Tinking

A meditation on Genesis 9: 8 – 17 and Mark 1: 9 – 15

Rev. Cathy C. Hoop Grace Presbyterian Church February 21, 2021

During the pandemic, I have found that creating things gives me hope – crafting and knitting have helped me occupy my brain and learn new things. I love to knit – my mother taught me when I was a child. Teaching a child to knit isn’t the easiest thing in the world – it requires a lot of patience, and my mother was left-handed, teaching a right-handed child, which made it even more of a challenge. Getting back to knitting has been a nice connection to my mother, who could knit anything - argyle socks, lovely sweaters, never scarves or dish towels!

I doubt I will ever tackle an argyle sock, but I have pushed myself beyond square and rectangular items! Which also means, I do a lot of ripping out and starting over. I discovered something via YouTube that makes the ripping out not as painful. In knitting, when you take out your stitches to correct the mistakes, it is called “tinking.” In case you aren’t paying full attention, “tink” is “knit” spelled backwards. (Side note – I guess it’s a good thing I lean more towards knitting [2 needles] than crocheting, [1 needle] since I’m sure I would do an equal amount of ripping and I seriously doubt I could pronounce “crochet” backwards. “tehcorc”?) Somehow, calling it “tinking” makes the “un-creating” so much easier. As I rip out stitch after stitch, I say the word, “tink” over and over in my mind, and it has a cheerful sound, like the call of a towhee. Tinking instead of ripping. While “tinking” I discover things I didn’t understand about knitting. I understand more about the construction and the pattern. Of course, this isn’t always true, sometimes I just give up and move on.

But it reminds me of when my oldest was young – he was always taking things apart. Friends would give him broken things to disassemble. He is a mechanical engineer. He learned why things work – and why they may fail, from taking things apart. My only fear is that we may have stifled him a bit when we tried to reclaim the garage for our car, a decision which forced him to let go of quite a few unfinished projects.

“Un-creating” is often a crucial parr of any learning process, which leads me to the question, what did God learn from un-creating the world? And what do we learn from God’s response to God’s learnings?

God created the world in harmonious balance and beauty. Genesis 1 offers us a poetic imagining of how the world came to be.

First the earth was without shape or form.

Then God sent wind – *ruach* – spirit over the waters.

Light and darkness were defined.

Then the waters above and the waters below were separated.

Next, the dry land appeared.

Green plants emerged from the soil.

The sun, moon and stars were hung in the sky.

Finally, all kinds of crawling, flying and swimming creatures, and humans, in God’s image.

Until the days of Noah, when God looks at the earth with regret. God watches the violence being committed and grieves. God stares into the face of so much pain and chooses to “un-create” the world. Ryan Bonfiglio writes, “As the flood narrative unfolds, clouds hide the light of the sun (reversing days 1 and 4), plant and animal life is destroyed (reversing days 5 and 6), the dry ground disappears (reversing day 3) and as the rain descends and seas rise, the distinction between the waters above and the waters beneath is effaced (reversing day 2). At the height of the flood the earth is once again a “formless void” (1:2)” [[1]](#endnote-1)

Creation is undone. But not completely. A remnant has been preserved. Animals, plants, humans. Over this remnant, God sends a wind, “ruach,” over the formless void, just as God did in the beginning. The Spirit blows over the waters, and the process is begun again. The dry land appears, the plants grow, the animals are re-introduced to the land.

Noah and his family offer a thanksgiving offering to God, God delights in its fragrance and makes a decision. God will never “curse the land” because of the faults of humans. God, in the un-creating, acknowledges something that maybe God has been hesitant to fully admit: that humans are so very human. I think this is what breaks God’s heart.

We rush to the rainbow because it is breath-taking and whenever it appears, it catches us by surprise. Though far from childhood, I still call friends to share a rainbow sighting. Despite scientific explanation, rainbows will always be magical because for the brief moment that they are present to us, they transform our world.

So we rush to that moment in this traumatic story.

But if there were ever a time to acknowledge the trauma of this story, it is now. Now, while we wait on our little individual arks for the waters to recede and the sky to clear. Now, while we hope for safety for ourselves, our loved ones, and people we have never seen or will ever meet. Now, when thousands upon thousands have been lost to the pandemic’s flood. Now. We need to acknowledge the trauma and what it is doing to us.

Why are we surprised that when Noah left the ark, he built a vineyard and got himself stinking drunk? Why are we surprised that he was lying naked in his tent, and as a result of being found by his son, Ham, blamed and cursed him instead of admitting his own despair? He was exhausted and traumatized. Day and night when he had stood in the middle of a field, with no water in sight, no one – not one neighbor, not one cousin, not one friend, had believed him. No one had been convinced that something needed to change. No one of his community named the violence around them. He couldn’t save them.

But he wasn’t the only one traumatized. His wife, his sons, their wives, they all witnessed the chaos, they all knew what was happening beyond the safety of the walls of their boat. Unspeakable sorrow.

But they weren’t alone. For God was traumatized, too. God, who never sleeps, who never slumbers, was witness to the destruction. And in the “un-creating” God realized that she would never, could never, go through this again. Instead, she would knit the world back together, and let all the flaws stay in place: the holes, the twists, the unevenness. Holding to the perfect pattern was not worth the pain they had suffered in the un-creating. Instead, God would recreate the pattern, freer in form and possibility. No guarantees of what the end result would be other than whole.

Theologian Terence Freithem explains it this way:

*For God to decide to endure a wicked world, while continuing to open up the divine heart to that world, means that God’s grief is ongoing. God thus determines to take suffering into God’s own heart and bear it there for the sake of the future of the world. The cross of Jesus Christ is on the same trajectory of divine promise. [[2]](#endnote-2)*

God, who had looked upon a world torn apart by violence, would choose to turn away from violence, would relinquish violence as a solution. The sign of this promise? The bow. While we quickly translate the story for children and call it a “rainbow,” as we should, the Hebrew text simply reads “bow.” Bow, as in bow and arrow. Bow as in weapon.

God said, “This is the symbol of the covenant that I am drawing up between me and you and every living thing with you, on behalf of every future generation. I have placed my bow in the clouds; it will be the symbol of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, I will remember the covenant between me and you and every living being among all the creatures. (Genesis 9: 12 – 15, CEB)

God takes their weapon, the bow, and hangs it the clouds. God, whom we so often define by violence in the Old Testament, doesn’t only offer a promise. God demonstrates their commitment to peace, by putting their weapons away. The unstrung bow will hang in the sky, painted with brilliance and diversity.

God promises life to all creation, *all* creation. Not just humanity, but all living things. Not just one tribe, but all people, of all generations. God will offer a specific covenant to Abraham and Sarah, a specific covenant to Moses, but here, the covenant is as wide and as all encompassing as the rainbow itself. The rainbow, which appears to the just and unjust.

And *nothing* is asked in return. Nothing is asked of us. God doesn’t place any requirements on us. It is up to us to choose. It is up to us to acknowledge when we have chosen violence over peace, injustice over justice. But even as we leave our flaws in the patterns of God’s creation, we can remember how God responds: God regrets choices that involve violence, God grieves over the resulting pain, God remembers and God chooses a symbol of promise, a symbol of accountability.[[3]](#endnote-3)

As we move into this Lenten season, as you prepare your heart, your life for Easter’s renewal, may this be our pattern. May God’s example be our pattern: regret when regret is needed, grief over the pain we have caused, remembering and holding fast to what is good, and choosing a symbol, a sign of accountability.

1. Bonfiglio, Ryan. *Connections*, Year B, Vol. 2, WJK Publishing, Louisville, 2020, p. 25 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Freithem, Terrence. [Commentary on Genesis 9:8-17 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/first-sunday-in-lent-2/commentary-on-genesis-98-17-2), 2009 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Howard, Cameron B. R. [Commentary on Genesis 9:8-17 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/first-sunday-in-lent-2/commentary-on-genesis-98-17-3)

   Multiple sources referenced the “bow” as a weapon, including, [First Reading - The Old Testament Lectionary Podcast (firstreadingpodcast.com)](https://firstreadingpodcast.com/). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)