

WORSHIP

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"Remember that you are dust. But remember as well that God remembers. And to remember that God remembers is to find assurance that God is in love with dust, no matter how messy it is." – KC Ptomey

The Promise of Remembering

By the Reverend Erika Funk

Psalm 25 and Genesis 9:8-17

I remember, way back in the day, when gas stations used to give out gifts. Probably around the same time when banks used to give away toasters and stuff when you opened an account. I was pretty young so I don't remember the details of the exchange but I do remember I had a toy Noah's ark that I got from our corner gas station. Brown plastic ship molded to look like planks of wood on the side and a little ladder off the side that the animals would walk on board and then two little plastic monkeys, cows, giraffes, lions, elephants, horses, on and on. I used to play with it in the bathtub all the time. Never thinking, wheeee..this is from the story when God killed most of humanity. Folks, just because it has animals in it doesn't mean it a good story for children I mean... Old Yeller for example?

Today it's hard for me, and probably most of you, to think about Noah and the ark and not think about the mass destruction. As we get older and these stories transform from bathtub fun into bible stories – we have to ask – what is it telling us about God?? What does this say about the nature of God?

The answer to that question is a small detail that comes from this morning's reading. If we are honest we are not surprised that God might desire to erase our sinfulness and lately, after watching what is going on around the world, I wonder if a new start isn't a crazy idea. Consider this: creation was called into being from chaos and nothingness by the breath of God and it seems we are determined to return to chaos and nothingness.

As we begun the journey of Lent on Wednesday, imposing ashes on our heads, reminding one another of our mortality and sin another school took 17 shots to its heart in Parkland, Florida. Again, another person engulfed in rage and pain returned to chaos and nothingness.

And the debate around how to prevent these tragedies also seems to return to chaos and nothingness.

What's important to note in the story of the flood and the covenant is that it is God who says "I promise never to do this again" when in fact ever since then it is humanity who should be making this promise to God.



But remember, this story isn't about us...its about God. And it is God who relents, it is God who takes a step back, a step down and says "no more". The omnipotent, all powerful God says "I choose mercy over power". No more. No more.

We may wonder how those who heard this story first responded to God's choice to say "no more". What we know is the understanding of God was all powerful and willing and able to create and destroy when creation proves disappointing. Yahweh was merciful, yes, but to give up on all rights to destroy for all time was an "unheard of surrendering of divine power"

God is now the creator and protector but no longer the destroyer. We remember this part of the story because of the rainbow in the sky, we love to tell our children that when we see a rainbow we can remember that God loves us, that God makes promises to protect us forever. But that's not really what the text says. The text says "bow in the clouds" and it is often translated as rainbow but it is not a rainbow that God sets in the sky it is God's bow as in bow and arrow.

12 God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: 13 I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

We know from the psalms that the Israelites conceived of lightening as God's arrows fired from God's bow. Hanging up God's bow would mean God's war with creation was over, creation could now rest because peace had come. Whether it is a rainbow symbol of the beauty of the earth or a warrior's bow set aside, the imagery says and the language tell us that God laid down his weapons of destruction a long, long, time ago. God is waiting for us to do the same. And so are our children. So are our neighbors, so are our teachers, our poets, even our soldiers.

Through the covenant established by God, God is now bound up with the fate of humanity. No longer distanced from us, lording power over creation, God chose a different way.... A way of vulnerability, a way of strength but not absolute power, a way of investment not privilege.

Because God knew that you cannot be fully invested in something if you also have an option to destroy it. God knows if you have an investment in destruction of any kind, you thus are not invested in the thriving of that person, place or thing.

- After the flood our survival is God's survival, our thriving is God's thriving.
- God is more than committed to us, God is invested in us.
- After the flood, the story tells us, God realizes there must be sacrifice, that God cannot rule with an iron fist or a distant glance. God must participate differently and so God enters into a new relationship with us that puts limits on God's power and prerogatives, God's rights so to speak.
- Anyone who has entered into a committed relationship such as marriage or parentings knows this to be true.
- And in so doing God also opens himself up to hurt, disappointment, hope, joy and grief.
- As do we when we enter into relationships that strive for the flourishing of the other and a stepping down of



our own power. We place ourselves in positions of hurt, disappointment, even rejection and grief.

But if this is the way God chooses to be in relationship then so must we. We must relinquish relationships that ask power over another, establish violence as a mode of security and expect trust to come because we demand it.

From the flooding of the earth to the incarnation of Christ, we find a God who is loving, compassionate, forgiving and creative in his ways to find us and rescue us. Interesting that it is God who says, "I promise never to do this again" when in fact it should have been the human race expressing those words. It shows us God's goodness and steadfastness over and against our imperfection.

"most dramatic of all, only one party to the agreement - God – speaks at all. No response on the part of Noah and his sons is called for or given, not even their acknowledgment of acceptance is noted. The covenant with creation, then, is an act of a free and gracious God on behalf of a world that did not have to ask for it or earn it, or even respond to it."

And that is what makes a covenant with God unique.

Imagine being given a jacket, the warmest jacket you can imagine. And then you lose it, or someone takes it. And the next morning you wake up there it would be. Clean, with pockets full of tasty snacks and plenty of tissues provided before you even knew you had a cold coming on. Exactly what you needed before you even knew you needed it. By the end of the day its dirty and wet and the pockets are empty. And when you wake up the next day, there it is again, clean and warm and dry, pockets filled with things to get you through the day. Then one day, in anger or pure forgetfulness or a messed up head, you tear it up and throw it away. You're sick of it, you don't want it, it's an ugly, useless jacket to you now. And tomorrow when you wake up, cold again, it's there, as warm and dry as it was when it was first given to you.

Too many of us wake each day needing a warm jacket, too many of us wake up feeling so cold inside that no jacket however perfect can make us feel warm again. Every day we flood this city with cold waters of self hate and destruction and every day God posts a rainbow, if for no other reason than for God to remember that the world is worth saving, the creation is good and beautiful. Maybe that isn't comforting, because the world is still cold and the nights are still dark and you're not sure if you can keep up the dog paddling much longer, you're getting tired. So how far will God go to retrieve us from a flooded land?

Humanity wasn't fixed when the flood waters dried up. Keep reading in Genesis and you'll see. More human forgetfulness, more sin, more destruction and disappointment. It's not about being fixed, but finding God in this world, in ways we can see and ways we can't. serving each other and bringing in the Kingdom. God didn't promise to eliminate natural disasters; destructive events still happen. They are still a part of creation's natural growth, death and cycle of new life. But the acts of God, saving, birthing, healing, baptizing show us what God is doing, the new realm that God is bringing in.

God remembers when we forget.

We begin the Lenten journey freed to care less about God's powerful threats and more about God's promises for the threats are largely of our own creation and the promises are realized again and again.

And it doesn't matter how many times we may forget this. Despite our forgetfulness God will remember. God will not destroy us, God will not forget what we always forget. In other words, we are free to forget but God is



not.

During Lent as the nights get shorter and the light stays longer... we watch for anything that beckons us to true and deep repentance, for new life to rise up out of the waters, the chance to spend more day light with God, more time in the light looking at what we fear might be destruction to find instead a wild, set free God showering us with redemption.

- This is the journey of Lent - to watch, walk and wait with God as traditional symbols of power and supremacy are shut down and weakness and vulnerability become symbols of love and victory.
- How does this change our relationship with others?
- How does this change our relationship with symbols of power?
- Whatever the answer it is a long journey to get from here to there.

Let us begin.

This is good news.

