

First United Methodist Church-Omaha
Dr. Jane Florence
May 12, 2013
Sermon Title: "Scotty and Mario"
Text: Gospel of Mary 9:16-29; Gospel of John 3:3, 6



Have you ever found yourself in a situation when you wanted to just say, "Beam me up, Scotty!?" I'm not a "Trekkie". I don't have a spandex Starfleet uniform. To be honest, I haven't really watched a whole episode of *Star Trek*. The catchphrase is part of our culture. In the midst of a sticky situation, when confronting hostile Klingons, Vulcans, District Superintendents or disgruntled coworkers, another way of praying, "O Lord, deliver me!" is "Beam me up, Scotty!". So far, I have yet to dissolve into a sparkling vapor and re-materialize back aboard the mother-ship, but it's a nice idea.

Wouldn't it be nice if our faith development could work like that? I've had people tell me, for example, that they were praying for patience. I think their hope was that patience would come upon them or they upon it—"Beam me up, Scotty, transport me into Patience." Sounds lovely; instead, what I experience when I pray for patience is an opportunity for me to practice patience. I find myself in a long line at the grocery store—with a checker in training and a "price check" light flashing. Or an even longer line of traffic—parked on an interstate—going nowhere anytime soon. Patience is not bestowed upon me with the push of a button or the wave of a magic wand or a call to the mother-ship.

Developing character virtues, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, self-control or "fruits of the Spirit" as the Apostle Paul called it or "going on to perfection", as John Wesley put it, is not so much a "Beam me up, Scotty" process, but rather a *Mario Brothers* endeavor.

I haven't played a video game in some time now, but when my girls were younger, we would play a bit. *Mario Brothers* came with the original Nintendo game, I think. At any rate, I learned how to make the little plumber race across the monitor, jump over gaps and even bang his head against an overhanging ledge. When I moved my thumbs appropriately, I would be rewarded in a shower of coins and delightful tune. Upon successful completion of one level, the tiny plumber would disappear and emerge on the next level with a new background with even more challenges. I believe each level took us closer and closer to the goal—helping the plumbers work their way out of the sewers beneath New York. I think that was the goal. I'm really not sure. I never made it to that "perfect" level.

It makes for an interesting juxtaposition: "Beam me up, Scotty"—transport me through a magical moment at only a word's command or must I bang my head against a brick wall in an attempt to defeat one creaturely obstacle after the next—both with goals of rising from deadly circumstances and returning upward—to a place of safety—a place of home.

Ancient peoples didn't have *Star Trek* or *Mario Brothers*, but they expressed the same theme in words and imagination and story. The human condition and the goal of our existence are often described in archetypal stories that more resembled the Italian plumbers working their way, with some success and failure, back to the surface than the sparkle of vaporized transportation.

The ancient's stories begin at our beginning with our souls emerging from the Divine. Ancient people told stories of a birthing God breathing life into being. They told stories of our souls

nursed at the Divine bosom, feeding upon the essence of holy life. They told stories of the Divine shaping us, molding us, creating our trueness, creating our very being in God's own image. Holy and sacred, sparkling with the dust of long-dead stars, breathed into new life each one of us birthed and treasured by God.

Then these ancients looked around this world of ours and not so much star-sparkling God-imagined creatures did they see. They told more stories—stories of our tumble from God's mothering lap, stories of our fall into slumber, stories of our forgetfulness, of our trueness; stories of our soul being tricked or deceived into turning away from God's perfection that created us; stories of us catching sight of worldly sparkle instead of stardust sparkle; stories of sensual cravings, pretty distractions deceiving us into thinking these earthy things can satisfy our longings for that which we've forgotten. Deeper and deeper we sink and wander off from home as we become more and more birthed into the physical world when we forget our origin printed in God's gracious image.

The ancients told stories, not of a plumber in the sewers of NY fighting to defeat creatures that attempt to destroy, but stories of human souls fighting that which binds and blinds and destroys. They told stories.

The Soul went upward. On each level she faced a new challenge that attempted to chain her. Darkness kept her eyes from seeing, shrouded her face—covered her eyes. But walking in the way of Darkness was not to be her destiny, for the Light within overcomes Darkness of the world. On the next level, her challenge drew stronger. For when her eyes were open, she saw the things of this world, and Desire claimed her Soul. Desire was not alone. She brought with her companions: Greed, Jealousy, Envy. Their green eyes seduced; their flashy gowns and dripping diamonds beckoned—the "good life" tempted and flirted—teasing her to go for the gusto. Fame and fortune could be hers, they promised. But the Soul discovered Desire was never satisfied—enough was never enough—worldly sparkle soon chipped and tarnished. Desire always wanted more. The Soul banished Desire from her presence, and she ascended to the next level. There, Ignorance did his best to lure the Soul back into quiet slumber. He sang her a lullaby and told her not to concern herself, not to worry; but alas, he too fell dead when the Knowledge of Light in her "being" remained with her keeping her awake to the deception and falsehood. The Soul ascended, working her way slowly through the long upward canal of birth. But the last bit was the hardest, for there she met Wrath who held her with sevenfold powers. Anger, Resentment, Bitterness, Spite, Domination, Violence, and Rage: malevolent beings using their power in their attempt to kill the Good within. But the Soul persevered until she pronounced, "What binds me has been slain! What surrounded me has been destroyed! I was set loose from the chain of forgetfulness! In the Good, I rest in silence."

The ancients told their stories.

A Pharisee, a Jewish leader, came to Jesus by night seeking wisdom from the Teacher. Jesus answered [Nicodemus], "No one can see the Realm of God without being born anew... What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. You must be born again." *John 3:3, 6*

The ancient told their stories.

The younger son took his inheritance and traveled to a distant place, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, when he was lusting after the slop that he was feeding the pigs, "he came to himself"—he remembered he was his father's son. He journeyed back home into the arms of his Compassionate Father. *Luke 15:11*

The ancients told stories—of sheep and coins that are lost and then found, of pearls of great price that are buried within, of tiny mustard seeds and crops that grow into great bounty. The ancients told stories of new life and rebirth and being born again and resurrection and transformation. Stories of those who lose their life and find true life—of prisoners released and captives set free, and the blind seeing, and new wine poured for all.

In the Light of God's love, we knock and seek and find our way home to the place of our soul birth, to the place of our trueness, to the place of our belonging, wrapped in God's love.

May it be so.