

Palisades Presbyterian Church
Palisades, New York
June 1, 2008

Celebrating and blessing the upcoming marriage of
Kim Brainard and Jamie Wekerle

A Day for a Covenant
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Have you ever just felt totally frustrated, worn out, just like...ready to give up?

Have you every walked into a room after someone who has been there totally frustrated, worn up, ready to...give up – has been there?

Ever been in a kitchen where the chef has lost it? The place is an abandoned mess, crusty, burned things stuck on the side of the pots, the stove looking like whatever was in the pots and pans leaped out of them, in fear for their lives...

Or an office, where someone has been struggling with writing something, papers crumpled, thrown about, more paper on the floor than visible floor?

We all have those “Network” moments, “I’m made as *you know*, and I just can’t take it anymore!”

Seems we are of the human species are not alone in being subject to frustration.

I thought of this in reading about God and Noah. “That’s it! I’ve had enough. Wipe out the human race, save a few who are righteous and good. Build an ark, get on board, Noah. I’m starting over! Get moving before I change my mind – again!”

I wondered, too, well, if this wasn’t one of those after-the-fact stories created to explain some geological event beyond the scientific realm of the ancients. I thought, “Hmmm. I wonder if it was something like what’s going on in China, following the earthquake and the production of “quake lakes” that if they aren’t drained soon, millions of lives are in jeopardy of being wiped out. Easily, that’s more than the population of the time of Noah. I wonder if anyone in China is building an ark?

I’m not sure about the flood and the ark. I am sure, though, that a vindictive wrathful God was not behind whatever might have transpired. I just don’t know God in that way.

Whenever I read the First or Old Testament, I love reviewing The Jewish Study Bible. The JSB refers to this morning's reading as: the flood: corruption, destruction, re-creation, and covenant. In its commentary, it points out that the word *ark* is used only in the flood story of Genesis and the account of Moses's mother's effort to save him by putting him into the Nile in Exodus 2.3 (where the term is rendered *basket*). The JSB states:

“Noah foreshadows Moses, even as Moses foreshadows the people of Israel, whom he leads to safety through the death-dealing sea that drowns their oppressors. The ark symbolizes the tender mercies and protective grace with which God envelopes God's people in even the harshest circumstances.”

Then, following the “re-creation” of what needed to be changed: a covenant.

In the ancient Near East, covenants were made between parties, with the gods as witnesses. The gods' role was to enforce said covenant. Yet, from this point on in the Bible, the meaning of covenant like the one with Noah has changed. God is now a party to the covenant – the agreement between God and God's people directly involves God in a very personal and active way in the lives of the faithful. God is now present in a new way.

And herein we find ourselves this morning, the faithful, sharing a covenantal relationship with God, however we may know God.

Like the gourmet meal that comes out of time and again of frustration and scrapping first attempts -- or the novel that emerges from the floor to the best-seller list – it seems that we are of this “covenant making stuff.” It is in our nature.

“Ok, I'm going to try this one more time God...

“God, you just have to help me here and find the words...

“God, I finally get it...ok, whatever is your will....

And more.

Time and again, out of the trials of the human condition we emerge, drawn by the Spirit of God into covenants, agreements, and a willingness to accept God as a merciful God, present, involved, having meaning in our lives – a source for restoration and re-creation.

We find the restoration throughout the Old and New Testaments. In the stories of Noah, Moses, Abraham, Jacob...

We find the restoration and re-creation in the teachings embodied in Jesus in the Second or New Testament.

Time and again, we rely upon each other and our own journeys in this endeavor of faith and covenant-making, holding onto one another as we go, not asking people for a resume of beliefs, instead just knowing that the person we hold onto believes enough – to hold onto us. And somehow it works...

We make a covenant to believe and be together. We, God's people, all – make a covenant, practice a covenant with God. It's about as sacred as we can get.

We agree to seek the wonder of God in our presence, active in our lives, and hold onto hope through one another's faith. We continue the covenant of the ark and the basket.

Matthew tells us this morning of those who know the words of covenant, but talk the talk, instead of walking the walk.

This doesn't preclude the frustration that is sometimes involved, as with preparing the meal or writing the novel. Still, there is a big difference between drifting aimlessly and being open to the Spirit to guide us as we "drift." That's what a covenant does; it keeps us open to something greater than ourselves because the one with whom the covenant is made – is the God of mercy who remembers us. We are not forgotten. Good news, indeed.

In a few minutes, we will reaffirm that covenant in the meal we share, where we will hold onto one another at the table, however we may come to it. Arriving here, as a community is like boarding the ark – it is a sign of the agreement and the covenant, a covenant which God remembers and which we have not forgotten. It lives all the time and visibly comes together when we share the bread and the cup...

And so, what better day than on a day of covenant and witness and table to invite Kim and Jamie to come forward so that we can embrace them among us as the re-creation that God has made evident in their plans to wed.

Blessing:

Kim and Jamie, you are part of this community of covenantal people.
You stand with us in this place where you are loved,
before those gathered and all who will know of this day,
stating your love and covenant to one another in our presence.

You are with us upon the ark,
floating in the basket,
building your home together on the foundation of the mystery
that moves the waters that carry us
and firms up the land upon which we stand.

There is in your union and soon to be wedding a kiddushin –
a sanctification that will be more than a social contract,
it is the spiritual fulfillment of a mitzvah,
a Divine precept that joins the souls of two who found each other
and crossed the boundaries of ages
to a time and place where God is simply, powerfully – God.

In that wonderful and gentle spirit,
we gather to wish you much success and many blessings in your life together.
May the God of uncompromising clarity and love
be with you always.

And, may you know how grateful we are for you
and how much you are both cared for!
Remember that we hold onto you,
As much as we rely upon you
To hold onto us!

Let us close with the words of the Song of Solomon,
With our wish that these words forever ring true in your lives:

Ani ledodi v'dodi li, haRo'eh baShishanin:

Among the lilies God feedeth and my beloved is mine and I am my beloved.

Be beloved to one another always, as you are to us!

God bless you both. Shalom, Peace, and so much more...

Amen!