

FIRST SCRIPTURE READING: John 1: 1-5, 14 pg 91 NT

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life,^[a] and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son,^[d] full of grace and truth. This is the word of the Lord

SECOND SCRIPTURE READING: Mark1:9-13

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. 11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." 12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. This is the word of the Lord.

THIRD SCRIPTURE READING: Genesis 9:8-17 pg 7 OT

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9 "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, 10 and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. 11 I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

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. 14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16 When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." 17 God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth." This is the word of the Lord

***“Committed to the Flesh”**

***I** believe it was our youngest son’s nursery that was decorated in a Noah’s ark theme. I can remember the cute mobile that was hanging over his crib with little giraffes, tigers, elephants and monkeys all twirling around. It played music. I think we had a Noah’s ark lamp shade as well and a poofy wall hanging of a rainbow. Mike and I were happy to contribute to the abundance of marketing of Noah’s Ark decorations, toys, books and clothing because their cute, and it’s a lot of fun to think of the animals coming two by two. ***We** taught our kids the arky, arky song, and we together wondered about how the cats and mice got along on the ark, weather the giraffes had to stick their heads out the windows, and why God didn’t just do away with the cockroaches when God had the chance.

But, as you might imagine, the story of Noah is actually very different than this way of thinking about it. ***You** may already realize that the flood account, which is actually pretty terrifying, was likely claimed as Jewish scripture from a common religious tradition of flood accounts in the Ancient Near East. However, the INSPIRED account we find in Genesis, expresses the unique, very unique theological truths of Israel’s faith as opposed to their pagan neighbors’ beliefs. These truths center not on the flood, or the ark or the animals coming two by two, but upon the character of the ONE, living, sovereign God. (*pause*)

***Now**, as we’ve mentioned before, to understand any biblical text fully, we need to consider the context and the author’s perspective. Regarding the context: It is critical here that we know what has happened previously. We need know of Adam & Eve’s rebellion, Cain’s murder of Abel, the perversion of Cain’s descendent, Lamech and Lamech’s people. We need know that the people who populate the earth at the time are wicked, murderous, and violent; they have no regard for the value of life, no regard for goodness or order at all. ***Creation** has turned its back on and is hostile to its Creator. As Walter Brueggemann says, “Creation has exchanged the truth about God for a lie, worshiping and serving the creature rather than the Creator”.¹

¹ Walter Brueggemann. “Genesis.” In: Interpretation. A Bible Commentary. James Mays, Patrick Miller, eds (Atlanta: JKP; 1982), 76.

In regard to the authors' perspective: coming in, the writers knew that their God is very different than the pagan's gods. *Their God, the God of Israel is Righteous, uncompromisingly so, completely, steadfastly righteous. God is not wishy-washy nor does God's attitude change-on-a-whim regarding right and wrong. God is wholly JUST, and the divine justice flows out of God's pure and total holiness. For this reason, sin, they understood correctly as a horrible affront to God, completely contrary to all that God stands for and desires for creation. Our God detests, hates sin.

So, with these considerations in mind, we read in the 9th chapter of Genesis a not unexpected condemnation by God. We read of God's plan to destroy that which is so opposed to how it was created to be, God's intention to completely blot out that which has used its freedom to turn on its Creator. (*pause*) But, but there is something else! We also have an amazing and very important truth revealed. In the narrative, the authors present a God who feels pain, whose heart is broken for the Creation which he called into being, who exercises restraint and divine mercy. *We read that God does NOT destroy the ENTIRE world. God spares righteous Noah, his family and two of every species of creature. This is not an angry tyrant God doing this, but a troubled, grieving parent whose holy righteousness comes not as punitive judgement, but through a choice to enter into the Creation, into its pain and brokenness.² The truth we see revealed here is that our God is not distant and immovable, but free, free to hurt and ache, to celebrate and rejoice with God's creation. Again, (Click) *Walter Brueggemann, "God can and does choose to be compassionate and vulnerable and can rescue that which should be condemned".³

This revelation of God's character is affirmed further when, in the story, *God goes on to make a promise, a covenant, that never again will God destroy Creation. As a sign of the covenant, God sets a rainbow in the clouds—not to jog Noah's memory, but God's. Note that it is a covenant without strings attached. It's not a conditional "if/then" promise. There is no expectation that Creation will change. And sure enough, it is not long before Jacob is stealing

² Walter Brueggemann, pg 81

³ Walter Brueggemann, pg 78.

Esau's birthright, Aaron is dancing around a golden calf, and David is figuring out how to kill Bathsheba's husband."⁴ In fact it is not too long before people are committing cyber crimes, and shooting innocents in schools and churches. *"Evil continues. Bad things happen, but since here in Genesis, we know that none of them is rooted in God's anger and ill will toward us".*⁵ With this covenant God has pledged that God will stay with us, will endure our burdens, and sustain the world despite our sorry state. My favorite preacher, Barbara Brown Taylor, says it this way, *"From this point on, God is binding Godself to the creation in peace, promising himself to it although he knows how it will wound him. God chooses to ally himself with his cantankerous creation whatever the cost. *If there is to be pain in the world, our God will share it. God's promise to the world is life, not death."*⁶

So, friends, the Noah story is much more than the story we learned as children, or that we teach our children. It is the story which introduces the truth which is then threaded throughout all of Scripture, and is at the heart of the Gospel, the truth about our God, who, at cost to Godself, makes.... ***A** COMMITMENT TO THE FLESH. (repeat) Ex 6:6-7 *"I will deliver you from your bondage...I will redeem you with an outstretched arm...I will take you for my people and I will be your God.* Is 43:1-2 *"I have redeemed you....When you pass through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you."* Jr 31:33 *I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts...I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more,"* and Jn 1:14 *"And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory."* We see it even in the gospel text for the first Sunday in Lent, Mk 1:12-13 *"And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan."*

Sooooo, what's the take away, brothers and sisters? What does it mean for us that our God's character is and always has been to enter into the pain and brokenness of the world, that our God's holy justice comes to us as compassion and vulnerability? How does this translate for us in our lives? (Pause) ***Well**, does it not mean that we can get up each day to face the world

⁴ Barbara Brown Taylor. *"Refreshing God's Memory"* In: Gospel Medicine (Boston: Cowley Pub; 1995), 32.

⁵ Barbara Brown Taylor 32

⁶ Barbara Brow Taylor, 32.

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with just a little more excitement and courage? We can know that no matter what good or bad happens, we will be accompanied by Jesus who will share the walk, carrying our burdens and giving us a shoulder to lean on when the going gets tough. Does it not mean that when we sin and fall short of what we were created to be, we can still go on without the weight of guilt or shame, go on forgiven, repentant, not fearing eternal punishment? We can know that God wants for us life not death. Does it not mean that we need never feel left out, too different, too far away, too lost? We can know that God has entered FULLY into our world in Jesus and there is NO place that Jesus has not been, and NO place which is outside his salvific reach. Yes, this is what it means. It means all of these things and more. *Yes, it means that the next time it rains we can search the sky for the rainbow and remember that we are children of the God who is committed to the flesh. Amen.