

Message for May 20, 2018

"It's A Dove"

Genesis 6:11-14

NIV, 9

¹¹ Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. ¹² God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways.

¹³ So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth.

¹⁴ So make yourself an ark of cypress^[a] wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out.

Prayer:

1. Each morning, I carefully look at my bird feeder. There are many different types of birds that visit the feeder in a feeding frenzy. Recently, I have noticed a pair of morning doves in and around the feeders – they are gray and quite quick on the flight. For me it is refreshing and quieting to see the birds and especially the doves.
2. The dove has long been a symbol of peace.
 - a. The dove has great symbolism in the Bible too and is mentioned 46 times in Scripture.
 - b. The first occurrence we read about a dove is when Noah "sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground" (Gen 8:8) "but the dove could find nowhere to perch because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark. He reached out his hand and took the dove and brought it back to himself in the ark" (Gen 8:9). That's when Noah "waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark" and this time "When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth" (Gen 8:10-11). When Noah sent the dove out after another week, the dove didn't return (Gen 8:12) indicating that the floodwaters had receded enough to now support life.
3. In the Song of Solomon, the images of doves come as a symbol of beauty.
4. Today is Pentecost --- the coming of the Holy Spirit. And much of our liturgy today is about the coming of the Spirit to the Disciples. Initially the symbolism was the tongues of fire to represent the Spirit. Our Methodist symbol of the cross and the flame – is derived from the Pentecostal scenes.

5. Just prior to Jesus beginning His earthly ministry he went to John the Baptist to be baptized. We read this account in Luke 3:21-22 *"When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*
6. The other Gospels also record the descending of the dove as a symbol of the Holy Spirit.
7. Today we continue to look at Bible stories we like to tell our children and grandchildren.
- 8. Let's take a look at the video about Noah – something we all know.**
9. As I thought about Bible stories that I remember learning in Sunday School, the first one that came to mind was Noah's Ark.
 - a. The Bible says Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. The Bible says Noah walked with God.
2. When I was growing up, I remember learning in church that God created the world and as time went by, the beauty God had created on earth was being spoiled by wicked people and God decides to start again.
 - a. Noah and his family were the only people God believed in and wanted to save. God tells Noah to build an ark and it holds Noah and his family along with two of every kind of creature on earth.
 - b. Once the ark is built and everyone is safely inside, it begins to rain. It rains for forty days and forty nights and the whole earth is covered with water.
 - c. When the rain stops, Noah sends a dove to look for dry land and the dove brings back a branch from an olive tree so the ark lands on dry land and Noah and his family begin their new lives with the animals they saved from the flood.
3. Flood stories were found in every ancient civilization, the Babylonians, the Sumerians, and the ancient Mesopotamians. The most famous of the flood stories is in the Gilgamesh Epic, which predates the Biblical flood story.
 - a. All of these flood stories follow the same pattern. The world is created, humanity spreads across the earth, but humanity is bad, so a flood is sent to stop the bad humans, and a hero is always saved.
 - b. These stories are set in the Tigris-Euphrates River valley and geologists can tell that there were periodic floods in ancient times.
 - c. Some speculate that the Black Sea was once a freshwater lake – glacier melt – breaching the Bosphorus land bridge --

4. The story of Noah's Ark is a universal story, and it makes you feel good to think about all of those animals walking two by two onto the boat. Two giraffes, two tigers, two snails inching forward, two rabbits, two parakeets, even two skunks.
 - a. But there is a dark side to this story of Noah ---so many people die. Everyone else on the face of the earth died except for Noah and his family.
 - b. We gloss over the death of the ungodly people outside of the boat, because it is too horrible to comprehend, and we consider it right.
 - c. Finally, the waters recede, and the boat lands and the animals leave the boat and **there is a rainbow in the sky as God promises never again to send a great flood that will cover the entire earth.**
5. I wish that there was more detail in the Bible because I have lots of questions about how this all happened.
 - a. Did the flood really cover the entire earth?
 - b. How did the animals get on the boat?
 - c. And how did Noah and his family keep the ark clean with all of those animals inside?
6. The Bible doesn't answer any of my questions.
 - a. In fact, Noah in the Bible is pretty silent.
 - b. Noah builds the ark.
 - c. Noah does what he is told.
 - d. We don't learn about Noah's motivations or his questioning,
 - i. we don't hear any description of Noah's family members,
 - ii. we don't hear how they reacted,
 - iii. we don't get much detail about the flood itself,
 - iv. and there is very little attention paid to the victims who are killed in the flood.
 - e. In the Bible we only hear about Noah, the one who will be saved. It seems like Noah is the only one who is told what is coming.
- 7. What truth about life do we learn from the story of Noah's Ark?**
8. A few years ago, a man named Robert Fulghum wrote an essay called "**All I really need to know I learned in kindergarten.**" It was so popular that it spawned a number of spin-offs. This week I ran across one called "All I need to know I learned from Noah's Ark."
 - a. Don't miss the boat.
 - b. Remember that we are all in the same boat.
 - c. Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark.
 - d. Stay fit. When you're 600 years old someone may ask you to do something really big.

- e. Don't listen to critics, just get on with the job that needs to be done.
 - f. Build your future on high ground.
 - g. For safety's sake travel in pairs.
 - h. Remember the Ark was built by amateurs, the Titanic by professionals.
 - i. No matter the storm, when you are with God there's always a rainbow waiting.
9. We learn a lot about God in the story of Noah's Ark.
- a. **The language used for God isn't angry or judgmental, but sad, disappointed, regretful, and merciful.**
 - b. **The relationship with God and the world is not simply that of a strong God and a needy world, but a tortured relationship between a grieved God and a resistant world.**
 - c. Four times in the story in Genesis, we hear the lists of people and animals and birds that are saved.
 - d. **The writer wants us to focus on who was saved rather than who was not. The writer wants us to focus on what God does to preserve creation.**
 - e. **The flood didn't change humanities bent towards evil, but it effected an irreversible change in God.**
 - f. The real changes in this story are in God.
 - g. What God does is to re-characterize the divine relationship to the world. **God decides to put up with the evil that is in the world.**
10. In this story there have been ten generations of people since the creation and the wickedness of creation has become so deep and broad that God feels like something must be done.
- a. Water is used to wipe the slate of the world clean and start again.
 - b. And the promises that God gives at the end of the flood are that something like this will never happen again.
 - c. **The flood is a unique event; it is not seen as an illustration of divine judgement but as an illustration of the certainty of God's promises.** *In Isaiah 54: 9-10 God affirms that for us, "This is like the days of Noah to me: Just as I swore that the waters of Noah would never again go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you and will not rebuke you. For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you."*
11. **The flood deeply affected the relationship between God and humanity.**

12. In this story we see that God is open to and affected by the world.

- a. **We see a God who expresses sorrow and regret,**
- b. **a God who judges, but doesn't want to,**
- c. **a God who goes beyond justice and determines to save some creatures, including every animal and bird,**
- d. **a God who commits to the future of a less than perfect world,**
- e. **a God open to change and doing things in new ways,**
- f. **a God who promises never to do this again.**
- g. **This is a story that reveals this tension within God, and in the end we have a God who wills to save, not who decides to destroy.**
- h. **A God committed to change based on experience with the world, and a God who promises to stand by the creation.**

13. **In this story Noah teaches me about being faithful.**

- a. Noah felt God calling him to build the ark and Noah did it. When Noah was finished, the animals came to him.
- b. He followed the urging of God and God provided what was needed.
- c. Twice in the story we are told that **Noah did all that the Lord had commanded him.**

14. The reality of all of this is that it is very hard to listen to God's voice calling us to do something that might be difficult or might not make sense.

- a. I was visiting with someone recently and they shared with me that beginning in January they decided to be regular with their giving. They kept stressing that it wasn't a lot of money, but they felt called by God to begin making their generosity a regular priority in their life.

15. **Noah listens to God and then Noah did what the Lord commanded.**

- a. These people today are taking actions based on what they feel God is commanding them to do.
- b. Are you listening?
- c. As a congregation, are we listening to what God wants us to become in the future?

16. **What truth about life can you learn from the story of Noah's Ark today?**

- a. Maybe it is to stand with those who are victims and are voiceless in our world, like countless people who lost their lives in the flood.
- b. Maybe it is to hear the stories of those whose stories we don't know.

- c. When I think about the violence in our world today, I give thanks for the conversations that are happening.
 - d. Folks are talking about race and white privilege.
 - e. People are talking about the senseless killings and massive gun violence and the hopelessness our young are feeling.
 - f. People of talking about the opioid crisis where so many young people are dying today.
 - g. May we help give justice to all of these voiceless peoples.
17. And in the middle of all of this is the dove – the Holy Spirit --- from the resurrected Christ nudging us and pulling us into a closer relationship with God so that we can really understand the saving grace that God has for all of his creation regardless of who they are.
18. In the Noah's Ark story, God sees the evil in the world and continues to open up God's heart to that world, which means that God will continue to grieve because we will continue to mess up. God decides to stick with us because of our brokenness. Our future depends on God's promise of love, forgiveness, and grace.
19. Thanks be to God.