

Read also ISAIAH 58:5-9

The first week in Lent takes us on a very different journey, a road less traveled.

Churches envision Lent as a somber season of abstinence, fasting, music in a Minor Key, Repentance Ashes to Crucifixion... As if we need to endure and survive Lent in order to make it to the Resurrection of Easter! When survival is the opposite of what happens. HAS ANYONE NOT HEARD THE STORY OF NOAH'S ARK and JESUS' BAPTISM BEFORE? Yet by setting off on a different journey, we look for what we never saw.

The Flood is told in nearly all ancient cultures, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Assyria and Babylon. Something took place. Recognize that the Book of Genesis is sacred Scripture to Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

BUT WHY THE FLOOD? WHY? Perhaps to explain that DAYS before the Flood were longer than our days; Perhaps to explain why no archaeologist can find the Garden of Eden;

Possibly why even with our increasing life expectancy none of us are living the 969 years Methuselah lived.

WHY THE FLOOD? Some have suggested that rather than GOD looking like George Burns, sounding like a 10,000 yr old Mel Brooks; that, When God created the Heavens and the Earth, God was a child.

SO When Eve and Adam chased their own desires rather than trusting GOD's Word, GOD got angry.

In the next generation Cain killed Abel, GOD like a very young child began destroying GOD's toys.

WHY THE FLOOD? There is also this odd story, I have never heard any Preacher try to take up, that the Nephilim (that is Angels) saw how beautiful human women are and created a mutated race of half-Human/half-Spirits, which sets up last week's discussion of Jesus being Wholly Human and Wholly Divine.

WHY THE FLOOD? With description of CHAOS in Genesis 1 CHAOS is WATER, in Exodus WATER is The Death of Pharaoh's Army, Jonah thrown into the Sea, There is a recurrent theme, of CHAOS in the World!

WHY THE FLOOD? Possibly, the purpose of this story is to explain why our Faith in GOD, different from the GOD of the Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks and Romans: Our GOD never again seeks to KILL/DESTROY the World, because at one dark time, GOD DID...

in Genesis Chapter 6 the Story of Creation becomes a tale of Extermination, of Genocide and Mass Killing, as GOD sought to HUNT DOWN ALL LIFE: to KILL every human, every animal, fish and bird, plant and tree, every living thing... YET, over the next 3 Chapters, GOD REPENTED, GOD chose a remnant, Noah's family and two of every animal.

SOMEHOW this Biblical story of the Killing of Creation, is transformed into a beloved Trip to the ZOO!

Afterward, in our Scripture this 1<sup>st</sup> week in Lent, GOD resolves to hang up GOD's Hunting Weapon, making this Bow a Rainbow in the Sky, and HERE, I BELIEVE IS THE REASON FOR THIS STORY being told...

ABHORING MASS KILLING, GOD BLESSES EVERY LIVING THING!

What can we say, what can we do, that HUMANITY would hang up our weapons, ending Mass Killings?

How do resolve all of the HATE, the ANGER, the NEED TO DESTROY EVERYONE WHO SEEMS A THREAT?

While many parts of the Christian Church perceive Genesis to be the Story of Humanity's Fall from Grace; while later Genesis will include GOD's Election of Abraham's family: Israel through whom to provide salvation to the World; and in CHRISTIANITY we know Jesus to be our LORD AND SAVIOR; this day's Scripture, names GOD'S COVENANT OF UNIVERSAL SALVATION, that every living thing is blessed by GOD.

SO possibly a MYTH, but a MYTH HELD BY EVERY ANCIENT CULTURE AND EVERY RELIGION OF THE WORLD.

If the FLOOD of Genesis, before Abraham, before Moses, before King David and King Solomon are long, long ago in an unknown place, Let's discuss a very specific occurrence in a specific place with one person.

Each of the GOSPELS have a different starting point, however, all four name that JOHN THE BAPTIST came

like a current day ELIJAH from the wilderness across the JORDAN, calling everyone to REPENTANCE, to BELIEVE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD and to go down into the waters to be BAPTIZED. WHAT DOES REPENTANCE feel like? Does it smell like Flowers? Or SOUR? How do you imagine THE KINGDOM OF GOD? Although he had no Sin, Jesus also came from Nazareth in Galilee to the JORDAN to be BAPTIZED. If Jesus personally had no SIN, no reason for REPENTANCE, then WHY, why was he Baptized in the Jordan? The TRUTH we cannot forget is that Jesus entered into this life to bring us into full relationship with GOD. Bringing parties together in relationship requires appealing to both GOD and Humanity. So on behalf of HUMANITY, as a MAN he went down into the Waters that the old self would die and a new self be reborn. BAPTISM like the RESURRECTION are each about letting go the past life and entering into something new.

We have tamed BAPTISM, making this SACRAMENT into a Christening, a Naming celebration for a Baby, when the truth of Baptism is this is WELCOMING GOD into every corner of your life! What that means according to MARK is that when Jesus came up out of the Waters, the FIRMAMENT of the HEAVENS, the barrier between Heaven and Earth was TORN OPEN and GOD was set free to enter into all the world.

Christmas we celebrate with Cradle Songs of "O Little Town of Bethlehem", and "Silent Night, Holy Night" when the point of Christmas is that the CREATOR of all we can imagine and know, the CREATOR of all that has ever been and will ever become, ENTERED INTO CREATION. That is the Pygmalion Story of the Artist being so captivated by the beauty of their Creation that they long for it to be real. The Story of Pinocchio, of My Fair Lady all are based on this premise. The only two occasions where MARK describes RIPPING or TEARING, are HERE at Jesus' BAPTISM and at the CRUCIFIXION, when he dies for all the WORLD and the TEMPLE CURTAIN, is TORN TOP TO BOTTOM. Yet thinking this through, With the Heavens Ripped Open, with Jesus bringing GOD and Humanity together, GOD IS ON THE LOOSE in our lives. Nothing is safe, nothing is hidden or secreted. All our lives are open to GOD, we are Vulnerable, Exposed, BLESSED...

Decades ago, a young woman began coming to worship in the Church. She attended nearly every week being very curious, yet unwilling to make any commitments or relationships. For over a month she left without staying for Coffee Hour, never filled out the Registration Pad. She would come for several weeks, then be gone, then back just as before. This went on for close to a year, never even leaving her name. One day, she phoned saying she had no one who could drive her home from Chemo. On Thursday I picked her up on the street outside a series of Apartments and drove her to the hospital, some time later I drove her home. I recall stopping the car because she needed to be sick. DO you know the smell of Chemo Vomit? We waited for her world to stop spinning, for balance to restore, for the heat to leave her and I gave her a Prayer Shawl. Then one day she stopped coming all together. SILENCE. No one knew what happened to her. We had no phone number for her. It was before the days of Internet. I knew where the Apartment complex was but not her number.

Close to a year went by, when I received a phone call from a woman, asking if REBECCA had been attending our Church. When I recognized her, I said yes but we had lost touch with her. Her sister described REBECCA had died and she was cleaning out her sister's apartment. Going through her belongings she had a collection of our Church Bulletins, so she had called. The sister went on to say that their family had never been religious. Rebecca had held a high powered job bringing her to our town. She had always been a loaner, quiet without friends. Then she had been diagnosed with Cancer and she dropped all contact with her family. Now she had died, and her sister recognized something had finally come into Rebecca's life, something that from her papers seemed to have made a difference in how she lived, in who she was, and how she approached life and death. I asked if she wanted us to have a Memorial, and the sister said "No it is enough to know from the Bulletins and her notes that JESUS was in her life, that she found the KINGDOM of GOD."