

Seeking Hope when the times feel hopeless

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

September 17, 2023

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Think for a quiet moment:

When have you witnessed the renewal of creation - something that was destroyed or on the verge of extinction was restored to life? [silence]

Keep that image or memory in the back of your mind we look at some of the context out of which the Genesis story of Noah, the Flood and the Rainbow covenant emerged. The Flood story has always bothered me – the notion of a Creator wiping out all creatures on earth, intentionally. Of course, I need to remember that it is a Story, not necessarily historical fact. Like many powerful stories, it offers a truth. Today as I read this story, it speaks to me less about the Creator, and more about humanity.

You see, there is no mention of *other animals* causing grief for the Creator, it is the humanly creatures that are the problems. According to this Genesis Flood Story, the crucial opening verse of the account is [tells us]:

"YHWH saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually."¹ ...

It was said by certain rabbis that every human being possessed a "yetzer tov and a yetzer ra," that is "a good inclination and a bad inclination." These two basic human traits were forever at war with one another for the "soul" of each human. ²

God, grieving how God's dream for Creation has gone awry, sends a great flood that wipes out the earth, and all its creatures, except for a small vestige of humans and each species of animal. It feels like, in a modern analogy, wiping the memory of your smart phone, back to "factory settings." I remember doing that once, seeing the final warning, "Are you sure you want to reset your phone? All data will be lost."

We humans can accomplish amazing things, but we have also seen human capacity for great evil through history. That Covenant that God ultimately made - God was faithful to that promise to Noah, to creatures and to Creation. Unfortunately, humans haven't always been dedicated to caring about our Creator, to one another and about Creation.

What a beautiful reminder, though, the bow in the sky, telling Creator and Creation that God promises to always be waiting expectantly for us when we mess up, ready to make right our relationships.

Our most brilliant minds of humanity, often (but not always) focused on innovations to make life convenient, busy, efficient. How difficult it is to pay attention to the wonders around us.

How do we slow down enough to notice when our actions or attitudes harm the Earth, Water, ourselves? The Genesis Flood Story serves as a mirror reflecting back to us our human capacity to be arrogant and short sighted. Amazing, the truths an ancient tale can tell about our modern reality!

¹ Genesis chapter 6, verse 5. New Revised Standard Version.

² "A Grace-Filled God: Reflections on Genesis 6." John Holbert, June 19, 2011. Patheos.com.

A week ago, United Nations warned that countries are way off track to curb warming as agreed in Paris Agreement in 2015. It feels apocalyptic, the level of warming, and extreme weather patterns that seem the norm.

Apocalyptic visions found in the Book of Revelation are unsettling. God offers the author of the Book of Revelation, John of Patmos,

vivid visions, an end and a beginning a “New Jerusalem” descends from heaven and a throne for Christ. From the throne, flows a river with a tree of life growing on either side – their leaves bring healing. Just like the plot of a good book or movie, things seem hopeless for the hero. But there is an intervention, like a Greek Tragedy, the gods descend and save the day.

Looking at the state of our planet, creatures going extinct daily, we wish that there was divine intervention that could fix things.

*Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which He looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which He blesses all the world.*

Those are words attributed to St. Teresa of Ávila.

Last Friday, climate action protesters took to the streets around the world, calling their respective political leaders to have the courage to make bold decisions now, not later, that care for Creation.³ Will governments heed these protests? Perhaps. Perhaps not. In all of our legitimate concern for people of the Maritimes pummelled by Hurricane Lee, we may have missed the report that 100 youth and a handful of politicians taking to the streets of Sudbury to call the government – and all of us – to change our ways.

It is difficult to filter through the sensational media reports to find the glimpses of hope. But those glimpses of hope are definitely there. We need hope.

I began by asking you to quietly ponder when or where you witnessed the renewal of creation - something destroyed, or on the verge of extinction, but then restored to life.

Would anyone be so bold as to yell out what you thought of?

[The congregation – in sanctuary and online alike! – offered some great observations]

One glimpse of hope was of Sudbury, formerly so obliterated by pollutants from the mines that NASA used it for training astronauts preparing for the moon landing. Now look at the landscape, filled with trees. Oh, what humans, and ingenuity, can accomplish!

There is hope, friends. The New Jerusalem might indeed come. But hope really needs to begin with us, being open to change, to even make sacrifices of our comfort and convenience, heeding the voices (of youth, of climate science) calling us to right relations with Creation. Amen.

³ CTV News, Northern Ontario. Amanda Hicks, September 15, 2023, found at

<https://northernontario.ctvnews.ca/sudbury-students-call-for-action-on-climate-change-1.6563809>