

## *Second Chances*

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – June 13, 2004

### Sermon Background Study

Scripture Passages (NRSV)

Genesis 6:5-8

<sup>5</sup>The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. <sup>6</sup>And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. <sup>7</sup>So the LORD said, “I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.” <sup>8</sup>But Noah found favor in the sight of the LORD.

Genesis 9:8-17

<sup>8</sup>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.”

*Today is the second week in our sermon series, “Kids’ Stories All Grown up.” Today, we take a grown-up look at the story of Noah.*

#### A God Who Grieves and Remembers

There is not a lone portrait of God in the Bible. On my shelves, there is a book that looks at eight portraits of God; e.g. God as loving father, good shepherd, and righteous judge. None of the portraits are sufficient in themselves; all are important to grasping the fullness of God.

It is easy for us to bring to each a portrait of an all-knowing, all-powerful, changeless God to the story of Noah. But when we do, we miss so much of what is here.

In the story, God is sorry that he ever made the humans in the first place. In this, his grief is so sharp that it hurts God’s heart. God is not an angry and vengeful judge, but a grieving and pained parent. Despite the flood that “blots out” nearly all humankind, God is not remote or indifferent. God is not absentee landlord, he is deeply involved in all of creation, always caring, always loving.

A trap lies in the flood story. It is easy to get caught up in questions like: Could it really be *all* the animal species? How could the ark be large enough? Did water really cover the whole planet? Wouldn’t it have to rain 15 feet each hour for forty days to cover even Mt. Rainier, much less Mt. Everest? In the end, such questions are futile. Better questions are: What does this story tell us about God? Why such destruction? Why not just do away with humankind entirely? Did this fix the problem created by Adam and Eve? Why a second chance? As the community of believers, we’ve always affirmed that the Bible is “God-breathed,” inspired in a way unlike any other writings – God’s word for the people of God. Thus, another good question to ask of all Bible stories is, “Why does God want us to have *this* story told in *this* way?” We’ll try to keep these sorts of questions in mind as we look at the story of God and Noah.

*“People thought evil, imagined evil – evil, evil, evil from morning to night” (Genesis 6:5b from *The Message*)*

Once Adam and Eve made their choice to turn away from God, desiring to be like gods themselves, things went downhill quickly. Eve gave birth to two sons, Cain and Abel. Foreshadowing the

darkness that is with us still, Cain envied his brother and murdered him. As the generations proceed, the darkness would grow until, as Peterson renders it, “God saw that human evil was out of control” (6:5a). It is hugely important that we comprehend God’s response to the evil wreaked by his children.

God is neither angry nor vengeful. Instead God’s heart is broken. God grieves. The pain cuts into God’s heart like a knife. This is a portrait of a loving parent whose child has done something so heinous that, in her suffering, the parent regrets giving birth in the first place. The Biblical portrait of a God who suffers is not limited to Jesus on the cross. Here, in the very opening chapters of the Bible, we see a God who loves and desires to be loved; a God whose heart breaks when his children run from him. God as a loving parent is one of the most powerful images in the Bible.

*Uncreation?*

The biblical writer paints such a stark picture of human evil that one might think God will simply wipe out humanity, admit the experiment has gone tragically wrong, and pour out his creative energies elsewhere. Indeed, God’s judgment is swift and sure. A flood will cover the planet and every living creature on the land will be destroyed. In essence, it seems that God will “uncreate.” Or will he?

God’s act of “uncreation” is not complete. Water covers the planet, but God chooses Noah to carry on. Noah is to build a large ship and load up a male and a female of every species. It is through Noah that God’s work will go on. God desires a people that will live in right relationship with him and if that takes second chances, then so be it.

*“But God remembered Noah”* (Genesis 8:1)

Today’s scripture passages bracket the story of Noah and the flood. But 8:1 is the pivotal verse – God *remembers* Noah. That seems an odd choice of words. After all, how could God forget

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>The Rainbow</b></p> <p>When God gives new significance to the rainbow, it is a sign of the covenant that God makes. In this case, the covenant is simply a promise; nothing is asked of Noah or his family. The rainbow is a symbol of peace and goodwill. Never again will such devastation be brought upon humanity and the rest of God’s creatures.</p> <p>As Terence Fretheim writes, “The covenant will be as good as God is. God establishes it in goodness and love and upholds it in eternal faithfulness. It will never have to be renewed; it stands forever, regardless of what people do. Humans can just rest in the arms of this promise.” After the flood, God knows that evil still lies in the human heart (8:21), but God cares so much for creation that God heads in a new direction.</p>
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

something? God has not forgotten Noah; but he is now turning his attention back to Noah. Later, Israel would sometimes think that God had forgotten them (don’t we?) and the biblical emphasis on God’s remembering ought to assure us of God’s constant care for us.

So God remembers and recovery begins. The waters subside. Noah, his family, and all the animals disembark. It is a fresh start, but things are not as they were in the Garden of Eden before the fall. The present is still burdened with the past. When Noah builds an altar and offers pleasing sacrifices, we get a peek inside God’s heart. God knows that the human heart is still inclined toward evil. Still, God promises himself that he will never again “uncreate” as he just had.

*Third chances?*

We might think that the story of Noah ends happily. It does not. God knows the human heart. God must explicitly warn Noah’s family against murder and its consequences. Noah’s son, Canaan, sins and is cursed by his father. Just as Adam and Eve desired to be as gods, Noah’s descendents will build a great tower at Babel so that they could “make a name for themselves.” God will smash the tower, scattering the people and diversifying the languages.

Beginning in Genesis 12, God will choose yet another person, Abraham, and a people, Israel, through whom God’s work will be done. God will be relentless in pursuit of his people and, in the end, will do the work of reconciliation himself, in the person of Jesus Christ.

## Daily Bible Readings

*(the complete story of Noah, his family, and the Tower of Babel)*

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<b>Day 1</b> Genesis 6:5- 8:22 The flood	<b>Day 2</b> Genesis 9:1-17 God's covenant with Noah
<b>Day 3</b> Genesis 9:18-29 Curse and blessing in Noah's family	<b>Day 4</b> Genesis 10 The table of nations
<b>Day 5</b> Genesis 11:1-9 The tower of Babel	<b>Weekly Prayer Concerns</b>

## Sermon Notes

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

The first “Fruit of the Spirit” evening lecture, *Goodness*, will be this Tuesday, June 15, at 7pm in Piro Hall with Rev. Kathryn Self.

What does a disciple of Jesus look like? How can you spot those who live in God’s way and walk by his Spirit? Surely this has nothing to do with our physical appearance or where we live. In a letter to the house churches in Galatia, the apostle Paul offered them a list of nine virtues that characterize the activities and attitudes of those who are led by God’s Spirit. God produces such fruit in all God’s people; not overnight but over time as God works within us and with us.

Please join us for these nine evenings (or at least as many as you can!) as we learn more about each fruit and its meaning for our lives and discipleship. There will be many surprises along the way. The biblical understandings of these fruit often differs a good bit from the secular world in which we live and work.

St. Andrew Bible Academy audio courses are now in-stock in the bookstore.

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Many Christians embrace the notion that in the Old Testament, God is largely a god of blood and wrath while in the New Testament we learn that God is a god of love. Certainly, God blotting out all humanity with the exception of a small family seems to reinforce this notion. What portraits of God do you see in the Old Testament? How might the picture of a grieving, pained God reshape the way you see God in this story? How might this picture of God’s suffering relate to the New Testament story of Christ and his death on the cross?
2. The discussion about evil and sin that began last week with Adam and Eve continues this week. The flood doesn’t fix everything. Humanity is sinful before the flood and sinful afterward. After he emerges from the ark, Noah fails just as miserably as did Adam. We don’t talk much about “original sin” and it is probably very misunderstood. What do you think the writer of Genesis is trying to say to us about human nature? What is wrong with us? How is that humans could kill tens (hundreds?) of millions of fellow humans in the last century alone? How will this ever be put right? How can we be reconciled to God? In considering these questions, we ought to remember that the story of Noah is set before the choosing of Abraham. God’s promises to Noah are promised to all humanity – they are universal. How might this influence our understanding and appreciation of other religions?