

Sunday February 21, 2021
Sermon Series/Message: Heart to Heart
Scripture Lesson: Genesis 9: 8-17 Part 1
Preacher: Kirstie J. Engel

We are beginning a new sermon series that will take us through our Lenten journey; a time of repentance, fasting and preparation for the coming of Easter.

- **Lent is also a time of self-examination and reflection.**
- **The season of Lent lasts 40 days excluding Sundays.**
- **The season ends on Holy Saturday, the day before the Resurrection of our Lord.**

- The name of our series is **Heart to Heart**; a series designed to look at the heart of what our Triune God might be trying to convey to us; so that we may understand why Jesus mission was so important not to just the Triune God; Creator, Son and Holy Spirit; but to our world;
- For I stopped by to suggest that historically, the journey that Jesus will take towards Jerusalem is an important part of our history as a Church;

- From my perspective, the journey that Jesus will take towards Jerusalem is an important part of our history **as a collective world.**
- For the story we are about to dive into over these next 40 days; is the story that undergirds our Christian faith.
- And so why this scripture this morning is so important to the story for us, is because we begin to hear God speak up;
- We as readers of this text are witnessing **God speak up**, in a world that had been ravaged by a flood as disastrous as any flood that has ever impacted our world;
- **Floods such as** the flood that hit China in 1931 with a death toll of 500,000-4,000,000 people.
- **Floods such as** the flood that hit Indonesia in 2020 with a death toll of 66;
- **Floods** that hit Louisiana in 2016 with \$10-15 billion dollars worth of damage and many lives lost;
- **Floods that are too** many for me to list in this message alone; floods that have done irreparable damages as a whole, worldwide; these floods didn't hold a candle to the flood that hit during Noah's time;
- And so the story reveals to us that in almost the aftermath of this flood, the Word tells us that God speaks up;

- **God has a heart to heart** with Noah and makes a covenant with him;
- **God promised** that never again would the earth and all flesh be destroyed by a flood.
- The only demands God made upon humanity were those mentioned in the preceding paragraph of our passage—abstention from eating blood and respect for the life of humanity as a whole.
- **Then the scripture tells us** that God graciously granted a sign to remind humanity of God's promise—
- God's **bow in the cloud; aka known as the rainbow;** would be the symbol of this covenant;
- Not suggesting that the world had never been graced with a rainbow before;
- Only now **if it ever were** to rain again; **if ever a storm** should hit again; **humanity would no longer have to** be concerned or suffer from post traumatic stress again from such an event again;
- **For the rainbow will** come out again;
- **No matter how looming and threatening** the clouds may be;
- **No matter how intimidatingly** loud the thunder may sound;

- The covenant to humanity was that God's bow in the sky would remind us of God's promise
- A promise that we can be certain of, that the Earth as a whole will remain intact and those who inhabit it.
- **This idea is comforting on some level isn't it....**
- **That no matter how tumultuous** things may get for us; that God's rainbow will shine again;
- **That no matter how** catastrophic the flood will be, there is still hope for restoration, when it is all said and done.
- However, in this sentiment, as I attempt to unpack what this covenant really means for us in today's time;
- My preaching goal is **to have a heart to heart** with you on an individual level; as this is what the 8:30 preaching goal is designed for; to speak to the heart of the individual; I'm talking about you and I am talking about me;
- And so with that, I would like to share a few of my concerns from this very passage of Noah that have arisen within me in preparing this message, if that is alright with you.
- For the way I shared the story to kick this conversation off, is how I have always heard it preached before;
- A rather ambiguous story where depending on who is interpreting the story;

- (1) God either caused the flood; (2) God allowed the flood to occur; (3) or the flood just happened...
- Furthermore, the primary theology that I was raised up in would suggest that reasons 1 and/or 2 was the rationale behind why the flood occurred;
- That some God who operates from above, chose to place tests and trials in our lives, in hope that we might learn something from it;
- And if I am honest, this type of theological rationale does cause me some discomfort;
- Because for me, a theology such as this, contradicts the essence of who God is; a God of love.
- Now don't get me wrong, my theological upbringing did once reflect a God who placed tests and trials intentionally in my path to see if I would remain faithful;
- My embedded theology stems from a God who would never put more on me than I can bear.
- But where I place my sermon tent for all of us this morning to consider as it pertains to Noah's story; is in the form of a question, what if we all accepted that **the flood just happened?**

- **Perhaps the flood just happened**, because in life sometimes, stuff just happens.
- **Perhaps the flood just happened** because sometimes in life, we cannot always pinpoint the why's or the where's or the what's.....it is just a mystery that we are tasked to live with and wrestle with; with the knowledge that even if these types of occurrences **do just happen**; the theological question that I would raise is **does this change** our faith in God in any way?
- **Does this change** what we believe in our Triune God, Creator, Son and Holy Spirit?
- **For the disclaimer that I would like to put out there**, is that the theological decisions and/or questions that I am raising, are something that you and I have to consider, if we wish to even attempt to do the tough work of the reconciling mission that lies ahead; if you and I desire to share God's love to all people;
- For I stopped by to suggest that we will be entering a mission, where stuff will just happen;
- For that is the complexity of life;
- **People will lose their jobs** even if they didn't necessarily do any thing wrong; and even if they caused it...it doesn't

change the fact that it happened; they are jobless and need assistance!

- **People will get sick**, although the reason may not always be apparent;
- **Poverty will persist**, with no apparent way to end it;
- **Things and situations will happen** that will not always be apparent on why it is happening and perhaps at this point the answer doesn't really matter; **because the reality is it is happening** and people need relief and hope like yesterday;
- So the way I see it; how you and I understand God's role and activity in these "happenings", can make or break the Church in my eyes; depending on how one interprets the role of God in this story and our day to day lives.
- For I don't know about you, but I have been triggered by a lot of bad theology in my day.
- For instance, when my daughter was diagnosed with a brain tumor at the age of four;
- My first husband and myself were divorced and let's just say; that our parental relationship was strained.

- So when our daughter was diagnosed with this brain tumor, I remember being confronted with a theology of a God who punished those who committed sins.
- The sin that my daughter was to pay for, was the sin from her parents; who could not get our act together.
- A harmful theology that was pushed onto me during those days of her sickness, was that it was because I was a sinner; **a sinner who did not** pray enough; **a sinner who did not** repent enough; **a sinner who did not** fast enough; this was the reason why my sweet baby girl had this tumor;
- This was the theology of God that had been instilled in me....and church I believed it....I believed it for a long time!
- Along these same lines; a book that I just finished up called *Preaching for Justice*, by Christine Marie Smith;
- She shares her experiences of people who are considered to be disabled in our world.
- She states as an example, “when we think of persons who are deaf and blind, our minds conjure up the image of persons so deprived that their lives must exist in a permanently, dis-valued state; full of suffering and loneliness.”

- The author shared her own story of her disability and she shared how people had commented to her, ‘that because of her disability, God has taught her discipline. God had taught her how to work well in advance for due dates and how to be extremely focused since she may never know what tomorrow would bring.’
- The author ends all of these instances with the question of, “but did God give me (her) the disability in order to learn these things?”
- **Another example in scripture;** in John 9, tells the story of a man blinded from birth.
- The disciples came to Jesus and asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (v2)
- Jesus reply essentially was neither; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.
- I raise all of these examples and there are many others in the Bible and throughout the world, where going back to our story of Noah; depending on how one interpret's the role of God in these instances, will normally make or break the church as a whole.

- The question comes again as it pertains to our scriptural lesson;
- Did God cause the flood?
- Did God allow the flood to happen as some sort of test for humanity?
- Or did the flood just happen?
- Did God cause the brain tumor in daughter's head?
- Did God allow the tumor to happen as a test?
- Or did the tumor just happen?
- Did God cause the disability to happen to this woman?
- Did God allow the disability to happen to test her?
- Or did the disability just happen?
- These questions are not ones that I can answer for you Church.
- These are questions though, that I think are important for us all to wrestle with in our faith journey.
- For I will say it again, depending on how we view God's role does **determine how we share God's story.**
- And how we share God's story, will then determine how we share our witness.

- **And how we share our witness**, is what will determine how we invite others to participate in this journey of Jesus mission.
- And I will be honest with you church, that depending on the day, or the event, I still find myself struggling with these questions.
- I often wrestle with the **role of** free will, **the role of** our choices, **the role of** just life and why it seems that some are spared and others are not.
- **I wrestle everyday with questions** such as to why my daughter survived and is well at the age of 17 and thriving, while others have not been as blessed?
- **I wrestle everyday** with how some seem to escape poverty, while other's do not.
- **I wrestle everyday** with how some for instance as it pertains to the terrible cold and storms throughout Texas and the US; have lost their lives and some haven't.
- **I wrestle with a lot**, making it very difficult to discern for me, what is this covenant that God is trying to convey in our story today?
- **Why can** some see the rainbow clearly, while others only see the dark clouds?

- **How do we reconcile with things** like the author of the book raised, ‘how a baby born with multiple disabilities or a person suffering from Alzheimer’s disease?’
- “What sin of an innocent infant is being punished or what lessons could possibly be learned when one cannot remember what was served for lunch?”
- **Did God cause the flood?**
- **Did God allow the flood?**
- **Or did the flood just happen?**
- For if disabilities **are not caused by God**; if floods **are not caused by God**; if tumors **are not caused by God**; then what can we as communities of faith believe, that reconciles the reality of all of these things being able to occur **and God still** being able to remain a loving compassionate God?
- Can these two realities exist together?
- Furthermore, what does our ministry and the gospel look like if this is the case?
- **I know I am** raising a lot of theological concerns that may or may not be some of your concerns as well; as it pertains to God’s role in it and if God is the culprit for any of it.
- What I will share with you as I close this portion of my message; that I anticipate will continue to serve as the

springboard for a lot of dialogue and perhaps studies in the future.

- That for me, my faith is content enough to know for now; **that the rainbow is here.**
- For as I look over my own life journey, I am confident that God was not the culprit of my daughter's brain tumor, **just as I know that the rainbow is still here.**
- **I know that God was** not the culprit of my dad's pancreatic cancer.
- **I know that the God I serve** is not the culprit for the natural disasters that the world has faced and will continue to face.
- **I know that for me, God does not cause** what we may perceive as disabilities in others, but what I do know **is that the rainbow is here.**
- **The rainbow reminds me** that those who the world may view as disabled are on the contrary, some of the nicest, more adaptive, more capable beings that have ever graced this Earth.
- **I know that** regardless of what hardship, natural disaster, or travesty that may come upon the world, individually;
- **Through my** life journey;
- **Through my** life experience;

- **Through my** daily observations;
- **I know that the rainbow is here;**
- **For the rainbow is** a reflection of God's grace;
- **The rainbow is** a reflection of God's strength;
- **The rainbow is** a reflection of God's compassion;
- **The rainbow is here....and it is here to stay.**
- Although my dad passed from pancreatic cancer; the fact that I was able to baptize him on a Friday and he passed on to eternal life Sunday;
- **I know the rainbow is here;**
- The fact that I see my baby girl rise up to challenges with grace, resilience and perseverance; **I know that the rainbow is there;**
- Church Cancer may come....**but the rainbow is still here;**
- Financial hardships may come....**but the rainbow is still here;**
- This pandemic may still be persisting....**but the rainbow is still here....**
- Setbacks and grief will come....**but the rainbow is still here...**
- **For the rainbow is God....**

- **And God is wanting** to have a heart to heart with humanity...to let the world know that God is here....
- The floods are rising....but God is still here!
- The storms are viciousbut God is still here....
- God will never leave nor forsake us....
- God isn't doing the bad things to us, God is helping us through it!
- God is here today, and tomorrow and for all the days to come!
- Thanks be to God! The rainbow is here!

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First Lesson: Psalm 25: 1-10

Gospel Lesson: Mark 1: 9-15

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- For I stopped by to suggest that historically, the journey that Jesus will take towards Jerusalem is an important part of our history as a Church;
- From my perspective, the journey that Jesus will take on towards Jerusalem is an important part of our history **as a collective world.**
- For the story we are about to dive in over these next 40 days, is the story that undergirds our Christian faith.

- And so why our gospel this morning; along with part 1 of our conversation this morning; surrounding the covenant that God made with Noah who represented humanity; is so important, is because depending on our understanding of that covenant; will dictate how you and I might understand our “wilderness” trials and circumstances that the gospel is inviting us to consider in our gospel this morning.
- So I strongly encourage you as your spiritual leader, to take the time throughout this journey to look at part 1 of these messages when you can;
- I will always send out the manuscripts as well and have Mike edit it where you can view the sermons after the fact on our FB pages and website— but what I need to reiterate as it pertains to my preaching goal, is that every week I, (God willing) will prepare two distinct messages.
- The first message in the 8:30 service will typically be a message designed to preach to the individual; with the hope that what we work on as it pertains to developing our spiritual intelligence that I explained in the Ash Wednesday service;

- An intelligence that involves being able to bridge our IQ (intellectual intelligence) with our EQ (emotional intelligence) and magnify it by our individual presence;
- The preaching hope then, is that we will take some of these concepts as it pertains to the heart of the individual and apply those learnings and tools to the 10:45 message experience; a message that will aspire to address the church as a whole.
- So thank you church, for allowing me the time to review my preaching intent and goals because number one, sometimes it is easy to forget;
- In fact there is a study that says that typically people forget 95 percent of what was said after 24 hours! Isn't that something!
- So again, my having this knowledge; I will periodically take a moment to reiterate these things, so that it will hopefully get ingrained in all of our hearts and minds;
- Also the benefit that you all are hopefully learning, is that because these messages tend to build off of one another; the result is that our spiritual growth and intelligence increases. Amen!

- **So now let's unpack a little more where we are going in this message for our 10:45 service; now that we are all hopefully on the same page shall we!**
- So again, the earlier message invited us to consider, essentially the role that God plays in our day to day lives; as it pertains to the trials and challenges that we may face.
- For I made the theological claim that it is important for us to ask these tough questions, so that we might then understand the covenant that God is making with humanity.
- In the story of Noah that was part of this weeks lectionary readings; God said to Noah that God would not allow a flood to completely wipe out humanity and the living creatures that inhabit it ever again;
- This statement alone is comforting on one hand;
- This idea that God made such a covenant like this to humanity...us.
- However, if God in our minds is the perpetrator or the culprit for why the flood happened in the first place; then one can hopefully see how this can potentially negatively impact our response towards this covenant.

- As an example to hopefully expand this preaching concept; I used to serve on the board of the Friendship Home right here in Lincoln;
- **The Friendship Homes mission** is to Empower freedom from domestic violence;
- **The Friendship Home offers** wonderful services to empower this freedom; that includes but is not limited to; a variety of crisis services, emergency shelters, transitional housing and more; to help the victims of domestic abuse, reclaim their lives and live a life free of verbal, emotional and physical abuse.
- **The Friendship Home's** ultimate mission, involves keeping the victims and their children safe from their abuser.
- During my time in working with this organization, I often heard stories where battered women in particular, would express how difficult it was for them to leave their abuser.
- Typically their abuser would do a lot of gaslighting and manipulation to keep their victims in this vicious cycle.
- **A cycle where** when things were bad...they were really bad.
- However, the bait in these instances that typically kept the victim engaged; is that after the abuse, the abuser would

typically try to bribe the victim with empty promises; promises that would claim that the abuse would never happen again.

- The abusers would be very convincingly sincere in making these claims; leaving the victim in a state of constant flux.
- This is because the abusers would typically be on their best behavior for a spell; by giving their victims gifts, promising changed behavior, without seeking services on how to do so and more.
- In these instances for the victim, typically this pattern of the cycle of abuse; allowed them to envision that their situation has been resolved and reformed.
- From the victim's standpoint, in most cases, their desire for their abuser to have a complete transformation becomes the priority; often because children are involved.
- Causing many of the victims to feel this sense of euphoria, love and acceptance...
- For in this part of the cycle of abuse, **when things are good....they are really good.**

- **Making the theological connection; the abuser in the context that I have shared, would often make in a sense; a covenant with their victim; promising that the abuse would never happen again.**
- Furthermore in the example I shared, one can easily see who the abuser is.
- Now why the abuser abuses; there are many reasons why; involving mental health, them being victims of abuse themselves; typically at the start of early childhood and more;
- But all in all, I will reiterate that the abuser is easily detectable in this scenario.
- This is because, I can reasonably assess, that either someone in this worship space or watching online either have been victimized or know someone personally who has been victimized.
- These are harrowing statistics that unfortunately have become part of our collective story.

- **Now let's consider then a similar rationale applied to the statement that God made to Noah who again represents (humanity).**
- If indeed our theological rationale **is one that sees** God as the perpetrator of the flood in Noah's story; **or if one** identifies God as being the culprit of the flood **or if one identifies God** as being the antagonist of the flood; can you see how a message of God making a covenant with humanity could then become problematic?
- So church this is a long way of saying that **it matters** how we view God and God's role in the world.
- **It matters** because now as we fast forward to the gospel where Jesus is in the wilderness; I could essentially raise the same questions that I raised in the earlier service.
- The questions I raised concerning Noah's story was; Did God cause the flood; did God allow the flood, or did the flood just happen;
- In the story of our gospel today; I will ask similar questions;
- Who is the tempter in this passage?
- Who is the abuser in this passage?
- Why is Jesus in the wilderness?
- Did God create this wilderness predicament?

- Did God allow this wilderness predicament because God could?
- Or is what occurring in this wilderness, an example of the trials that the pursuers of Jesus mission will unfortunately encounter;
- For the way I am experiencing this passage of scripture after wrestling with some of the questions that I have raised earlier, is that our gospel is not a message **about God testing our faith;**
- The gospel on the contrary is informing us that **the world will test our faith!**
- **The gospel is giving us** a preview of what we can anticipate as we do the hard work of the reconciling ministry;
- **The gospel is letting us know** that there will be trials;
- **Trials and tribulations** that are symbolic to the wild beasts of our story....
- **For there will be wild beasts of** opposition;
- **There will be wild beasts** that will distract us,
- **There will be wild beasts** that will try and hinder our work of mercy;
- **There will be wild beasts** that will try and discourage our work of justice;

- **There will be wild beast that will metaphorically attack our children; I am thinking about my stepdaughter's school; Lux middle school;**
- Just the other day everyone was notified via email and phone, that an 8th grader took his/her own life.
- They have not disclosed specifics as to why this student committed suicide; was it being bullied, mental health, depression or problems at home; we do not know these details.
- But tying this back to our discussion; what metaphorical wild beasts was this sweet child encountering?
- Furthermore, did God cause the circumstances of this child to happen?
- Did God allow these things to happen to test those left behind?
- **There will be wild beast that will attack our livelihood;** in Texas as we speak; the devastation that has resulted from this unusually cold relentless weather has resulted in lives lost as well as homes and more;
- I'll ask again, did God cause these circumstances?
- Is God testing the people in Texas?

- Church, these are difficult questions to raise and perhaps even answer;
- **But here is the heart to heart I would like us to consider as a church as a whole; because I know I shared a lot;**
- **The theology that we subscribe to matters;**
- **For it is our theology** that informs us of who God is and who God is not;
- And although this gospel that I shared is not crystal clear without careful exegesis and investigation that I will continue to reflect on as I hope you do as well;
- I am more certain now more than ever that this **a gospel of preparation;**
- Letting us know the things we are going to come up against;
- For looking at our gospel as a whole one last time; Jesus was baptized first according to the gospel Mark;
- The Word tells us in verse; **11** And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved;[a] with you I am well pleased.”
- And then the story tells us that Jesus immediately was in the wilderness;

- Jesus was in the wilderness and at first glance, **he was there all alone;**
- **He was alone** tempted by the tricks of Satan;
- **He was alone** with the wild beasts;
- He was presumptively alone; **getting ready to be attacked** by the wild beasts of violence;
- He was seemingly alone; **getting ready to be annihilated** by the wild beasts of hatred;
- Jesus was all alone, **getting ready to be crucified** by the wild beasts of his oppressors;
- Jesus was presumptively alone...but wait
- The bible reveals to us that this is not the entire story;
- The bible tells us that **Satan was there** (which is a whole other doctrine for another sermon and another time);
- The Bible tells us that the wild beasts **were there;**
- The Bible also tells us that **the angels were there too!**
- **The angels were there** guiding him;
- **The angels were there** supporting him;
- **The angels were there** praying for him;
- **The angels were there waiting on Jesus;** ready to help Jesus to make it to the next part of his missional journey;

- So you see, **this is why church** we have to spend some time, asking these tough questions;
- **This is why we have** to spend some time naming and talking about these wilderness challenges;
- **This is why we have** to spend some time identifying who the wild beasts are and who they are not;
- **This is why we have** to spend some time identifying who God is and who God is not;
- Because the truth of the matter as I see it, that as Jesus was being equipped for his mission symbolized through his baptism prior to;
- The God of love wanted to give **humanity a heart to heart**; to let us know that **as we continue to learn how to** symbolically put our baptism into action;
- **As we continue to learn how to** step into discovering how to develop our spiritual intelligence in the areas of prayer, presence, gifts, service and witness;
- **As we continue to work** on living as a Resurrected community and be freed from our shame; freed from our guilt; so that we can be spiritually and emotionally free to pray, give, serve, be present and be a witness!

- **As we continue to do** the great work seeking to reform a world filled with evil and wild beasts of every form; food insecurity, inequity, poverty, marginalization, evil and oppression of every form and more;
- **We must understand** who God is and the role God plays;
- **We must not overlook** that the angels are there.
- The tough work of the Reconciling Church is understanding that the Church has a lot of repairing to do and it starts from us shifting from a place of preaching messages of shame, into a church that preaches messages of Resurrection; not just on Easter Sunday, but every day;
- All the while trusting that the angels are here as the first lesson of Psalm 25 reveals; leading the humble in what is right,
All the while teaching the humble the way.
- Let the Church say Amen!