

Reading: Genesis 9:8-17 (OT page 10)

SERMON

The text verses for the sermon is verses 12 & 13: ¹²And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: ¹³I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.”

We all know the story of Noah and the ark. Even people who don't ever come to Church, know the story of Noah and the ark. There is even a movie coming out soon called “TWO BY TWO”. Yes there was a Broadway musical called by the same name years ago.

And there are lots of well-known slogans based on this story, like:

- Noah didn't wait for his ship to come in, he built one.
- Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the ark.
- Remember that the ark was built by amateurs and the Titanic was built by professionals.
- And above all else... don't miss the boat.

We have heard it all before. But let's be honest - there are many lessons to be learned from the story of Noah.

The story of Noah started when God looked down to the earth, and He saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every

inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. It says in Genesis chapter 6 verse 6 that “The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.”

God created everything and it was good - But now God had to “start” all over again just because of what the humans did not do. They did not live as God intended them to live.

The only person around who still believed in God was Noah. So God told him to build a huge big boat, because he was going to send a flood to destroy everything and everybody on the earth with the exception, of course, of Noah and his family and “seven⁸ of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and two of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, and also seven of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth.”

And in Genesis 6 we read that “Noah did everything just as God commanded him.”

That of course, doesn't mean that it was easy. Can you imagine what it must have felt like to build the ark? People most certainly thought that Noah was off his head!

In Palestine, without a single cloud in the air, far away from water, surrounded by dry land and Noah was building a boat bigger than a house. Can you imagine how difficult it must have been for Noah and his family to do the hard work of

building such a huge boat and managing the crowds of people wanting to see the spectacle - at the same time. Can you imagine the tension, the anxiety and yes the knowledge that most probably other people who you know or even like are not going to survive?

But Noah kept his focus on God. He kept his faith and listened to God. And God kept his word. The rain started, for 40 days and 40 nights, just like God said it would, and Noah and his family and all the animals that were chosen were safe.

The number 40 is not only very meaningful in the story of Noah but also in the whole Bible. Have you noticed how many times things in the Bible happen for 40 days or 40 years? The rain fell for 40 days and 40 nights in Noah's story, Moses stayed on mount Sinai for 40 days to get the 10 commandments from God, the Israelites had to travel through the desert for 40 years on their way to the promised land, once there, the spies came back to their people after exploring the promised land for 40 days, the prophet Elijah had to travel for 40 days to reach mount Horeb, the mountain of God, Jonah preached that in 40 days Nineveh will be overturned if the people didn't repent, the devil tempted Jesus in the desert for 40 days and 40 nights...

In Biblical times, 40 was a symbolic reference to the "right amount of time." The number 40 was an indication of the proper amount of time something had to last. So – all this just to say that Noah and his family were in that ark for as long as God needed them to be there.

Our reading is a description of what happened after a very long time in that boat, when Noah, and his family had to face their new future. And for this new beginning, God promised that he would be there for them – and every time they saw a rainbow, they should remember that He would never allow the whole earth to flood again. In other words, they should never forget that God is in charge, and that He would take care of them.

Why did God give them this assurance? Well, without this assurance Noah and his family could not plan their future, especially if the threat of a flood hung over their heads. The covenant made by God made a huge difference in how they viewed their future, their new beginning, because without this covenant, they did not have a future. They would have been too anxious, too afraid to plan ahead because they were very scared of water.

In Biblical times and especially in Palestine it was always warm and dry, so water became a symbol of chaos and evil, of everything they couldn't understand and were scared of.

And now God promised to keep the water at bay for ever!

In our reading there is a lot of repetition of words, and phrases. Why? Well only a very few people could read and write. The bible consisted of stories that were told by one generation to another and to make it easier to remember a lot of words and phrases got repeated so that they could learn it by heart.

What is the message of our reading?

HOPE.

To have hope in God will mean to believe in the inevitable as Noah did. Noah was faithful to God in a time when no one else was. But he did not follow suit. He followed God. Noah persevered and believed in God's promises.

God remained faithful and made not only a covenant with Noah but also with Abraham. Despite God's faithfulness, the human race chose not to follow and obey him. Sin took hold of humanity and God saw in His Almighty wisdom that humans will never enter His eternal kingdom unless He overcomes sin on behalf of the human race. So in and through Jesus Christ He was tempted by SIN after he fasted for forty days and forty nights. But because He was God, He could overcome sin and save humanity.

On this first Sunday of Lent we think of the sins of humanity and the sacrifice Jesus had to make in order to redeem the human race from sin, death and hell. In the Church year this Sunday is traditionally called "Invokavit" which is derived from the first words of the Latin version of Psalm 91:15: "He will call on me, and I will answer him". The first Sunday in Lent focuses on the mission of Jesus to the earth. During Lent, which last 40 days, we too will have to think of our own humanity and our relationship with God. During this time, we renew our perseverance to avoid the temptations of evil and trust and hope in God who saved us.

In the journey of Lent we can have the living hope that God will be with us in all our circumstances. And like the name Invokavit says, we too can ask God for help in the knowledge that He will answer our prayers in 40 days, meaning the right time. He will give us hope when all other help has failed. He will be there

when we reach the edge of a cliff. He will be there when we free fall and there is no one else to catch us.

God has a mission for each one of us on this earth. We do not necessarily have to build a boat like Noah did. God wants us to listen to Him and follow Him because when we do, other will follow suit.

We can be so easily frightened by our world, by the people of this world, especially the ones that do not have faith. We need to remember whom we serve. Noah did know his God and was not afraid to face his uncertain future. We too do not have to be afraid. God is bigger than any threat that we face. In and through Jesus Christ we have a new future.

Let us all walk during this time of Lent as a UNITED BODY of Christ and think of the sacrifice Jesus made on this earth for the salvation of our sins. And let us focus on our relationship with God and what it means in our daily lives.

No matter what other people said or thought, Noah did what God expected him to do, and that turned out to have been the right choice.

If we do the same – just focussing on what God tells us to do and not get distracted by anything or anybody – we will also be able to stay afloat in any and every storm that might erupt in our lives.

Amen