

There was a reason for the flood. In Genesis 6 it says...The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. All the ugliness of this world...all the horrible things we do to one another ...what is God's response? Grief. Deep grief that this beautiful creation...these humans created in God's own image, so deeply beloved...could destroy one another. Could destroy themselves.

And so...according to Genesis...that grief drives God to want to start over. In grief, God destroys everything. God sends the flood as an attempt to wipe away evil and hatred and violence...and start everything new.

But when the flood waters recede, God makes a promise...to all the earth....people, animals, plants...every living thing...that God won't ever do it again. God won't ever use destruction and violence in response to evil ever again. Why? Because, frankly...the flood didn't work. You see, wickedness and evil had stowed away on the boat with Noah and his family, and God knew it. After the flood, God says, "I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth.." It's just who they are. Indeed, if we were to read the whole story in Genesis...we'd find that right off the boat, Noah's family immediately took up drunkenness and debauchery, curses and hatred. The flood did not work. God tried to save the "good people"...but the painful truth is that no one is good. All of us are broken.

So what the answer? How do we respond to evil? To the evil of our human hearts. The evil of fear and hatred. The evil of racism and violence. The evil of greed and selfishness. The evil that cares more about profit than people. The evil that cares more about how someone looks than what's inside them. The evil that cares more about me than you. I confess...my instinct is also to want to see it all destroyed. To lash out with violence to destroy all the horrible people in this world. The floodwaters almost seem hopeful, don't they? Wash it all away, God. Bring on the rain... I'm ready for the do-over. Any of you feel that?

But ...there's that danged rainbow. There's a reason God said Never again.. And it's because the flood doesn't work. It doesn't fix anything. Like God said, we simply are too inclined to evil...from our youth. And retaliation and destruction, punishment and violence....do nothing to end evil. They never have. They never will. We know that. Scripture says that God repented after the flood. God turned around...chose a different response to the evil of the world. Why? Because after God saved humankind with the ark, we just turned right around and chose ugliness and wickedness again. So

God repented. God turned around and chose a different course of action...a different way to save us all.

Because we really do still need saving...we desperately need saving. We need saving from our own arrogance and pride and bluster and defensiveness and fear and selfishness and hate. We need saving from our rabid determination to be god...to have power...to have unlimited freedom. To retaliate and get even. We need saving because we are Adam and Eve, we are Noah and his family, because we are sinners, all of us.

So how does God save us? By entering into our world, **unarmed**. Not with weapons of mass destruction...but by coming to us in ordinary flesh, a baby, an ordinary human...that can be killed by our bullets and bombs, and by our crosses. Ordinary flesh, like yours and mine, that can drown in floods and suffer dehydration in the desert wilderness when there's no water to be found... like Jesus did. God comes in ordinary flesh that needs the care of others...that needs to be ministered to ...that needs to be helped in the wilderness...like Jesus was. Ordinary flesh that grieves when loved ones are jailed unjustly and murdered by governments...like Jesus did for his cousin, John the Baptist. We are saved by God who comes to walk alongside us from birth to death, in the midst of our demons.

God saves us, by coming into the midst of all our evil and injustice and proclaiming that God's kingdom is already here. Right here. In the way of Jesus. So repent...turn around...turn around and believe. Trust God...who says "no" to floods and destruction. Trust God...who says "no" to violence and arms. Trust God...who shows love in the face of hate. Who seeks redemption, not vengeance. Who seeks healing, not death.

This is the way of Jesus. This is the way God saves us. The way of gentleness and reverence and goodness. Turn around...turn around and BELIEVE this good news.

That's not easy to do. If I'm honest...I still want a flood. I want to wipe out all the child molesters and white supremacists and drug dealers and rapists and warlords. I want to remove all the nationalist political leaders and corrupt officers and CEOs and cruel people of every stripe right off the face of the earth. But, the heartbreaking truth is that even if we do that...and even if we are the only ones left....they...those evil people... will still be here. Why? Because the truth is ...the seeds of that kind of evil are in us too. The seeds of fear and hopelessness, the seeds of selfishness and pettiness. We are no different than Noah and his family after the flood. So in the end...God can only save us by loving us all the way to death and back to life again.

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday. It begins reminding us that we are not God...our flesh is vulnerable to bullets and bombs, to cancer and other illnesses and injuries. We begin Lent by saying "remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return." We will die. But that dust, that frail dust is what God chose to inhabit. That is how God saves the world. How God saves us from ourselves.

As Lent continues...on its way to the cross...we find the holy presence of God where we didn't imagine it could exist. Jesus comes to be with us...at our birth and baptism...in our wilderness and temptation...in our grief and our death...in the midst of all that is wrong....and shows us God's beauty. Jesus comes...and proclaims God's kingdom is here. Now. Where there is healing and redemption. Where there are angels that minister to us...where there are children and adults and animals...who show kindness and compassion. Where there is love and forgiveness. God's kingdom breaks through. And God's kingdom...is where our hope lies. It is our only hope. And death cannot defeat it. God's kingdom, breaking into the midst of all that is broken...saves us. Turn around. Look at the good news. Believe the good news.

Frail flesh that we are...may we trust in God's kingdom. Who chooses unarmed love in the face of all that is wrong.

Frail flesh that we are...may we strive to follow Jesus' way. The way of unarmed love in the face of all that is wrong.

For that is the way God saves us...It is the way we are loved from death into life. Amen.