

THE MEMO THAT STARTED IT ALL

A Sermon by the Rev. Dr. Arthur M. Suggs
Preached on Sunday, September 13, 2015

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Educating the Country on Myths: *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*

Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) was the person who educated our entire country on the notion of myths and the way in which the concept of myth *prior* to Campbell meant something that wasn't true, and *after* Campbell it meant something that, although not literally true, was actually far more true at deeper levels of the psyche.

He also coined the idea of "monomyth." That is, at root *all* stories — stories in sacred scripture, stories in novels, stories in movies, stories in magazines, stories on television, stories told over a white picket fence to our neighbor, jokes in the local barroom — absolutely all stories are basically one story, the monomyth, no matter how complex or how simple they might be.

Campbell articulated the idea of one myth, a monomyth, in a 1949 book that he wrote under the title *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. The hero being the central character of our story, whatever form it might assume, it presents not just one but a thousand different faces, a thousand different variations. In that book the author showed how, throughout the years, throughout the cultures, throughout the eons, these different stories are essentially one yarn in their twelve basic elements of construction. (Please refer to pages 3-6.)

I'm going to hone in on movies for the most part. Movies have much more commonality in our culture than novels do. For example, think of all these movies: "The Wizard of Oz"; the "Star Wars" series; the "Lord of the Rings" series; the "Harry Potter" series; "Lion King"; "Sleepless in Seattle"; "Jaws"; "Avatar"; "Message in a Bottle"; "Sea Biscuit"; "Rocky" I, II, III, IV, V, VI, and VII; "Little Mermaid"; "Raiders of the Lost Ark"; and even the "Mario Brothers" video game.

All of them and in fact all movies ever made, worldwide, share the notion of a common story, of a hero starting off, facing adventures with allies and enemies, achieving a highly sought goal, and then bringing it back to their homeland.

The Script Consultant's Mind Blows: All Stories Are One, the Monomyth

So the book dates from 1949. Somewhere between then and the late 1970's a guy by the name of Christopher Vogler read the book. He happened to have a job working for Disney Pictures as a script consultant. Then in 1977 "Star Wars" came out, and somehow something popped out from the depths within that guy. He had read the book, knew about Joseph Campbell, knew about the concept of the one story, the monomyth, and then he saw it on the big screen, almost slavishly following Camp-

bell's pattern that he had articulated in his book.

So Vogler calls a friend, and they meet in Manhattan, where they decide to spend a whole week watching movies together. His friend also worked for a movie firm, also as a script consultant. Watching movies for a week (they called it work), but then a surprising result jumped out at them. You take the book and you take "Star Wars" I, and you take a week of watching movies with your friend, and you look to see if what Campbell said in the book was true about all of these stories.

They Were Amazed! And a 7-Page Memo Shook the Hollywood World

Vogler then wrote a seven-page memo to Michael Eisner and Jeffrey Katzenberg at Disney Pictures, which became known as "The Memo." Seven pages categorizing all myths into twelve descriptive steps of progression in the story line.

Now at that time, Disney owned Hollywood Pictures and Touchstone Pictures, so this memo from the early 1980's — around then was when FAX machines had been invented — was sent out on those machines to all subsidiaries of the company, Disney Pictures, Touchstone Pictures, Hollywood Pictures, et cetera.

Vogler then gets hired by Disney to work on Lion King. With the advent of the FAX machine, the memo gets stolen by Paramount Pictures and now becomes spread around through that firm as well.

The Hero Myth Springs from Universal Sources in the Collective Unconscious

Allow me to quote from "The Memo" for a moment. I know you have no idea where

I'm going with this. I'll get there, trust me. I'm quoting from the memo from Vogler to Michael Eisner, head of Disney:

"Campbell's contribution was to gather the ideas together, recognize them, articulate them, and name them. He exposes the pattern for the first time, the pattern that lies behind every story ever told.

"In his study of world hero myths, Campbell discovered that they are all basically the same story, retold endlessly in infinite variations. He found that all storytelling, conscious or not, follows the ancient patterns of myth and that all stories, from the crudest jokes to the highest flights of fictional literature, can be understood in terms of the hero myth, the "monomyth," whose principles he lays out in the book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

"The theme of the hero myth is universal, occurring in every culture, in every time. It is as infinitely varied as the human race itself, and yet its basic form remains the same, an incredibly tenacious set of elements that spring in endless repetition from the deepest reaches of the mind of man.

"Such stories are true models of the workings of the human mind, true maps of the psyche. They are psychologically valid and realistic, even when they portray fantastic, impossible, unreal events.

"This accounts for the universal power of such stories. Stories built on the model of the hero myth have an appeal that can be felt by everyone because they spring from universal sources in the collective unconscious and because they reflect universal concerns. They deal with childlike but universal questions: Who am I? Where did I come from? Where will I go when I die? What is good, and what is evil?

“Campbell gives a condensed version of the basic hero myth in Chapter IV of his book.”

Now he’s talking to Eisner sort of as a kid at this point. He’s trying to get these high-powered CEO’s to understand what he’s talking about:

“I’ve taken the liberty of amending the outline slightly, trying to reflect some of the common themes in movies, illustrated with examples from contemporary films. I’m retelling the hero myth in my own way, and you should feel free to do the same. Every storyteller bends the myth to his or her own purpose. That’s why the hero has a thousand faces.”

The 12 Stages in the Universal Pattern Of All Stories in the Monomyth

So now I’m going to go over the 12 stages of the pattern that started with Joseph Campbell, but only up to a point because he’s drawing upon the archetypes of Carl Jung. But Campbell then articulated it into his book, picked up by scriptwriters, FAXed everywhere, and finally winding up in the hands of the CEO’s of movie production studios.

I’ll cover these stages quickly:

Stage 1. The Ordinary World

The hero, uneasy, uncomfortable, and unaware, is introduced sympathetically in his or her Ordinary World. Some kind of polarity in the hero’s life is pulling in different directions and causing stress.

Most stories ultimately take us to a Special World, but they start in an Ordinary World. Think “Wizard of Oz.” And if you’re going to tell a story about a fish out of its customary element, you have to create a contrast by showing the fish in its mundane Ordinary World.

In “Witness” you see both the Amish boy and the policeman in their Ordinary Worlds before they are thrust into alien worlds. The farm boy into the unfamiliar city, and the city cop into the unfamiliar country. In “Star Wars” you see Luke Skywalker bored to death as a farm boy before he tackles the universe.

Stage 2. The Call to Adventure

Something shakes up the situation, either from external pressures or something rising up from deep within, so the hero must face the beginnings of change. The hero is presented with a problem, an evil, a challenge, an adventure. Maybe the land is dying, as in the King Arthur stories and the search for the Holy Grail.

In “Star Wars” it’s Princess Leia’s holographic message to Obi Wan Kenobi, who then asks Luke to join the quest. In detective stories, it’s the hero being offered a challenging new case. In romantic comedies, it could be the first sight of that special but annoying someone who will be pursued by the hero or heroine.

Stage 3. Refusal of the Call

Often at this point, the hero balks at the threshold of adventure. After all, he or she is facing the greatest of all fears, the fear of the unknown. That fear may cause a temporary roadblock as he/she tries to turn away, however briefly. Alternatively, another character may express the uncertainty and danger that lie ahead.

At the point of refusal, Luke turns down Obi Wan’s call to adventure and returns to his aunt and uncle’s farmhouse, only to find they have been barbecued by the emperor’s rampaging stormtroopers. Suddenly Luke is no longer reluctant, and his fear is overwhelmed by anger and a surge of strength in his backbone. He is abruptly eager to undertake the adventure. He is now motivated.

Stage 4. Meeting with the Mentor

By this time, many stories will have introduced a Merlin-like character who is the hero's mentor, usually a wise old man or woman. The hero comes across as a seasoned traveler of the world who provides training, equipment, or advice that will help on the journey. Or the hero reaches deep within to a source of courage and wisdom.

In "Jaws" it's the crusty Robert Shaw character who knows all about sharks. After all, he was on the USS Indianapolis during WW II, when it sank and its crew suffered horrible shark attacks. In the mythology of "The Mary Tyler Moore Show," it's Lou Grant. The mentor gives advice and sometimes magical weapons. Obi Wan Kenobi gives Luke his father's light saber.

But the mentor is old and can't go on the adventure. He can only offer advice. Eventually the hero must face the unknown by himself.

Stage 5. Crossing the Threshold

The hero passes the next threshold. He/she commits to leaving the Ordinary World and enters a new region or condition with unfamiliar rules and values. The hero fully enters the Special World of the story for the first time. This is the moment in which the story really takes off and the adventure gets going. Prior to this the character development might seem a little tedious because you want to get to the action.

But you need to know who your enemies are, and you need to care. Finally Luke and friends embark on their adventure. The balloon goes up, the romance begins, the spaceship blasts off, the wagon train gets rolling. Dorothy sets out on the Yellow Brick Road. The hero is now committed to his or her journey. There's no turning back.

Stage 6. Tests, Allies, and Enemies

Here's the meat, the bulk of the story. The hero is forced to make allies and enemies in the Special World and to pass certain tests and challenges that are part of his or her training. The hero is tested and sorts out allegiances that will be useful in the Special World.

In "Star Wars" the cantina scene is the setting for the forging of an important alliance with Han Solo and the start of significant enmity with Jabba the Hutt. In "Casablanca" Rick's Café is the setting for the alliances and enmities phase, and in many Westerns it's the saloon where these relationships are tested.

Stage 7. The Approach

The hero and newfound allies prepare for major challenges in the Special World. The hero reaches the innermost cave, and here's where the Jungian archetypes come in forcefully. It's a dangerous place, often deep underground, where the object of the quest is hidden.

In the Arthurian legend, the Chapel Perilous is a dangerous chamber where the seeker finds the Holy Grail. In many myths the hero has to descend into hell to rescue a loved one or to enter a mysterious cave to fight a dragon and gain a treasure.

It's Theseus going into the Labyrinth to face the Minotaur. In "Star Wars" it's Luke and company being sucked into the Death Star, where they will rescue Princess Leia. Sometimes it's just the hero going into his/her own dream world to confront fears and overcome them.

Stage 8. The Supreme Ordeal

The hero endures a nearly inconceivable trial. This is the moment when the hero touches bottom. Near the middle of the story, he or she enters a central space in

the Special World and faces the possibility of death, brought to the brink in a fight with a mythical beast. And for us, the audience, standing outside the cave waiting for the victor to emerge, it's a black moment. Out of the moment of possible death comes a new life.

In "Star Wars" it's the harrowing moment in the bowels of the Death Star, where Luke, Leia, and company are trapped in a giant trash-masher. Luke is pulled under by the tentacled monster that lives in the sewage, and Luke is held down for so long that you thought he would die. You thought so for several agonizing seconds, and it was horrible. In "E.T., the Extraterrestrial," you might remember when E.T. is about to die on the operating table.

This is a critical moment in any story, an ordeal in which the hero appears to die but is born again. It's a major source of the magic of the hero myth. What happens is that the audience has been led to identify with the hero. We are encouraged to experience the brink-of-death feeling with the hero. We are temporarily depressed, and then we are revived upon the hero's return from possible death.

Stage 9. The Sword, the Reward

The hero seizes the thing of value — the gold, the girl, the weapon, the information that is needed. He/she takes possession of the treasure won by facing death. There may be a celebration, but there is also a danger of losing the treasure just won.

Having survived death, beaten the dragon, and slain the Minotaur, the hero now assumes ownership of the treasure that he had come to seek. Sometimes it's a special weapon like a magic sword, or it might be a token like the Holy Grail or some elixir that can heal the wounded land of the Ordinary World.

The hero may settle a conflict with his/her father or with a shadowy nemesis. In "Return of the Jedi," Luke is reconciled with both, as he discovers that the dying Darth Vader is his father and not such a bad guy after all.

Stage 10. The Road Back

The hero is not out of the woods yet because he's made many enemies in the process of attaining the goal. About three-fourths of the way through the story, the hero is driven to complete the adventure by leaving the Special World to be sure the triumphal treasure is brought home.

Often a chase scene signals the urgency and danger of the mission. Some of the best chase scenes come at this point, as the hero is pursued by the vengeful forces from whom he/she has stolen the elixir or the treasure or the mate.

In the case of "Star Wars," this is the chase scene as Luke has finally rescued Princess Leia, and they are escaping from the Death Star. She has brought with her plans on how to defeat Darth Vader.

In "E.T., the Extraterrestrial," if the hero has not yet managed to reconcile with his father or with the gods, they may come raging after him at this point. This is the moonlight bicycle flight of Elliott and E.T. as they escape from "Keys," a force representing governmental authority

Stage 11. The Resurrection

At the climax the hero is tested once more on the threshold of arriving home. He/she is about to emerge from the Special World, but first must undergo purification by sacrifice or by another moment of the potential for death and rebirth, but on a higher and more complex plane. By the hero's action, the polarities that were in conflict at the beginning are finally resolved. The hero

is transformed by the experiences in the Special World and by victory in battle.

There is often a replay here of the mock death and rebirth of Stage 8, as the hero once again faces death. All appear about to die, but once again they miraculously survive. Our hero is transformed by the experience.

Stage 12. Return with the Treasure

And then the final Stage. The hero comes back to the Ordinary World but makes it better because of what he/she has gained and what has been learned.

The adventure would be meaningless unless the hero brings back the elixir, treasure, or some lesson from the Special World. Sometimes it's just knowledge or experience. But unless the hero comes back offering some boon to mankind, he/she is doomed to repeat the adventure until the hero prevails.

Many comedies use this ending, as a foolish character refuses to learn his or her lesson and embarks on the same folly over and over again that got him in trouble in the first place, often with a lot of humor involved. Think "Groundhog Day." But they return, and they live happily ever after. The world is a better place because of the story and the adventure and the lesson. And the evil that has been conquered.

What Campbell and Vogler Did for Myth, Schaia Did for the Four Gospels

So that is Vogler's interpretation of what was in the book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, based upon Jungian psychology.

Okay, you've been very patient through so much of the trials and triumphs of the heroes. Why? Why did I bother with all of this?

What Joseph Campbell and Christopher Vogler did was to help us understand the role of story and myth in our lives and to see it portrayed in so many different ways.

What those two did for myth and stories and movies, Alexander John Schaia has done for the four Gospels. I have been reading his theology for several weeks now, and I plugged him several times in the course of Sunday mornings. From my point of view, each time you guys just sort of stared back at me.

What I realized was that Campbell's book does not lend itself to sound bytes. I can't do it. It's too complex. It has twelve steps in it, and if you don't see all of them, you don't get the whole picture.

And so that seven-page memo hit Michael Eisner like a ton of bricks. It was suddenly, "WOW! This is how you do it." Out comes "Little Mermaid." Out come "Lion King" and all the others. And billions of dollars poured into the coffers of the movie giants because the story line touched nerves that are important to every one of us.

The Gospels Are Also Part of the Pattern Of Archetypes in the Depths of Our Psyche

Well, another thing that's important to every one of us is the Gospels, and what Schaia has done has shown the way in which there's a progression. There's a way these archetypes get to us deep, deep inside, whether we're aware of it or not. But all the same, we're touched by the stories in the Gospels.

Instead of the twelve steps of Vogler, Schaia articulates four steps. It's the same kind of thing, just simplified. He talks about the Roman Catholic mass as an example of the four steps. The Catholic ritual known today as the mass also reflects this sequence of four steps.

Step One. The believer forms an intention and enters into the sacred space for the mass, opening his or her heart to inspiration and challenges.

Step Two. The words of scripture and sermon charge the believer with stringent self-examination and nourishment in spiritual growth.

Step Three. The believer experiences the oneness of being all with God, called communion.

Step Four. The believer receives the final blessing, the “missa,” which means “to be sent,” mandating him or her to go out into the world in service.

Four stages. Four Gospels. First, it says that we surrender. Second, that we struggle and endure. Third, that comprehension dawns upon us. We gradually learn the practices that make our understanding and our discovery repeatable and consistent and real. Fourth, that we bring our works and our words out into our world, to our friends and neighbors, to our community.

The Four Gospels Represent Themes Of Evil to Be Overcome in the World

Schaia does this with Matthew. The theme of Matthew is often realizing that there’s an issue in our world that needs to be addressed. Climbing the mountain, the mountain representing the problem, the evil, the thing that needs to be changed in our world.

Then over to the Gospel of Mark. When we try to change the world for a better place, we meet resistance and suffering ensues. And how do we deal with suffering? That’s the theme of the Gospel of Mark.

We achieve some success, we achieve some progress, and we love it. We feel good inside. We experience joy. And that is the theme of the Gospel of John.

And then finally in the Gospel of Luke, how do we mature in service? Seeing how we address the issue, we endure what’s necessary to make the effort. We experience some success in it, and now we repeat it and take it out to make our world a better place, the theme of the Gospel of Luke.

You may not know that the Gospel sequence of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John is preceded by the much-older sequence of Matthew, Mark, John, and Luke. The latter is the oldest sequence in which the Gospels really came to us.

So that’s what I wanted to tell you. That’s why I thought this was important.

You Are Every One in Every Story: Traveler, Robber, Innkeeper, Passerby, Samaritan

Now, one final principle. One of the important things about any experience on Sunday morning — I don’t do this all the time, but I do want to do it today — is that you need to address the “So what?” question.

I’ve given you a lot of information. I’ve done many a lecture here, that kind of thing. And “So what?” Why should you care? So the final principle is this: Where somebody’s being egocentric, it’s not all about you. You need to remember that. It’s not all about you.

But on the other hand, yes it is. You are involved in every one of these stories. It’s a final principle that in each one of these stories and each of these characters, you have sole linkage to the good and the evil and the innocent bystander as well.

Let me give you an example in the story of the Good Samaritan. There are five characters in this parable. You’ve got the guy who was beaten up. You’ve got the robber who stole and did the beating up. You’ve got the people who walk on by. Actually there are two of those guys, but I’m treating them as one because they do exactly the same thing as each other. You’ve got the Good Samaritan, our hero in this story. And then you’ve got the innkeeper, who is paid to take care of this guy.

The point of all this, in a mythological, archetypal way of thinking, is that all of us have a tendency, as relatively rich white Americans, to think always of ourselves as the Good Samaritan. That’s who we are and if we have shortcomings, it’s because we weren’t as good a Samaritan as we really ought to be.

But That’s not Really the Case: We Get Beaten up, We Rob, We Are the Samaritan

We are the one who gets beaten up now and then. And we are also the one who does the beating up now and then. We’re not innocent. We might think we are, but we’re not. And we are also the

people who walk on by. We don't want to get our hands dirty in somebody else's mess. And we are indeed the Good Samaritan sometimes. And one thing that's cool about this guy is that the money to care for the victim came out of his own pocket. It didn't come out of an expense account. It cost him, and he got nothing out of it. And sometimes we're the innkeeper, where we got paid just simply to take care of a mess.

There are facets of the whole of our lives that identify with each of the five characters. We harm ourselves, we limit ourselves to thinking that the scriptural story is telling us just one thing. But we're too complex for that.

The woman caught in adultery. You've got the adulterer. You've got the people about to cast stones at her. You've got the people on the outer edge of the crowd trying to make up their minds whether they're part of this gang or not. And you've got people farther out than that who might have their stomachs turned by simply watching the gratuitous violence. They can't do

anything about it because they're powerless. And finally you've got a Christ figure who manages to defuse it all with a bold challenge. Whoever is without sin, let him cast the first stone.

You are all of them. And I am all of them. We're the adulterer. We're the unfaithful one. We're also the accuser. And we're also the violent ones. Also the ones repulsed by the violence. And we are also the Christ figure with the ability to heal and save in horrible situations.

The Power of the Gospel; Don't Limit Your Reading of Text; See Yourself Wholly in It

That for me is the power of the Gospel. Don't limit how you read a text. See yourself à la Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, Christopher Vogler. See yourself in the whole of these stories, in our secular world, and especially in our Gospels.

Amen.