

Staying Afloat on the Ark of Jesus ...David Jahnke, 10/25/15

I spoke last week about Cain's fall into sin and death when he killed his brother Abel. While God would still love and protect Cain, there were many consequences to his sin. 1. He had to leave his homeland. 2. He would feel less than fulfilled in his work. 3. He would no longer be sure of God's presence. 4. He would be suspicious of those around him and generally insecure because of this. All these human traits would be passed on from generation to generation and lead humanity to chronic violence within and among the tribes of the earth.

God said in Gen. 1 and repeated in chapter 9 that humans differed from animals in being made in God's image and yet, like animals, we were hurting and killing each other left and right. And despite all of the advances in knowledge and communications and prosperity, I believe humans remain largely alienated, unfulfilled, mistrustful and insecure.

I heard this week from a good friend whose son is essentially being abused by his stepmother. He is not living up to her standards and she lost it on him recently, shouting at him that he is a retard and that she would knock his teeth out if...

I do not care what the "if" is. She is the adult and she is not only demeaning and threatening her stepson, she is demeaning God's special children. And this is happening in homes all around us every day, among all classes.

Mistrust, anger, and derision pervade our no longer "civil" society as well. I saw and had to re-post this John Wesley quote earlier this week. Wesley was the founder of the Methodist Church.

This is important to remember over the next year of campaigning. But the very next day, I received an e-mail deriding one of our candidates for president with all kinds of unsubstantiated accusations. I sent him this quote from Wesley back and I am glad our correspondence was civil and fruitful after that. Friends, I want you to care passionately about political matters but do not let your passion lead to deriding or debasing those with whom you disagree. It is a form of violence which God cannot stand.

Because of man's violence to man in Noah's day, God forsook his creation. He repented of what he had made and stepped away from the preservation of the world, opening up the floodgates of his judgment. But before doing so, he chose a faithful and righteous man to build an ark and bring remnants of creation with him.

Can you imagine what Noah's neighbors were thinking and murmuring as he was building a giant ark hundreds of miles from any coast? And the mocking he received from neighbors. *In a Minnesota-Norwegian accent:* "That's a pretty big boat you're making there Noah. What are you planning to do with it? Ohhh yeah... You say a big flood is coming? Would have to be pretty big I think to use that boat." You did not know they spoke with a Minnesota-Norwegian accent in Noah's day.

This is part of our plight in the modern world. We hear that there is flood of judgment coming. And that we have to build an ark...and not even a physical structure which some would understand. Millions, after all, have built nuclear shelters over the decades.

Instead, we have to build a spiritual house on the foundation of an ancient man named Jesus who tells us that he alone can keep us afloat. And the skeptical around us wonder, and we hope they wonder out loud to us, "Where is the divine judgment that you refer to? Do you have any proof of this Word of God that you hear? And why should I care about an ancient so-called prophet?"

We can point to the harbinger of judgment in the terribly broken world around us; and to God's judgment alive in almost everyone's conscience. We might ask, "Are you not shaken by what humans do to each other? And what we are capable of, good and bad? Do you not have a powerful sense of right and wrong within you? If so, where does your clarity and judgment come from, if not from a spiritual or idealistic realm beyond physical matter?"

If you spark curiosity at this point you can get into why Jesus. But they will probably dismiss us. That's when we shake the dust off of our feet and keep doing what God tells us to do-- building the ark of Jesus. And then as the rain of the world's sin starts pouring down, including by the way our own, we trust the promise that we will not get washed away by the flood.

I wonder how Noah and his family felt on the ark as it sunk in that they were the only ones left. Was God really with them and going to deliver them? They kept sending out doves in search of signs for land and new life. And the only signs around were the frightening remnants of judgment. They must have felt abandoned and forsaken.

And do we not feel the same? Alone? Adrift? Beaten up and broken down by a world gone wrong or by a life gone wrong? Wondering if God is there and whether He will really save us.

This even came to the one who told us to build our lives on his teachings. Jesus was forsaken by his followers and God. He knows better than we do the horror of being without the Father he had so trusted and loved. But if the Son had to suffer the loss of the Father, remember that the Father had to suffer the loss of the Son. Both were willing to endure this horror because of their love for all of us. The Father and the Son understand and go with us through every trial we face.

The Son had to go to where we were lost in order that we might be found. He had to go where we were condemned in order that we might be forgiven and saved. He went into sin and death that our sins would be washed away and that we would live forever with God in a new creation. The flood heralds crucifixion and you might say God was swimming with all the dying and the dead.

Now I want you to now imagine how Noah felt when he saw land in the distance and a giant rainbow in the sky. *[Forward to the next pic of the rainbow]* Imagine the cheering among his family; the hugs and shouts of joy. And the brays and neighs and roars and chirps from the animals singing their praise. And on top of being saved, Noah hears from God that never again would all the earth be destroyed. This part of the story heralds the resurrection.

A great African-American leader in this community for almost fifty years, Dr. Kelmo Porter, pastor of St. John's Baptist Church, passed away last week. And at the memorial service last Friday, one of the many church "sons" whom he mentored as pastors spoke of how he met Dr. Porter when he was 3 years old. And that he did not like him. His mother was one of the matriarchs of the church so not only was she kept very busy at the church, it meant that Pastor Porter would come to their house for Sunday brunch every week. And he would eat up all the chicken.

He, of course, came to like the good reverend and concluded with these words to Dr. Porter's children. "I just want to let you all know that it today may be Friday but Sunday is right around the corner." And the congregation erupted in joyful amens and applause as they did dozens of times throughout the service.

Here is a community that knows that God is with them through all of their trials; that God has a particular love and care for the sick, the oppressed, the mourning and the poor. And God raises up their spirits day after day even as they know God will raise up their bodies from death in the fullness of time.

I want to contrast the joy and hope and trust of this service with a conversation I had with a colleague who expressed how she loved her church but struggles with its lukewarmth. She believes there is little to no passion for matters of faith and discipleship. And that God is a peripheral matter to most in her

congregation, rather than the center of their lives, pressing them forward in hope, joy, peace and loving service.

Everything going on in our church these days gives me great hope for which of these churches FPC will be in the 21st century. Over the course of two months between mid-Oct. and mid-Dec., we will have led our communities in 1. recycling, 2. a blood drive, 3. meal ministries, 4. a crop walk for the hungry and those fleeing war in the middle east, 5. the scouting for food drive, 6. a Heifer market to buy livestock for the poor internationally and 7. providing thanksgiving turkeys and 8. Christmas tree hams and gifts for the poor around us. It's awe-inspiring what you all do. We have a growing number in small groups and youth groups and so much good happening in our women's circles. I am proud to be a part of this church.

So come join the Spirit of Noah and his family, as the clouds break and the Sun shines and the rainbow bends over our church— rejoice in the coming of the Son of God to all the colors of the earth. Reject the lukewarmth of life clouded over by apathy and instead radiate the warmth of God's love and eternal life to all. And God's people say...

