

Of Disruption and Promise

Wednesday Lent - The Story of Noah

Slide: The story of the flood

Rarely do we have an opportunity to hear the majority of this very ancient story of the flood, of Noah, of the animals, both clean and unclean as it says here in scripture, and the iconic image of the dove that flies to find dry land. And, when we do hear it in full like this instead of in brief pieces like we usually do, we can almost hear our heads snap up and our eyes open wide while thinking something like: "God caused an apocalyptic flood to kill everything and everyone off like a horrible, terrible end of world movie plot?" If you have that reaction or at least some part of a reaction wondering this, than it's likely, like me, you feel it's uncomfortable, difficult to rationalize, and disruptive to the view you already have of the God we worship, who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. But, then, that's exactly the point of this story.

Let me tell you what this story is about but also what it's not about. First, what it's not about:

It's not about whether or not a flood happened in the ancient world like this one and it's not about the fact that there are other flood stories like this from various ancient traditions of the time. That's important, but not the reason why it's in the Bible - for that emphasis, however, I recommend you attend a great class of Pastor Nate's on Sunday morning at 9:30AM.

It's also not about the problem of evil, that God would do such a thing to what God created, and although a good question, again, Pastor Nate's class on Sunday mornings is currently dealing with these important topics. I recommend attending his class this week.

And, not to throw Pastor Nate under the bus, but that is exactly what I'm doing, the story of Noah also isn't about a story unto itself, to be taken out of context with the rest of scripture. I'm sure now that Pastor Nate has many an awesome topic for which to have his next classes until he retires!

Now, here is what the story of Noah is about: us. It's about us, the human condition, and our tendency to disrupt God's intention for creation over and over and over again, until God has to come down here and fix it. It's about our relationship with God, who is God and we who are not, and our tendency to want to take God's place in this world instead of allowing God to be God.

In the story of creation as Pastor Nate reflected upon last Wednesday, God created the universe to be good. God made a promise to Adam and Eve that God would give them every good thing. But, they broke their end of the bargain to not eat from the one tree they were told not to, so God had to work a new relationship with the human ones God made. Human beings disrupted the plan of God, abusing that awesome beautiful gift of free will given to them, and some stories down the line, after stories of the first murder and the hubris and absolute narcissism of the human race, that starting over is this story of Noah's family and the big flood. From this story, God gets a clean slate to recreate the world over again, promising not to flood the earth again.

But, from day one, God can see that Noah's family can't hold to their faithful relationship with God either. So, God tried out Abraham and Sarah, giving them a promise that their generations will be numerous and they will have a land of their own. But, again, the people break their promises to God and they end up in slavery to Egypt - to be freed again by Moses until they complain against God again and hopefully by now, you get the picture. I could go on all the way to the captivity in Babylon, but...

It is clear in scripture that God keeps promises but we don't. But, it's also clear in scripture that God desires to be in relationship with the creation God loves...no matter what they do to it.

But, here is where the Noah story becomes important for us today. This cleansing flood is a metaphor for the cleansing promises of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. This baptismal flood, unlike the first one in Noah's story, is a promise of permanence because of our tendency to forget our promises. Because we are the human ones, we cannot keep our promises well, but God does.

In the flood waters of baptism, we die daily to this falling short of God's glory. We die with Christ, who was the final promise of God given to us. And, it was the last promise God needed to give us. Noah's flood leads to the flood of baptism. We die daily in that flood, those healing, cleansing waters, and in those waters, God raises us daily as well, through the resurrection of Christ; in the flood waters, forgiveness abounds. There, we start anew each day. At the font, we begin again in the flood waters, in the waters of creation, because we don't keep our promises. But, God does.

This gift is meant to restore our relationship with God and it is not to be taken lightly or for granted. This gift of life, for the here and now and the then and after, is a flood that's worth dying in. Thanks be to God.