

**First Baptist Church of Augusta**  
***Three Stories That Changed the World: The Flood***

Genesis 8:1-4

June 22, 2008

I love the book of Genesis. It is rich with great stories that many of us grew up hearing. The stories of Genesis give a foundation of some of the earliest understandings of who God is and how God works in the world. Last week, I began a series entitled, “Three Stories that Changed the World,” and began with the creation. Next week we will hear the story of the Tower of Babel. Today, we will listen to the story of the Flood. This story begins with chapter six and ends with chapter nine. For the purpose of time, we have chosen the first four verses of chapter eight as our text, although, there are many rich angles one can take in this great story.

Most of our earliest impressions of Noah and the Ark go back to childhood. Noah builds a boat, two animals of every kind march up a gang plank, and everyone is sealed in cozy and dry while it rains for forty days, and they float for the rest of the year on a cruise, until it finally rests on Mount Ararat. A raven is dispatched and then a dove to find dry ground. They come back without any luck. After another release, the dove returns with a twig of an olive branch. The next time the dove is released, it does not return. The ark and presumably all the contents made it safe.

When I was a child, there was a movie about a group of archeologists who believed they had found the real ark of Noah in Turkey. It was just a couple of years ago, that another group thought they had discovered the ark, but this time it was in Iran. Back in 1916, Czar Nicholas dispatched two expeditions in search of the ark, and it is said that when Jimmy Carter was president in 1977, he flew over the alleged site of the ark.

Besides an entertaining story – which it most certainly is – what makes it a great story that changed the world? The story of Noah, the ark, and the flood, tells us three things about God...

### **The Anguish of God**

The flood narrative does not reveal to us the hands of an angry God. God is not angered, God is *grieved*. In chapter six, verse six we read: *And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.* In the KJV of the Bible, it says that God repented, because of the creation. God is not enraged, but saddened. The story of the flood speaks to us of the immanence, the proximity of God.

God dwells far more closely with us than we think. We imagine the Holy and Divine abiding “out there,” above us and beyond us, looking at us, but from some unnamable distance. This story is as much as anything, a theological testimony of God’s nearness and compassion.

Compassion means, to feel with another. Yet, in this compassion, God is sorry and grieved over what has become of creation. The story of the flood is the story of the anguish of God. It is also the story of the...

### **The Judgment of God**

At the time of Noah, the order and harmony God appointed for his creation was perverted. Therefore, the judgment of God was certain. In chapter 6 verse 11 we read: *Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth.*

The Hebrew word corrupt is simple enough. It means to go to ruin. It implies willful neglect. Every time we leave for vacation, I fear the worse for our house plants and garden. A week or so away can wreak havoc on living things, that depend on you for water and care. One year, we returned from vacation and our garden was

scorched from heat and lack of water. Another year, the freezer went out and all our frozen beef thawed, and left an ugly mess for us to clean up when we returned.

To go to ruin is how one understands corruption - willful neglect.

Not intending to reduce this story to mere moralistic conclusions, we nonetheless should know that when we distort the harmony of God's creation, we risk the very judgment of God. The sin of "isms" is just one way - racism, environmentalism, sexism are just a few examples of willfully neglecting responsible care for others.

In the beginning, God has called a world into being to join as a faithful covenant partner. Yet, the world did not live up to its part. The creation has refused to be God's creation. Those forty rain-soaked days that flooded the earth is a chronology of God's judgment. Yet, this judgment of God is **only** for forty days. God's judgment for that evil world is not everlasting. Even then, we see a glimmer of mercy. The flood is in part a word of warning - God has powerful ways to bring to the world his vision.

It is a story of betraying God's intent.

- refused to be God's creation
- refused to honor God as God
- perverted the relationships with God's creation

Are not these problems of Noah's day, the very same problems we face and experience today?

The story of the flood is the story of the anguish of God and the judgment of God. It is also the story of the...

## **The Hope of God**

Here is the twist: the story of the flood is really not about the flood at all. It is about God making possible a new future and thereby a new hope.

An unforgettable "prop" in this flood story is the ark. The ark in the story, is a boat about the size of a small aircraft carrier. It is really not a boat at all, at least in the traditional understanding of a boat. It was not used for sailing. It was a floating house. It is made of gopher wood, but to this day, nobody knows what exactly gopher wood is.

This is the vessel God used to deliver Noah and redeem creation. Interestingly enough in literature and in art, the church is often symbolized as an ark or ship. And this is most appropriate, because as God's people through his church, we can augment hope to a troubled world. A world that has perverted God's vision and intention is not left to judgment but brought into deliverance.

Genesis 8:1 is such a lovely verse: *But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark.*

You see, no one - not Noah or any one of us - wants to be forgotten. God remembered and God remembers - in this rests our genuine hope. Until the end of time, this will be our hope too - **that God will not forget us.**

In the movie *Grumpier Old Men*, Burgess Meredith plays a grumpy old man waiting to die. He has this poignant line where he says: "I think that God has forgotten about me."

There are times in all of our lives, when we secretly wonder if God has forgotten about us. Remember what God remembers: You are his creation.

It's not just important, however, that we remember that God knows who we are. It is also important that we know who we are. When I was teenager, I used to think that my daddy said some pretty dumb things. Parents are like that: "*If you don't stop crying, I am going to give you something to cry about.*" "*If you keep making that face, it will freeze like that, "Your teeth are going to rot and fall out"* – or the classic – "*Do I look stupid?*" Trust me kids, you do not want to answer that one.

It was not uncommon, that when I was about to leave home on a Friday or Saturday night for a date or a party, that my father would call out to me, "Son, don't forget who you are!" What? Did he think that once I got out of the driveway, that I would develop amnesia and forget my name and address. Was he concerned that I might be discovered wandering the downtown streets of Eatonton mumbling to myself, "Who am I?"

Oh yes, I knew what he meant. You probably heard the same thing too, when you were younger. And it is still difficult sometimes to remember who we are. The world with its competing claims on values beckons us to answer to a plethora of names, most of them false or fictitious. We still wish to impress friends, our boss, our companions, and our co-workers - all at the cost of forgetting who we are. Believe me, there are plenty of groups, political ideologies, philosophies, and cults who are ready to tell us who we are, ready to name us, put a label on us - conservative, moderate, liberal, radical, democrat, republican, libertarian, preppie, dead head, or grunge.

But, God remembers who we are, even when we forget - we are intimately part of God's handiwork, his children - don't ever forget that. The last word is God's and it is, "*I will remember my covenant*" (9:15). It is a sweeping movement from chaos to deliverance.

Sisters and brothers, we sit before the same God today. It is the God of Jesus, who can take the chaos that so often marks our lives - our failures and even our rebellion - and deliver us. God will not forget us. Sometimes the floods come because of our own propensity towards evil. Sometimes it is God's judgment. In these times, the floods are purging, even cleansing. This is part of the symbolism with baptism. But the flood will not last forever. Although God does not have to, God remembers. God will deliver.

The mountains of Ararat stand as stark symbols of creation's rebellion and God's inevitable judgment. But more importantly, the mountains of Ararat remind us of God's grace-filled memory.