

October 7, 2018
Lesson 6: God Destroys and Re-Creates
Scripture: Genesis 6: 9-22

Context:

Today our lesson revisits one of the most famous biblical narratives. The story of Noah and the Flood is one of those stories that even nonreligious people know and affiliate with Christianity. Whenever there is a storm and the clouds pull back, a rainbow often reminds us of the story and we smile at thinking of God's promises.

A little background to the flood story should involve a study of other ancient texts written at the time of the Bible's canonization. Much like the creation story, there has been an inordinate amount of time dedicated to figuring out the historical accuracy of the event. Finding the ark on Mt. Ararat is an enterprise likely to be unsuccessful and not give us tangible proof that the flood occurred.¹ In nearly every religion in the Middle East, there is an account of the Flood story. In other versions of the Flood in Mesopotamia, there are heroes like Utnapishtim in the *Gilgamesh* epic and Atrahasis in *Atrahasis* who are saved by gods when floods cover the earth.² It appears that just as there are creation narratives about how the earth was formed, that also includes explanations of primeval history that explain bloodlines and cataclysmic events. Thus, the story in the Bible is exchangeable with others in certain regards.

However, the flood story in the Bible is different in that we see a different part of God that explains new life and new beginnings. Here we are given a proclamation about what God has done about the fractured world and a warning about God's interactions with the world.³ The God of Israel is not a static god, one that passively sets the world in motion like a clockmaker and watches it tick forward. We see that God is actively involved in creation and like humanity has moments of hurt and celebration, and responds as such. God is as fresh and new in relation to creation as God calls humanity to be in union with God.⁴ Much like the relationships we find ourselves in with ups and downs, God demonstrates as much in the beginning of creation.

In the text, we discover that creation has gotten out of hand with all the creatures behaving vilely. There is hatred, jealousy, greed and people do all the things that are harmful such as stealing and killing one another. They abuse the earth and one another, trashing the beauty that God had made good. Yet there is one man who is exemplary and continued that covenantal relationship with God, Noah. God, feeling hurt and dejected, decides to destroy the earth through a great flood, but wants to spare Noah and his family.

¹ Walter Brueggeman, "Genesis," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY 1982), 74.

² Michael Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, (Oxford: University Press 2011), 66-67.

³ Brueggeman, "Genesis," 75.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

In addition to Noah, God wants to save the animals that were created and tells Noah to build an ark for them to call home.

Thusly, God makes a covenant with Noah and Noah proceeds to do what he is told along with his family. While the rest of humanity will be swept away, Noah and his family will stay safe in the ark with a portable zoo. God will be with Noah and also vow for this to never happen again after God sees the destruction that occurs.

Application

I remember that as a child, this was one of my favorite Bible stories. In one of our parsonages, the border along my room was the story with all the animals stretched across the walls. When I turned seven my birthday party was at the Montgomery Zoo and you better believe that ice cream cake from Dairy Queen had icing in the shape of ark, the animals, and Mr. and Mrs. Noah waving from the bow. I received hand-carved arks with animals from church members for my amusement. The story of the Noah and the flood has been long seared into my memory and psyche.

Yet this story is more than a childhood classic meant to make us think of all the furry animals. While there are some for whom this story raises great concern because of God destroying something that was originally created as good, I see it as more of a hopeful commentary on God's redemption and renewal of the world and of us. Here we also get a different understanding of God. God is not some distant hazy figure in the sky just watching us mess everything up and not caring about our souls and beings. God is actively watching us and like in dealing with Noah, nudging and stirring us to go in different directions.

If anyone stops at this passage and doesn't read on to see what happened to Noah and his family after the flood, they are missing out. Even this family, thought of as the one redemptive family in the whole world, had their "stuff." They had issues that God probably knew about it and yet they were still rescued from the flood and its destruction of the entire world. Even the moral exemplars were still going to mess up and God was still going to use them to populate and spread through the world.

Today's story reminds us of God's grace in creation and in our lives. God is constantly remolding and reshaping us even though we can be the most ornery parts of creation. God is still creating rainbows and sunsets and sunrises to remind us that God is involved with creation and it is good. God is at work in our church bodies as new people are baptized and churches grow not just in numbers, but also in qualities like mercy, love, and grace.

Like Noah we are called to continue to be a part of that work. It may be easier to be like the world. We can make ugly political posts on our social media accounts. We can choose to be apathetic to the needs of our neighbor. We can choose to be driven by anxiety and tension treating life like a rat race. We can choose to be a church focused more on fighting about who is in and who is out than about doing ministry.

Yet in the case of Noah, we see a better life. We see a life where you get involved in God's work building things and being a good steward. We see a life where you'll mess up from time to time, but you get back up and step out in faith. We see a life where there is family drama, but there is also love and grace. We see a life where God never forsakes. We see God who never gives up on us and calls for us to keep following Jesus as best we can.

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