

“After the Storm”

Trinity Sunday, June 16, 2019

Genesis 6-9

Covenant Presbyterian Church, Madison WI

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Excerpts from Genesis 6.5—8.1

The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.

So the Lord said, “I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.” But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord. And God said to Noah,

“Make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you. And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female.”

Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.

The flood continued forty days on the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. The waters swelled and increased greatly on the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters.

And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, domestic animals, wild animals, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all human beings; everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. And the waters swelled on the earth for one hundred fifty days. But God remembered Noah.

Tomorrow afternoon, our church will be buzzing with activity with 35 kids coming in for our Vacation Bible School. Their theme is “Arkeology” and the focus is on this account from Genesis 6 thru 9.

The curriculum looks great, with age-appropriate focus on what the Bible says about Noah, the flood, the animals, and God's love.

But there is more to the story than a smiling man and happy animals. These chapters tell us about human nature and about God's nature. We need to set the story in context.

In Genesis 1-3, we learn about creation, and the refrain in Genesis 1 is clear. Creation is good. But then in chapter 4, things go downhill fast.

Tensions grow between Cain and Abel, two brothers. God cautions Cain about sin, that is "lurking at the door" to pounce on him. But Cain disregards the caution and he kills Abel.

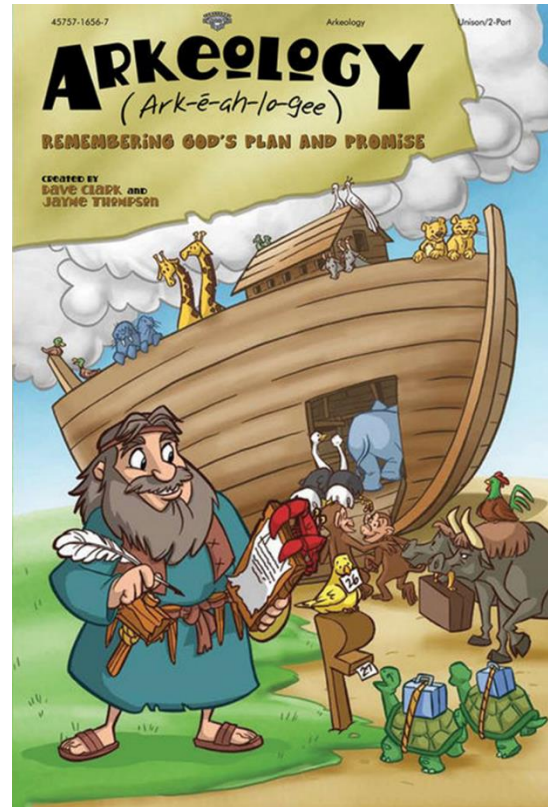
This leads us to the beginning of chapter 6 which you heard a few minutes ago, with God being angry and saddened by the wickedness in the world.

So the text tells us that God takes this drastic and quite frankly horrific action of flooding the world, to start over again, with the one righteous family, the family of Noah. The language is blunt and disturbing: all other people are destroyed.

This is where we need to remember that we can't read biblical texts like this as science or as history. As Presbyterians, we don't look at Scripture through a lens of literalism, but rather as a text inspired by God to teach us God's will and God's ways.

And we also are people of Good News, so we are always looking for the Good News.

We get a hint of good news in Genesis 8, as the narrative continues. We read that God remembered Noah and the animals, and how the rain stopped. Then we read how Noah sent a dove out from the ark, and the dove came back with a branch, so Noah knew that the waters were receding.



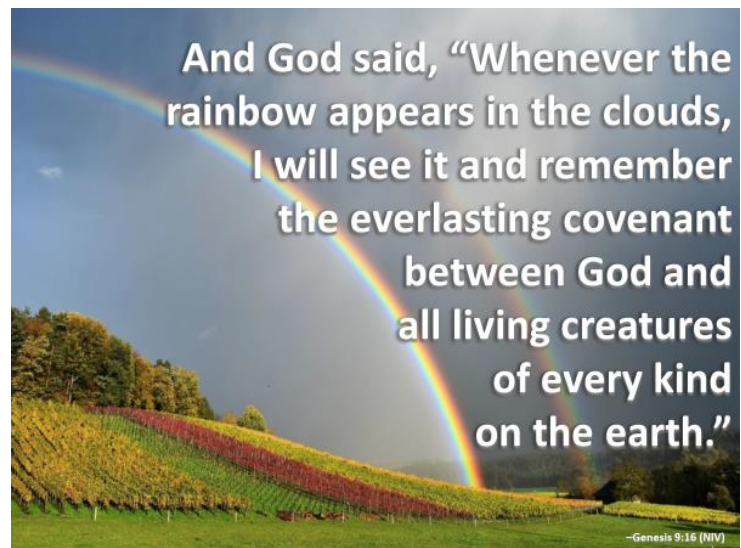
Noah offered a prayer, and then we read:

The Lord said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. -Genesis 8:21

Humanity hasn’t changed, but God has. God seems to recognize the way that we humans are, and God decides to make this commitment to us in the form of a Covenant, a promise. Listen for God’s word in Genesis chapter 9.

God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.”

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my



covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.”

Happy Trinity Sunday! Today we celebrate and acknowledge that the Christian God is one in three and three in one: Father, Son, Spirit. Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. While as a pastor, I'm tempted to offer a lengthy discourse on the theological and historical background of the trinity, we're not going to do that today.

Since today is the day before our "Arkeology" Vacation Bible School we're focusing on Noah. But to help us appreciate Trinity Sunday, I'm going to offer three key lessons from the Noah narrative, and I'm going to illustrate those three with three Scripture verses each.

Lesson #1. God loves us.

Despite the fact that we sin, that we do stupid and foolish and selfish things, despite the fact that we turn away from God, God continues to love us. This is the core message of the covenant, made with "hesed", what is often translated as steadfast love.

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. --Psalm 103:8

This refrain is common in Scripture, recognizing that God isn't happy with human sin, but the underlying affirmation of faith is God's love.

The message is echoed in Isaiah, God's word for people in exile:

This is like the days of Noah to me:
Just as I swore that the waters of Noah
would never again go over the earth,
so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you
and will not rebuke you.

For the mountains may depart
and the hills be removed,
but my steadfast love shall not depart from you,
and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,
says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

--Isaiah 54:9-10

That same “steadfast love” appears here. This covenant love is God’s way of not letting us go.

We see a similar message in Romans, where Paul wrote:

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. –Romans 8:38-39

So God’s love is for everyone.

Genesis makes it clear: every living creature.

Not just the Presbyterians.
Not just the white landowners. Not just the religious leaders.
Everyone. Including gay lesbian bisexual and transgender people.

3 Lessons for Trinity Sunday

I. God loves us

“This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.”

--Genesis 9:12

I wrote about in our weekly email, this love of God includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. But I feel like I need to mention this again, because on Friday night, I read about a minister with a job in law enforcement, and this minister recently said from the pulpit that LGBT people should be arrested, tried, and executed.

<https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/14/us/tennessee-preacher-cop-lgbtq/index.html>

How tragic that this message of hate comes from a supposed church leader. We who recognize God’s love of all creation need to be strong and clear and loud in affirming a message of love.

God loves us. All of us.

Lesson #2. God is with us.

In the Genesis reading today in a couple of places it says “God remembered Noah.” Even though we might forget God, God doesn’t forget us.

That’s the truth of the gospel. We read it in many places in the Bible, including one of the best loved parts, Psalm 23, the Good Shepherd psalm:

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I fear no evil;
for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.
--Psalm 23:4

We read it in the birth of Jesus:

. . . they shall name him Emmanuel,
which means, “God is with us.” --Matthew 1:23

And we read it in the last words of Jesus according to Matthew:

Jesus said: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

--Matthew 28:19-20

Lesson #3. God has high hopes for us.

God gives Noah and his family a second chance, repeating the promise from creation:

God blessed Noah and his sons,
and said to them,
“Be fruitful and multiply,
and fill the earth.” --Genesis 9:12

“Being fruitful” in a biblical sense means more than having kids. It means being productive, making good use of the days we’re given.

Jesus told his disciples:

I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit.... --John 15:5

And the apostle Paul wrote about being fruitful, saying that the fruit of living in the Spirit of God includes:

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. --Galatians 5:22-23

God has high hopes that we would be fruitful, that we'd make good use of our time and resources and opportunities.

So after the flood, after the storm, when Noah got off the ark, I have a sense that he realized these three things

1. God loves us
2. God is with us
3. God has high hopes for us

Noah got a second chance, a fresh start, a new beginning. He got a sense of clarity about God, life, and purpose.



There are certain moments in life when we get that kind of clarity

Our son graduated from high school yesterday. It was an exciting day.

As the graduation speakers shared their inspiring and encouraging reflections, I found myself thinking about Jesus' words to the disciples, to let them know that God had high hopes for them

From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required.
--Luke 12:48 (NRSV)

Great gifts mean great responsibilities.
-Luke 12:48 (*The Message*)

We get clarity at dramatic moments of life, clarity that God loves us, and is with us, and calls us to live a life of purpose.

Sometimes that clarity comes at times of celebration, like graduations, or baptisms, or weddings.

Sometimes the clarity comes in times of challenge, like health issues, or death, or job loss, or relationship challenges.

Wouldn't it be great if we could get that clarity every day, even on a regular plain old rainy Sunday morning?

Let us pray.

Welcome

Trinity Sunday

Vacation Bible School starts tomorrow

Noah's ark theme

Next Sunday—festive musical, kids present Good News

Picnic following worship

Right here

Prayer list additions:

- Lois Cosmides (coz-ME-dees), friend of Mary-Beth and Peter Hughes, nearing end of life.
- Covenant friend Shu Chun Hsu, dealing with a health concern.
- High school youth and advisors departing tomorrow for a week in the Boundary Waters.

Father's Day

Joys to share

- Congratulations to our graduating high school seniors and many blessings in your new adventures! (a list of the graduates is on p. 3 of the bulletin announcements.
- Today's floral bouquets celebrate two more wedding anniversaries!

Poppelbaums 40th and Madsens 55th