

The responsive God

Readings: Genesis 6:1 – 8, Luke 13:31 - 35



Who knows who this couple is?

They are April Kepner and Jackson Avery from Grey's Anatomy¹.

Last season of the show they got married. This season they are having a baby.

Perfect story right?

Trouble is the baby in April's womb is very sick and won't survive. Together they have to decide what to do about this.

April calls out to God for help and struggles to get any response.

April is a Christian; Jackson isn't.

There is a very poignant scene where Jackson goes to the hospital chapel to pray for the woman he loves. Now remember he doesn't believe in God.

"God..... *pause*

I don't know if you are out there or not

Or if you even hear people who don't know if you are out there

Or if you give a crap about what they say

..... but God, Yahweh, Buddha, ET whatever

April knows and she believes and she needs you

So uh show up for her – please?

Show up for April

She loves you, she needs you

Please – show up! For her!

Please.

And God does show up. God responds by giving April (and therefore Jackson) what she needs – strength to face the coming ordeal with their baby.

¹ Grey's Anatomy is a medical soap opera based around the key character of Dr Meredith Grey. It's a bit cheesy at times, but I find it a very interesting character study around contemporary issues.

OK, it's television. But I'm sure we can all give examples of God's response to us or others we know. (I will ask you to share some of those examples briefly later on in the service.)

God always responds to what is happening in God's world. It is not always in the way we expect or want. But God always responds.

The story of the flood in Genesis is one of the most terrible stories in the Bible. We tell it to children with smiley-faced cartoon characters. But it's awful!

Let's look at the text:

(I'm not going to get into the 'sons of God' or Nephilim at this point in time.)

Verses 5 and 6

The world could not get any worse than it was at that point. The Message puts it like this:

God saw that human evil was out of control. People thought evil, imagined evil—evil, evil, evil from morning to night. God was sorry that he had made the human race in the first place; it broke his heart.

What is going on here for God? You might be very surprised at the Lord's reactions as we look a little deeper² at what Scripture says about God's responses:

1. The Lord regrets making humanity "I am sorry I made them" God says in vs 7.

This is very interesting! I want to take a moment to get you thinking about what this, and other passages that express similar sentiments, might mean. It would appear that these events have taken God by surprise. If he knew all the detail of what would happen, would God would regret any of it? Mostly we assume that God knows everything; there is nothing God does not know – 'omniscient' right?

But what if, God chooses not to access all the knowledge he could?

There is a tension in Scripture around this:

There are several surprises for God in many of the stories³ – usually they are not good surprises. Yet Scripture also says that God is able to know the future and he reveal it to people at various times.

Perhaps this tension has to do with God being outside of time. God is not contained within our time systems; nevertheless God is working out a plan that does occur

² Genesis for Everyone, John Goldingay 96 - 97

³ Twice the Bible says that God repented for something he had done in the past. Genesis 6:6-7 and 1 Samuel 15:11

within our earthly time frame. Perhaps God chooses frequently not to avail himself of knowledge outside of that time frame.

This doesn't mean that when God is surprised by what happens; God is not overcome or helpless. No God is God – all powerful and will continue to work out his plan for the good of all creation.

Anyway, go away and ponder the implications of that thought, but be clear - Scripture does say that God regrets having made human and animal creatures.

2. God feels pain. God's heart was grieved or broken. The Creator had spoken earlier and all things were fashioned with such love. Now the created beings broke the Creator's heart. Adam and Eve experienced pain in working the land and giving birth. God's parenting and work is also painful.
3. God's third response is to blot out created beings. Complete annihilation. God's back is turned on all he made. He apparently abandons the work of his hands. People have stuffed up so massively that all of creation is impacted in the worst possible way.
4. And yet, in the midst of despair God brings grace – he creates a glimmer of hope. Noah found grace in God's eyes. No reason is given; there's nothing special about Noah. It is the Lord's sovereign act of grace to keep a remnant. God's plan always includes a remnant. Noah and his family were ordinary imperfect humans. Yet Noah and his family were the recipients and the carriers of God's grace.

That still leaves us with a two big questions:

1. Was there no other way for God to work out his plan than the flood?
2. Does God still cause 'natural disasters' today?

What do you think?

All our answers are partial answers aren't they?

It is important to note how God feels when he responds with judgement. God said:
I take delight, not in the death of the wicked one, but in that someone wicked turns back from his way and actually keeps living. Ezekiel 33:11

The destruction of the wicked in Noah's day broke God's heart. It wasn't part of God's original plan.

Whatever questions remain, there was no other way for God's salvation plan to advance. God, who is love, would never choose destruction of his created world if there was any other way.

God's final response to the evil of humanity is grace. At no point is there any talk of anger here. There is no talk of God's anger anywhere in Genesis. God's responses actions bring about judgement at times, but never from anger. God is a God of love and God always responds to his creatures in love.

Some people would give a resounding 'yes' to the second question: does God casue natural disasters. After the Christchurch earthquakes some people said they were God's judgement.

Really?

There are several possible responses to that including gross human negligence in stewardship of creation. Clear explanations are found on a website called Kingswatch.co.nz ⁴

The most acceptable answer for me is expressed in Romans 8:19 - 21

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time

Nothing in creation now is as it should be. It's all marred. The Lord continues to experience great pain because of that.

Let's take a brief look at our New Testament reading.

Here we see how the future of the capital of God's chosen people is linked with that of Jesus himself.

Jesus has come to Jerusalem because it is the centre of the Jewish world. It's the place where many of God's chosen people live. Jewish men were meant to come to the temple in Jerusalem three times each year for various feasts.⁵

The picture of Jesus' longing for his people, like the longing of a mother hen, to gather her chicks under her wings, is such an intimate one. This response is full of tenderness.

⁴ http://kingwatch.co.nz/Christchurch/causes_of_the_christchurch_earth.htm

⁵ Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Festival of Booths. Deuteronomy 16:16

Every Easter we are reminded it was in Jerusalem that Jesus was finally rejected and crucified. And yet even in that rejection God's response, displayed through Jesus, was one of love.

In Christ's tenderness we see again God's pain. God's response is again to blot out. This time though, the Lord chooses not to annihilate his people but rather to annihilate their sin.

This is the response of a God who agonises for his people and provides grace. Wonderful grace.

Just as all of creation suffered from human sin; so all of creation will benefit from that annihilation of that sin.

Some hold the view of a god who created the world and then left it to its own devices. There is nothing further from the truth. The loving Creator God has responded throughout human history to his creation. The tender-hearted God continues to respond to his world; to us.

The Lord's responses are not always what we'd like. We wouldn't have chosen death for all those people way back then. We wouldn't have worked out grace in that way.

When we pray for God's intervention today we must remember that we are not God. We don't have the whole picture. God will respond in the best way possible. That response is always a response of love in and through Jesus however it appears

In such times we need to remind ourselves who serves who. Who is God? We don't serve a God whose role is to meet all of our demands. It might take a while for us to work through but our response to God's response, needs to be humility and obedience.