

[sermon Sep 8-9 Noah 2018]

RALLY DAY
SEPTEMBER 8/9, 2018

1st MARSHALL
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GENESIS 6:5-22; 8:6-12; 9:8-17; MATTHEW 8:24-27

Flood and Promise

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.



The rainbow is one of the friendliest, most inviting and feel-good images that one could imagine. It belongs at the top of the list that includes other such adorable icons as: ponies and puppies, kittens and colts, lions-lying-down- with-lambs, and, of course, unicorns...

So it comes as no surprise that such attractive images are also featured prominently in lots of children's bedrooms, nurseries, pre-schools and daycares. If memory serves me correctly, we had a Noah's Ark mobile that we hung over our kids' cribs when they were little. And, as I speak, we have a Noah's Ark figurine set in our grandchildren's toy-box at home.

It features animals matching two-by-two, the ark, a happy looking Mr. and Mrs. Noah, who bear a remarkable resemblance to Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus! Have you noticed that too???

In fact, Noah's Ark is such a popular story that even people who don't go to church are most likely familiar with this adventure. It has been so well known that it was even the theme of a top ten pop hit back in 1968! The record was called The Unicorn (Song).



The words were written by the famous children's author, Shel Silverstein, and the ballad recorded by a band called The Irish Rovers. The song is significant – not just because it sold 8 million copies worldwide – but because its message reminds us that this story:

- in which those happy animals march into the ark two by two;
- and in which Noah and his family are also saved;
- and in which God puts a beautiful rainbow in the sky...
- is also, in many ways, anything but a happy bed-time tale for children.

The point of the song is to explain why there are no unicorns today.

Here are the words to the 3rd Chorus;

*(There were) Green alligators and long necked geese,
Some humpy-back camels and some chimpanzees,
Some cats and rats and elephants, but Lord I'm so forlorn,
I just can't see no Unicorn.*

Turns out, as “the rains came down and the floods came up” the unicorns were off playing in the water and mud. Eventually, of course, Noah's Ark had to be closed...and...the last verse of the song tells us the sad ending to the unicorn story.

*The ark started movin, it drifted with the tide.
Them Unicorns looked up from the rocks and they cried,
And the waters came down and sort of floated them away,
And that's why you'll never seen a Unicorn (today) ...*

*You'll see green alligators and long necked geese,
Some humpy-back camels and some chimpanzees,
Some cats and rats and elephants, but sure as you're born,
You're never gonna see no Unicorn.*

[Irish Rovers - The Unicorn Lyrics | MetroLyrics](#) Irish Rovers - The Unicorn Lyrics | MetroLyrics

So this story, that has so many delightful child-friendly images, also invites us adults to take a good, hard look at the destructive power of sin in our lives, the destructive power of sin in all creation.

The setting for our story is made abundantly clear in Genesis chapter 6:5-8:

⁵The 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. ⁶And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷So 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.' ⁸But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord.

God's pain over humanity's cruelty, God's wrath at human selfishness, God's frustration with humanity's love of sinning – all these terrible traits of human nature are combined to convince God to do something drastic.

So, in a very real sense, the Lord rolls back the hands of time, God arrests the forward motion of creation and drags it all back to the brink of a watery chaos – in a painful and, ultimately, futile, attempt to wipe the slate clean and start all over again.



Remember the creation story from Genesis one? Here's what the biblical witness tells us: *In the beginning...*

God calls forth light from darkness,

God pulls dry land out of the clutches of the sea.

God creates an environment out of that hostile, watery chaos in which Life can be nurtured and blessed to grow.

Then the blight of sin that enters the story through one man and one woman eventually spreads its toxic tendrils to include the whole creation. It leads God to the terrible conclusion that the only way to save the world is to hit the re-boot button, to turn it all off and then on again to see if that will make any difference in how creation is able to function.

Those of you who know the rest of the story [spoiler alert!], does the Lord's plan work? Does starting over with creation eliminate humanity's selfishness, sinfulness, our cruelty or greed???

The answer, of course, is no – as God later freely admits. We're told in Genesis 8:21, the Lord said in his heart, *I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.*

That's not a real rosy outlook on the future of life as God's people, is it? Humanity will not change, therefore what we see around us today is the same...yesterday, today and tomorrow.

But is life really that difficult? I mean, what are we called to do? How are we called to live? Someone tell us how Jesus summed up the entirety of God's holy law in two little sentences:

Love God. Love your neighbor as yourself... Simple, right? So simple that even children can understand it...and yet...

How's that working for you? How's that working for our society? How's that working for the world? Heck, we can't even remember how to live by one of the rules we all learned in Kindergarten – *If you can't say something nice...*

Right or left, liberal or conservative – it does not appear to matter. A quick scan of Facebook reveals that often, the only thing that seems to count is who can be the nastiest. Or is that just me??

But...maybe we're looking at the wrong thing in this story. Maybe its message is not about the futility of God trying to fix the many holes in our very human hearts.

Maybe what we're meant to see in this story is a glimpse of God's heart, of the depth of God's love, of God's particular passion to take the problem of our sin upon himself and fix it – once for all.

Turn in your bulletins or pew bibles to Genesis, Chapter 9, v. 12-13

¹²God said, 'This is the sign of the **covenant** that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations:¹³I have set my **bow** in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.



Here God does NOT say *I will put a **RAIN**-bow in the sky*. Instead, the Lord says, *I will put a **BOW** in the sky*, which could be seen as a **BOW-AND-ARROW**, as in deadly **WEAPON**.

In v. 12 God refers to the covenant that he has made with the people. A couple of years ago I preached on the way that God made a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15. You've heard the phrase, *Let's cut a deal...*

To cut a covenant, to cut a deal, meant to cut the large sacrificial animals in half, and create a bloody walkway between the carcasses. Then, both parties were to walk on that path, thereby making this promise:

May this bloody mess – or worse! – happen to me if I fail to live up to my part of our deal.

After the flood, Noah kills some animals and makes a sacrifice to God. Then the Lord does something amazing – he puts a bow in the heavens – pointed not down toward the heart of humanity, but up toward the very heart of God.

The Lord makes no demand of Noah and his family – God simply acknowledges that since humanity cannot change, then the only thing that can change is God's

plan to save the world... Placing the bow aimed at God's own heart, the Lord makes this promise: *May this bloody mess – or worse! – happen to me if I fail to live up to my part of our deal.*



So what happens to God's plan as the centuries unfold?

Things do not get better.
 We humans do not improve.
 Sin runs rampant.
 Peace is trampled by war.
 Forgiveness is flooded by vengeance.

So this time, God takes a very personal role in the plan to save the world.

God sends the Son as a beacon of light – in a dark and stormy world... knowing full well that his light will be extinguished like a candle in the wind.

And yet, instead of letting anger once again flood the earth with a regal and righteous wrath, the Lord, instead, honors Jesus' prayer, *Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing.*

And God remembers...the promise, God honors Jesus' prayer, and God places over us a symbol that will forever stand as a song of praise to the triumph of God's grace. As the old hymn puts it, *In the cross of Christ I glory.*

Thanks be to God. Amen.