

Sunday, August 16, 2020 Genesis 6-9

Noah and the Ark

We continue in our “At Your Request” summer series with today’s focus being on “Noah and the Ark” which is one of many well-known stories of the Old Testament. Artwork or different images of this story show Noah on the boat with many animals all around him as the sun shines. But if we look to the story of Noah and his family and what led to this scene there was much that was dark and dreary mixed with wickedness, death and destruction and this is often not shared.

The story as recorded in Genesis 6-9 occurs because God saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the Earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of the people’s hearts were evil. God was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth and it grieved him so he comes up with a plan. “I will blot them out all except Noah” for Noah had found favour in the sight of God. Just how bad were the people of the earth? How evil were they to cause God to be sorry for what he had created which was good? How wicked were the people that God grieved and prepared to destroy them all?

The other question that we raise is how did Noah find favour with God? He was righteous, blameless and walked with God. He and his family were good people and lived according to how God had instructed. Yet when we think that Noah was the 10th generation after Adam’s time on earth, the world as was known had not improved with each generation, God saw evil and wickedness and he grieved what had occurred. And he wanted to do something about it. God decides to return the earth to its pre creation state except for one family and a boat load of animals and creatures.

Just think about Noah and his family. It is beautiful outside and they are gathering all the supplies they need to build a boat. They live inland somewhere far away from water and their neighbours see them not building a nice big house for the entire family to live in but a huge boat. They were mocked, made to be foolish and even teased. But it is not like Noah in his goodness to tell them why. God told him to build an ark and to prepare it by filling it with food supplies for a long time- food for not only his family but food for all the animals too. He would also need to build it strong enough to withhold the weight of the animals and supplies, and that it would float and not leak. It needed to be safe for all who would live in it.

Noah does what God asks by following his instructions and builds this big boat with three decks, a roof and with the door on its side. God then tells him to round up the animals –a male and female of each kind and bring them in the boat. He also told him to bring in 7 pairs of animals who were clean and a pair of animals who were not clean all in order to keep them alive on earth. And the creatures came from all over! Noah then had one week to organize it all and let them in because after this, it would rain. Once every animal and Noah's family were inside the large boat, God shut the door. Then "the windows of heaven and the fountains of the deep opened up" and the world returned to the watery chaos of the time before creation. The sequence of the flood is the opposite to the creation, the flood first covering the earth to the highest mountains, then destroying birds, cattle, beasts, "swarming creatures", and finally people.

It rained for 40 days and nights which in biblical phrases is a long time. Noah and his family looked after the feeding and cleaning up of the animals regularly. It was dark outside and inside. It rained and as the water levels rose the boat floated and then rode the waves and moved steadily in the wind. For 150 days the waters swelled on the earth covering everything and all that had lived on dry land died. One can only imagine what Noah's family was going through during the time of the rain and being on the boat.

As of today it has been 152 days since the stay at home order was issued on March 17 and we have been living through the COVID19 global pandemic. We have been able to go out and get essential items like food and living with electricity, water, heat and air conditioning. We have been able to do some errands and tasks. Essential workers have been great in all that they have done and many people worked from home. For Noah and his family this global flooding that they experienced involved a lot of work and they grieved the deaths of friends extended family and through the dullness of each day and its general routine they would have become depressed as they grieved all what they had lost. They did not see the sun rise or set as the sky was covered in darkness and they could not see any form of life. They saw rain and water all around them. They were living on a huge boat and everything that they knew as familiar was now gone. Once God shut the door of the ark, their lives had changed forever. They knew that God was flooding the earth because he was grieving what he had created. But there was hope. Why?

God had told Noah and his family to stay in the boat, keep safe, and look after all the animals that were there too. One day they would emerge from the boat and new life would begin. This is what we can relate to in this time of covid19. There is hope. We are slowly seeing

changes happening in the right direction in Canada. As Stage 3 enables us to gather in larger groups, and now with discussions of school reopening soon there is hope. Details of a safe plan will emerge as new information is shared and agreed upon. But we must be like Noah's family- and be patient. Just because the rain stopped they could not leave the boat. It took a long time for the flood waters to rescind, for dry ground to produce vegetation and for the sun to create heat enough for plants to mature.

But in the meantime, Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth and their wives worked hard in the boat- feeding and cleaning up after the animals, day after day. They had no other tasks to do- no internet, no books to read, no musical instruments to play, no connecting by telephone, or zoom meetings—there was no one outside of the boat! Only the fish of the seas roamed freely. Then, after a while the water stopped rising. A couple of months later the ark stopped moving about and eventually mountains appeared. A dove was sent out and it returned. A week later, it was sent out and it returned with a twig of an olive branch. It was sent out again but it did not return Why was this significant? As the waters receded, the earth began to grow vegetation of different kinds. When the dove was sent out the first time- no trees; yet the second time it returned with a twig a sign of life bursting forth. When it did not return it could make its own way to live.

Once the dove did not return what is significant about the story of Noah is what occurs as the family emerges and steps forward onto the earth. Noah and his family built an altar and offered burnt offerings to God. This pleased God so much that he blessed Noah and his sons and told them to be fruitful and multiply. He also established what is known as the covenant of Noah. God said, "Never again shall a flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." As a sign of the covenant God made he stated, "I have set my bow in the clouds and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth." A new world was begun with Noah and his family. The rainbow in the sky reminds us of God's promise not to again destroy the earth. But what other learnings might we glean from Noah's story?

When we think of this family locked inside a huge moving boat we can almost imagine the discussions between the family members—they had a whole lot of choices for food but could they cook what they liked? They had been inside for so long the idea of fresh air was not possible unless they went above deck and got wet. But they knew that God would not forget them and they were cared for.

Once God closed the door of the ark. No one else would be saved. All human life was lost except for Noah and his family. The animals which emerged from the ark were able to multiply and be like the creatures God had first made. Yet when Noah and his family left the boat there was a new beginning similar to when Jesus rose from death and offered forgiveness and new life. As Christians, we believe that Jesus' resurrection offers us this new hope for life and we must believe. An older song about the Noah and the Ark asks this simple question, "*Are you in the ark? Or are you outside? O don't hesitate, you'll be too late, the door's open wide. Are you in the ark?*" This song tells the story and then the lyrics proceed, "*Now Jesus' is God's ark today and in Him you must be. His side was opened wide for you and me on Calvary. If you're in Him and He's in you then you'll be lifted higher. When God comes back to judge the world next time in flaming fire. Are you in the ark?*"

God's covenant with Noah was the first of many because He wanted people to worship, follow and love him as their creator. But from the time of Noah until the prophets foretold of the Messiah, people entered into covenant with God but then turned away. With the flood and destruction of the earth, God's creation is given another chance to follow His way of life and love. And we are reminded of this when we remember Jesus' baptism when he rises up from the water, a descending dove appears and the voice of God tells all who are listening that Jesus is His Son and we are to listen to him. But we must have faith and believe.

After Jesus' baptism people started to follow him as he preached, taught, healed and performed miracles. Jesus asked those who heard him to trust and put their faith in him. Noah's story is about his faithfulness to God. We read in Hebrews 11:7. "By faith Noah, after he was warned about what was not yet seen and motivated by godly fear, built an ark to deliver his family. By faith he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith." This led to other generations coming to know God by faith and entering into covenant with him. But when the prophets spoke of the Christ who was to come people started watching and waiting for this messiah.

As we celebrate the sacrament of holy communion we remember what happened that night when Jesus had eaten the Passover meal with his friends. He took a a loaf of bread, gave thanks and broke it. This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. Then he took the cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me." As we honour the New Covenant made by Jesus let us lift up the faith of all who have gone before: all those who when facing difficult challenges, losses, suffering, hurting, pandemic or diseases, wars, conflicts, battles and destruction for they believed in God

and had faith that hope would come. We might look at the pictures of Noah in a different way when we realize what he and his family endured. But we also know what Jesus did for us by dying and rising again. Let us by faith share love and have hope that will see us not only in these days of global pandemic, but in the new world which will soon emerge with hope and faith,

Let us pray: God we thank you for Noah's faithfulness to you to do what you asked and to endure the full consequences of life and loss or work and new possibilities. Enable us to grow in our faith so that there are possibilities and challenges anew that await us always. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.