

What Jesus Hath Wrought.

By Rob Lieb

Prelude “*What a Wonderful World*” By Louis Armstrong

Opening Words: Most of you have heard this tune by Louis Armstrong. It describes our human interaction and the joy we get from that interaction. I used this prelude before because it is so rich. I plan on addressing how we humans got into a position where we can enjoy and contemplate these things. Our human history is mostly thought to consist of an evolution from lower primates to more complex animals that evolved and improved to include more complex mental processes, the result of which is our current human condition. We got better and better and then dominated the animal kingdom because of our increased mental capacity. Some of that is true. But why are there not other species of humans around. Birds, cats, hoofed animals all have a variety of close cousins that populate the earth. We do not. There is no species that lives on land that is even close. Why? I hope to present to you some problems with the human condition that make our species particularly difficult to change. It lies mostly within the dealings and social interactions between peoples, but goes from large groups down to the family itself. There have been critical events within our recent history that have changed our lives and our social behavior. The life of one individual is the pivot that I will focus upon. There have been others, but I will focus on Jesus' recognition of a new way that impacted the world significantly. What it did, and how it came about can be talked about for a very long time. What I hope to do is to introduce a force that lays the groundwork for change, a new and exciting way to view the future, and ways that force continues today.

Hymn: *We Laugh, We Cry* **#354**

Meditation *Transitions* **Rob Lieb**

Sit back. Let go of your thoughts, and place your feet on the floor. Open your mind and let in thoughts of what you hold to be very, very true.

When did these thoughts first appear?

Who did you believe or what happened to confirm and maintain these thoughts?

How long have you held these beliefs?

How long has it been since you changed a belief that you held for a long time, what caused the change. If your beliefs have not changed, why have they remained the same?

As you move forward, are you open to change?

Are you able to look both up and down the road of time to realize what a change might mean for you?

Reflection I: “The Last Human” by G. Sawyer and Viktor Deak: (Paraphrased from pg 23 of the referenced text) We were not alone. There were dozens of peoples, mostly in Africa but spread out over the earth by migration, changing climate, the evolution of forests, but mostly because of competition between the species. What most probably happened is that in the biological reorganization that resulted in the appearance of our species as a highly distinctive entity in Africa some 150,000 years ago, there first appeared a new cognitive potential that was born, i.e., language. Discoveries of this kind have been known to be routine in other species. For example, birds had feathers for warmth long before they co-opted those same feathers for flight. What humans are likely to have co-opted was the development of language as a result of brain enlargement. Language involves the manipulation of mental symbols and is a metaphor for symbolic thought that caused homo sapiens to leap to the fore and become the dominate species in a very short period of time.

However this happened, it does not appear that the evolution of modern human intelligence resulted from a gradual process of fine-tuning over the ages. Smarter individuals did **not** gradually outbreed the lower intelligent cousins. It appears that instead to have been a suddenly emergent event, resulting in an acquisition of a being with an entirely new potential. This potential was not able to be exploited immediately but, like many evolutionary advantages discovered (feathers!), it was gradual and proceeded with many false starts and some dead ends. It is almost certainly true that we are still in the process of developing and discovering new applications for these symbolic gifts. This ability for symbolic reasoning combined with our intolerance for competition have led to our eminence as the only humanoid left on Earth.

I would like to take you through a very quick but incomplete tour of the evidence for this conclusion. There have been discovered 22 species of extinct humans identified over the past century. How this information came to be will now be presented.

Presentation of images: (Slide show.)

So after eliminating all other species, we began a sole journey beginning 150,000 years ago with no other humanoids around. The other important factor is the a seven million year history of fierce competition among the species, desperate privation from needed resources, and constant threats to the existence of our troop from others. So, we developed habits and practices that had always best ensured our continuance, i.e., taking food from neighboring communities when needed, slaying competitors who vied for the same resources, always making sure the enemy was dead, and using other labor (slaves) to enhance our own likelihood for survival. There was little time to take opportunities during that seven million year history to live a new way. How long would it take to recognize and incorporate a new way, and how long would it take to exercise a change in behavior? There was a strong motivation to look into the past and repeat what had been done previously very successfully. Looking ahead for a better way might be risky.

Offertory **“Standing on the Side of Love”** By Greg Greenway

Reflection II **“The Bronze Bow” by Elizabeth Speare** Rob Lieb

So what opportunities were there for ways different than what had worked well up to the current time? There were some, for example Buddhism and variations on that philosophy (Zen). But for the most part an "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" and the ultimate defeat of an enemy by violent action was practiced. Therefore the raising of armies and violence continued to be exploited.

I will focus on one thought that I feel I know, since I was raised Christian. It was what Jesus brought forth, and it was so radical and against any ideology of the time that it was rejected by the rebels, rejected by the government, and rejected by the religions in power. It went against anything that was in standard practice up until that time, and is presented very well in the book, "The Bronze Bow". I will read a small section that presents the attitude presented by Jesus in the book.

It is a story about a Jewish boy, Daniel, living under Roman occupation in Galilee during Jesus' life. He has heard about Jesus and is intrigued by what he has heard about him and by what he has heard him say. Daniel, suffering under the Roman oppression, is looking for a leader to follow so the Romans can be defeated. He comes to where Jesus is staying in hopes to see him. Samson, a slave whom Daniel had earlier freed, became Daniel's friend. When Daniel was later captured by the Romans, Samson appeared and freed Daniel. Samson died in the rescue. The reading begins when Daniel finds himself unexpectedly in conversation with Jesus at the place where Jesus is staying.

Reading: pg 224, 225, & 226

So, Jesus is advocating defeating your enemies not by killing them, but by loving them, and loving them until they are no longer your enemies. Loving them strongly enough that you can agree on actions that will benefit you both. Then instead of having one live person to finish the task and one dead person to bury, you will have two people to get the work done. This was radical. This was unheard of. This was very much like the use of reasoning for the very first time so long ago to solve problems not recognized by others in the community, and people were not used to it.

It threatened the way things had always been done. It threatened the way that the government worked. It threatened the way that religion controlled the people. However, it was very powerful, and it started to stick.

Reflection III *On the Shoulders of Giants* Rob Lieb

One thing that is true of all dynamic systems is that a change in the system will always be met with a force or condition that brings it back to the way that is was before the imposed change. This is almost always true whether it be losing weight, building body muscle, or changing society. This is why when people or organizations want to make changes quickly they do not use small impacts. They try to make the system unstable. However, if the change is good overall, then it usually proceeds over a long time. To really lose weight your set point has to be changed, which takes time. The generation of democracy in America took a long time to effect and came about through fits and starts that were tried and modified over a prolonged period.

Jesus knew he had a great radical idea, and I think he also knew that it would catch on. However, there were many people in power who did not like the change. As a result, he very likely anticipated his death. What I think he did not anticipate was the perversion of his simple message. I believe it was perverted into the very thing he was trying to reform in the human race. However, when you have 7 million years of an "eye for an eye" practice, it may not be unreasonable for a significant change in the practices of existence to take a longer than 2,000 years to emerge.

This is shown very well in Dostoyevsky's "The Brothers Karamazov." In the Grand Inquisitor Scene, Jesus comes back during the Spanish Inquisition and starts to preach what he was preaching 1600 years previously. Word gets out that Jesus has come back and the Cardinal has him picked up and thrown in prison. The Cardinal goes to Jesus' cell and asks, "Why did you come back? We are just getting things back under control. People do not want the freedom to choose. Freedom is too strong for them. They would rather be told what to do and how to act. You know what is going to have to happen now, don't you?" Jesus just nods his head and knows that once again he will be killed. The Cardinal leaves the cell and closes the door. That's how tough it is to effect real change. If Jesus came back today, the same thing might happen.

So Jesus' message is still being tried. It makes sense. We still see the waste that war and violence produce, but we also still feel the emotions that seven million years of Homo Sapien success has produced in driving our actions. We are still in the process of getting rid of the apes closest to us. Can the new message, "Love your enemy." really take hold? We'll have to wait and see. We can do what we can to promote the concept. Others have taken up the effort.

I would like to close with a postlude that recognizes two modern people's efforts to make a significant change in society that is consistent with what Jesus introduced. Sir Isaac Newton once wrote, "If I have seen farther, it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants." Jesus was a Giant, and the two Giants featured in the postlude are Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. Both are Giants in their own right. They did what Giants do. **They made a way out of no way.**

Benediction:

So, If you can at some point in your life – Make a way out of no way, you can help make a better way, but that is difficult to do. Be sure, however, that you are always able to ride and look forward from the shoulders of Giants. Don't be afraid of new messages.

Postlude

"In the Name of Love"

Greg Greenway

by U2/Greg Greenway