

Next week is Palm Sunday - Passion Sunday -
the beginning of our journey through Holy Week.

But before we get to the intensity of Holy Week,
I thought for today's sermon I'd offer a little interlude,
a little bit of a zag.

It's like how on all my Star Trek shows,
just before the climactic battle against the Cardassians or whoever,
you could always count on one off-beat, quirky episode
to let you catch your breath before the big ending.

So today, no talk of the crucifixion. No light versus dark.

Instead, a little reflection about the story we heard
on the first Sunday of Lent,
and then a word or two on the Ten Commandments.

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Back on Lent 1 we heard the conclusion of the story of Noah and the Ark,
the story of God sending a rainbow
as a sign of his covenant with the entire earth,
a promise that God made to never again
destroy the earth with a flood,
a promise that he was instead ready to begin again
with the creation of life on Earth.

There's a wonderful writer named Marilynne Robinson.

Some Holy Trinity folks got together a few years ago
to read her novel Gilead.

She's just written a new book,

but instead of a novel it's a very close reading of Genesis.

I was listening to an interview with her

and she gave a beautiful interpretation
of this story of the Flood.¹

In Genesis, she said, the Flood comes because God

is so angry with the wickedness of humanity
that he decides to destroy the world,

“because people are only evil
in their thoughts from their youth.”

“But then,” she says,

“in the way of a forgiving father,
God says, ‘I can't destroy them,
“because people are only evil
in their thoughts from their youth.”

“In other words,” she says, “the incorrigible is still loved.”

“This is who [we] are. This is what [we] are - God still loves [us].

God doesn't want to destroy [us].

So God began creation over again.”

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¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/05/opinion/ezra-klein-podcast-marilynne-robinson.html>

The Flood story is a wisdom story,
not a historical truth but one of our oldest stories
about the nature of God's relationship with humanity.

And according to Marilynne Robinson one of the oldest truths we have
is that God has decided to love us as we are.

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Now, the Ten Commandments.

We've been reciting the 10 Commandments during Lent
as part of the penitential order.

They come later in our sacred story, centuries after the Flood story.
Ten rules for right relationship with God
and right relationship with neighbor.

God is teaching us through the 10 Commandments
something very similar to what Marilynne Robinson says
we can learn from the story of Noah and the Ark.

4 of the commandments are for our relationship with God:

No idols

No other gods

No swearing falsely in God's name

Keep the sabbath

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In scripture, when people violate the commandments towards God,
it's because they're trying to gain power that is not theirs to possess.

When kings want more wealth, more power,
when they want to rely on some foreign country for security
rather than on God,
they create idols and false gods and they worship them.

When God's people want to get just a little bit richer,
when they decide they're willing to trade
their identity as God's people for a little more security,
they ignore the sabbath and work 7 days a week
just like they did when they were slaves in Egypt.

When they want to claim authority they don't have,
they swear in the name of God.

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It's the same when it comes to the 6 commandments
about us and our neighbors.

We lie and steal and kill to gain for ourselves
the things that are not ours to have.

We dream of what other people have
and we even violate the vows of our marriage,
believing that it would make us happy
if only we could live without the limits of our lives.

Or we tell ourselves that the only way we can truly be ourselves
is if we abandon or leave behind the parents who raised us.

But it never seems to work, does it?

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Time and again we strive for what is not ours -
for power, possessions, independence,
we even strive for people that are not ours to have,
and always in the fantasy that it will lead to a happiness
that never comes.

And by the way, God is not anti-achievement.

God is not saying, “don’t get above your raising.”

But I think God is giving us a set of commandments
that tell us to walk our own journey
instead of trying to take somebody else’s.

God is teaching us through the 10 Commandments

the same lesson he teaches us through the story of the Flood:

Be who you are. You are enough. YOU are who I created.

In the Flood story, God reconciles himself to the real us -

us broken, insecure, occasionally wicked humans,
and with the sign of a rainbow God promises
that he will love us forever.

And on Mt. Sinai God gave us 10 commandments for how to live,

not to show us how we could earn his love,
but so that we might learn to live within ourselves,
so that instead of trying in vain to be who we can never be,
we might realize that we are already beautifully made,
that you...are all you need to be.

And by the way, God didn’t choose Superman and Wonder Woman
to be the beginning of a great people.

God chose two ordinary, flawed, waaaay past their prime people
named Abram and Sarai.

The Ten Commandments are not about perfection.

God never said,

Thou shalt not fail.

Thou shalt not be poor.

Thou shalt not get sick.

Thou shalt not be depressed, or lose a job,
or miss a payment, or be lonely.

Instead, God said,

“You are enough. Be who I made you to be.

You are a beautiful creation just as you are.

And I will always love you.”

Amen.