

“We Love to Tell the Story”

Genesis 6:1-8

When people began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose. Then the Lord said, ‘My spirit shall not abide in mortals for ever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred and twenty years.’ The Nephilim (giants) were on the earth in those days—and also afterwards—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown.

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 They had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved Them to Their heart. So the Lord said, ‘I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.’ But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord.

The late Eli Wiesel, Romania-born American novelist, political activist, Nobel Peace Prize winner and Holocaust survivor of Hungarian Jewish descent, once said: **“God created humans because God loved stories.”**

Who of us doesn’t love a good story. We all have a favorites we love to tell or hear at family gatherings, around a campfire, over coffee, during a meal, and in church.

The banner at the front of this sanctuary reminds us that: **“We love to tell the story.”** I would guess we all have a favorite story from the Bible we love - Adam and Eve, Joseph and his amazing technicolored dream coat, Moses and the burning bush or Moses leading the Hebrew people out of Egypt, the birth of Jesus, a parable Jesus told like the Good Samaritan, or one of the resurrection stories from the Gospels.

Of all the stories we love to tell, I am guessing none of us has ever heard the one from Genesis 6:1-8? What are we to make of this Bible story about the “sons of God” coming down to earth and having sexual relations with human women who give birth to their off-spring, who grow up to be the giants; “heroes of old, renowned warriors.”

Sure, we have heard stories like this in Greek and Roman mythology. Author Rick Riordan enthralled his young adult audience, including Sam (and his parents), with his “Percy Jackson and the Olympians book series” (Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief).

Riordan's series follows the boy, Percy Jackson, who lives in New York City with his mother, who isn't married. In what makes for a good Father's Day story, Percy Jackson, discovers his absent father is none-other-than the Greek god, Poseidon. Struggling with his new identity as a demigod, Percy is sent to a camp for demigods where his adventures begin.

Of course, the Romans followed suit with their own stories of gods having children by earthly women. As did many other cultures, so why shouldn't the Hebrew people have similar stories of the sons of God having sex with human women, who bore their demigod children?

Remember, Genesis was a collection of stories told through various oral traditions which were edited in their telling, before finally being written into what has become the first book of the Torah (Hebrew) or Pentateuch (Greek).

The first 11 chapters of Genesis are considered by Biblical scholars to be myths that hold sacred meaning for our faith in God, but are by no-means a factual account of history. These include the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Able and their lesser known brother, Seth; Noah, the ark, and animals, which actually have two different stories woven into the one we love to tell; and the tower of Babel.

Still, even with that understanding, why is this particular story, which leads into the Noah tale, skipped over?

I have long been fascinated by this account that proceeds the flood narrative, so I decided, we need to hear this fascinating, if not, confusing Bible story.

So let's revisit it for a moment, though this time hearing it re-told by the great American storyteller, Mark Twain. In this 1909 "**Letters From the Earth,**" a story Twain wrote from the view point of God's adversary, Satan, who is a member of the Grand Council, which includes the archangel, Michael.

You might recall, in Genesis 1:26, the first Creation story goes like this: "**Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness....'**" There is a plural-ness to the image humankind is created in this telling. Have you ever wondered about who is included in the phrase "our own image?"

Twain tells it this way: "**The pleasant labor of populating the world went on from age to age, and with prime efficiency; for in those happy days the sexes were still competent for the Supreme Art when by rights they ought to have been dead eight hundred years. The sweeter sex, the dearer sex, the lovelier sex was manifestly at its very best, then, for it was even able to attract gods. Real gods. They came down out of heaven and had wonderful times with those hot young blossoms....'**" Classic Twain!

Twain's humor aside, you might be surprised to learn there is very little biblical commentary on this passage. Which might also explain why, when I asked my clergy colleagues if any one had ever preached on this passage or led a study of it, very few had.

When I read these verses to Sam, he looked at me and said, "That's really in the Bible?" Yes, it is.

So now the question, why is it there and why don't we tell this story?

With what little is out there in the Jewish or Christian scholarly commentaries which I could find, those resources would say it is a transitional tale used to move the overarching story of the creation of humankind and the presence of evil, pain, suffering, and death (sin in-other-words), in the world.

Remember, stories and the stories within the stories, hold meaning. In the Jewish "Midrash" tradition, rabbis use stories to answer questions. This is one possible explanation they use to help explain the presence of evil and wickedness in the world.

It is also a lead-in to the flood narrative, and the tale of Noah.

Again, these are not factual historic stories. Flood narratives from other cultures have existed before the story of Noah, which probably developed within the Hebrew oral tradition to explain a time when there was some major flooding in the known world.

So why should we "love to tell" this story?

Ah, well, let's forget what I have told you so far, because I don't like what the direction this sermon has taken, and let me start over.

Actually, that may well be the meaning behind this Bible story. Grieved by the evil, pain and suffering we humans are capable of inflicting on each other, God decides to start over and wipe the pages of the story of humankind who have been created in God's own image, clean and start anew.

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.