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Symbiotic economics: Timid Desperadoes

Timid Desperadoes, sounds like a band of outlaws from the old wild west doesn't it? Definitely not a rock band. Sheriffs with white hats upholding law and order. Outlaws and other thugs with black hats, robbing from everyone in an effort to do their own thing. Cowboys and Indians, like some of us saw in the movies and on TV when we were kids. Finally, the US Army sent to keep all the factions apart, to bring stability to the real west, where most of the above illustrations, were really just tales of romantic fiction.

Lest we forget, so came the missionaries. In this area, the land I call the home of the Swept Aways, (both white and Indian), they were the Protestants and the Black Robes (Roman Catholics). While proud general Custer, or more appropriate to the area, Colonels Wright and Steptoe, didn't respectfully ride in to the tune of the Gary Owen, to get slaughtered, to slaughter, or to slip away in the night, there was an often unreported war between these

hostile competing religions. This religious backdrop hopefully can be a backdrop for this week's article. This time redundantly hopeful that no war will occur.

The real settling or unsettling of the west, was a struggle between competing cultures, European and Indian, with very different worldviews, to bring it all into 21st century focus. In modern terms both cultures were dirt poor. The arriving culture deemed poor, because they had not dirt. The other culture believed the dirt sacred, too sacred for anyone to own, and as a result didn't understand the basics of the worldview they found so foreign. Foreign, as defined in the dictionary probably didn't even exist in most of the native languages. As with much of human history, those that had the most and most lethal weapons, ruled the land and wrote the history.

As there are today, back then there were Timid Desperadoes in both cultures. Both cultures handle



these people differently, which still brings much tension and animosity, as we all journey through this pilgrimage we call life. Furthermore, not everyone in either culture is a Timid Desperado, though most are. There are some who live life beyond the timid. They may still be found, and were to be the topic of this week's message, which will be postponed until next week. These, the non timid, may still be Desperadoes, but desperado is really redefined as a search, to find meaning in life, which seems too illusive to find. Most of the non timid, non desperadoes, are really more brothers and sisters, part of the diverse human family.

So what brought about this Timid Desperado concept?

This Christmas, perhaps somewhat as a joke, I was given the latest book by Sherman Alexie, "The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian." Why could this be a joke you are probably about to ask? Well Sherman is a Spokane Indian, who went to grade school on the Spokane Reservation (the rez) in Wellpinit and high school in Reardan. I on the other hand, went to grade school in Reardan and high school in Kettle Falls. We both know the culture in Reardan, and some of the same people. We also understand the value of a good education, which we both got in Reardan. I will leave it there, even though my father was my school principal in both Reardan and Kettle Falls.

Amid the sex and other honest representations of adolescent life and modern literature, one paragraph in the book struck me as something that I share with the principle character Arnold Spirit, Junior, something that also makes, Sherman's books humorous, yet insightful. That is true for anyone who will never see the Spokane Rez, travel through Wellpinit or Reardan, Kettle Falls, or other border towns to the Indian Reservations of the Swept Away geography. For those of us who have some context of the true reality of the area, about all we can say to Alexie's writing is, Amen. Even though his humorous look at his own people, reflects, or illuminates life, just as strongly upon us all.

I will paraphrase, but dirt poor Junior, his rez name, said that he was grateful for his parents. Even though his dad drank too much, his mother was distant, they were always there to talk to him about life as best they could interpret it, and also listen

to what he had to say, even if it might be childish or immature. As Junior, he was loved. As a part-time Indian going to high school in Reardan, Arnold considered this a priceless blessing, something that many of the local kids, especially Arnold's rich, beautiful, blond, blue eyed, girlfriend, Penelope would never experience from her father and her mother was never present in the book.

I have been using the term land of the Swept Aways. Who are these people? The area of the Swept Aways encompasses, the northern Columbia River Basin. Part of this area was recently covered deep in the continental ice sheet. Other areas were non glaciated, much land was covered by huge lakes, the most predominate being Lake Missoula taking its name from the town. Lake Missoula, and other floods gave us a landscape dominated by water, some of it as huge valley lake bottoms, others as represented in floods beyond any concept of human comprehension. Hence the land of the Swept Aways. It's people, people groups from all human backgrounds, who have made or adopted this area as their home.

I can trace ancestry to Creston and the former shores of glacial Lake Columbia, the year 1883, on my mother's side of the family. On my father's side, about ten to fifteen years later to Tonasket and the North Half of the Colville Indian Reservation, where a mountain and a creek are named after my great grandfather, who homesteaded with his brother after that north half of the reservation was opened to homesteading in 1900. Anyone who thought they could make a go of a homestead on 320 acres of side hill, at almost 3000 feet in the Okanogan Highlands, had to be desperately poor, if not completely insane, but that is another story.

What I have found in my non-scientific journeys broadly through this area, is that no matter the cultural background the people understand one another at a much deeper level than I ever experienced with someone who was raised in say Seattle or California. From just ethnicity, there is no basis for this communication. Furthermore, Californians communicate in a way, while the words and the language may be the same, that are slightly different, from any native Northwesterner, from wherever.

These are basically cultural differences based and determined by the natural environment, land, sunlight, water. In a broader creation concept, you can take the boy or girl out of the mountains, but you can never take the mountains out of the boy or girl. In this way our company clerk in the Army, from the mountains of West

Virginia was my mountain brother, even though I kicked myself every time I spoke to him in my imitated Appalachian Mountain accent, for we had very little else in common. But he didn't seem to be upset by my twang, maybe he just considered me as talking to one of his friends back home. If that be the case, maybe it was a good thing, to think about home and family while being stationed in Germany.

This is really an outworking of the concept of the triune Christian godhead, Unity in Diversity, and the speech (preaching information) of the land in Psalm 19:1-6. God only knows if the land speaks in dialects, or with peculiar accents. If the creation account of the Bible is true, the land of the Swept Aways, as a developing culture, is occurring in a relatively short period of time. Furthermore, contrary to false evolutionary religious dogma, this creates tribes and nations rather than races.

So what were, or are your parents like? For me, as Arnold, even though completely human, my parents were always there for me, not perfectly, but there none the less. Compared to the neighbor girl in my same high school class, I was loved but never spoiled. As an only child that of course is an oxymoron, and made for a family joke, but you see the application. But as strange as it may seem, probably more than in any area, they both worked hard at loving their kid, but not spoiling him.

In case you don't understand, perhaps another illustration. As a teacher, principal, tease, and listener, my dad was the father many kids never had. This fall I had the opportunity, to return to Wilbur, where I was born. The occasion was sort of an after wheat harvest community day. The local museum was open and in the building where all the tractors, cars, and old big stuff was displayed, a young gentleman well into his eighties was host. As the conversation continued he eventually asked my name.

"I'm Jerry Bannon."

"Are you Wally Bannon's kid?"

"Yes."

"Great to meet you, I graduated from Creston in . . . (we never lived in Creston) Your dad and I . . ."

Most of the stories go something like "your dad did more for me than my dad . . ., your dad got me through high school . . ., variations on the theme of listening or speaking the truth from love rather than

authority. Therefore, never needing to use the authority. I have heard that in all the towns where we lived and sometimes those nearby, like Creston, or Marcus. That was the way I was raised.

In recent years I have spent a great deal of time with Christians of all ages. Sadly, many of these people grew up in homes like Arnold's love, Penelope. Mostly law, little grace, little listening, a lot of talking. Along with non Christians they wear this sad childhood in their eyes, their voices, their speech, their dreams, and their timidity.

In contrast, as bad as it is on the rez, with poverty and booze, a family atmosphere extends not only to true brothers and sisters but to cousins and eventually to the whole tribe. You may be a drunk, you may not have any formal education, you may not be worth anything in the eyes of the world, but I am still there for you and you are there for me, as best as we poor, uneducated, drunks and teetotalers can carry that out.

This is the common grace community, as God intended society to operate. This is how indigenous people groups around the world function and survive. This is why the Jewish people became God's chosen, not only in the Old Testament era, but in the Christian era, by not becoming extinct. This is something the Christian church, and more specifically the Protestants, their churches, and their missionaries have never understood.

These communities are based upon applied creation science, something the European white man is just too arrogant to comprehend. It has been said in North America, as in the rest of the world, European and the white man's conquest of indigenous people was promoted by arrogance squared. At least in some sense that perceived arrogance was really just Timid Desperadoes, running from a life they had fouled up elsewhere, to a place where they hoped they could make a fresh start. Little realizing, that they were carrying that baggage with them, and without God had no hope of erasing the past and truly starting fresh. That is as true today as it was one hundred or two hundred years ago.

I haven't read all of Sherman Alexie's books, but I have seen the two movies he was associated with writing or producing. In all of these as well as the general Indian community you see a very strong tension between Christianity and native practices and religion. There is good reason for this. Not only are Indian communities more common grace strong, as opposed to the white man's individual individuality, but at least in the Swept

Away lands, who was evangelized by whom, was political rather than true Christian evangelism. By the will of the great white father, where the sun rises, Black Robes were given certain tribes and or bands, Protestants, by name Presbyterians, were given other tribes and bands.

Furthermore, these Presbyterian protestants were not your modern liberal protestants of the 20th century, but perhaps they became such. Neither were these Presbyterians, the strict non conforming Calvinists of Scotland and John Knox. These evangelizing Presbyterians were disciples of revivalist Charles Finney. These were Presbyterians, in name only, because the real Presbyterians were too timid to kick him and them out. These missionaries were sent under the general auspices of Oberlin College, where Finney was college President, and where Finney spent the last forty years of his life, after having gained fame as the evangelist that helped create the great "Burned over area" of little Christian influence that still exists in upstate western New York.

Therefore, when you read the history of the Black Robes you hear about, building missions, and fields, and farming, and education. When you read similar books about Protestant missionaries you hear about the number of converts in a particular area over a particular time frame, and nothing about discipleship. Both missionary groups found as extremely pagan, not only the lack of individual freedom of expression amongst the Indians, but also the disdainful inability to comprehend the value of private property, the bedrock absolute of the 19th century frontier and the nation as a whole. To choose in a natural sense which culture is superior to the other two, requires presuppositions, leaning heavy on law, with little tension of God's grace.

The Spokane tribe of which Sherman Alexie is a member, consisted of three bands as recognized by the government, upper, middle, and lower. The lower were evangelized by the Presbyterians, the upper by the Black Robes, and the middle were in no mans land. When the reservations were created the upper Spokanes were sent to the Roman Catholic Coeur d'Alene reservation, the lower Spokanes were sent to the Spokane reservation in southern Stevens county near the former site of the Tshimakin Mission of Cushing Eells and Elkanah Walker, associated with the Marcus Whitman Mission near Walla Walla. The middle Spokanes were divided somewhat upon family

lines. When the Whitmans were massacred by Cayuse Indians during the Cayuse War however, the Tshimakin mission was abandoned. The formal Roman Catholic influence on the Spokane Reservation seems to have begun during the early 20th century.

So what is the application of this remote history lesson?

Native American peoples have good reason for not understanding Christianity, either from the 19th, 20th, or 21st century, and to be Timid Desperadoes. What is your excuse?

I'm just too busy, with my job that allows me to collect stuff I really don't need or don't even want and really adds nothing to my quality of life, and, and, and.

I have been taught that once I asked Jesus into my heart, I needed to focus upon meriting God's grace by keeping God's laws, just like my parents continually lectured me to do, but I never really did, I just couldn't do it.

I'm still trying to earn my parents approval, or at least gain there attention. I wonder if they ever really loved me, or if I just got in the way of their life most of the time?

I go to church to learn about God, and all I am taught is how to be successful in life, even if that means doing things I don't feel as right, or am ever able to carry out, like the minister tells me I should, if I just had more faith.

I'm earning as much money as I can while I am able, and then I will retire, and devote myself to what I think is important, both financially and spiritually.

I really have no excuse, I am just a rotten person and no one takes the time of effort to help me.

Six lame answers, we could write a book, or multitude of books of our lament. Sorry that has already been done also, both in the modern world, secular and religious, and in God's word the Bible. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh.

Poverty is an interesting dichotomy. In our attempts to become rich, we really become poor. In our attempts to be somebody, the only person we really convince is ourselves, at least occasionally. By telling everyone how important we are, we forget that knowledge and understanding comes by listening.

Being a Timid Desperado is really a life choice. Hence, no longer being a Timid Desperado is also a life choice. The reason that so few people ever make that choice is that our God is too small, compared to what we want to become. What my dad was so good at, and I still have a long way to go, is in letting people listen to themselves, outside what today we call our talking points. Changes only come when we no longer fear defeat. It is that simple. Someplace from that first step toward our destination the desperate disappears. However, we may not grasp that for a long time.

This is true as a follower or a restorer in the finished work of Jesus Christ, but it is also true to a lesser extent in the world of the world. We anglo, white Protestants, (especially males) may have a lot harder time with this concept, because expressions of love and the extended family are not part of our culture, and definitely not part of our churches. Attempts to foster this community, especially in church, while still trying to maintain individual space and freedom, is not only impossible, it is also a very foolish travesty.

Indians had and have their powwows, the frontier had its rendezvous, a meeting of two cultures, we have high definition television with multi speaker Dolby surround sound, and say we have the good life. Too bad the Timid Desperados are too afraid of reality to leave their lonely fort and see that real life is worth living. Instead we wonder what in God's name is this guy with the great natural father writing about. The answer is one only a Heavenly Father can give as an ultimate purpose for why you are uniquely you.

To paraphrase again: God created us in His image, God doesn't make any junk. You are designed to be a truly unique individual, living within a loving diverse community of other uniquely gifted people. Truly the unity of the Christian Godhead, multiplied by the atoms of the universe, the stars in the sky, the sand on the seashore. Therefore, you are not junk, never were, unless you choose to be a Timid Desperado.