

Christus Victor, Part 2: The Second Flood
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Countryside Community Church (UCC)
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I. Toes In

Scripture: Luke 6:27-36

⁶⁻²⁷“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you. ³²“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

The title of this week’s sermon is “The Second Flood.” You may wonder what Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Luke has to do with Noah and his really big boat, right? Well, let’s talk about that.

The first flood happened in Genesis chapters 6 and 7.

⁶⁻¹¹Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. ¹²And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth. ¹³And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth.

⁷⁻¹¹In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. ¹²The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.

Now for many of us, we were taught as children in Sunday school, or we were told by more fundamental preachers throughout the years that the flood Noah and his family encountered was due to God’s wrath, or anger, with humanity. In punishment for humanity’s corruption and violence, the world was wiped out by God. And now you are all starting to look up, right? Searching for the storm clouds that must be gathering right about now? Humanity is in a pretty sorry state of corruption and violence in our current culture so it is natural that this story fills us with at least a little trepidation. But from what we have been discussing about the image of God in our last series and from what Eric told us last week about the whole concept of salvation, is this really the type of God any of us can relate to? If the flood story in Genesis is not about God’s anger and wrath, then how do we talk about God’s action in the story?

What if we see Noah’s story as God acting to correct the corruption of humanity? What if it was all about showing us God’s natural tendencies to relate to creation through healing, restoring, and reconciliation? If it is all about God’s anger, why would God bother to save Noah and his family? It’s not like Noah, himself, was a perfect human and was therefore worthy of saving.

One of the first things Noah does when dry land becomes accessible again is to plant a vineyard, get really drunk, and curse one of his sons for finding him passed out and lying naked in the tent!

But if we see this story of Noah and the flood as God's intervening in the world as a corrective for creation, leading it in a path of the abundance and joy in which it was created, then we can begin to see a God who acts from compassion, love and grace, rather than a God of vengeance and wrath. When we ascribe attributes like wrath and vengeance to God and how God acts in the world, we are really speaking out of our own fear and describing our own natural tendencies, not God's.

So if we will consider this first flood as God's compassionate corrective of creation, then it is a clearer path for us to reconsider Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as a second flood, a second corrective for creation, one based on love, restoration, healing and reconciliation.

Let's consider this idea together. Let's gather in groups of 2-3 people and talk about how shifting our understanding of how God actually works in the world might affect how we, as children of God in the world, might act with one another and the rest of creation.

Once you find your conversation group, spend a couple minutes talking about how acting out of love and gratitude with one another is different from acting out of vengeance and violence. How would the culture of our world be changed in this activity?

II. Waist Deep

Now if we take seriously that God's activity in the world always runs toward reconciliation, healing, restoration, and love, then it allows us to see a little deeper into what Jesus is telling us in the Sermon on the Mount about turning the other cheek and loving our enemies. Creation itself, which includes all of us, is created toward this restoration. If God's activity through love is to bring creation to its fullest beauty and wholeness, then the actions we take must also bear witness to that activity. If we are all loved beyond our wildest imaginations, then how we relate with one another should be based on that love that is shared with the guilty and the innocent alike. There is no partiality to God's love, so it is possible for our love for one another to reflect that same quality.

Out of this love, I would like us to practice praying for one another. I'd like you to gather into you groups again and identify for one of the people you are speaking with, something that is a concern for you, or something that seems to be blocking you from either giving or receiving this love. The idea is that this person will be praying for you through what we call intercessory prayer. This type of prayer understands that God's love for us allows us to reach out in love to another, on their behalf. I'll give you a couple of minutes to identify that one thing for which you would like prayer, and then we will come back together and do some guided intercessory prayer.

Now let us take a deep breath in, and let it out slowly. Take another breath in... and let it out. Now center yourself in quietness, continuing to breathe and seeking that place inside of you where you have experienced what it means to be loved. Find that place where you feel calm, safe, and loved. In this space, picture the person who has asked for your prayer. Surround this image with the love that you feel in this safe and calm place. Consider this person's request for

prayer. Is it a prayer for their health? Then find that part in your own body and call forth its strength. If it is a request to ease anxiety about a job, finances, or concern for a loved one, then find that place in you where your own calm is the strongest and draw from its strength. Once you have built up the strength in the areas needed, send that strength and that energy over to the person you are praying for. Whatever that person's request, find that part inside of you and build the energy of your prayer, drawing from your own strength in this area.

We are not praying that this person will find a job or will come into a windfall of money somehow, but rather that their anxiety about their job status or their financial status ceases to cause them undue anxiety. Pray that they are able to draw from their own sense of calm no matter what their situation may be. Continue to hold this person and their request in your prayers throughout the week, continuing to draw on your own strength in this area, sending it to them.

III. Over Our Heads

So how was that prayer for you? Were you able to associate their need with something within yourself that is healthy and then send that positive energy toward the person you were praying for? How did you feel knowing that there was someone in the room doing the exact same thing for you? How does the overall energy in the room feel? Can you feel some deeper connections being made and that energy lifting us all a little more than when we walked in here today? You may not feel the activity of the prayer in this instant, but the prayer itself turns you toward an openness for receiving something in the future; later on this afternoon, or maybe even later on in the week. Wholeness and restoration comes when we are open to the activity of the Spirit moving among us. When we pray out of the love God has for us, we are much more open to both giving and receiving that love within our lives.

Now comes the tough part. If this prayer is grounded in God's love, love that covers both the innocent and the guilty, then our prayer is led by this love and not our own partialities, prejudices, and fears. God's love is for everyone, everywhere. We are literally created in it and by it. So our prayers are not solely for those *WE* love but wholly for all those that *God* loves. For Jesus this means loving even those we consider our enemies, because they, too, are loved by God. And it means that we are prayed for even by those who consider us their enemies. Others are able to pray for us in love, even in our imperfections, because the love that leads that prayer is God's love. Our love comes from God. We do not pray for only people we naturally love. As Jesus says, what credit is that to you? We can love and pray for our enemies because God loves them and we trust in God's faithfulness to that person. We trust that God is active in that person's life, bringing them to fullness and reconciliation, just as God is working in our lives moving us toward healing and restoration.

When I was in 4th grade there was a boy in my class who was a couple years older than most of the kids in our class. At the time, none of us were given any explanation or reasons for why this boy had gotten a later start in school and was struggling to catch up. All we knew was that he was quite a bit older and bigger than all of us and he was prone to take advantage of position. He was often gruff and mean to several of the kids in class, and we were all a little scared of him.

One day early in the year, this boy decided he wanted to hang out with me and my friends who played kickball during recess. He always wanted to be the one who got to choose his team so

we let him, and I was always the first one he picked even though I was not the best kickball player on the field. He began jumping in line behind me when we lined up to attend events in the auditorium or to go to the gym for physical education. He somehow got my home phone number and was calling me almost every night, wanting to talk. It was starting to get really creepy for me that this boy was paying so much attention to me. I was happy that he wasn't being mean to me but his wanting to hang around me all the time was making me a little nervous. I didn't want to tell him not to call me anymore because I was afraid that he would get mad at me and start being really mean to me instead.

After a while, my mother noticed the patterns of this boy calling me and asked me about him. I explained the situation and that I was kind of afraid of this boy. My mother asked me if this boy was a mean person. I answered that he could be mean, but that mostly he was just bigger than most of the other kids and that alone scared us. During our conversation I thought my mom would help me figure out a way to tell the teacher or the principal about this in a way that made the boy stop following me around and calling me, but she surprised me by asking instead, "Have you prayed for this boy?" I didn't know what to say. No, I hadn't prayed for this boy. He scared me, he wasn't really my friend, so why would I put him on my prayer list for bedtime prayers? That list was reserved for my family and close friends.

My mother then explained to me that I couldn't expect this boy to ever change his behavior to me or the other kids if I never prayed for this boy to understand that he was loved by God and that he didn't have to be mean to get someone's attention, or to follow me all over the place and call me every night in order to get mine. If he could see the friendship in me to pray for him even though he scared me, perhaps he would let down his guard and be nicer back to me, so I wouldn't be so scared of him. So we prayed together for this boy. His name was Ralph. And I added Ralph to my bedtime prayer list and I really expected things to get better, and they did. I'm not sure whether it was really Ralph who got better or whether it was me who became less afraid of him since I was praying for him, but things really did get better and Ralph and I became pretty good friends after a while, and the next year, Ralph was moved up a grade and was in my sister's class.

Prayer changes things, in ourselves, in people we love, and in people we fear. So let us practice this same intercessory prayer for someone who you can identify in your life as driving you crazy or who is of great concern for you. Let's take a couple of minutes to figure out who this person is we want to pray for...

Now let's find that place in our heart that is open to receiving and giving love. Help us to feel the fullness of creation there. Help us to build our gratitude that such a place inside us exists, and that we are capable of receiving God's love for us so we are able to love others. In this gratitude, let us accept God's reconciling work in ourselves, and believe that God is also working this same type of reconciliation in others. Now, let us send that love and gratitude we feel toward this person we have identified. Let us pray for this person, that they too can feel this place inside of them and recognize that God is restoring them. Pray that they too might begin to reflect the love they receive in this restoration, out into all the world, showing loving action to all they meet. Let us pray that they experience what it means to be loved beyond their wildest imaginations.

Continue to hold this person and their need for restoration in your prayers throughout the week, continuing to draw on the gratitude of your own restoration in God for strength in this area, and send it to them.

IV. Communion

Jesus tells us: ... love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Jesus exemplified this way of living on the night in which he was betrayed, he broke bread and shared wine with his disciples knowing that one would betray him that very evening. Being merciful, like his creator, he was able to give himself for the guilty and the innocent alike. This is the gift of God, for the people of God. Amen.