

Sermon: A Peacemaker Church

Scriptural reading: Gen. 18,20-32; Psalm 138,1-3. 6-8; Luke 13,1-13

Introduction:

Genesis 18, the narrative of Sodom and Gomorrah has been traditionally interpreted wrongly. The exact verses related to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is 19,1-29. Theologians and Biblical scholars have said that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because the practice homosexuality. This interpretation read this narrative from a homophobic point of view, condemning all people who are not heterosexual. Other pastor and religious leaders have used this narrative to interpret natural disasters as punishment of God to cities and countries for their beliefs, for their festivities, etc. This second interpretation read this narrative from a Punisher point of view, for them God is not a merciful God but a Punisher. These two traditional interpretations are wrong. Our reflection this morning will help us to understand this narrative from a different point of view, from the margins, from the exclude communities in the society.

I. Abraham is presented as A Model of a Peacemaker community

A. The chapter 18,1-19 is a beautiful narrative which the character of Abraham. Being in a hot day, very warm, Abraham saw to three men walking and resting at the way. Abraham offered them a place to rest, his house. He offered them water to refresh from the hot weather. He offered them a meal, so these strangers were not only rest at his house, but will be feed them nicely. Abraham and Sarah prepared for them a big banquet. If we read chapter 19,1-3 we see to these men entering to Sodom and Gomorrah and now Lot offers them hospitality. But, Lot hospitality is not too well like was the Abraham's hospitality. So, in these two chapters, Genesis 18 and 19, Abraham is presented as a good host, as a person that portrait himself one the highest virtue among the ancient Semitic people: the hospitality. This ancient moral code is very important to understand the verses we are dealing with (vv. 20-32).

B. It is interesting the fact that, after they were well hosted, the leader of the group give to Abraham the promise of a son, and repeat the promise of the land and the promise of be the father of many nations. But, when Sarah hear this promise she laughed (v. 12). Interesting is the fact that this narrative underline that Sarah laugh. But, if we read the previous chapter 17,17, we will have again the same promise from God to Abraham, but in this case, he laughed. But, the text does not underline this reaction of Abraham as it does with Sarah's laugh. The reason is because, this narrative is trying to present an idealistic portrait of Abraham.

C. Our text, Genesis 18,1-9 present to Abraham as Mediator. After Abraham hosted very well to the three men, they told him about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham new that his nephew Lot was living there. For this reason, Abraham intercede and ask for mercy to the city, because

there were some of their relatives there. This way, Abraham is portrayed as a Mediator and defender of his family. Now, Genesis present an image of Abraham as a good Head of this family and protector of them.

II. Jesus warns about to the reality of the judgement of God to all people.

A. Jesus in Luke 13 point out the necessity of repentance and conversion. This call from Jesus was and is for everyone. Why? Because to enjoy a reciprocal relation with God, honesty and a acknowledge of our sinfulness is need. The Good News in Christ is that God does not reject to anyone, instead of that, God shows open arms to everyone. That is why, we as a Church of God, the Body of Christ we have to welcome to everyone in our sacred place and do not reject to anyone.

B. One example shown in Luke 13 is the healing of a woman, who had been crippled by a spirit. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. Jesus was teaching at a synagogue and he saw this woman. Then, he called her forward, and when he was in front of everyone, he healed her saying: "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity", and immediately she was straightened up and praised God.

C. Jesus was saying with his action that God is calling to conversion and salvation to everyone. When Jesus touch her, he was saying: it is more important to touch a sick woman to be considered impure. He was saying that is more important to heal a woman in Sabbath than see her suffering on the Sabbath. Jesus put a sick woman first. For Jesus, receive excluded people in the sacred place is a sign of salvation, of the grace of God.

III. A Peacemaker church today

A. These two biblical narratives teach us several things. I want to share with you three of them. First teaching for us is: As a church of God, we have to welcome to strangers. This means to welcome immigrants, refugees, people from other cultures. Abraham portraits the code of hospitality, Jesus welcome this sick woman in the synagogue and healed her. We have to welcome all people which are excluded in our society: poor, immigrants, people with other culture, LGBTQ people and others. Workings as a mission co-worker serving in Colombia, I have learned that some churches in United States love to send missionaries overseas. And we, the mission co-workers are immigrants in those countries. But, I learned that some of these churches which send missionaries, don't like immigrants in their own country. Migration and Immigrants is always an opportunity to listen what God is telling us from these communities. So, one honest step to be a Peacemaker church today is to welcome to all people of God.

B. To be a Peacemaker church today means to act and behave different that our violent culture. People use arms violently. People use hate language. People abuse sexually to vulnerable communities. People practice emotionally and psychologically violent. People use the Bible and religion to condemn people because they are not straight, because they are undocumented immigrants, because they have different beliefs, because they have different culture. In the middle of this culture of violence, we have to be critical of this system and to decide to be a Peacemaker church. A church where the Bible is used to

liberate people and not to condemn them. A church that express a humanized and ecological religion (I mean center in the care of the earth and the whole humanity). Peacemaker church means to read the Bible and religion critically, reforming our approaches to them, looking for respect to all people and the whole humanity and care for our planet. Peacemaker church means to have a language that express solidarity, empathy and inclusivity as expression of the grace, mercy and love of God.

C. Finally, to be a peacemaker church today means to be a group of people that provide a safe place and environment, where individuals can migrate from one understanding of the Bible to another one, from one opinion to another one, from one life style to another one. Migration not only relates to displace from one geographic location to another one. Migration refers also to the openness to change thoughts, understanding and concepts. Changes are good in the life when it takes to live the plenty life that Jesus wants to everyone. Migrate to a better understanding, which allow us to enjoy the life that God has for us is always welcome for our lovely God. May God bless our life and makes us a Peacemaker congregation in this part of the country.