

THE WANDERER



Exodus 12:1 "The Lord said to Abra(ha)m, 'Leave your country, (leave) your relatives and your father's home, and go to a land that I am going to show you. I will give you many descendants, and they will become a great nation. I will bless you and make your name famous, so that you will be a blessing (to all).'

This is the second in a sermon series which I am preaching this Lent about 'Archetypes of the Spiritual Journey.' As I noted last week, Jesus once told the Pharisees that "The kingdom

of God is not coming with things that can be observed . . . For, in fact," Jesus said, "the kingdom of God is within (us)." Lent, of course, is the traditional time of the church year to focus upon our interior lives. But most of us really don't know *how* to talk about them. Thus, I here continue a five-part series that may help provide some of the language and images we need in that self-reflection and discussion on the aspects of our spiritual life.

Last week, we saw how the Innocent one in each of us reaffirms the simple truth that we all long to be cared for, that we all long to be loved, and how we all seem to have a deep-seated yearning for a place where we will be safe and secure, like some lost childhood, a paradise perhaps, the Garden of Eden, Nirvana, somewhere where there is peace on earth and goodwill towards humankind, that seems to be humanity's ultimate goal.

The Orphan in each of us thus feels abandoned in this world, recognizing that real life is hard and painful, that we are not safe here, that things are not fair, that this world is not our longed-for utopia, and never will be, and sadly that we are powerless to ever make it so. Thus, in order to change our situation, we must believe and trust in that fundamental truth

from Alcoholics Anonymous, that there is a power greater than ourselves out there, someone or something calling to us, a knight in shining armor perhaps, a Promised Land, a Savior. The moment we accept that this life is never going to fulfill us is the moment that we set out on that yellow-bricked road to seek the holy One or holy place, to find that someone or something out there calling to us. That is the moment we have moved from being Orphans to becoming Wanderers.

And we are all of us Wanderers at times. We are all of us seekers, pilgrims, and travelers in this life; we are not meant to be settlers here. Indeed the essence of much of the Judaic-Christian faith is rooted in this theme of wandering or exile, found in our Scriptures again and again --- within the story of Abraham leaving his home in the Ur of the Chaldees, not knowing whither he was going, but simply trusting in God --- with Moses leading the people of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt on an Exodus to a Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey --- with the Israelites in captivity by the waters of Babylon, struggling to sing the songs of Zion in an foreign land, simply yearning to return home again --- right up to the recognition in the New Testament that we Christians, as St. Paul writes, have here no abiding city here; for we await the new

Jerusalem, a new Zion, where we shall find joy and peace, and where sorrow and pain are no more, neither sighing, but only life everlasting.

The archetype of the Wanderer is also found again and again in our secular stories, think of the Iliad and the Odyssey, the Aeneid, Jason and the Argonauts, Aladdin and his flying carpet, the travels of Siddhartha, even the fictional Lord of the Rings and the Narnia Chronicles. Again and again in our literature and myths we see the images of that errant knight on a holy crusade, or the lone cowboy riding the frontier, or the solitary explorer setting off to discover lost worlds.

The Wanderer in each of us makes the radical assertion that while it is a cold, cruel world out there, life is not primarily about suffering; it is instead an *adventure*, it is a quest, a journey, a searching for meaning in life and for our true selves, a longing to find that someone or something out there calling to us, that power greater than ourselves. Whether we as Wanderers journey only inwardly or also outwardly, we all find it necessary at different times in our lives to leave behind the world we have known, to discard and distrust the old social rules we have grown up with, and to try to discover instead who we really are beyond the old inherited order, who we are really

meant to be, and what we really want in life. It is what the Native Americans call a 'vision quest' or the Australian aborigines call a 'walkabout'. But whatever we call it, each of us at different times in our lives has set out simply to 'find ourselves'.

If the Orphan's story starts with a longing for Paradise, the Wanderer's story begins in captivity, with a sense of entrapment here, with a feeling of enslavement to some idea or to some person or to some community. For most of us, it starts in adolescence, when we seek to escape the values and lifestyles of our domineering parents, in order to be authentic to ourselves. Like children, we try to run away from home and get away from it all; and that urging returns to us again and again as we get older.

But setting off on that journey isn't easy, and most often we feel conflicted by the urge to wander. The Orphan in each of us will frequently want us to stay where we are, even in a dysfunctional and destructive relationship, because we still long to be taken care of. That's why a startling 80% of abused wives go back to their abusive husbands, because we all want to be loved, and even badly is better than not at all. Moreover, the Warrior in each of us may want instead to stay and fight, to

defeat the villain or captor, believing that running away is weakness and escapist. And the Martyr in each of us may see leaving as selfish, and out of a deep sense of duty, may be willing to die even for our old life, to be faithful to the old order to the very end. Thus, the Wanderer in each of us when we do set out often carries around great of deal of guilt as baggage on our journey. But it is the Wanderer in each of us who boldly declares that we do not have to live this way, and thus is willing to set off into the great unknown. And yet, what the Wanderer usually fears is that the true consequence of our searching will be perpetual isolation; that we will venture out into the frontier, never to find what we are looking for, and never to be seen again by those we love.

Most women do not like the Wanderer within them. As Carol Gilligan has pointed out in her wonderful book, *In a Different Voice*, while men generally fear intimacy, women fear aloneness. And the perceived loneliness of the Wanderer's life scares many women away. Men, on the other hand, are often so enamored with the ideas of autonomy and self-reliance that we get stuck in the stage of Wandering, since independence in our culture is practically a synonym for masculinity. We men are sometimes too good at leaving or running away. Still, the Wanderer's path is

one of great loneliness and insecurity, as we abandon all that is familiar and known, and realize that we are suddenly not in Kansas anymore.

Most of us experience this isolation many times in our adulthood --- every time we are pulled between our desire to stay within safe and comfortable surroundings, and our seemingly conflicting need to grow and risk, and confront the unknown possibilities of our lives. It is this tension that accounts for the consistent pain of growing up, whether it be the leaving home experienced by teenagers or young adults, or the difficulty of a mid-life crisis, or an empty nest, or a divorce, or a death of a parent or of a spouse. We become Wanderers again and again each time we are challenged to leave behind our former sense of identity, often based upon some prescribed role, or achievement, or relationship to others, and to face instead the deep psychological and spiritual questions about who we really are as individuals.

In the end, what each of us wants is to be loved, and to be loved for who we really are. And yet in order to be loved and accepted by others, we so often deny or diminish ourselves by acting out roles in our life, by pretending to be something we may not be, the good child, the loving spouse, or the successful

provider, as we try to meet the expectations of others for us in order to win their love, and in so doing, we so often end up sacrificing parts of ourselves along the way, until we have lost touch with our real selves, and thus we cannot be loved for who we really are, because we are not living the lives of who we really are anymore. So it is that we rebel, painfully forsaking the love of others at times, even of our parents or spouses, in order to rediscover ourselves --- for only in finding ourselves can we ever be truly loved for who we really are.

Now our movement toward becoming the Wanderer often begins in small stages. We become angry that life is hard or that we have to make difficult choices. At first, we act like Orphans, kicking and screaming that someone else is supposed to be protecting us! Or we may complain that no one loves us for who we really are, or that no one truly knows who we are, that no one understands us. This awareness leads us to rebellion; to those quiet or public displays of our desperate searching for what we really want, for finding out who we are, experimenting as we go perhaps, growing our hair long, or cutting it short, or getting pierced or tattooed, or changing our friends and social circles. And the more we are free to be ourselves, the less

alone we often feel, for we are never really alone when we are true to ourselves.

And we are, in the end, not meant to be alone. We are not meant to be perpetual wanderers, like some kind of high plains drifter forever riding the horizon. Nonetheless the time of wandering or exile is a formative period of self-discovery. It was during the Exodus, for instance, that Israel become a nation, received her Law and Commandments, and discovered her destiny as a chosen people. Jesus' formative temptations in the wilderness led him from his solitude in the dessert to the beginning of his public ministry among the crowds. We too are led back into community as we wander, capable now of experiencing intimacy at a deeper level as we develop a stronger sense of self.

But for most of us, the full enjoyment of this reward cannot be realized until we have also gained the Warrior's ability to assert our own wishes in relationship, and the Martyr's capacity to give and commit to others, and the Magician's ability to transform our relationships, our reality. But we have yet to explore the archetypes of the Warrior, the Martyr, and the Magician. They are still to come in this series, and that is where we will begin next week. AMEN.