

# The Dragon Who Was Sorry

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Has there ever been a time in your life when you were not the greatest person to be around? Has there ever been a time in your life when your mood was in such a way, or your anger was in such a way, or your indignation was in such a way, or your behavior was in such a way, that it was just hard for people to be with you, or to like you, or even to reason with you. That how you thought and how you behaved brought about chaos for the people around you. For some of you, I realize that if such a moment ever occurred it was fleeting. Momentary. But I would be willing to bet that there have been times even for the nicest of us that there was enough churning deep down inside, that as much as we didn't like it we kind of turned ugly for the people around us. We all have a time when we sort of turn ugly and we make life difficult. Have you ever made life difficult for someone? It usually happens with the people closest to us or the people we love most, but also complete strangers – people that we hope never to see again. I suspect we all can think of the times when for others we made life more difficult.

In C.S. Lewis' children's story, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Lewis tells of a young boy named Eustace who is a rather irascible little lad. Selfish, irritable, never happy, an all around brat. At one point Eustace gets turned into a dragon, a befitting metamorphosis – and for a short while does not even realize he is a dragon. And then finally he does and for a few moments likes the idea of being a dragon. It means he doesn't have to be afraid anymore and it also means he could be a terror and would be able to get back at all those people he didn't like. But then a few moments later after this knowledge of being a dragon has sunk in, Eustace all of a sudden doesn't like the idea of a being a dragon. Lewis writes:

*... the moment (Eustace thought about getting back at all those people he didn't like) he realized he didn't want to. He wanted to be friends. He wanted to get back among humans and talk and share things. He realized that he was a monster cut off from the whole human race. An appalling loneliness came over him. ... And the poor dragon that had been Eustace lifted up his voice and wept. A powerful dragon crying its eyes out under the moon in a deserted valley is a sight and a sound hardly to be imagined.*

There is a little bit of dragon in every one of us, isn't there? Inside each of our lives there is a little bit of an ugly monster. Despite whatever outward appearances we may wish to promote, each one of us knows that deep down inside there is a little bit of monster breathing. Some of us with short fuses have seen the monster leap out almost beyond our control. Some of us are able to keep the monster hidden very well deep down inside --- and yet it growls and makes us do things we wished we wouldn't do.

Kathleen Norris, in her book *Amazing Grace* tells of working with children in a creative writing exercise to get them to articulate their own spirituality, tells of a boy who wrote a poem called, "The Monster Who Was Sorry" – a poem in which the little boy speaks of how angry he gets when he gets scolded by his father. And how he has the feelings of a monster and how he wants to wreck his room and wreck his house and even wreck the whole town. And then the poem concludes: "Then I sit in my messy house and say to myself, "I shouldn't have done all that." He is the "monster who is sorry".

Maybe we could all say that about ourselves – that there is a little fire-breathing dragon in every one of us. And we, like the apostle Paul, "do those thing which we ought not to do, and don't do those things which we ought to do." And we create a mess with our lives, a mess with our dragon's tails. We get ugly and make it hard for even those who love us most to be around us. And we look around and see our messy houses and say to ourselves, "I shouldn't have done all this." Monsters who turn sorry.

It is, I suppose, the reason many of us have made our way here this morning. Somewhere along the way we got in touch with the fire-breathing dragon inside our skin and we have been met by the Savior and we have followed him to the cross and we have seen the lengths to which God will go to love us and forgive us. We have heard Jesus' words from the cross, "Father forgive them for they don't know what they are doing." And we have counted ourselves as one of that number. Dragons who didn't know what they were doing.

So Jesus tells us this story about the slave who has really made a mess of his life – and made a mess of his master's life too. He has managed to rack up so many debts, put himself in such hock, and put at risk perhaps even his owner's own solvency – that the hole he's dug for himself is so deep there's not a chance of climbing out. His dragon's tail has laid waste all around him. It's a mess he can't clean up. Strangely, he thinks he can. Just give me some more time, he says to the master and I'll pay it all back. But he can't. Everyone knows he can't. The damage is done. The hole is too deep.

And so in a stunning development the master forgives him the damage. Erases the debt and lets him free. With every hope of course that the slave will get the point. That the slave will see how stunning the development really is. Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. Emphasis on "wretch" and therefore emphasis on "amazing". And that this will make all the difference. This will make all the difference.

But alas, it doesn't. It doesn't make the difference. Because we know the rest of the story – the good turn does not deserve, unfortunately, another. And the slave just can't manage to forgive the peanuts owed by his fellow slave. Just can't do it. Just can't let this guy slip by. Evidently there is a little more wretch in this guy than there is in me. Somehow he's managed to forget. He's lost the ledger – the ledger he had with the master, the one with all the red ink, he's managed to lose the big fat I.O.U. torn in two. And with this spiritual amnesia he has developed a laser like vision for red ink in the other guy. And off to jail you go, pal. And now he's made a mess again.

He's gone off and been a dragon again. And therein lies, doesn't it, the deeper truth about you and me. That this dragoness in you and me – this sin, this brokenness, this fire-breathing propensity – though Christ has died for us – though the debt has been wiped clean – though amazing grace has been poured upon us beginning its seep into our pores -- the truth is there is more seeping left to be done. The stunning development feels less stunning.

Hector Tobar's compelling book, *Deep Down Dark*, recounts for us the intense story of the Chilean mine disaster that trapped underground 33 Chilean miners for ten weeks. We remember this four and a half years ago – the world remembers the vigil kept for those 33 men entombed beneath the earth. And for the first 17 days as workers above drilled frantically to find the cavity where the men were imprisoned – the miners struggled to survive with very little food. With each passing day listening to the drilling, lamenting the failed attempts, and growing more desperate, the men found themselves growing into a deep fellowship. They appointed one of their number – the one who appeared most spiritual – to lead them in daily worship. To be their make-shift pastor. They sang, they prayed and most of all they confessed. All of them. All 33 of them. They told to God and to all who would hear the truth about their lives. The failings. The selfishness. The poor behavior. The addiction. And what they might do if God should rescue them. "We aren't the best men," their pastor prayed over and over again, "but Lord, have pity on us." And when they sang together it was a fellowship and moment of spirit like none had experienced before. Said one, "When we sang I forgot for a moment that I was trapped in a mine."

But then comes day 17 and the drilling strikes the target. A path between heaven and earth is established and the men know that they have gone, in an instant, from desperate despair to the great chance of being rescued. Two more months they will wait for the drilling to open a large enough shaft for them to be pulled free, but now they can be fed from above. Now there is hope. But then Tobar chronicles that the fellowship, once so intimately bound, begins to fall apart. The men begin to fight. Sides are chosen up. Worship that once held 33 now receives only a half dozen. Some think they were more the hero. Others think

they had sacrificed more. Others remember long-held grievances. And quickly is forgotten how equally desperate they had so recently been for mercy. Once mercy had come, mercy had been forgotten.

And that of course is the crux. That when mercy comes, how quickly it seems to pass.

We've all been there. We are likely there now. We have found on the cross the stunning development -- the overwhelming mercy that yearns to seep into our souls -- and yet here we are wondering about what the other guy might owe us.

Of course for many of us -- the wounds are deep. The debt others have run up on us is enormous. The pain we have endured is extraordinary. The other guy has breathed his fire. But our greatest risk is to somehow lose the sight of ourselves in that crowd. The crowd under the cross. That gang of dragons breathing fire at the Savior. It's so easy to lose ourselves in that picture. Monsters making a mess of the world. And to remember that it was to us, it is to us, that the Savior says, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing."

It may explain why I found it such holy ground when a friend of mine, a recovering alcoholic, invited me to join him at the meeting of his Alcoholics Anonymous group. For years he had been telling me that being in the Program had saved his life. I had certainly heard story after story about it from friends and church members who were in the Program and what a difference it had made, but had never stepped inside the communion. I wasn't sure what to expect and was even less sure that I had any place being there. I was not a drinker. But we went. And there we were rich and poor, young and old, well-dressed and rumpled -- the twelve steps before us -- the first of course being -- to admit that we were powerless--that our lives had become unmanageable. And two -- that there was a Power greater than ourselves who could restore us to sanity. And as I sat listening to the man before us speaking with brutal honesty about the wreck he had made of his own life and others and his gratitude over his two years of sobriety and his mantra of one day at a time -- I felt like I was on holy ground. Never had our humanity felt so real. And never had the power felt so real. None of us had

anything over the other. No one better or worse. A sweet communion of the powerless. Dragons who were sorry. Yearning for a rescue that comes one day at a time.

Could this be said of us? We who gather before the cross? All debtors. All dragons. All powerless. All in need of a Savior. One day at a time. Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing. That this may be said each day to us. And that this may be said each day through us.