

“The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth”
A Sermon for Lent One
St John's Church, Port Williams February 17, 2013 at Evensong

The Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease. Genesis 8.21-22.

Nova Scotian is a narrow peninsula almost completely surrounded by ocean. No place is more than 67 kilometres from the sea. So, when, as in the time of Noah, we hear that the waters are rising, we pay attention. Last weekend, I began to discover personally what the rising level of the ocean means in a small cabin perched close to the ground at White Point beach. At six in the morning as the tide reached its height 15 metres in front of us the surge came over the top of the beach, washed out the walkway, and a lake began to form behind us. It was all more exciting than dangerous until the power went out, a couple were evacuated from another cabin and slogged their way with difficulty through the surf now on the wrong side of the bank. Happily Dean Hatt soon had us toasty again by way of a roaring wood fire. Armloads of good dry wood were brought and the power was restored. All turned out well in the end and the sun on breakers now at a safe distance brought delight. Yet a warning had been given. I was moved to examine the promise God gave us by way of the rainbow.

You know the story. This evening we read from Chapter Eight of Genesis. Immediately following in Chapter Nine we find God promising:

And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. Genesis 9.14-16.

The rainbow is a sign, both for God and for us, that God will not destroy life on the earth by means of a flood. He puts it there so that he will remember his covenant (contract) with us. Good! I guess we are safe. But to sure, and, after all, this is a matter of life and death, so we had best be sure, we should read the fine print. What does the covenant (the contract) say?

The Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.

This is very odd to say the least. God will not destroy life on earth with a flood because...? “Because the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth.” God will not destroy all life because we are so evil! The reasoning is worth pondering. Originally human wickedness had produced the opposite determination of God:

In the Sixth Chapter we read: God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for I repent that I have made them. (Genesis 6.5-7)

Then, God wished he had not made us and so he wiped out all life, except Noah and his family and the beasts in the Ark with them. Now, he looks on our continuing wickedness and determines that he will not wipe out life on earth because of us. He will not intervene. Rather the laws of nature and its regular cycle will continue: "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

This he promises to ALL life. God's new covenant is "between me and you and every living creature of all flesh". God's will for us and for the rest of creation is to preserve life: Our life and that of "every living creature of all flesh." The rainbow is not a promise that life will not be destroyed, but rather it is a promise that God will not interfere with the laws of nature in order to punish us. If there is destruction of life it will have two causes. The first cause will be that we have not respected the cosmic order and life, ours and the life of all flesh. The second will be the natural consequence of that. By the operation of the laws of nature, we shall be allowed to destroy ourselves by our own wickedness and folly. All indications are that we have set ourselves to exactly this.

What is to be done? Nothing and Everything. *Nothing* because there is no "silver bullet", *nothing* to be done in particular. *Nothing* except the work of this sacred season of Lent and that is *Everything*. Let us remind ourselves of what Lent is about and why we read the Book of Genesis in Lent.

Lent is the time of repentance which simply means thinking again, rethinking. As individuals, as communities, as humans, we are to examine our lives in the light of the Good, every aspect of them, individual and corporate, and to amend them. We read Genesis because in it we are shown God's goodness and the goodness of his work: the cosmos in its wonderful order, all living things, and ourselves. In its light, we are to critically and without self delusion examine our relation to God, to the elemental structure he formed, to "every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth," to one another, and to ourselves. I think you will agree with me that should we undertake this we will find that every aspect of our lives, from the smallest and most homely to the greatest, needs reformation. How we eat and house ourselves, whether and how we travel. How we amuse ourselves. How we care for one another especially in times of crisis, and, above all, what we love. On what have we set our hearts? This is Everything. Rethink everything individually and as communities. Impossible apart from the illumination from God given as in Genesis and the revelation of the created order and God's help to strengthen our wills. We must ask for this help and so repentance and amendment of life begins in prayer. We pray:

TURN thou us, O good Lord, and so shall we be turned. Show us the light of thy countenance and we shall be whole. According to the multitude of thy mercies took upon us; Through the merits and mediation of thy blessed Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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