

Seeds of Hope

Liturgical Year A

Meditate on This

February 26, 2023

Genesis 2:15-17 3:1-7

Place another log on the fire, make yourself some popcorn, pour your favorite beverage for this is going to be a long, rocky, exciting ride. My resource for this essay is built on the comic books of Roy Rogers, the movie “Good Morning Vietnam” the first book in the Bible, Genesis, and three commentaries.

The building blocks on which I will build my thesis are scorned by the closed minded and tossed into book burning fires by the ignorant and are revered by me, one of the few remaining liberals who refuses to give up on scholarship, imagination, and common sense. The first of the three commentaries I’ll be using was written by Gerhard von Rad, October 21, 1901-October 31, 1971. Von is a German scholar who utilizes the results of literary criticism. Von produced a commentary on Genesis that is exegetical, historical, and theological.

My second building block was written by my teacher and friend Dr. Walter Brueggemann, March 11, 1933. Walter continued the thought of von Rad and many others to produce over a hundred books where he skillfully delves into the passages of the Bible.

Awkwardly sitting on my German mostly bookshelf, is my third and last author, Kathleen M. O’Connor. I first read her book on Genesis on December 4, 2022. Kathleen teaches at Columbia Theological Seminar in Georgia where Brueggemann went on to teach after leaving Eden Seminary in St. Louis. I recently discovered that Kathleen is widely known for her work in relating trauma and disaster. She sees myth as one of the primary vehicles relating hope to tragedy.

I'll get to Genesis in a few paragraphs but first I have some housekeeping chores to perform. As a youth I had Dell Comic books delivered to my home every week. I still have a pile of comic books from the old days filed next to my theological books.

One of my favorite comics was Roy Rogers. Roy, along with his wife Dale Evans, never understood why her last name was Evans, along with Pat, who drove Roy's real 1946 Willy CJ Jeep named Nellybelle, Bullet Roy's real life German Shepherd, and Trigger, a registered Palomino. Roy and his crew offered me seeds of hope as he went about corralling the crooks.

As I entered adulthood, movies like Good Morning Vietnam, Tour of Duty, China Beach, The Deer Hunter and Rambo lifted me above the sickness that the Vietnam (conflict) War left in the pit of my stomach. Seeds of hope came to me over the television and the movie theatres.

NOW WE GET TO GENESIS:

The Native Americans had their trail of tears and the Israelites, also called Hebrews and later Jews had their own Trail of Tears. The story of the "Jews" begins between two rivers the Tigris and the Euphrates, referred to as the Fertile Crescent Valley. On their journey to Egypt Abraham gets his elderly wife pregnant, their offspring spend years as prisoners building bricks for Pharaoh, miraculously escapes with the help of Moses who killed a guard, spend forty years wandering around in some wilderness, finally cross the Jordan River where their new kingdom and temple are destroyed.

As the Israelites sat scratching their heads; the kids were crying, the wives were yelling "I told you so" and the men were lost as ever. In their confused, hopeless state of mind, a book called Genesis arrives, a book filled with seeds of hope, informing the people that all will be

well. Are you seeing my connection now? You will only hear this from me because most churches don't have the "pews" for honesty.

Since there were no comic books or war movies in the Persian Empire around 530 BCE the people needed another venue in which to receive seeds of hope. Superman, disguised as Clark Kent, a reporter for the Daily Planet does not come to the rescue. Instead, we have three families, J, E, and P bringing the Israelite seeds of hope. The kids stopped crying, the women breathe a sigh of relief, and the men stop scratching their heads.

Brueggemann reminds us NOT to look for Jesus on every page because he will not be found. Nor will you find the notion that the church in some sense is the "fulfillment" of the Israelites. Genesis is a story, a book communicating in a serious way with a hopeless nation.

Brueggemann talks about the three things he picks up in verses 15, 16 and 17. In vs 15 we are given VOCATION, what we are called to do, to "till" and "keep." This verse has to do with what we are going to do with our life.

In verse 16 we are given PERMISSION to act freely, to enjoy creation. Then for some strange reason we ignore the good stuff in verses 15, 16 and 17 and we major in verse 17, PROHIBITS. We all need boundaries to keep us safe, but we let this "apple" thing get in our way of enjoying life.

An important footnote. The Bible was not written as history, or as science to answer all of our curious questions. The early book of Genesis was written as myth, not a literal occurrence of the past. Our authors, J, E, and P gave us a mature understanding of how they felt it happened. They gave us a theological commentary. Brueggemann reminds us that "the Bible is a shared memory of events that were

important to our parents.” The purpose of the Bible is not to give us laws, or just stories but to bring us into the presence of God.

Our scripture reading is NOT an account of the fall, it is NOT how evil came into the world, it is NOT about the origin of death nor is the story about apples and the evil wrought by sex.

For crying babies and men scratching their heads our scripture is about guarding and nurturing the tree of knowledge, celebrating life and receiving the seeds of hope. God will provide. It is a summons for all to live in this world on God’s terms realizing that God is with us re-creating. We need to keep the Garden, the earth healthy, that we have ALL been blessed, that maybe the seeds of the fruit are what we all need to be faithful and just.

O’Connor writes that the tree of knowledge of good and evil is symbolic for our limitations of life outside the paradisaal garden. We are to “till and care for it”, meaning to serve. We have a vocation to work the land with deep respect for it.

Let’s not go rogue or stupid on me here. I am merely reporting that some stories in Genesis are narrative and not doctrine that they are meant to lift us up, to offer some hope. As a child my mother would read stories to us each night before we went to bed. Sitting close to mom feeling her warmth and care were seeds of hope I failed to realize as a youngster. At times we all need seeds of hope, may this essay give you some hope in a Bible that is very up-lifting and very hopeful regardless how so many portray it.

We all need our survivor stories to offer us seeds of hope. For the Israelites Genesis chapters two and three was the tonic they needed.

I can only end with a “Hi Yo Silver Away” from the Lone Ranger. “May we all return to those thrilling days of yesteryear” as we receive seeds of hope and encouragement.

Just a thought;

Dennis Siebert

On January 23 of this year Brueggemann wrote me concerning my project of interpreting scripture. Walter wrote, “if we get out of the way, scripture can have its say to many people.”