

“Blessed Are the Meek”

Rev. Nancy Landauer

11/13 /2011

In the movie, Camelot, and I’m going way back here, but King Arthur’s illegitimate son Mordred sings a song called the seven deadly virtues. Mordred sings it’s not the earth that the meek inherit, it’s the dirt. Whether we live in our modern era or medieval times or back in Jesus’ day or even back in the days of King David, we find it hard to argue with that. Our culture worships power. Literally, if you watch the news and read a newspaper just occasionally you can’t help but come to the conclusion that the whole earth belongs to those who take it by force. Meek means weak in our culture. We don’t teach our children to be meek. We take them to karate lessons and give them GI Joe toys. A meek child, boy or girl may mean they come home from school all beaten up, no matter how much of an upscale neighborhood you live in.

We don’t admire meekness in business; we only admire tough minded competition in the free market. We worship power in all its forms, in status, in money, and in military strength. We are attracted to powerful cars. Why buy a 4 cylinder when there is a 6 cylinder available? We buy more engine power than we need and shell out money for the largest SUV or truck or hummer. The more gas and electricity we use the better. We worship at the altar of the information super highway and its ever increasing speed and super volume. My growing colleremote controls don’t have on and off buttons, they have power buttons. Now I’m not going to ask you to raise you hands, but how many of you have argued with your spouse or partner over who gets to control the remote? Don’t tell me, I don’t want to know. All I’m saying is some years ago when my

husband was alive someone was over at our house and asked me why we had two remotes to the TV and the vcr and the dvd, one set on each side of the couch. I didn't comment then and I'm not going to comment now. I'm just saying, "think about it." It feels good to be the one exercising the power buttons. Nobody wants to be meek.

There are only two people in the whole Bible described as being meek. Moses and Jesus. I never think of either one of them as being meek. After all, Moses killed a man who was abusing a Hebrew slave. He ran away and hid in the wilderness. God called him to lead the Hebrews out of slavery. He answered the call and led his people, those people who were no people for 40 years of nomadic wandering in the desert. Why does the Bible call him meek? In the book of Numbers chapter 12:3 the bible translation in the King James version says that *Moses was very meek ... above all who were on the face of the earth*. In Hebrew, the word used is *Anav*. Hebrew words usually have a subtle range of meaning depending on how they are used in the sentence. *Anav* can mean humble or humbly devout. The *anavim* is the plural of the word and it always refers to the poor; those who have no status in the world. The Hebrews were 'no people' until Moses led them out of Egypt and God called them into being as a nation. Moses embodied this concept. He was the leader of the people who were no people. He was the meekest and humblest of them all.

Jesus also refers to himself in this way. In Matthew 11:29 Jesus says, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am meek and lowly in heart." Another translation says gentle but strong. According to some scholars it suggests that Jesus is strong, but it is a strength that is under control of the gentle spirit of God.

My sister gave me a wonderful Christmas present this year. It is a picture that I put up on the easel. The painting is by a woman called Mayumi Odo who lives in Marin County. She is a Buddhist and she often paints whimsical little goddesses that come from Buddhist stories. There is an old story and an often painted picture of a little boy with a stick who is grazing the huge ox. Sometimes the tiny boys are standing next to the huge ox and sometimes the boy is riding gently on the ox. Mayumi has transformed the little ox herder into a young goddess riding the back of an ox, but it is the same idea. The ox is our idea of tremendous strength, yet this ox has become gentle so that even the youngest child or smallest goddess can ride on its back. The strength of the ox has become gentled by the spirit of God. This I think is the concept that Jesus is trying to explain in this beatitude. Just because the ox is gentle, it has not lost its power. Look at the knowing eye of that ox. The ox has come under the gentle control of the little goddess. People all have energy and intelligence and ability. We do truly have power, but only when we put our power under the guidance of God, are we able to enter into the community of heaven, God's kingdom here on earth.

How does that work? How do we use our power for the good of the kingdom, when every culture is based on a hierarchy of the powerful at the top? Are we to avoid using ambition and energy and talent that God gave us? No, Jesus tells us, use your talents, but let them be gently guided by God.

If you would, let's take a few minutes. If you would, close your eyes and imagine that you are a horse, a beautiful horse, what color are you? What are your hooves like? There is a gentle tug on the reins. Where is the Spirit trying to lead you? You feel a soft nudge on your side. To what areas in life are you being gently nudged? Perhaps you still

feel a need to buck. Where in your life do you want to ignore the soft tug of the rein and speed away in your own direction? Take a deep breath and then slowly come back from your meditation.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that if someone hits us on the right cheek we must turn the other cheek to be hit as well. That would be an example of following meekness. How can that be? Which one of us would tolerate being hit, without in some way holding the other person accountable? Either hitting back or going to the police or in some way calling for help? What is Jesus telling us to do? During the first century the left hand was only used for unclean tasks. If I am going to hit your right cheek, then I must hit you with the back of my right hand. In the first century this was not only physically harsh it was humiliating. A back handed slap was a serious insult and it was used as a way to keep inferiors in line. Jesus suggested that if someone insulted you with a backhanded slap, and then turns another cheek so that the person must give you an open handed slap. By turn the right cheek you are giving notice that you refuse to be insulted. When someone is forced to hit you with the openhanded slap they acknowledge that you are a person of equal worth. Being meek is like using non violence. It is a subversive way to response and a way to demand respect.

This idea was not new with Jesus, Psalm 37 that we read this morning also expresses the idea. Psalm 37 states that those who are wicked will disappear like smoke. Those who have been humiliated will be vindicated by the noonday day sun. Also, the beatitude is set in the future. The meek will inherit the earth. Ambition and wealth will pass away. Those who are humble and follow the spirit of the Lord will in the future inherit the land. Those who trust will inherit the earth in joyful abandon. After

all, the earth is not really subject to deeds and property titles, fences and walls, the earth belongs to God and is free for everyone to enjoy with joyful abandon.

A forest ranger once said in a talk that if you quiet your spirit when you walk in the woods, if you take up no more physical or spiritual space than you need, if you are respectful and alert to the life and plants around you, then the earth and the animals will recognize you as one of their own and treat you accordingly.

Those who already live by the principles of God's gentleness already live in the kingdom, but there is also a future sense about this beatitude. It hints at something we can only imagine. Can we imagine an earth ruled by humble and meek people? Can we imagine a world where each creature is strong, clear minded and gently led by God's spirit. That would be the fullness of joy of God's kingdom. Amen