

GENESIS 6:1-8

When people began to multiply on the face of the ground and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose. Then the Lord said, “My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years.” The Nephilim were on the earth in those days and also afterwards—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown.

The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made mankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, “I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I made them. But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord.

MATTHEW 4:21-26; 43-48

You have heard that it was said in those of ancient times, “You shall not murder; and whoever murders shall be liable to judgment”. But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will liable to the council; and if you say, you fool, you will be liable to the hell of fire. So, when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while your accuser may hand you over to the judge and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny...

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy”. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing

than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?_ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly _Father is perfect.

AND

Genesis 6:1-8
Matthew 4:21-26; 43-48

There is a lot to digest in these scriptures. I find it ironic that we believe on a very deep level that we have evolved so far beyond the apes. And yet, apes are peace loving animals who take care of their own. What we see in our scriptures is a portrait of our own species which is ultimately corrupt and violent. Heavens, God was so disgusted with human behavior that He had basically decided to start over. It hadn't worked so well with the dinosaurs so why not take a mulligan on the second attempt? Had it not been for Noah, we would have been like a bag of kittens thrown into the river.

And we can readily glean from the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus was very concerned about murder, insults, slander and false testimony running rampant through his society. The legends comprising the book of Genesis were compiled many millennia ago while Jesus spoke to his audience over 2000 years in the past. You would think, would you not,

that we humans have had plenty of time to evolve into a more compassionate, peaceful and loving people who use all of our ever-advancing technology to create a more equitable and just world.

In many ways, we have, of course. But we have also made weapons of war which if ever used will basically do the job God was considering back in Noah's day. In spite of all the warnings, through our greed and failure to take care of this beautiful earth we have been given for our home, we have set off a climate crisis from which we may not be able to recover. And we naively believed that we were past the days when a peaceful nation would be brutally attacked to bomb and terrorize it into submission. How wrong we have been! What is it going to take?_

The problem is that we have become an all or nothing people. Either you are with me or you are my enemy. We count as our friends those who agree with us both in religion and in politics resulting in an Us against Them mentality. Look at what has happened since SCOTUS overturned Roe v. Wade. You see protestors gathered on one side of the street while advocates celebrate their victory on the other side. They have dearly held contrary beliefs which leave no room for compromise. The fire will be waging over this for the foreseeable future and the cement dividing red states and blue states will harden even more. And because of the emotion

involved, the political divide has become intensely personal. It's hard to imagine this going away.

Those versed in religion well know a disparaging attitude toward others of different faith systems. We all believe in God, but we often sharply disagree over who this God is, what this God's name is, and what this God requires of us. How many years were the Crusades fought? When you **know** you have it right and everybody else has it wrong, you can find justification for violence. The Old Testament is filled with holy wars and Yahweh was often painted as an intolerant deity who demanded genocide for those who worshipped other gods. And the reverse has been true as well. The Jews are still being targeted even in this country and it's 2022. What is it going to take?

Unfortunately, this "All or Nothing" attitude is infecting us wherever we look. So, it is crucial that we participate in another kind of movement which gets us back to the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus wants his listeners to know that the old ways just don't work. And he takes it a step further. Not only shall you not murder, neither shall you insult. Okay, we understand the proscription against murder, but casting insults toward others, particularly behind their backs is out of bounds as well. Oh, no! I'll bet all of us have flung a few recently. I know I have.

Indeed, Jesus is truly proposing a radical approach to human relations. Loving your enemies and praying for those who persecute you is a challenge not many of us are up to. If it's "All or Nothing", there is no room for this. But Jesus envisions a bigger picture. He is making a case for the oneness of all humanity: *He makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.* In other words, we're all in the same boat. We all have our own struggles and everything we believe in has a certain relativity to it. No matter how passionate we may feel about something, there will always be another side to it. Acknowledging this is very hard to do when we **know** we are right. But that is the first step we must take if we are to move toward loving our neighbors as ourselves. It's a process. It will never happen overnight. We must work at moving toward reconciliation every day.

But does that mean we give up our fight for a woman's right to choose or the legislation of reasonable gun laws just because others vehemently disagree with those stances? No. What it means is that both sides must learn to use the word AND. "You have a right to own guns AND I have a right to be protected from their use against me." Look, there are over 400 millions guns in this country and there have been over 400 mass shootings so far this year, including many children. Can we protect

people's right to own a gun AND also legislate strict laws prohibiting the sale and use of assault rifles which are only intended for police and military work; their sole purpose being to kill as many people as possible in seconds? I don't own a gun and I don't want a gun (my sister committed suicide with a gun) AND yet, I understand that other people like them for hunting or target shooting and feel they need them for protection. It is a matter of understanding that individuals all have rights; AND at the same time, we all have a responsibility to the communities we live in. It is not All or Nothing; it is Both And.

Like it or not, we are all in this together: *For your Father in heaven makes the sun rise on the evil AND on the good; and sends rain on the righteous AND the unrighteous. For if you love only those who love you, what reward do you have? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* These are words for the centuries AND wisdom for our lives.

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