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January 8th: Genesis 8 & John 4:27-54

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Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Genesis chapter 8 And she returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took her and brought her into the ark with him. He waited another seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark.

And the dove came back to him in the evening, and behold in her mouth was a freshly plucked olive leaf. So no one knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. Then he waited another seven days, and sent forth the dove, and she did not return to him anymore.

In the six hundred and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried from up the earth. And Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and behold the face of the ground was dry. In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth had dried out.

Then God said to Noah, Go out from the ark, you and your wife and your sons and your sons' wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh,

birds and animals, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, that they may swarm on the earth and be fruitful and multiply on the earth. So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife, and his sons' wives with him.

Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by families from the ark. Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took some of every clean animal, and some of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. When the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth.

Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease. In Genesis chapter 8 verse 1, we see the verse that is the turning point of the flood narrative.

God remembers Noah. Later on we'll see God remembering Abraham in the destruction of Sodom. We'll see God remembering Israel as he delivers them in the Exodus.

Here the wind blowing over the earth might recall the spirit of God hovering over the waters in Genesis chapter 1 verse 2. It also maybe anticipates the strong east wind that blows over the Red Sea, opening a path for the Israelites to cross in the Exodus. The description of the receding sea is also similar to that used in reference to the Red Sea in Exodus chapter 14. The chronology of the flood is important as I've already noted.

The length of days recorded are noteworthy. There are a number of periods of a week mentioned. There are a couple of 40 day periods and 150 days is five months.

You can think of this in a more schematized understanding of months where each month is allocated 30 days. We have different calendars for different things. There are some calendars that have exactly 52 weeks in the year.

So you have a 4-4-5 pattern, four quarters of 13 weeks divided into two four week months and one five week month. When we're dealing with the flood narrative I think it's important to recognize that we are dealing with something that seems highly schematized. There is a very close attention to the structure of the text.

We've already seen this chiastic structure, this there and back again structure. We've also seen specific dates singled out and those dates it seems to me are not just dates of occurrences but they're dates that are correlated with certain observances. The importance being that people read the story of the flood and recognize a meaning within it.

So there are events that occur on the first day of the 600 and first year of Noah's life. That day is a significant one not merely in terms of what occurred on it but in terms of

observance. It's correlated with a particular part of the calendar.

It seems likely to me that some of the peculiar details of the text can be explained in part by the bringing together of a lunar calendar with 354 days in the year and a solar calendar with 365 days in the year. And within the text we're seeing both of these having a play along with the schematized month of 30 days which is why you have the 150 day period being significant five months. The 150 is also associated with the age of Noah himself at the beginning of the flood four times 150.

The ark is also twice 150 in its length which suggests maybe more is going on there. The ark comes to rest on the mountains of Ararat not necessarily Ararat itself but rest is a play on Noah's name that Noah is the one who is named in order that he would bring rest and relief and comfort to people after the cursing of the earth and now he brings the ark to rest. He sends out a raven and the raven's an unclean bird but that's followed by a dove which is a clean bird and may represent Noah himself.

The dove finds no resting place and again this is a play on Noah's name. The dove may be looking for a Noah as it were outside of the ark but finds none. Note that Noah follows a weekly pattern in sending out the dove.

The dove comes back with an olive leaf perhaps representing Israel in the end and Noah reaches out his hand and takes the dove into the ark. The last time we've seen that sort of language is in reference to the fear that man will reach out his hand and take of the tree of life. Is there some connection to be seen in the fact that Noah is reaching out his hand and taking this bird with this part of the tree? Maybe there is something there it's worth looking into at least.

The waters recede on the first day of the 601st year of Noah's life and the tabernacle is erected on the first day of the first year of the exodus and I've already noted a number of the different details that connect these stories. Israel goes out with 600,000 people. Noah begins the story of the ark in his 600th year and so maybe there are further connections there.

Noah removes the covering from the ark and the same language again is used for the covering of the tabernacle. Noah is in many ways a new Moses. He's the one that goes to the top of the mountain.

He's the one who's lifted up in an ark. Moses is placed in an ark in his infancy. He's the one who acts as a mediator for the people and Noah acts as a mediator for humanity.

Noah constructs the ark. Moses constructs the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant which as we have seen have all sorts of parallels with the ark and so it seems to me that we can fruitfully read these stories alongside each other and the festal allusions that we find within the story of Noah and the flood may be helpful here. There's a new creation

situation.

Animals are sent out to be fruitful and multiply in the earth. There's a first reference to an altar. Noah sacrifices clean animals upon the altar.

Already we're having an anticipation of the sort of sacrifice that will be exercised later on. Maybe the animals are supposed to represent human beings so you have domestic animals representing human beings in an appropriate way that wild animals and beasts of the field cannot. It seems to serve as a propitiating sacrifice and maybe there's something important here to be considered concerning the logic of sacrifice more generally and God's statement where he almost repeats the assessment of humanity but yet declares his desire for mercy is an interesting one.

It may remind you of the way that God speaks concerning the children of Israel and the hardness of their heart but yet expressing a certain mercy even in his judgment at that point and so as I've noted Noah is a Moses-like figure and a mediator. One question for reflection. As we're reading through the story of the flood there are a great many parallels with the story of the original creation.

There's the wind of God upon the waters just as the spirit of God hovered over the waters in Genesis chapter 1. There's the deep that covers the whole face of the earth. There's all the animals being gathered together and then being sent out to be fruitful and multiply. There's the emergence of the dry land from the waters and the separation of the two and then there's this celebration of a sort of Sabbath-like event as God blesses and shows mercy towards his creation.

While the original creation narrative spanned the period of a week in the ark narrative we're covering a whole year and there are patterns playing out here as well. Seasons and particular festal days and other things that even in the chaos of the ark that's surrounded by waters there are certain patterns that are emerging that this seed is maintaining and then later on God's promise that he will not judge the earth in the same manner again but that the cycles of the year and the seasons will be maintained. So what I want you to think about are some of these parallels and how they can help us to read the greater significance of the story of the ark against the background of the story of creation and the story of creation against the background of the story of the flood.

John chapter 4 verses 27 to 54. Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman but no one said what do you seek or why are you talking with her? So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people come see a man who told me all that I ever did can this be the Christ? They went out of the town and were coming to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him saying rabbi eat but he said to them I have food to eat that you do not know about. So the disciples said to one another has anyone

brought him something to eat? He just said to them my food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. Do you not say there are yet four months and then comes the harvest? Look I tell you lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white for harvest.

Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. But here the saying holds true one sows and another reaps. I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor.

Others have labored and you have entered into their labor. Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony. He told me all that I ever did.

So when the Samaritans came to him they asked him to stay with them and he stayed there two days and many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman it is no longer because of what you said that we believe for we have heard for ourselves and we know that this is indeed the savior of the world. After the two days he departed for Galilee for Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in his own hometown.

So when he came to Galilee the Galileans welcomed him having seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the feast for they too had gone to the feast. So he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had made the water wine and at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son for he was at the point of death.

So Jesus said to him unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe. The official said to him sir come down before my child dies. Jesus said to him go your son will live.

The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. As he was going down his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. So he asked them the hour when he began to get better and they said to him yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.

The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him your son will live and he himself believed and all his household. This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee. In verse 27 of chapter 4 of John we take up again the narrative of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman and here his disciples return and they're surprised to see him in conversation with this woman.

We've already seen a number of the ways in which Jesus seems to be contravening some of the conventions that would have governed the relationship between Jews and Samaritans and between men and women as well. The Samaritan woman is alone seemingly in the middle of the day getting water and here a Jewish man is asking to

drink of some of her water. That would seem first of all to be going against certain principles of purity and also to be maybe stepping across the bounds of propriety that here is a man talking to a woman in a public space without any other people around.

Their conversation itself would seem to trespass some bounds. Jesus asks her about more intimate things about her relationship with her husband and the other men in her life and the conversation is also taking place within this type scene that is associated with marriage and so there are many ways in which the picture seems odd and the disciples come back and they don't directly ask Jesus but it's clear that they have a sense of something out of the ordinary. The unusual character of what is taking place however should be attended to.

There are ways in which we can think of the Samaritan woman as maybe being like Mary Magdalene later on who is sent with a mission to tell the disciples about the resurrected Christ. In John 4 the Samaritan woman is sent to call her husband and ends up going back into the town and saying to the people come see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ? In both cases a woman brings the news of Christ to another larger group of people.

The trespassing of boundaries in both cases I would suggest is related to the movement towards unity. The desire is that the Samaritan woman and the people of the town would be made part of the group of disciples in the same way the marital themes suggest that the woman is not just an outside woman but like Mary in the garden is someone who represents the bride, someone who will become united with Christ and his body of people and so the outside inside and the trespassing of boundaries is part of the importance of this text. The disciples ask Jesus whether he has had anything to eat and they invite him to take some food but yet Jesus says that his food is to do the will of him who sent him and to accomplish his work maybe we should see some reference back to the story of the temptation in the wilderness here John does not record the temptation of Christ in the wilderness as the synoptics do but at this point and then in a few moments later in this text there are allusions back to that context at least within the gospel of Luke.

Jesus talks about the harvest and the way that there are four months and then the harvest comes and yet they should lift up their eyes and see that the field's already white for harvest. At this moment in time they're seeing a Samaritan village that is receiving Christ and yet the Samaritan mission proper won't begin until after Jesus' death and resurrection and Pentecost while John the Baptist and the prophets that preceded him sowed seed in tears and spent great labours and suffering to sow that seed. In the case of Christ and his mission we're seeing fruitfulness from the very outset and so even though it might seem as if you'll have to wait for many many years to see the effects of the seed it is already being shown and in the case of the Samaritan conversion we're seeing this take place.

Many of the Samaritans believe him because of the women's testimony and then as they spend time with him they believe him on the account of his word itself. At this point Jesus returns to his primary base of operations in Galilee and he has mentioned in passing that he has testified that a prophet has no honour in his own hometown which is something that is said in Luke chapter 4 in his sermon at Nazareth. So he comes to Galilee, he's welcomed by the Galileans who have seen all that he's done in the feast and then he goes to Cana the same place that he made water wine and he performs a second sign.

As we go through the gospel we'll see that there are at least seven signs that Jesus performs, seven maybe being a significant number associated with creation and fullness and these sorts of things but this is the second sign and there are a number of details that might be interesting about this. First of all Jesus notes that unless they see signs and wonders they will not believe, they're looking for some dramatic display of power and yet when Jesus actually gives a sign it takes the form of something very understated. Jesus does not give some dramatic pyrotechnic work of wonder, rather he gives a word.

Go your son will live. He doesn't even go to the man's house, he doesn't even perform some great act of wizardry, he just gives the man the instruction and the man believes the word and goes his way and then as he returns his servants meet him and tell him that his son is recovering. Now it's worth noting that in the case of this sign as in the case of the sign of the turning of the water into wine, attention is given to the conversation that occurs afterwards.

That is part of the sign. He's asked the hour, he asked the hour when the servant began to get better and the answer is given at the seventh hour. Now we've already seen that Jesus meets with the woman at the well in the sixth hour and then declares that an hour is coming and now we see the seventh hour.

I suspect that we're supposed to see this as part of the sign. The seventh hour is pointing forward to what Christ himself will accomplish, that in the hour that is coming he will come to death and he will rise again and so the healing of this son that is at the point of death is an anticipation of Christ's resurrection from the dead in his hour that's to come and the father knows that this is a confirmation of Jesus' action much as the servants who draw the water that has become wine know that Jesus has performed this action even though the master of the ceremonies at the feast does not know that is the case and this is the second sign that Jesus does when he has come from Judea to Galilee. As in the case of the first it's a sign that remains largely secret apart from the person who believes.

The disciples and the servants at the feast know that Jesus has performed this act and in this case here it's the official who believes and his household who believe his testimony

and so the emphasis is not upon the spectacular sign but it's upon hearing, obeying and believing the word of Christ. That is where the power is to be found and these signs and the conversations that follow reveal something about the vision of faith that is held forth in John as the paradigm that is to be followed not just in Jesus' earthly ministry but by all who would seek to believe him in the future. A question to consider.

Throughout the book of John we have paradigmatic disciples, we have paradigmatic witnesses and a number of examples of people who bear the news of Christ to other people. What in particular can we learn from the example of the Samaritan woman as a witness to Christ?