

## FROM INNOCENT TO ORPHAN



Luke 17:20 "Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered (them), 'The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will (one) say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact," (Jesus) said, "'the kingdom of God is within you.'"

Jesus having once said that 'The kingdom of God is within us,' reminds us all of the importance of our interior lives as Christians, reminds us all of the importance of our spiritual journey. Lent, of course, is the most traditional time in the seasons of the church year to focus upon our spiritual lives and our spiritual disciplines. But even those who spend a lot of time reflecting upon their inner life, tend not to talk much about it. Margaret Guenther, a popular Episcopal writer on prayer, notes that most Christians are more likely to talk with our family and friends about the details of our sex lives than the details of our spiritual lives. Part of the problem in that,

I suspect, is finding useful language to employ in that discussion, because most of us really don't know *how* to talk about our interior lives. We don't have a ready vocabulary to describe our struggles or our journey. Carl Jung, the famous Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, pioneered the idea of universal archetypes that provide accessible common symbols and images that help us talk about our inner selves. Archetypes are seen as a kind of innate unspecific knowledge derived from our common human history, archetypes that we find repeated again and again over the centuries throughout our stories, our myths, our great legends, our music, across all cultures and boundaries, a fundamental language of the human experience and our spiritual journey.

Thus, I begin here a five-part sermon series on some of the archetypes of the spiritual journey that may help provide some of the language and images we need in our self-reflection and discussion this Lent. This sermon series is based upon Carol Pearson's book entitled "*The Hero Within*," which my spiritual director once encouraged me to read many years ago, when I seemed to be combative with everyone about everything in my life, with the Warrior archetype apparently as my default mode. Pearson's book helped me move from where I was then stuck in my

own spiritual life and wander further down the road. So, I am hoping this series may then help you as you move along on your spiritual quest.

In the book, Carol Pearson identified six basic themes or archetypes that occur regularly in each of our spiritual lives, regardless of whether we are religious or not: namely, the Innocent, the Orphan, the Wanderer, the Warrior, the Martyr, and the Magician. Each of us experiences each one of these aspects at various times in our lives. And each one of these archetypes contributes to our discovering something valuable about our real selves, an understanding or self-awareness without which we are not ever really whole or complete. But the progression from one archetype or pattern to another is not strictly linear. We can see all these themes and patterns in our selves at different times in our lives. They inhabit and haunt our dreams, our artwork, our literature, our myth, and yes, especially our religious heritage. Behind these themes are deep and abiding archetypes in the human psyche that are profoundly moving, that are universal, and that sometimes are even terrifying. They are the stuff of real life, beyond our outward appearances and glittering images.

The journey of spiritual lives begins then with the idea of justice and harmony, and with the idyllic conception of unconditional love, and an imagined situation where we could be truly happy and safe and cared for all the time, with peace on earth and goodwill among humankind. It is something that we humans all seem to long for deep down within ourselves, if we are honest. And since we have never really known that place, never really known somewhere where there is true justice and peace on earth, where we have experienced unconditional love, where we are truly happy and safe and cared for all the time, where does the idea of that place come from, if not from deep within ourselves, if not from God?

Shel Silverstein wrote an award-winning children's story many years ago entitled *The Giving Tree*, which speaks to this recurring longing within us all, I think. In the story a young boy plays in a tree's branches and eats her apples. When he grows older, the tree gives him her branches to build a home. Many years later, when the boy, now a middle-aged man, yearns to sail the seven seas, the tree gives him her trunk to make a boat. Finally, when the boy returns to her at the end of his life, the tree is sad because she has nothing left to give him, but the boy, now an old man, explains that he is tired and only

needs a place to sit down, and so he sits upon her stump, and, like every other time the tree has given to him, "He's happy and she's happy." It is a beautiful and touching story because there is a part of each of us that longs to be that child, a part of each of us that longs to live in a world where everything exists to serve and satisfy us. We all long to be cared for. We all long to be loved. Such innocence is a natural state for children, but when carried into adulthood requires an astonishing amount of denial and narcissism. And yet it is not uncommon for adults to believe that others should be making their life better. And the realization that they don't, that their mother or father, spouses, lovers, friends, employers, employees do not make their life better, is a constant source of annoyance, cynicism, sometimes anger or even rage among many of us. There is still a bit of the Innocent in each of us, whenever we get angry or sad that we are not properly cared for or loved. There is a spoiled child within us all sometimes, crying out that life is not fair!

We generally lose that innocence, however, as we grow up and discover more and more that it is a cold, cruel world out there, a world that doesn't really care for us, where life isn't fair, where we are often not safe. As we grow up, we realize

that things are not as we imagine that they should be in life, and thus we inherently crave something else, something better, something more. We realize that we live instead forever East of Eden, that we have lost our innocence, and yet endlessly we yearn to return to that entranced garden, we don't really want to grow up. The hope of a recovery of that mythic Paradise is one of the most powerful forces in human life. Yet it is juxtaposed against a growing sense of disappointment and despair, a sense that somehow we are supposed to live in a garden, safe and cared for, and that instead we are cast out into the harsh wilderness of reality. Inevitably we have moments when we feel forsaken, victims separated from the security of our innocent childhood stories, and lost dreams, and youthful aspirations. We move in our journey of self from being Innocents to realizing that we are really more like Orphans, that oftentimes we feel alone in the world, abandoned by our friends and family, abandoned even by God perhaps, tempted alone in the wilderness of our lives like Jesus in the desert. When we realize that we must care for ourselves, that we must make our own way in life, we oftentimes feel betrayed, even enraged at the prospect. Sometimes we are afraid, and we just want to go home. We want someone or something to rescue us. At times like

that I recall that old Irish fisherman's prayer, "O Lord, save me, for your ocean is so vast, and my boat is so small."

The fear of the Orphan is so profound that it is usually is not experienced directly. What we usually experience instead is the anger or disappointment --- often turned inward blaming ourselves for our fate, for our Fall from Grace, for our lost innocence, or else turning our sense of abandonment outward towards God, towards the world, or towards our parents, or the government --- anything or anyone else that can be identified as not properly taking care of us, as having failed to protect us.

Now it is important to realize in this sermon series that each of the identified archetypes of our spiritual lives contribute something vital and important in our search for our true selves and meaning in life. And what the Orphan contributes in our spiritual quest is the realization and the acceptance that life is hard and even painful, that this is not the longed-for Paradise we crave, and most especially, that we are powerless to really change that fact. This is not Paradise, and we cannot make it so on our own. Sometimes we get stuck in the stage of the Orphan, getting more and more angry at the world, continually depressed and discouraged with our lives and our

sense of helplessness, living lives of quiet desperation. The harsh reality recognized by the Orphan is so painful that sometimes in order to protect ourselves we become numb, we instead feel only a sense of alienation, a void, an emptiness inside. The primary subject of modern literature and film is said to be this experience of alienation and despair in the modern world. To move on in our quest for real meaning in our lives, we must believe and trust that there is more to life than meets the eye, that someone or something is out there, out there calling to us: a Promised Land, a knight in shining armor, a Savior, a better world, the Kingdom of Heaven, Nirvana. The Orphan in each of us must learn to trust again in that someone or something, must turn from looking mournfully backwards to what is lost and blaming ourselves for our plight, and begin to look forward in trust, and faith, and hope, for self-realization, for higher consciousness, for salvation.

Alcoholics Anonymous knows this truth, as it teaches its people not to blame themselves, and that although as individuals we are not strong enough to do anything about it, we can overcome our situation by believing in a higher power than ourselves. It is only in believing thus in some higher power that we can change our situation. Trust in a higher power than



ourselves is then the prerequisite of moving on from the stage of Orphan.

Remember Glinda the Good Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*, who tells Dorothy at the end of her journey that she could have gone home anytime she wanted to by simply clicking her heels together? Dorothy asks why she did not tell her that before, and Glinda explains that Dorothy would not have believed her. First Glinda had to convince Dorothy that there was a Great and Powerful Wizard in the far-off city of Oz who could make every right for her. In journeying to find this Great Wizard of Oz, Dorothy developed confidence in herself, she established a community of friends, she experienced hardship, so that ultimately, she was able to kill the Wicked Witch herself and trust that her own power could get herself home. Until she had lived through her travails along the way, however, Dorothy felt like the Orphan, who was not in Kansas anymore, too powerless to proceed except with the faith that she would be saved one day by the great Wizard of Oz.

Our lives, too, become transformed as we believe and trust in God, in some higher power than ourselves. Like Jesus on the Cross, one moment crying out in agony and despair, feeling forsaken by God, and then in the next moment, letting go, and

whispering quietly "Into thy Hands I commend my spirit." So, we too must venture forth in faith. However fearful we may be about the unknown and however much grieving we may need to do about what we leave behind, we will remain forever as Orphans in our spiritual lives until we can trust that there is something out there calling to us, that beloved Garden, a better life, a Savior, peace on earth, the Kingdom of Heaven. Like Dorothy we must set out on the yellow bricked road toward the fabled Oz and its Wizard. It is a frightening prospect most times, but the journey of faith brings us closer to home, closer to where we really want and long to be.

And the moment we accept that this life is never going to be our Paradise and set out to return home again, is the moment we have moved from being Orphans to becoming Wanderers; and that is the theme of next week's sermon. AMEN