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Junefest Sunday

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Growing Green

God tapped Noah on the shoulder and said, “Noah, there is going to be a mighty rain. Build a boat. Not just any boat! This needs to be a house boat, a boat big enough for your family and for a barn.” Best I can tell, the word for such a boat is an ark and the unofficial definition of an ark is a floating barn. There are wonderful idyllic pictures of the ark with happy animals making their way into the ark. However, I would have to consider the situation if I were Noah. Death by water as the floods roll in or death by stench as I am stuck on a floating barn. However, Noah built, people mocked and the rains came. You know the story, Noah ushered in the animals two by two. Some slithered and others crawled. Some flew and others hopped, slowly but surely the ark was filled and the waters began to rise. For forty days and forty nights the rain fell. And if you read the last verse of the 7th chapter of Genesis, you will find these words, “the water swelled on the earth for one hundred and fifty days.” 150 days! How did they survive? I am quite confident that there was some discontent in the peaceable kingdom before they reached land and that cabin fever was a real issue! Finally, finally, finally – land. The waters receded and then a new reality set in. This was it! Noah and Noah’s family, this boatload of animals; that is all that is left. Friends, neighbors, extended family--even enemies--were all gone. Imagine that!

Growing up here in Indianapolis, we had neighbors not too far from us who had a bomb shelter in their back yard. I was so impressed with that bomb shelter. It belonged to a large family and if needed, there would not be much extra space, but I was ever hopeful that if the time came, they would make room for me. I had a plan to race over to their house on a minute’s notice and be standing at the entrance as the family prepared to go into the bomb shelter. I felt sure they would not deny me if I just happened to be in their back yard at the appropriate time, looking pitiful and desperate.

I had a place. I had a plan. Only one flaw - when all was said and done, when the destruction was over and we climbed out of the bomb shelter, what then? All the rest of my friends, all of my family, all of my neighbors would be gone. That is really something to consider isn’t it? Destruction so great that virtually everyone and everything is destroyed.

So it is with the story of Noah. He is left, his family and his boat filled with animals. I cannot even imagine his depth of grief for the destruction that surrounded him tempered by his relief to be alive.

So there they are, Noah, his family, the animals and God makes a covenant with Noah and with all of creation. Never again will God flood the earth. Never again will God flood creation, never again will God initiate destruction on such a grand scale, never ever again. The promise is sealed with a rainbow in the sky. The rainbow will be the reminder to God and to humanity of God’s intentions of grace in place of destruction.

For Noah and his family, life was forever changed. The same is true in many ways for all of us. I remember when we lived in Los Angeles back in the 80s and early 90s, environmentalists were sounding the alarm about oil, global warming, acid rain and much more. Of course, I was busy as were most of the people that I knew. Besides, we were doing our part. We were recycling, conserving water and composting. Yet, our little bit of conservation seemed to make little difference on the issues concerning the health of creation. Now, more than a decade later, the truth of our use and abuse has become not just a warning, but a reality! The question is, what are we going to do about it? I mean quite specifically, what are we going to do to alter the reality around us? Are we going to be a force for destruction or grace?

The God of Noah, the God of Abraham, the God of Moses, the God of Jacob, the God of Mary, the God of the Disciples, made a covenant with us, with all of us, with humanity, with the plants, and with the animals, that never again would God bring us destruction, God choose to offer grace instead. We humans have consistently made choices that have been self-serving, convenient, and in so many ways, destructive. How now do we choose to provide grace instead?

You may have read that our good neighbor Butler University is constructing an environmentally friendly building. Butler vice president Mike Gardner stated in an *Indianapolis Star* article that: “Going green is not cheap up front. The extra steps are likely to boost the construction costs 2 percent to 5 percent. But, he added, the annual energy savings should make up the difference during time. And, frankly, it’s the responsible thing to do.” Going green is a process and for most of us it will take time. We will be growing green. According to GreenBiz.com companies of every size are now asking, “What’s our green strategy?”

It is a great question for all of us. God has chosen grace over destruction. We, the people of the resurrection, we the church of Jesus Christ, we too are invited, expected, inspired to be good stewards not only of our offerings, not only of our time and our talent, but also of God’s glorious creation. What is your green strategy? When it comes to sharing this planet, what is your grace strategy?

We are all aware of easy steps of change – paying for and actually practicing recycling of plastic, aluminum, glass, paper; washing clothes in cold water; allowing clothes to air dry; using low watt and long life light bulbs; low flow toilets; turning off the water while we brush our teeth; saving and reusing rain water; when we replace a car, exploring hybrids or high mileage autos; composting; carpooling; taking public transportation; choosing products with reduced packaging; reusing items; reducing waste and reducing consumption. These are just a few of the first initial steps of good stewardship of God’s good gifts as we create a green strategy, a path of choosing grace rather than destruction.

God said to Noah, never again. What are we willing to stop doing, what are we willing to start doing? We have some materials that might be of interest to you on the table outside the tent. There are some books that you might want to borrow, some information about websites that could be instructive. Focusing on Stewardship is a part of our new direction at Meridian Street and if you are interested in joining a team of people to look at how we can grow green here at the

church, we would welcome your participation. Just leave your name on the table with the materials and you will hear from us soon.

God made a covenant with Noah, with humanity and with the whole of creation. God chose grace. What are willing to stop doing, what are we willing to start doing?

I read a book years ago about the hundredth monkey. This is what I remember. On an island in the Pacific, a group of scientists studied a community of monkeys. According to the book, fruit from the island trees would fall into the sand and the monkeys would pick up the fruit and eat the fruit, sand and all. Over time a few of the monkeys picked up the fruit and took it out into the ocean and washed off the fruit. A few monkeys began the practice, a few more copied the process, but it was the hundredth monkey that moved the entire community. For some reason when the hundredth monkey took a piece of fruit and washed it off in the water it tipped the entire community. Suddenly, all the monkeys in the community picked up the fruit and took it to the water. From that day forward, this community of monkeys washed the sand off the fruit before they ate it.

I have since been told that the study was bogus. However, I feel like we have seen this played out over and over again. When our daughter was in middle school, there was a brand of shoes that was all the rage. If you asked me, they were ugly, they were heavy and they were not worth the money. However, a few of the kids had the shoes and before long several of her friends had the shoes and then suddenly it seemed like everyone she knew had the shoes. I personally could not afford them though I had a full time job, but she has grandmothers and she saved her money until she could purchase her own pair. I remember when she tried on the shoes the store clerk turned to her and said in the most sincere voice, "Those shoes look great on you! You have got to have them." That is how it works. A few, then a few more and suddenly, there is a tipping point and it, whatever it is, becomes the norm.

There was a time when a few people had cell phones and now look around, most everyone has a cell phone. A few people, then a few more and suddenly the hundredth one, the tipping point, and everyone participates.

Now, imagine taking the same principal and applying it not to consumerism, but to environmentalism. Who knows, you or I may be the hundredth one so to speak, the tipping point. We may well be the tipping point toward change as we engage with the world around us. We can become the tipping point toward the faithful stewardship of the earth's resources. We, God's people of faith, are the tipping point toward grace.

God called to Noah and made an everlasting promise. What are we willing to stop and what are we willing to start in our lives as we live into the promises of God?

Look around. God has made a covenant with each and every one of us, it is a covenant of love, a covenant of grace. Now, what is your strategy for growing green, what is your strategy of grace?