

The New Humanity, April 27, 2025

Ewen Todd

“When the world unravels, can we pick up the stitches, or must we start again.”; from Pastor Lisa’s Schrott’s sermon of April 20, 2025. In the next 20 minutes or so, we are going on a journey from the violence of humanity within a few generations of Adam, God’s reluctant solution, and despite God’s working with his chosen people, we seem to be in the process of unraveling that new humanity created after the Flood, even after the coming of His Son to dwell amongst us. To reinforce this, I will take you through a metaphor of the world being a refashioned pot building on the potter vision that came to Jeremiah about 2600 years ago. I will conclude with a warning expressed by Peter in his Second letter to the churches in Asia Minor not to be complacent about the risks we face. New Testament professor N. T. Wright said maybe the Bible reading should come after the sermon so that the Word is what remains in the congregation’s ears, not its exposition.

The story of Noah and the ark is probably one of the best known even if you have never read the Bible; children draw as many animals as they can going in the ark two by two from the largest to the smallest. And the Biblical Noah has been the butt of jokes over time. I asked ChatGPT to create limericks about Noah which I then modified:

There once was a grand wooden ark, that sailed through the rain and the dark. With animals aboard, And Noah as lord, they floated o’er the hills and a shark.

When Noah stepped off from the ark, he found a world fresh and stark. With a rainbow in sight, He felt pure delight, and thanked God for a place to park.

After months on the ark, Noah’s wife finally snapped and yelled, “Noah! I’m sick of all these stinky animals! The lions roar all night, the monkeys throw things, and don’t even get me started on the skunks! “Noah sighed, looked out at the endless ocean, and said, “Look, honey.. I told you we should’ve just taken the first cruise that we both liked, but I was too busy chopping down gopher wood (hard to find) and left it to you, but you kept on searching the web for the cheapest cruise you could find, and look we only just made this one on time before the gates were shut.

Yes, we make fun of Noah and his family, but strip away the storybook elements of passive animals and hopeful rainbows, and what you have in the story of Noah’s Ark is a tale of despair, destruction and desperation, depicting the worst mass killing in human history. The flood was a divine response to humanity's wickedness, wiping out all but Noah, and those he brought aboard. This Flood story, adapted from ancient Mesopotamian tales, emphasizes the need for humans to control their sinfulness and maintain a relationship with a just and merciful God. Even though it is ancient, the ark is still in the news today as mentioned in an article in the Jerusalem Post of April 7 where it describes a claim that remains of the ark were found on Mount Ararat, and recent tests have yielded positive results [2].

Environmental Consequences of Unheeding Warnings

Also, did you know that Noah traveled beyond this planet? The Noachian System and Period is named after Noachis Terra (lit. "Land of Noah"), a heavily cratered highland region west of the

Hellas basin on Mars when it was wet millions of years ago [3]. A place where there is robotic exploration today for signs of ancient life. Was this a place where life once existed and then died out? A sobering thought for us!

On our own earth, warnings about violence (Hebrew, *hamas*) and environmental crises persist. Ismar Schorsch of the Jewish Theological Seminar compares Noah's story to our global climate crisis, highlighting that collective small actions have led to significant damage [4]. Climate change disproportionately affects vulnerable populations, such as Kiribati island villagers forced to become refugees due to sea level rise. Climate change is both an environmental and social justice issue, impacting the most vulnerable in our society. One example we all know about is *Hurricane Katrina*. Experts had predicted that the New Orleans's levee system was insufficient, but funding for improvements was cut, and the warnings were largely unheeded. When Katrina made landfall in 2005, the storm surge overwhelmed the levees, submerging 80% of the city. Over 1,800 people died, and entire neighborhoods were washed away.[5]. The floodwaters exposed deep societal failures, including racial inequality, government inaction, and poor disaster preparedness. However, from the ruins, New Orleans began to rebuild, strengthening the levees, overhauling disaster response policies, and emerging with a renewed sense of resilience. Katrina served as both a catastrophe and a lesson, warning of the consequences of neglect but also providing a second chance. Also, did you that that extreme weather events as a result of climate change can increase demand for blood supplies while also limiting supply, leading to blood shortages when they're most needed [6]. Or without bee pollinators there would be no more broccoli, avocados, apples. or almonds.[7]. In the words of a Mohawk thanksgiving prayer, "We have been given the duty to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living things."

How the Rabbis Discussed the Meaning of the Flood Destruction

As Ismar Schorsch reviewed the Midrashim documents on the Flood, he read that rabbis over the years saw the deluge is an instance of divine regret and repudiation [4]. God would not rest from creating until the result became a source of everlasting satisfaction. God thought, "*If I run the world on the basis of compassion, sins will abound. If on the basis of justice, the world would not endure.*" *That is why God runs the world with both justice and compassion, if only it will survive!*" (B'reishit Rabba 11:15). Against this backdrop, the flood stands out as the final phase of the creation story. No more exterminations by water. God settles for less than perfection. The covenant with Noah after the flood binds God to what exists: "*Never again will I doom the earth because of man, since the devisings of man's mind are evil from his youth*" (read earlier by Dorinda VanKempen). Rabbi Abbahu's claim evokes the image of a master craftsman or artist, whose handiwork is the end product of many arduous efforts. It doesn't come out right the first time. Centuries before, Jeremiah had dared to conceive of God as a potter. What the prophet beheld in the workshop was a craftsman accustomed to failure: "(Jeremiah 18:1-6). "*This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ² "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message." ³ So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. ⁴ But the pot he was shaping from the clay was spoiled in his hands; so, the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. ⁵ Then the word of the LORD came to me. ⁶ He said, "Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel."* Suppose a new Jeremiah revisits this potter image of a lovingly created world trying to get it just right. What would that be like? Imagine this prophet standing right here,

what would he say? So, let us explore that vision what it might be like stretching back from God's initial thought to where we are today. As you listen, maybe you could imagine a different ending. Feel free to share.

The Imagined New Jeremiah's Story

In the beginning God had an idea to bring something beautiful into His universe, and He thought to himself He would act like a potter, and so lovingly He created a ginormous pot of clay but included a smattering of stardust for the essential elements of life, and then expanded it further as life started to grow inside, and it glimmered with imaginative textures and colors shimmering inside and out as that life thrived under His guidance, and this whirling ferment started to bring harmony out of the original chaos illustrated by sounds of music ebbing and flowing to complement the pulsating colors, and God was so pleased with His work. Then, He wanted to share it with one of His creatures, the earth people, and He made them such they were able to absorb His creativity to manage his Creation. But then as time went on, He noticed dark liquids welling up inside that were starting to spread outwards showing unseemly black splotches throughout the fabric of the container, and the music became strident as tritones filled the air. Its original shimmering appearance started convulsing, and the colors dimmed. He knew it was the work of these earth people; they acted as if they knew better than Him. But when the color of blood showed up in the inside of the foaming pot, He knew it would only get worse, because instead of blessing His Creation, they were disrupting it. So, as violence inside increased, He reluctantly dropped the whole pot into His pond, and it started to dissolve away until all the black and red had been removed, and it was shiny and bare. Now what, He thought? Then, He started to savor something offered to Him, without Him asking, a precious piece of life that had been saved from the washing, and freely given to Him by an earth family whom he had protected during that washing time. Then, he remembered that these earth people contained a spark of Himself, and He was pleased once more. But He knew that even this family would not be perfect and its succeeding members down through the ages would fail time and again in rebellion against him, but He loved that special creation, these dirty earth people, because they were specially made to have part of Him in them. He decided He would have to love as well as instruct these rebellious earth creatures no matter what wrongs they did. Perhaps what was in them was not only His creative power but also His curiosity and imagination, but they certainly lacked His wisdom.

And so, the potter started working again. This time He merged the bright colors with the earthy hues and the dark and red splotches, so they were now a part of His design. And when they whirled together with harmony, he felt that this new work was good, even if it changed from His original thought. He then decided it was wise for Him to choose one small group of these earthy people to show to the other parts of the pot His intricate weaving of texture, color and sound blending together that it would be admired and copied by other earthy creatures. But no sooner had they started to show promise, than this small group fell away again, and the colors and sounds dimmed once more. It seemed to be a hopeless cause. He said, "They simply don't understand that My rules are for their benefit. There must be a way of perfecting these people" and He said to Himself "It can only be done if I actually live with them in that special original small part of my design". And so he did, and the pot developed new visions of His plan for a few of the earth people to see and learn, and from there he hoped these visions would spread His favorite colors and sounds so that some other parts of the pot were at least were in tune with His vision.

But unfortunately, it was not complete enough. The knowledge and imagination of these multitudinous earth people expanded to disrupt the very foundational texture of the pot; it seemed to them it was now more of their creation than His, to be able to be exploited and modified. There was always a force of evil lurking in His world, but now with increasing violence, that seemed to resist His great vision for a peaceful kingdom for all his creatures. Did they not know he was offering a cosmic redemption for all in the pot? If it continued, He knew the consequences for His beloved Creation as it started to unravel, but did these earth people not know the endgame they had created? Most of these creatures felt unwilling or powerless to make the necessary changes to their lifestyles. In His potter world He saw that oxygen-giving plankton were being replaced with toxic strains, and fish were dying as the waters heated up. Even if they didn't pay attention to these environmental impacts, surely these earth people would notice the abnormal weather patterns directly affecting them: land being inundated by rising seas; frequent heavy rains with extensive floods, hurricanes and tornadoes; the scorching heat and wildfires; people displaced from their homelands? He had given them the ability to solve these problems with their creative powers, but the land was simply used for profitable ventures. Rapacity, covetousness and power dominated the pot once again, but now there were so many more of these greedy leaders with lack of vision that the poor became poorer and the rich richer. Power turns their heads, and they lack mercy and kindness to those who get in their way. How that hurt Him as he looked into the ferment. They were no longer the peaceable neighbors who wanted to share what they had with others in His Kingdom, where empathy and love are essential for all living creatures. His carefully crafted ecosystem was disintegrating away; did they not realize that their lives were dependent on all these other creatures including the microorganisms, plants, and pollinating insects? Do they know that fifty despised houseflies can lay enough eggs for their larvae to convert nearly half a metric ton of pig waste into compost [8]? He needed to bring back the wild once again to be full of throbbing life! He had given these earth people dominion over his created beings to be life-giving, not life-manipulating and-destroying.

God had promised not to purify the pot again at least in the same way, but could He simply let it self-destruct? Would it come to some violent end? Would He dissolve it away, not as before with a flood, but with fire to be repopulated with a faithful remnant redeemed through His sacrifice? Maybe these rebellious earth people will bring their own fire to complete that task? What if He said, *"I have other worlds that are more amenable to my creative abilities. Why should I waste time on this one?"* Then, he remembered his original purposes for His glorious peaceful kingdom with all his creatures living in harmony under His caring guidance, promised by the prophet Isaiah in the passage read by Emmie McKillops, and there were some who heeded His commands and understood His vision. So, he said to Himself, *"I will set My presence set among them as never before experienced, for I was hidden to most before, but now I will reveal myself in My true glory. Then, the pot will be ever so brilliant reflecting this glory with colors and music, and the brightest light yet, beyond description, and the people will live in a pleasant land with all of Creation so clearly present that they can see the largest and smallest of my creatures and how they intricately manage the environment and marvel at My works"*. So, what do you think of our New Humanity on this Creation Care Sunday? Are we able to learn to collaborate with all of nature including ourselves? Then it will truly be a peaceful kingdom for our new humanity. *"The people will praise me, and I will bless them. But they have to show up when I call them!"* He is calling us now. Are we ready? As Pope Francis said in his 2023 Laudate Deum *"human life is*

incomprehensible and unsustainable without other creatures.... all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect. Let us think of ourselves differently, in a humbler but more fruitful way". So, can we pick up the stitches, or must the world continue to unravel? One small thing we all can do is reduce food waste in our homes and ask warehouse companies to end their use of excessive packaging. Also, let us not associate with the scoffers in Peter's Second Letter to the churches in Asia which is given as a warning for all of us to be ready to prepare and respond to any human-made or heavenly judgments to come. So, hear the Word of the Lord from Second Peter chapter 3.

2 Peter 3. The Promise of the Lord's Coming

3:¹*Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. ⁴ They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."⁵ But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. ⁶ By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. ⁷ By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.*

The Word of God for the people of God

Thanks be to God

Lord, we thank You for the beauty and wonder of this Earth. Help us to cherish and protect it, to live in harmony with all living things, and to be mindful stewards of Your creation. Grant us wisdom and courage to make choices that honor and sustain the world You have entrusted to us. Guide us how to address climate change and its impacts, so that we may preserve Your creation for future generations. Amen.