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Eastminster Worship Services

Sunday, August 30, 2009

Never the Same: When the Word Changes You

Wipe Out!

Genesis 6:5 – 7:24

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Never the Same: When the Word Changes You. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”¹ The Word of God asserts that God is the author of life; the creator. God spoke the world into existence. Life as we know it had its beginning with God. God called the world into being to be his covenant partner.

Never the Same: When the Word Changes You. “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’ When the woman saw that the fruit was good for food, she took some and ate it. Then the eyes of both of them [Adam and Eve] were opened and they realized they were naked.”² Why were their eyes opened? Sin. Adam and Eve believed the half-truth of the serpent and disobeyed God. They chose to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They realized they were naked and felt shame. Adam and Eve were in a predicament. God had willed (authored) unity, harmony and goodness. But sin entered the unity, harmony and goodness. Creation was recalcitrant and resistant to the purposes of the very one by whom and for whom the world exists. God banished Adam and Eve from the garden and placed cherubim at the entrance of the garden to stop Adam and Eve from returning to the garden and eating from the tree of life. The tree of life had fruit that would keep man immortal. Why the banishment? God’s plan for getting out of the predicament of sin was not for Adam and Eve to think that they on their own will could save themselves. No! They had to believe the LORD God and obey him, for only in God could they be saved.

¹Genesis 1:1-2

²Genesis 3:1; 6-7

Never the Same: When the Word Changes You. “So the LORD said [to Noah], ‘I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth. I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. So make yourself an ark.’”³ Following the Fall, man grasped at immortality. As the verses prior to our text state, the sons of God, who were spiritual beings, came to earth and were infatuated with the daughters of men. These immortal beings married the mortal daughters of men and had children. Although the spiritual beings approached the daughters of men, the daughters of men should not have married them nor should have the fathers of these daughters allowed it. Man was enamored with immortality. The LORD God judged man for breaching the boundary between the human and divine. God drove Cain out of the community and he became a restless wanderer. There was only one bright spot left on earth. That bright spot was Noah. Genesis 6:5 reads, “The LORD saw how great [human] wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.” In biblical anthropology the heart is where will and thought originate.

The fracture between creator and creation is the premise and agenda of the flood narrative. The LORD God was grieving over his creation of man. The evil inclination of man’s heart caused him great pain. The Hebrew *asav* for “grieve” in verse 6 is the same word used to describe woman’s pain in childbirth in 3:16. The pain bequeathed to woman is now felt by God. *asav* is the same word to describe the toil from which Noah will deliver humanity in 5:29. The evil heart of man troubles the heart of God. The LORD God felt bitterly indignant. For the LORD God to wipe out humanity is a strong statement. Often the phrase “I will wipe out” is used of erasing names from records and wiping plates. Since water was sometimes used to achieve the results, the very word choice hints at the manner by which the complete annihilation of mankind would be accomplished.

The LORD God found Noah righteous. Judgment on humanity was coming. The LORD God told Noah two things: enter the ark and take two of all the living creatures, male and female. Noah completely and totally obeyed the LORD God. The flood came. Forty days of rain were followed by 110 days of the

³Genesis 6:7; 13-14

water's triumph. Nothing remained of the teeming life that had burst forth on the earth. The LORD God, who gave man his breath, removed it and man died.

Remember Noah. The faith of Noah made him righteous. A righteous person is one who keeps the moral law. For example, a righteous person clothes the naked and feeds the hungry. In the Old Testament, the word "righteous" is a general term to describe a person who lived according to God's standards of behavior. Noah was such a man. Noah was blameless. A blameless person abstained from iniquity.

The obedience of Noah shaped his character. Noah's character stands out brightly against the darkness of the rest of humanity. From the LORD God's perspective, the earth was ruined. The earth and its people were being spoilt and destroyed. At the completion of creation, the LORD God was pleased with what he had made and declared it good. In our text the LORD God was shocked by its corruption. To preserve humanity from complete annihilation by the flood, the LORD God commanded Noah to build an ark and to gather the animals two by two. The Ark corresponds to the future tabernacle of the people of the LORD God. The ark is a refuge as is the LORD God's tabernacle. Noah's heart was inclined to do evil. His faith in the LORD God made him righteous and blameless. Noah did all that the LORD God commanded.

Our gospel text, Matthew 7:15-23, states that as followers of Jesus we must always be discerning whether the voices we are listening to are true or false. Voices that we receive which are true will manifest fruit in our lives; the other voices will not.

Our New Testament text, Romans 3:21-26, states that righteousness can only be found in Jesus Christ. Noah's faith in God made him righteous. Our faith in Jesus Christ makes us righteous. Righteousness is not our work, but God's.

Grief and pain are prominent in the lives of individuals, societies and civilizations. An alcoholic abuses his wife. Women who were sexually abused by their fathers are angry at and suspicious toward men. Parents abandon their children at shopping malls. Gangs have rites of passage that are violent and

deadly. Nations like Turkey, the former Soviet Union, Germany, Cambodia, Yugoslavia and Rwanda perfected mass murder and genocide. Philip Yancey writes, “As societies increased in knowledge and technological skill, they descended to depths of depravity and mass violence never before imagined in history.”⁴

The evil inclinations of the heart foster a point of view that avoids the truth about the LORD God’s world. Yancey writes, “At the moment of sin, I declare it my world, not God’s.”⁵ The grief and pain that we experience, as individuals, societies and civilizations, is more often than not a result of sin. The serpent’s half-truth is that disobedience will not kill us. I may not die physically, but I do die spiritually. Life flitters away as we deliberately disobey the LORD God and his Word.

The flood came. Noah, his family and creation was set free from the bondage of sin. The judgment of the flood was a new beginning. Just like the judgment on Jesus, his death and resurrection posts a new beginning for man. While it is not clear that our faithfulness will guarantee a consistent level of quality in our world, it is beyond doubt that that our infidelity diminishes our lives and all of life around us.

One of the hallmarks of the Reformed tradition in which we stand as Presbyterians is the doctrine of the LORD God’s sovereignty. We believe that the LORD God is in control of all things and nothing happens outside of His purposed intent. Again Philip Yancey writes, “All of life involves a clash between impulse and inhibition, between our fallen nature and the image of God. A sacred view of life calls for simple trust that the One who created the human creature has our ultimate good in mind.”⁶

The flood set humanity free from the overwhelming consequences of sin in order to begin anew. Yes, our hearts are still inclined to evil, but Noah demonstrated the power of obedience in overcoming the inclinations of an evil heart. Noah totally and completely obeyed the LORD God. As your pastor, I have a requested response of you. From what do you need to be freed? Admit the evil inclinations of your heart

⁴Philip Yancey, *Rumors Of Another World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2003), 118.

⁵*ibid.*, 123.

⁶Philip Yancey, *Rumors Of Another World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2003), 58.

and confess them to the LORD God. Do not rationalize them away by blaming others or playing the role of victim.

With the flood, the human race received a new start. What? What does the text say about Noah and the Flood? So what? What does the story of Noah and the Flood mean to you? Now what? What should you do now? The LORD God provided an ark then for a new way of living. And he continues to do so today. The ark is Jesus Christ. The floods in life are never ends in themselves. Will you believe in Jesus Christ, the one who will rescue you from the sin in which you find yourself? In Jesus Christ, the floods of life become means to a greater end; that end being faithfully “bearing witness” to the goodness of God. Noah did everything as the LORD God commanded him. Only Noah was left and those with him in the ark. Noah believed God and listened to his voice. Never the Same: When the Word Changes You. Let us pray.

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