

The Ark Narrative re-told as a 3-day story is not new. With Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter always ringing in our ears and resounding in our souls how could we miss it? But before the dying and rising of the Savior, the movement from location, to dislocation, to relocation in the Hebrew Scriptures was told often. The story of loss, and reversal, and then gain is repeated in many contexts. The Hebrew Scripture teaches that it is one of the ways of God. When Jesus tells his hearers 'haven't you heard?' that the Scriptures teach that, like Jonah, he must be in the belly of whale, he is citing but one of the many Biblical instances of this theme.

Exodus. On a grand scale it happened before the Ark Narrative. The Hebrew children descend (it is always 'descend') into Egypt – the first day. God sends, unassisted, a final plague in the night - the second day. By great miracle they are rescued – the third day. When the Ark Narrative is composed, most certainly the Exodus story was known. Even the Philistines knew and drew the correct inference of the plagues on their land by which the god of the Hebrews had defeated Egypt. The inglorious defeat of Dagon would be so obviously parallel to the embarrassing of the Egyptian gods – the Nile (now bloodied), the Sun (now darkened) – they would send the Ark away with gifts as the Egyptians had done.

Exile. On a grand scale again, this 3 day movement affects the whole nation. The people of God are in the land of Promise (Day One), exiled to Babylon (Day Two), returned, like the Ark, (Day Three).

Ezekiel. The glory of the Lord departs the Temple (like departing Shiloh), wins victory while away (like in Dagon's Temple), and will return to the Temple of God.

Prophets. They speak often (sometimes it seems almost always) about God's judgment on our sin, which is followed by our humiliation, then, as if surprisingly, at last our restoration. Furthermore, 'glory' like in the Ark Narrative is the theme, so too is a highway back from the captivity. Re-read Isaiah 17:4 – 'On that day the glory of Jacob will be brought low'. Then re-read 35:2, 8,10 – 'They shall see the glory of the Lord ... a highway will be there and it shall be called the Holy Way...'; re-read the familiar 40:4-5 – 'Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven places shall be become level, and the rough places plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed ...' Hosea 6:1-2, 'It is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck us down, and will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; On the third day he will raise us up.'

Lamentations. I preached on it during Lent this year in preparation for the triduum (three days) that ends Holy Week. Re-read Lamentations in this light – 1:1, 6, 10; 2:1, 4, 10, 15 – 'How lonely sits the city...'; then 3:16-18 – 'Gone is my glory, and all that I hoped for in the Lord'; then 3:22-23 – 'Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning: great is your faithfulness'.

Walter Brueggemann concludes that in all this, the Ashdod story is like a script for the many later stories told and to be re-told – the utter defeat of glory; the stunning victory anticipated; the joyous journey back home.

Christ. Day One. Good Friday. Utter defeat. Death. Can it be more final than that? The disciples have all either fled or walked away in despair. Day Two. Holy Saturday. The battle in the night unobserved by any human witness. See notes on the Creed and Theology below. Day Three. Easter Sunday. Christ's victory in announced in his rising from the dead. 'According to the Scripture'. The Ark Narrative included.

Creed. Day One: 'Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried'. Day Two: 'He descended into hell'. Day Three: 'On the third day he rose...'

Ancient and Eastern Orthodox Theology. In the icons of the Orthodox Church which are used to teach the Faith, the icons of Day One and Day Three are, as we in the West might expect, representations of scenes from the Gospels. Between these two days is a representation of the action of Day Two. Christ has descended into hell. He binds Satan – he lies bound and gagged at Christ's feet. The gates of hell are burst open – bolts and locks are scattered about; the gates lie in ruins. He preaches to the saints of old '... the gospel was preached to those who are now dead...' 1 Peter 4:6. They are rescued from their captivity; Jesus now takes them captive to himself 'when he ascended on high, he took captive many captives ...' Ephesians 4:7. At the center of the icon is Christ lifting a man and woman out of their coffins, holding on to their limp wrists. They are Adam and Eve. When this is accomplished (remember: all on the second day) Christ has reversed the curse, gone to the beginning of human history and rescued all – all! – who belong to him. 'He is the first born of the dead', Colossians 1:18. The victory is on the second day. The orthodox call this icon 'Anastasis' – 'Resurrection'. The third day is the announcement of the victory ... like the Ark coming back Israel.

Life in Christ. Knowing this theme, this truth, this story about God's ways in the world, how shall we then live?

*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:
Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.* *Philippians 2*