

The Church of the Good Shepherd
The Rev. Christine Love Mendoza
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – July 7, 2019
Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Humans are meaning-makers. Throughout human civilization and culture, probably the most common thread that connects humanity across vastly different cultures, geography, and time is this fundamental need to make meaning of all that is truly important: the meaning of life and death; the meaning of our individual places within creation; the meaning of being human.

And across all cultures and times we have found that concrete language just isn't quite sufficient when trying to wrestle with these questions of ultimate truth. It often feels thin and brittle and we are left with the suspicion that there is much, much more that is left hidden. This is why humans have always relied on mythology to reveal this greater depth of meaning.

The word "myth" is now understood to refer to a story that is made up, that is not true - Oh, that's just a myth, we say. But that is not how human cultures have thought of it throughout time. Rather than being not true (or not rational and literally true in a proven and repeatable sense), myths speak to truth that is greater than our ability to describe it. They transcend our rational understanding and, because of this, myths are robust enough to take on the biggest human concerns like love, death, suffering, and God. Myths reveal the great Truth that lies behind and underneath what we can capture with our concrete language.

Myths come from the same mysterious land as dreams in that they emerge from the collective unconscious of humanity.¹ As Richard Rohr, Benedictine priest and writer, describes it, "Our myths are stories or images that are not always true in particular but entirely true in general – they are usually not historical fact, but invariably they are spiritual genius. They hold life and death, the explainable and unexplainable together as one; they hold together the paradoxes that the rational mind cannot process by itself."² In this way, myths give deep meaning and pull us into what Rohr calls "deep time," which encompasses all time, past and future, geological and cosmological.

Renowned mythologist, Joseph Campbell, often taught of the Hero's Journey. Repeated in various forms but with different symbols, Campbell found what he called the "monomyth of the hero" to be present throughout the world's mythologies. The pattern of the heroic journey is pretty consistent and roughly follow these five stages.³ First, the heroes live in a world that they take at face value. They may be uncomfortable in this world in some way – they may experience a sense of restlessness – but they assume the world to be true and sufficient. They are often a prince or princess, or of some divine origin, which they know nothing about.

Second, the heroes then have the call or the courage to leave home for an adventure of some type. They are called to go out and beyond their comfort zone. Often, they don't even know what they are to accomplish or why they are called.

Third, while on this adventure, they find the problem they are to solve. They are often wounded in some way, physically or emotionally, and encounter a major dilemma. The great realization later is that this wound becomes the key thing that changes them dramatically.

Fourth, this task or problem, which the heroes think is the *only* task, turns out to be only the warm-up to prepare the heroes for the "real" task. And in this work, they discover their "real life," which lies hidden underneath the appearances of their life situation. Like a deep underground river, this real life reveals their true identity and life sourced here is rich and meaningful, irrespective of

¹ Rohr, Richard; *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*. Jossey-Bass, 2011, San Francisco; p. XXX

² Ibid, p.XXX

³ Ibid, pp. 18-19

the everyday events on the surface of life.⁴

Fifth, and most importantly, the heroes then return home. Heroes are sent out and they journey in foreign lands, and then they must return to where they started. But they return home transformed people who bring to their communities the blessings of their experience of new life. With this, they are generative people, renewing and healing the community.

Our scriptures are full of heroes and those who embark on the hero's journey. Starting with Adam and Eve, Jacob, Joseph, Samuel, David, and so on, we find this journey played out over and over. Being called and sent out – this leaving of home and the familiar – is the first sign of the hero's journey. Think of Yahweh's words to Abraham and Sarah (one of the greatest calling and sending stories in our scriptures): "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." God not only calls them from home and the familiar, he sends them out and doesn't even tell them where they will be going. Just go! These heroes were sent on their personal journeys, and they returned home transformed – ready and able to do the work God had given them to do.

Our Gospel lesson today is a sending story – a hero's journey of sorts. The great narrative pivot in Luke's gospel occurred in last Sunday's lesson. Jesus has "set his face" to Jerusalem and all that awaits there: betrayal, trial, crucifixion, and death. He informs those who wish to follow him that the journey will be difficult – one relying on God's grace and the hospitality of others.

And in our lesson today, Jesus commissions seventy of his disciples in mission. These apostles are sent ahead of Jesus into the towns to prepare the way for him. Their mission is to preach, teach, and heal, and they are given the same authority as Jesus for these ministries. They are also given the power to extend God's peace – this peace is representative of the kingdom of God, the salvation that is *shalom*, or wholeness and restoration.

Now, these apostles had already begun their hero's journey some time back. Little is known of these unnamed seventy, but we can presume a few things. They had probably lived in some village or city in Galilee and had ordinary lives in a world they understood. They probably lived with the usual afflictions, sufferings, and surprising but fleeting joys that mark the human condition. Then this mysterious healer, teacher, and wonderworker bursts in on their lives and they found they were called to leave their homes, families, and lives behind and to follow him. They are shown a new life, life that they never knew existed, being lived within this Jesus. And now they are being sent out ahead of him to spread his message and mission.

Even though Jesus grants them the power and authority to do the work given to them, they must have been a little hesitant to embark on this mission. They must have wondered how in the world would they be able to heal, cast out demons, and extend God's salvific peace. Luke doesn't let us follow them and hear the whole story, but we are told that they returned successful. Filled with joy, they returned to Jesus and his gathered followers to report, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" To their surprise, this generative and powerful abundance of new life found within Jesus was also found deep within *themselves*. And through this experience, they are given a vision of their true identity as children of God and missionaries of the good news of God in Christ – their true life that lay underneath their life circumstances.

Now, lest we get too comfortable here, let me tell you that the hero's journey is not only for those larger-than life figures found in scripture. Nor is the hero's journey reserved for those few others we speak of nowadays as heroes, who we hear of doing some great deed or accomplishing something previously thought impossible. No, heroes are found all around us.

We are all heroes because we are all called and sent out on the journey – for most of us multiple times. We are called to the hero's journey that leads to our transformation and the realization of our true and abundant *life* that flows underneath our life circumstances. *That* life found within Jesus may also be found within us. *That* life is the kingdom of God. *That* life is where

⁴ Ibid, p. 19

we may experience salvation, restoration, and wholeness *now*, even as we await the age to come.

This hero's journey begins with our birth into the world – as it also begins with our birth into the church through our baptism. The church says that through the waters of baptism, we share in Christ's death and his resurrection. It is through these same waters that we begin this great journey into the real and abundant life found in Christ. And after we return home, we will find that we will be called to embark on yet another journey, another mission into the unknown, as we are also presented with this heroic question: "What are you going to do with your now resurrected life?"⁵ The harvest is plentiful and the journeying never ends.

Amen.

⁵ (Rohr, 2011, p. 21)