

Genesis 6:13–22 (CEB)

¹³God said to Noah, “The end has come for all creatures, since they have filled the earth with violence. I am now about to destroy them along with the earth, ¹⁴so make a wooden ark. Make the ark with nesting places and cover it inside and out with tar.

¹⁵This is how you should make it: four hundred fifty feet long, seventy-five feet wide, and forty-five feet high. ¹⁶Make a roof for the ark and complete it one foot from the top. Put a door in its side. In the hold below, make the second and third decks.

¹⁷“I am now bringing the floodwaters over the earth to destroy everything under the sky that breathes. Everything on earth is about to take its last breath. ¹⁸But I will set up my covenant with you. You will go into the ark together with your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives. ¹⁹From all living things—from all creatures—you are to bring a pair, male and female, into the ark with you to keep them alive. ²⁰From each kind of bird, from each kind of livestock, and from each kind of everything that crawls on the ground—a pair from each will go in with you to stay alive. ²¹Take some from every kind of food and stow it as food for you and for the animals.”

²²Noah did everything exactly as God commanded him.

Acts 2:1–4 (CEB)

When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place. ²Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them. ⁴They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

Sometimes commitment seems, well, just a bit crazy.

This week, we begin a new series on commitment. We all know that committing to something and then sticking to it can be a real challenge. In fact sometimes, it can seem just plain crazy. Noah is a case in point.

Build an ark? . . . say what???

Nearly everyone is familiar with the story of Noah. The humans have gone bad to the bone. God decides to flood the earth. God tells a man named Noah to build a giant ark to save animals of every kind from the flood. The rains fall. The earth floods. The waters recede and things start up again. I think that is pretty much what I got in Sunday School as a kid, with the rainbow thrown in as well . . . but there is a whole lot more to the story than the “felt figure” account we might have gotten as kids.

For example, there are a few traps that lie in the flood story (Genesis 6:9-9:29). 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 these: 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 this: “Why does God want us to have *this* story told in *this* way?” We’ll have 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, The Message)

In his paraphrase of Genesis, Peterson gets the problem on earth exactly right. And a just God must do something about it. The sad truth is that once Adam and Eve made their choice to turn away from God 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).

God is neither angry nor vengeful at this turn of events. “The Lord regretted making the human beings on the earth, and he was heartbroken.” (6:6, CEB). 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.

The biblical writer paints such a stark picture of human evil that one might think God will simply wipe out humanity 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?

No . . . God’s act of “uncreation” will not be complete. Instead, God comes to one man, Noah. Why him? All we’re told is that God “approved” of him. The choice proves to be

The Rainbow

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.

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.

wise indeed. For when God laid out the audacious plan to build a giant wooden box that would float on the raising tides, Noah simply “did everything as God commanded him.” What God asks of Noah is so outlandish that the story has birthed movies and comedy routines. Would any of us be willing to do what Noah did? I wonder.

But Noah did it. His commitment never wavered; he built just as God had told him to build. And he gathered his family and the animals and the rains came and the floods covered the earth.

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

And then, as the waters peaked, God *remembered* Noah. That seems an odd choice of words. After all, how could God forget something? God has not forgotten Noah; it is a Hebrew way of saying that now had come the time for God to act. 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. The rainbow is the sign of God’s promise.

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. And just as Adam and Eve desired to be as gods, Noah's descendants 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.

But despite the disappointing outcome, the example of Noah's commitment to God, even in the face of a seemingly crazy request, ought to urge us all toward a deeper and surer commitment to God, to his purposes and his vision. And in this, God has given us a gift not bestowed upon Noah.

The power to commit

After Jesus returned to the Father, the believers returned to Jerusalem to wait. There, the believers prayed and waited, but I wonder what they thought would happen next. Jesus had said that the Father would send them the Spirit, who would teach them everything and remind them of what Jesus had said (John 14:26). Whatever the believers imagined, I doubt it quite measured up to the dramatic reality of that Pentecost day.

The believers were all in one place on that day. It was early, about 9am. Suddenly, there was the sound of a huge wind and tongues of fire leapt from believer to believer. These were theophanies, dramatic manifestations of God. God was suddenly with them in a way that God had not been with them before.

The Holy Spirit, God-present, gave each believer the ability to proclaim God in languages they couldn't know. It would be like me suddenly preaching Sunday's sermon in Russian. What they said wasn't gibberish; rather, it was the undoing of the multiplicity of languages following God's destruction of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), the sad outcome after Noah and his family left the ark.

This outpouring of God's Spirit marked the beginning of a new age. The disciples were new creations in God's kingdom and the Holy Spirit would forever be God's empowering presence in their lives. Indeed, the rest of Acts tells the story of how the Holy Spirit guided and directed the growth and development of the early church. Though we refer to Luke's book as the Acts of the Apostles, it really ought to be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. And God's Spirit is today, for each us, God present with us, empowering us all to do God's work.

That's why we needn't be fearful of commitment to even the largest of tasks. The Holy Spirit guides us toward better decisions and empowers us to build for God's kingdom in ways that few of us could have imagined, some of which may even seem kinda crazy.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Do you think God has ever asked you to do something that seemed crazy at the time? If so, how did you react? What did you do? Did it seem less crazy as time passed? If God hasn't asked you to something like that, how do you hope you would respond? How would you go about deciding whether it was something God asked you to do or just another crazy idea of your own?
2. 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? 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?

3. The Holy Spirit is God's empowering presence in our lives. Even in our prayers, the Spirit helps us in our weakness, expressing to God what we cannot (Romans 8:26-27). Yet, for many of us, God's Spirit is relegated to no more than a still, small voice, robbed of any real power. When do you most see or feel the Spirit at work in our congregation? How can we go about fostering a life of the Spirit at St. Andrew? How can we foster a life of the Spirit in our individual Christian walk?

Daily Bible Readings

This week: The story of Noah, the flood, and the aftermath

Monday, Genesis 6:5- 7:23 The ark and the flood

Tuesday, Genesis 8 The waters recede and God makes a promise

Wednesday, Genesis 9:1-17 God's covenant with Noah

Thursday, Genesis 9:18-29 Curse and blessing in Noah's family

Friday, Genesis 10 The table of nations

Saturday, Genesis 11:1-9 The tower of Babel

Scott Engle's Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own.

This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Monday Evening Class

We are studying the book of Genesis

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the Gospel of Luke

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Our current series -- *Spring Training: Some Theological Curveballs*