

River Sunday Meditation
September 27, 2020

Genesis 6:20-22 and Matthew 28:1-10

On March 18, the Session of Gordon decided to suspend in-person worship because of Covid-19. After much urging, my arm took a long time recovering from the arm twisting by my children, I left to go and stay with my son and his family in Ucluelet. Kyle and I spent the next couple of days learning how to tape a service so that it could be shared with the congregation. That first service was a little late, the second one was on time and by the third service – Gordon, Knox and St Aidan’s had combined their services. We were now having live services via ZOOM.

It was over the next 100 odd days that I was in Ukee; with the family, writing the prayers, the Calls to Worship, arranging people to read, phoning members of the congregation and writing sermons. It was not a holiday like some may have thought.

Meals were for the most part prepared and eaten indoors, but occasionally we would have a bar-b-que. We cooked a variety of meat; hamburgers, fish, sausages – but when we cooked the steaks and chicken thighs, that’s when things changed. First change was the appearance of Spaghetti, the dog, when he came to visit along with his owner, Richard. Simon also walked by slowly. Simon and Richard, both commented on how good something was smelling.

For the past 3 weeks we have been looking at what we refer to as the Season of Creation; on the 6th we looked at the forests, Laurie’s emphasis was on the land that we earthlings inhabit and last week Bev emphasized those parts of the land that are less inhabited by people. Just as the liturgy of the previous Sundays drew attention to these topics, today the focus is on water, rivers and the ocean.

Just as Simon, Spaghetti and Richard were attracted to the smell of meat cooking on the bar-b-q, so our other senses can be used as we explore the parts of creation spoken about the last three weeks.

When we think of the forest, we can touch the bark on the trees, see the variety of colour that exists on the same tree and we can smell the dampness after a light rain. Whether we are running our hands through the soil in our backyards, picking up a smooth pebble to skip across the lake or listen to the loon on that same lake, we use our senses. Senses – we all have them, all five (5) of them.

Think about Spaghetti and Richard and Simon; what attracted them to Kyle’s back yard? Their sense of smell brought them close because of the meat that was cooking.

In this morning’s reading from Genesis, we have some meat that was cooking, why and where? Let’s take a look at that.

Noah had obeyed God; he had built the ark, gathered two of each animal, brought them into the ark along with his family and waited for the water to subside. After the water had subsided, Noah “. . . built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.” (Gen. 8:20). Noah was giving thanks to his God for bringing him and his family through the flood. Noah wanted to let God know that he knew God was God and that he was thankful for God’s grace in saving him and his family.

Being the person I am, I know the next question I would ask; Why did the flood occur? To get an answer to my question, we have to go back to chapter 6 of Genesis and we are told that “. . . Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God” (Gen.6:9). That answer kinda sounds like a politician, that doesn’t answer the question; Why did the flood occur?

We are told, in that same chapter, that the earth was corrupt and full of violence and according to God, “. . . all the people on earth had corrupted their ways” (Gen.6:12). Now God wasn't happy and the solution God came up with was “. . . to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence . . .” and God was “. . . surely going to destroy both them and the earth” (Gen.6:13).

The world was flooded, so that the people and the earth would be destroyed. This would eliminate the corruption that existed in the world and end the world's violence. My question now is; Did the flood change the human race? NO, it didn't! Think of the son who stole his brother's birthright, think of King David making sure Bathsheba's husband died in battle, or the brothers who sold their younger brother into slavery; these are but three (3) examples of people from the bible demonstrating acts of corruption and perpetrating violent acts upon their fellow human beings.

You may ask, why flood the world to eliminate corruption and violence, because it didn't work. We humans have not changed, there is still corruption and violence in our world today. We, the human race, hasn't changed. But something has changed.

God changed. Before the flood, God saw a corrupt and violent world. God thought that a flood would solve the problem. But after the flood had waned, God heard and smelled the offering that Noah presented on the altar that he had built. There was an irreversible change in God. God had observed the devastation that the flood had caused and because of these observations, God promised that this would never happen again. After the flood, and the Noah incident, God had unlimited patience and forbearance for the people. God had changed. Even though the human race hadn't, God had changed.

The human race hadn't changed, some were still taking advantage of their fellow humans, but God has held firmly to the covenant. But God knew that something had to be done, but the promise that “. . . the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh” (Gen. 9:15) was remembered. What could God do to impress upon the people His power and His love of the people?

That question brings me to the Matthew reading from today - the Easter resurrection story. Now I believe we all have heard the resurrection story in the past - resurrection is not resuscitation. Resuscitation is more common today. More people would be dead today, if not for all the medical advances that have been made. They have been able to continue their lives because of speedy and effective medical intervention. The first century situation of Jesus being raised from the dead, however, is more than simply being brought back to life. Resuscitated people will eventually die. Resurrection is about a transformation of the bodily life we know in this world; into a new, transformed, and eternal existence with God.

The concept of resurrection is complex and confusing to many people, and the way the biblical story develops makes rational explanation difficult - earthquakes and angel messengers, sealed tombs mysteriously opened, a man seen to be dead and buried now seen alive again on a new and wonderful way - the rational mind has difficulty accepting these things. There is no denying that the story offers a strange mixture of fear and joy, along with an equally strange mixture of broad promise and precise detail.

In an overview of the Gospels we see a number of reversals occurring: the expected King is born in a stable, the conquering hero enters Jerusalem on a donkey, the Teacher and Master washing the feet of his disciples - and now the great reversal of victory over death, Christ gives precedence to out-of-the-way Galilee.

Galilee was home territory to Jesus, but Galilee was not seen as important in his day, especially when compared to the power and prestige of the capital city, Jerusalem. Galilee was seen as a backwater place, and Galileans were thought of as country bumpkins.

The name Galilee comes from the Hebrew *galil* which means "border," with the connotation of being a boundary area between the known and the unfamiliar. To those at the perceived center of power and influence in Jerusalem, Galilee was distant, strange, and unimportant.

Matthew's Gospel reminds and reassures us that Jesus goes ahead of us and will meet us in whatever is our equivalent of Galilee. We don't have to go to some out-of-the-world place to encounter the risen Christ. We don't have to go into some hyper-spiritual zone or to accept some incomprehensible abstract theological concept. We can go to whatever is home and known or new and different and Jesus meets us there.

Part of the realization that resurrection is not just a strange and awesome event recorded as happening some 2000 years ago, but something that happens to us here and now and continually. Christ makes us new creatures, and with God's help we overcome despair, make new friends, let go of old hurts and prejudices, enter new relationships, and learn new ways of faithful living.

And every day, we can know ourselves to be loved, forgiven, accepted, and included in Christ's ongoing ministry. In that awareness we are changed, and living this new life we go with Jesus to change the world by loving, forgiving, accepting, and including, as Jesus did.