybe they were raised to be thoughtful – consideration comes naturally. In big ways (turkeys) or little ways (chickadees) this kind of believer makes the best kind of neighbor, friend, citizen.

The sneaky kind have an agenda. This doesn't mean they have a mean streak or wish to cause any harm. They just want to "get the message" to the rest of us and the message is "I sure would like you to believe the way I believe." Or they may sprinkle symbols or catchy slogans here and there, on billboards, bumpers or baseball caps.

On a stroll along the waterfront in Savannah I saw T-shirts that said, "Relish Sweet Jesus," "Wanna Taco Bout Jesus?," and my favorite, "Catch-Up with Jesus ... Blessed from my head To-Ma-Toes." This isn't exactly sneaky, but it's clever advertising with a hook (like those old FISH symbols). Either way, these people hover like hawks or observe like owls, waiting to swoop in for souls from their pulpit perches.

Then our kingfishers and crows. Always raising a ruckus to proudly announce their presence they want everyone to know that they are believers and are very upset that the rest of us don't share their beliefs. They have an agitated, impatient quality. Every conversation has to come back to their personal faith. They like to pray in public, carry their bibles or jump in to join the hawks and owls in the feeding frenzy at the pond. This is a bit harsh, but the pushy and preachy people can act like the king or queen kingfisher who, as Ellison describes, likes to "make her entrance, as if the marsh was a stage on which

she was, of course, the prima donna."

I'm not saying that the loud and proud folks are necessarily bad. Any of us can preen our feathers and squawk about the "best part of the pond." We all have our causes and commitments to defend while we nestle comfortably in our nests. And I have to apologize to my feathered neighbors for comparing any of them to us loud and intrusive humans.

Now that we have flocks of these diverse species in our spiritual scopes, we can ask the main question, a challenge raised by many philosophers and even some theologians over the centuries: Where is the Christian? I think this has been and will always be a critical question.

Seems to me when someone says they are this or that kind of believer, flying with this or that flock, it should not only be evident in their life but should have some relation to the original message.

Of course, there's the rub. Who can say what that "original message" was?

Concerning Christians, the only rule of thumb I've ever been able to reason with is the Sermon on the Mount. You know, "blessed are the poor," "love your enemies," "do unto others," "do not judge" and such radical stuff. This may ruffle some feathers, but I might even consider joining a "Church of the (Sermon on the) Mountain."

I could roost and rattle around that kind of pond now and then.

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