

## IT IS GOOD FOR YOU

Everyone seems to like a “feel good” sermon that’s full of “Good News.”

Well, Today’s sermon is titled “It’s good for you”.  
So, why does that title feel like.....BAD NEWS???

I suppose, because that phrase, “It’s good for you,”.... is often heard when a nurse is approaching with a syringe.. or.... it is attached to things we don’t like to eat or do.

Sometimes it is associated with a difficult or undesirable experience we **had to endure**..... such as the time I went camping and forgot to pack the coffee. Complaining about my oversight, I heard the wise crack, *from someone who doesn’t drink coffee*, “Well, It’s probably good for you!”  
Well it may or may not be, BUT just hearing that ..... “advice”.... hits a discord.....with echos of parental chastisement.

Most of us cringe... when we hear that phrase.  
We don’t like to be told, “It’s good for you.”

Well,..... Get ready to cringe..... because the message in this Sermon is.. “Good for you”..... and me.

More than likely, you’ve figured out that this message includes the story of Noah and the flood.

And, I think we all appreciate the power and truth in OT stories.  
Those Great Bible Stories, including the Flood Story, tell us a lot about God, ourselves... and....our relationship with God. They are full of truth.

Nobody dwells on the fine details, such as the impossibility of gathering a pair of everything..... or ..... the image of millions of bloated carcasses floating on the water. To be **too realistic** would cause us to miss the powerful messages in the story, and **we don’t want to miss the truth** in the story.  
On the other hand, we don’t want to ignore key elements presented, and thus repress the theology to only pigments on a nice nursery wall mural, either.

The Flood Story is a wonderful Story full of truth. So, let’s explore the story.

But, before we look at it, ... we must realize that God nurtures and tries to prepare the children of God for the undesirable, the hardships, the challenges in Life.

For example, before Jesus went out into the Wilderness, he was baptized and blessed. And, as we know, this “wilderness experience” was a very difficult time for Jesus, BUT a necessary time for personal formation, growth and discipline!  
The Wilderness Experience ..... was good for Jesus.

It was Good preparation for his life and ministry!

And note, the text in Mark states that the Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness. God sent Jesus, God's special son, out to a place where he would have to endure terrible conditions and intense temptations.

But also note, God was ever present – through an angel!

Just as God prepared Jesus for the challenges of life, I believe God seeks to prepare you and me for life..... **so that we can learn to overcome the pitfalls, the temptations..... and life's challenges.** God does not want us to be victims of sins and bondage.

Hebrews 12:6 states,

“The Lord disciplines those whom [God] loves.”..... oooooo, boy,.. most of cringe at that passage. It sounds too much like.... “well, it's good for you!”

I think God does provide... and... allow opportunities for growth – for discipline. AND, Discipline is NOT punishment!

Discipline is more like honing, polishing or even carving like an artist.

In addition, WE MUST NOT CONCLUDE THAT EVERY HARDSHIP AND CHALLENGE IS A TEST FROM GOD!

Bad things can just happen; there is certain randomness in life!

God does NOT control everything in our lives.

{Did everyone hear that?}

*Acquired Discipline is a GOOD thing!*

Discipline, like it or not, **is good for us**, ...and, it is a lot better than the consequences of ignorance, laziness.... and sin.

Receiving what we deserve because of ignorance, laziness and sin,... is NOT a good thing.

*The Bible often calls THOSE consequences – Punishment, and usually they are self inflicted.*

And this leads into the story of the Great Flood.

The Bible says that God made creation and declared that it was Good!

Yet, after a while,.....creation, at least the human element, ... turned to Exploitation and VIOLENCE.

Gen. 6:11 states, “In God's sight.... [*in God's opinion, not the people's, but God's*].... In God's sight....

The Earth was corrupt.”

God's wonderful creation had corrupted itself by turning to VIOLENCE.

– The Strong and powerful were abusing the weak;

– the fearful were reacting with brutality: *people were shooting each other and getting tough on crime, and fighting chaos and terrorists with weapons.*

The earth / God's creation – **humanity CHOSE NOT love and harmony**, BUT instead VIOLENCE!

People were filled with evil and wickedness, and God was so hurt by their choices that God **regretted** creating humans.

*??Can we sense the message in all this??*

Humanity was incorrigible, nearly everyone was bound for self-inflicted destruction – Consequential Punishment.

God's creation was imploding; it was a MESS, and God was disgusted.

SO.....God decided to UN-CREATE.

*During creation, the waters were separated, BUT NOW, God would bring back the waters..... UN-CREATE.*

Keep in mind, in the Hebrew perspective, water represented chaos, and it was feared. *They were Not maritime people.*

Being inundated, having the waters return..... was the equivalent of our parents' fear of WWII or.... our fear of a pandemic or endless drought.

AND ... YES, apparently, .... it was an option for God the creator..... to UN-create.

Like it or not,..... God can alter events and bring about consequences sooner than later,.... if God wants to.

Our reaction to this is interesting,..... because a lot of people want a God who controls everything..... as long as that control is viewed as desirable. ???

Yet, here we have God erasing creation.

AND,....Our response is that: THIS IS NOT GOOD NEWS!

This is BAD News! ..... and....This doesn't fit OUR model for God.

We'd rather hear about a warm fuzzy, tender God, ...and not about the God who brings Judgment AND KILLS ALL LIVING CREATURES!

**Yet**, the story **clearly** informs us that God did NOT completely destroy Creation! Humanity was on a path to its own destruction, and....

God was able to see the good IN creation, and life continued.

God even kept the basic ingredients– the pairs of all living things.

The Flood was an attempt to wipe out evil, and un-create back to the beginning, .....when all was good. Noah's Ark is the **link** – the connection away from evil, **above the chaos**, and back to peace / wholeness. And, we the living are people of / from the ark.

The Story of the Ark reveals God's anger and frustration, but it also presents God's hope for creation.... for life.... for people.

Moreover, we see that Creation was / is a Risk – a risk God had not completely given up on.

And, as we can observe, The flood did not solve the problem..... Therefore, Creation is a risk that God HAS NOT given up on.

Even so, we are inclined to stand with pointed finger, and label God cruel for allowing so much to be destroyed.

Listen to the words of Ezekiel 18:29-32:

“Yet the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is unfair.’”

O house of Israel, are my ways unfair? Is it not **your ways** that are unfair? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to **YOUR ways**, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? **For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone**, says the Lord God. Turn, then and live.

God does not delight in anyone’s or any thing’s destruction!

And, is it unfair for a Pure and loving God to detest evil and violence?

We may criticize God’s un-creating, YET, as Ezekiel suggests, How do we treat Creation.... each other? What are our ways?

Just over 150 years ago, this area was inhabited with abundant Elk, wolves, gophers, large itinerant herds of bison, and of course a number of groups of humans of a different culture– we know as Aborigines.

How have we treated Creation? ???

????????????????

And yes,... the carnage was much worse back East and in the States, where most of the forests were wiped out, along with the extinction of various species and cultures.

So,.....How have we treated creation?

Well, we have killed for vanity – furs for fashion sake;

We have exterminated and altered the ecosystem because “undesirables” cut into our profit margin;

We’ve polluted the water, and uncovered buried radioactive material.

And, we have conquered and impoverished the weak, and at times, did it in the name of justice.

How do we value life?

How do we value God’s creation – each other?

????

Self professed piety and clean nose won’t save us either. There are not enough of us in Saskatchewan to cause Global Warming; however,... The Bible is very clear about collective guilt!

Do we want God to treat us the way we treat God's creation????

Who is unfair... and.... Ruthless????

And, our sins are not just in the past.

How are WE... as a society.... treating each other, today, and the rest of God's creation????

Are we creating..... or .... UN-creating / destroying?

Are we depleting the earth and each other..... or are we enhancing life? Are we life giving?

A drain or a gift???

Are we building ARKS..... or more prisons?

Are we searching out and gathering in survivors..... or hoarding and building walls to isolate ourselves?

*In all fairness, we have come a long way from the days of arrogant indifference. We are concerned about the environment. We feel really badly about continuing to extract the oil from the tar sands. And, we do have some social services in place to help the poor get by, yet they continue to be poor.*

And,..... life goes on..... for most of us..... And, Global warming may not be such a bad thing..... well..... at least for us here in Saskatchewan.

//// We still have another day..... to confront the consequences.....

In the Flood story –

Creation, thanks to humanity's poor choices, nearly got what it deserved. Humans were making poor choices; People were choosing violence and conquest.

*Left to our own devices... we would surely destroy ourselves.*

So, in a twisted OT sort of way,..... the flood story is about God's intervention to preserve / save creation....

The Story of Noah's ark is really a story of Salvation and God's grace.

God could have completely UN-created, but didn't, ....and to fully appreciate God's grace,..... we must clearly understand God's power and prerogative.

The Flood story strives to impress upon us the truth that Humanity / creation WAS NOT DESTROYED, but rescued!!

And, this truth is a constant, ongoing message: God is NOT destroying creation, but continues to risk being gracious to us. God creates. God gives.

This continuous message is part of the covenant God made.

God was so moved / troubled by the Flood..... the near UN-creation, that God made a promise..... a Covenant... TO all humanity.

God was so hurt by the devastation of the flood that God, **unilaterally**, without negotiation, without being asked.... God promised to limit self!

There were no conditions to this covenant,... no ifs or buts, Just a pure promise to all people..... to you and me.....

That God will change how God interacts with humanity. God will never again purge creation to save creation.

NO ONE will **have to** die just so some can live. No one will die to bring salvation for creation / for humanity.

The covenant began a new way for God to relate to people, to us.... a more personal way.... A method that includes Prophets with warnings, and includes Jesus's life and message.

Jesus taught and demonstrated God love and the way of peace, justice and grace.

And,..... Following Christ..... INCLUDES times and opportunities to learn and acquire... DISCIPLINE!

Discipline. We're back to discipline *because it is good for you and me!*

Discipline, as Jesus presented, yields self restraint, awareness, trust in God and a willingness to risk loving others.

Discipline, as modelled by Christ, overcomes the temptation to be greedy, to lust for power and to seek to be independent. And, it was and is those sins that are mostly responsible for our separation from God.... and the fall of humanity.

Nevertheless, self discipline and good intentions are not enough to deliver us safely through the perils of life. We are not that strong or wise.

The flood story ends with the reminder for those trapped under storm clouds, .... to look for the rainbow and remember that God is not the source of suffering and destruction.

That is a promise from God. Our God is a God who creates / gives / loves..... provides a way out.

And, to the seeds of self discipline God adds Angels to be with us / to see us through.

We are not alone in this venture we know as life.

We have the lessons from the Bible, we have the inspiration and help from others and God's ever present Spirit.

However, the medicine that we need to digest.... That is good for us.... is the "rainbow" covenant was a gift. Jesus and Jesus' life was a gift.

The Good News is a gift. Creation is giving!

\*\*The FLOW is outward and NOT inward.

Creation / Life is a Gift. Do we get it..... or Give it?