

**Bumper Sticker Theology**  
**A Sermon by**  
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You see them everywhere! On highways and byways – back roads, dirt roads – paved roads, Vineyard roads and everything in between. Often times there is only one or two – but some times there is an entire collage of them – giving those following a small treatise of ones political leanings; religious affiliation, eating habits and whether you think lobstermen, policemen, firemen, teachers do “IT” better! *Funny I have never seen a “minister’s do it better?”* Now of course I am talking about the well-known phenomenon of the bumper sticker!

Now the bumper sticker did not appear until actual bumpers began to appear on the Ford Model T in 1926. The first adhesive tape stickers began to appear after WWII.

Bumper stickers have been used in advertising as well. Researchers agree the initial widespread use of the *advertising bumper stickers* might have been from the ubiquitous “*See Rock City*” touting a tourist attraction atop lookout Mt. in Tennessee. There is also one now for Lookout Mountain.

Bumper stickers have inspired legal actions between people and states. A gentleman with a bumper sticker containing indecent wording was convicted. However, the man’s conviction was overturned in 1991 during

Cunningham v. State. The court referenced the First Amendment stating: “the provision regulating profane words on bumper stickers reaches a substantial amount of constitutionally protected speech and unconstitutionally restricts freedom of expression.” (*Internet: Bumper stickers*)

So it appears you can place any wording on a bumper stickers. However, today is not about the words on bumper stickers or the infinite number of advertising “slogans” on such stickers; “This car climbed Mt. Washington;” rather today we explore the many theological and political implications of the phenomena of bumper stickers. Why do people use them? Why do others not? Are bumper stickers a form of evangelizing one’s beliefs and values? Or are they simply fun and entertainment along our nation’s highways?

I was heading back to Provincetown on Rt. 6 right where the two lanes merge into one (suicide alley). So we were all pacing along when all of sudden this SUV cuts in front of me, on the right yet. I chose some choice words – words that apparently are legal for bumper stickers – as we all keep moving forward. Suddenly I am faced with the bumper of the SUV with a sticker that says: ***“Warning! In case of Rapture this vehicle will be unmanned!”***

Yeah right! I shouted. “I’m sure that’s how the Rapture will work. God, in her infinite wisdom will begin to randomly pluck people out of their cars and have them floating upward.” And what makes you think you are going?

(story of Six Feet Under). You who rudely cut people off?

This is bumper sticker theology at its best or worst depending on your theological slant. Yet who hasn’t been behind a car close enough to read the bumper stickers and then wanted to ram the back of the car because: either it was for a political candidate you vehemently oppose, or a religious doctrine you felt the exact opposite towards – or anything that can push one of the gut wrenching emotional buttons – especially if they had just cut you off!!!! I often find myself looking right at them when I pass – and I always pass!!

Certainly there are examples of other theological themed bumper stickers. “My karma ran over my dogma,” the fish symbol, or the fish symbol with the word “Darwin” in the middle. “God is my co-pilot.” Or; “My boss is a Jewish carpenter.” Yet two of my favorites are; “Jesus is coming – look busy.” And the other “The end is near... lighten up.”

In the hope of finding a variety of bumper stickers for today I looked in every store in Provincetown – of course most of them are closed now. But

then heard of a small little “hippie – earthy shop” as it was described to me in Orleans. It was earthy after all as it was called the “Earth House.” And in it was you, know, oils, chimes, incense and one huge wall full of bumper stickers. It was like a dream come true! There an entire wall covered in varying bumper stickers. They even had them categorized by themes. At the top of course were the Political ones: “Feel the Bern,” “It’s time for a Women” “Trump 2016” and then my favorite, which clearly shows my political slant’

“Voting is like driving – to go **backwards**, choose “R” – to go **forward** choose “D.”

Following political ones was Health Care: “Keep your rosaries off my ovaries.” I love a good rhyme. “*Health care is a right Not a privilege.*” Or again a favorite: “*Republican Health Plan – Don’t get sick.*”

Marriage equality and equal rights had a few – many in rainbow colors with words or phrases like; *Love Wins*, *Straight but not narrow* all in rainbow colors. However again, my favorite was; “*The biggest threat to marriage is the wedding of church and state.*”

Now truth be told the only bumper sticker I ever had was a simple equal sign = . I placed right below my Texas license plate. I felt the placement and

the sticker in and of itself was my statement. After all I had to say something – I felt, it was Texas after all.

And now so many years later – and cars later – still no stickers – a lot of dents and scratches – that’s for certain. But still no bumper stickers. I am not sure why. May be it’s a neatness thing. Or what if I have to explain it – or things – my values – my religion? I remember a few years back the UUA came out with an ad program. We were the *Uncommon Denomination!* I kind of like that one. Phew, but the storm it set off? But I like being different or uncommon. Because my faith asks of me to express some of the questions, mystery, the doubts. “Cherish your doubts” “For doubt is the attendant of truth.” Let’s put that on a bumper sticker!!

Truthfully however, my all time favorite bumper sticker ever was again seen in the state of Texas. It was on a colleague’s car right under his Texas license plate. Right where my equal sign was. *Grace Happens. (2X)*

In our reading this morning Safford’s responses to questions of god she speaks of the emptiness between all of us, together. If I were asked I would call it Grace. Grace happens – the movement of grace happens. If there was a bumper sticker to be had on the back of my car – perhaps that would be the

one – that would be the one because I believe it. I believe it because I have experienced it.

There are so many religious bumper stickers all claiming the right path to some sort of salvation. But.....

*“If you don’t know where you’re going.... Any road will get you there.”*

*And the optimist hopes we can live in the best of all possible worlds. The pessimist fears that we do.”*

Two more of my favorites seen at the Earth House wall of bumper stickers.

So part of the idea behind this service today is to hear from some of you gathered here this morning. Are you a bumper sticker fashionado? Do you select them with purpose and intentionality? Do you tend to react as you are driving around the Island or off Island when encountering a sticker that pushes some of your theological or political buttons?

As Eleanor Roosevelt has stated; “Small minds discuss people. Average minds discuss events. Great minds discuss ideas.” And yes it too, is now a bumper sticker. But since we are not small or average minded here let’s discuss the ideas of bumper stickers. What are some of your ideas?