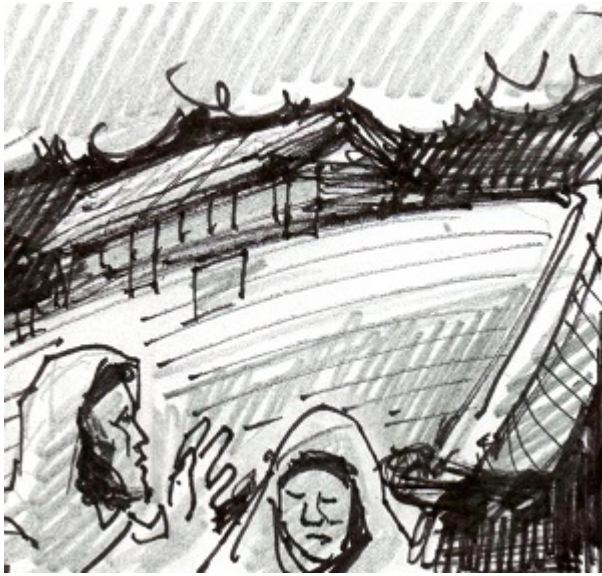


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by Pat Marrin

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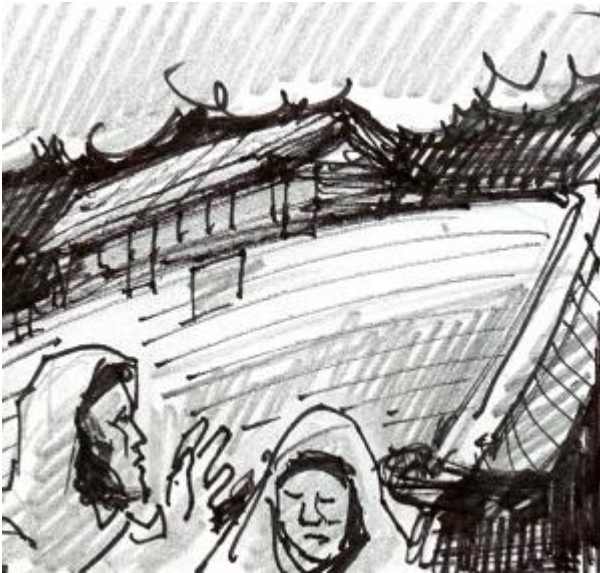
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“Guard against the leaven of the Pharisees ... and of Herod” (Mark 8:15).

Gen 6:5-8; 7:1-5, 10; Mark 8:14-21

The flood story in Genesis, like the Mesopotamian saga it borrows from, is about the collapse of the cosmic order because of human sin. The upper and lower waters of primordial chaos, separated at the Creation, flow together again as the sluices of the heavens are opened to submerge and destroy the world. Unlike the original myth, the biblical version is a story of hope and recovery by Providence. Noah becomes the second Adam, father of humanity, for his heroic obedience in saving the future in the ark.

If Creation itself is the first mystery that reveals God (Why is there a world instead of nothing?), then the introduction of Evil into God’s beautiful garden is the second mystery. How could this tragedy have happened? Genesis attempts to explain that God’s absolute goodness had to allow human freedom if mutual love was to occur. If humanity could not say “No” to God, its “Yes” would be meaningless. Sin is the prerequisite for Grace. If divine-human friendship, not naive servitude, is the goal of history, humanity must be the cocreator of the Beloved Community God wants for us.

The world of Noah shows what Original Sin caused as deception and selfishness expanded exponentially to destroy right relationship within the created order. Jesus describes this same permeating poison when he tells his disciples to guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. Evil finds a hiding place in the heart and acts like tasteless, invisible leaven as it spreads throughout the dough and

transforms it.

It is remarkable that Jesus describes the self-righteous Pharisees and the utterly debased Herodian court as examples of the same corrupting enzyme at work. What distinguished them was that Herod was wantonly vicious while the Pharisees paraded respectability as cover for their hidden vices, making them not just corrupt but hypocrites as well.

The disciples are slow to understand the metaphor but all too susceptible to the reality as they compete with one another for prominence and argue about who is the greatest. Even after witnessing the miracle of the loaves, they do not grasp that the expansive love and generosity Jesus proposes can be countered by expansive hatred and selfishness. Jesus knew how easily they could be seduced and predicts that they will all fail before they understand the paradox of his suffering and death at the hands of a corrupt system in Jerusalem.

We do not need to look far to understand how quickly corruption spreads in any system when leaders tell lies, undermine trust and seek their own advantage by sowing confusion and doubt, pitting people against one another to distract from the looting that assaults institutional stability and erodes shared principles and values.

The antidote to evil is to replace its leaven with love and truth. We are the leaven that must permeate the world to inspire it to choose community over chaos.

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