

## **(16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost)**

### Building the Bridge Between Noah and Matthew

Just down I-75 south of Cincinnati is the Ark Encounter. A life-size structure built as a Biblical tourist trap based on the biblical story of Noah's Ark. It has become a bit controversial as it was built as a money maker, that has struggled to make money, so to avoid paying taxes, they applied to be a "church".

While not as large, not far from where my parents grew up in western Pennsylvania, was another Noah's Ark structure complete gift shop and restaurant.

Of course, you don't have to go to either of those places to get a feel for the flood story, you can jump into the waters at Noah's Ark Water Park in the Dells, which has its own flood story from a few years ago.

Beside serving as tourist destinations, the story of Noah has been a money maker for the baby industry, which churns out everything cute for parents decorate their baby's nursery with.

Churches, like ours, have liturgical banners adorning their sanctuaries or Sunday School rooms with images of Noah.

The Irish Rovers made the story of Noah famous with their song about unicorns getting left off the ark.

For all the commercialization of Noah's Ark, we should remember it is faith story about a flood that destroys all of humanity and creation. The Bible is not the only place you will find the story of a global flood.

Flood narratives of destruction, death and salvation can be found in all three of Abrahmic faiths (Islam, Judaism, and Christian), as well as other religions and cultures, the most famous one being The Gilgamesh Epic Flood story.

"According to Vedic lore, a fish tells the mythic Indian king Manu of a flood that will wipe out humanity; Manu then builds a ship to withstand the epic rains and is later led to a mountaintop by the same fish. An Aztec story sees a devout couple hide in the hollow of a vast tree with two ears of corn as divine storms drown the wicked of the land. Creation myths from Egypt to Scandinavia involve tidal floods of all sorts of substances — including the blood of deities — purging and remaking the earth." Ishaan Tharoor (Time Magazine)

The search for Noah's Ark has been as famous as the Indiana Jones searching for the Ark of the Covenant or King Arthur quest for the Holy Grail.

People have long sought the Ark on Mt. Ararat, with some claiming to have possession of wood or even pictures of it, but at the end of the day, no credible Biblical archaeologist has ever found any real evidence that the Ark existed.

Whether it did or it didn't, the story of Noah isn't about factual history. It is a sacred faith story about God and God's covenant with God's creation. It is a story about a new beginning for God and for God's creation.

As we move forward over this year, we will be hearing stories of God's covenant with individuals, people, and with the world. With the flood waters still rising around us, it is appropriate we begin with the story of the flood in Genesis 6-9.

Rev. Scott Marrese-Wheeler  
September 9, 2018

Genesis 6-9  
(Noah, God, Evil and the Flood)  
A Re-Creation Story

Kermit the Frog sang a beautiful, cute, catchy, little song “Why are there so many songs about rainbows?”

For you Irish, the lore is that Leprechauns hide their pot of gold at the end rainbows.

Rainbow colored ribbons adorn young girls hair. They even become hair colors these days. Rainbows are splashed across t-shirts and church sanctuary’s serving as symbols of hope, healing, reconciliation and welcome.

Rainbows have long fascinated us with their beauty hanging in the sky following rain. A double rain is really awesome to see!

With all the rain we have been having in our area, there have been plenty of pictures of rainbows being shared on social media and by the local news stations.

Of course, the most famous of rainbows is the one God hangs in the sky in Genesis 9:13: “God said...I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.”

We love this story about Noah’s Ark and God’s colorful rainbow.

It is a favorite Sunday School story children learn. Parents have decorated their baby’s room with a Noah’s Ark theme.

But this story is really not a cute, little children’s story when we really pay attention to it. It is a story of human wickedness, evil, violence, and God’s decision as Creator to destroy it all and start again. God’s decision leads to mass death of humankind (who were created in God’s image) and global destruction of plants and animals.

As the story begins in Genesis 6:5 - “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. And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart...God said, ‘I’ll get rid of my ruined creation, make a clean sweep: people, animals, snakes and bugs, birds—the works. I’m sorry I made them.’”

To deal with the evil and violence that has infected humankind, God uses another form of violence, a flood, to destroy all that God had created, blessed, and said it was “good”.

Floods are a destructive force, causing serious damage to property and claiming lives. We no that all too well, as reports pour in that estimated damages due to the flood waters are estimated to be close to \$154 million. *A friend told me that her childhood home, where her parents live, is on the Black Earth Creek. Due to the flood waters, there home has been deemed structurally unsafe to live in.*

Staci has been dealing with flooding issues at Lakeview Moravian Church these past days. The rising water table is causing basement flooding in the pre-school, forcing them to close while they deal the continual flow of water. We spent time the other evening trying to stave off the water coming up through the cracks in the foundation, carrying sandbags from Olbrich Park. I don't think I have ever had to sandbag a basement before!

And then there is the loss of human life. People being swept away by the rushing flood waters. I can't image what it was like for those who tried desperately to cling to the arms of the gentleman who was being pulled into flash-flood waters only to lose their grip and know that he drown.

My parents grew up in the Johnstown, Pennsylvania area. In 1889, after heavy rains and rising waters caused a mountain dam to break, sending rushing flood waters down the valley into the city, over 2,000 people died.

A clergy colleague shared that during a children's sermon, when asking the children what they saw, smelled, and heard when told the Noah's Ark story, one young child said: "I hear people screaming".

Biblical Scholar, Terry Fretheim, says: "The theological focus of the (Flood Narrative) is not on human sin (wickedness and evil) but on God and God's commitment to all living things." It is a story about God redeeming God's own self in relationship to God's creation.

It is a story of God beginning anew, but not totally from scratch as we know. God uses Noah, his family, and the animals.

Following the flood, as the earth is repopulated, humanity has not changed, just read the closing lines about Noah who gets drunk and naked, embarrassing his sons. No, this is a story about how God changes.

God is grieved by the wickedness and evil of humanity, and then in an act of violent destruction caused by Godself, God destroys all God has created. And then, as if having God's own divine eyes and heart opened to what God has done, God grieves again and now makes a covenant agreement with Godself - never again!

Genesis 9:14-15: "When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 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."

If we follow our sacred story, we know all too well even today, that we as human continue to sin and to rebel against God. Humanity continues to fill the earth with violence and evil. God judges, yes, but God also redeems, over and over and over again.

Why are there so many songs about rainbows, the ones we love to see following rainstorms? Well, maybe because they serve as reminder that no matter how evil, destructive and violent we are towards one another, and God knows we are, that God's steadfast covenant of love will never leave us, and in the end, we too might just remember who we are and whose we are.

Amen.