

The God of Second Chances

When the torrential rainstorm and its accompanying crashing waves that pelted and shuddered the hull of the ship died down...when the frightening storm that had assaulted and inundated the land, swallowing everything upon the earth in a ravenous flood, had finally subsided...when the destruction was over, the sky finally cleared and the ground was at long last dry...It was after the storm, in the calm silence, that Noah opened the doors of the Arc and let the sun shine once more upon his face..his heart grateful with the knowledge that God had saved him and his family...and eternally thankful that we have a God of second chances!

It was the beginning of a new day...it was a fresh start to build a new world. In a sense, it was God's way of bringing us back to the Garden...back to the beginning...where it all started...with God's sacred vision of creation...where people with goodness in their hearts were caretakers of God's creation which He had proclaimed good in the beginning.

Despite the flood's destruction, God would not eradicate the only part of humanity that was still good or the animals he created. He saved Noah and his family, He ensured that the animals would survive, blessed and decreed that all should be fruitful and multiply, filling the earth. And then, though God did not need to, He made a covenant with his creation, with Noah and the animals...he promised to never again destroy all living creatures upon the earth with a flood...and as proof of his word, the bible tells us, He set his bow upon the clouds as a sign of his divine promise.

When I was a young girl and I heard the Old Testament stories for the first time, I often wondered why God seemed so angry sometimes...like in the story of Noah, that he would send a flood in the first place and save only Noah's family and the animals. There was no doubt in my mind back then that I much preferred the image of God as Jesus with his arms open in love, forgiveness and sacrifice. But, as I grew up and kept hearing these stories over and over, I would pick up little bits of the story here and there that I had never really thought about. It was challenging me and I was growing with the story and the story was

growing with me...just like it was meant to do with the community it had been originally written for...The stories of the Old Testament were a living book, meant to guide people in their communal and personal lives. And, certainly, those who followed sinful ways and tried to mess with God, upon hearing these stories could not say they hadn't been warned!

As a parent, now, hearing and reading these stories, my perspective has broadened. Now, I can't read the Old Testament without picturing God as a parent, a mother, dealing with the growing pains of the children she gave birth to...and when you read about humanity in these stories, you see that too often they were quite violent, human growing pains that had corrupted God's originally perfect creation and gradually turned it against her. To be honest, now when I read the stories, I don't wonder at God's wrath or judgment...I wonder why God's people would incite it.

Now, having allowed the story to challenge and help me grow, with my perspective as a parent, I find that much of the imagery we see of God in the Old Testament and especially in the New Testament (in the form of Jesus who sacrificed himself for us), shows us that we have something quite special...we have a God who cares, who is present and engaged with His creation...A God who loves...who creates...who protects...who promises...who must be respected, honored and not be trifled with...He is someone whose wrath can be piqued and incited, in the face of humanity's evil and violence, as portrayed in the story of the flood...because those corrupt tendencies in humanity are a profanity of the holiness He had envisioned when He created and breathed life into us in the Garden. So much of my attention, as a child, was always placed on Adam and Eve and how they must have felt when they left the garden...but as a parent, I ask what about what God must have felt when the actions of humanity corrupted the goodness He had created?

God's wrath in sending the flood was incited not simply because humanity had fallen short of its original potential...no, it wasn't because it just didn't measure up in some way, because if that was the case, the story of humanity would have ended after Adam and Eve took a bite out of the forbidden fruit. No, His wrath was incurred because even after God took mercy on humanity and let them live out their lives outside the Garden, humanity had increasingly over time aggressively abused the holy gift of life it was given in the Garden, it had neglected its responsibility of stewardship of the earth and its creatures by

showing more interest in itself...showed hatred and violence towards each other, and had purposely walked away and rejected God, believing in its own self-importance and embracing evil while propagating violence wherever its hand could reach. With the exception of Noah and his family who loved and followed God, the rest of humanity was self-destructing and became lost to God way before He ever sent the flood.

Yes, the bible stories tell us that God can show wrath. But, they also tell us He can show great, unending mercy and forgiveness, especially in seeking ways to heal and save the relationship between Himself and our inconsistent world...He cut the wheat from the chaff to separate what was still useful and good to begin again. We have a God of second chances! He saved the good part of humanity that lived on in Noah and his family, as well as the animals, so that we could have the opportunity to wipe the slate clean and write a new story with God's love and mercy at the forefront while closing the chapter to humanity's past evil ways. There is much we could learn from this, when we consider that sometimes, the only way to grow or go forward is to cut away and let go of those things that drag us down deeper into our storms and keep us from reaching out and having a closer relationship with God.

Certainly, letting go and letting God take over, can be a frightening thing...and a true test of faith...to trust that God will be there to catch you in case you fall.

And, it must have been hard for Noah, when he learned of the massive, watery destruction that was headed towards humanity at God's hand. As a father, who surely worried about the future of his family...the flood must simply for him have become a terrifying but inevitable situation that must simply be faced head on. It was, for him, a test of great faith to follow God's command, to build an ark of incredible dimensions. Then, knowing what was to come, knowing that he, his family and the animals alone would be the only survivors of God's impending punishment, must have simultaneously made Noah feel both grateful and truly terrified. It was time to start over. It was time to face the situation at hand, face the storm, follow God's command and trust in God's deliverance. It was time to put his trust in God, that he would take care of him and those he loved.

What are the storms in your life? Do you sometimes feel like a ship, being tossed and turned, battered and worn in the waves of the storm? Do you feel like you're being pulled in every direction by the many underlying currents surging around you? Do you fear that you'll sink under the weight of all your troubles?

Are you allowing yourself to drown by holding on to your problems instead of reaching out to God for help?

If you are in the midst of a storm, you most certainly are not alone, which we can clearly see by one look at any newspaper. Every one of us weathers storms at one point or another, some storms more overwhelming and trying than others, but storms nonetheless. Life is tempestuous, full of the upheaval, disorder, disruptions, irritations and turmoil that only humanity is capable of inflicting on itself...but in facing the storms in our lives, like Noah, we must learn to trust God to be there for us. We must learn to ask God for help. We must talk and open our hearts to him. Like Noah, we must trust and allow God to guide us in the direction He is pointing us to. Until we seek and trust God, how will we ever feel the miracle of God's saving hand holding onto ours when we finally reach out to Him?

Whatever different storms that may be assailing you...Today, we have entered the house of God together...to praise and worship him. And, as I look up to the ceiling of our church, I love that the beams above us look like the bottom of a ship. We are in this ship together! We are not alone. We have a God who from the very beginning created and sought a relationship with us...and who made that relationship a permanent one by creating a covenant with us...God's promise to us...his bow in the clouds...to remind us about his great love for us...

Our storms will pass, and today, when the service is over and we open up the doors of our church and you step out into the light of day, with the sun shining on your face, I hope you feel like Noah...humbled and grateful knowing that God has saved you...knowing that you are worth saving...and as you walk out today, on this the first Sunday of Lent, a season that is meant to bring about not only reflection but a positive change in our lives, celebrate the loving and forgiving nature of our God by letting this be a brand new day...a new start...a fresh beginning...and an opportunity for us to seize the moment and share that gift of a new beginning with others...by opening your heart and being the child God created you to be in the beginning...a new start and a fresh beginning...this is the gift from our God of second chances!

Amen.