

# **“There be dragons here”**

**Rev Dr Len DeRoche**

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## **Reading 1 - Genesis 11:1-11**

<sup>1</sup> Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. <sup>2</sup> And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. <sup>3</sup> And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. <sup>4</sup> Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” <sup>5</sup> The LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. <sup>6</sup> And the LORD said, “Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup> Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.” <sup>8</sup> So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. <sup>9</sup> Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

## **Reading 2 - from “Facing the Dragon” by Robert Moore**

“Throughout human history, spiritual masters and sages have utilized various mythological images to symbolize the presence and power of the grandiose energies they intuited to be present in the depths of the human psyche. My own research has found no mythic image for these energies used more often than that of the dragon. World mythology presents the dragon with two different faces: the dragon as enemy, and the dragon as a source of power and blessing.

Western spiritual tradition have tended to emphasize the interpretation of the “dragon as enemy,” the nemesis of human life, a tradition best exemplified by the classic Beowulf. The task was to slay the great beast, called by many names, including

Behemoth and Leviathan. Human life and civilization somehow depended on the success of the dragon-slayer.

The other tradition is more characteristic of the Eastern spiritual tradition, both Christian and non-Christian. Here the dragon, including the “Great Self Within” is not demonized, but seen rather as a beneficent resource to be related to consciously for its transformative, regenerative energies...The human concerns (are) reflected in the Beowulf traditions: the necessity for vigilance in discerning the dragon’s presence and the dragon’s threat to personal, social and spiritual life when one encounters it unprepared. Lack of a sophisticated consciousness of the dragon within leaves us defenseless against the evil effects of its invasion into our personal and social lives. Any realistic hope for a promising personal and planetary future requires us, like Beowulf, to wake up and face the dragon of personal and spiritual grandiosity.”

### **Sermon: “There be dragons here”**

I’ve always had a certain fascination with maps. Finding a location in Allentown coming from Bethlehem 7 miles away a few years ago took almost two hours of frustration using mapquest, so I stopped, and bought a map at a 7-11 and drove right to it. My earliest recollection of maps was as a child and was shown them by my maternal Grandfather who spent his life at sea as a Norwegian sailor and whaler and during the war captained Liberty ships across the North Atlantic. As a small boy he would show me his navigational maps and especially the channels for getting into and out of New York Harbor. We could see the ships entering the harbor on these channels from his house in Great Kills Staten Island. Later he taught me finding the stars using some charts of the heavens. Growing up in rural New Jersey I used ordinate survey maps as a boy scout.

Maps were part of my life when I flew aircraft and developed a certain appreciation of their importance and their evolution. We had maps and charts that helped us make approaches to land at air fields. Other maps were general airways that would lead us on the many jet routes that crisscross the world from one electronic navigational aid to another. And lastly we had maps that went into great detail about the terrain and man-made features. In fact one of my duties before I went up to fly was to update the chart I was using to reflect any feature that changed or was built after the map was produced and needed to be annotated on the paper. This was important especially with the growth of objects like Microwave or cell phone towers. Just a few years ago a Navy plane caused an accident when it severed a cable to a cable car near an Italian Ski Resort that resulted in the loss of the lives of all the Cable Car

passengers and caused an international incident. The plane's vertical stabilizer or tail cut through the one foot steel cable at 500 miles per hour as if it were a steak knife through warm butter. The underlying cause was that the map did not have the annotation of the Ski Resort Cable car through the valley that the navy crew was flying. We need maps that reflect reality.

Part of my historic interest with maps goes back to my time in England. In England I started collecting maps. The maps have a certain importance in the founding of the new world and in most the making and defining of our modern world. Certainly in the last decade we have all seen sections of the world map change. But to understand humankind's conquest of this planet you need to understand something about how the mind of our species saw maps. There is a very good exhibit of the evolution of map making in the British museum that has displays of modern maps whose scale isn't distorted by our northern European bias and goes back to some of the first maps ever produced. Some these early maps that show the pre-Columbian world indicate the world as it was known in flat world thinking. Many of the older maps show areas at the extremes with water monsters and the phrase, *hic sunt dragones*, "there be dragons here."

The places where humankind feared to go. There be dragons here. The ends of the earth where mariners would disappear never to be seen again. Here be dragons. Places where they believed the earth ended and where ships fell off the edge. There be dragons there.

Just as our ancestors fear the unknown reaches of their world. There are many places where modernity should say "here be dragons." The individual human psyche and our corporate psyche contain certain energies that try to destroy us either by the action or by the fear of their action. One of these shadow dragons is the dragon of personal and spiritual grandiosity.

Henrik Ibsen, the great Norwegian Playwright and I don't get to identify many great Norwegians wrote, "This longing to commit a madness stays with us through our lives. Who has not, when standing with someone by an abyss or high up on a tower, had a sudden impulse to push the other over? And how is it that we hurt those we love although we know the remorse will follow? Our whole being is nothing but a fight against the dark forces within ourselves. To live is to war with troll in heart and soul." One of Ibsen's dark forces was grandiosity. Politicians like Governor Sanford, or former presidential candidate John Edwards, Athletes like the footballer Michael Vick or Tiger Woods, or Captains of Commerce like Enron's Ken Lay all display some of this dragon energy of grandiosity. Grandiosity is the unconscious belief that an individual is better or smarter or more privileged than other people, that the same rules do not apply to them. This energy will work to destroy the

individual. Most healthy religion teaches against grandiosity in favor of humility. Proverbs tells us “pride ends in a fall, while humility bring honor.” These ancient words describe what the dragon of Grandiosity does.

Grandiosity is god energy. The text of the Tower of Babel looks at that god energy mythically. A meaning of Babel is gate of god and one interpretation of the story is that city people were becoming more god like as they separated themselves from the land and it is part of the divine mission to keep humanity humble by thwarting grandiosity. In the eyes of nomadic farmers, the Mesopotamian city culture was characterized by the ziggurat, a pyramidal temple tower whose summit was believed to be the gateway to heaven, the realm of the gods.

Our national adventure in Modern Mesopotamia or Iraq these past nine years can be seen through this same mythology that our national sense of grandiosity or feeling god-like led us into the thinking that caused this seemingly intractable dilemma. The United States is after all the only super power left to exert such grandiosity.

On the spiritual level the battle lines between liberal religion and the more fundamental elements of Christianity, Islam and Judaism have been seen erupting in many of the issues we hear debated on National stage. The Religious Right’s rally toward Terri Schieble displays a grandiosity that exists despite general rejection by a majority of Americans. The loss over stem cell research debate was a further rebuke yet the dragon still believes it speaks for the country. This is Grandiosity on the national stage, where the talking heads of the media or Washington portray a vision that the divine is inspiring them to pursue certain agendas despite being rebuked by the majority of the nation. The response to this type of rebuke, to this particular dragon of grandiosity, is to demonize their critics whether the critic be the courts or media which they tend to label as activist or liberal.

On the individual level this dragon of grandiosity belches out its fire with threats to incinerate the castle like our princess Elizabeth’s even in communities of faith like ours. It appear as certain righteous indignation that says to the rest of us that I am correct or right or just because I know something or do something so much better than does anyone else. These grandiose energies devour good will and relationships. No one wants to work with someone who has all the answers and whose opinions are superior to another’s, be they clergy or laity.

This is the power of the dragon of grandiosity over us. It strives to put through its agenda and its cost usually involves straining a relationship. Dealing with these dragons calls for the cunning of a princess and not the strength of a St. George. Combating a dragon in this fashion we do not have to kill the dragon to make it ineffective. But occasionally we are

forced to say “Ronald you are a bum, your dysfunctional way of being is not worth your presence. You look like a prince, but your actions destroy relationships.”

The 8<sup>th</sup> century poem Beowulf, which was made into a movie last year, shows this dragon in action. In the story the young hero, Beowulf, defeats the giant Grendel, but must strike a bargain with Grendel’s mother to keep his hero reputation intact and it is this bargain that destroys Beowulf’s spirit or relationship with himself. The dragon Grandiosity exerts its cost.

Our old maps tell us that there are dragons there, but if the map we are referring is ourselves then the fabric of our dragons are those unconscious forces like the god-energy, Grandiosity. Do we keep this energy like Beowulf or try to slay this dragon within? First we have to recognize the dragon for what it is. It is the shadow those flaws in us that we more easily identify in other people. If you want to hear this phenomena without looking too close at those that you know personally listen to the rhetoric of some of our politicians. The loss of Senator Kennedy’s seat to the relative unknown, Scott Brown in Massachusetts attests more to the grandiose energies in his Democratic opponent, Martha Coakley, than his campaign. In this case it is easy to see the dangers inherent in these energies.

With these energies we first have to accept that we all carry significant shadows and our first task needs to be accepting our shadows. In the story Peter Pan, his shadow became separated from him and it took Wendy to sew it on. Identifying our own shadow is never very easy or straight forward. One way to do this is to look at those traits of other people which disturb us the most. These traits are active within ourselves. The dragon of Grandiosity may be an element of our own being without our noticing it. If we can’t see these energies in ourselves we will project them on other people.

Personal grandiosity may be self-regulating phenomena. Here’s a story that is true, but may not be factual. There is a transcript between one of our naval vehicles and radar return that was identified as HMS Vigilant. After searching several frequencies USS John F. Kennedy finally made contact, the communication went like this:

USS John F. Kennedy: Unidentified radar return 25 nm south-south east of Gander please identify yourself.

Roger sir this HMS Vigilant go ahead.

Roger Vigilant this is the Aircraft carrier John F. Kennedy. We indicate on our current course we will collide in 25 minutes. Please turn port immediately to course 340.

Roger Kennedy Vigilant copies.

After Ten minutes. Roger Vigilant Kennedy still observes no course correction, Turn immediately to heading 350.

Roger Kennedy this is Vigilant negative.

At this time the captain becomes aggravated and gets on the radio himself. Vigilant this is Captain Hathaway, commanding officer of the USS John F. Kennedy. Do you realize that our aircraft carrier weighs in at 61000 tons and has 80 aircraft and a crew of 5000 souls. Sir, I can't turn this city on a dime. Come immediately to heading 360.

USS John F. Kennedy this is Mr. Steward, Commander of HMS Vigilant. Are you aware that the Vigilant is a lighthouse?

Sometimes eliminating grandiosity comes on its own terms, or may be eliminated just by having good map.

When we think of that old phrase from early maps, "Here be dragons." We can also say there be dragons here for we all have dragons. We can hide them like the elephant in the living room, or we can face them. Let us leave today and try to recognize our own dragons. In an ever-involving and never-ending world. Amen