

There's No Place Like Home
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Sunshine Cathedral January 18th, 2009
Deut. 30.11-14; 1 Cor. 10.1-4; Thomas 2-3, 5

My great-aunt Gladys' favorite movie was The Wizard of Oz. When I came out to her, she surprised me by saying, "Thank God!" I said, "Thank God? That's not the reaction I suspected from the news that I'm gay." She said, "Well, it's good news for me; as long as I have a gay nephew I'll never have to watch the Wizard of Oz alone." And she was right.

Now there are several reasons why someone like me would find The Wizard of Oz so appealing. First of all, Dorothy's idea of utopia would be a world over the Rainbow! Well, not only is the Rainbow a symbol of shamanistic importance in my tribe, but it is actually one of the biblical images for God. The prophet Ezekiel described his vision of the Divine by saying, "Like the bow which appears in the clouds on a rainy day was the splendor that surrounded the Holy One; such was the vision of the likeness of God's Glory" (Ez. 1.28). Well, if Dorothy Gale doesn't have me at hello, she certainly has me at Rainbow.

Secondly, there is the matter of her traveling companions. Once in Oz, she goes on a journey and meets a brainless scarecrow, a heartless tin woodcutter, and a cowardly lion (Brainless, Heartless, and Gutless...I dated each of them).

What always fascinated me about her companions were the affectations shared by two of them.

I'm sure you remember the Tin Man pining:

I'd be tender - I'd be gentle and awful sentimental/Regarding Love and Art./I'd be friends with the sparrows ... and the boys who shoot the arrows/If I only had a heart.

Well, if for some reason the softer side of Mr. Tin escaped your notice, you were bound to catch a clue with the lion:

Yeah, it's sad, believe me, Missy, When you're born to be a sissy/Without the vim and verve./But I could show all my prowess, be a lion not a mou-ess/If I only had the nerve.

If he's not, I'm not!

So, maybe it was sheer familiarity that drew me to the Land of Oz. But over the years, each time I would enter that magical world, I would experience something increasingly profound. There was a message in that story – a message that felt very much like good news. And that's really the point of all this today.

You see, Dorothy runs away from home. Auntie Em was not attentive to her. She felt alone, orphaned, raised by relatives and farm hands who undoubtedly cared for her deeply; but if she needed them to make her feel whole inside, they simply couldn't. No one can give us our dignity; it's part of us and it is our job to discover it. If we expect others to make us feel good enough, we are certain to experience disappointment.

In her disappointment, Dorothy acts out. There is this particularly unpleasant neighbor, Miss Gulch. And for some reason, Dorothy insists on walking her dog Toto, without a leash, near cranky Miss Gulch's house. Toto invariably gets into Miss Gulch's garden and Miss Gulch responds with all the hatefulness she can muster. Finally, when Toto winds up snapping at Miss Gulch, she takes legal action and Dorothy decides the world is against her...family, neighbors, nobody cares. So she runs away from home.

Soon she returns home, but more out of fear or guilt than joy or gladness, and a storm is brewing. Dorothy is caught up in her story, her drama, her storm, and loses consciousness...is unable to see things as they are, or even as they could be. When she wakes up, or when she thinks she wakes up, her life is spiraling out of control and it finally lands in a dream world of her own making. We never want to think we've contributed to our own reality, but usually we

have; and that's good news because it means we can make different choices and improve our experience!

In her dream world, Dorothy encounters a poisonous poppy field, a power-hungry sorceress, an unwelcoming forest, a Wizard who is really a liar and a fraud, and other challenges. When we get stuck in our story of victimization and self-pity, the monsters are plentiful and always willing to validate our misery. BUT – Dorothy also encounters the angelic Glinda, and the three friends we've mentioned already. There is always the voice of enlightenment calling us to wake up from the nightmare and to take responsibility for our own lives.

Well, Glinda tells Dorothy to follow her path, her true nature, the yellow brick road. It's on that road that she finds not only challenges, but also friends to stand in solidarity with her. She isn't alone and she finds she is quite capable of navigating the challenges in life, especially with other people who are honestly seeking their highest good.

She is sent on her journey with a chant, "Follow the yellow brick, follow the yellow brick road." Easily enough turned into an affirmation, "I will follow the yellow brick road." A positive statement of hope and encouragement repeated over and over until its power penetrates her consciousness is what sends her on a journey toward enlightenment and empowerment.

In the end, we learn that the brainless scarecrow is no such thing. He has always had all the intelligence he could ever need; he just didn't believe it. Once he does, it's magically there for him.

The tin woodman and the lion, or as I like to think of them, the couple, also get good news. The tin man discovers that he had never been heartless. He only needed to accept the divine quality of love that has been part of him from the start; likewise, the cowardly lion realizes that within him is a reserve of courage and strength that he could have called on at anytime. They each are already the thing they have been seeking; the journey was what it took to get them to discover the truth of who they have always been.

What Dorothy wanted was a way home. Finally, Glinda tells her that she has the ability to get home. She's always had the ability. She can click her heels three times (that sacred number three...Mind/Idea/Expression; Thinker/Thought/Action; Positive Thoughts/Healthy Attitude/Balanced Living; Spirit/Mind/Body; Love/Wisdom/Joy; Presence/Principle/Power; Creator/Redeemer/Sustainer...She can tap into the wholeness that Three symbolizes while affirming a positive statement...there's no place like home, there's no place like home, there's no place like home.

The Scarecrow wonders why Glinda didn't just tell Dorothy she had this amazing power to begin with. Glinda says, "Because she wouldn't have believed me. She had to learn it for herself."

Dorothy just has to hold a clear intention, support it with positive speech, thoughts and actions, and not try to control how it comes about. By being at once optimistic about the possibilities and at the same time detached from the outcome, by holding her intention deliberately and yet also gently, Dorothy discovers she has the power to accomplish almost anything. And she magically wakes up at home. She's happy now where she had been miserable, because she's learned the utopian home she dreamed of is really right where she is; in fact, it's who she is.

That's the story of The Wizard of Oz. It mirrors a Hindu myth that tells us that humans have always had divine potential, but the deities didn't trust them with it; so they decided to hide the divine spark in the one place most humans would never think to look for it...within their own hearts.

And that's the message of our readings today. The non-canonical Gospel of Thomas says, "don't look in the sky or the sea for the experience of God; it's inside you and all around you." St. Paul seems to concur: In the Hebrew Bible, there is a story of a rock that produced water

during a time of need. A Talmudic legend developed that the Rock must have followed the Israelites around for 40 years which is how they survived in the wasteland for so long. St. Paul mentions that legend when he says, "Our ancestors ALL ate the same spiritual food and drank from the same spiritual rock." The divine presence was with them at all times. Paul calls that divine, nurturing presence, Christ.

The writer of Deuteronomy also says, "This isn't too difficult to comprehend. The Word of God is not in the heavens and it's not across the sea. The divine Idea is already in you, part of you...it's in your heart."

What we all want is to feel at home; but what we must remember, is that home, the nurturing Presence of God, is within us. We are part of it; we're made in that divine image, we are filled with that divine Energy. The home we long for is right where we are; it's WHO we are! No one can give it to us, because we've never been without it. We just need to discover and embrace it.

The Sunshine Cathedral is a community that encourages our journeys and offers us companions on the way...on the yellow brick road to discovery and enlightenment and joy. We support this home with our prayers, our positive attitudes, and with our time, talent, and treasure; and in turn this home brings us together to share our energy with one another and to remind us that our real home is God, and God is always with us, within us, expressing as us. This is the good news. Amen.

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**God's presence is near.
God's presence is at hand.
God's presence is in my heart.
In God's presence all is well.
I am whole, hopeful, and full of joy.
And so it is!
Amen.**

"True happiness is not the absence of suffering: You cannot have day after day of clear skies. True happiness lies in building a self that stands dignified and indomitable. Happiness doesn't mean having a life free from all difficulties, but that whatever difficulties arise...you can summon up the unflinching courage and conviction to...overcome them." – Woody Hochswender, et al. (*The Buddha in Your Mirror*)