

Sermon on the Second Sunday in Lent  
St. James Episcopal Church  
San Francisco, California  
March 4, 2007  
by The Rev. Mary Moore Gaines

Genesis 15:1-12,17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3:12- 4:1; Luke 13:31-35

My reflection today is the second in a two part series. The first was last Sunday. The text was the story of Jesus' time in the wilderness immediately following his baptism where he was led or driven by the Spirit, accompanied by wild beasts and ministered to by angels. For forty days and forty nights he did not eat or drink while the devil tempted him with the lure of personal power.

The invitation last Sunday was to the observation of a holy Lent in new and deeper ways through our own personal wilderness experience. Going into the wilderness is a metaphor for exploring the unconscious side of one's personality. The conscious mind is but the tip of the iceberg.

In scripture, in life and in the psychology of Carl Jung there are two sides to everyone's personality. There is the conscious side that we show to the world which Jung called our *persona*. Then there is the unconscious side that is hidden, usually even from ourselves. Jung called this the *shadow*.

I suggested a number of ways to get in touch with your unconscious. Quiet time. Meditation. Prayer. Yoga. Solitude. Dreams. Spiritual reading. Spiritual direction. Spiritual friendship. Journaling. These are a few which have stood the test of time.

Then I spoke about how the numerous references to the devil or Satan, the personification of evil in the New Testament, are the biblical example of our attempt to project evil out of ourselves onto an 'other.' The reality of life is that good and evil are not always so far apart. Sometimes we don't know where the good is and where the evil is.

Last Sunday I closed with two examples. In the film *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Nikos Kazantzakis declares, "Someone came. Surely it was God, God . . . or was it the devil? Who can tell them apart? They exchange faces; God sometimes becomes all darkness, the devil all light, and the mind of man is left in a muddle."

A current and powerful example of this muddle is Clint Eastwood's film, *Letters from Iwo Jima*.

When and if you are embarking on your own wilderness experience, your personal journey into your unconscious, be prepared. Be prepared for strong emotions, your own. Be prepared to discover and make friends with your shadow, the wild animals of your personality. Be prepared also to be ministered to by angels, 'the grace and consolation of the Holy Spirit.'

We have to be oh so careful about the implications of the terms we use. In our tradition and our theology, light is good. Darkness is bad. Hence, our assumption that whatever is in our shadow, our unconscious, our dark side, is our 'bad' side.

Kazantzakis challenges this assumption. Listen again: "They exchange faces; God sometimes becomes all darkness, the devil all light, and the mind of man is left in a muddle."

Often the most energetic, the most passionate, the most real aspects of our personality are pushed into our shadow, because we, and/or society, feel that they are somehow unsuitable, don't fit the stereotype. Traditionally for women – assertiveness, intelligence, anger. For men – gentleness, kindness, fear, pain.

In our Christian tradition, man is associated with light – the mind, the spirit, higher things while woman is associated with dark – the body, the flesh, earthy things. In our tradition, woman is associated with the temptress Eve. Eve became the personification of evil. Mary became the symbol of female purity, up on a pedestal, out of reach. Theologically this translated into the Doctrine of Original Sin, the Doctrines of the Virgin birth and the Immaculate Conception and the required vow of celibacy for Roman Catholic priests. The Church Fathers feared the power of the feminine and were determined to keep it subjugated.

We are still struggling with this aspect of our institutional shadow. Several members of the gathering in Dar Es Salaam a week ago would not sit with or receive communion with our Presiding Bishop because she is a woman.

*Call to Question*, the spiritual memoir of Joan Chittister, a Benedictine sister, best-selling author and lecturer is a powerful invitation to look into the center of our own souls, name our questions about God and life, admit the worst, and pursue the best – even when we are unsure where that pursuit will take us. The subtext is the deep pain Chittister has experienced and continues to experience as a Roman Catholic woman.

Another aspect of our personal and institutional shadow is violence. Jesus taught 'love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Do not return violence with more violence, but 'turn the other cheek.' Early Christians were not even allowed to serve in the army. Constantine made Christianity the religion of the empire in the 4<sup>th</sup> century and from then on, continuing today, Jesus' teachings have been sorely challenged by the very real temptations of social, political and religious power. Mostly we have succumbed to these temptations.

Concerning light and dark. Deeply embedded in our country's shadow are both our treatment of native Americans whom we slaughtered as deemed necessary to establish "One nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all," and our treatment of black Americans with slavery thriving in our midst while we proclaimed that "All men are created equal and entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." White is good.

Dark, or ‘colored,’ is bad.

This struggle continues. Our racism is very often unconscious as we earnestly try to respond to Jesus’ teaching to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Hence the invitation and the urgency of the journey into our unconscious.

In an article “Expensive Ghosts: How Did We Get To This Point?” James Hollis writes about our resistance to this interior journey. “It is quite natural to cling to the known world and fear the unknown. We all do – even as that crevice between the false self and the natural self grows ever greater within, and the old attitudes more and more ineffectual.”

“Most of us live our lives backing into the future, making the choices of each new moment from the data and agenda of the old – and then we wonder why repetitive patterns turn up in our lives. Our dilemma was best described by the Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard when he noted in his journal the paradox that life must be remembered backward but lived forward. . . . For those willing to stand in the heat of this transforming fire, the second half of life provides a shot at getting themselves back again.”

Hollis continues, “The second half of life is a continuing dialectical encounter with divergent truths, truths that are generally quite difficult to bring into consciousness until we are forced to do so. These truths include the recognition that this is *our* life, not someone else’s, that after our thirtieth birthday we alone are responsible for how it turns out, that we are here but a fleeting instant in the spinning shuttle of eternity, and that there is a titanic struggle going on within each one of us for the sovereignty of the soul.”

“To grasp this reality, live with it, accept its summons is already to enlarge the frame of reference through which we see life. No matter how humble our circumstances, it is necessary for us to step out onto center stage, where large issues are at stake and where we are involved in a divine drama.”

To close, Vaclav Havel’s compelling invitation. His poem, “It is I who must begin . .

Once I begin, once I try –  
here and now,  
right where I am,  
not excusing myself  
by saying that things  
would be easier elsewhere,  
without grand speeches and  
ostentatious gestures,  
but all the more persistently  
- to live in harmony  
with the ‘voice of Being,’ as I  
understand it within myself  
- as soon as I begin that,

I suddenly discover, to my surprise, that  
I am neither the only one,  
nor the first,  
nor the most important one  
to have set out  
upon that road. . . .

Whether all is really lost  
or not depends entirely on  
Whether or not I am lost . . .

AMEN.