

Today is the fourth and final Sunday of a sermon series we've called, "Questions Thinking people ask about the Bible. In December I asked the people at Chain of Lakes to ask the questions about the Bible they've always had, but have never had answered. You did a terrific job of asking questions. Your questions were thoughtful, articulate and courageous. They reaffirmed for me that I am in the right place as a pastor.

I saved the hardest question that you chose for today. Today's question is "How can we reconcile the God of the Old Testament with the Jesus of the New Testament?" This is a very important question. Here's why: Many people have problems with God because of their belief about the image of God that they believe is in the Old Testament. Their rationale is if God is so violent in the Old Testament how could I ever trust God? Why would I ever want to get too close to a violent God? We can take it a step further to say if a person won't get close to God because of an image about God in the Old Testament, then that person will probably not get too close to the people of God. They won't devote themselves to a church.

I hope that none of us here at Chain of Lakes will ever be stopped from a deep and satisfying relationship with God because how we think God is in the Old Testament. I don't believe that the God of the Old Testament is only angry, only violent, or only mean. I believe that the God of the Old Testament can be reconciled with the Jesus of the New Testament. Today I'm going to tell you why.

I want to encourage you to use this brochure that is in the bulletin. On this brochure you'll find a place to take notes. This is an excellent day to take notes. I'll be teaching about what the Bible says about the God of the Old Testament. This week I've shared devotional readings that explores more deeply the question of this sermon. And you have a prayer sheet.

The people on this prayer sheet are asking you to keep them in your prayers. Please use this devotion.

Instead of doing today's sermon from a pulpit, I'm going to do it at a table. Today's question could lead to a conversation that we have with a friend at a coffee shop. I want you to imagine that I'm having this conversation with a friend of yours. Your friend has a hard time believing in God. There's enough interest among your friend to come talk to you. Your friend is very inquisitive about the faith. The person has some sort of belief system, but hasn't made a commitment to God.

I'm going to sit at a table; I have a coffee mug; I even have a treat from Dunn brothers.

Your friend says, "I have a hard time getting close to God because of the God I find in the Old Testament."

Your friend goes on: Is God angry in the Old Testament. Doesn't this anger prevent you from having a deep relationship with God.

I say: There are sections in the Old Testament that God is angry. But God's anger doesn't stop me from trusting and loving and caring for God.

Your friend says: Remind me where God is angry in the Old Testament.

I say: Do you remember the story of Noah's ark

My friend says: I remember that story. We did a skit about it at Bible School. I never went to Sunday School, but my Grandma would take me to Bible School in the summer. One summer we acted out the story of Noah's ark. I was a cow and I dressed up as a cow and walked into the ark. We all stayed in the ark as animals. (Sounds)

I say: That sounds like fun. I say, do you know why the cow had to go into the ark

My friend says: It rained 40 days and 40 nights

I say: Do you remember why it rained 40 days and 40 nights

My friend says: God caused it to rain

I say: Do you know why God caused it to rain

My friend says: I probably wasn't paying attention during that part of the story in Bible School. I was too focused on being a cow.

I say: Most people don't think about why God caused it to rain. It rained because God's heart was sad about what humans were doing.

I look around to see if there is a Bible at the coffee shop. I find one. It's the NRSV—the best translation. I read this

**SLIDE** The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, 'I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them. Genesis 6:5-7

My friend says: I can see why we didn't focus on that part of the story and I can only remember that I was a cow.

I say: God's heart was sad about the wickedness that God saw

I say: When you went to church as a child did you ever learn the 10 commandments.

Your friend says: I learned the 10 commandments and I had to memorize them. I did memorize them once. We learned at my Grandma's Bible School some trick with our fingers to remember the 10 commandments. That was fun.

I say: You remember who received the 10 commandments from God.

Your friend says: It was Moses

I go on to tell the story. Moses went up to Mount Sinai for 40 days and received the 10 commandments. When he came down

Your friend interrupts: He had more commandments, but a tablet fell and he only had 10

I say: No that's from a Mel Brooks movie

When he came down he saw that the people had a Golden Calf and he broke the Ten Commandments

Your friend says: Golden Calf

I say: When Moses was gone for so long the people thought he was dead, so they made a golden calf to worship. They worshipped the calf.

This grieved God deeply. I get out my Bible.

God said this:

SLIDE

“Your people ... have acted perversely; they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshipped it and sacrificed to it ... Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation. Exodus 32:7-9

One more story—the story of Joshua.

Your friend says, “Joshua? I learned that song at my Grandma’s Bible School. Sings: Joshua fit the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho. Joshua fit the battle of Jericho. And the walls come tumbling down.”

I say: Not the story of Jericho; the story of Ai.

Your friend says: Ai? You mean my eye?

I say: No. not e, y, e, but A, i

God said this in Joshua 8

Joshua 8

Then the Lord said to Joshua, “do not fear or be dismayed; take all the fighting men with you, and go up now to Ai ... Then the Lord said to Joshua, ‘Stretch out the sword that is in your hand toward Ai; for I will give it into your hand. ... When Israel had finished slaughtering all the inhabitants of Ai in the open wilderness where they pursued them, and when all of them to the very last had fallen by the edge of the sword, all Israel returned to Ai, and attacked it with the

edge of the sword. The total of those who feel that day, both men and women, was twelve thousand—all the people of Ai. ... So Joshua burned Ai, and made it forever a heap of ruins, as it is to this day. And he hanged the king of Ai on a tree until evening;

Your friend says: Yuck. I couldn't worship a God like that.

I say: That's a hard story. If we look at the entire message of the Old Testament I can worship and love and embrace this God.

Your friend says: You love Jesus. Jesus is not like God. The God of the Old Testament is not like Jesus of the New Testament

I say: They are consistent

Your friend says: You've been drinking too much coffee

I say: We have to understand what caused to God to be angry. And how God first responded.

In the Noah story God was angry with the people because they were acting evil. Humans were doing wicked things. Your friend isn't paying attention. You say the word, "wicked"

Your friend says: Wicked. That's a Broadway musical.

I say: Pay attention. We're not told what the people did that was so wicked, but we've had experiences of wickedness in the last hundred years. Think of how the Nazis treated the Jews in the 1940's. Or how the Afrikaners treated the blacks in South Africa. Or think of the genocide in Rwanda. That was wicked. That was where all the inclinations of the human heart were evil. If God saw this sort of wickedness taking place, we can understand how God's heart was grieved and how God could get angry. .

Your friend says: You mean genocide was taking place when God sent the flood

I say: We're not told that, but we're told the people were acting wicked and every inclination of their heart was evil.

There's a long silence. Your friend is thinking quite a lot.

Your friend says: That kind of changes things a little bit

I say: Remember that after the flood God promised never to do that again.

Covenant-----Rainbow-----explain

Your friend says: I remember the rainbow when we were at my Grandma's Bible School.

We made rainbow collages and hung them in the church sanctuary.

I say: The story started when God was responding to the people's wickedness and evil with anger. The story ended with a covenant.

I say: Anger is a very small part of God's character in the Old Testament. I ask my friend if she has every read Psalm 30.

My friend says: I don't remember reading that one in my Grandma's Bible School. Your friend says, "Is that the one about the shepherds?"

I say: No—that's Psalm 23. This is Psalm 30.

SLIDE:

Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones and give thanks to God's holy name. For God's anger is but for a moment; God's favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning. Psalm 30:4-5.

My friend says: That kind of does make sense. God's anger is a part of God's character, but it doesn't last.

I say: Yes. There are 23,000 verses in the Old Testament. Only 200 of those verses describe God's anger. In the Old Testament God was much more gracious, loving, and faithful to the people. To say that the God of the Old Testament is an angry God is to distort the entire character of God in the Old Testament.

I say: Think about how God responded to the worst event in human history

Your friend says: What was that

I say: The murder of God

Your friend says: When did that happen

I say: Jesus was killed on the cross. And then was raised from the dead

Your friend says: Raised from the dead?

I say: Easter

Your friend says: Oh yea, Easter bunnies

I say: Easter is not about a bunny. God took Jesus from death and brought Jesus back to life.

My friend doesn't say anything

I go on: That event exposed the wickedness of humanity. Jesus came into the world to share love and humans stripped him naked, nailed him to a cross and had him bleed to death over the course of six hours.

God could have sent another flood after Jesus was killed. God promised that God would never destroy humanity. Instead of destroying humans, God destroyed the power of death in our life. Jesus came back from life and because of that all of us have the promise of eternal life.

My friend says: Yes. It would have made sense for God to destroy humanity after Jesus was killed, but instead God transformed the murder of God into something we celebrate at Easter.

I say: Really we celebrate the resurrection every Sunday in worship.

I go on: Jesus was angry too

My friend says: No. Jesus wasn't angry. I remember learning in Bible School. Jesus meek and mild. Jesus was like milk toast. Jesus never sinned. Jesus wasn't angry.

I say:                            You can be angry and not sin

I say:                            Jesus was angry.

I share the story of when Jesus entered the Temple. According to John's version Jesus took a whip of cords and drove out the money changers. People were selling cattle, and sheep and doves in the Temple court. Jesus overturned the tables and the coins on the table went flying all over. "You're turning my Abba's house into a marketplace Jesus cried out.

I tell my friend:                Jesus was having a moment. It wouldn't be too far to say he was having a temper tantrum. He was angry. This wasn't Jesus, gentle, meek, and mild. This was Jesus drawing a line between what he saw as right and wrong.

My friend says:                 I didn't learn about that Jesus in my Grandma's Bible School.

I say:                            This Jesus is threatening

I try to close the deal with my friend. Don't stereotype God because of a small number of passages in the Old Testament. Anger is part of God's character, but this is a small part of God. This anger doesn't last. Instead this anger was redeemed into a covenant. It happened in the Noah story, it happened when God gave Moses 10 commandments when Moses went to the mountain a second time; it happened when God redeemed Jesus' death and turned it into the resurrection. Plus what is more significant than God's anger is the characteristics of mercy, compassion, and love that God consistently displays in the Old Testament. These characteristics—just like anger—are consistent with what Jesus displayed.

Your friend says:                yes—that makes sense. I think I could worship the God of the Old Testament.

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This sermon is not only about God—it's about us. God became angry when God's heart was broken with sadness. God created a covenant that lasted—it was part of the Kingdom of God. Anger can be used to create the Kingdom of God. But before we explore anger I think it's appropriate for us to think about what makes our hearts sad. What events cause our hearts to hurt. The call to action in this sermon is this. I'd like all of us to be able to articulate what makes are hearts sad, what makes our hearts break.

We're going to give all of us an opportunity to talk with another person later in worship about what makes your heart sad.

I want to share briefly what makes my heart sad or what makes my heart break.

My heart breaks when vulnerable people are exploited by others.

This week I was sent a link to an article in Rolling Stone magazine by a leader at Chain of Lakes about teen suicides that have taken place in the Anoka-Hennepin School district. According to the article nine teens have committed suicide in the past few years. Some of the teens were gay and had been bullied because of their sexual orientation. The article was obviously a hit piece and parts were overdone. Later in the week the Star Tribune ran an article that said that bullying in the district wasn't all that bad.

I don't know the entire truth. But I do know that some teens have committed suicide and these suicides took place partly because they were bullied.

Over the past few months the Anoka-Hennepin school district has had a lot of discussion about what is called the neutrality policy. I don't know a lot about the neutrality policy in the A-H school district. I've tried to follow the conversation in the media, but haven't really understood it. As I understand this the neutrality policy discourages teachers from taking a position on controversial issues. Allegedly what has happened is when teens have been

struggling because of their sexual orientation the teachers haven't been able to support them because of the neutrality policy.

But I do know that some of these issues generate a lot of heat. I posted a link to the Rolling Stone article on my Facebook page where I was asking for input in understanding these policies. When I posted the link a strong conversation broke out.

These are very delicate issues. When sexual orientation is brought into a conversation people's buttons can be pushed. I totally get that. I understand that people have different views about gay and lesbian issues. I wrote a blog on this this week, and I encourage you to read it. Like any issue I would expect that we at Chain of Lakes would have different views about gays and lesbians. Like any issue I would ask the people of Chain of Lakes to live the value of Healthy Disagreement on any issue.

Here's the thing. We can disagree about whether gays and lesbians should be ordained or married. We can all agree that no teen no matter what their orientation should ever commit suicide. Any policy that encourages a climate of lack of support must be changed.

My heart gets sad when I reflect on a vulnerable teenager not receiving support and then committing suicide.

Which leads me to the second challenge. However our heart is grieved, I want us to encourage us to respond with love. God responded to the worst event in human history with an astonishing display of love. It was the most brilliant act of love in the history of the world. The resurrection defines us as disciples.

When our hearts are grieved how can we respond with love. I believe that one of the defining characteristics of a disciple of Jesus is the ability to respond to anger in love. It's easier to take our anger to destroy things and destroy people. It doesn't take intelligence to start

smashing the things and people with whom we are upset. That isn't hard at all. It is much more challenging to respond in love.

One reason a faith community is so important is we need a group of people to whom we can say, "My heart is so sad right now I need people to help me respond in love." When we travel our journeys as individuals we can lash out. One of the purposes of the community is for us to help each other love others.

Two challenges—what makes our heart sad; how can we respond in love.

Which leads me to conclude with this. Let's create a world where God's heart doesn't become sad. As a new church we have a terrific opportunity to live into God's desires for the world. Let's create a world where parents get resources for the hardest task in the world—being a parent; let's create a world where teenagers have the resources to respond to bullying; let's create a world where churches band together to encourage their teens to love others and not bully them; let's create a world where our disagreements about sexual orientation lead us to love and respect each other even more. How cool would it be to be a church where we can say about another person—you know I disagree with that person's view on this issue. But I still love him. I would have dinner with him at any time. Let's create a world where people get angry about what God gets angry about—and then we respond with love. Amen. Amen. And Amen