

June 22, 2020

Last week I returned to doing things that I love to do just a bit, I “did” three funerals, I preached God’s word, I hope, reasonably well, yesterday for the first time in months, I spent time with people, mostly unguarded, unmasked except for my first brief trip to Walt’s for milk, laughing, listening, speaking out loud, remembering, even, eating, and then I came home and I was acutely aware of being alone and being lonely, so I read a bit of *The Inner Loneliness* by Sebastian Moore and this is what I thought about.

*Oedipus Rex* is the title of a play by Sophocles that was first performed about 500 years before the birth of Jesus. This play was based on older oral and written stories based on myths that would tell of a man, Oedipus, who would end up murdering his father and marrying his mother.

The etymology of the word “Oedipus” is a combination of ancient Greek words that literally mean, “swollen foot” but how that term got associated with the myth and subsequent associations of the word “oedipus” is unclear, at least to me and my shallow study.

In the play by Sophocles one tragic decision leads to another tragic decision and in the end lots of people are dead including the father Oedipus murdered and his mother whom he married.

The mother hangs herself when she realizes what has happened, and Oedipus blinds himself and that is what I want to tell you about today.

The blind Oedipus is a metaphor for a person turning inward to find out who they are, to whom they belong, and what is the meaning of it all.

At some point in time long before Sophocles and longer before Christ probably in North Africa but more than likely, as well, among other developed societies, individuals began to question and think for themselves, they stepped out of the boxes of tribal and familial meanings and began their own quests for personal and cosmic meanings.

They became “self-conscious” and so began the notion of individuality and personal uniqueness that in some ways we assume and take for granted today

even though we do not actually find as many individual and unique persons among us as we would like to think we are, at least that is my experience.

The self-blinding of Oedipus and the deaths of his parents symbolized the turning inward and the detachment from outer supports of meaning inspired others to do the same. Oedipus became the symbol of a human search for meaning

I would suggest that that is what has been happening to us these last four months and counting, we have been blinded in a sense by our quarantine, limited in what we can see and do, cut off from our familial and tribal identities, we have experienced tragedy, some far, far more than others, but all have experienced a tragic taste of life in one way or another.

At the end of the play, after all Oedipus goes through, experiences, loses, and learns, he can only admit and know for certain that he is lonely, personally, individually, and cosmically lonely.

The questions are, is loneliness the price for being alive or is there more to learn? Is the inner life ever exhausted? Is the search for meaning ever finished? Could our loneliness be the teacher or The Teacher?