

**Flood and Promise || Genesis 6:11-22 & 9:8-17**  
**Rev. Drew Hanson || September 9, 2018**

There is a preschool at my old church in Los Angeles. In the preschool is a long hallway that goes between two classrooms and it was bare, and if I may say so, a little creepy. So the preschool wanted to brighten it up and decided to create a mural of animals marching two-by-two with a comic book Noah holding up a sign shaped like an arrow with the word “Ark” on it at the beginning of the hall. So now when kids walk down this hallway they are walking alongside elephants and giraffes and hippos and it’s a much happier hallway now. This hallway is a good depiction of how we teach the story of Noah, it’s one of our more popular children’s stories in church. It involves a big happy boat, a happy Noah, and happy animals walking up a happy ramp into that big happy boat as storm clouds – which we sometimes even depict as happy – gather to bring happy rain. And at the end there’s a happy rainbow! And they all lived happily ever after. That’s the happy children’s version that we see in books and painted on walls. But is that it? As adults, can we stop there? What does the story really teach us?

Children teach us a lot about Scripture, because they look at Scripture with fresh eyes. Sometimes, though, that’s awkward in a “Kids Say the Darndest Things” kind of way. I read a story this week about a children’s pastor telling the story of Noah to kids during the children’s moment, just as Vickie did this morning. She read the story and asked the kids to pretend they were there and after reading the story, “What did you see?” “What did you hear?” “What did you smell?” She was expecting kids to say things like “I saw two lions!” or “It smelled like a zoo” or “I heard a dog barking.” Instead, the first kid to raise his hand said this: “I hear the people outside the ark in the water screaming for help.” Needless to say, the children’s pastor was speechless.

We have tried to tame the story of Noah and the Flood for children, and it was a child who pointed out that this story cannot and should not be tamed. We need to look at this story with honesty and admit, there are some messed up parts of this story. This story has a lot of death. It's scary to think of God flooding the earth to get rid of all flesh.

## **Tell the Story**

So let's look at the story with fresh eyes.

At the beginning of the story, God says that he has seen too much evil, too much corruption, too much violence all perpetuated by people. The people God created. The people God created in God's own image. God is not corrupt, God's image is not corrupt, but sin has corrupted God's image in people. So God declares that he will destroy all flesh because of the violence and corruption he sees on earth. God does this because God is just, and in God's justice violence and corruption cannot be ignored. But there's a catch. Remember when we studied the book of Ruth, and we saw that God provided a sliver of hope when the barley harvest was beginning. In the dark times, God always provides a sliver of hope. In this story, God declares he will destroy all flesh because God is just but he provides a sliver of hope in the person of Noah because God is also merciful. In this story we see God's justice and God's mercy. God's mercy is shown in this sliver of hope when he sees that Noah was a righteous man, and orders Noah to build a boat. He gives Noah the dimensions and gives instructions on how to fill it with a male and female of every kind of animal. The ark is the vessel used to carry the sliver of hope. The sliver of hope for humanity and for every kind of animal. God's creatures will have a chance to start again. God's creatures will have a chance to begin fresh after God washes the world of the violence and corruption that had filled it. God's justice and God's mercy are on display.

The book of Genesis is all about the beginning of God's relationship with people, and in the beginning of that relationship we as God's people struggled with how God's justice worked with God's mercy. Should all flesh be punished? Should it be ignored or pardoned? These are the tough questions a story like Noah tries to provide.

So God makes it rain for 40 days and 40 nights. And the waters swelled on the earth for 150 days. Now these are the details we know and remember from the children's stories. Animals came two-by-two, it rained for 40 days and 40 nights, and everyone was safe in the ark. As the flood recedes, Noah releases a raven to fly around and see if it could find dry land. The raven couldn't find dry land so he sent a dove, and the dove found no place to set its foot so it returned to the ark. Noah waited another 7 days, and released the dove again. This time, it came back with a freshly plucked olive leaf. After another week, he released the dove and it did not come back, meaning there was plenty of dry land. That's how the flood part of the story ends. If we told the story of Noah from the top of our heads, many of those details we would remember and share. But there are details we leave out. These are the details that the little boy in that children's moment who said he heard the other people screaming thought of. What about everyone else?

Scripture is not afraid to show us the difficult side of this story or other stories. I think we are invited to face the difficult side. As Christians we are invited to face it with full knowledge that God is good, but also with the knowledge that we are not always good, and we can't always see God's full plan when difficulties arise. I think this is a good thing: Scripture doesn't sugar-coat reality. Bad things happen. We face difficulty all the time. In the story of Noah, as that little boy remembered, there is a lot of death. Genesis 7:21-23 says this: "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; <sup>22</sup> everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. <sup>23</sup> He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground, human beings and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark.”

Wow. That detail is left out of the Noah story in our minds. But let's face it. Let's face it without fear and in faith that God is good. Let's face that difficult situation in our lives and remember that God always provides a sliver of hope. Even if it seems that the flood waters surround you, God provides an ark.

As I said earlier, there's this interplay between God's justice and God's mercy. God's justice demands that the corruption and violence cannot go on, and God's mercy saves life. God's justice is that sin has natural consequences: violence and corruption lead to death. God's mercy desires to save us from death. God's justice is not without mercy, but God's mercy is not without justice. God's justice is not without mercy because he saves a remnant of his creatures in Noah and the animals. God's mercy is not without justice because the merciful act of cleansing the world is also justice served.

It's uncomfortable to face the difficult details of this story. I'm a happy guy, a positive guy, I would rather just stay with the happy parts. The happy animals and the happy rainbow. But life isn't like that. We are surrounded by corruption and violence. Corruption and violence have no place in God's world. We see corruption like financial corruption and moral corruption, we see violence from domestic violence to global war violence. Maybe that corruption and violence happen in different ways, and maybe we think we don't play any part, but remember what Jesus said about the violent act of murder: that even being angry or insulting is liable to the same judgment as murder. Life isn't always happy animals and happy rainbows. Well, let me change that. Life is not like

that now. But there is hope. There is always at least a sliver of hope. We have a life promised to us that no longer has death or pain. A life of peace in the Kingdom of God. A life of resurrection. We have that promise. We have that promise thanks to both God's justice and God's mercy. And that's how the Noah story ends, with all the details of the flood's destructive power on humanity, humanity also receives a promise.

That promise is a new covenant. A new relationship with God. It is a covenant that God creates with all flesh, humans and animals – all parts of God's creation that has the breath of life in them. He promises that he will never flood the earth again to destroy it.

### **A look at Jesus**

The sign of the covenant is, famously, a rainbow. In our translation, it just says bow. This word for bow is the same for the weapon like a bow and arrow. So, God sets a bow as the sign of this new covenant. Think of a bow and arrow, if the bow is shaped and oriented like a rainbow, which way is the weapon aimed? Up. I heard it said once that if you think of this rainbow as the weapon, the weapon is aimed up, at God. God promises that he will not punish the world like that again and instead invites that pain upon himself. God offers to take on the violence and pain, the injustice of the world, upon himself. Sin brings violence and pain and God offers to take that on himself. Does that sound familiar? If it does, it's because God does this on the cross. That's the story of Good Friday. Jesus took on the sin of the world and the pain and violence that is the natural result of sin upon himself on the cross. The sign of the new covenant at the time of Noah was a bow facing God and now, for us, the sign of the new covenant is Jesus' blood. We say it every time we celebrate communion. Jesus took on the violence of being nailed to the cross for us. God aimed the bow at himself for us. The sliver of hope God provides in the ark expands to an

ocean of hope in Jesus Christ and in new promises. We have the promise of a new relationship with God, one that is everlasting, thanks to God's justice and mercy.

Believing in Jesus and the power of the cross doesn't mean that everything is going to be easy or painless. Jesus even uses flood as a metaphor in a parable when he says that one man built his home on the rock, representing a life in Scripture, and another on the sand, a life without the Word. When the rains and floods came, the house on the rock survived, and the house on the sand did not. But notice that the rain and the flood still come to the man who built his home on the rock. We will experience floods in our lives. We are called to build our house on the rock of Scripture as Jesus says in the parable. Even when the flood in our lives seems impossible to survive, God provides an ark. Even when the flood in our lives seem impossible to survive, God provides the promise shown in the bow that he will not send a flood like that again. God always provides hope. Cling to that hope if you have lost sight of that hope. Rejoice in that hope if you have experienced that hope.

## **Conclusion**

The story of Noah is about God. It's about God's justice and mercy. It's about God's promise. It's about teaching us that in God's justice God will now allow the natural consequences of sin, like corruption and violence, to run rampant in the world he created. It's about teaching us that in God's mercy God takes on the consequences of sin, like corruption and violence, upon himself on the cross. In Jesus, we have the promise of freedom from corruption and violence, we have the promise of freedom from sin, we have the promise of hope. If you are here this morning in need to hope in the midst of floods, receive that promise. It's not the empty promise of some preacher, it's the full, just, and merciful promise of our loving God.