

WHEN YOUR PREACHER LEAVES: Interim Services for Churches Between Ministers

July, 2010, #48



Jerrie Barber and John Parker

To subscribe to this newsletter: > [Subscribe](#)

In this newsletter:

My Anonymous Letter Policy
Reversal in *King Lear*
Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books
Smile of the Month
Jerrie and John this Month

My Anonymous Letter Policy

by Jerrie Barber

Last month, I discussed responding to anonymous letters: [June 2010](#) . This month, I want to give a slightly different rule that I have from the one the Berry's Chapel elders developed.



One night, as I was driving to a speaking appointment, my wife called. She asked about a letter we received in the mail that day. She wanted to know who we knew in Cincinnati, Ohio, whose last name was "Moose." I replied that I didn't know anyone in Cincinnati and I didn't know anyone with the last name of Moose.

When I inquired why, she said we had received a two hundred dollar postal money order in the mail with a sticky note attached: “For all you do in Him.” It was signed, “Anon E. Moose.”

I deposited the money. A few months later, another such letter arrived from East Ellijay, Georgia. Later, one came from California. These were followed by one from Nashville, Tennessee. In each case, I wrote a thank-you note to Anon E. Moose at each address. Since none were returned, I assume Anon E. Moose received my note of appreciation.

My general rule is that I don’t respond to anonymous communication. However if anyone would like a response from me anonymously, please enclose money and a return address. I will write a thank-you note.

Reversal in *King Lear*

by John Parker



May not an ass know when the cart draws the horse?

One of the foundation principles of Elizabethan England was order, especially as it was laid out in what’s come to be known as the Great Chain of Being. The universe, the Elizabethans believed, operated according to an established hierarchy: divinity, man, animals, plants, and matter. Inside each of those major categories were sub-hierarchies: deity over angels; king over subjects; lion over mouse; rose over weed; diamond over rock, etc.

So long as this order established by God was preserved, the Elizabethans believed, harmony reigned, as it always did above the moon, where the planets moved in perfection, creating a literal music of the spheres. However, if it were disturbed by a subordinate’s usurping the place of his superior, chaos prevailed, a chaos that was reflected in other parts of the universe. For instance, when Macbeth kills King Duncan, the weather becomes stormy, the earth shakes, an owl kills a falcon, and Duncan’s horses each other.

In no play is the Great Chain disrupted more profoundly than in *King Lear*, where individual, family, kingdom, and universe are turned upside down, and where the resulting chaos does terrible damage. The nation is disrupted, and the lives of Lear, all three of his daughters, and many others are lost.

Whether or not the Renaissance concepts of God’s hierarchies are strictly correct, God *has* established an order to his universe (Genesis 1), his church (Ephesians 1:22-23), and his people:

*The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord,
And He delights in his way. (Psalm 37:23)*

And following this order provides a harmony of life that parallels the harmony in his original creation.

But, as *King Lear* illustrates, men can walk in extreme disorder (cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:6), leaving or even reversing the course that God has established. When the cart draws the horse inside our families, our churches, our world, or ourselves, there's chaos, and order must be re-established to have harmony again.

The ultimate violation of God's Great Chain was sin, the disruption that brought death into the world and separated God from man (Isaiah 59:1-2; Romans 5:12-14). Since then, man has continuously walked in the reverse of the way God wants him to go:

Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward. (Jeremiah 7:24)

But through Christ the breach can be closed (Romans 5:15-21), and disrupting reversals be reversed; then divine order and grace can reign again.

The Play

Lear, eighty-year-old king of pre-Christian Britain, has decided to retire from active rule and to divide his kingdom among his three daughters—Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia—ostensibly on terms that the best portion will go to the daughter who declares most effusively how much she loves him. Goneril and Regan give lavish speeches, but Cordelia—the youngest and Lear's favorite, and the one to whom he's already assigned the best share—refuses to be a part of the undignified performance. Enraged, Lear banishes her penniless, as well as Kent, a nobleman who defends her. The King of France, however, who's at court to woo Cordelia, claims her as his queen. Goneril with her husband Albany, and Regan with her husband Cornwall divide the kingdom between them. Immediately, these two elder sisters reflect on how Lear "hath ever but slenderly known himself" and plot to bring him under control with their new power.

King Lear also has a fully developed subplot that's intended to parallel the main one. The Duke of Gloucester has one good son, Edgar, and one illegitimate and evil son, Edmund. To get Edgar's inheritance Edmund dupes Gloucester into believing Edgar is planning to kill him. With a price on his head, the young man flees, disguising himself as a mad beggar.

Lear is living idly at Goneril's castle—along with a hundred of his knights! Goneril, mean to begin with, is getting irritable fast. To his utter disbelief, she roundly rebukes him and orders him to reduce his retinue;

Lear, in another rage, pronounces an awful curse on her and storms out to go live with Regan. Lear's Fool (predecessor to the court jester) humorously but candidly points out to Lear that *he's* the fool, having given his children his fortune before his death, and can expect this kind of treatment. Meanwhile, Kent has returned in disguise, joining Lear to help him.

Edmund has cozied up to Regan and Cornwall, and at Gloucester's house they put Kent, who's come there in advance of Lear, in the stocks. Lear is incredulous that anyone would treat his servant so, but he's beginning to show signs of recognizing his powerlessness. When Goneril arrives and teams with Regan against him, he rails against them and goes with the Fool out onto the heath just as a storm breaks.

On the political front, Albany and Cornwall are already at odds with each other, and Cordelia and the French army are invading England to rescue Lear. He's in desperate need of rescue, because he's exposed to a storm of hurricane proportions, symbolic of the tempest in his mind. He calls on the storm to destroy the earth and to smite all wrongdoers, crying "I am a man/More sinn'd against than sinning." Under the strain, his mind is beginning to go.

Gloucester confides to Edmund that he's going out to help Lear, and Edmund immediately reports him to Cornwall. Gloucester discovers the king with the Fool and the disguised Edgar: the first two deranged and the third pretending to be! In a mad parody of a trial, Lear prosecutes Goneril and Regan *in absentia* for their treatment of him.

In the next scene, Gloucester is the one on trial: Cornwall and Regan arraign him for helping Lear, and in one of Shakespeare's most violent scenes Cornwall grinds out his eyes with his boot. Surprisingly, an unnamed servant tries to stop him, mortally wounding Cornwall before being stabbed by Regan. (Nice family, this.) Gloucester is put out on the heath, where his disguised son Edgar takes charge of him.

Albany condemns Goneril for the fiend she is and aligns himself with the good side. On the other, division is now rampant: both sisters have fallen in love with

Edmund and begin to turn on each other in mutual jealousy. Meanwhile, after Edgar forestalls a suicide attempt by Gloucester, the old men meet, one blind, the other mad. Yet Lear is magnificent in his madness, proclaiming himself "every inch a king" and continuing to condemn all injustice. Edgar intercepts Goneril's letter to Edmund urging him to kill Albany and marry her, and exposes his brother to Albany with a request to fight him.

The forces of Cordelia are approaching and battle is at hand. Lear has finally been apprehended, and in a tender scene, he and Cordelia are united. They lose the battle, however, and are taken prisoner by their own daughters/sisters and their husbands, plus Edmund, who secretly orders the execution of the king and Cordelia. These all immediately turn on each other, however. When Albany rejects Edmund as a legitimate contender for power, Edgar comes forward, challenges Edmund, and kills him. Goneril also poisons Regan and then kills herself.

In a scene of great pathos, Lear enters with the body of Cordelia in his arms. He dies, leaving Edgar to rule a shattered kingdom.

I am better than thou art now; I am a fool, thou art nothing. (1.4)

Shakespeare's audience would regard Lear's decision to abrogate his responsibilities as king and father, and to divide England into parts and put his children in control, as appalling, the ultimate follow of the cart drawing the horse. In God's order, according to their beliefs, the kingdom and family are to be preserved, and the king and the parents to rule. Both political and social stability depend on these foundations.

In the kingdoms of our homes and families today, as in Lear's, division and role reversal also threaten the order of things. Because they but slenderly know themselves in their own relationships as husbands and wives, almost half of today's parents abrogate their duties and divide the kingdom of their homes by divorce. Other parents, focused like Lear on their self-centered desires, simply don't want to be bothered any longer with the responsibilities of parenting, and hand over control of their children's lives, and sometimes even control of the whole home kingdom, to the children themselves. This all may be done in the name of allowing and teaching independence, but in effect it fosters insurrection. Hardly anything would lead more certainly to having, in Gloucester's words, "the bond crack'd 'twixt son and father."

Husbands, wives, or parents, what's the state of *your* kingdom? God's order for it is this:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as

also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. . . . let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Countless homes past and present have followed this model, with the result of successful, happy homes devoted to God and each other. You know of many today, and you probably remember families from the past—maybe your own parents and grandparents—who lived by these principles.

But many don't; they're more like Lear's: the cart draws the horse. Instead of loving, sacrificial, decisive men who fulfill the role of husbands by modeling themselves on Christ's love of his church, we have self-centered, ill-tempered, college-boy fun-seekers who leave their lives to do the major tasks and make the important decisions. Instead of mature women who support their husbands and cooperatively submit to them as the church does to Christ, we have feminists demanding joint authority, engaging their husbands in daily combat, and demanding major "space" outside the home. Instead of obedient children, we have sarcasm, indolence, disrespect, and demands to have their own money, own entertainment centers, own cars, and own decisions (still to be paid for, though, by their own parents, whom they expect to finance both cart and horse!).

Today's children are as bright and skilled as any yet seen: there's no denying their abilities, and we rejoice in them. But especially powerful carts draw the horses when these excellent skills are mistaken for maturity, because without the maturity the skills add to the danger. The computer, for example, offers tremendous promise for the future lives of the next generations. But putting so powerful an instrument literally in the hands of extremely competent, savvy, unsupervised, and morally blank young Edmunds has often produced havoc.

Abrogation of power can also lead, as it did in Lear's case, to real harm to the older, abrogating generation. Paul said that the law was made for "murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers" (1 Timothy 1:9). By extension we might mention "murderers of teachers" in schools, and of other authority figures. Young, mean people can and do turn into Gonerils, Regans, and Cornwalls more quickly and readily than their parents or authority figures might want to admit, especially when they come from homes in which religion and worship died with their grandparents.

We'll note here one specific from the play about parent-child arrangements. In the category of being "wise as serpents and harmless as doves," parents might want to heed the Fool when he offers advice to those who might "play King Lear" and surrender too soon an inheritance that their children aren't suited to manage. In doing so, he says, Lear makes another reversal: he trades being king for being a fool. Offering the king his coxcomb (fool's cap), he says

Would I had two coxcombs and two daughters.
. . . . If I gave them all my living, I'd keep my
coxcombs myself. There's mine; beg another of thy
daughters.

When Lear asks if he's calling him a fool, he replies

All thy other titles thou hast given away; that thou
wast born with. . . . When thou clovest thy crown I'
th' middle and gav'st away both parts, thou bor'st
thin ass on thy back o'er the dirt. Thou hadst little
wit in thy bald crown when thou gav'st thy golden one
away.

Children are commanded to care for their aged parents (1 Timothy 5:4), and most are loving children who tenderly repay their aged fathers and mothers for the care they have received. But some aren't, and older people in today's families might consider the Fool's admonitions before putting their security in the hands of immature or doubtful members of the next generation:

*Fathers that wear rags
Do make their children blind,
But fathers that bear bags [of money]
Shall see their children kind.*

O, that way madness lies; let me shun that!

Renaissance philosophers thought of man as a little kingdom of his own, a "microcosm," or little world. The ruling part of man was supposed to be "right reason," which followed God's teachings, but the lower parts, the humanistic "rational man" and the animalistic passions, were always challenging for control, to have the cart draw the horse. Lear is an example of such a microcosm that's suffered such an insurrection. According to his daughters, "he hath ever but slenderly known himself," and even "the best and soundest of his time hath been but rash." In high rage he sends away Cordelia, the only daughter who loves him, and gives his estate to two of the most monstrous women in literature. He's paying for it now: the cart draws the horse.

Is your microcosm, in Renaissance terms, directed by "right reason," or does the cart draw the horse so that your spiritual nature is guided by human wisdom or, even further below, by passion and the physical?

Among the scripture's teachings on the power of the source of true "right reason" are these:

Hebrews 4.12

. . . the Holy Scriptures . . . are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 2:15-17)

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

Psalm 119 and many other passages attest to the benefits of this guide.

Right reason, that supplied by God through his word, truly makes a man wise, but the wise of this world, the apostle says, regard God's true wisdom as foolish:

For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

This wisdom of the world is represented in *Lear*—ironically enough—by the Fool. Considered a fool by his masters, the Fool is more wise, at least in the ways of the world, than they are, as they prove by their foolish and destructive behavior. But the Fool's wisdom is limited, and in a sense foolish too, for he counsels Lear only on what is practical for personal security, not on what is right:

O nuncle, court holy-water in a dry house is better than this rain-water out o' door. Good numcle, In, and ask thy daughters' blessing. Here's a night pities neither wise men nor fools.

In the end, the Fool disappears with his last mysterious line:

And I'll go to bed at noon (3.6)

a speech which suggests the emptiness of the earthly wisdom about whose ineffectiveness Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:14, which draws this conclusion:

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Those who spiritually discern, then, whom the world regard as fools, become the truly wise:

But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty.

The consequences of foolishness for Lear and his two evil daughters—and for all whose microcosm is guided by the foolish wisdom of the world rather than the wise foolishness of God’s word—are awful. The king suffers not only the loss of his power and position, but the agonizing pain of his children’s ingratitude:

*How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is
To have a thankless child!*
* * * * *

Filial ingratitude!
*Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand
For lifting food to ‘t?*
* * * * *

*O Regan, Goneril,
Your old kind father, whose frank heart gave all-*

On the heath, exposed to the terrible violence of the storms pelting his body and ravaging his mind, he cries

*Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! Spout, rain!
Nor rain, wind, thunder, fire, are my daughters.
I tax not you, you elements, with unkindness;
I never gave you kingdom, call’d you children,
You owe me no subscription [allegiance].*

Not just Lear, but the whole of society and even the universe reel before the terrible storm of evil in this play. Edmund, who cynically jests that his “goddess” is “nature,” or nihilism, is in a category of Shakespearean villains who seemingly do evil for evil’s sake. He, Goneril, Regan, and Cornwall inflict incredible cruelties on their respective fathers or father-in-law, and then wolf-like turn on and devour one another. The evil they represent is so fierce that Shakespeare both emblemizes and attacks it by a storm so powerful that it threatens to destroy the earth and man.

Yet having reversed right reason until the end of his life, Lear at the last begins to learn, and presents himself the most heroic of Shakespeare’s tragic figures. The Fool admonishes him

*Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst
been wise*

and now—eighty years old—he begins to reverse towards wisdom, to learn the answer to his question “Who is it that can tell me who I am?”

Sadly and ironically, Lear’s wisdom comes as his agony and madness come:

*O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!
(1.5)*

O, fool, I shall go mad! (2.4)

But in his approaching madness he begins to see how he's wronged Cordelia, and from there to recognize both the wrong and the right in the universe whose privilege he's enjoyed, but whose awful sufferings he's never faced until now. A series of speeches marks the course of his realization:

Woe, that too late repents! (1.4)

*O most small fault,
How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show! (1.4)*

*O Lear, Lear, Lear!
Beat at this gate, that let thy folly in
And thy dear judgment out! (1.4)*

I did her wrong! (1.5)

Out on the heath, suffering cold and hunger for the first time in his life, he reverses to acquire an empathy for others:

*Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp,
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them
And show the heavens more just. (3.4)*

Having recognized his need to reverse his own course of shallow folly and faults, Lear next turns fiercely on the injustices of the world he inhabits, and calls on all wrongdoers to reverse theirs:

*Let the great gods,
That keep this dreadful pother o'er our heads,
Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch
That hast within thee undivulgèd crimes
Unwhipped of justice; hide thee, thou bloody
hand,
Thou perjured and thou simular [pretender] of
virtue
That art incestuous; caitiff [wretch], to pieces
shake,
That under covert and convenient seeming
[hypocrisy]*

*Has practised on man's life; close pent-up
guilts,
Rive [split] your concealing continents and cry
These dreadful summoners grace. I am a man
More sinned against than sinning. (3.2)*

Eventually, Lear receives grace from Cordelia:

CORDELIA

O, look upon me sir,

*And hold your hand in benediction o'er me
. . . .*

LEAR

*I know you do not love me; for your sisters
Have, as I do remember, done me wrong.
You have some cause, they have not.*

CORDELIA

No cause, no cause.

Lear's suffering isn't over: the final scene of the play when Lear enters carrying Cordelia's body, then dies searching for a breath from her, is one of the most pathos-filled in literature. But like the other great tragic heroes, he dies at the height of his self-knowledge: he no longer slenderly knows himself.

"And cry these dreadful summoners grace"

A summoner was the officer who arrested offenders and brought them to an ecclesiastical court, much like the magistrate in Jesus' figure in Matthew 5:25. Whether the in state, family, or church, sin and disorder create storms of disturbance, disruption, and agony which summon us to cry to them for grace, and which should lead us to the one reversal which restores God's order: the reversal known as repentance:

*Repent therefore and be converted [NIV "turn"],
that your sins may be blotted out, so that times
of refreshing may come from the presence of the
Lord.*

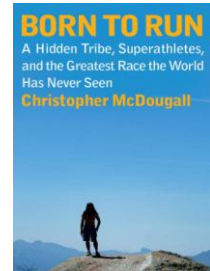
Those who have let the cart draw the horse in the family, the church, or the microcosm of their lives may reverse themselves, cry Him grace, and receive both grace and the refreshing blessings that come from following His order.

*For the Lord will again rejoice over you for good
as He rejoiced over your fathers, if you obey he
voice of the Lord your God, to keep His
commandments and His statutes which are written
in this Book of the Law, and if you turn to the*

Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Mustard Seeds from Favorite Books, Jerrie Barber

Born To Run: A Hidden Tribe, Superathletes, and the Greatest Race the World Has Never Seen, by Christopher McDougall, Copyright © 2009 by Christopher McDougall.



It reminded me of a proverb attributed to Roger Bannister, who, while simultaneously studying medicine, working as a clinical researcher, and minting pithy parables, became the first man to break the four-minute mile: “Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up,” Bannister said. “It knows it must outrun the fastest lion or it will be killed. Every morning in Africa, a lion wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the slowest gazelle, or it will starve. It doesn’t matter whether you’re a lion or a gazelle – when the sun comes up, you’d better be running” (page 13).

In Tarahumara Land, there was no crime, war, or theft. There was no corruption, obesity, drug addiction, greed, wife-beating, child abuse, heart disease, high blood pressure, or carbon emissions. They didn’t get diabetes, or depressed, or even old: fifty-year-olds could outrun teenagers, and eighty-year-old great granddads could hike marathon distances up mountainsides. Their cancer rates were barely detectable. The Tarahumara geniuses had even branched into economics, creating a one-of-a-kind financial system based on booze and random acts of kindness: instead of money, they traded favors and big tubs of corn beer (page 14).

These Young Guns wanted something fresh, tough, and exotic, and they were flocking to trail-running in such numbers that, by 2002, it had become the fastest-growing outdoor sport in the country. It wasn’t just the racing they loved; it was the thrill of exploring the brave new world of their own bodies. Ultra god Scott Jurek summed up the Young Gun’s official creed with a quote from William James he stuck on the end of every email he sent: “Beyond the very extreme of fatigue and distress, we may find amounts of ease and power we never dreamed ourselves to own; sources of strength never taxed at all because we never push through the obstruction” (page 112).

Scott was a hero for a very different reason among back-of-the-packers too slow to see him in action. After winning a hundred-mile race, Scott would be desperate for a hot shower and cool sheets. But instead of leaving, he’d wrap himself in a sleeping bag and stand vigil by the finish line. When day broke the next morning, Scott would still be there, cheering hoarsely, letting that last, persistent runner know he wasn’t alone (page 125).

Consider these words by Dr. Daniel Lieberman, a professor of biological anthropology at Harvard University: “A lot of foot and knee injuries that are currently

plaguing us are actually caused by people running with shoes that actually make our feet weak, cause us to over-pronate, give us knee problems. Until 1972, when the modern athletic shoe was invented by Nike, people ran in very thin-soled shoes, had strong feet, and had much lower incidence of knee injuries” (page 168).

Smile of the Month



Bill and his wife Mary were sitting in the living room, having just heard about an unfortunate situation regarding a recovering accident victim. Bill looked over and said to Mary, “Just so you know, I never want to live in a vegetative state, dependent on some machine and fluids from a bottle. If that ever happens, just pull the plug.”

In one swift move, Mary got up, unplugged the TV and threw out all of Bill’s beer! (48days.com, August, 22, 2006)

Barber Clippings

We continue to have great cooperation and encouragement at Collegeside. We are ready to start the self-study. It will be on line for those who prefer to use the computer and paper copies for those who want to write their answers.

There are questions on demographics, worship, involvement, communication, core beliefs, ministry effectiveness, and opportunities for growth.

Questions on the preacher — his preparation, personality, presentation, and ministry emphasis — invites thinking on the qualities we need in the next preacher.

Our leadership class, *God’s Great Servants*, is nearly full. It starts the first Wednesday night in August.

Jerrie Barber

jerrie@barberclippings.com

www.barberclippings.com

<http://barberclippings.blogspot.com/>

(615) 356-8371

756 Woodland Way

Nashville, Tennessee 37209-5207

Church phone: (615) 824-6622

Cell phone: (615) 584-0512

John Parker (by Jerrie Barber)

John had open heart bypass surgery June 30. He and Jill had just returned from their tour of the English hymn sites. He had an angiogram on Tuesday and surgery the next morning.

John did not have a heart attack. I am thankful for that.

Jill posted the following on her Facebook account: “John is at home as of Tuesday afternoon and is making progress every day. The Lord blesses and blesses again.”

Please continue to pray for John for a speedy recovery.

John H. Parker

Johnparker22@comcast.net

www.interimcofc.com

(615) 373-4462

To subscribe to this newsletter: > [Subscribe](#).