

## **Lent Begins - Genesis 9:8-17 – February 18, 2018**

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As we enter into the Season of Lent, our Old Testament readings will focus on the various covenants that God has made with humanity since the earliest days of our existence while the lessons in the gospel of Mark take us alongside Jesus as he journeys toward Jerusalem and the cross.

A covenant is an agreement or contract which generally requires specific actions from both parties agreeing to the contract. The first covenant between God and humanity occurs following the story of the Great Flood. The book of Genesis begins with the story of God's creation of our world out of the turbulent primordial chaos. From this chaos, God brought order and created everything, setting our world in motion and calling it good. The pinnacle of God's creative process was forming humans in God's image from the dust of the earth and imbuing them with the breath of life.

In the early generations, God's ordered creation fell backward toward its chaotic roots. What was originally called good, quickly became willful and chose a path away from God and toward destruction. God was frustrated by this descent into violence and made the decision to start over. Choosing a remnant of what was originally created to save – what we know as the story of Noah, his small family, and a male and female specimen of each type of animal – and then sent a deluge of water upon the earth, destroying everything else. From this surviving remnant, life would have a second chance to grow and flourish upon the earth.

While this story seems exceptionally harsh to us – a wrathful God, hellbent on destruction – it came out of a time in Israel's history known as the Babylonian exile. During the exile, the Israelites were defeated, ruled by a foreign nation, lost, and alone, and they wondered if their place as God's chosen people would ever be restored. To them, this story of God actively choosing to save part of the original creation, rather than just annihilating everything and starting from scratch, shows a God who cared so much about the relationship that God had with creation, God was unwilling to completely wipe it out. God saw in Noah and his family, a chance to start over. God wanted creation to succeed, so God took this small remnant and gave it a second chance. This is not a vengeful God, but instead it is a God who forged a relationship with creation and felt extreme hurt by its choice to descend back into chaos rather than live in a harmonic relationship with its creator.

And like the story of the Garden of Eden and the Fall of Adam and Eve, who, while sending our ancient ancestors out of Paradise but giving them the tools needed to survive, we see a God once

again, giving a second chance for humanity to move beyond willful disobedience into the mutuality of relationship with God.

And so with the Flood, the story ends with a covenant – a promise by God to never again send a destructive flood upon the earth in order to destroy creation. God puts a limit on God's self. God chooses to allow humanity to go its way, even back into chaos, if humanity so chooses, because of God's commitment to the idea of a restored relationship "some day."

But what is most strange about this very first covenant, while God makes a contract with humanity and creation to never again destroy it, God does not require anything in return. Most contracts require something from both sides. But not this one. God wants creation to succeed. And so God sets this limit, allowing for the possibility that creation won't. That it's self-destructive bent may well do it in. But this is a God who loves creation and humanity so much, that God is willing to take that chance.

Now, we may think that that destructive and willful part of creation is a thing of the past. But is it really? Just this past week we saw once again how much apart of our life is this desire for the chaotic. How many times must we continue to hear about children in our schools mowed down by military grade weapons? How many times will people on both sides of the gun control debate scream at one another while children cry out in the background for us to actually grow up and do something? When will we put aside our differences and agendas to work toward a compromise?

We believe in a God who weeps in anguish over scenes like what happened in that Florida this past week. Who weeps for the 19-year-old child who got lost in a system that doesn't care about the mental health and wholeness of all its citizens, especially the most vulnerable. A God who weeps with mothers and fathers who kissed their children goodbye on Wednesday morning, never imagining that would be the last time they saw them alive.

This is the God who makes covenants with humanity – beginning with that first covenant with Noah and walking alongside humanity throughout the generations, offering love and strength and weeping with our fumbings and failings. Watching us again and again descend into the destructive chaos that does nothing but tear us apart. But over and over again, offering second and third and fourth chances, until finally taking on human form, and residing with us in the person of Jesus Christ, to finally show us how much God loves us. And to give us the model of what type of relationship God wants to have with us and wants us to have with one another.

As we do at this time each year, we have entered into this season of Lent, where we walk alongside Jesus in his journey. Let us learn from him. Let us look inside ourselves and awaken to our own capacity for destruction – let us finally learn to put our chaotic sides away, repent of our desires to put ourselves in front of everyone else in order that we might experience worldly pleasure and success, and finally see this beautiful creation of God and believe that relationship with God and one another is truly more desirable than anything we could ever imagine. Let us allow God’s love to flow in and through us, so we might love God and one another as God has always hoped we would.