



Proper 9, Year A – March 6, 2011

A Homily preached by the Very Rev'd Robert Pynn

Good Rising from Good

Deep in our race memory, far below the upper strata of modern experience, there are primeval shards of our beginnings that we continue unearth from ancient places. Such findings help us to understand one a basic human questions: Who are we, really.¹

Ten thousand years BCE our ancestors lived in a predominantly Goddess Culture. We understood our selves in relation to family and a small group subsistence society. Women and men shared responsibility for the life of our small clans. When we died we were buried with others, and with symbols of a "family culture".

If we roll our minds forward to 7,000 BCE we find a very different picture. We then lived in a Warrior culture. Men were typically buried alone with their weapons. There was no significant place for women. A "Warrior God" had replaced the "Goddess". Social order was imposed by military power. This is a time of warrior heroes and the focus on Law and Order.

Conventional conditions are written into laws that form a tenuous relationship with the Gods and their King whose earthly reign was a microcosm of the heavenly court. The development of the Code of Hamurabi and the Hebrew Torah grew out of this warrior society. The Bible also grew out of this warrior culture. Some of our discomfort with certain warrior like psalms is a reflection of that surrounding culture. The later psalms evolved into a wisdom that sought to subvert such oppressive systems and their impact on personal morality and values. A spiritual counter-culture rooted in wisdom, mercy and justice came to flower in various regions the globe from about 500BCE. Despite this new Axial age consciousness our world was still caught in the grip of a warrior mentality. There is a classic book by Anthony Jay that shows how warrior culture is still embedded in many of the corporate management systems and competitive practices of modern business.

I don't know how many of you watch the TV series, The Good Wife. The main character Alicia Florrick must struggle with the contradictions a large law firm to realize GOOD outcomes for her clients. In conversation with one of the partners, Will Gardner, she discovers that her firm's efforts to defend a Chinese dissident was actually motivated by hidden, self-serving motives. The defendant was only a pawn in a much more sinister game. She had thought that the firm had taken on the case based on a commitment to do the right thing. Will tells her that there is no such thing as a pure motive (to do the right thing). For him all humans and their systems are motivated by ulterior motives directed to self- serving ends.

The Gods of Competitive power must be appeased with increasing corporate profits. The innocents like the defendant are sacrificed to garner the Warrior God's favour. Mammon, by the way, is a Warrior God. The ancient Creation Myth that undergirds this kind of culture portrays human beings as created out of the body of a slain god.

¹ The question uses "we" instead of "I" because relationships formed the context for the basic existential questions.

Who are we in this picture?? We are slaves born of violence to do violence. We are not to be trusted. We are creatures of deception and can do no good because it is not in our nature.

While the bible arose out of a warrior culture its creation story gives a very different message with a very different understanding of human origins. In Genesis Chaos is not the enemy. The good Creator calls forth a good world out of chaos and imprints the divine image in core of that creation. Humans are not the slaves of the Warrior god's military maneuvers we are the stewards of an abundant garden in which we rejoice. God's moral order flows naturally from Goodness at the core of created existence.

Today's gospel reading comes at the end of a rich offering of Jesus' moral teaching. All of Jesus moral teaching is grounded in the fundamental affirmation that creation is good and that human beings are essentially good as God is good. Many of us have encountered the finger- pointing preacher who is the mouthpiece of a punitive God figure. As good old Archie Bunker put it when he saw anyone acting out of line: *God 'ill get you for that!* This is a tradition that lays down moral imperatives as a way of keeping our chaotic natures in line. It is a scapegoat system of self- protection from the wrath of a warrior god who presides over a domination system. Many see morality as a "Lord, Lord" proposition. It is based on fear and the frantic desire to join those in the kingdom's drivers seat without any perception of what the kingdom really is.

Instead of doing the loving will of a loving God who truly knows who that we are essentially good we indulge in rituals sacrifices and solemn assemblies aimed at covering our pitiful posteriors. The Good news has escaped us. Trapped in the programmes of the false self we operate free of any sense of mutual concern or responsibility.

Wall street bankers had no sense that their 2009 decision to collectively pay themselves a record \$140 billion seemed in any way perverse, given that they had just brought the world economy to its knees.

"Many in the elite have seemed determined to shake off any responsibility for the 2008 financial meltdown. I am not just talking about those who directly engineered it, but also those who dismantled the regulatory walls or who simply encouraged the culture of greed that brought it about. By the beginning of 2009 the only things scarcer than jobs for the masses were *mea culpas* from the elite." (McQuaig and Brooks).

It is also worth noting that while the courts are full of those accused of petty theft, not one person responsible for the meltdown have been charged. The justice system seems to be without a mechanism to deal with crimes of such elites. Could it be that in these matters nothing morally better is expected??

Jesus' moral teaching is offered precisely because we are capable of better. His ethical framework is not a system of condemnation of an evil humanity. Following the freedom of Torah wisdom, Jesus teaches the moral options of personal choice and communal peace because he knows we are, at core, good. If we were beyond redemption why bother in the first place.

It is often said that modern society has lost its moral compass. Dambisa Moyo's book, *How the West was Lost* gives ample evidence of this. The loss of moral compass is always preceded by the lost understanding who and whose we really are.

In my book *LifeLines* I prefaced my poetry with these wonderful lines by Rumi.

*Once you get hold of selflessness,
You'll be dragged from your ego
and freed from many traps.
Come, return to the root of the root of your Self.*

*You are born from the children of God's creation,
but you have fixed your sight too low.
How can you be happy?
Come, return to the root of the root of your Self>*

*You were born from a ray of God's majesty
and have the blessings of a good star.
Why suffer at the hands of things that do not exist?
Come, return to the root of the root of your Self.*

*You are a ruby embedded in granite.
How long will you pretend it's not true?
We can see it in your eyes.
Come to the root of the root of your Self.*

Jesus taught that we must seek first the kingdom state of being and its true alignment with our merciful God and all that is true and just will fall into place. When we faithfully fulfill the heart of the law, not to justify our selves, we will discover the root of the root of ourselves.

Yeshua says,

*"Love your brother and your sister
as your very own being.
Protect them as you would the
pupil of your eye."
(Logion 25—the gospel of Thomas)*

This is how the kingdom is entered and the peace is won.