

## **Season after Pentecost**

Flood and Promise

Narrative Lectionary Year 1, Week 1

September 7, 2014

Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown MD

Readings: Matthew 8: 24-27; Psalm: 46; Genesis 6: 5-8,16-22; 9:8-15

*Grace and peace to you from God - Father, Son, Holy Spirit –Amen*

We are in the beginning. We are beginning a new journey through the Bible using the Narrative Lectionary — a schedule of weekly Scripture readings that is different from the one we have been using. Rather than having three abbreviated Scripture readings and a psalm, we will primarily have one longer reading that captures an entire story from the Bible. The Scripture selections during the year will follow the sweep of the whole biblical story, from Creation to the Israelites to Jesus through to the early Christian church. The hope is that we become familiar with the overarching story of God's love story with creation and humanity — not only so we become more Biblically literate but to become even more in love with the Lord who first and forever loves us.

We are in the beginning. We have new children's bulletins. You will find two new inserts in your bulletin every week. They both offer suggestions for getting even more out Sunday's readings through daily time in God's Word and prayer. There are two because one appears to be more family and kid friendly. After using them for a while, we hope you could tell us if one is more helpful than the other or if they each simply serve different folks. Starting September 17 & 18, there will two weekly Adult Bible Studies for those who would like to fill in the blanks between the readings of one Sunday and the next. One class will gather Wednesday mornings and the other Thursday evenings. Our children's Sunday School has also been at work, planning to cover most of the same Bible stories in Sunday School that we do in worship.

We are in the beginning. There may be unanticipated snafues and adjustments. We're interested in your questions, curiosities and suggestions. But what is it that the Lord says continually throughout Scripture? Oh yes — Do not be afraid. Do not let your hearts be troubled. God is with us. Together we will walk through the Bible, noticing the

Lord's presence, promises and faithfulness. Together we will grow more confident of our understanding of the Bible and the fullness of God's love, faithfulness and saving efforts. If ever you, a family member or a friend has expressed the longing to understand the Bible better, this is the year to make every effort to be here each week and be caught up in God's ancient and ongoing story of hope, love and salvation.

Today we are in the beginning. Not at the very beginning, "when God created the heavens and the earth" in the first chapter of the first book in the Bible. But we are amid the initial chapters of Genesis in which our Hebrew ancestors made professions of faith about the LORD their God in stories. The Creation narratives and this story of Noah were never intended to be science or history lessons. They were to be proclamations about their God, Yahweh, who was the one and only God and whose nature was so very different from the many gods of their neighbors. That's why we will usually not find the answers to all our curiosities, or the details to satisfy our modern-day notion that all can and must be rationally or scientifically explained. Those chosen to tell and record the story of Noah were not interested in providing a blueprint for building an ark or directions for managing a zoo of animals. Divinely inspired, they included what they thought essential for relaying the truth revealed to them and their ancestors — and in the story of Noah, the truth about God's heart and God's response to a failed world.

The story of Noah is one of those popular biblical narratives that is so familiar we think we know the whole story. Most see it as a cute children's story about animals and rainbows that captures that refrain from Annie: "The Sun will come out tomorrow, bet your bottom dollar that tomorrow, they'll be sun." This is the Noah that is popular in nurseries and pediatrician waiting rooms. Others have a much darker view of Noah. In this interpretation the sinfulness of humanity sends God in a fit of rage, moving God to a vengefully wiping out of just about everyone and everything. This view offers a picture of God "whom you'd be crazy to want to have anything to do with, a God of wrath ready

and willing to strike down sinners”<sup>1</sup> on a whim or divine temper tantrum. The story of Noah reveals a Lord who is neither a Pollyanna or a raving tyrant.

What leads to the Flood? “God’s creation has refused to be God’s creation.”<sup>2</sup> Rather, humanity has chosen to deny God and creation it’s true character, betraying God’s intention and love for all living things. Instead, going their own way, humanity has become selfish, wicked and violent. In the actual text of Scripture, we are invited into the heart of God and find, not an enraged tyrant but deep grief and sadness. If this is the hurt and pain humans will cause God’s creation and each other, “It grieved him to his heart” and God is sorry to have made them. This Lord is not a spoiled child throwing a fit or a scientist raging when an experiment goes wrong. God sees the pain and violence of humanity, so out of synch with God’s Eden intention for creation, and this broken world breaks God’s heart. In response to such pain, God decides to blot out his creation and let humans face the consequences of their uncontrolled sin, evil and violence that has utterly corrupted all the earth..

“But”... In each of these early Genesis stories there’s always a “but” or “yet” of grace. In this case, “But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord.” God decides not all will be blotted out after all. God decides to use a remnant of the original creation to give the earth and its inhabitants a “start over,” a new chance to live in the fullness of God’s purpose and intent. The Flood then becomes a rescue of creation rather than its utter destruction. One extended family and two of each creature will start fresh. There is really no explanation for why God selected Noah and his family. But what we can say is that Noah does what God says. Noah let’s God be God and call the shots. Noah and his family are not escaping but picking up a vocation to be involved in God’s purpose for all creation.

When the flooding subsides, God makes a covenant not only with Noah and his descendants but with “every living thing”. A covenant is a promise. God promises that never again will God bring destruction to the earth in response to humanity’s actions.

God promises to stand by God's creation and God's purpose for it. This is an unconditional covenant, one God promises to honor no matter what humankind does. It is a costly promise. God will put aside God's own broken heart and pain to remain faithful and committed to us and all creation. It wasn't long after the Ark lands, that we find sinfulness resuming with the resulting evil and violence. "The flood has effected no change in humankind. But it has effected an irreversible change in [how God] ... will approach his creation. With an unlimited patience and forbearance....God resolves that God will stay with, endure, and sustain God's world notwithstanding the sorry state of humankind. God will not let the rebellion of humankind sway God's self from God's grand dream for a harmonious, obedient creation."<sup>3</sup> Suffering and "evil have not been eradicated from creation [by the flood.] But [through God's promise] we are now assured that [suffering, evil and death] are not rooted in the anger or rejection of God."<sup>4</sup>

The sign of God's promise and faithfulness is the rainbow. Assurance to humanity and a reminder to God. God will not use nature as a tool of judgement. God will not be provoked by humankind to use God's power as a punishing weapon against it. This promise and rainbow first given to Noah, gives us the grounds on which to reject the claims of others that disease or events like 9/11 are God's judgement on our sin. Rather than annihilation, God has chosen to take the suffering of a wicked world into God's own heart and bear it there, while working to redeem it. The relationship between God and us is based on unqualified grace. Sin and evil are still not acceptable to God but God promises to work from *within* the world to redeem it, rather than overpower the world from without.<sup>5</sup>

As we begin of our walk through Scripture we will find God's good news each step of the way, in the Hebrew and New Testaments. In this story of Noah, we hear the good news that our Lord grieves the world's pain but still chooses to love and be faithful to all creation. We celebrate the good news that "the only thing the waters of chaos and death do not cut through is the commitment of God to creation"<sup>6</sup>, the promise of God to

love us eternally and work for all creation to enjoy the fullness of creation as God intended. It's the promise we affirm and confess each time we gather, and very appropriately today as we baptize Chase, Trinity and Kyleigh. Whether a rainbow is in the sky or not, we profess with our Hebrew ancestors the truth that God is good, faithful, ever-present and keeps promises. Thanks be to God. Linda M Alessandri 9/6/14

## ENDNOTES

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1. Elizabeth Webb, "commentary on Genesis 9: 8-17" as posted on [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org)
  2. Walter Brueggemann, Interpretation: Genesis Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982 p.74
  - 3.3. Adapted from Brueggemann, p. 81
  4. Brueggemann, p. 81
  5. Adapted from statement by Terence E. Fretheim in his "Commentary on Genesis 9: 8-17" posted on [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org).
  6. Brueggemann, p. 85