



Anglican Parish of Warracknabeal

Warracknabeal, Areegra, Minyip, Hopetoun, Brim

Pentecost 15-18
18 September-09 October 2022

Hello Everyone!

I hope you've had a good week!

Just for something a little different - for the next four weeks I am presenting some writings by Richard Rohr on 'The Sacred Quest'. It may not be your cup of tea, but at the same time - there is always something 'refreshing' and challenging by 'going on a journey'.

Like the Gospel accounts, we are invited to wrestle or wriggle ourselves within the text and make it our home or like a favourite cloak - and walk in it for a time. Much like the nature of 'journey'. It is fair to say - we can walk, or we can imagine, or we can entertain the idea that we can enter the 'Sacred Quest' wherever we are, and whatever circumstances we find ourselves in. We take ourselves - as we are - and integrate all the aspects of our lives into the reality and movement of what happens around us - here and now.

The Sacred Quest starts with an openness - an open heart, an open attitude, an attitude of gratitude and wonder rather than fear and dread. Fear and dread may be part of the quest - but must be confronted in order for us to truly be free!

The following pages are presented as 'one piece' - so where you would like to enter the journey is up to you - and how you respond is also within your grasp. They are to accompany the Gospel texts produced each week, and hopefully you will be able to find some connections with your own earthly pilgrimage.

I hope that the following also is a launching pad for new adventures in your faith journey, or at least a basis for renewal and reflection as to where God might be calling you: using the Spring season to renew some 'New Year Resolutions': are there people that you would like to connect with: is there a task at work or within your social group that needs attending to: is there something at home that needs a 'freshen up' - a corner, or a room, or a cupboard. What can you plant this Spring season to bring you joy?

Every blessing, Rev James



A Heroic Journey

The main character is a hero or heroine who has found or done something beyond the normal range of achievement and experience. A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself.

[Joseph Campbell, The Power of Myth]

In this week's meditations we turn to Quest for the Grail, based on Father Richard's earlier work with men and spirituality. The power of myth and legend can help us grow in consciousness and maturity, and the Grail legends contain many such archetypal patterns. All are invited to embark upon a heroic journey:

I am told that European quest legends emerged in various forms around 1180 to 1350 CE. They originated from different levels of society, at precisely the time when the great gospel story was in eclipse and no longer reaching the ears or affecting the souls of Christians. It could be said that Grail stories were lay persons' ways of charting and describing a necessary and good spiritual path.

The myth expressed the deep wisdom of the Christian collective unconscious in a style that was neither churchy nor clerical. Instead, these stories moved confidently into a world of mystery and metaphor. They could do this because the quest was real and the myths were anchored in reality.

I believe we live in a time when the quest is *no longer* real. People are unsure of the goal, insecure in their search for meaningful patterns, and even unconvinced of any divine origins. It is a major crisis of meaning for the West; at the deepest level, it is a loss of hope. The anxiety and solutions to this crisis cannot be addressed at a mere surface or problem-solving level. Only sacred psychology or mythology are deep and true enough to address questions of meaning and hope.

What true religion has always done is open the door to this symbolic universe, to the world of the soul that is the primary access point for the spirit world. Healthy religion teaches us how to see, how to see more clearly, and how to see things all the way through.

The quest for the Grail is a homespun story of a man named Parsifal growing up and learning the right questions through trial and temptation as he pushes on toward God. During the quest, God speaks and leads through family, failure, violence, visitors, betrayal, sexuality, nature, shadow, and vision. Every person and every event the man encounters is a necessary and grace-filled occasion. There are no dead ends, though there seem to be many. There is no wasted time, no useless characters, no random happenings. *All* has meaning. It is a wholly enchanted universe; God is in all things waiting to speak and even to bless.

The Grail story can be told and retold, but finally it is a quest that must be walked. It is always a descent, always a terror, and for those who know the bigger story, always participation in a miracle.

[Adapted from Richard Rohr, Quest for the Grail (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1994), 9-13, 27.]

The Fisher King

The most common version of the Grail myth takes place in a medieval kingdom. The King is tragically wounded, and the kingdom is in disrepair. Father Richard describes the situation:

Most versions of the Grail legend begin with a wasteland kingdom, ruled over by one called the Fisher King. Crops are dying, monasteries are empty, and the people have no hope. All the king can do, because his wound refuses to heal, is fish all day—that is why he is called the Fisher King. This name has Christ connotations, since Jesus too was the “fisher of people.”

Fishing is the appropriate symbol of dipping down into one’s own unconscious. The sea is the natural image of the vast unconscious. I think this is the reason we can sit by the ocean for hours and watch it with fascination—waiting for the gift from the sea, waiting for something to show itself.

For author and depth psychologist Carol Pearson, the Fisher King is an archetype connected to inner places of suffering and longing:

Many times in our lives, we find ourselves in the position of the Fisher King. Something is not right. We feel wounded, disconnected from ourselves, and our kingdoms reflect our inner state. Often, we do not initially notice our own

wounding; we just find ourselves unhappy with our lives. Answers that previously worked for us no longer serve. . . .

The part of us that is fragmented, split, and wounded—that knows of the splendor of the Soul, but cannot connect that splendor with our everyday lives—is the Fisher King. The young knight [Parsifal in the Germanic version] is the seeker in each of us, yearning for the Grail [DM team: the soul, our True Selves]. The Grail offers the capacity for renewal, forgiveness, and transformation. It also is within us. [1]

Father Richard speaks of what is required when we find ourselves in such suffering:

The aim here is to do soul work. Such soul work, if taken seriously, is no picnic. The pain of the hero or heroine is heart-rending. And, to make coping harder, it is mysterious, often even to heroes and heroines themselves.

The journey to happiness involves finding the courage to go down into ourselves and to take responsibility for what's there. All of it. This means looking at the self without flinching, owning up to whatever wreckage we find, while also acknowledging that there are some promises and some energy there.

The aim is to experience the fact that *everything belongs*—the good, the bad, and the ugly. Often this is hard—especially coming to terms with the ugly—and may take living a while. When I was almost fifty, I began to realize that more clearly. I could see myself better. At twenty-five, I had no strong sense that everything belonged, but it did, and it does. [RR: Now, at seventy-nine, I guess I am ready to believe and even trust that "everything belongs." It has become my motto and my mantra.]

[[1] Carol S. Pearson, *Awakening the Heroes Within: Twelve Archetypes to Help Us Find Ourselves and Transform Our World* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1991), 50.

Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Quest for the Grail* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1994), 57, 19-20.]



The Quest and Its Questions

Bill Plotkin, depth psychologist and wilderness guide, identifies a crucial moment in the Grail story. He highlights the importance of asking ultimate questions of the soul:

In the popular European myth of the Holy Grail, the young man, Parsifal, goes out into the world to seek life's deeper meaning—his soul (which is what the Grail ultimately symbolizes). His travels take him to the castle of the sick Grail King (who, as in most myths, symbolizes the old story, the ego's old and fortified way of being in the world). The only cure for the king is for an unknown knight (a Wanderer) to come along and ask the king two specific questions. But Parsifal's mother had taught him that questions were foolish or rude, and so Parsifal does not ask. Consequently the castle (and the vision of the Grail) vanishes, and Parsifal finds himself in a great wilderness through which he must wander for many years, until he has learned enough, through the trials and losses of life, to be ready to ask the right questions. [*Father Richard: Thus, it was called a "quest"—seeking the right question, unlike today's insistence on the right answer.*]

The first question is, "Lord, what ails thee?" By asking ourselves (our egos) that question—and living it—we, like Parsifal, develop understanding and empathy for how we cocreate many of our ailments and how those difficulties teach us what we need to learn. We begin to uncover our sacred wounds. We develop compassion for ourselves, learning to appreciate our mistakes, failures, and wounds as much as our talents and successes.

The second question is, "Whom does the Grail serve?" By asking "Whom does my soul serve?" we learn to turn our attention to the deeper purposes of what we do. We enlarge our vision of what's possible and gradually learn to root our actions in soul. Eventually we learn who and what to serve. The answer will have two parts to it, like two sides of a coin: we serve the specific purposes of our souls and we serve our people, and we do one by doing the other. . . .

One of the key features of the Grail myth is that, in order to heal the king, and thereby the land, Parsifal need only ask the questions. He doesn't need to answer them himself (nor does the king). [1]

Richard writes that to go on a spiritual quest is inherently tied to asking life's deeper questions:

We cannot go on a quest until we know what the question is. Whom does the Grail serve? What am I doing this for? Why am I feeling what I am feeling? This anger, this pain? Unless we feel it, unless we go down into the grief, into the depths, into the great unconscious, we won't usually know the deeper

answers. We will have stayed on the level of life's superficial questions, which is precisely not to go on the quest. [2]

[[1] Bill Plotkin, *Soulcraft: Crossing into the Mysteries of Nature and Psyche* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2003), 259-260.

[2] Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Quest for the Grail* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1994), 78, 79.]

The Grail Experience

Richard tells of the maturity necessary for authentic spiritual experience to change us on a deeper level. He calls this the Grail experience:

Zen masters traditionally did not allow a young man to come and study spirituality until he was at least thirty-five. Carl Jung imposed similar restrictions at his institute in Zurich. The Roman Catholic Church has had comparable guidelines in Canon Law; for example, one could not become a bishop before the age of thirty-five.

We are not told Parsifal's age, but we assume that as the story begins, he is no longer a youth. When we set out on the journey too quickly, we are not likely to know what the questions are, especially if we do not have a mentor to guide us. Thus, if we have an experience of God—what I am calling a Grail experience—too early in our journey, we are likely to use it for our own ego inflation. If our egos attach us to the holy too quickly, we often do not know what to do with it except to say, "Aren't I special?"

That's why, when the Grail enters a young person's life, it often appears veiled. This became a relevant issue for me in the early years of the New Jerusalem Community in Ohio, where it was basically myself and a thousand younger people. There, I saw the danger of religious experience that is protected, hovered over, and talked about. We had a bunch of eighteen-year-old boys all eager to be holy and right. It doesn't, of itself, lead to true wisdom.

While heroic stories are always exciting to the young, the Grail myth probably makes more sense for people somewhere in the middle of life. We may recall that Jesus did not have a full Grail experience until he was thirty or so. At his baptism, he hears the voice from heaven say, "You are my beloved son" (Mark 1:11). He then immediately leaves the world of productivity and efficiency and success. He goes into the wilderness, where he fasts and faces suffering, testing, and uncertainty. Knowing he is God's beloved child changes his life. The Grail experience is the first numinous experience that opens our eyes. It only needs to happen once. When, finally, we are able to be open and awake—and it takes work—then we are on the true, heroic journey, also made by the ones we usually call saints.

What evolves in us is less and less control. More and more we sense that Someone Else is for us, more than we are for ourselves. All we can do is get out of the way. We realize that this is a radically benevolent universe, and it is on our side despite the absurdity, sin, pain, and dead ends. It will be more like letting go than taking on. Maybe this is why it is hard to accept.

[Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Quest for the Grail* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1994), 97-98, 105, 106.]



Living with a Grail Experience

A powerful spiritual experience challenges us, like Parsifal in his quest for the Grail, to find a way of holding the paradox of living in the everyday world while knowing there is something beyond it. Richard explains:

Once the Grail experience is over for Parsifal, he finds himself back in the forest, back in the world as he knows it. He has been touched by God in such a way that only God will do for him from now on. He has experienced the Absolute, and the relative will never again totally satisfy him. He aches for God, and the aching now becomes the seeking.

After our own Grail experience, our lives are characterized by some measure of perpetual dissatisfaction. Nothing lives up to our standards: not the church, not ourselves, not our country. There is a radical, aching longing: Ordinary life will never again be good enough, yet it is not meaningless either.

After the Grail experience, the ordinary forever becomes extraordinary. God is both perfectly hidden and perfectly revealed in everything. Once a paper cup becomes a Grail, even if it looks like a paper cup to everyone else, we know

it's also a golden cup. What frustrates us is that we can't tell anybody. They all think it's just paper!

A peak experience can be disconcerting. Sometimes we might even be ungrateful for it. We don't fit in anymore. We live the rest of our lives at a tilt, wandering like Parsifal. We might feel a bit off-center. We can't get excited about things most people get excited about. We just don't believe they're important anymore.

Life's not about being perfect. It's about getting involved in this great wrestling match. We get wounded in the hip, like Jacob (Genesis 32:26), and we limp the rest of our lives, but we're not worried about the wound. We're utterly confused, but we're not confused by our confusion. We can live with our confusion now because, behind it all, *we know*.

Does that sound like double-talk? When one gets into Grail language, it's all paradox. Everyone wants to pull us back to the first language of logic, law, and ego-tower building. But we can't go anywhere with that. We have jumped off the ego tower. Once Parsifal has seen the Grail—even though he returns to the world—he is radically different ever after.

Once we have experienced the Grail—our soul, our True Self, God-in-us—we still fall short. We betray others and ourselves. We fail to live our own truth. We act contrary to our values and beliefs. We are hypocritical, lazy, lustful, and all the rest. But we are also trapped in the truth. As Jeremiah says, it burns within us (20:9). We know it's the truth, even though we can never live up to it. Henceforward the only sin would be to deny that it *is* the truth. Trying to live up to it is the rest of the Grail journey.

Now the quest is real because the Grail is real. God is real.

[Adapted from Richard Rohr, Quest for the Grail (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1994), 114-115, 116.]

Whom Does the Grail Serve?

What the spiritual journey teaches us is that in the end there is only love. And the foundation of everything . . . is finally love. That's the Grail experience: We're standing on love. —Richard Rohr, *Quest for the Grail*

In a homily offered on the final day of the Men's Rites of Passage (MROP) retreat that served as the material for his book Quest for the Grail, Richard shares these thoughts on the importance of this myth:

Whom does the Grail serve? The Grail serves the Grail King. Our lives are to be given for the world. We are called to be people who live for others. Once we hear the gospel, once we have been into the Grail chamber, we are destined to live in two worlds: the world as it is, which we might call power, and the world as it should be, which we might call love.

We have to take both worlds absolutely seriously. Love without power is only sentimentality, cheap and innocuous religion. However, power without love becomes brutality and that's what every culture instinctively moves toward: self-protection and self-aggrandizement. Once we have learned the truth of the Grail, of love, we cannot believe the world of power is adequate or a correct response to reality. The heroic journey unites power and love.

We have chosen Jesus as our primary hero, and no one addresses issues of power and domination more directly. We could read the whole gospel as Jesus undercutting false power and standing insistently and constantly on the side of the powerless. He always takes the side of the victim, the poor, the oppressed, the little ones.

No matter who we are, we, too, have been invited on the heroic path. We enter the Grail chamber and know it is a radically trustworthy world, despite all the tragedies with which we may have to live. In this basic trust we can lay down our spear and our shield. Now we can live the truly nonviolent life.

Love is not given to us to help us solve our problems. Love, rather, leads us into our problems. It's love that leads us on the quest and ultimately to a final, universal, and grounding love. It's a love we can trust because we know it is not all up to us. We do not have to secure ourselves because we are radically secured—we are beloved children in a benevolent universe.

When we truly and fully *belong*, it is natural to believe and to become. The tragedy of our time is that so very many do not *belong*—people who have no parents, no family, no community, no tradition. It's no wonder that survival has taken the place of *becoming*. One true love is all that is necessary. It tells us we do belong, we are connected, and we are at home. We are *in*, precisely because we have been led *through*.

[Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Quest for the Grail* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1994), 177, 178, 179, 180, 187.]

Questions for those on a Holy Quest:

What do I require from my earthly quest with the Divine / God?
What baggage will I take with me - to aid my quest?
Are there things I need to 'let go' of to embrace the adventure?
Who are the people I 'take with me'?
Are there 'stumbling blocks' to my quest that I need to identify?
What will be my daily ritual to honour my journey and those I meet
along the way?
How will I give thanks to God at the end of each day?
What decision can I make today to give me LIFE?
What verse of Scripture will sustain me today?
What image can I capture today to speak of God's wonder in my life?
Can I look in the mirror today and say, "I am a beautiful person!"
What pain can I offer to Jesus - who bears me, and all my being?
What word of hope can I offer another today?
Today, how can I become a more compassionate person?
Today, I accept in my life, and give thanks....





Prayer in the Parish

In the Parish & Beyond:

- +Garry;
- For the memory of Queen Elizabeth II;
- For King Charles III, Queen Consort and their family;
- For our Deanery: Parishes of West Wimmera, Horsham, Stawell, Ararat & Warracknabeal;
- For all the people of the World;
- For all those who hunger for food;
- For all those who thirst for water;
- For all those who seek refuge from violence, injustice, war, hatred;
- For all who hunger for God's Word;
- For all who thirst for God's Spirit;
- For all who seek refuge from abuse, fundamentalism, misunderstanding and apathy;
- For our friends, families, and our neighbours; for those who make us proud; for those we treasure;
- For those grieving;
- For Project Regenerate;
- For all we love – near and far away;
- For courage, conviction & compassion;

Years Mind:

- For all those we remember who have gone before us in faith:

“Rest eternal grant to them O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them.”

Services – Sept/Oct

Pentecost 15 – 18 September

9.30am HC Warracknabeal

Pentecost 16 – 25 September

10.30am Cafe Church Warracknabeal

Pentecost 17 – 02 October

9.30am Morning Prayer Warracknabeal

11.30am Morning Prayer Areegra

Pentecost 18 – 09 October

9.30 HC Warracknabeal

8.30-12.30pm COFFEE Van –
2nd Year Birthday Party

Pentecost 19 – 16 October

9.30am & 5.00pm Warracknabeal

Pentecost 20 – 23 October

9.30am & 5.00pm Warracknabeal
8.30-12.30 Coffee Van

Other Events:

Anglican Treasures Auction

21st October 2022

Synod

21st-22nd October in Ballarat