

## LELC 2019 Lent One

One summer, when I was a kid, some dad in the neighborhood talked some construction dude to dump the last little bit of a load of gravel where we kids could play in it. I was little, so it probably wasn't all that big – though it seemed so to me. It was just a pile of gravel – but back in the days of free range kids, it was great fun. We all brought out our truckers and diggers, and pushers and played road construction, castle or fort building, dam building in case it might rain, and every other things imaginable.

But every once in a while, and since I was only 5 or 6 at the time, I had not idea why, another sort of game would break out. It was the one where someone, usually some boy, would run and stand up on top of the pile of gravel and yell, "I'm king of the mountain" and a rough and tumble game of King of the Mountain would ensue. Everyone, mostly boys, which we had more than average of, would be trying to be the one on the top of the pile, pushing and shoving one another aside until either somebody got hurt badly enough to go in, or someone, usually the person who was big enough or mean enough to have shoved everyone else aside, was up top and everyone else decided to give up the fight. Then we would all go back to rebuilding our roads and castles and dams and peace would reign, at least until the next time, maybe when somebody's cousins came to visit. Anybody else know this game, or were we just weird?

There must be something ingrained in us humans along these lines, because last fall I had some fill dirt delivered to my driveway and my 4 and 6-year-old granddaughters fell into a milder version of Queen of the Mountain almost immediately. Fortunately mine was more of a mountain range so there was room for two. And it was all flat in two days.

I am pretty convinced that this urge to play the "game", King of the Mountain, is the essence of the broken-ness of the human condition. Everywhere and always we are in pitched battles to see who gets to be the king of the many and varied mountains we make in our world. Waltar Wink, in his landmark book, "The Powers That Be" calls it the Domination System. Everywhere in human society there is the urge to be the boss of somebody else. One person <sup>having power</sup> over another. Human history is just the long and sad story of us playing King of the Mountain as Domination passes to whoever is the biggest, strongest and meanest at that point in time. And now, here in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the class system replaced by a so-called meritocracy, the Domination System shakes out this way: Rich over poor.

Educated over not. Light-skinned over darker-skinned (which is particularly insidious because then you can sow division even among those of the same race.) And finally, the most basic unit of domination of all: male over female. Oh, except for this one caveat, a person with a firearm can <sup>have power over</sup> dominate a whole lot of folks, no matter who they are. That's why the gun debate is so testy. It's not about rights. It's about power.

For some, especially those who don't mind their position on the King of the Mountain mountain, this system not such a bad thing. It is an orderly way to order the world. Everything rests on the orderly arranging of all these blocks. Of everyone knowing their place. And staying in their place. Which is why President Obama's election made white supremacists so completely lose their minds. He wasn't supposed to get to be king of the mountain. He wasn't staying in his place. Their world order was shaken.

The Domination System is also why the LGBTQ movement is so threatening to some folks. They tend to be advocates of what they call traditional values . What they don't usually say is that it is the tradition of male domination and female submission. It is the domination system in which everyone, especially men and women - the basic unit of domination – have to do their part. Male boxes have to assume authority over female boxes. None of male-male, or female-female stuff is allowed, somebody has to be dominate. And don't even think about changing the box you're supposed to be in.

People who want to stick to traditional values are not wrong that acceptance of alternate ways of being will ruin their beloved tradition. It is just that their tradition is a system of domination. And it is not what God created us and called us to be. And, look around a little bit, The never-ending King of the Mountain game is not serving us all that well.

So, what does any of this have to do with Lent? Or Jesus? Or any of the texts for today? Luke's version of Jesus being in the wilderness and being tempted by Satan is the longest of the three. It places the most focus on the dialogue between Jesus and Satan. There is the temptation to avoid want, to have resources, riches at one's bidding. Think of it as power over nature.

Then there is the temptation to have all the power of all the authority of all the kingdoms of the world throughout time. That's self-evident. Jesus you can be king of every mountain ever. And lastly there is the authority to call down angels and

heavenly beings to attend you. Authority over heaven and earth. Satan is saying to Jesus, "I will make you King of the Mountain of every kind of mountain there ever was or will be if you will just worship me. What a deal.

But Jesus rejects the offer. He rejects all three offers, complete rejection. I think it is fair to say that Jesus, in rejecting Satan's offer, is also rejecting Satan's King of the Mountain game. Jesus rejects the whole domination system. And, by way of his reference to Scripture, Jesus gives an invitation with instructions to his followers on how to do the same.

You see, all this domination system stuff is not God's idea. From Genesis 2 where God creates human beings to be partners to Judges where God tries to get the people in the Promised Land to let God be their King, to the Koinonia, or beloved community that was created by people who followed Jesus way of self-giving love, God has always and ever been calling us to a different way of being in the world.

Testament to insidious nature of this evil, most anything can be turned into power over game. Church itself 20 years

Think about it. God makes us all different, very different. We're not interchangeable blocks (much as the world might try to get us to be.) We are each unique, like some intricate piece of some amazing 3-D jigsaw puzzle. The world tries to sand off any little part that makes us different or stick out. But what if that was the little part that actually helps the whole puzzle hold together?

The first step, the very important step is to recognize the beauty and importance of one another, just as we were created. And then maybe, just maybe, we can give up trying to be Kings of the Mountain. Could we just stop playing the game.

I've been reading a little more lately about how we can think of human history since the Bronze Age to the present as being an extractive culture. We have extracted mountains and mountains of minerals, gold, iron, coal and oil, from the earth and have fought ferociously over the years to be kings of those mountains.

But Mother Earth can not much longer endure such treatment. We are coming to a time when we must become a restorative, regenerative culture. We must restore forests, wetlands, and rivers. We must rebuild habitats. We must clean the ocean and re-balance the carbon cycle. We must think about how we and all things fit together, work together, create conditions suitable for life together. I think Jesus' three-fold rejection of the King of the Mountain Domination System invites us to re-examine our own engagement in the whole world, with the earth itself.

Gen 3 Domination = Curse

We need to ask some questions like, “How, where and when am I playing the domination system game? And what is the cost to my unique self? What is the cost to others? What is the cost to the earth?

We could ask. “How, where, and when are we seeking to live into our uniqueness. How can we let God help us know how we fit, how we contribute to the breathing, life-giving wholeness?

I won't presume to know what answers to any of those questions might be for any of you. Most days, I barely know for myself. But I do know these are some good questions. Great places to start a Lenten journey. May God help us out of the boxes the world keeps trying to force us into. And may we let Jesus show us the way, leading us in paths of being our truest unique selves, living lives of humble service and even bolder loves for the good of the world that God so loves. Amen.