

**“Not everything can be fixed”**  
*Dealing with imperfection*

**March 1, 2009**

*Text: Genesis 9:8-17, 1 Peter 3:8-17*

I.

One of the things I love about the Psalms of the Bible is how rich and compelling they are—how they reach out and touch seemingly every realm of life. Today marks the first Sunday of Lent, a time of spiritual introspection and reflection ... a time when we seek to sort out who we are as human beings and as people of faith.

In this regard the Psalms are also nurturing and reflective.

In Psalm 31, the psalmist is clearly in a troubled place ... CHECK IT OUT!

*Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away.*

For those of us who are in a troubled place ... distressed over any number of things, these words speak to us ...

And later, the psalmist adds, *I am the scorn of all my adversaries ... the object of dread to my acquaintances ...*

Clearly, the psalmist is in distress; as if there were much in his life that he deeply regrets, that he'd like to be able to rewrite and change. Imagine, the feeling that our *bones are wasting away* (with my increasingly arthritic joints, I can certainly relate to that).

But what about being *the object of dread* to his acquaintances. Think about it! That's not good. That's an awful life-situation. In trying to get our mind and spirit around this, we can't help but wonder, *How did he get to that place in his life?*

In this regard, I ask myself this question all the time ... about people or situations: *What was the life-process that produced that result?*

In other words, *How did I get here? How did this happen to me?* Which prompts the question, *Are there things in our lives that we regret?*

Another way of unpacking regret is the question: *If you could turn back the clock in your life, what would you do differently?* That is a very evocative question, I assure you, because living with regret can be a painful experience. It can wear away at our soul and spirit and be a barrier to our ability to live life more fully.

## II.

As I reflect on my own life, there's a lot that I'd do differently. I certainly wouldn't major in psychology at Grinnell College (although Grinnell is one of the top Liberal Arts colleges in the country). I'd major in English at some place like UC Santa Barbara—somewhere where there's warm weather and a stronger intercollegiate sports program.

However, let me be real clear: I'd definitely marry Yvette. She's a keeper. I'm not always sure she feels the same way about me (laughter), but I'd definitely marry her.

This notion of *regret* is an engaging reality, isn't it? It's hard not to have some regret in life—some decision that we wish, looking back, we'd made differently; some fork in the road where, if we could reverse our steps, we'd choose another road.

A careful reflection on our reading this morning from **Genesis 9** suggests that God, too, knows regret. CHECK IT OUT!

*I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.* And of course, the rainbow is the sign of that covenant.

What the flood story unveils for us is how God's mercy and compassion are greater than God's judgment. That's no small matter is it?

God's judgment is always hovering over us as a consequence of sin. Certainly, that's what happened with the flood.

Human kind had been going the wrong way to the point where God's heart was deeply grieved. However, over time, the grief turned to anger and eventually the flood waters of judgment inundated the earth.

But the consequences of the flood were apparently more than God could bear. What a God! Where mercy and compassion rose up in God's spirit bringing about a change of heart:

*I will form a covenant with you and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.*

## III.

Part of the problem with our regrets, of course, is moving on ... letting go. Living beyond regret is sometimes a steep hill to climb.

We can't help but think about some of our mistakes; our poor choices—situations we've gotten ourselves into in life that we wish had never happened.

Broken relationships, job opportunities gone south, the loss of loved ones; and we think of things we wish we'd done differently along the way. The reality of regret can evoke great pain in our spirit.

Sometimes, we have to come to a healthy acceptance and realization that *not everything in our lives can be fixed*.

- Not every crooked path can be made straight.
- Not every unresolved relationship can be resolved.

God couldn't *fix* the flood, but God *could* express regret and resolve to never do it again. Perhaps the KEY in our regret is how we choose to deal with it. Clearly, the key is how do we move on?

How do we learn what we need to learn with a, hopefully, humble and repentant spirit and move on? At some point, a key element in all of this is grace, God's unconditional acceptance and forgiveness of us, no matter what.

Not that everything is suddenly okay—instantly forgiven, forgotten and ready to go; there's cost involved. But, still, the larger point—that God's infinite grace surrounds us, massages the rough edges and imperfections of our spirit, begins the sometimes-tough work of forgiveness, and enables us to move on.

All the time in our lives, stuff happens that we can't fix. We can't, suddenly, make it right. But we *can* turn it over to God to where God's grace begins a healing process in our spirit and we're able to get on with our lives.

#### IV.

Another part of this is that regret isn't all bad. To have the capacity to regret things that, clearly, we ought to regret can be a good thing. It can, at least, initiate a process of healing and renewal.

What about the spouse or parent whose actions bring untold pain and sorrow to their families and, yet, they feel no regret. It's like they're not even aware of the consequences of their behaviors. That's the worst because there's scant hope that the harmful behaviors will change.

While it is indeed the case that *not everything can be fixed* in our lives, nonetheless, it's important to be aware when things are broken.

Still, amidst all the humanity and imperfections of our common lives, what do we do?

The words for 1 Peter can be helpful to us at this point. This letter was written, probably during the last decades of the first century, to encourage Christians who were dealing

with any number of possible struggles related to persecution and oppression. Still, the words resonate for us today.

*Finally, all of you, says Peter, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind.*

And then the letter goes on to essentially say, *Do the right thing! As long you are eager to do good and seek to do the right thing, you'll be blessed. Even if there are set backs along the way, live lives that sanctify Christ, and you'll be okay.*

V.

Finally, friends, amidst the ongoing imperfections of our lives—in this season of Lent—let us each one resolve to seek God's presence in all things. While there are things in our lives that cannot be fixed—always—forgiveness, renewal and redemption are close at hand.

We need only seek God's presence with an eager heart. In closing, may these words of the psalmist (Psalm 25) grant us courage:

*To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.  
O my God, in you I trust.*

*Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.  
Lead me in your truth, and teach me,  
For you are the God of my salvation;  
For you I wait all day long.*

**All praise be unto God Amen!**

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