*Between God and All Creatures*

Genesis 9:8-17

This is the first Sunday of Lent, the time we reflect upon ourselves and our relationship with our Creator. This is not the time we beat ourselves up over our failures, but it is the time when we acknowledge our humanness and realize that we have not followed God “perfectly”. This year it might be a good time to take a look at God’s world and see how it is shaping up, how God’s kingdom is progressing. We can certainly look at the world and see its many problems, see that some of God’s creatures are at odds with God’s intentions for creation. We see this in places where religious truths have become distorted and used to progress certain groups with fanatic ideologies and desire to “conquer” the world and eliminate Christians, Jews and if allowed to go unchecked, anyone else who does not profess Islam. We see such patterns of behavior rooted in evil. We see intentions of this group to foist their ideologies on others and make their “religion” the only true religion of the world. In this series of sermons I am not going to compare Christianity with Islam. I am going to help us make sure we know specifically what we believe in, what God has done in human history to get us back on track in the healing of creation, focusing on who Jesus is and what he accomplished and is accomplishing on this earth. These special days of Lent would be a good time to “get to know” what our faith is all about, what we believe in, and why we follow the one we call Jesus. So Let us begin at or near the beginning with a promise from God. If we remember the story correctly we will see that the world had gotten out of hand and had become so evil that God felt the need to save one good family and eliminate all others. Keep in mind that God could have literally destroyed it all and started all over again, another Adam another Eve. (Read the Rainbow story in Genesis)

The first job my father had when he graduated from Ohio State was with IBM, a brand new company. His job offer was the lowest paying offer from the three offered to him, but he felt it was the best offer in terms of where the company was headed and its potential for growth. When he started at IBM, computers were about the size of a small room and punch cards were used to feed and disseminate information. I remember him bringing home thousands of punch cards for us to play with. We folded, glued, cut, and marked up those cards to make a multitude of structures. We used them as currency in pretend opportunities. They made great bookmarks. But the one thing we didn’t know about them is what those little holes in them meant. We were certain there were valuable pieces of information in those cards but had no way to decipher them. Their knowledge would always remain a mystery for us. We did not have the right equipment to get the information from them.

Our faith can be like that sometimes. We come to church, we know some of the basics about our faith, we know that Jesus is at the center of what we believe in and we know that the Bible is a living book that tells us a lot about God’s story and our story. And we know that no matter how much we think we know, there is always something new to learn about it.

But there are some things we must know about our faith in today’s world and I would like to start at the rainbow story with Noah and the animals. Almost every ancient culture had a flood story, a story of the earth being covered by water, a time of new beginning. This is the first covenant, the first significant promise the God had made with humans, in fact with all of creation. He promised never to destroy creation again with a flood with the specific intention of destroying every living thing. It will not be His mode of correcting an errant, sinful world. And to remind himself, he used the rainbow to dissuade him from flooding the earth again.

Several things come to light in this story of Noah and the flood. First is the capability of humans to become so depraved that all of creation was messed up, off its target and purpose for being created. According to the story, the humans had walked so far away from God, that something had to be done. So God found one righteous man, and gave him very specific instructions on how to save humanity through him and the creatures that had roamed the earth. And Noah obeyed, even when he was the subject of ridicule. After all he was building an ark inland.

So we see the human capacity to sin, to walk away from God, to focus only on themselves even to the hurt of others. It doesn’t take much a stretch to see that we still have that capacity. We see the events of this day and see that evil still rears its ugly head.

The second thing that we see in the Noah story is that God saw that there was some good in creation and he found it in Noah. Noah pleased God because Noah did what was right in God’s eyes. God did not destroy humans all together, but preserved what was right. God was not a whimsical God, but a strategist who did not give up on what he created. His love for what He had created was great enough for him to find a way to redeem it.

The third thing we see in the Noah story is that God is a God of promise. He made a covenant with Noah and his family and with all of creation never again to destroy it with the waters of a flood. Though there continued to be the typical spring floodings that literally replenished the earth, there was never again a world-wide flood designed to destroy creation. This gives us a glimpse into God’s nature. God is one who wants to save, not destroy. This is a God who maintains a relationship with who and what he created. In the generations to come we read in scriptures stories of human’s continued capability to do wrong things. God made a covenant with Abraham, a promise that through Abraham’s family all the earth would be blessed. It seems that every generation has it’s evil components, but also we see that individual human beings have difficulty walking in God’s righteousness. Even the best of the people God chose to be leaders had their downsides. King David was an adulterer. Jacob was a trickster and his sons conspired to kill one of Jacob’s favorite sons, Joseph. But God turned things around and made things right. God was continually helping humans redeem themselves. And God’s promise to Abraham remained and was accomplished through the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

God’s best work was Jesus. Through Jesus God gave humanity a way to turn around and walk back in relationship with God, even when they had walked so far that there seemed to be little hope that they would return to God. No longer was God’s redemption available to just one group of people, but was made available to all people. God had found a way to redeem His creation and make it right.

It is not that we have a remarkable story about God’s walk on earth through Jesus and we believe that story of what happened more than 2000 years ago, but it is what we call a living story. It is an event that continues to work the world today. God’s promise became Jesus’ promise to be with us always. Jesus gave us the great gift of the Spirit to guide us into walking in God’s ways and being a part of re-creating creation itself. We believe that Jesus lives today in a very unique way. We believe that Jesus is a living part of us. No other religion can make such a claim. Countless events have happened through the centuries that demonstrate the power of the living Jesus to make a difference in our lives. Jesus continues to offer hope and light to a sometimes very dark world. Jesus continues to redeem and to save lives and bring people into a vital living relationship with God our Creator.

And when we find ourselves drifting away from God, Jesus has the capacity to bring us back into reconciliation with God. Over and over again we find ourselves forgiven and loved and once again right with God. It takes work on our part to accept forgiveness and continue to seek knowledge and understanding about our creator. Our God is not a distant God, and heaven is not something for the future, but God is within us, moving and motivating us and the kingdom of heaven is among us. We catch glimpses of it as we travel through faith. No other faith can make that claim! Our relationship with God can be as close as we allow it to be. It doesn’t lead us into paths of destruction, but into paths of reconciliation and the way of love for all of God’s creation.

So what can we say about our faith? The God that we worship is a God of promise, not only for the future but for the here and now. Our God is a God who walks with is, active in our lives, and loves us into salvation from our tendency to walk out of harmony with creation. Jesus is the key to leading us through life the way we were intended to walk life on this earth. Jesus is the one capable of healing our souls and bringing us into alignment with the kingdom of God. This Jesus offers us the opportunity to walk in the breath of life.