

Sermon, July 23, 2022

Genesis 19:1-11  
“Sodom and Gomorrah”

This morning’s reading from Genesis is really one of the more distasteful readings in the Bible. It begins with a man named Lot, who was a nephew of Abraham. Lot is sitting at the gateway to the city of Sodom when two angels appear. We are not told how Lot knows they are angels, but he bows down to them, and invites them to his house. At first, they turn down the invitation, but then agree. After they have finished their meal the two strangers are ready to lay down for the night when a crowd begins to form outside. The crowd is not made up of a certain group, but, rather, all the men of the city. That sounds strange, but it refers back to the previous chapter where God has a conversation with Abraham in which it has been disclosed that God intends to destroy the city because of its wickedness. Abraham barter with the Lord asking if there are a certain number of righteous men in the city will he spare it. Abraham is concerned about the innocent being destroyed along with the guilty. God finally agrees that if there are ten righteous men in the city, he will not destroy it. This is why the two angels have come to Sodom, to investigate and see if there are ten righteous men there. And, so, to say that “all the people to the last man” show up outside Lot’s house indicates that there are no righteous men, thereby justifying God’s plan to destroy the city.

The question is, what shows that there are no righteous men there? Well, the men insist that Lot bring the two angels outside, so they can “know” them. This, of course, does not mean they want to get acquainted with them. They want to know them in the biblical sense of the word. Consequently, for many, this story has often been used to condemn homosexuality. But is that really the issue? The real issue is sexual assault, and sexual assault has little to do with sex - it has to do with power and control. And the fact that the issue is rape is confirmed by Lot’s response to their demands - a response that, to put it mildly, hardly makes Lot , Father of the Year. He tells the crowd to leave the two men alone, and, instead, to take his daughters and do what they want with them.

Eventually, the city would be destroyed, although Lot would escape with his two daughters. His wife, however, would disobey God’s orders, and would be turned into a pillar of salt. Lot and the daughters would then take refuge in a cave. Considering that all the men in Sodom had been killed the daughters were now concerned that they would not be able to continue the family line, so they devised a plan where they would get their father drunk and sleep with him in order to get pregnant. Thus, the story spirals down into acts of incest. I told you the story was very distasteful.

As I said, for much of church history this story, and a few other passages in the Bible have been used to further an anti-gay agenda. But times change, as well as moral sensibilities, and we can certainly hope and pray that we are living in a more enlightened time - a time when the church can have the courage to uphold the rights and dignity of gay people.

Now, obviously, the city of Sodom, and Gomorrah as well, were filled with wickedness, showing a bent towards sexual violence. But what other reasons might there have been for the city to be condemned? Well, listen to what God had to say through the prophet Ezekiel: "Now this is the sin of Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, over fed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me; therefore, I removed them when I saw it."

Put simply, Sodom was a city of great wealth, which ignored the needs of those who were not as fortunate. Throughout both Testaments, Old and New, we find the Lord's deep concern, and love, for the poor and marginalized, and for his call for the church to respond in kind.

In the beginning of this sermon, I said that I found this story distasteful, and, certainly, the sexual violence has a lot to do with that; but there is something else that I find disturbing - that is, the very idea that God would destroy the two cities. It is the same reason why I am bothered when I hear people refer to natural disasters as a form of punishment from God. The God that I see revealed through Jesus is not a God of wrath and destruction, but a God of salvation and redemption. Yes, we human beings are capable of doing some terrible things, and the scriptures tell us that God is angered by all forms of wickedness and injustice, but it also tells us that he is a Loving God whose desire for humanity is transformation, not destruction, and that at the heart of that love is forgiveness. Next week I will have more to say about the importance of forgiveness. Amen.

**Let us pray:** Loving God, ever gracious, we thank you for this day, and we seek your guidance and inspiration through the power of your Holy Spirit. Lead us and teach us each day how to be the people you would have us be. Knowing that love is the essence of your Being help us to reflect that love in this world so desperately in need of more love. We know that there are times when we are a disappointment for you, and we thank you for your Son, Jesus, who shows us a better way, and reveals to us the transforming power of forgiveness.

Lord, we know that in this world there is much suffering and that you call us to do something about it. Help us to be your hands and feet in the world, striving to bring an end to poverty and hunger as well as overcoming the powers of hatefulness and injustice. In the words of your prophet, Amos, "...let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

As always, Lord, we pray for the sick and the dying, the anxious, the lonely, and depressed, and we lift up before you.... Amen