

BORN TO BE MILD

Sermon, August 26, 2018

Texts: Psalm 1, Matthew 5:1-12

In a past sermon I called attention to two top-of-the-chart songs from the sixties; one was from 1966, the other from 1968. 1966's was "Born Free" ... the theme song from the movie of the same name, which I am not going to sing for you at this time; it was sung by Andy Williams. And I pointed out that "Born Free" may make a wonderful title for a song or a movie, but the reality is that few living things are actually born free ... at least, not for long. Most living things are born **DEPENDENT**. Learning how to be free, learning how to live freely, learning how to possess freedom, learning how to stay free, learning how to train and tame our passions and maximize our strengths ... that does not come automatically. Being free is a skill; it is a learned behavior. We need nurture, we need feeding, we need care, we need protection, we need training, we need teaching; we need to be *raised and taught* to stay free from the moment we are born.

Two years after "Born Free" was released, in 1968, another song hit the top of the charts ... Steppenwolf's hit, "Born to Be Wild," which also served as the theme song in the movie "Easy Rider." (*By the way, I noticed "Easy Rider" was actually on the TV this morning ... I think it was the Sundance channel... and I'm glad all of you chose to be here rather than staying home to watch that! I remember viewing it years ago and wondering what the attraction was; it frankly struck me as a dark movie.*) The lyrics include, "Like a true nature's child, We were born, born to be **WILD**. We can climb so high, Never wanna die." Yes, Steppenwolf, we like to be free, even a bit wild, but the trouble is, you stay wild, and you **WILL** die ... and probably a lot sooner rather than later ... whether you "never wanna die" or not. Living wild is a sure way to self destruct. Being free is a skill; it is a learned behavior. Again, we need nurture, we need feeding, we need care, we need protection, we need training, we need teaching; we need to be *raised and taught* to be, and stay, free. All human beings are a bundle of conflicting strengths and powerful passions that need to be bridled, tamed, disciplined, directed for constructive purposes; unbridled, they can consume us, causing us to wind up living terrible lives ... terrible for ourselves, and terrible for those around us.

We are not "Born Free," nor are we "Born to be Wild," but life as God intended it is that we are "Born to be **MILD**." With apologies to Matt Damon, **THAT'S** our "Born Identity" (*which is another sermon title I had considered ... Jason Bourne basically forgot who he was, and he was a confused mix of powerful skills, strengths and talents that he didn't know the purpose for. In short, understanding our identity, who we were born and gifted to be, frees us to be ourselves as God intended us to be.*) "**MILD**" is a synonym for "**MEEK**"; Jesus promise in the Beatitudes is that the meek will "inherit the earth." Some wrongly assume meekness is synonymous with weakness or passivity, as if the Beatitude read, "The meek shall inherit the earth ... that is, only if nobody minds." We have expressions like, "That person is meek as a mouse." Like the exasperated wife said to her henpecked husband, "What are you, a man or a mouse? Come on, squeak up!" That's a misunderstanding of the word.

Biblical meekness is not synonymous with weakness and passivity; rather, it is synonymous with power and strength ... it is power and strength **under control**. It is not the negation of strength; it is strength under control. Biblical meekness is best exemplified in the One who entered Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday as fulfillment of the prophecy in Zechariah "... meek and riding on a donkey, riding upon the foal of a donkey." The Messiah, the long awaited King, God in the flesh: He was the epitome of tremendous strength, unlimited power, incomprehensible might **under control** ... in the meek and mild Jesus, we have the ultimate **GENTLE**-man.

In the original Greek, the word "meek" Jesus used here was also something of a military term used to describe tamed horses; as in the meekness of the powerful, tamed stallion. I'd like to read an excerpt from a devotional entitled "Meek Like a War Horse":¹

Our dictionary defines meekness as, "quiet, gentle, easily imposed upon, submissive, spineless." But wait a minute. Once you realize that this word is a translation of a Greek military term, you get a completely different picture. The Greek word translated as "meek" is "praus" (prah-oos) was used to define a horse trained for battle. Wild stallions were brought down from the mountains and broken for riding. Some were used to pull wagons, some were raced, and the best were trained for warfare. They retained their fierce spirit, courage, and power, but were disciplined to respond to the slightest nudge or pressure of the rider's leg. They could gallop into battle at 35 miles per hour and come to a sliding stop at a word (ed. note: keep in mind these powerful steeds weighed an average of one ton!). They were not frightened by arrows, spears, or torches. [Such horses] were said to be "meeked." To be "meeked" was to be taken from a wild unbridled state and made completely loyal to, and dependent upon, one's master. It is also to

¹ See http://www.readjourneymagazine.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=828:meek-like-a-warhorse&Itemid=125

be taken from an atmosphere of fearfulness and made unflinching in the presence of danger. Some war horses dove from ravines into rivers in pursuit of their quarry. Some charged into the face of exploding cannons. Meeked stallions became submissive, but certainly not spineless. They embodied power under control, strength with forbearance.

On a more familiar level, think of the secret identity of Superman: Clark Kent, the meek, mild-mannered reporter of the **Daily Planet**. This is also something a portrayal of genuine meekness, for it demonstrates tremendous strength and power under complete control. Some of you are old enough to remember February 25, 1964, when 22 year old underdog Cassius Clay defeated champion Sonny Liston in a technical knockout in the sixth round to win the world heavyweight boxing crown (*for those of you born later, you may remember Cassius Clay by another name: he later changed his name to Muhammad Ali. He passed away 6/3/16*). I remember as a young boy sitting with my father and brothers around the radio listening to this (*untelevised*) match. As Clay won, the sports world was introduced to his much imitated, but never matched, colorful and megalomaniac ego as he strutted the ring and exuberantly bellowed again and again into the microphones, *"I'm the champ! I'm the king of the world!"* Not exactly your best model of humility and meekness. The story is told that not long after that bout, Clay was on board a commercial airline flight, and the flight attendant walked down the aisle reminding people to buckle their seat belts. He sat there with his seatbelt unbuckled, and said in mock defiance to the flight attendant, *"Superman don't need no seatbelt."* The flight attendant didn't miss a beat; she responded, *"Champ, Superman don't need no plane. You buckle up."*

BORN TO BE MILD! Our passions and strengths need to be tamed, trained, kept under control, channeled for productive purposes. When we allow ourselves to be "meeked" by God, to submit to His ways and allow Him to train us in obedience and faithfulness ... *that's* biblical meekness. In our natural states, we are wild, willful and independent, and often fearful, reluctant to be controlled or directed, and prone to make disasters out of our lives. Once a horse is broken, tamed, it allows for a productive and loving relationship to develop between horse and master which otherwise couldn't exist as that beast's strengths are harnessed and honed and brought under control. When that relationship develops and grows, horse and rider perform tasks as a unit which the horse just could not perform on his own. And just as a good trainer lovingly, gently, patiently brings the horse to the "breaking point," so God persistently, gently, patiently works on us. He is a gentle master. (*However, and this is almost another sermon, but the harder we fight him, the tougher He must be with us ... for our own good!*) You may remember the line from David's psalm of repentance, Psalm 51:17 -- *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."* David is not talking about a broken heart as we would talk about a broken heart; God does not delight in crushing us or disappointing us or causing us heartache or sorrow. No, David means this: When we willingly bring our heart and strength and soul under God's "rein" (*as well as His "reign!"*), when we allow ourselves to be *broken* by God, "meeked" by God, that is when we are most fulfilled. For we were BORN TO BE MILD.

I close with this: I've also mentioned this before in sermons and also in the *Fishermen's News*, but for over thirty years I've subscribed to a mildly quirky, eccentric but interesting magazine called **Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture**. It doesn't have a huge readership (*personally, I only know one other person who reads it!*), so they have an annual appeal for funds. In one fund raising letter, senior editor Thomas Fleming wrote: *"We have to recover the purpose of education, which is the conversion of our wild offspring into moral, civilized, and disciplined human beings, who will be responsible parents, honest workers, good neighbors, and solid citizens; people who will not wish to die stupid."* He continues, *"... We [here at Chronicles] are also happy in the knowledge that we are not going to die stupid, that by pursuing the true, the beautiful, and the good, we can enjoy all that is best in human life."*

I like that. I also believe that is particularly true for the church. One main purpose of our Christian Education program is to come alongside parents who are doing what they can to train up offspring in the way they should go, offspring born (*as all of us were!*) with a proclivity for wildness. We want to help parents help their children get "meeked," to develop into moral, civilized, disciplined, faith-full, gentle human beings who will themselves become responsible parents, honest workers, good neighbors, solid citizens, pillars of the church, faithful and trustworthy people of integrity ... to grow and mature so they can, to quote the Westminster Catechism, *"glorify God and enjoy Him forever,"* thereby enjoying all that is best in life, here and hereafter. In short, as referenced is Psalm 1, we want our children and we want ourselves to be BLESSED.

Jesus, the epitome of biblical meekness and mildness, wants us to be free. He wants to MEEK us to be who we were created to be ... free us from our destructive habits, free us from our burdens, free us from all that which is keeping us from being who we were uniquely born to be. Free to live life fully and abundantly. Free to make a real and significant difference in the lives of those around us. Free to be a blessing to those we love and to those who are depending on us in life. Free to be who God created us to be from the beginning. Free to make a real, significant and lasting difference in the world about us. Free to live life fully and abundantly. Jesus said, you shall know the Truth, and the Truth will make ... and keep ... you free. You were born, born to be mild.