

Makes one think ... doesn't it?

A SCARY STORY

“I know, John, let’s ask Sam?”

“Ask me what, fellas?”

Startled, Reverend Williams jumps in his seat. Turning, he sees Samantha standing behind him, coffee pot in hand.

“Oh, hi Sam, didn’t see you. You must stop sneaking up on me like that. I want to meet my maker, just not today, good Lord willing,” the Baptist minister says with a wink and a sly smile.

“Sorry ‘bout that,” she chuckles. “What are you two working on?”

Setting his coffee cup down, Father John smiles at the proprietress. “Martin and I were just comparing notes about this weekend’s sermon. We’re stuck ... thought you might have an idea.”

“I’m flattered. What’s the topic?”

“The scariest story in Scripture.”

“... scariest story in Scripture,” the lady muses. “... interesting, how’d you come up with that?”

“Well, Monday’s Halloween and we thought we’d have a little fun and make a scary story the theme of our sermons on Sunday. Turns out it’s not as easy as we thought.”

“Sounds like it could be fun if you served it up right.”

“Well, we’re not thinking of wearing a cape, fangs, and preaching in a bad Transylvanian accent if that’s what you’re thinking, Sam,” Martin chuckles, doing his best Count Dracula impersonation.

“And the processional hymn will not be “Werewolves of London,” laughs the priest.

Chuckling, Sam tops off Father John's coffee cup. "I was thinking more along the lines of Skywalker and Darth Vader," she says, a mischievous smile lighting her eyes.

The belly laugh Reverend Williams is known for resounds throughout the room. "Think I should wear the cowl and bring the light saber, Sam?" he asks.

"It wouldn't be you without 'em."

Laughing softly at the banter between the two, Father John shakes his head.

"Yea, well the dark side and Dracula aside, we've been thinking of things like, oh, the fall in Paradise, the plagues of Egypt, Sodom and Gomorrah, the beheading of John the Baptist..."

"... the crucifixion, Christ's agony in the Garden, things like that," Martin says, finishing the priest's thought. Stirring his coffee, he looks up at the strawberry blonde in the flour-stained apron. "What do you think Sam? Anything come to mind?"

From the counter, Sam picks up two of her awesome club sandwiches. Setting them on the table, her smile fades to a more thoughtful look.

"How about the story of the nice guy who went to hell for simply minding his own business ...?"

.. that one always scares me."

Hi, I'm Tony Baggz. We're here at Sam's Bistro, owned by one very lovely, Samantha Bates. Pastor Martin Williams of Mt. Nebo Baptist and Father John O'Malley from St. Katherine's have gotten together this morning to compare notes. Both are accomplished homilists and they enjoy collaborating on their Sunday talks. And since this coming Monday is Halloween, they've obviously chosen to have some fun with the day's theme ... scary stories. From the sound of things, though, I think the task is a little more daunting than they bargained for.

Oh, and if you're a little curious, Reverend Williams is known among his peers in the clergy as 'Darth,' as in Darth Vader – the character from the movie. Hear his voice and you'd understand.

So, what's the scariest story in Scripture? Well from the look on their faces, Sam's suggestion has intrigued them. And me.

What do you say we listen in?...

"A nice guy minding his own business," Reverend Williams muses. "Who are you talking about, Sam?"

"Well to me the most frightening stories in scripture are those of people thrown into the darkness, locked out for some reason. I take them to mean to lose one's soul. Kind of like the lazy steward or the foolish virgins. But here, I'm thinking of the opposite. And to me, that's even scarier."

"And that would be..." Father John asks?

"The only man Scripture tells us is in Hell."

"Only one?"

"Well, from what I read, Jesus often speaks of how a man can lose his soul. But, if I'm correct, there's only one instance where He actually identifies a particular person."

Silence ensues as both men search for an answer.

***"Not in the bosom of Abraham..."* Sam whispers as she walks to the counter to refill the coffee pot.**

A few seconds elapse and a look of recognition slowly flickers across Martin's face. "Lazarus? ..." he says, tentatively.

"Lazarus?" Father John asks softly, almost to himself. A puzzled look lingers on his face for a second or two and then slowly changes to one of understanding. "Right, the rich man in the parable of Lazarus the beggar."

"I see what you're getting at, Sam," Reverend Williams says, chuckling softly. "The parable Jesus tells in Luke's gospel."

Returning to the table Sam tops off his cup.

“Think about it,” she says. “The rich man was generous. When I was a young girl, I remember the Sunday reading said he threw feasts for his friends. And he was tolerant; kind, really. He let Lazarus sit at his doorstep and beg. From the story it’s obvious he wasn’t cruel or heartless. Like I said, he seemed like a nice guy. I mean nowadays we’d probably call the police and have a guy like Lazarus removed; taken to detox or something. But this rich man didn’t and yet he found himself in the next life imprisoned in misery. Why?”

“Because he didn’t care,” Father John says, his eyes lighting up. “I see what you’re driving at Sam. Not because of some terrible sin or wicked deed but rather because he had the means and the ability to alleviate another man’s suffering and didn’t. He made no effort at all. The story isn’t about the sanctity of being poor and miserable; it’s about the danger of being apathetic. The only man Scripture tells us is in hell is there because he saw a man in need and did nothing.”

Sipping his coffee, Martin nods his head. “Sam’s on to something, John. If God is love, as we are so fond of saying, maybe it’s not so much hate that’s the opposite of love, as it is apathy. And, we tend to think of condemnation as punishment for things we do, the evil we commit. Not the things we don’t do; the evil we allow to go either unnoticed or unaddressed. When you think of it that way, it’s a wakeup call.”

“Well said, my friend,” Father John says. “In the beginning of the Mass we ask forgiveness for our sins. ‘The things we have done, and the things we have failed to do’. Sins of omission.”

“... the things we fail to do,” Martin says quietly, a reflective look in his eyes.

“And though the story’s a parable, Christ tells it to make a point. That a man may find himself condemned for all time because of what he didn’t do.”

“A scary thought when you really think about it, isn’t it,” smiles the lady with the coffeepot in hand.

“Sam, you should be a scripture scholar,” Martin chuckles.

A look of mock horror races across the priest’s face. “Heavens no, Martin! We already have enough self-important gas bags endlessly pontificating on

Scripture. What the world needs are more terrific pastry chefs. Especially when they own a great little bistro like this one just a few blocks from home.”

“And especially when they are lovely as this pastry chef ... and Scripture scholar, right, John?” the Baptist minister says, chuckling and winking at the priest.

“Okay, knock it off you two,” Sam laughs softly, a blush rising in her cheeks. “I made a blueberry crumb cake this morning. Fresh out of the oven. I’ll bring you each a piece and some fresh coffee ...

... you two polish off that sermon ... fair enough?”

“To whom much is given, much will be expected.” We’ve heard those words spoken by our Lord. The question is ... do we really listen?

Do you think Sam’s on to something? That the scariest story in Scripture is about a nice guy? Of all the accounts of war, murder, lust, betrayal, and all the other forms of sinful and self-destructive behavior we read in Scripture, maybe the most terrifying is about a man who loses his soul, not for what he did, but what he failed to do, a dreadful sin of omission. The sin of not caring, not making an effort. After all, is Pastor Williams not right; the opposite of love isn’t hate, it’s apathy.

Is there a terrible punishment to come for all who, seeing the needs or the plight of others, simply turn their backs ... and close their eyes, their ears, their hearts and their minds?

I wonder ...

Thinkaboutit ... I’m Tony Baggz.