

This is a wonderful time of year! Not only for the Monsoons that cool things down and replenish the atmosphere, but I love the smells: just before and during the Storm you can feel the electricity in the air. But afterward, the air smells different, the world is fresh, with all the heat and electricity taken away.

Recently, I was listening to the news. No, it was not MSNBC, it was not FOX, or CNN.

And the commentators described that the last time unemployment was as low as it is, was 50 years ago when Johnson and Nixon were in Office! Despite the Federal Reserve raising Interest Rates, the Economy continually posts Job Growth and Record Spending and the Dow Jones continues to climb. Economists are no longer predicting a Recession or fears of an Economic Depression. Yet everyone in the world is so angry. We cannot listen to one another, let alone talk. Among the News commentators, they could not come up with a single leader in our Nation, or any Nation, none of the declared candidates or incumbent politicians, no one who could provide leadership to guide us through this storm today!

Breathe deeply. Let go the burden of your fears. Take courage! For you are in the Body of Christ. Just breathe. If you are able, place both feet on the ground and sit upright in your seat. Now I hope you will trust me to close your eyes, while you listen. Just breathe. Outside doors are all locked, no one can enter. I am not climbing any ladders. There are no banners, or wood pallets suspended from the Rafters. No one is asking for money. We are not requiring you give your name and email, we are not demanding you to wear a mask, sit six feet apart, receive an injection, or refrain from singing. There are not going to be any loud noises. I am not going to bark like a dog, not going to take my clothes off, not going to light anything on fire. I am not going to leap off the Chancel. No one is going to take their own life or anyone else's. Relax. Breathe deeply. Imagine the most beautiful relaxing place you know, looking out at the flowers in your garden, surveying the mountains and vistas of the desert, sitting beside a tranquil body of water the waves gently lapping at the shore. Loved ones laughing together. The smell of favorite foods. Try to remember the happiest memory of your life. Now, gently come back to us, breathe as you open your eyes. Someone described writing an article about how to stay awake in worship! I had not recognized all of the things I had put you through to bring the Scripture to life and to keep us safe!

I am a child of the Enlightenment. Rather than immediately looking for miracles, I regularly go first to logical explanations. Possibly, when 5000 men came to Jesus in the wilderness, by sharing 5 loaves and 2 fish it became like Stone Soup of everyone sharing from the little they each had. Possibly, as I mentioned last week, instead of reasoning from scarcity, the people re-conceived the situation and acted in Love. Maybe it was a Miracle, Jesus prayed to God and not only did 5 loaves and 2 fish feed all the people, there were 12 baskets full left over.

Following John the Baptist's gruesome execution, thousands of people came to Jesus to minister to their needs, and despite his Disciples asking HOW to do so, Jesus fed them. 5,000 men along with their women and children... so 12000, 20,000 people?

After which, Jesus sends the disciples ahead in the boat, as he dismisses the crowds; then finally, Jesus had an opportunity to pray. About the Fourth Watch of the Night, in the dark just before sunrise, Jesus walked through the storm out across the angry sea to where they were. The Disciples react as if to a ghost. Jesus speaks to them in reassurance: "Take courage, Here I am, be not afraid."

Always attempting to be bold, Peter says, "If you call me I will come to you." And Jesus invites him "COME." And I want to say, "Good for you Peter for trying," but when he sees the wind (remembering that the word for Wind also refers to the Spirit, and Breath of God) he panics and begins sinking... However, he did not die trying.

The story of Genesis confronts a different kind of storm, that brews in family dysfunction over generations. Abraham and Sarah could not conceive, so used her Egyptian handmaid Hagar to have a son Ishmael, then were gifted a son Isaac, and sent Ishmael and his mother away. ISAAC and Rebekah had twin sons Jacob and Esau. JACOB fell in love with Rachel, and was tricked into marrying Leah along with Rachel, along with responsibility for their Handmaids. LEAH had Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah. Rachel remembered Sarah's trick and used her maid BILHAH to conceive Dan and Naphtali. Leah then used her maid ZILPAH to conceive Asher. Suddenly LEAH conceived a fifth child with Issachar, then Zebulun, then a daughter named Dinah. When Finally, RACHEL became pregnant with Joseph as 1<sup>st</sup>-born of Jacob's favorite wife. And she became pregnant a second time, but Rachel died in delivery of the littlest one Benjamin.

This brewing storm is not only that Jacob/Israel has 12 children by 4 different women, two of which were slaves used as property for breeding; but Sarah and Abraham had played favorites between Ishmael/Isaac. Isaac and Rebekah had played favorites between Jacob and Esau. Now Israel decides that the 11<sup>th</sup> child, the eldest son of his favorite wife, who died in childbirth was his favorite child.

It was bad enough that Joseph was a Tattle-Tale, regularly betraying his brothers;

but his father rewarded Joseph by gifting this famed Coat of many colors. Andrew Lloyd Webber capitalized on the idea that this was special because in the Ancient Middle-east they did not regularly use dyes let alone multiple shades in technicolor. But there is added subtlety to this gift. What the text actually describes is that the Coat had long sleeves, a high collar and went down to his shoes. If you were laboring out in the fields, doing manual labor, long-sleeves would get in the way, and his brothers' coats all were like Vests. This was the coat of a Prince, who did no work.

Yet, the lightning of this storm was that Joseph had Dreams, dreams that he did not keep to himself... Last night I dreamed all my brothers were working stripping the Corn from sheaves; And as Joseph walked by in his Coat, all of the Sheaves came to attention and bowed down to me!

The next night, that their father Israel was the Sun, and Rachel the Moon, all his siblings stars in the sky, and all of them, the Sun, Moon and Stars, all bowed down and circled round Joseph.

This became enough that Joseph's brothers wanted to recall the story of Cain and Abel, except Reuben, who was the eldest suggested that instead of killing him, they drop him into a dry well, tearing his coat and covering it in blood.

I have always had a personal affection for this story of brothers dropping you into a dark hole. When we were little, our parents would send the first 3 of to stay us for the summer with our grandparents on the family farm. It was only a subsistence farm, Grandpa had two Dairy cows, Grandma had chickens, they grew Hay, and they grew Vegetables for a road-side stand. My brothers had older friends, and being the youngest I would try to keep up or spy on them. I fondly recall the smells and sounds of that barn. What was different was that the barn was built into a hillside, so you could run a wagon of hay up the hill directly into the loft; while on the opposite side you entered the lower level where the cows, calves and some summers a pony were kept. I still have recurrent nightmares of my brothers holding me by my ankles dangling me head-first through the Hay-Chute to where the Animals and Manure lay.

Sarah and Abraham had an Egyptian Slave, Hagar, they used to conceive a child, they then did not want, whose name was Ishmael. Rather than being rescued by Jesus walking across the water in the storm, when Joseph was down the well, who was it Josephs brothers sold him to, and where did they take him? Ishmaelites going to Egypt where the Nation of Israel became Slaves!