

“Our VOOM! Power”

Isaiah 1: 1 – 15

Using “The Cat in the Hat Comes Back” from July 2012

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Rev. Dalene Vasbinder

In the beginning.... God.

In the beginning, God created.

In the beginning, God created and it was good. It was so good; life, light, beauty, peace.

But then things got messy.

Eating the apple, sin of pride, Cain and Abel...Genesis stories, those “Creation/ in the beginning – how to explain how we got where we are now” stories, how we got into the mess we are in...and how those messes at times seem to just get messier.

There are those huge messes – throughout history we have had war upon war upon war, most of them caused by human greed, the desire for resources or power – many in the name of religion or security but history often proves those to be false motives. The huge mess of environmental destruction hits us in the face in the name of progress: vast stretches of the rain forest mowed down so that multinational corporations can have land on which to graze their beef, mountaintops in Appalachia lopped off, ruining streams and ecosystems for coal; areas of the sea are now labeled ‘dead zones’ – places where nothing lives due to pollution; glaciers melting, rivers and lakes dirty and unswimmable.

We look around the world and see those economic messes that we have created; huge agribusiness that makes the small farm unaffordable, that measures food by yield instead of quality or taste, that uses pesticides that pollute the land and fertilizers to put nutrients back into the land because it’s so tired of giving birth all of the time to new and bigger crops.

Everywhere we look we see the messes of the world; the Herald-Leader reports on abused young children who have fallen through the cracks, on the pill mill epidemic in our state resulting in an increase in crimes and death.

Oh these messes we’ve gotten ourselves into; collective, societal messes – and those personal messes as well. We mess up our bodies with the choices we make – eating or drinking too much, not exercising – we mess up our lives with bad relational choices or continuing patterns of family dysfunctions or continuing to

carry the past with us full of guilt or hurt or resentments that spiral out of control and hurt others, creating even bigger messes....

The prophet Isaiah, in the very beginning, names the messes of the people of Israel, with God stating, “When you stretch out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you, even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.

As James Kemp writes in his book, “The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss”, we have trashed the world and we have trashed ourselves.

In the beginning, it was good...and then things got messed up and the mess just seems to grow and grow and grow....

A ring in the tub! And, oh boy! What a thing!
A big long pink cat ring! It looked like pink ink!
And I said, “Will this ever come off? I don’t think!”
“Have no fear of that ring” laughed the cat in the hat.
Why, I can take cat rings off tubs just like that!”
Do you know how he did it? WITH MOTHER’S WHITE DRESS!
Now the tub was all clean, but her dress was a mess!
Then Sally looked in. Sally saw the dress, too!
And Sally and I did not know what to do.
We should work in the snow but that dress!
What a spot! “It may never come off!” Sally said. “It may not!”
“Ho Ho, I can make the spot go.
The way I take spots off a dress is just so!
See here!” laughed the cat. “It is not hard at all.
The thing that takes spots off a dress is a wall.”
Then we saw the cat wipe the spot off the dress.
Now the dress was all clean but the wall! What a mess!

I DO feel sorry for the children in the story. They seem innocent enough. The mess wasn’t their fault, after all. Oh, they DID open the door to the problems but then it just spiraled out of control. How innocent were they? And is the Cat in the Hat a creature of good or of evil...or of both? It’s not just black and white. There are grey areas, just like life. Life IS complicated, it’s messy at times, sometimes no fault of our own – life happens. We turn away – sometimes in despair and sometimes in apathy – after all, the mess isn’t our fault.

Those sins of commission – knowing and doing something wrong, and those sins of omission – the failure to step in and do what one can...they are both sins,

contributing to the mess of the world. And God turns God's head, says the prophet Isaiah, "I will not listen, your hands are full of blood."

In the beginning, God created and it was good and then we made a pretty good mess of things. And we continue to make a pretty good mess of things. Luckily for us AND for the world, that's not the end of the story....

And I bet you can't guess what he has in his hat.
He has something called VOOM.
VOOM is so hard to get
You never saw anything like it, I bet.
Why VOOM cleans up anything, clean as can be.
The he yelled, "Take your hat off now, little cat Z.
Take the VOOM off our head.
Make it clean up the snow,
Hurry you little cat one, two, three go."
Then the Voom... it went VOOM!
And, oh boy! What a VOOM!
Now don't ask me what Voom is. I never will know.
But, boy! Let me tell you it DOES clean up snow!
"Ha ha, So you see!" laughed the cat. "Now your snow is all white!"

From the prophet Isaiah, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow."

Our faith storyline goes like this: God created and it was good, life is complicated and messy – sometimes by our own fault and sometimes no fault of our own – but there is a power greater than we are, unseen but present, that can and will wipe clean up the messes in our world and in our lives.

Isaiah spoke to a people surrounded by a mess, surrounded by destruction in a world crumbling from without and within. The prophet spoke words of hope that no matter how scarlet, how severe their sin appeared, how big their mess seemed, God could take it away and they could start again. Or, they could reject the new path and be destroyed.

'The Cat in the Hat Comes Back' has a happy ending. The mess is cleaned up with the power of VOOM!. Voom – though small, puts the entire house in order. For those of us in the Christian community, that 'VOOM' power is defined by us as the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ... the Lamb of God who washes

away the sins of the world. Voom is the restoring power that came with Jesus...the one who came into our world and comes into our lives to clean up the messes, the sins of the world.

There is at times the temptation to parallel our faith story too closely with a children's story. With our language we say that Jesus died for our sins, that all our sins are forgiven, wiped clean, that this mysterious power of VOOM has come into the world and we are innocent bystanders/recipients, watching it do it's magical cleansing.

There is more to our story. Our story doesn't have Jesus appear like the smallest cat in the hat with the power of VOOM and clean things up. Rather, all throughout the Bible, this power of VOOM is there for us to tap into, for us to turn to. God gives us the power of a new beginning, gives us a new path but it is our choice to follow. Jesus shows us the way, points to a God of love, but it is our move as to whether we will open our hearts to that God of love.

The good news is that for all who trust in God, for all who open their hearts to God, life can begin anew, no matter how hard you've hit bottom or how impossible a situation may seem, transformation can occur, messes can be cleaned up, beauty and wholeness restored. In his book, Kemp writes, "In small towns and suburbs across the nation, people put out their garbage on the curb if they want it hauled away. Christ invites us to do this very thing with the garbage or mess that has found its way into our lives. We can place it on the curb, knowing that the Lord will soon pass by and take it away so that we can be reshaped to become the persons God intends us to be."

To Kemp's words, I say, "Amen". But before the Lord can take the garbage away, we have to first identify it, then decide to let go of it, to place it out on the curb. Through our turning, through our confession, in opening our hearts to God all of our messes, big or small, can be made clean.