Genesis 8:6-12, Luke 21:37-38

“Steal Away”

It was hard for me to actually lock my sermon in this week until the game ended last night. I had mentioned to you earlier this whole Tebow phenomenon that is getting seasoned announcers and sports analysts to proclaim that something is going on and attributing that something to God.

There is a struggle every week in knowing whether I should even address what is going on in the world or just stick to the interpretation and exposition of Scripture. My favorite theologian of all time, Karl Barth, said that every Christian has the duty to every day read the Bible and read the newspaper.

If we were to just stick to our Scripture it would point us to a very direct message of being patient for God’s response which then demands discipline and deliberate “Stealing away” in order to discern his direction and course.

But this weekend in which we find ourselves I am a bit biased towards just for my own personal reasons that inevitably bleed into my Christian faith and walk. Martin Luther King Jr. weekend demands that something is acknowledged, but at the same time we can’t sacrifice lifting up the truth of Scripture. Let’s see if we can do both.

**READ**

I have quite a few vivid images that have remained with me in my nearly 20 years of ministry. The first would be visiting Breyton on Monday morning after having heard that this young man from Ghana had been stabbed 7 times by a group of people from Moscow shouting “monkey go home”. This happened on his way home from attending our church.

I remember in Palatka, Florida, when I was chairing the family selection committee for Habitat for Humanity and going to visit with an African American woman a family living in a single-wide trailer home. We walked in the door and draped on the ceiling from one end of the trailer to the next was a confederate flag. I was shocked and couldn’t wait to leave. As we were leaving I asked Doris, how could you stand sitting under that flag. She looked at me and asked what flag? I told her and she said, that doesn’t bother me, it’s just part of history.

I’ll never forget my last week as a missionary in Italy as a very young 28 year old being asked by the Italian Protestant Federation to board a freighter because there were 11 stowaways from English speaking Cameroon and one of them was a minor. I was terrified, there were police, cameras, and news people everywhere but once I boarded the ship it was so quiet. I sat in the room with three who said they were minors but only one was. We were able to get him into the orphanage where we worked.

For some reason, and I really don’t seek it out, God somehow seems to use ministries in which we are all involved to lift up those who may have been marginalized or whose voices have been silenced. Some of you have asked why it is important for me to ride in a squad car, or pick and strip tobacco, or watch cows meet a most unfortunate end, because God happens in the midst of our daily lives. But we need to have the discipline to steal away and regroup and evaluate and not let life run you over, but rather allow God to run you and your life. Jesus and Noah are both great examples of how to do that.

Let’s look at that Genesis Scripture. It is a very familiar one. The flood took place and it rained for 40 days and 40 nights. Then it took 150 days for the waters to dry up and the land to be dry again. You can find all of this in the previous verses from the ones we read. We pick up this Scripture after Noah and his family have been spending way too much time together in very, very close quarters. Can you imagine spending 150 days in a confined space with all the animals of the world with you?

When we were in Italy we lived and worked in an orphanage as well as ministered to 4 churches. We lived on the bottom floor of the boys section of the orphanage. Stacy led a Bible Study for the younger boys and there was this one kid called Antonio. We had 6 of his siblings in the orphanage and three others were with mom and dad at home. During the weekend they would all go home and they lived in a single room apartment, and Stacy and I could never imagine how they managed with 9 kids and two parents in a one room apartment.

The lesson that Stacy was teaching that day was the one from John 14 where Jesus says that there are many mansions in my Father’s house. And Stacy was explaining how when we get to heaven we will each have our own room that God has set apart for us. Antonio’s eyes got really wide and he said, my own room? Yes, Antonio, I don’t have to share it with anyone? No Antonio, it is all yours. Wow, Antonio said, God must really love us.

Noah knew personally of God’s love. Even though he was living in cramped quarters, God had just chosen him to save, and only him, and all of humanity would come through his seed. Probably Noah was also looking forward to his own room. But look at how deliberate Noah is, able and willing to wait patiently for God’s timing to come through perfectly. One raven sent out for an indeterminate period of time, no report. A dove finds nothing and returns. Another dove, an olive leaf, but still comes back. Notice that there are 7 days that pass between each of these experiences. More waiting, but then a last dove. Okay, now we can move.

Our greatest test as people is to be able to wait on God’s timing in the midst of a stressful situation. Noah got the sign of the olive leaf to tell him that my timing is just about at hand. You have waited patiently, you have obeyed me even in the face of ridicule and impossible odds and situations, but you waited. We don’t always get that little sign as we are praying for a healing or praying for patience before a surgery.

We had probably one of the most meaningful Bible Studies at our men’s breakfast at least in my time here. We read these Scriptures and then talked about waiting for God’s timing and wondering where God was in the midst of the various tragedies that some of the men had experienced. Men shared some of their most painful experiences in light of these Scripture of waiting, yet knowing that God’s hope never comes up short even in the face of death.

This is the same group that was acting like a bunch of teenagers the week before on our boys night out to see Sherlock Holmes.

Our New Testament reading is one of those that the commentaries basically skip over and play down their significance. At first glance there doesn’t seem to be much going on here. But I am convinced that it is in these very Scriptures where we find a very important insight into the every day life of Jesus.

Look at these Scriptures and see the discipline and the faith filled walk that he followed. Every day he taught, every day he goes at night to the Mount of Olives. You need to know that the Mount of Olives is a very, very important location for Jesus. It is on a hillside directly across from the Temple in Jerusalem, and there is a valley separating the two. When we went there I amazed to find that for over 3,000 years it has been a cemetery and there are over 150,000 tombstones present. Jesus chooses this place to spend the night to regroup and go to his Father in prayer. The Garden of Gethsemane is also on the Mount of Olives hillside and so the place that Jesus chose on the very last night with his disciples and when he could would have gone to be near his Father.

Jesus steals away in what probably could have been in Luke the most intense time of his life. The crowds now know who he is, everywhere he goes he is mobbed. But still, he has to steal away to pray. Every morning, see this on vs. 38 it tells us, all the people would go to the temple to hear Jesus. Jesus could not face them in the morning if he hadn’t taken the time to renew the hope and promise that God Almighty gives us.

I love the part that says that early in the morning all the people came. For those of you who know black preaching, anytime you say the phrase early in the morning, it was early that Easter morning, it is a direct reference to the resurrection that uses that same exact term. Early on Easter morn, before the rooster crowed, early in the morning before the sun had begun to climb the sky. It was early in the morn, while the dew was still wet on the grass. Jesus made his way down the Mount of Olives to the temple, taking the same exact path he would take on Palm Sunday.

Our ability to hear God’s voice is directly tied into our willingness to wait for God and our expectations of what that waiting will produce. It is tied directly to our hope that good things will come.

I had lunch with a member of MPC this past week and he said, it’s been 6 months and I feel like I’m waiting for something to happen. What is your vision and where are we going as a church. You know, I’m also waiting, praying, seeing where God is leading and taking quite some time on that mountain to see were God is leading.

I know that next weekend will go a long way in dictating the direction and the future of this church. Your session is going to the mountain at Gretna Glenn to seek God’s future and guidance. This weekend could lead us to the unkown.

Many of you are facing a very uncertain future in regards to jobs, health, relationships, children, church, but both of our Scriputres today teach us that reliance upon the faithfulness of God and recognition of the hope that he gives us, allows us to face our future with confidence. Don’t be afraid to steal away so that you can truly understand God’s desire for you in your life. Amen.