

**GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH
SUNDAY, AUGUST 15, 2021**



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Sermon Notes:

Lutheran theology teaches us to view scripture through the lens of law and gospel. Law teaches us how to live and shows us how we fall short of God's calling on our lives. Our failings, in turn, cause us to reach for the gospel and its good news of forgiveness, reconciliation and seventy times seven second chances.

Last week, we heard the gospel. We were reminded of God's utter delight in this created world. This week, we get the law. Our theme is "God does not delight in destruction."

We begin with the beloved and well-known story of Noah and the Ark. We love to tell this story to our children. We focus on adorable scenes of life—the animals entering the boat two by blessed two. We remember the rainbow, the sign of promise that God will never utterly destroy the Earth by a flood again. But in this context, we focus on the darker side of the story—on God's grief and sorrow; on the destruction of so much of what God had made. Pastor Julia Seymour of Big Timber, wrote the following introduction to our First Lesson: *The flood narrative shows two aspects of God's grieving. God ached for the wickedness evident in human behavior and God grieved the destruction of creation, which included people, plants, land, and non-human animals. The covenant with Noah reveals a truth about Divine Love. This Love does not find joy in destruction and covenants for flourishing with all life- not just people.*

God does not find joy in destruction.

Putting it into human perspective, imagine a work of your hands which you have put hours and hours of time planning, crafting and dreaming of the outcome. You create the thing and admire the wonder and beauty of what your hands have made. You look upon your creation and smile. You say "it is good". As time passes, it becomes distorted. Broken. A parody of what you made. It becomes destructive. An instrument for destruction. Like the scientists who crafted the first atom bomb, your heart is broken by the impact of your creation. You wish you had never made it. And, in a last desperate act, you undo the work of your hands to prevent further destruction.

You destroy your beautiful and beloved creation. And when your anger and disappointment are flushed and your tears have dried, you begin again. With the resolve to find a different way if your creation goes astray again.

God does not find joy in destruction.

Yet we who are made in the image of God, continue wreaking havoc on one another and on God's beautiful creation, time and time again.

Earlier this month, I heard a story on Montana Public Radio about a "success" that was filled with all the grief and remorse of the destruction of the flood.

The Berkeley Pit in Butte, is one of the great human-caused disasters of the world. One mile long and a half a mile wide, it is filled to the depth of 900 feet with highly toxic water, laden with heavy metals and dangerous chemicals with an acidity equivalent to Coca-Cola, lemon juice or gastric acid. It was opened in 1955 by the Anaconda Copper Company and closed on Earth Day 1982. On that day, the pumps that kept the water from rising were turned off. The water began rising at the rate of one foot a month. A decade or so ago it became evident that the water was going to reach a critical point, spill out, and render Butte uninhabitable. Engineers of various sorts got busy trying to find a way to treat and remove the water before it reached that stage. A strategy was developed, experiments were conducted and in 2019, a water treatment has been in operation since 2019, cleaning the water sufficiently to allow it to be released into local streams.

You may remember hearing stories of massive bird deaths as a result of them seeking refuge on the waters of the Pit. In 1995, a flock of migrating geese landed in the pit and 342 of them died. Despite wailing sirens and firing cannon, on November 28, 2016, three or four thousand snow geese died after landing on the surface to avoid the ravages of a massive snow storm.

On August 5 of this year, Bird Protection Specialist Mark Mariano gave an interview about the successful implementation of the revised Waterfowl Protection Plan on a fall day in 2020. It includes a complex forecasting and communications system, an arsenal of drones, lasers, spotlights, rifles, bullhorns, honking and even fireworks and people trained and practiced in using that equipment in case of an emergency.

One morning last fall, he arrived to find the Pit covered with birds. "It <was> crazy that morning ...there were so many birds and so m any species We needed to get them out of there as soon as possible." He put out the call. About a dozen people responded. Four years of work and preparation was put to the test.

"It was a sight to behold. We filled the sky with birds...it's like getting to the Super Bowl and actually winning it! It was cool. Now there's a precedent that it can be done effectively".

God does not delight in destruction. God does not delight in the poisoned waters of the Berkeley Pit. It would be good if the water treatment and bird hazing were not necessary. However limited, human effort and ingenuity appear to have found a solution. God does not delight in destruction, but God delights in our efforts to preserve and restore creation.

Our second lesson, from Colossians, reminds of us God’s deep and abiding love for us and for the whole creation. Pastor Seymour writes: *The distance perceived between people and their Creator is a function of people’s misperceptions, not God’s desires. The everlasting love revealed in Jesus is God’s eternal refutation of the implication of a destroyed relationship between the Divine and creation.*

Jesus “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him... and in him all things hold together...through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.”

God does not delight in destruction. In Jesus, God has offered us a way out. A way out of our foolish and destructive ways. Reconciling us to the Father through his death on the cross, we have a second chance. Not unlike those birds who had a second chance when they took off in flight after being frightened off the Berkeley Pit.



Source: mtpr.org, Flickr User Christopher

Karyn Bigelow and Avery Davis Lamb, co-directors of Creation Justice Ministries, wrote the following in an article for Sojourner’s magazine:

“The climate crisis is, at its core, a spiritual crisis. In our churches, we have the physical and spiritual assets to help our communities cope with the worst effects of the climate crisis. Many are already adapting to the new realities of the climate crisis, integrating it into the mission of the church. Across the country, Christian institutions are responding to the climate disasters in their communities. In the Southeast, churches are helping their communities adapt to the spiritual and physical traumas of sea level rise and intensifying hurricanes. In the South, they are acting as cooling centers, providing life-saving space for those without access to air conditioning. In the West, faith communities are housing climate migrants — those displaced both locally by wildfires and globally by other climate-related...disasters. Our Christian response to the climate crisis is not merely hope in action. It is a demonstration that hope is action.

Hope is also redemption. Even as we truth-tell and take action for a more beautiful world, catastrophe continues to unfold around us and destroy the places and people we love. In Colossians 1, we read of a Christ in whom all things came into being and through whom all things are held together. Through the body of Christ, all things came to be, and yet, just as Christ was crucified, so too is creation. It seems that today creation itself—creatures included—are being crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20). Like the crucifixion darkness, our skies are darkened with ash from wildfires and 1,000-year-storm clouds.

This crucifixion darkness is a Holy Saturday moment. We sit in the darkness of the crucifixion with no presumption of resurrection. We can hope in God's grace and redemptive mercy, but in the words of the prophet Ezekiel, "You alone know" if these bones can live (Ezekiel 37:3). As Ellen Davis writes, "Resurrection hope does not mean that things are not as bad as they seem. It does not mean that we may expect to be shielded from the worst effects of our selfishness." Things are bad. Things will continue to worsen before they get better. But perhaps, by the grace of God, our best efforts might be redeemed by the resurrection power of Christ."

Amen.