

“Building Trust”

June 25, 2017

In the Beginning: (God’s) Family Drama – VBS Commissioning

I’d never thought much about Noah’s family and how all of this must have affected them. I was especially struck by the expression on Noah’s wife’s face in that video as if to say “We’ll get off this boat, won’t we?” **(SHOW SLIDE with question)**

And we can understand her, right? This wasn’t a quick thing. You have the building the ark (which is the same word used in Exodus when Moses is put into the basket). Not really a small boat, but rather the size of a very large cruise ship, with particular specifications and measurements to get just right.

Interestingly, too, it doesn’t have a rudder or sail. Noah and company will trust that this vessel will sustain them and that God will move it. As one writer says, this is “not a luxury liner, but a place of survival.”

Then there’s preparing the family for this journey on the water. Noah is described as one who is righteous (someone who loves God) and one who is blameless (someone who loves others). But I wonder what his family had to say when he presented this plan from God to build an enormous floating house when there was absolutely no sign of heavy rain - not a cloud to speak of - and told them they’d need to get ready for a long ride?

There’s the gathering the animals. The first video we saw is funny, but I can only imagine Noah trying to wrangle all of the animals, making sure that he has the right ones. And, again, the noise and the smell!

And then there’s the waiting – for days and days. Of course, all of the animals were calm, smelled good, and were docile, right? I’m sure that the family got along just great cooped up in this ark together!

Notice that in these chapters we don’t get any dialogue - nothing from Noah or his family - just the word from God and the writer’s assurance that Noah did as God said. But just imagine the conversation!

Yes, 40 days and nights it rained, but that wasn’t all. They waited until it was safe to go out, which most scholars figure was about a year! I can see myself giving that same expression to my spouse if we were stuck on a floating house with no knowledge of how this was going to turn out.

We know that many ancient cultures have a flood story that is similar to Noah as a way to explain why things are the way they are. We’re skimming over a couple of

chapters, but it's important to know that after Cain kills Abel, we're told that violence continues to increase.

God is deeply distressed - some say it's almost as if God is broken-hearted at the state of humanity - and decides to cleanse God's creation. And the account in Genesis comes from two traditions as it was written down, so we have some differences in which animals Noah brought on board and how long the flood ultimately lasted. Even so, the challenge is to consider Noah and the role he has in bringing hope for all of God's creation.

Noah is chosen by God to help with this task. Noah's name is well-known to most people even if we don't have a lot of biblical knowledge. When I say "Noah," you say "ark" almost immediately. The story of Noah and the ark is the stuff of children's books - and lot of baby stuff! Noah's Ark is still a popular theme for babies these days. The images of this old man with a long white beard and animals in groups of two is a very sanitized version of the account in Genesis.

At the outset, this seems like an "un-doing" of the creation that we lifted up last week when we began this series on Genesis. And yet this is really about God who is grieved over the state of the world God created. This is about God making a judgment, calling a man to be an agent of saving a remnant of that creation, and God ultimately redeeming the world and making an important promise.

There's something about how this starts - it's violence that grieves God. I can only imagine how God is grieved these days with daily news of terror - innocent people hurt and killed - not just far away, but even close to us. And we stand in the middle grieved, too - and trying to be confident in God's presence and power to overcome it with love.

Even after the flood is over, God speaks to Noah about the importance of human life and reminds him that human beings are made in God's image - that *imago Dei* that we talked about last week. Violence is a reason for God's deep grief and concern. Yes, God's covenant is with all of creation - not just Noah - but there's a deep truth about how we're connected to God and to each other.

After the flood, it's the wind (like the Spirit in Genesis 1 that hovers over the water) that blows over the land to dry it up. In light of God's promise and the rainbow that's connected to it, I wanted to show you the rainbow that we saw last week. Here's the picture. **(SHOW RAINBOW PIC)** I know a lot of people saw it, and it appeared after the news of more violence and death in our world. For the person who sent this to me, it was a reminder of God's presence in the midst of violence.

Here's the thing: God doesn't move forward with this promise signaled by a rainbow because human beings are all of a sudden without sin after the flood. Quite

the contrary - if we keep reading, we learn that Noah had his own struggles with drunkenness and family strife! God makes this covenant knowing full well that humanity will continue to struggle, and God will continue to grieve.

Is that a reason for us to pay no attention to the violence in our world? Maybe we're not directly involved, but how are we responding to the violence? How are we speaking up in the name of God who is deeply grieved by it? How are we standing against those actions that work against the good of all creation?

I said last week that going back to the beginning shows the best and worst of who we are – and of who we can be. Noah is not sinless, but Noah is righteous and blameless. Noah loves God and loves others. And Noah trusts God completely. It's not a small thing, and it's a huge challenge for us.

I've been struggling with the word "obey" and "obedience" as I look at Noah. Somewhere along the line, I've turned away from those words - perhaps because they've been co-opted by some who would use them for abusive and destructive purposes when it comes to human relationships. But God calls for us to obey - to be obedient - and follow God closely.

I'll be honest - the thought of God destroying in order to re-create and start again is a tough one for me. But maybe it's more important to remember that God created it all. God grieves at the violence and destruction, but still seeks to show us grace and mercy every day. This is God in whose image you and I are made image and who will not turn away from all that has been created. God seeks to save God's creation and will never stop trying. No one – nothing – is outside of God's care and love.

Yes, God judges. We can't ignore it and skip to a sanitized image of Noah collecting animals. But God also chooses to preserve creation, shows mercy, and makes a covenant - a promise that doesn't ever end. We're dependent on God's grace no matter what we do or don't do.

And it doesn't end with God's part of the story. We try to do God's will. We repent of our sin and accept God's forgiveness. We seek to care for all of God's creation. Are we willing to walk by faith and trust in God even when the plan seems strange and the outcome uncertain? When it's all over, Noah brings hope for all of creation - not just himself or his family, but every living thing.

And he builds something else later. After the dove comes back with an olive branch, which grows low to the ground and lets Noah know that the waters have decreased, God calls Noah and his family out of the ark just as God had shut them in.

When Noah gets off the ark, he builds an altar and offers a sacrifice to God. Noah worships God and gives thanks. We don't have words to a long prayer from him, but an act of worship after a long journey trusting and hoping in God.

We hear it often - that we have to trust in the Lord. Think about that verse from Proverbs: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart..." But how do we do it well? Can we take a lesson from Noah - even with all that we don't know - and trust that God who created us is also working to redeem us and sustain us - even when the future is uncertain?

I think about all of the people I've talked to this week. Some are connected here and some aren't. There are joys and celebrations all around, but many people are also facing uncertainty - the death of a loved one, continuing to grieve over loss, unemployment, transitions, eviction, the pain of losing a loved one to addiction, family relationships that are painful, feeling the pain of the world, and you can add to the list. How can we offer it to God - not because it'll take the pain away instantly - but because God is able to receive it and walk with us?

This week, we'll welcome kids into this space. And my prayer that we're helping them to trust in the Lord for all that's ahead for them. What a blessing - and a vital part of our mission to make disciples!

I invite you to join me in a litany before we sing "Trust and Obey."
O God, you always remain faithful to your covenant, even when we are unfaithful.

Grant us the faith of a servant like Noah,
who trusted in your Word, even when no one else did.

Grant us the faith of a servant like Noah,
who endured the ridicule of friends and neighbors, even when it deeply hurt.

Grant us the faith of a servant like Noah,
who chose to be righteous, even when society tempted him to be unrighteous.

Grant us the faith of a servant like Noah,
who stood on the solid ground of kingdom values, even when the world's values were easier to follow.

Grant us the faith of a servant like Noah,
who trusted only you.

Grant us the faith to live with confidence that your promises will be fulfilled in our lives.

Thanks be to God! AMEN.