
I Saw a Snake: Dangers and Digressions

**An article for the *Cathedral Times*
by Dean Sam Candler**

Boog and I broke our quarantine the other day. We were glad, and eager, and ready, to drive down to Coweta County, about an hour southwest of Atlanta. That's where I grew up, going to school for the first six grades of my life at Elm Street Elementary School, in Newnan, Georgia.

Yeah, that's where Alan Jackson, the country singer, is from. The other day, my mother sent me his recording of the song, "The Older I Get," which was actually written by Alan Jackson's nephew, Adam Wright, who also grew up in Newnan. A friend of my mother's, in Newnan, had apparently run into Adam Wright's mother while walking the other day.

But I digress. It's a habit of Southerners who are from where I am from.

The point is, Boog and I drove down to see my parents, who still live down there, outside Newnan, in Coweta County. They live in the same house I grew up in. My sister and her husband live nearby on the old farm property. My brother does, too. Actually, my son now lives nearby, too, with his own family.

So, it was refreshing, and a nice gradual way to expand quarantine, to get down there, to those familiar woods and pastures. I walked a lot, and I bicycled a lot. My daughter's family, who live in Atlanta, also got down there, with her three children. It was lovely to play and walk and bicycle with them!

But, I digress. The point is, I saw a snake. It was actually a beautiful snake, a black snake, a long one, almost five feet long. He was perfectly still, lying right by the road as I drove by. I have driven down that road a thousand times, and—even as the bushes and trees change—I know what that roadside is supposed to look like. Had I not been down that road a thousand times before, I would not have noticed something different this time. Yes, it was a smooth and silky black snake, trying to remain still and not attract attention to itself. I had to stop and digress!

I like snakes; and so I knew it could have been a black racer, as silky and slender as it was. But they usually race off! This was probably a thicker, black rat snake, who are happily more docile. (The next day down there, I saw a second snake; that one was definitely a black racer, and I could not catch up to his speed, slipping and sliding through the woods.)

My mother tells the story of when I was quite young down there. She had been telling me all morning to go outside, to go ride my bicycle. I kept coming back inside. She kept sending me out. I kept returning. "Go ride your bicycle," she instructed. "I can't ride my bicycle," I replied. "Why not?" she asked. I said, "Well, there's a snake under my bicycle."

Yeah, this time of year, no matter what else is going on, snakes reappear. Oaks and pines bud and blossom; and the weather gets warm enough for snakes to come out. It is part of the rhythm of life. Despite everything else going on in the world, the wildlife of the world is moving again. The snakes can be frightening, but these black snakes are fine. They do keep the mice and rats and rodents away.

This rhythm of life, the rhythm of God's creation, can be frightening. But it can also be important, even healthy. I have no idea where this beautiful creation will end up. But I am sure glad to be a part of it. Psalm 104:25 says, "O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures."

Even the dangers and the digressions can be useful. Digressions happen, time stops, and what we thought we were headed for is not where we end up at all. We stopped going one way, and we turned another. "The Older I Get," they sing. Part of growing older is understanding how wisdom comes with age, too. Growing older is meeting those dangers and digressions with patience, and turning them into wisdom.

Hey, that reminds me; it's my mother's birthday this week. She's getting on up there, like the grandma that Elton John sang about in the song, Country Comfort. "And it's good old country comfort in my bones /Just the sweetest sound my ears have ever known," he sang. But, I digress. I will go see her this week.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

The Very Reverend Sam Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip