

## “The Waters Came Down”

Genesis 6: 9-22; 8: 1-12; 20-22; 9: 8-16

This week as we continue to get back to the basics of our faith, we will take a look at the story of Noah and the Flood. I will tell you I debated on whether or not to include this story for one simple reason. As a person of faith, I have always struggled with this particular story. God doesn't come off in the best light in this story. It has always bothered me that God decides to send a flood to wipe out all creation, not just humans, but all creation.

I'm sure I am not the only one who feels that way. That's why this is a perfect story for us to take another look at as we get back to basics. Surely, there has to be some reason the editors of the Bible put this story in the book that shapes our identity as the people of God. So it is our responsibility as people called to grow in our faith, as people called to struggle in our faith, and yes, as people called to question our faith, it is our responsibility to figure out just what is exactly going on in this particular story.

The best place for us to start is well, in the beginning. As we remember last week, there are two creation stories in the Bible, followed up by the story of the

Garden of Eden. Those are the first three chapters. Our reading today is from Chapter 6. So the question is what happens in the between time?

Well, let's just say not a lot of good. After Adam and Eve are kicked out of the Garden, we get the story of Cain and Abel, followed up by the first murder in the Bible. As we may remember Cain murders Abel because he was jealous. This horrible story is then followed up by more murders. For example in Chapter 4, we hear about Lamech who murders someone in vengeance. Four chapters into this story and we already have multiple murders. Let's just say that after humanity is kicked out of the Garden, things begin to downhill real quick. The breaking point for God as humanity's downward spiral continued was when the sons of God kidnapped human women and created a "new" type of people, known only to us as warriors of renown.

As we continue to read along, we see that all of this disorder is followed up with the story of the Flood. Let me just say, that for years, in reading this story, we have all assumed that this story of the flood is about how people have acted badly and God gets mad. And in that anger, God decides to destroy the world. This assumption makes sense given all that has gone on up to this point in our Biblical story. We can easily see how humanity is turning away from the good that God had created. So naturally we assume that anger is God's reaction to this fact.

We would be wrong in our assumption. If we look at the text, we don't see that God gets angry. Instead, the text tells us, "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." God's first reaction in seeing, in experiencing the evil, the disorder, the disharmony that fills God's creation is not anger but grief and regret. That changes the story just a bit, doesn't it? God's heart is grieved when God looks upon Creation which is so filled with brokenness and disorder. Not at all what we assumed.

It is interesting to note that after hearing about God's grief, there is a short introduction to Noah, followed by his instructions from God to build an ark. After this quick introduction, we are told that the flood waters began to fill the earth. As I have lived with this story this week, I have often wondered if the flood waters that filled the earth were God's tears of regret, God's tears of sorrow, maybe even God's tears of disappointment and frustration. Maybe in looking at this Creation in which God proclaimed it good, maybe in seeing that it had become so broken, so much in disharmony that the very thought of this, breaks God's heart and overwhelms God to tears.

This image of God's grief, this image of God's disappointment, even this image of God's frustration really does change the story a bit for us. But that is not

all that is changed. This image of God's grief also changes our perception of God as well. No longer can we see or should we see God as just being a vengeful and angry God. Rather now, our perception is changed. We begin to see God as one who has a vision for how things can be for all of God's creation. We see God as one who has a vision for how things should be for all of God's creation. But more importantly, now we see that God is devastated, God is heart-broken, God is overcome with grief when this vision of goodness, this vision of wholeness, this vision of peace falls apart.

You see, we've all been told that this story is about Noah and his family. That is a natural assumption. We are used to plot lines where humanity is the main character. Selfishly, we as humankind tend to think we should receive top billing when it comes to the action of the story. But as we soon discover in reading this story, things are not always what we assume. We learn that Creation is not about us and our wants. Creation was and continues to be about a partnership between humans, animals, God and the very Earth itself. Humankind is not God's only concern. I'm sorry to burst everyone's bubble this morning. But life here on here is not just about humankind. The Earth does not revolve around humanity. All of the Earth is God's. Everything was created to be in partnership with one another.

I'm sorry to have to tell everyone but this story is not about Noah. Here is why I say this. If we take a look at the text, we are told that Noah is a man of great

character. We are told how he found favor with God. So it is natural for us to assume he is the main character. It is natural for us to place Noah in top billing in this story. After all, without him, there would be no building of the ark, right? We all like to think that Noah was this great example of faith, that he must have been really special for God to select him, for God to save him and his family for after the flood.

But the funny thing of it is, we are not told any of those things. What we are told of Noah was that he was a righteous person which let's face it, isn't hard to do when everyone else around you is killing other people. God's standard at that point doesn't really have to be that high. Was Noah killing people? No. Was he still following God's ways? We can assume so because we are told he is a righteous person, that he found favor with God. Did Noah have a pulse and was breathing? Yes. Add all those things up, and God takes what God can get in rethinking this whole creation business.

You see, for so many years, as people of faith, we have mistakenly thought this story was about Noah, that Noah was the main character but he is not. God is the main character of this story. This story is not about Noah but rather this story about God's broken relationship with all of creation. This story is about the life giving, life changing understanding that God will never give up on Creation or us.

God will not give up on Creation until we are all lead back to restoration. God will not give up until all brought back to wholeness.

Let me explain: I fully admit Noah is mentioned a lot. I also fully admit Noah is important to the story line. If it wasn't for him building the ark, collecting the animals, we wouldn't have much of a story. But after he builds the ark, after Noah collects the animals, he just waits for God to act. He just waits for God to do what God is going to do. In fact Noah is really kind of passive in this story. We don't have to look much farther than the verbs used to describe Noah in this story to see that this is true. We are told Noah did what God had commanded. We are told Noah went into the ark. We are told Noah waited.

But when we look at the verbs used to describe God, they are all active. God grieved. God commanded. God shut Noah in the ark. God remembered. God made the wind to blow across the waters. God blesses Noah and his family when they step off the ark. God establishes the covenant with all of creation.

In reality, the Flood story is not about Noah and his family after all. The Flood story is about God. It is about how God changes in God's understanding when it comes to God's relationship with all of God's creation. I'll let that sink in for a moment.

This story is not about Noah. It is about God. It is about how God will not give up on leading us, all of us as God's creation, leading us all to restoration, leading us all to wholeness.

I know what everyone is thinking. "But didn't God send the flood and destroy the world?" Yes, I can't deny that fact. And I can't excuse God's behavior.

However, let me ask everyone something. Have you ever acted out in desperation? Acted out in grief? Acted out in frustration only to regret your actions later?

The same can be said about God in this particular situation. Our biggest clue to this comes at the end of the story when God establishes God's covenant with Noah and his family, and, and all of creation as well. All of God's creation, not just humans, are given the promise that the Earth will not be destroyed by the flood waters ever again.

The sign of this promise is that God puts a bow, a rainbow if you will, God puts a rainbow in the sky. This is a significant act but not for the reasons we assume or have been taught.

Now, I'm sure we all have been told that when we see a rainbow in the sky, it is a sign for us, a sign to us of God's faithfulness. This is only partly true. Yes, the rainbow is a sign of God's faithfulness but it is not for us. It is a sign, a

reminder for God. Take a look at verse 12-16 in Chapter 9. <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."

Twice God pauses to see the bow. Twice God sees it and remembers God's promises to humanity and to all of God's creation. Twice God states that it is God's sign to remember who God really is. Twice God realizes actions done in grief, done in frustration never really go well for either party. Twice God remembers who God is called to be in this relationship that connects all of Creation.

As we look at this story, I fully admit it is hard for us to put the two sides of God together because we have all experienced, we all know, God is merciful and gracious. God is slow to anger. God is abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

That's where the bow comes in. The bow is not a message to humanity but rather is a reminder to God to be faithful, to be merciful, to be gracious. It is a reminder to God to be steadfast in love. It is a reminder to God to be the grace

filled God we so desperately need God to be because we cannot stop the cycle of brokenness on our own.

God realizes that there is too much at stake for God to forget God's promises again. You see, this covenant that God makes with Noah and all Creation is different from all the rest mentioned in the Old Testament. In this covenant, God is the one who is held responsible for God's action if this covenant is ever broken. God realizes that there is too much at stake for God not to be the God we need God to be, the God God promised to be, the God in whom all our hopes of new life and grace reside.

God sees the rainbow in the sky and remembers. God remembers God's promises, not just to us, but to all of God's creation. And as people of faith, we all know what happens when God remembers God's promises. All of Creation beings to experience life giving, life-transforming things opportunities for wholeness. And all, not just humanity but all of God's creation is once again brought back in harmony. All experience God's care. All are made whole once more. All because God remembers. God remembers to be the God we so desperately need God to be. God sees the rainbow and remembers that we cannot stop the cycle of brokenness of our own. Take heart this morning People of God. In our hearts, let us always know that God remembers. Thanks be to God. Amen.