

Ebb & Tidal Hope

Genesis 6:5-22; 8:6-12; 9:8-17

Matthew 8:24-27

And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. Have you ever done something out of love that pained you so much, hurt so bad, you wondered how much worse death itself would be? It was a love so deep within you that you knew the initial cost benefit as hurtful as it may be now to you and those you love, you know down the road, through the passage of time, it will be of great worth to the bigger picture. The big picture...God is brokenhearted. God is sorry for having given the gift of freewill to humankind. Humanity is corrupt to the core. And God's very being is grieving. God has a heavy heart. Laden with regret for having given so much away, but knowing that humankind cannot be left to its own devices, God seeks renewal. God will start over. But you know, God did not have to. God could have moved over the waters and the land as he had done in the beginning and totally withdrew the **breath** that once gave life. Yet being hope itself, God loved hard. God would use death to forge new beginnings, new life.

- Story of Noah...

- gather up your family...build a boat like this...two of all flora and fauna, plant and animal on the face of the earth...and it rained and the waters rose...and life was blotted out...all except who and what floated upon God's instructions perished...And God's heart grieved.

This...was the first act of **tough love**.

God's hope for a loving creation going forward, and intent to be **THE GOD** of renewal and promise would start here.

Noah did as God instructed. He built a **vessel** to rescue the world from itself. And God would say, *But I will establish my covenant with you...* I promise you protection from harm, from death. I promise to provide you a future with hope. As the story goes, there came a point after 40 days of drifting, 40 days of wondering, 40 days of prayer, 40 days of fear, 40 days of human and animal stench, 40 days of grieving for friends and family who drowned in the flood, Noah would **test the waters**. Noah releases a dove. It returns with nothing. Seven days later the same test, with different results. The dove returns with an olive branch. Seven days later the same routine. The dove leaves and does not return. So, it is with hope. Hope comes and goes, ebbs and flows, comes and goes, and sometimes when it goes, and does not return, and yet somehow, we are still filled with hope.

We hope for better health. As we grow old, we hope for a good quality of life. Some of us hope for a loving companion. We all hope for a congregation bustling with activity. We hope for our government to really be for the people. We hope for our children to experience, learn and live out care, compassion, advocacy, and justice for the “other”. I hope for the day when my middle schooler doesn’t need to carry a clear backpack to school for fear of gun violence. We hope for hunger to be no more. We hope for the gift of human touch to not be abused. We hope for grace and mercy to prevail among us when needed. Some of us hope for our past to drown in the love of God. And we hope for others to know of the hope we cling to, the hope that brings us to church week after week, sing hymn after hymn, hear the word of God time and time again, and to pray without ceasing.

The reality of our world is that drowning in despair is more of a thing than drowning in hope. Just like Noah's dove hope comes and goes, ebbs and flows. You are here to drown yourself in hope, are you not? You are here this morning because there are days you are up to your neck in the chaotic waters of life. Not unlike the raven Noah initially released that did not return to the arc, you at times find yourself flying aimlessly about wondering where to find refuge and rest, solid footing, when it's right here in this place, in worship, in community, in fellowship. This place has become refuge, rest, and restoration for me. Arguably, we are here to drown ourselves in hope. There are days when hope is shallow for us, it ebbs away for a time leaving us stuck in flats of muck and mire. And there are times when hope comes in like a tide, the waters cleansing us of despair, drowning us in hope. Hope is essential to being human. Hope is the glimmers/the flashes of God having drawn close. Hope floats the boat for faith to ride upon. Hope is the glimmers/the flashes of God having drawn close.

It's a bit like gator hunting. Yes, I said gator hunting. Last weekend I went gator hunting with _____. This is what it's like to go gator hunting. Gators are elusive. At night you walk the bank of a body of water, or you climb into a john boat built for 3, but there are 5 of you in it, and you scan the waterscape for eyes looking back at you. Aaah, they are there. Lots of them. And they are staring back at you. You get close. Not too close. And the gator slips into the water. Maybe it pops back up a few yards away, maybe not. You continue to move through the water, or along the shore, the gator eyes saying we're here, but only to disappear as you draw near. To an extent it's like whack a mole. There and then gone. There and then gone. They come, and they go. Frustrating.

Hope can be elusive. Hope can show itself and then seemingly be distant, out of reach, slipping away as we search. You see glimpses of hope, of an existence that God would desire and then it is drowned out by the corruption of the world. And we grieve. And God grieves with us, wanting more for creation, wanting to find favor like He did with Noah, wanting to make you and I agents of hope in this world.

The flood was tough love. The flood was God saying I cannot let this go on, but I cannot let this beautiful creation come to an end. It is far too good. I saw to it. There is hope for it yet. So hope was set afloat on a boat with the promise of a new start. How committed was God to this do over? Deeply committed... Hear again the last part of our reading... "*As for me, I am establishing my covenant with **you** and **your** descendants after you... I establish my covenant with **you**" 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... **I will remember** my covenant that is **between me and you** and every living creature of all flesh... **I will see it and remember** the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established **between me and all flesh that is on the earth.**"*

Covenant...promise

Me and you...

I will remember...I will not forget (remind myself)

From the flood onward, we have known the make-up of God. God does not give up on what he loves. God is not afraid of tough love. God's latest and greatest appeal to us reiterates those very qualities. Jesus Christ. God in flesh. Jesus would relentlessly speak hope into the lives of everyone. He would talk about a kingdom, he would talk of loving neighbors as self, of true trust in God coming from the heart. He would be that glimpse of good, of what should be, of what God the Father intends. And he would go away. Hope in the flesh would go away...Death on the cross for us. God's tough love. But this time hope would go, He would promise to return and offer eternal life.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, my hope is that we keep on hoping. My hope is that you drown daily in the promise of the waters of baptism, that God has you coming and going, ebbing and flowing in all aspects of your life. And that in this place, starting here, the Holy Spirit gives you the courage and strength of faith to love when it's tough. Jesus Christ, your vessel of all life, healing and forgiveness comes near, His Spirit wading through ebb and tidal waters of hope, bridging us to God the Father, offering hope and healing to you and me, and a world in need. Promise. Amen.