

## **That Sounds Familiar: Noah and the Ark**

Genesis 9:8-17

First Presbyterian Church, Charlotte, NC

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8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him,

<sup>9</sup>As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>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.'

<sup>12</sup>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: <sup>13</sup>I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

<sup>14</sup>When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>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.'

<sup>17</sup>God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.'

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Think about your earliest memory of hearing the story of Noah and the Ark. Try to remember what that scene looked like in your mind's eye.

The Scriptures we have chosen for our summer series are all stories that most of us have heard before. Even if you are pretty new to this Christian thing and haven't spent much time reading the Bible, my guess is that you will have heard of most of the stories that we will cover this summer.

For others, the stories we will read are ones you may have learned at Vacation Bible School or on a felt board on a Sunday morning in church.

What did you first remember about Noah and the Ark?

For me, it was a song.

*Oh the animals they came on, they came on by twosies, twosies, elephants and kangaroosies, roosies...children of the Lord.*

I learned this song sitting around the bonfire at Camp Grier when I was a camper there many moons ago...

When I was a child, what stuck out most from this story to me were the animals.

Two of every kind.

That really must have been a BIG, and *MESSY* boat!

But what about the fish? I guess the reason there is no mention of them is pretty obvious. They must have fared quite well during the flood.

But weren't there animals that God might have left off the boat – like mosquitos and cockroaches?

And how did the lions not eat the antelope?  
And how did Noah keep the lemmings from jumping off board?

An ark that is chock full of animals sailing beneath a rainbow is a captivating image for a child. Perhaps that is why so many nurseries are painted with a Noah's Ark theme and many a children's playroom have wooden arks with pairs of animals (and perhaps an extra Lego figure or Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle thrown in).

Yet what I didn't notice as a child were the deeper, more threatening parts of this story. I never considered what must have been happening outside of the boat when the waters began to rise. The naivete of my youth prevented me from asking how – only four chapters after pronouncing that all of creation was "good" – God could take such a decisive, destructive action.

Irrespective of the questions kids do not ask, we would do well to take seriously what children notice about this story. More than just smiling animals and pretty rainbows and a shiny Mr. and Mrs. Noah – children understand in ways that many of us adults forget that God's promise and God's commitment weren't just to Noah and to human beings, but to **all** of the creation! Which means that **all** of creation is both worth saving and is important for us to take care of and respect.

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When we grow older and hear this story again, we notice different details. Unlike the figurines in my kid's playroom, I cannot imagine Mr. and Mrs. Noah wearing smiles after they experienced what they must have experienced on that ark.

As we grow and begin to understand ourselves as responsible adults – who face and make choices that impact our lives and the lives of other people (in addition to the way our choices impact the rest of God's creation), what we wonder about this story of Noah's Ark is **why** the flood happened. What triggered it? What provoked God to unleash the waters from the heavens and the fountains of the great deep?

Read this story again and you find that God was so disappointed with the way human beings were behaving that God expressed sorrow that he had even created us at all.

On this side of the flood, what can we learn from the mistakes of our past?  
What kind of behavior would cause God this kind of grief?

In a lot of ways, this is a dangerous question. Because since human beings were created, it has always been easier for us to point out the sins of others rather than our own. And then easier to believe that these sins are the root of all that ails us.

Pay attention the next time there is a tragedy that people describe as an act of God: a flood, a hurricane, something that results in a catastrophic loss of life. There are usually people who want to lay blame – who seek to interpret the event through the lens of a particular sin...a sin of someone else. Whether it be sins of the flesh, or of communism, or capitalism, or secularism...there are always those who are quick to blame.

But go back and read the Bible. What was the sin that grieved God's heart?

"I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them."

Think about the headlines you have read in the past couple of weeks.

The world that God created failed to find a way to live peaceably with one another.

And for this reason, God was sorry.

One of the reasons why I love Scripture so much, and why we ascribe authority to God's word over all other sources of authority is because this book is much more than a collection of stories with a moral point and it is much more than a history of a particular group of people. The Bible is not a static document. It is not a museum piece that we can examine under the glass. The Bible a book that lives and breathes. It reveals to us who God is and who we are. In the words of Walter Brueggemann, the faith that is transmitted in the Bible is, "a memory that is transformed and extended each time it is told."<sup>1</sup>

Do you see? If we only read stories like this one of Noah's Ark as an account of history from a long, long time ago we miss the point. This is a story that reads us – and it continues to speak into our life in order to reconcile us with God and with one another.

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When you read this story of Noah's Ark long enough you find that it is really not a story about Noah but rather, it is a story about God.

From the time Noah is chosen to build the ark to the time the flood waters finally subside, Noah never speaks a word in this story.

God issues a summons for Noah to build the ark.  
God makes a plan to continue creation.  
God causes the waters to cease.  
God forges a covenant with Noah.  
God puts the bow in the clouds as a mark of that covenant.

God, God, God, God...

It is important to note that even though Noah was chosen because he was a righteous man, and blameless...he didn't stay that way. After the flood, the people on the earth reverted to the same behavior they had practiced before. The nature of the human heart did not change – even when exposed to such judgment and such grace.

What did change was God's heart.

Before the flood God resolved to wipe out what God had created.  
After the flood God resolved never again to allow a flood to destroy all flesh.

We talk a lot in church about the sovereignty of God.  
Essential to our faith is a belief that God and God alone is able to act with a will and a power that is completely unfettered.

How then does God choose to exercise that sovereign will?  
God chooses to make a covenant with his people.

And then, when God's people break God's heart, God chooses to make a covenant again.

And when that covenant is broken, God does it again. And again. And again.

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<sup>1</sup> Brueggemann, Walter, Genesis (Interpretation Series Commentary), p. 3.

This is the God we worship and serve.

The God who made a promise to Adam and Eve. And to Noah. And to Moses. And to Abraham. And to the people of Israel. And to the gentiles. And to the world – through the power of cross.

This is the God we worship and serve.

The God who makes a promise to claim us – as we witness in the covenant of baptism. The God who makes a promise to welcome us – as we find when we share the cup of the New Covenant that is sealed with Christ's blood.

This is the God we worship and serve.

Even though we falter.  
Even though we fail.

God remembers the promise.

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Amen.