

Flashes of Green

This morning we begin our nine-month walk through the breadth of scripture beginning not quite at the beginning of the story. In the first verses of Genesis, we hear an account of God's creation of the world, when God pushes back against the powers of chaos and separates light from darkness. God calls this separation good and the first day comes to a close. Throughout the succeeding verses we witness each new day unfold in God's good creation, including the creation of the first man followed by the first woman. And at the end of the first creation account we are told that God declares it all good and then rests. The second creation account gives us a slightly different story of God's creation of human beings where they are shaped from the dust of the earth. God breathes God's spirit into them, filling them with the breath of life. Very quickly, Adam and Eve are tempted to know what God knows and find themselves banished from the garden out into life in the real world. Generations come and go, and humanity seems determined to break God's heart again and again. Until finally, God has had enough. [Read Genesis 6:5-8, 11-14, 17-22]

So God grows weary and fed up with humanity's determination to gorge themselves on evil thoughts and flood the world with violence. In one translation, the earth is described as corrupt—tarnished and broken—in God's sight and "filled with outrage."¹ It's an ancient story, but that insight sounds sadly current. We, too, live in an age flooded with anger, and violence. Not all outrage is wrong. In fact, outrage can be downright holy, but it seems that we live in a constant state of outrage toward our fellow human beings and on a steady diet of disdain toward our brothers and sisters, making me wonder how we must look to God today.

The story continues with the pieces we know. Noah does what God asks and builds the ark. The animals come on board in twosies, but this is no benign children's story. As countless people everywhere observe, this is a terrible story. God is so distraught, so brokenhearted by the evil in the hearts of the men and women shaped by his hands and in his image that God decides to start over...until God takes notice of Noah. It's not in the text, but I wonder if God isn't actually looking for a reason not to destroy everything and start over. Yes, it is terrible to think of those who are not on board the ark when the floodwaters come. But I don't believe our ancestors

¹ Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: Norton, 1996) 28.

saved this story simply as a cautionary tale or only as a way to explain the rainbow. I believe they saved and told and re-told this story because it reveals something deeply important about God.

The story continues with the rain pouring down and the springs in the depths of the seas spouting up. Water, water everywhere. The earth, once filled with violence and outrage grows strangely quiet except for the sound of waves and wind outside one lone ark. In chapter 7 we hear that it rained for 150 days. At the beginning of chapter 8 we are told that God remembers Noah and the rest of the creatures on the ark. It's not that God has somehow forgotten about them, but rather that God now determines to begin again with them, to act on behalf for those who have rocked and floated for so long. God blows a wind over the earth, causing the waters to recede:

The springs of the deep sea and the skies closed up. The skies held back the rain. The waters receded gradually from the earth. After one hundred fifty days, the waters decreased; and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day, the ark came to rest on the Ararat mountains. The waters decreased gradually until the tenth month, and on the first day of the tenth month the mountain peaks appeared.²

This second round of creation happens gradually. The flood story and all that follows is understood to be the work of different voices, one writing during the great glorious days of when King David and King Solomon reigned. The other thread is believed to have been written sometime during or after the people Israel's time of exile in Babylon, when all that is solid and good and great in their eyes seems to have been destroyed yet again. God does not snap the divine fingers and clean up the mess like some kind of cosmic magician. Little by little the waters dry up and land begins to appear, while Noah and the others wait, somehow trusting after all this time that God will make a way for them to make a life outside the damp cypress walls. Noah takes it upon himself to open a window and send out a raven. The raven never returns to the ark, but instead flies tirelessly, "back and forth until the waters over the entire earth had dried up."³ And then Noah sends out a dove. [Read 8:8-14]

² Genesis 8:2-5, Common English Bible

³ Genesis 8:7, CEB

So the dove returns first with an olive branch in its beak—a small but tangible sign of God’s new creation taking root, a bright spot of green after so many long days and nights immersed in blues, grays, and browns. So often we think of the rainbow as the one sign of God’s faithfulness—as we should—but long before we see the red, the orange, the yellow, or the blue, we see green, the smallest bit of green that tells Noah—and us—that the promise is true. The story continues of course. After the dove finds a home on the green earth, God encourages Noah and his family to go forth into the new creation. God welcomes the burnt offering Noah offers, and we overhear a bit God’s internal monologue:

The Lord smelled the pleasing scent, and the Lord thought to himself, I will not curse the fertile land anymore because of human beings since the ideas of the human mind are evil from their youth. I will never again destroy every living thing as I have done.⁴

Do you hear that? God recognizes that humans—even the righteous Noah and his family, are sinful creatures. Fathoms of floodwaters have not changed that fact. And yet God decides not to destroy creation ever again. To save us from ourselves, God will find another way. God will have to try something else. And then, God speaks the promise out loud. [Read 9:8-17]

I have said it before, but I love baptisms. Yes, there is the joy of seeing an infant, a small child, or an adult receive the sacrament. The water, the giggles, the questions. But the most joyful piece for me is the reminder that we are all beloved children of God, that God promises to stick with us come what may, no matter what we throw at God or what life throws at us. Like a flash of green after unending days of gray, this promise pokes its way through and points us back to this one unchangeable promise. But it can be so hard to hold on to.

Writer Glennon Doyle tells a story she affectionately refers to as “The Gift of the Green Blob”:

Amma’s been walking around for four days with a green blob on her head. [As the second child, Glennon says she gives Amma a bit more freedom than her first child, Chase. She refers to Amma and Tish, child 2 and child 3 as free spirits.] Anyway—like I said, Amma’s been green for four days. I kept thinking the green would fade but every morning it somehow seems fresher, brighter. So this morning I made her take a shower, because desperate times call for desperate measures. When she got out of the

⁴ Genesis 8:21, CEB

shower I noted that the green was gone and I dried her off in her snuggly towel and sent her off to her room to get dressed. Five minutes later Amma walked back into the kitchen with A NEW GREEN BLOB ON HER HEAD. *On no, she didn't*, I thought. I SHOWERED THAT CHILD. I WANT PUBLIC CREDIT FOR THE SHOWER. So I said, "Sister. I give up. What's going on with the green blob?" And she looked up at me and said, "I'm a CHILD OF GOD, mom." She pointed to her forehead and said, "My green is to **Remember**. So I can be brave." [Glennon continues,] She's making herself a SACRAMENT, which is an outward reminder of an invisible truth. Every morning she's saying to herself and the world: I'm GOD'S. SO I CAN BE BRAVE...

[She goes on to write,] Do whatever it takes to remember that you're a child of God, friends. Paint it above your door, tie it to your wrists, stamp it on your forehead: I AM A CHILD OF GOD. And then remember the flip side of that brilliant, life-saving truth: So is everyone else. As you walk around today, imagine that every single person you meet has a green blob smack dab in the center of her forehead.

Then treat her accordingly.⁵

One flash of green can be a reminder of a deeply important truth. Despite the countless ways we fall short, that green tells us just how beloved we are and just how beloved others are, too. Yes, God can see us in all of our outrageous outraged, violent, disdainful state, but God sees something else, too. God sees us through the lens of the rainbow, the reminder that God promises to save us and to keep finding ways to save us, to keep building us into the people God has created us to be. As the story continues, God will raise up kings and prophets to lead us and calls us back to God. And ultimately, God gives us God's own son, God's own heart, Jesus Christ to show us God's loving and saving ways face to face. But when the waves are crashing all around us, when it seems that truth and justice and kindness and peace have all been washed away, this promise can be so hard to see. Sometimes we need more than the occasional baptism celebration in here to remember. But blessedly, the reminders come. Sometimes it comes in a bright green olive leaf in a dove's beak, sometimes it comes in a bright green blob on a child's forehead. And I for one am so grateful that those reminders come, because I for one need that flash of green, and others do, too. And as you leave worship today, I have green stickers for you

⁵ <https://momastery.com/blog/2015/08/04/the-gift-of-the-green-blob/>

to take if you'd like one for yourself. I'd also love for you to take a few more with you—I have plenty! Take them and share them and wear them, so that someone somewhere asks you, “What’s going on with the green sticker? What’s up with the green?” And you will get a chance to tell them and remind yourself what Noah knew when that dove returned. You are an adored child of an infinitely faithful God, and so is everyone else. We cannot say it too often or too loudly. Because in an age when God’s beloved children are overlooked and vilified, sidelined and written off for their age, their race, their income, their immigration status, their party, their gender, just to name a few, we who gather here know something every single human being needs to know: I am a child of God, you are a child of God, and so is everyone else. Without fail. Without end.

Thanks be to God. Amen.