

“Restore Factory Settings”

13 June 2021 - Led by David Boyd

Welcome & Call To Worship

Hymn of Preparation: Shout to the North

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Reading: Exodus 2:1-10

Sermon:

I am sure that, like me, you have been using the internet during the lockdown, more than you have ever done before. We use it for work, for email, for keeping in touch with friends and family, for Netflix, for shopping, for church, Sunday services, homegroups, prayer meetings, Session and Committee. For the past year and a half practically our entire existence has been lived online. That means that your Wi-Fi has had to work a lot harder than it ever has before. And I am sure that, like me, you have been frustrated when your Wi-Fi has stopped performing in the way that it should. But by now, I am sure that every one of us has learned that the way to get it working properly again is simply to switch the router off and then on again. This forces the router to reset itself and usually cures all ills.

When you have done that, have you ever thought, “Wouldn’t it be great if all life’s problems were solved that easily?” Maybe you’ve even thought, “I wish I could just reset my whole life like this, and start over again.” Well, if you have, just hold that thought because we will come back to it later. You see the idea of doing a reset doesn’t just apply to electronics, almost anything can benefit from a reset and the idea has been around for a lot longer than you might think. As we shall see, the person who invented this idea of a reset was God himself, and he has made something of a career out of it since.

Now, you’re probably wondering what all this talk about resets has to do with Moses. Well, in the passage we just read, Moses is born into a Hebrew family living in slavery in Egypt. When he is born they hide him away, because his life is under threat. The rapidly expanding population of Hebrew slaves in Egypt is making Pharaoh nervous, and a nervous Pharaoh is not a good thing if you are a Hebrew slave. He wasn’t well-known as someone who overflowed with the milk of human kindness. You see, in a bid to stem the tide of the Hebrew population explosion, Pharaoh gives orders that all newborn Hebrew males are to be thrown into the Nile. Moses’ folks are understandably not keen to say goodbye to him just yet, so they hide him at first, and then, when that isn’t going to work any longer they throw him in the Nile, in a basket that is waterproofed with pitch obviously. And then, somewhat ironically, it’s Pharaoh’s own daughter who discovers him and rescues him out of the Nile.

So far, all very familiar. You’ve heard this story since you were only babies yourselves, but what you may not have heard is that the Hebrew word for the basket that Moses set sail in, is *tevah*. The interesting thing about that, is that the Hebrew word for the ark that Noah built is, you’ve guessed it, *tevah*. (Incidentally, if you notice, the ark was also waterproofed with pitch.) The ark was the means by which Noah and his family, together with two of every living creature escaped the Flood.

Now, if we go further back, right back to Day 2 of Creation in Genesis 1, God separates the waters above from the waters below, and then on Day 3 he separates the waters below to reveal the dry land. Now, what I want you to notice here is that the Flood reverses this sequence. God allows the waters that he has separated, to fall back in on themselves, and return the earth to its pre-creation state. Then when God stops the rain and separates the waters once again the slate has been wiped clean, so to speak, and it's like we are back in Day 3 of Creation. In effect, God is pressing the reset button on creation. The Flood is a re-creation. Only Noah and his family are saved from the original creation in this *tevah*, or ark, to make a new start. They are saved because God reckons Noah as the only righteous man and uses the Flood to remove all the other wicked people from the face of the earth in the reset.

Any Jew reading the story of Moses would immediately think back to Noah and the ark when they saw that word *tevah*. Moses is the new Noah, and his rescue from the Nile would remind them of the Flood. It also flags up the reset that is coming at the Exodus when the waters of the Red Sea are parted by God, just like Day 3 of Creation, to let the Israelites escape from Egypt on dry ground. And then, when the Israelites are all safely across, just like the Flood story, the waters come crashing back to wipe the chasing Egyptian army from the face of the earth and the reset is complete. The Israelites are freed from slavery and the wicked Egyptians have been wiped out. Even when the Israelites finally reach the Promised Land, after forty years wandering in the desert, they have to cross the Jordan, which is in flood at the time. Once again God separates the waters and the Israelites cross over on dry ground as God changes them from a wandering bunch of homeless people to a nation with their own land in another reset.

So what is the significance of all this? Well, we have seen Noah, Moses and the Israelites all get saved through God's intervention in a way that recalls God's acts in Creation. In each case, there is water involved. Clearly, deliverance is a resetting of creation, it's a re-creation. And this is not just a theme in the Old Testament, in the New Testament God really cuts loose with it. Think about John 1. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it." That is Creation language. Do you hear the echoes of Genesis 1? To any good Jew that signals that a deliverance is coming. God is going to hit that reset button again in the most significant reset of all.

Or, how about 2 Corinthians 5:17? "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come." Even at the personal level, being saved is an act of re-creation. That is why we talk about being born again. What is the mark of our new status? Baptism! More water! We think that baptism symbolizes the washing away of our sins, and so it does. But it symbolizes so much more as well. The water of baptism echoes God's acts in creation and re-creation. It recalls God's deliverance of his people at various points in their long history. When we put our trust in Christ and God hits the reset button for us as individuals we become a part of that redemptive history. And the Good News is that this reset is available to each and every one of us. An opportunity to wipe the slate clean and make a completely new start.

And finally, Revelation 21: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." Why was there no longer any sea? That always puzzled me. But

maybe it's because there will be no more resets. The waters will never surge back together again because this is the ultimate act of re-creation. The story is complete. God's work of redemption is finished and everything will be just the way that he wants it.

It should be obvious by now that God is someone who likes change. In fact he embraces change because, with him, it is always change for the better. He has called us to be like him, to be conformed to the image of his Son, Jesus. Jesus is the only person who has ever lived a perfect life, and when I think of where I'm at, compared to his life I have a lot of scope to change for the better. No wonder God is so keen on us changing, because we all have a long way to go. We only begin to understand just how keen God is on changing us, when we take a good long look at what he did to make it possible. As always, God doesn't expect us to do something that he hasn't done himself. Just think of the change that Jesus embraced when he set aside the glory of heaven, his position as the second person of the Trinity, the creator of the universe; to be born into a poor Middle Eastern family as a helpless baby and to spend part of his childhood as a refugee.

Matthew's gospel tells us about the wise men following the star and coming to worship the baby Jesus. They almost cause a premature end to the story because they stop off with King Herod and tell him about their quest. This talk of a new king makes Herod nervous and, just like Pharaoh, he starts killing off the male babies in an effort to take Jesus out. Joseph and Mary escape to, of all places, Egypt, in order to save Jesus' life, mirroring Israel's journeys to and from Egypt. Clearly, Matthew wants us to see that Jesus is the new Moses, come to free his people from slavery and lead them into the promised kingdom.

Remember when Moses went up Mount Sinai and came back with the Ten Commandments? Just read the Sermon on the "Mount" in Matthew 5. Jesus says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them." Then he goes on to not just endorse the commandments but to expand on them. "You have heard it said, Do not murder, but I say to you, if you are angry with your brother you are already guilty of murder. Similarly, Do not commit adultery, but I say to you, if you look at a woman lustfully you have already committed adultery in your heart." This is the new, improved version of the Law!

Moses gave the Law to the Israelites to prepare them for life as God's people in the Promised Land. Listen to what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven." Why does he say that? Moses' Law set out the requirements for life with God in the Promised Land. Jesus is now setting out the requirements for life with God in the kingdom of heaven, and unsurprisingly, those requirements are even more stringent than those that Moses gave. But can you see the parallels? In Matthew's eyes, Jesus is the new Moses, no question.

But I am getting side-tracked. Let's get back to Jesus' story. Jesus grows up and goes on to have an itinerant ministry for a few short years. His teaching and miracles are popular with the ordinary people but he is vilified by the powers that be until finally he is executed on a cross as a common criminal. He went through all of that to save us from our sins, to rescue us from the impossible task of keeping this new, improved version of the Law that he has just dished out; to give us the opportunity of a reset. But that doesn't just mean praying the sinner's prayer and relaxing in the happy knowledge that we have our fire insurance and we are now sorted. No, he endured all of that because he is so keen to see us change. He wants to see us fulfil the requirements that he gave us in the Sermon on the Mount. In human terms, an impossible task, but not with God, for him all things are possible, even changing us into the likeness of Christ.

Maybe you are listening to this this morning and you're not a Christian, but God has been speaking to you about your life, pointing out all the wrong things that you have done and showing you your need to change. The Good News is that Jesus has made that change possible by his death on the cross, and if you will trust him to change you, he will press the reset button, wipe out all your past mistakes and give you a new start in life. When that happens you will be born again into a completely new existence, where he will welcome you as a brother or a sister into God's family.

Maybe you are listening to this this morning and you are a Christian but change stopped being a feature of your life a long time ago. We tend to put such an emphasis on becoming a Christian that we can start thinking that once we become a Christian we've arrived. The Bible is perfectly clear that that is totally wrong! When you become a Christian, you have been born again, but you are still only a new baby, and like a new baby you need to be looked after, to be weaned off the baby food and onto solid food (Paul says a lot about that). You need to grow and develop, to learn how to navigate this new life that you have been given, and as I said earlier, to work towards perfection, the goal of Christlikeness! The Good News here is that you don't have to do this in your own strength because when you become a Christian the Holy Spirit comes to live within you and changes you from the inside out. But do you see that word again, the Holy Spirit changes you from the inside out, but He won't force that change upon you, you have to want it. You have to cooperate with the work of the Spirit and that's when change happens. The other part of the Good News is that you will have help during this change process. That's where the church comes in. You are called to be part of a church because you need help and encouragement on the journey. We are here to help, encourage and spur each other on towards love and good deeds, as Paul says.

The weird thing is that quite often churches can be places that are incredibly resistant to change, something that's a complete denial of their reason for being. The church's job is to help you change. Folks, you're sitting in the changing room! If the church is not changing, and you with it, then it's simply not a church!

Now, I know that that is hard for Presbyterians to hear. We are not known for welcoming change; in fact, we are probably better known for resenting change, even fearing it! I can see a few incipient heart attacks as I look around the room. I wish we had bought that defibrillator now! Right now, we are standing at a unique point in the life of our church. The Coronavirus has presented us with a natural break and as we begin a new chapter it seems to me that this is an opportunity to make changes, to embrace change even, as we enter the post-covid world.

So let's go forward now, with a sense of anticipation and expectation that God is going to do great things among us, to bring about the changes that he wants to see happen. Let's go forward with an attitude that is open to change, and with a desire to see God's will come to pass. Let's go forward prepared to give the Holy Spirit free rein in our lives and to cooperate with him in His work of changing us into the likeness of Christ. Let's pray.

Father, forgive us for our reluctance to change. Help us to fully trust you and to go forward in the knowledge that you only want what's best for us. As the only person to live a perfect life, Jesus is the personification of what's best for us, so help us to cooperate with the work of the Spirit as he changes us to be more like him, and it's in his name that we pray. Amen.

Praise: Lord, You Have My Heart

Prayers for Others

Announcements

Closing Hymn: The Servant King

Benediction