

Desperate Measures

Genesis 6:5-8:22

Rev. Judy Medeiros
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(Pastor is quietly drawing and then throwing paper away)

My friend Collin loved to draw. And he was really good at it, especially for a six year old. He was so good at it, as a matter of fact, that he could not stand to make mistakes. He would spend hours drawing robots or machines, monsters and space ships, underwater worlds and super heroes and then in a flash, rip them up and throw them away. He just could not tolerate mistakes. He could not bear to look at it. His eye would go right to the spot. Right to the place of imperfection. And no matter how good the rest of it was his heart sank into darkness for what it was not. Perfect.

Finally, Noelle and Frank, his mom and dad said, “Collin, think of this as your practice. Just like when you learned to read and write, when you learned to throw a ball and ride a bike. It took practice. It took falling and getting up, it took dropping and trying again. See your pictures as “practice”, as first drafts.” Many trees were saved by these insightful and compassionate parents, along with the heart of a little boy.

“Practice” It’s not a word we often think of as adults. What do we really practice any more? Most of what we do we expect we have already learned and now know how. Practicing is not a concept we embrace or even contemplate as adults.

We figure by now we either can do something or we can’t. And we mostly like it that way because it means we are not expected to learn anything new. We’re not expected to try and do something better or “learn new tricks”, as the old saying goes. We’re adults and part of the privilege that comes with it is we’re done. We don’t have to feel the pain of imperfect pictures, or misread recipes or burned pot roasts or lopsided tree houses. We know our limitations and we stand in them – we’re done being stretched and challenged.

I wonder if that is how Noah felt when God told him to build the ark? Of course, I don’t know about you but I can’t even think about Noah without hearing Bill Cosby in my head.

“Noah! Build me an ark!”

“An Ark? What’s an ark?”

“Make it 40 cubits”

“Cubits? What’s a cubit?”

Bill Cosby portrays Noah and God with a lot of humor & humanity. Noah didn’t have a clue what God was asking him to do. He just followed directions and fumbled along. And God, well, God tolerated his fumbling. But what is more important on this first Sunday of Advent is why. Why an ark? Why the flood? And why does Jesus refer to Noah in today’s scripture?

God is always looking for one faithful one. Have you ever noticed that?

God is searching for just one – one reason not to roll up the divine piece of paper and throw it away. Why? Because right from the start, right in the beginning in the garden, right after God created and made all these beautiful things, right after God said, “It is good, it is good, it is good”, right smack in the middle of this beautiful, perfect painting, was a flaw. Some spot in the middle of the human heart

Or perhaps in the human brain, didn't come out right, and by the time God noticed, it was already too late. Creation was animated, and active, partnering with God in co-creating, naming the animals, yearning for a mate, and then boooooom! Imperfection flowed out of that one spot and began to take over before God's very eyes. And God's vision for what the world might have been was dashed by a narrow and self-centered human vision. And God responds - not as an angry, vengeful judge, but with a grieving and pained heart.

God "regrets" having proceeded with creation and wishes he could tear it up and throw it away. God seeks to erase, "wash away" through a flood in hopes that humanity might begin again. God wants a do-over. And chooses Noah to make it happen. It's not about Noah, especially. It's not about Noah's righteousness or character at all, It's about God refusing to give up on us.

It's about a God who looks at his picture and is full of sorrow and regret. It is about a God who judges what has been created and can't stop focusing on that blasted spot, even though he doesn't want to. It's about a God who tries to erase, wash and fix the mistakes, and eventually has to live with and more, commit to the future of a less than perfect world. Because the truth is as plain as day The flood has effected no change in humankind. Our inclination toward evil remained.

But it has effected an irreversible change in God. It is no longer a strong God and a needy world, but a tortured relationship between a grieving God and a resistant world. It's about a God who is willing to practice and be changed.

And so Noah is a glimmer of God's hope. From a broken Adam, comes new hope in Noah, and then new hope in Moses, as he also is placed in an ark and dropped in the sea, and then there is new hope in Abraham and Jacob, in David and Joseph, in a young girl named Mary and then the new hope is finally, the cry of a new born, when God comes to us . Emmanuel.

God does not become resigned to the presence of sin. God does not look at creation and only see the imperfection. Instead, God decides to learn to love his first draft. His creation with the holes in it and commits to practicing how to be in relationship in a different way. God decides to love with a broken heart, to endure the divine agony of not being loved back. And to relentlessly pursue a dark and broken worldeven if it means self-sacrifice.

And so God tries again in a wet and cold cave, with water most likely tricking down its sides, with one man and one woman, with animals herded in the corners, with hay on the ground for both feed and easy clean-up, and in the middle of this cold wet dark night –

An ark. (*holds up wooden baby cradle/manger*)