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## Who is Our God?

I want you to take a moment, and consider who is God to you? You might even close your eyes as you contemplate what God looks like, feels like, sounds like? Is God close or far, tangible or amorphous, feminine or masculine? Is God soft or hard, gentle or rough, sweet or bitter? Is God kind or strict, sympathetic or demanding, benevolent or punitive? Alright if you have closed your eyes you can open them.

Now, our Season of Lent is a time set aside where we as the Church are called to repent and return to our God. Because let's face it, it's easy to drift away, at least for me. It's easy to let the business of our schedules, the lure of worldly goods, the appeal of fame and fortune, or whatever it may be that gets in the way of making God the main focus of our constantly shifting gaze. And so, if this is a time in which we are called to repent and return to our God, then, I think we would do well to consider (as we just did) who is our God? Is our God an old man in the sky, with a long white beard, long forgotten and so far removed from this world and our lives that it barely matters? Is our God an ethereal being that moves throughout the universe, like rays of light, so vast and formless we don't even know where to begin to turn? Or, is our God an all powerful dictator, watching our every move, just waiting to dish out both reward and punishment, based on either our "right" or "wrong" actions?

As we contemplate who our God is I wonder if it might be helpful for us to return to the beginning. Maybe not as far as "the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth," when "the earth was [still] a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep," but close. There is still the face of the deep, although this time, instead of emptiness, we find a solitary ark, filled with animals of every kind, birds, mammals, and every creeping thing on the ground. Along with every kind of food that is eaten. And, of course Noah, who built the ark, along with his family. It's, to quote another infamous fable, a tale as old as time, Noah and the Ark. But one, I would argue that we don't spend enough time contemplating. Because well, at least for me, every time I think about this infamous tale that adorns the walls of each and every church nursery, I wonder, who is this God who erased the entirety of humanity, except for one chosen family? Is that the kind of God I truly want to be repenting and turning to? And if so, am I doing it solely out of fear of yet again being washed out by a Divine entity for my own wickedness and notoriously sinful ways?

While we may all be familiar with Flood Narrative we find in the first chapters of the book of Genesis. You may or may not know that our faith, including our Hebrew brothers and sisters, from whom our text comes, is not the only one to have a flood narrative, or even a solitary family's survival via boat. From the Americas and Asia, to Africa and Europe, and of course the Oceania, there are similar yet varied tales of a great flood sent from the heavens to cleanse the earth of the wicked and notoriously sinful human race. I mean given that the first few chapters of Genesis (the first book of our Holy Scriptures) included Adam and Eve's exile from the Garden of Eden, Cain's murder of his brother Abel, and entire generations continuing in the ways of depravity and brutality, as Genesis six puts it, so "that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually." It's no wonder God wanted to do something about the scourge of inequity multiplying throughout the earth. Bringing us to Noah, who found favor in the Lord's sight.

Now, before I go through the 300 cubits length ark (that's 1.5 football fields) that God instructed Noah to build, or the animals 2 by 2, male and female alike, or the forty days and forty nights of rains, I want to note a brilliant quote I once heard from Barbara Brown Taylor. Which is this, "It is not that the facts don't matter. It is just that they don't matter as much as the stories do, and stories can be true whether they

happen or not.” Whether or not there was a great flood, whether or not Noah and his family built this monstrosity of a floating zoo, whether or not God even sent a great flood for forty days and nights, this story has so much truth to reveal to us. Truth about the frailty of our human condition, truth about our call to care for creation and all that entails, truth about how we are to draw closer to God in order to hear God’s call and God’s will, and most significantly in my mind, truth about who our God is and how our God cares for us and loves us. Because here’s the truth, at the end of the flood as the deluge of water from the heavens subsides, and the sun peaked her face from behind the dark clouds, and the dove finally returned with the olive branch in its beak, and the families from the ark, Noah, his wife, and their children, the animals of every kind, birds, mammals, and creeping things alike descended from the ark, there was in the sky a sign, an acknowledgement, a truth telling, of covenant of who our God is. As God said, “I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” Allowing both our story and our God no longer to be defined by destruction, or even by the previously notoriously sinful and wicked ways of humanity. But, now by the beauty, the inclusion, and the love of God’s covenant put in the sky, in the form of a rainbow, which now forever and for always defines and reminds us who our God is. A God who desires nothing more than to see all of humanity flourish. A God who despite all odds has hope for us as the human race. A God who no matter what will always be for salvation for all people and all time. It is the same God, who today in our story from Mark calls out from the heavens as Jesus ascends from his own depths below the waters of the deep, as John the baptist pulls him from the river Jordan and the heavens open to reveal God’s love and God’s words, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Our story of Noah and the Ark is not a fable to forewarn children, or for that matter us, that our God is one of wrath, violence, and vengefulness. As we might assume from our flood narrative. No, our story of Noah and the Ark, and for that matter the entirety of our salvation narrative found within the books of our Bible, is one that is meant to remind us We are God’s and we are beloved. As the storytellers of Noah remind us at the end as God says to us, “I have set my bow (think like an archer's bow) in the clouds.” Not pointed down towards us, but bowed up and away from this world and this life. So that we might know and might be continually reminded that our God is a God of inclusion as the covenant is for all people. A God of justice as God seeks to remind us as the human race of our call to care for this earth and one another. A God of love who continually reaches out to comfort and connect to us.

And so, this Lent as we take on the practice of repenting (turning away from whatever keeps us from our God) as we return to the Divine source. Remembering who and what we are turning towards, as well as maybe who and what we are turning away from. Fixing our gaze on our God and returning our presence to our Creator who loved us first, our redeemer who loves us now, and our sustainer who will love us forever and forever more.