

Sermon Text for July 12, 2015

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Ephesians 5:15-20, Genesis 9:20-29

“What’s up with that?”

It’s been a good week as we have been gearing up for VBS. It’s been a bit of a challenge trying to figure out the rules and the regulations for the clearances because it seems that every week we get new directives from the state. I saw something this week that made me scratch my head and say only in Lancaster County. There are a number of things over history that people have said that make you say hmm. Yogi Berra is the classic of all time. He said – baseball is 90% mental and the other half is physical. He also said – that player hits from both sides, he’s amphibious, and then finally, and he has many others, these are just my favorites, if you see a fork in the road, you take it.

There are others who have said puzzling things that make you say what’s up with that. JFK said famously Ich ben ein Berliner which means in German, I am a jelly donut. Dan Quayle once said “I was recently on a tour of Latin America, and the only regret I have was that I didn’t study Latin harder in school so I could converse with those people”. The Duke of Edinburgh as he was meeting the president of Nigeria wearing his national dress said : “You look like you’re ready for bed!” And then Barak Obama said: "Over the last 15 months, we’ve travelled to every corner of the United States. I’ve now been in 57 states? I think one left to go."

Every now and then we also run across Scripture that makes you go hmm, or as the sermon title states, makes you say: what’s up with that? Today, we find ourselves at a Scripture that doesn’t historically get a lot of time on Sunday. It didn’t even make it into the Sight and Sound rendition of Noah. One commentator said the following about this Scripture we are about to read: It is likely that we do not understand what was intended by the shaping of this text.

So what do we do with Scripture that no one really understands or can somehow glean from it nuggets of truth? Do we just skip them and avoid them and not address them because it is so much easier and safer that way? Or, what I’m proposing today, is that all of God’s action and even all of Scripture as a whole is a mystery, and it ought to remain a mystery, and it can, if we trust in His providence and His grace that will lead to redemption and the fulfilment of his plan. Let’s ready.

If you think about it there is a number of Scripture, quite a few actually, that give you pause. And since we come to Scripture with the perspective that it is authoritative and speaks as the voice of God we aren’t able to say, no big deal, it doesn’t really matter. Because Scripture

matters to us and we believe it contains the perfect, infallible truth, then we are not given the latitude to dismiss it. Sorry, we are I this together so we have to approach it head on.

Think of some other instances where people have questioned God's judgment. The flood itself where all of humanity is destroyed. How could a loving God do that? We do have an answer for that one which is founded on the trust that we have in God that every single one of his action will lead to a fulfillment of his perfect plan which ultimately is for our good and our building up. So the flood produces Noah and a family of righteousness through how God can start over.

It might give us pause that a father knowingly would send his son to die what kind of a father would do that? What's up with that. And of course, we know the answer to that question today and that is a father who was intent on saving all of his children was willing to sacrifice one willingly knowing it would have an eternal impact.

So that brings us to today. The flood has come and gone and the righteous one and his family survives . The covenant with Noah the survivor was established, and at a young 600 years old he discovers how to make wine, and also discovers, we find out today, the effects wine can have on you if you drink too much of it. At vs. 22 we find the key verse which describes Ham, the youngest son who walked in on his father and "saw the nakedness of his father." Not that big of a deal, right? Not something anyone would get too excited or upset by, right?

Well, apparently not, the reaction of Noah is so extreme and so harsh that commentators have taken liberty to interpret this Scripture as something far more than what is stated literally. They see this term, nakedness of his father as a euphemism for all sorts of acts and atrocities that need a bit of imagination to conjure up. Others see this as a historical commentary because the Israelites were consistently criticizing the Canaanites for their loose morals, so this is where it all started, they say.

Some call this the fall of Noah and paint him as the bad guy. But we have Scripture in front of us today that is puzzling but doesn't really allow us to be as creative as these explanations want to be. The brothers walk backwards to cover up their father and there is real detail in vs. 23 that makes me think the point here is that they also did not want to see the nakedness of their father. My take on Ham is that this term here in this context relates to exposure and not some illicit act that Ham may have performed.

If you want to spend more time looking at this you can go to Leviticus 18:1-18 where this term uncover the nakedness of someone is repeated 20 times in just these 18 verses in Leviticus

alone. So without being too creative and taking at face value the words of Scripture Ham's sin was that he saw the nakedness of his father.

As a result of what happened, Noah is furious, so much so that in vs. 25-27 we find the blessing of the 2 brothers who honored their father by covering him up and the cursing of the grandson, not Ham, the one who saw Noah's nakedness, but Ham's son Canaan who is told once that he is cursed and 3 times in these verses that he will be a slave to his two uncles.

So where does that leave us with this Scripture? Ham sees his father naked and as a result his son is cursed and his future is that of a slave. Or where does that leave us with the other Scriptures that give us pain like Jephthah the judge, the leader of the Israelites who kills his daughter on his return from battle because he promised the Lord that he would. Or Lot who offers his daughters to the citizens of Sodom to spare the visitors. Our human perspective is that all of these instances do not make any sense, Canaan, if it was up to us, would not be cursed, Jephthah's daughter would have been spared, and Lot would be punished for his insensitivity. Probably we would figure out a way for salvation to work without Jesus having to go through all that he went through. There had to have been a better way, right?

We have it all figured out, don't we? God, don't worry, I've got this. And we go about in these Scriptures trying to make excuses and try to justify God when his actions seem extreme or unfair or completely outdated. Let me suggest that instead of wasting our energy in trying to come up with creative ways in which we can justify God. Let me suggest that we actually give God the benefit of the doubt that he knows what he is doing in every single situation. That the cursing of Canaan, as unjust as it seems, fits right into God's plan somehow, and we don't know how, but we don't have to know how, do we?

Ephesians 5 tells us not only to live our lives within the moral codes that are set forth in Scripture, but on top of that we are to give thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Give thanks to God at all times and for everything. When we are confronted with the mystery of God, we need to be comfortable allowing it to be just that, mystery, and not try to explain it away for our sake so we can fit it into a nice neat box and move on. Life is messy, not everything is explainable, not everything fits into a box that we can package up, and doesn't that just make you crazy?

The only way we can approach Scripture and life by accepting the mystery of God as just that, mystery, is if we can trust that God has our good in mind. When we read about God's punishment, and let's not overlook that, God does punish. He does punish but the who, the why, and the how, for me, that's a mystery. We need to be okay with that, and we can as long as we

trust that it will lead to the good. As Romans tells us, all things work for good for those who trust in the Lord.

When things are confusing to us, it's okay to ask questions, but we should never put God's providence in question. As Isaiah 64:8 tells us: "Yet, O Lord, you are our Father, we are the clay, and you are our potter, we are all the work of your hand." The clay doesn't, and shouldn't know all that the potter is doing or why he is doing it.

The mystery of what's up with that can and should lead to the response, I don't know, but I trust that ultimately it is for all of our best interest. Things that make you go hmm, should provide an assurance I the enveloping love of God. And the mystery of God's action ought to comfort us as we recognize the bigger picture toward which He is striving for our sake. Amen.