

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Twenty-second Sunday of Pentecost/Ordinary Time – October 16, 2016
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Mark 9:30-37

For Reflection

The soul is an ecology, a territory. It is populated.

- declined to state

In its highest sense [the soul is] a vast capacity for God. A chamber with elastic and contractile walls, which can be expanded, with God as its guest, illimitably, but which without God, shrinks and shrinks until every vestige of the Divine is gone, and God's image is kept without God's Spirit.

- Henry Drummond, Natural Law in the Spiritual World (1883)

My soul is myself; the well-spring or point of consciousness, or center of inner activity. The most real thing in the universe to me; the start for all other knowing, the test by which I judge all other data.

- Upton Sinclair, What God Means to Me (1935)

The Chimera

In 2003 a woman in need of a kidney transplant asked her family to be tested for a DNA match. As a result of these tests, she discovered that neither of her sons, both of whom she had given birth to, carried any of her DNA. It was as if they had a different mother. Further testing on the woman herself revealed that she carried two sets of DNA in her body. One showed up in her blood and several organs, the other in several other organs.

The medical explanation was that HER mother had carried fraternal twins - two fertilized embryos – that, very early in the gestation process, merged and became one person. Literally, this woman IS her twin sister, as well as herself... her sons' aunt, as well as their mother... which raises serious identity issues for her. It also raises questions for the crime fighting community regarding false negative DNA tests. But I don't want to go there this morning.

The medical term for this multiple DNA condition is, as usual, a mythological term: **Chimera**. There are Chimeras born all over the world, more often than we think or know about. I immediately think of the possible link with our **transgender** brothers and sisters – and, of course, the implications for those among us with organ transplants.

Interestingly enough, the symbol or logo for the American Society of Transplant Surgeons is the Chimera. The Chimera is a beast from ancient mythology that, like the Minotaur or Sphinx or Mermaid, is composed of multiple species. The first head and legs are a lion, the belly is a goat – with a head rising from the middle of the creature – and the tail is a serpent complete with snake head.

The story in its earliest written form – Homer’s Iliad written in the 9th century bce – says this of the Chimera (Greek for “young-she-goat”):

She was of divine race, not of men, in the fore part a lion, in the hinder a serpent, and in the middle a goat, breathing forth in terrible manner the force of blazing fire. And Bellerophon slew her, trusting the signs of the gods.

Homer gives here one version of the classic “dragon-slaying hero story.” However, the IMAGES of Chimera – in sculpture and relief – go back much further than Homer – indicating an oral tradition as old as 2500 bce – spanning continents and cultures. It is more than likely that an old tale was twisted to meet new circumstances and power structures. Just as Eve became the new – powerless – Isis and the snake became her enemy instead of her tool – Chimera was transmuted from goddess into monster.

A clay Sumerian cylinder seal from the 1st half of the 3rd millennium bce shows a winged lion harnessed to a chariot – with something falling downward from its mouth. Standing on the lion is a naked goddess holding thunder bolts. On the chariot is a male God representing the sun. In Sumerian cosmology, the sun god’s name is Utu, the sky goddess is Inanna – the most loved and best known of the Sumerian deities. She was mother and loving partner, but also huntress or dragon or lioness. In fact, Inanna was referred to as Labbatu or “lioness.”

The clay seal seems to depict the lion spewing lightning – in concert with the storm goddess’ thunderbolts. The storm is followed by the sun – blessing the land with a good harvest. It is a story of nature’s powerful hierarchy and the people’s honoring of the source of fertility.

Joseph Campbell (The Masks of God), among others, describes a shift in human history when

a whole set of cosmic beliefs turned from a Goddess-ruled system to a male dominated system, where the main God is a father figure. In this cosmic revolution, ancient myths and histories changed their meaning as well. The winged lion, the storm beast of Sumerian times, ceased to be a symbol of fertilization and became an evil monster. The goddess, she who rode the lion, and at times she herself a lioness, became, too, an evil creature... the center stage was stolen by the male hero, Ninurta or Marduk, who was there to slay her, affirming his male superiority...

So the Chimera is in the end a grotesque and deformed image of the mother goddess and it embodies all the evil men can think about women... Valerius (1st century [ce]), an author much fashionable throughout the Middle Ages, [says this] “You do not know that woman is the Chimaera, but it is good that you should know it; for that monster was of three forms; its face was that of a radiant and noble lion, it had the filthy belly of a goat, and it was armed with the virulent tail of a viper...” a woman is beautiful to look upon, contaminating to the touch and deadly to keep.

The winged lion was a storm beast of the Sumerian-Babylonian mythology – a symbol for the goddess Inanna. The ancient Greek word for “storm” is “Cheimon” – giving us a linguistic link to “Chimera,” Greek for a goat that has lived one winter. In Christian mythology regarding the devil, the goat element is evidence of an “unclean” nature. Nobility has become unclean and, therefore, evil.

Mythologically speaking, this leads to some SERIOUS identity issues for those labeled “Chimera” by the medical profession. Even so, what might this have to do with us as Judeo-Christian-Agnostic-Spiritual-Human-Beings worshiping God and contemplating the meaning of Life in a vast Universe on this beautiful Sunday morning?

Let’s look first at the Wisdom of Solomon, a Jewish text, written in Greek in Egypt around 30 bce. It is a text that was left out of the biblical canon, but re-included by the Roman Catholic Church - therefore found in SOME bibles at the end of the Jewish scriptures – before Matthew.

The author is passionately in love with Sophia, the Wisdom aspect of God – a manifestation of God transformed by Christians into the male Christ. The words used to describe her are borrowed largely from Greek philosophy. And in the midst of this ardor and hyperbolic display of affection, the writer says this:

Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; IN EVERY GENERATION SHE PASSES INTO HOLY SOULS AND MAKES THEM FRIENDS OF GOD AND PROPHETS; for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom. (7:27-28)

In every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God and prophets. Wisdom – Spirit – Breath – Logos – Light – Emanation from God – SHE enters into holy HUMAN souls – and makes them friends of God – Chimeras with and of God – prophets – wise beings for a generation.

Now if we look at our text for this morning from the Gospel of Mark. Jesus takes a child into his arms and says, ³⁷ “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.” The Disciples have just been arguing and acting like children – and are referred

to throughout the scriptures as children-of-God. So the child in Jesus' arms might represent his disciples – as well as representing human children generically.

But the real point is this: Jesus as a male manifestation of Wisdom – Logos – God Aspect – claims to reside in the being of a child – and claims that God-Who-Sent-Me resides within himself. This is a clear statement about INTER-BEING. Jesus – like Sophia – AS Sophia – “PASSES INTO HOLY SOULS AND MAKES THEM FRIENDS OF GOD AND PROPHETS.”

No matter how many sets of physical DNA we have in our bodies – we also have spiritual DNA that makes us children of God. God is part of us – just as we are part of God. We are **spiritual Chimeras** – God's faces shine from our own and the face of every person around us. That is what it means to be a human being – a member of the Family of God.

Every time we gather at the communion table we affirm our kinship with God, the Christ within all of us, our very cellular DNA connection with the Deity that makes us all part of Itself - ONE BEING.

It is an affirmation of Ultimate Interbeing.

It is physical, it is spiritual, it is natural, it is ritualistic.

It is an honoring of powers beyond our control and beyond our understanding – yet deeply embedded and embodied in our deepest selves.

The woman who needed a new kidney got one from her husband. She now has three sets of DNA in her body that are medically identifiable. She is her sister and herself, her husband and her sons, she is all of these. Even more, she is Chimera with God, a soul that is occupied by Wisdom, literally one with the Universe and all that exists physically and spiritually - ancient and future.

She is no monster and neither are we. We are those who are CAPABLE of claiming a spiritual identity - Chimeras of God - populated and complex - noble and unspeakably beautiful. May it be so. And may the myth of our having passed through this time and place be told with wisdom and truth in the generations to come.

Wisdom of Solomon 7:22b-8:1 (deuterocanonical)

References to the Chimera are from Ugo Bardi's
Chimaera: The Origins of the Myth (March 1997)

Note: September 14, 2003

Article on modern medical Chimera can be found at:

http://ucdavis.academia.edu/AaronTNorton/Papers/126923/Which_Half_Is_Mommy_Tetragametic_Chimerism_and_Trans-Subjectivity



Scripture Reading for Sunday October 16, 2016 – Pentecost 22 – Year C

Mark 9:30-37

30 They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; 31 for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.' 32 But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

33 Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the way?' 34 But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. 35 He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.' **36 Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, 37 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'**