

Sermon  
Epiphany 6-C  
St. Andrew's, Methuen  
February 13, 2022  
William Bradbury

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Psalm 1

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

Luke 6:17-26

Back in 2007 at Grace, New Bedford, the oldest youth group came over to the rectory to eat pizza and watch a movie they had picked out called *Click* starring Adam Sandler. It's a morality tale about what happens when we get exactly what we think we want.

Michael Newman is a promising architect working ridiculous hours which keep him from his wife and kids that he loves. One evening at home he gets frustrated dealing with all his different remote controls —one for the tv, one for the sound system, one for the fan, on and on.

So he goes to buy a universal remote that will control all the gadgets in his house.

At *Bed, Bath, and Beyond* the clerk directs him to a hallway that has a sign over it that reads, "Way Beyond". There he meets a wild man who sells him a Universal Remote that allows Sandler to control the universe—or at least his part of it.

He finds that when his wife is nagging him, he can just hit the mute button and he can no longer hear her, or he can hit the fast forward button to speed through a tongue lashing by his demanding boss.

**He uses the Universal Remote to control anything his ego wants.**

The end result is that Michael gets the big promotion he wants but loses his wife and kids in the process. **His personal universe falls apart even though he is trying to control the whole thing.**

There are a number of ways we might suggest for Michael to find healing, but we assume the most important is to get rid of the Universal Remote, but that just puts him back into his former frustrated life where his ego continues to try to control his universe.

The typical religious strategy would be to submit to God's Law which usually means to follow the Ten Commandments and be a moral person.

This is what churches normally tell their kids to do, but when they become teenagers they realize the limits of the ego following the Law, which

Paul describes in Romans 7: "the good I want to do I can't do. The evil I don't want to do I do." Romans 7

To find healing we must finally face the powerlessness of trying hard, and begin the necessary journey beyond the ego into the depths of oneself and the depths of God—which is to say we need a better image than that of using the ego as a remote-control device to fix our lives.

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 Our readings from Jeremiah and Psalm 1 give us one such image:  
 "Blessed are those who trust in the Lord. They shall be like a tree  
 planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream."

Jeremiah 17: 7-8a

Blessedness comes when we are willing to stop living on the surface of life and to enter the hidden depths where we find the Living Waters of God.

Nothing can destroy those who find these depths—as Jesus says in the Luke: not poverty or hunger or sorrow or hatred can separate us from the experience of God's realm.

But if we live on the surface of things, avoiding the depths, then we may find riches, fullness, laughter, and the approval of others for a time, but soon enough our lives will wither and die.

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**Another image that means a lot to me is the image of a human being as a child riding an elephant.**

The child represents our small and immature egos. The elephant represents the larger part of ourselves—the unconscious part that beats our hearts, breathes our lungs, and runs all our other autonomous systems. The elephant is also where our emotions, feelings and various drives live. The elephant that we are riding is also that deep place from which come our truest dreams.

When the child ignores the elephant, the child can't understand why life is so difficult. When the child fights the elephant, like a man beating his dog, a split develops, leaving us in a broken relationship with ourselves and with life.

That's why just trying to be religious on the outside doesn't lead to wholeness. For instance, the people of the U.S. claim to be the most religious and moral people in the world, yet we have locked up a higher percentage of our population than any other developed nation.

**That is, we use our religion, like Michael uses the Universal Remote, not for self-knowledge, but for control.**

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**On the other hand, when the child befriends the elephant,** his deepest self, learning its needs and listening to its guidance, we are also connecting with the Creator and growing toward integration and wholeness.

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To keep this image of the child riding an elephant in mind, years ago I bought a tiny wooden elephant in an Asian shop and put it on a table in my study that serves as a home altar. Opposite the elephant I have a tiny statue of a man meditating. Above both I have a crucifix and icons of Christ.

Taken together—the meditating man and the elephant sitting in the presence of Christ—they are an ongoing reminder to me that a full human being is both child and elephant living together in Christ.

As Saint Irenaeus puts it: “The glory of God is man/woman fully alive.”

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Michael has a Universal Remote that controls others, at the expense of knowing his True self.

**It’s why Jesus tells us to first take the beam from our own soul before we go around trying to fix others.**

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In his classic spiritual memoir, Confessions, the great Augustine of Hippo, 5<sup>th</sup> century Bishop and Saint, writes how he and his buddies one day steal pears from a neighbor’s tree, not because they are hungry, but because they are lured by the superficial thrill of stealing.

As a grown man of faith Augustine comes to a deeper understanding of his life when he writes:

**“Late have I loved you,  
O Beauty ever ancient, ever new,  
late have I loved you!  
You were within me, but I was outside,  
and it was there that I searched for you.  
In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you  
created.**

**You were with me, but I was not with you.  
Created things kept me from you;  
yet if they had not been in you, they would not have been at  
all.**

**You called, you shouted, and you broke through my  
deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness.  
You breathed your fragrance on me;  
I drew in breath and now I pant for you.  
I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more.**

**You touched me, and I burned for your peace.”**

Confessions (X, 27)

Amen.