

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
The Rev. Dr. John Judson
“Children of God: Long Term Investing”
Genesis 17:1-8; Romans 8:18-25
July 20, 2014

Laughter and anticipation filled the cabin. Families were headed for vacations in tropical paradise. Men and women who had given their adult lives to fighting the scourge of HIV/AIDS were headed to a meeting with their colleagues in order to further their work. College students were headed to a rendezvous with families. Men, women and children were headed home. It was a day like any other. They were arriving at work early in the morning. Business men and women headed to their offices, cooks and maintenance crews into the building, firefighters to their stations. It was a day just like any other. They had all gone to the market to buy what they needed for dinner. Children scurried around. Vendors and buyers haggled over the price of lintels and bread. It was a day just like any other day. A father was taking his daughter on a stroll. They had survived the winter and now it was time to enjoy the sun. It was a day like any other. Then a finger pushed a button and the plane was blown out of the sky. Men filled with hatred flew planes full of people into buildings. Suicide bombers blew themselves up. A man stepped from a car and shot a two year old and her father.

Unfortunately in our world even these days are like any other day. They are days like any other days because evil is real. I realize that speaking of evil is a dangerous thing. It is dangerous because we use the word evil too often. It has become almost passé. Liberals describe conservatives as evil. Conservatives use it to describe liberals. We use it to encompass entire religions; Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, or even religion itself. We use evil to describe anyone and anything we do not like. This morning though I use it in the sense we use it in our baptismal vows. We ask people to reject the evil that defies God’s righteousness and love. For that is what evil is. Evil is whatever defies the purposes of God; the purposes to bring peace, love and joy to all of creation. Evil can be subtle; the long term verbal abuse and bullying of a teen that destroys their life. Evil can be obvious; the destruction of a plane filled with innocent people by an untrained militiaman filled with hatred. But evil is real. Evil is alive and infects us all.

The question what do we do in the face of evil? There are two things I hope that we will keep in mind when we feel overwhelmed by evil and simply want to pretend it’s not there...or we want to run and hide from it. First we need to remember that God is making a long term investment in eliminating evil and bringing about a world in which God’s righteousness and love guide all of creation. This concept is at the heart of both of our passages this morning. First we have Abram who is now 99 years old. Though God had promised him land, children and blessing, Abram still had neither land nor children, and he had yet to be a blessing to the world. In a moment when most of us would have given up hope, God appears to Abram, reminds Abram of the promises that had been made, and then gives Abram a new name, Abraham, as a reminder that God’s commitments do not fade. God will indeed bless Abraham with descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. And it is through those offspring that God will bless all of the nations and renew creation.

This idea of God renewing creation is picked up by Paul in this 8th chapter of Romans. Paul acknowledges that there is evil in the world. He speaks of the sufferings of those to whom he is writing. By following Jesus Christ they had placed themselves in the line of fire of the Roman government. The Christians would be hated, persecuted and killed. Paul continues however and reminds his readers that

those sufferings are not worth comparing with the creation that God is bringing about through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He speaks of the whole of creation waiting for the moment it will be set free and experience the freedom that is offered to God's children. He also reminds them that they have tasted the very first fruits of God's liberating work. In a sense he is retelling the story of the Exodus, but this time the liberation is not merely from a Pharaoh, but from evil itself. This is freedom from all of that which defies God's righteousness and love.

The second thing we need to do is for each of us to commit ourselves to a long term investment in this recreative work. We do this first by holding on to hope. Paul writes, ***"For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."*** The hope to which Paul refers is not a, "I wish I may, I wish I might, wish upon a star tonight" kind of hope. The hope to which Paul refers is a powerful trust and belief that the God who created the world; the God who made a covenant with Abram; the God who liberated God's people from captivity; the God who sent God's only son into the world and raised him from the dead, will continue to work. Hope is the belief that this God is working to make all things new; to make all things such that they reflect God's righteousness and love. God is working at, as Paul writes, ***"...that the creation itself will be set free from change and decay."*** In other words, once again, God is making a long term investment in the recreation of the world and we can find hope in that promise.

The second way in which we make a long term investment in God's recreating work is to reveal ourselves. Paul uses an interesting phrase in this section. He says, ***"For the creation waits on tiptoe for the revealing of the children of God."*** I was often puzzled by that phrase. But then it began to dawn on me, that part of what Paul is implying in those words is that creation is waiting to see God's children remove the old garments of sin and evil and show their true selves; selves that love God and neighbor; selves that show forth God's grace; selves that offer forgiveness; selves that work to restore creation; selves that turn away from the allure of evil and toward the calling of Jesus Christ. Creation waits for this because it is a sign that God's recreative work is actually happening. Our task then is to reveal our true Christ-centered selves to the world. We do this not only by resisting the evil that defies God's righteousness and love, but also by being proactive in showing that righteousness and love to the world. Can you imagine what would happen if every one of those descendants of Abraham revealed that love to the world? Can you imagine what a different and wonderful world this would be? If every person of faith across the planet offered love and not hate, forgiveness and not revenge, compassion and not contempt? This would be the blessing that God intended for this world. Creation would indeed rejoice.

The question then that presents itself is whether or not we are willing to make a long term investment in God's recreative work. Are we willing to make it in this place as a community that cultivates mission, inclusion and community? Are we willing to make it in Detroit and Pontiac by insuring that all children receive a good education? Are we willing to do so in our places of work or our schools by treating all people as beloved children of God? Are we willing to do so by how we treat our own family members? So here is my challenge for the week, for each of us to ask ourselves, how I am making a long term investment in God's recreative work, so that God's righteousness and love shine forth from me?