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Genesis 6:5-8

> The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the Lord said, "I will wipe mankind whom I have created, from the face of the earth - men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air - for I am grieved that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.

This passage provides the bedrock on which Christian social work is founded. We find in these verses the essence of history, a glimpse of the character of God, and a framework for our helping.

The world, in this account, is in a mess and God is in pain. The creation which had delighted God is now in turmoil. The gap between the beauty of creation and ugliness of evil is so great, we find God nearly overwhelmed with grief, so much so that he is sorry he made mankind, so much pain he thinks of destroying it all.

Social workers know the feeling. We have seen the gift of childhood crushed by sexual or physical abuse. We have watched as the beauty of family life was destroyed by a parent a with alcoholism. We have seen enjoyment of life die as the harsh realities of poverty took over. We have ached as we have watched the marvelous human body wither away under the ravages of AIDS. We have felt the anguish of those who have been discriminated against because of race or ethnicity. We know, like God, something is very wrong and it hurts to the core of our being. We have felt the pain so deeply that we, like God, wonder if life is worth it. We, like God, know this is not the way things are supposed to be.

But God did not destroy his creation. He began a process of reconciliation - taking individuals one at a time, groups one at a time and remaking them. First there was Noah, then Abraham, Issaac, Jacob - on and on throughout history. God cared enough to not give up on his creation. He cared enough to send his son, God incarnate, to live among us, suffer for and with us, that we might live again.

This passage can, oddly enough, give us hope and inspiration. As friends of God, we are here to carry on his work. In spite of the pain around us, we, like God, care enough about the painful situations people are in to hang in there. We are called, as Paul says in II Corinthians, to be ministers of reconciliation. We take the child with a

shattered soul and try to find healing. We immerse ourselves in the painful world of a family in distress and work for peace. Rather than run from a world of injustice, we struggle for justice.

As we feel the pain of broken lives and see the evils of twisted culture, we can move beyond despair and offer hope.

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