

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
305 EAST MAIN STREET  
DURHAM, NC 27701  
PHONE: (919) 682-5511



## “Could We Start Again, Please?”

A sermon by Marilyn T. Hedgpeth

Fifth Sunday in Lent (Year C)

March 13, 2016

Romans 6:3–11

---

*For God so loved the world, that God...*

saved the world he loved, over and over again from flood, fire and famine,  
from destruction, doubt and death, by giving his only begotten Son,  
*that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life* (John 3:16).

This is the story of God, and world that God so loves,

otherwise known as salvation history, the meta-narrative of creation,  
fall, and redemption that spans the breadth of universal time.

Most Sundays we focus on one periscope of scripture and see

what God is doing at a geographic epicenter, at one specific point in time.

But occasionally it is helpful to look at the bigger picture

and examine the universal significance of God’s saving acts.

That is what we are attempting to do today with these Lenten Lessons and Carols:

to get a sense of the wondrous love of God,

beginning with Creation, continuing through delivery from bondage

and exile, acknowledging the prophets’ call to faithfulness,

and culminating in the sending of God-with-us as Jesus, the Christ.

It is a story of darkness giving way to light, of death giving way to life,

of the earthly powers giving way to the heavenly powers,

which will reach its apex in the passion narrative of Jesus.

I hope that you have heard today's readings

as a sampling of the powerful stories that lie at the root of our belief,  
and that you responded to each through song and prayer.

I hope you paid attention to each reader who stepped to the lectern,  
to see how they connected to their story:

the older reader who might resemble one of the patriarchs;  
the parent of an only child  
who would rather die than consider giving that child up;  
the women who give voice now  
to words women were never allowed to speak before;  
the child, the little child, who models the One who will lead the way  
into God's peaceable kingdom.

And I hope you imagined with wonder what unique part you might play  
in this meta-narrative of God's love for the world.

There is a beautiful song in some renderings of *Jesus Christ, Superstar*,  
sung by Mary Magdalene, and sometimes Peter, called

*Could We Start Again, Please?*

*I've been living to see you. Dying to see you, but it shouldn't be like this.*

*This was unexpected, what do I do now?*

*Could we start again, please? Could we start again, please?*

The song comes towards the end of the second act

after Judas' betrayal, after the disciples fall asleep in Gethsemane,  
after Peter's denial, after Herod finishes interrogating Jesus  
and turns him back over to Pilate,  
and just before Judas' suicide and Christ's crucifixion.

It comes after everything has gone irreparably wrong in the Jesus saga,  
and the only way out, for those who love Jesus, seems to be through.

*I've been very hopeful so far. Now for the first time, I think we're going wrong.*

*Hurry up and tell me, this is just a dream.*

*Oh could we start again, please?*

*Could we start again, please?*

The song is an all-too-human lament about how things can go terribly wrong, even when every intention is for them to go well and right.

*I think you've made your point now.*

*You've even gone a bit too far to get your message home.*

*Before it gets too frightening, we ought to call a vote.*

*So could we start again, please?*

*Could we start again, please?*

I think it is the question that every child of God has asked of God throughout salvation history: could we start again, please?

Could we return the apple? Could we recivilize after the flood?

Could we try and reconcile with our sibling?

Could we take back that golden calf?

Could we recommit ourselves to covenant faithfulness?

Could we hear and respond to the prophetic plea one more time?

Could we return from exile?

Could we have a do-over on discipleship?

Could we stop before God's son has to die?

Please, could we start again?

Could we start again, please?

And God's answer to this question, each time throughout salvation history, surprisingly, is a grace-filled and merciful "yes."

Yes, there is pardon and protection after the apple-snatching.

Yes, there is a rainbow and an olive branch after the flood.

Yes, there is hope for brother to reconcile with brother and sister with sister.

Yes, there will be opportunities for covenant renewal.

Yes, there will be other prophets to show you the way.

Yes, I will give you a clean, new heart, and a right-as-rain new spirit.  
Yes, there will be rescue. Yes, there will be restoration.  
Yes, there will be renewal.  
Yes, there will be reconciliation. Yes, there will be redemption.  
There will be forgiveness and second chances and new life.  
And yes... there will even be resurrection. The story is not finished.  
And yes, you can start again.  
You can start again, please, because God so loves you, and the world. Amen.