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Although sharing much common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry, often Mary and Bob find themselves approaching ministerial concerns from different angles... *He said - She said* is a venue to share differing perspectives and provide food for thought.

## The Caribbean or Coney Island?

*Bob's Perspective:*

So a philanthropist comes to you and says: "I have a great offer for you. I want to give you an all-expense paid trip to the Caribbean Island Resort of your choice. I can guarantee that you'll always have perfect weather, you can stay there as long as you like, eat and drink whatever you want anytime – even for the rest of your life. There is absolutely no catch and no strings attached."

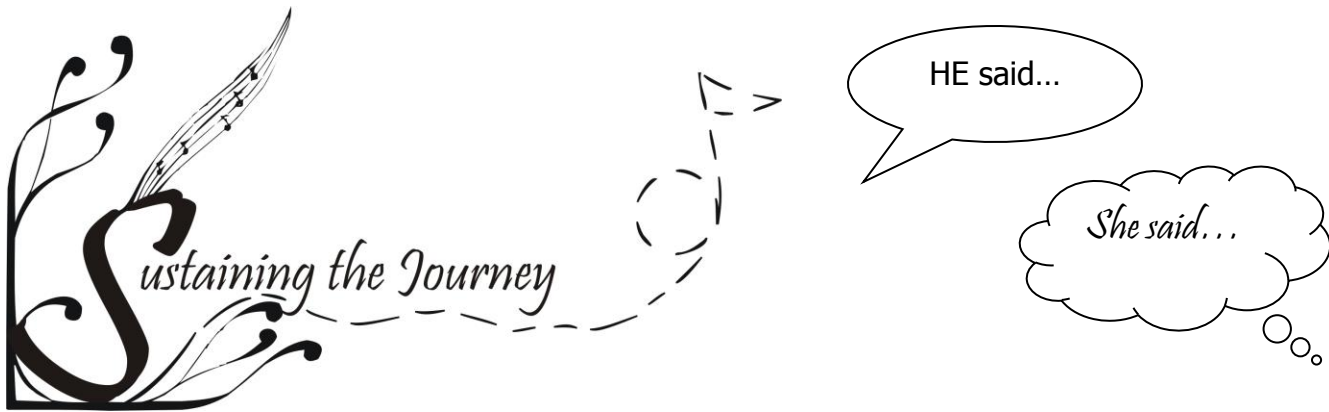
You work 12 hour days and struggle to make ends meet. A four day three night hotel stay at Coney Island would cost you approximately \$600 (I checked around) not including transportation, food or entertainment. Altogether, for the average person the expenses would work out to about a two week paycheck.

Which deal would you take: the free Caribbean Island Resort or Coney Island? And yet, there are so many who struggle with this question on a daily basis.

A friend recently told me that I was looking old. I replied, "Of course I'm looking old – I'm 64." He retorted, "There's a lot you can do to look much younger." I asked him, "Why would I want to do that?" He looked perplexed, so I continued, "I've worked hard, have overcome many obstacles and I've accomplished much in my life – my gray hair and ruddiness are badges of honor – I wear them proudly."

Now don't get me wrong here. The quality of my life is pretty good, but with all that said, I can't wait to go to the Caribbean. So maybe this blog isn't so much about giving answers as it is about asking questions. My question is: why do people struggle so hard to stay in this life, when the next life will be so much better? I'm not proposing or condoning cutting things short – but at the same time, I'm asking why do we grasp at straws?

So many times while watching TV, I see ads for drugs that have horrible side effects, just to add a few months to this existence. I see ads for fad diets (that don't work in the long run), tummy tucks, face lifts, wrinkle cream and so on. I suppose there are extreme or extraordinary cases in which some of that may be of value and important (or even necessary). But to the average person, it's grasping at straws and staving off the inevitable – which actually will be better in the long run.



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About a year ago I underwent a routine medical procedure. Since I was in need of full anesthesia (which comes with certain risks), I pointed out at check-in that I have a DNR order (Do Not Resuscitate) on file. That statement all but threw a monkey wrench into the works. In succession, at least three people (hospital staff) came to me to question my choice – and by each of their expressions, it obviously shook them up. Each one separately asked me why (given my age and good health) I would make such a decision.

I replied to each of them that I'm not asking you to do me in, but merely asking you to let me go. I love the Land of Oz and all of the characters that I've met here – and I cherish (for the most part) my visit to this extraordinary place. I intend to make the best of my visit for as long as I'm here. But, if a cyclone appears to take me back to Kansas – that's where I want to be – because that's where I belong. Why would I want to continue struggling down the yellow brick road, when I can live comfortably on my own farm?

Hmmm...The Caribbean or Coney Island?

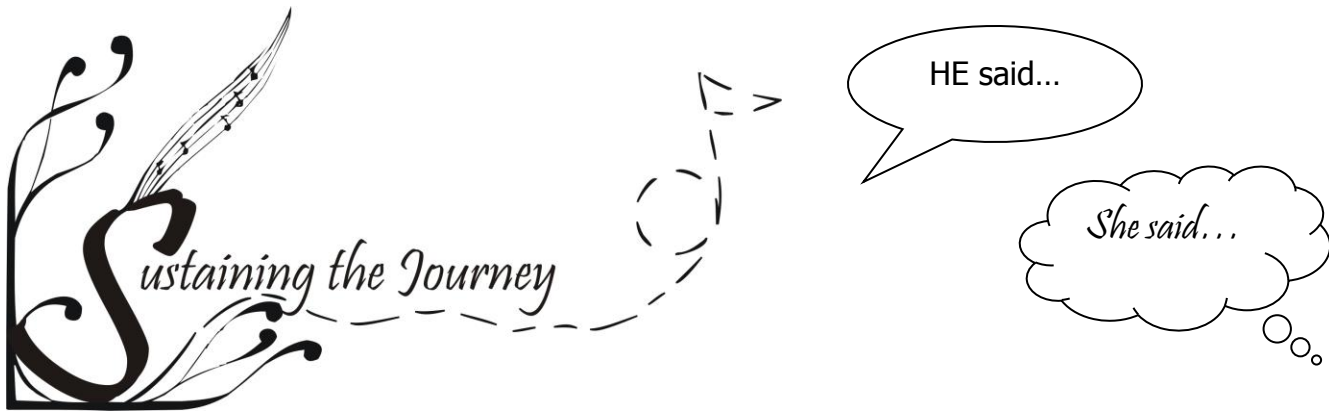
*Mary's Perspective:*

Part of the reason we named this blog "He Said – She Said" was because Bob and I come from very different points of view – often to end up agreeing in the long run. When it comes to The Caribbean or Coney Island, we definitely have different points of view, but I'm not so certain we agree in the long run. To clarify, I most definitely believe that this life as we know it isn't the end. That life is changed, not ended. That there is more to come, of which we can't begin to imagine.

We have a mutual priest friend who very confidently preaches at funerals, in great detail, what our experience of heaven is going to be like. I understand his intent is to offer comfort and consolation, and to reassure the grieving of our faith in resurrection. However, it's interesting to me that he can speak with such confidence about that which we can't begin to imagine.

While Bob's description is lovely – I'm all for tropical paradise – I'm pretty sure that the average person does not think about life in these terms. You can liken our existence to Oz and express desire to get back to Kansas, but the reality is that it's more complicated than this imagery. In the great big picture of life, certainly we would desire to "choose the Caribbean" (using Bob's example), but I would suggest that very few people think regularly in terms of the great big picture of life. Heck, most folks have trouble figuring out next week, next year, or a 5-year plan, let alone the great big picture.

And if you're only concerned with the great big picture, I think that discounts the relational aspects of the here and now. Perhaps Bob is not so interested in hanging out on the yellow brick road, but I personally intend to have a blast on the way as long as God grants me the continued journey. I am attached to this life. There are people in my life that I treasure and desire to spend time with. I believe we are each called to make this world a better place, in our own ways and using the abundant gifts we have been given. I'm not done yet.



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Am I “struggling”, “grasping at straws”, or “staving off the inevitable”? Perhaps. Or perhaps I am being refined, like gold in a furnace. Perhaps my struggles are part of the process of redemption. If I’m called to accomplish *x*, *y*, and *z* (whatever that calling may be), then looking for the cyclone may be distracting me from actually fulfilling my calling. Being so disconnected from others that I jump at the opportunity for the Caribbean discounts their feelings, the depth of our interconnectedness, or the good works to which I am still called in the here and now.

Certainly extraordinary circumstances call for a “big picture” perspective. Facing the transition point between Coney and Caribbean, I would hope I still have the confidence that our mutual priest friend does, and jump at the opportunity to continue on to the Caribbean. But if I’m so set right now in being *done* that I miss (or avoid) those opportunities for depth, relationships, fulfilling our calling, changing lives for the better, and leaving a legacy, then I’m not so sure it’s wise to consistently focus on the great big picture.

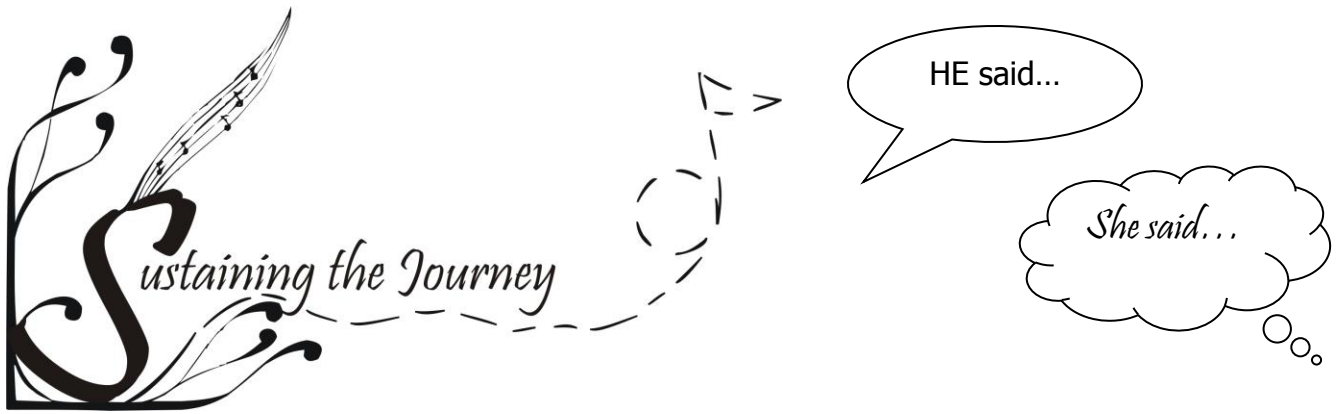
Two other thoughts... while I’m not of the mindset of trying to look 20 when I’m significantly past that stage of my life, I do believe we have some responsibility to care for our bodies to the best of our ability. I have no intention of surgically altering my appearance – my tummy may not be tucked, but its sag is evidence of the four lives I nurtured in there, and I’ve earned those wrinkles (crevices?) that I prefer to think of as smile lines. However, I do try to eat in moderation, exercise regularly, and sleep consistently so that I’m functioning efficiently. After all, if something is worth doing, it’s worth doing well. I will be less successful fulfilling my calling if my body is falling apart.

Finally, my first impression upon reading Bob’s blog entry is that folks are going to think he has a death wish. I’m fairly confident that he’s not actively looking to end things, but rather that he has no regrets and feels like he’s ready when it’s his time. In our work, Bob and I deal with death an inordinate amount of time, as compared to most people in secular jobs. We are familiar with the stages that occur at the end of life, and we understand the grief that accompanies loss. It gives us a different perspective – one that relies on faith but also alleviates some of the fear and unknown that others may face. His statements about the Caribbean versus Coney may reflect an overall comfort level that others outside of our ministry may not have when it comes to dealing with death. So do I think we should be sending in the guys with the white coats to take him to the padded room? While that may be entertaining, I don’t think it’s necessary just yet.

*Bob’s Response (but probably not the final word):*

A few things:

1. I don’t have a death wish! I like this life and for the most part enjoy what I’m doing and cherish the people with whom I interact.
2. On many occasions I have written about the importance of the Journey. I still maintain that if we become too focused on the destination, we miss out on many of the good things that the journey presents along the way.



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3. The only way to be truly free to experience the journey and all of its possibilities is to allow oneself to let go of attachments. That's not to say that we should run out on or disavow our loved ones, nor is it to say that we should become irresponsible, uncaring and foolish. However, the more weight we place on attachments directly correlates to the less open we are to the journey. In other words, if I'm dead-set on a particular goal, then I'm not open to anything that is not in line with that particular outcome. In some instances that's perfectly fine – Good is good and Evil is evil – there's no way around that principle. I would never suggest or recommend that someone cross over or give up on their core beliefs. The challenge would be to survey and examine what core beliefs one holds (and keep them sacred) – then look at other parts of one's life to see what can be cast aside (or at least put on the back burner) in order to be more free and open to the journey.

*Mary's final word:*

Oxymoronic.

As in Bob's initial point and his rebuttal, #2.

But he's still my friend.