

Pastor Roy's sermon from March 22, 2015

What is salvation? What do the whole of the Scriptures say about salvation? Some folks think of salvation as a mainly one time experience with God, while others see many "little" salvations along the way leading to growth and increased unity and mercy with one another and God? Either way, we are tempted to reduce the salvation of God to a "one-size-fits-all" experience--as if everyone else's experience will be the same as mine. Some see salvation as mainly about life beyond the grave, others as mainly about this life, others as both, while yet others a faithful mystery. Is it helpful to think of and experience salvation as a holy dance, a communion of creator and creation? --As unique for each of us as each of us is uniquely relates to God? Our human nature longs for short cuts and quick fixes and easy answers. But the salvation we find in the Scriptures is neither quick, nor simple, nor the same for everyone.

Let's take a broad look at salvation in the characters of the Bible. Adam and Eve are saved from their choice to become their own boss. Saved by a conversation with the head gardener and a few leaves for coverage. And years of hard work.

Noah is saved from water with a couple conversations with God, a lot of work, and a boat, completed with a rainbow promise.

Abraham is saved by his faith, his wife-Sarah, her handmaiden Hagar's faithfulness to her son, the birth of his own son Isaac, the conflict between him and his half-brother Ishmael, quite a few conversations with God, and a ram in the thicket to substitute for Isaac on the altar.

Jacob is saved by his mother, conversations with God, really tough times--such as conflict with his brother Esau, betrayal by his Uncle Laban, conflict between his wives Leah and Rachel who died giving birth to Benjamin, and wrestling matches with God who promised much more than he demanded in return. The same was true for with his grandfather, Abraham.

Joseph is saved from his favored son status by dreams and fateful turns of events. Pharaoh and all of Egypt are saved from famine when the cup bearer remembers Joseph's ability to interpret dreams. Jacob-Israel is saved by Joseph's power to forgive his brothers' cruelly jealous betrayal and Judah's amazingly mature love to place Joseph's half-brother Benjamin's future absolutely before his own--as in "life in prison." Joseph and his father Jacob-Israel are saved by all of this, as God works to bring reconciliation in this seriously messed up family. Keep in mind that according to the genealogies, Jesus is descended not from Joseph, or Benjamin, --the favored sons-- but from Judah who was willing to give up his future for his father's second favorite son, while he figured no one was watching. But well-disguised Joseph *was* watching *closely* and God's salvation of reconciliation was born in the depths of uncertainty close to despair. This was all out of both Joseph and Judah's hands. The result of Judah's faithfulness was in the hands of God was working quietly, invisibly in the shadows. This is the stuff of salvation. Following a holy hunch and being surprised at the results.

Moses is saved by his mother and sister who placed him in the pitch lined basket where no one would hear him scream and he would be saved from Pharaoh's soldiers. Oh, no one except Pharaoh's daughter, with her maids, who takes him, has him nursed by his mother--thanks to Miriam Moses' sister--, and raises him as a member of the royal family. After he flees Egypt having murdered a task master abusing one of the Hebrews, he finds himself in the wilderness defending shepherdesses from bully shepherds. He saves them, but really, they and their father, the priest of Midian, save him and then he stumbles upon the burning bush in a wasteland. Suddenly he is sent commissioned to bring the Hebrews from slavery to the promised land. So Israel is saved by Moses, Aaron, Miriam, the plagues. God and the Red Sea rescuing Israel from slavery to enter a promised land with many opportunities.

David is saved from the Philistines, from his jealous King Saul, from his short cutting self, but has to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. He pays a price for his faithfulness and his unfaithfulness. It's a tough journey for David and for his family, and then, Israel. Much later, Jeremiah is saved by his willingness to tell the Word of the Lord and not hold back. The Jews are saved as they hear his words and consider their wisdom.

Joseph and Mary are saved as they listen to the Word of the Angels, the message about this child, Jesus, as they raise him to love and serve God first, regardless of the cost. A salvation he receives from his parents and his God. A salvation he shares with all who walk in his faith and learn from his love. God has blessed those who know the stories of their ancestors, the source of their identity, the source of their salvation from a God who works wonders and brings reconciliation from mysteries and grave uncertainties.

How is the salvation of God at work in your life? In the life of your family which is finally as out of your control as the working out of your own salvation? How is the salvation of God at work in our community, nation, and world? Are we listening for the details? Are we patient with the pieces that don't seem to fit and seem to go unresolved? Like for Judah pleading for his brother's freedom it seems no one is watching or helping. How are you working out your salvation of union with God and God's people filled creation? The details, the twists and turns, the faithfulness, the betrayal, the sacrifices, the misunderstandings, the dark corners, the bright flashes of insight, nurture, and peace? How is your salvation coming? [Pause]

There are also the faith stories of our congregations. How is God working out our salvation as sisters and brothers? Have we already decided how things must go, say, in our financial struggles? How are we being saved? Or are we going to save ourselves? Are we open to listening to one another and the Spirit which has been leading us down this long, shared path of faithfulness? Might there be a sharp turn into something new, totally unexpected, which brings a faithful surprise--yet another twist of salvation? [Pause]

Let us listen to one another and the Spirit, setting aside fear and certainty, to live into hope and trust.

May we, during this final week of Lent, ponder our salvation and savor the divine hand at work. Thanks be to God. Amen.