

Sermon: After the Flood

Good Morning! Today, we conclude our series on Noah and the Ark. Throughout these weeks, we've been able to see that this isn't just a children's story. It's very much an adult story. Its themes are complex and they are particularly relevant for us today. Last Sunday, we looked at the storm that flooded the earth. The flood is a metaphor for our lives and the storms we go through. Right now, we're in the storm of the coronavirus – a global storm. We never thought we'd be here but here we are. And so, we looked at the in-between time. In the Bible, it's the time between God seeing us and the time when we are fully delivered by God. And it's important time in the scriptures. This pattern of waiting, seems to be the norm for God's people, almost like it's a necessity, during which God works in us in multiple ways to prepare us for a new future ahead.

Today we're going to look at what happened after the flood. Noah and his family and the animals are finally going to get off the ark. It's been almost a year now that they've been on the ark and the flood waters have been receding for a couple of months. Noah's thinking, "Ok, maybe its time to get the animals off the ark. So, he sends a raven out to see if the raven will find land and the raven comes back. Then he sends out a dove and the dove comes back because there's no place to go. Seven more days go by and another dove is sent out and this time, the dove comes back with an olive branch in its mouth and there's excitement on the ark, things are growing again and with that comes food. But it wasn't quite time yet to get off because the dove came back. So another week goes by, and Noah sends out another dove and this time, it doesn't come back. Which means its safe now to get the animals of the ark.

Genesis 8:15-17: Then God said to Noah, "Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth." And this phrase "be fruitful and multiply comes from the Adam and Eve story and its saying that this is the 2nd creation story. God scrapped the first creation. Creation is starting over again with Noah and his descendants.

But what's interesting here is that God has to tell Noah to get out of the ark. You'd think that after being cooped up for 12 months, stuck with all the stinky animals, that Noah would be running off that ark.

But Noah had to be told by God to get off the ark. I think sometimes, when we go through the storms in our lives, sometimes we're scared to get off the ark. We get used to the trauma, the fear, used to the grief, used to the resentment – we get used to being in survival mode and this story reminds us that there comes a time, when the storm is over, when God says to us, “I know that you've been through hell on earth. But you need to get off the ark. You need to trust me some more. I've been with you this far, I'm not going to leave you now. It's time now for you to move forward again.”

The ark comes to rest on Mt Ararat, a 17,000 foot high mountain and Noah is going to step off the ark and Noah is going to be in a place that he never intended to go and he's going see things he never imagined he'd see. And Noah has just got to be overwhelmed with the prospect of having to start all over again. That happens to us when we go through these storms in our lives and we wind up in a place sometimes we didn't even imagine we would be - having to do things we never thought we'd have to do. How do we move forward?

When my first husband, Mike, was put on the transplant list, we waited in that storm for 6 years before the call came. At that time, you were put on the transplant list because they considered that you only had a year to live. On the transplant list, you couldn't go anywhere. You had to stay within a short driving distance of the hospital. But Mike astounded them all. He made it 6 years before the call came. And when we got that call, we rushed to Loyola University Hospital where Mike was immediately wheeled off to surgery to receive a new heart. After the surgery, I remember the surgeon coming in and saying how well it went. Mike was put in the transplant ICU for some days and then moved to the transplant unit for a longer time. And during all that time, during all those weeks, I never left the hospital. I slept in the visitor waiting room. A shower was made available to me. After 6 years of the hell of waiting for that call, living in the fear that at any time Mike could die before that call came, when we were finally moving forward, a I'd been in that hospital for some many weeks, a strange thing happened. I started feeling afraid. Now there was a lot of fear during these weeks, terror even when Mike went into the surgery, after the surgery, with each step and back step there's concern the transplant but this was different. I'd become afraid to leave the hospital. I could not get myself to get in the car and drive.

Nothing like this had ever happened to me before. I called my father and told him, “Dad, I don't know what's going on with me but I think I might be having a little PTSD or something. I'm afraid to drive.” He came down, we got in the car, and he said, “Now, you drive. I'm here with you.” And he just acted like it was any other

day. We went to the pharmacy, I picked up some prescriptions. And after that, I wasn't afraid to drive anymore. Sometimes when we need to get off the ark, when we are overwhelmed with the prospects, God is with us through those who love us and are brave enough to get in the car with us.

In the ensuing months ahead, there would be many more times that were overwhelming. But I would never be overwhelmed like that again. And it was my family and the people in the church where I served, those with medical backgrounds who stayed with Mike when I couldn't be there, others offering meals or doing shopping trips, they prayed for us and they gave support in so many hands on ways, as we inched our way forward into a new day. You know a transplant isn't a cure, it's a treatment. After the flood, things are never going to be like they were before. But eventually there does come a new normal. And with God's help and the help of our faith community, we were given that space of grace to get out of the ark and start moving forward - adjusting and gaining some confidence in this new world that we were in.

In this story, Noah again shows us what faith looks like. He steps off the ark, he's in a place he's never known before and the first thing Noah does – soon as he gets out of the ark and he worships God. He builds an altar and offers burnt offerings of thanksgiving to God for seeing them through the storm. Noah's trust and obedience to God will remain steadfast.

There are two main characters in this story Noah and God. Noah is such an interesting character. He's an example to us of faith and shows us what faith looks like. He's righteous, blameless and he walks humbly with God. He's an example of trust and obedience. And we're supposed to be like Noah. But in the end, the decisive and most interesting character is NOT Noah but God.

Who is God? That's really what this story is about. And more to the point, the story of Noah and the Flood is about the question of how God will deal with a world in rebellion. How will God deal with us (!) even when we are disobedient and destructive?

And at first, it looks for all intents and purposes that God is our worst nightmare. God is like Bill Cosby's father when he was a teenager. "I brought you into the world and I can take you out."

But then it appears as if God changes his mind. God changes – God repents – twice in this story. First, he repents that he ever made human beings in the first

place. But in the end, God repents for the flood. “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,” God says. This is the first covenant between God and humanity in the Bible.

“As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.” Those are the words of the covenant.

A covenant is supposed to be a two-sided contract. Both parties agree to act in the future in a certain way. But in this covenant – this astonishing turn from God’s judgement to God’s assurance – there is no promise given on the human side: no repentance or resolve going on here. The inclination of the human heart is as “evil” at the end of the story - as it was at the beginning. Nothing has changed in the inclination of human beings.

All that has changed – and decisively changed – is God’s resolve to remain faithful to his creation in spite of us. In this story, it’s not humanity that moves closer to God in order to resolve this crisis. It is God who moves closer to us.

Walter Brueggemann writes: “There may be death and destruction. And evil has not been eradicated from creation. But we are now assured that these are not rooted in the anger or rejection of God. The relationship of creator to creature is no longer in a scheme of retribution. Because of a revolution in the heart of God, that relationship is now based in unqualified grace.”

So often people think that the God of the OT is a God of anger and judgment and the God of the NT a God of grace and forgiveness. But that’s not true. From Noah’s story and from here on out – God will embark on a long history of saving a disobedient humanity that resists God’s purposes and will over and over again place the world in jeopardy. That’s what follows in the rest of the OT and it will culminate in the saving grace of Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected.

I cannot do without this story. I cannot do without the God who has promised never to forsake or leave us, come hell or high water. I cannot do without that God who has promised to set a rainbow in the sky as a sign of an everlasting covenant, and who tells us, “Do not fear, I am with you.”

It is that God who finally emerges from the story of Noah and the Ark. It is that God whose love is from everlasting to everlasting. Amen.

Sermon Video

<https://youtu.be/HbB-oB36jzo>

Musical Accompaniment

<https://youtu.be/h03TU3o1teQ>