

## **WARRIOR**



John 2:13 "It was almost time for the Passover Festival, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. There in the Temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and pigeons, and also the moneychangers sitting at their tables. So (Jesus) made a whip from cords and drove all the animals out of the Temple, both the sheep and the cattle; he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and scattered their coins; and he ordered those who sold the pigeons (to), "Take them out of here! Stop making my Father's house a den of thieves!" (he cried out). (And) His disciples remembered the scripture that says, 'My devotion to your house, O God, burns in me like a fire.'"

This is now the third sermon in a series that I have been preaching this Lent entitled "Archetypes of the Spiritual Journey."

We have looked, for instance, at the Orphan within each of us who recognizes that life is unexpectedly hard, and who longs for someone or something out there to come save us from this plight. And we have looked at the Wanderer within each of us who flees from this oppressive state of affairs in search of that someone or something out there, like the Great Wizard in distant city of Oz, and in so doing, we often find our true selves. This morning we shall look at the Warrior within each of us, whom we expect to fight on our behalf and to defend us.

In its simplest form, there are it seems three central characters in almost all traditional heroic tales, namely: the hero, the villain (or dragon), and the victim (or the damsel in distress). In our culture, the "hero" is almost exclusively defined as the "Warrior", as the one who defeats the villain (or slays the dragon) and thus rescues the damsel in distress. It is almost dogma in our society that the Warrior is the one within us who fights for what we believe in, stands up for what we treasure, what we value, and defeats the villain, thereby making the world a better place. Think of Moses confronting the Pharoah of Egypt, or Elijah with the priests of Baal, or King David and Goliath, or Jesus and the temple priests. Good must conquer evil in the end, the Innocent one in each of us seems to insist.

In the beginning, the Warrior in each of us views the world in these rather simplistic terms as a fundamental struggle between good and evil, between right and wrong, a battle between good guys and bad guys, as a simplistic conflict with villains, victims, and

heroes. And we as warriors always see ourselves as fighting on the side of goodness (otherwise we would be the villain), and at our very least we are seeking to right the wrongs within our society, waging war on that which is pernicious and corrupt, and defending the rights of the poor and the oppressed. However, we are easily tempted in such simplistic battles to become self-righteous, especially in regards to moral, religious, and political struggles, to see our ourselves and our own positions as divinely right and our opponents' as demonically wrong. We are good and they are evil, we say. We are the heroes and they the villains, villains who must be destroyed, or at least converted to our way of thinking. And indeed, the crudest acts executed in the name of religion are often the actions of such Warriors, of Holy Crusaders, and Grand Inquisitors, and Jihadists, and simple Christians like you and me when we are called upon to contrast the differing faiths that are among us.

At this primitive stage Warriors are primarily motivated, I think, by fear, by the simple fear of losing. For failing to win whatever battle we are fighting, failing to win brings with it disgrace and shame upon us, a sense of being weak and unworthy, and thus unlovable, for nobody loves a loser. If we lose, then either the loss is our own fault (and we are the villain, because goodness always wins in the end) or else the loss is really not our fault (and we are thus the victim). For we cannot see ourselves as the hero unless we are waging a battle and winning. Rarely do we ever question the fundamental presumption here that life is a contest

between winners and losers, a simplistic fight between good and evil. By now in this series, I hope that you all realize that the Warrior is but one of the heroes within us, only one of the Archetypes of the Spiritual Journey. And the goal of the Warrior is not in the end to 'win,' it is not to conquer our opponents, but simply to stand up for what we believe in, in face of opposition.

But the Warrior's progress through this archetype is very much dependent upon how much we as individuals have learned from the other heroes within us. For example, pseudo-Warriors who simply exude machismo, are more likely Orphans masquerading as Warriors, covering their fear with bravado. For if we haven't yet engaged as the Wanderer and "found ourselves" to some extent at least, we may be fighting mainly to prove only our courage, but will not have any real idea of what we are fighting for, except perhaps to win. For when we have made inroads as Wanderers into finding out who we are and what we really want, only then can we truly fight for ourselves as Warriors, and only when we have developed the Martyrs' capacity to care for our community, can we be seen as truly fighting for others.

Thus, the usual simplicity of the Warrior's perspective ultimately fails us. The real world is not simply black or white, but is full of grey. And the Warrior blindly asserting his own will in the end, can often become a kind of tyranny itself, a kind of bullying. It is ultimately the source, I believe, of much of the sexism, racism, classism, and political partisanship in this country, where we seek power and domination, and not necessarily

resolution. As the Warrior in us matures though, we connect our warring instinct with the other archetypes we have looked at, and then we may begin to see our opponents not as villains or potential converts, but as other heroes like us. The real issue for the Warrior is NOT fighting or winning, but simply standing up for what we believe in, and for who we are. The mature Warrior realizes that his or her truth in the end is only one among many --- and still that does not preclude in the least our commitment to our ideals, to our people, our causes, to our firmly held beliefs. When we have reached this stage in the journey, those who assert a seemingly antithetical truth to ours will not be greeted as an enemy, but instead as an intriguing ally. "Here's my truth," we might say. "I will explain it to you as fully as I can, and then you can explain yours to me." The task of the Warrior is not ultimately to slay dragons and win wars, our task is not ultimately to defeat our opponents or convert them. For in the end, our task as Warriors is merely to stand up for what we believe, and then learning from others, to find common ground and to build bridges, by respecting our opponents, and not demonizing them. We must, in the end, trust ourselves and confidently proclaim our own truths, but with very real humility and unpretentiousness; this is the true role of the Warrior within each of us.

And what the Warrior contributes in our search for that someone or something calling to us, is exactly this trusting in ourselves, and confidence in our own judgments, and acting upon them with absolute conviction in the face of opposition or peril,

when we find ourselves wandering through the haunted forest that is filled with frightening lions, tigers, and bears, oh my. The Warrior teaches us to claim our own power and to assert our own identity in a dangerous world, to stand up for ourselves. Now as Orphans, we often view ourselves only as victims, and as Wanderers, we sometimes see ourselves only as outsiders. And so, by defining ourselves in those roles we suggest that we have little power in the world. We tell ourselves that we do not have to take any responsibility for our lives or for the state of our community. But to identify the Warrior within us, we must say instead, "I have power here. I too am responsible for what happens here," and "I too must do what I can to make this a better world for myself and for others." Warriors change their worlds by asserting their wills and their images of a more virtuous life.

We are required as Warriors then to claim this authority for ourselves, that we have a right to assert what we want for ourselves and for our community. Warriors learn to trust their own judgment and, perhaps, most importantly, to develop the courage to fight for what we want and believe in, even when doing so requires great risk --- like the loss of a job, a friend, a lover, social regard, or even our very lives.

Now male and female experiences with the Warrior archetype differ significantly. Men are socialized practically from birth to be Warriors, we tell our sons to be strong and brave. For women, the issues are whether they will have the audacity even to enter a contest culturally defined as masculine, and, if they do, whether

they will learn to speak in their own voices, and to express their own wisdom. Thus, the male world can be often profoundly painful for women, not only because it does not value women, but because it often does not value care for one another either, it often only cares about power, and maintaining that power. Indeed, the realization that the hero has traditionally been cast as male, and the victim as female, holds pitfalls for both men and women. Men may identify their heroism solely and self-righteously in terms of protecting and rescuing the weak - like the women and children, while often neglecting our very own needs and weaknesses! For neither men nor women can fight intelligently for themselves unless they have taken the time, as Wanderers, to find out who they are and what they want in life.

So then, what happens after the Warrior slays the dragon, after the war is over, after the election is decided? It is symbolically important, I think, that at the end of the old heroic myth, after the Warrior has confronted his fear by going out and slaying the dragon, that the Warrior usually returns home again and often marries. The reward for this battle is that the Warrior becomes, finally, a lover. For healthy intimacy demands the regular assertion of who we are and what we want in our relationships, especially with those we love, and a willingness to look at how conflicting desires can come together to create a mutually enriching life, not a domineering one, and that is the role of the Warrior within each of us and with each of us.

But alas because this world is not our longed-for paradise as the Orphan within each of us realizes that we cannot ever make it so either. Moreover, because we all die, all Warriors are doomed to lose in the end, and thus our victories are always less than complete. We can take charge of our lives and change things, sure, but the real battle is never won, the war is never really over. There will always be poor among us, and evil, and sin, and thus the endless struggles that drain and exhaust even the strongest of Warriors. Ultimately, we as Warriors will all be defeated; ultimately, we as Warriors will all become Martyrs, who will need to admit our ordinary human vulnerability, and our need for other people to sustain and nurture us in our eventual weakness. But then that is the topic for next week's sermon. AMEN.