

A TIME FOR PRAYER

Jonathan Sperry is a professor at the university in Jack Valley and an occasional visitor here at St. Peter. Jonathan often took time for a little camping and hunting in the Dakset Mountains. He relished the solitude and majesty that nature so bountifully supplied in the mountains. The peaks and valleys constantly provided Jonathan with practical and perhaps even boldly inspirational texts for his lectures at the university.

What occurred this one particular weekend will always serve as a defining moment in the distinguished career of the man. Always a teacher with a straight-forward, sober demeanor in his lectures, he added a certain element of controversy to his professional standing upon his return from the mountains this time. Some of his colleagues insist that his story stretches the limit of believability a little more each time someone repeats it.

Pastor Fred Anderson

The fading light of the red hued ball in the west cast an eerie glow on the cliff overlooking Jonathan's campsite. A cacophony of insect, animal, and rustling tree sounds only added to the strange feeling that the camper experienced. He had been coming to the area for a long time and he couldn't ever recall sensing such uneasiness before. As the night wore on, Jonathan watched the last glowing embers of his campfire dwindle. Settling into his bedroll, he reached out to feel the cold steel of the loaded shotgun by his side. The weapon provided just enough peace of mind for him to fall asleep.

When the morning broke, Jonathan got up from his sleeping site and walked down to the edge of a babbling brook situated just beyond a grove of trees. The cold fresh water that he splashed on his face swept away any remaining thought of going back to his warm bedroll. Invigorated, he headed back to his campsite for a breakfast of bacon and eggs. As Jonathan stepped out into the open from the trees, he stood face to face with the biggest mountain lion he had ever seen. Why the creature didn't attack right away, he didn't understand. Staring into the eyes of the big cat, the camper

sensed that he was being sized up for a number of meals.

Unfortunately, the cat stood between him and the shotgun he left behind at the campsite. Looking for an escape path, Jonathan, in a momentary lapse of judgment, chose to climb the closest tree. Once he reached the second limb up, he began to dwell on his choice. By the time he reached the third limb, he looked back to see the big cat closing in.

Jonathan then made another hasty but necessary decision. He hoped that if he went out on that third limb, he might be able to drop to the ground and get back to his shotgun before his opponent could back down. His next problem then became clear as the trajectory leaving the limb would put him right onto a jagged outcrop of rock. He couldn't go back to the main trunk, for the cat was now on the third limb too.

Perhaps ... it was a time for prayer. And so, Jonathan began his earnest plea to the Almighty. "Dear Lord, I'm in a tough spot right now, and I could sure use your help."

The cat edged closer.

“If you’d only get me out of this spot, I promise to officially join St. Peter’s and not to miss one Sunday of church for an entire year.”

The cat edged closer.

“Okay, two years. Two years of perfect attendance.”

The cat edged even closer.

“Lord, maybe you could just let that cat lose his balance and fall out of this tree. Not so he’d get hurt, but just enough to stun him and I’d have time to get back to my campsite.”

Jonathan could feel the hot breath of the big cat now only two feet away.

“Okay, Lord, maybe I’m being selfish here, only thinking of myself. Lord, I’d like to pray for this cat. I’m only thinking of his health. My body fat is way out of whack, so if he were to eat me it could have serious implications for his well-being. And then there’s my cholesterol level. Why should this fine animal suffer from ingesting all my bad dietary decisions? Lord, please give this cat all the wisdom you can in this regard.”

After finishing his earnest prayer to the Lord, Jonathan struggled with the critical question of whose timetable would prevail—the Lord’s, the

cat's, or his. He received an immediate answer with the cracking sound of wood. When the tree limb that he was on snapped, he fell straight to the ground, somehow missing the jagged edge of the rocks. When he hit the ground, he felt a sharp pain in his right knee, but it didn't stop him from hobbling as fast as he could toward his campsite. Once he reached his bedroll, he grabbed his shotgun, released the safety, and turned to shoot the cat that he fully expected to be right behind him. But Jonathan saw no cat anywhere on the path behind him.

A more cautious man would have immediately broken camp, packed up his truck, and left the area. Jonathan, though, gave in to an abnormal curiosity as to the whereabouts of the cat. With his finger on the trigger of the shotgun, he slowly limped back down the path to the point of his encounter with the cat. What he saw at the base of the tree that he had climbed bewildered him. The big mountain lion and a small squirrel appeared to be playing with each other. The squirrel ran into a hollow in the tree and then emerged with a large walnut. He dropped it at the foot of the cat and stepped back. The mountain lion batted the walnut away and the squirrel then took off and retrieved it, again dropping it in front of the cat. The lion then ate the

walnut while the squirrel ran back into the tree to bring out another one. When Jonathan left to go back to his camp, the two were still engaged in their game.

When his knee wouldn't stop throbbing, Jonathan decided to pack up, head home, and get into the doctor. As he started backing up his truck to get turned around, he saw the mountain lion and the squirrel sitting by his campsite. They watched him drive off and when he looked into his rearview mirror, he saw them wave goodbye.

Since the only witnesses to this incident were Jonathan, the mountain lion, the squirrel, and maybe the Lord, there have been no contrary accounts recorded. Recently, other oral versions have surfaced attributing even more human qualities to the lion and the squirrel, but they are undoubtedly just fabrications.

I, personally, have direct knowledge of only two points regarding Jonathan and his story.

First, upon his return from the mountains, Professor Sperry has authored a publication for the university entitled "Dietary Anomalies of the Mountain Lion".

Second, Jonathan Sperry has gained an expanded spiritual vision as a committed full-time member here at St. Peter since the incident.

Pastor Fred