

Psalm 68:1-10, 32-35
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“On the Move God”

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This is a time of the year when people are on the move. High School Graduates are preparing for summer jobs and excited about the next chapter of their lives. College graduates are moving out of dorms and classrooms and seeking stable employment, or new adventures. Families are on the move to vacation spots and cabins in northern Wisconsin.

In the Psalm today, it sounds as if God is also on the move. “Let God Rise Up,” opens verse one. Then the people are instructed to “lift up a song to God who rides upon the clouds.” Later the author remembers their ancestors leaving slavery in Egypt, “O God, when you went before your people, when you marched through the wilderness.”

When we are on the move there can be a tendency to not let anything get in our way! We make our own way, forge our own path. Maybe you have seen that commercial from the Federal Railroad Administration. It shows a train barreling toward a railroad crossing, all the caution lights and alarms working and the narrator says, “If you think a train will stop when it sees a car on the tracks... You’re right... it will stop... about a mile down the tracks. The audience sees an SUV getting pushed down the tracks, twisted and damaged. And the narrator closes saying, “Stop... Because Trains can’t.”

In Psalm 68 it begins to sound like the on the move God is plowing through like a train. We hear there are winners and losers, righteous who are honored and wicked who are cast aside. The author tells us the on the move God scatters enemies, drives them away, and let’s the wicked perish.” Ah, finally God is beginning to sound more like us. Either you are with me, or get out of my way!

The author makes the divide clear... The wicked will perish, will be driven away like smoke. The righteous will be joyful, exulting before God. There it is... some are in, some are out. Some are good, some are bad. This kind of thinking translates quickly to some are loved, some are not. If the author is splitting Humanity into two neat categories, it sure makes the gospel sound a lot less inclusive than many of us imagine. Is it possible that the on the move God leaves casualties on the road to salvation?

As we ponder this let me ask if these strict categories of humankind make sense to you? Are there people who are genetically good, and others who are built-in bad? The genetically good people may mess up sometimes but overall, they do more good than destruction and therefore fall among God’s joyful people. Everyone else is the built-in bad, no amount of doing good can compensate for the destruction they cause, and their only plight is to be brushed aside as God comes crashing along the tracks to salvation.

This kind of polarity exists in every day and time. It allows one group to objectify, vilify, and victimize another group. It permits one group to validate its privilege and self-righteousness

and deny the same to the other group. This dualistic thinking may be more at work than we care to admit. But it was not the way Jesus categorized people, and with further investigation, I don't think it is the way the Psalmist looks at humankind either.

Gregory of Nyssa, Bishop in the last part of the 4th century, believed he found the roots of universal salvation in scripture. Gregory argued that when Paul says God will be "all in all," this means that though some may need a long time of purification, eventually "no being will remain outside the number of the saved" and that "no being created by God will fall outside the Kingdom of God."

Still, for some when we read Psalm 68, it looks as if the author is suggesting God just goes along, letting the chips fall where they will, with no regard for anyone except the righteous. It is at this point the middle of our Psalm becomes so pivotally important. The author writes, "Father of orphans and protector of widows, is God in the holy Habitation." That verse ends with a period, it is not a question, it is a promise. Then we hear, "God gives the desolate a home to live in; leads out the prisoners to prosperity." Professor J. Clinton McCann, internationally recognized Psalms Scholar reflects on Psalm 68, "God is not merely a mighty warrior who scatters enemies for the fun of it, or for the thrill of the battle, or for the purpose of just showing off. Rather, God 'fights' for the vulnerable and dispossessed—orphans and widows, the homeless and the captives." The on the move God works on behalf of all people.

As we celebrate Memorial Day tomorrow, we remember this holiday began after the Civil War as an effort toward reconciliation between the families of veterans in the North and the South. After the war, there was already a tradition in the North of decorating soldiers' graves, called "Decoration Day." But in 1868 an organization of Northern war veterans decreed it ought to be a national holiday. The date was carefully chosen because it was not the anniversary of a specific battle, and therefore would be a neutral date for both sides.

But human beings hold on to their wounds, and reconciliation takes time, grace and mercy. So initially, as the holiday spread, it was an occasion for both sides to give angry speeches about the wartime atrocities inflicted by the other side, and the righteousness of their own.

However, as time went on, Memorial Day really did become a time to remember all veterans, a time to visit the graves of family and friends, and to remember their lives.

Today, let us remember the spirit in which the day was conceived, as a way to bring together those who had once been bitter enemies.

Psalm 68 teaches God's love and salvation ARE inclusive. Humans are not inherently wicked or righteous; instead, there is faithfulness and failure within each of us. With God, reconciliation and transformation are possible. The gift of salvation from the on the move God is present to each one.

So I invite us today, as people on the move with an on the move God, to trust ever more deeply in the relentless, ferocious, undying nature of God's love and how no one in God's creation lies outside the reach of redeeming Grace; not orphans or widows, not sinners or murderers, not you or me, there is no one who does not finally have a home in God's holy habitation.

Amen