

1 Sermon, December 29, 2013

Texts: Genesis 9:1-17

Title: "The Story of the Love of God: Noah"

1. The Bible has several types of literature
2. This is myth, which is about meanings
3. There is no satisfactory way to explain an actual world-wide flood, nor would all of creations species fit on an ark.
4. People are rotten, but God works with us anyway

1. The Bible has several types of literature

To speak of Noah and the ark is to speak of a story that many of us learned in Sunday School, and probably took literally at that time.

But before we get too far into the story, it's good to remind ourselves that the Bible contains many kinds of literature. The psalms are songs of praise to God. The proverbs are wise sayings. In the New Testament there are letters that were written from a person to a church. There are historical books, like Kings and Chronicles. There are even parables told in the Old Testament.

2. This is myth, which is about meanings

The story of Noah and the Ark is a particular type of literature, often called myth. Myth is something where historicity is not important, but it explains something about why things are the way they are.

Many ancient cultures had flood myths. There were flood stories in ancient Mesopotamia, the Puranas (from India), the Deucalion in Greek mythology, the lore of the K'iche' and Maya peoples of Central America, the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwa tribe in Wisconsin, and the Muisca people in South America.

The flood story in the Bible is gives us an explanation of why God puts up with us imperfect people. It explains poetically how God desires to be in relationship with us, but we rebel, and God keeps trying to find ways to bring us around.

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3. There is no satisfactory way to explain an actual world-wide flood, nor would all of creations species fit on an ark.

There have been many attempts over the years to explain physical origins of the flood myths, some attempts better than others.

There were undoubtedly great floods, but not covering the whole earth.

The biggest obstacle to the literal interpretation of the story is the idea that all species could fit on a ship, even a ship as big as described in Genesis. It's pretty far-fetched. Soil bacteria and fungus alone would be hard to keep in an ark. Add to this the weight of mammals and reptiles and amphibians and insects and you have something impossible. Scientists have named and cataloged 1.3 million species, and each year, researchers report more than 15,000 new species.

So, if we take away the historicity of the flood story, what do we have left?

4. People are rotten, but God works with us anyway

What we have left is the truth that the story tells us:

People are rotten.

God is not pleased when people are rotten.

God is willing to go to great lengths to make his people better.

God wants a relationship with us.

God is going to try to work with us.

God makes a promise.

All of that is true.

The Bible tells us that over and over again.

In fact, this Bible passage from Genesis tells us over and over again. God says to humanity:

Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.

You have charge over every animal of the earth, every bird and every creeping thing. I give you the green plants, too.

Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.

be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.

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I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you. 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."
"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*: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 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."
"This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."

So, God wants a relationship with us. God wants a relationship with all creation. God will be faithful. Will *we* be?

Let me take you through the story in a little different way.

The story of Noah and the flood gives us a poetic description of a world that's a mess; we can relate to the world being a mess.

40% of our fellow human beings live in "poverty" (1.5 billion people) or "extreme poverty" (the 1 billion people who earn less than \$1 a day). With little to lose, many of those extremely poor are deforesting the planet. Humanity is using resources faster than they can be replaced, and adding more and more waste. And the demands being placed on the earth are accelerating. Beijing alone, for example, now adds 1,000 new cars every day to its streets.

Then we have God using drastic means to cleanse the earth. But it doesn't work.

We can relate to that. When we try something drastic, it usually doesn't work.

Take the situation of rats in Hawaii. They came in on ships, and became a problem, so someone took drastic measures, and decided to import mongooses. It was thought that these mongooses would help control the rat population.

However, rats are active at night, and mongooses are active during the day. The mongooses had very little effect on rat populations, but they did make a big dent in native bird populations, especially by eating bird eggs. Drastic action didn't help.

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But then, faced with no ability to “fix” things, we cope. We ask ourselves what is really important, and it is seldom our own plans or our success. It comes down to relationships.

Can you relate to that? When all else fails, what do we have but our family and friends, and God? Whatever wealth we may have may disappear. Whatever plans we may have may come to nothing. Our own stubborn way may fizzle out.

But God will always be there for us. Unfortunately, it sometimes takes our plans failing in order for us to turn to God. And that’s happened to me, too. I have had to be humbled.

The Flood story tells us that God decided to focus on relationships; create a covenant with the people – all people, and with the creatures of the earth, too. God even decides to give himself a reminder. A rainbow would be a sign of God’s covenant with all humanity and all the earth.

God didn’t have to do that. God could have done a Donald Trump, and said, “You’re fired.” But instead, God decided to put up with ornery critters like us.

In fact, God takes a bow (as in bow and arrow), a weapon of war, and throws it up into the heavens and makes it a sign of peace.

Thanks be to God, who keeps on, even when we give up.
Amen.