

Devotion: Noah and God

On Sunday, we concluded a four-part sermon series on the story of Noah and we've been looking for insights on how to navigate this uncertain time. Throughout this story we've seen how Noah is an example of faith.

- In the first sermon, we looked at what faith looks like and we saw that faith is less of an affirmation of belief in God (as important as that is). Biblical faith is more of a relational dynamic of trusting in God. Noah trusts that God is present in his life. Noah listens to God and he trusts that God directs him. Noah has confidence that God is going to do what God says he's going to do. As Elton Trueblood said, "Faith is not belief without proof, (faith is) trust without reservations."
- Our second sermon focused on the second aspect of faith. Not only does Noah trust God, and listen to God. Noah acts, he does "all that the Lord commanded him to do". Noah shows us that faith - when fully matured - has these dual elements trust and obedience. Faith trusts in God and it also launches out to where we believe God is leading, with the belief that if we trust completely, God will guide and support us all the way.
- Next, we looked at the flood as metaphor for the storms we go through in life and we examined the "in-between time" of waiting, which is a painfully difficult and slow time. But it is also a time in which God is doing a transforming work in us to release the past and to prepare us for what lies ahead. The in-between time loosens us, frees us, transfigures us, and refines us as we stumble our way into new expressions of hope and faith and gratitude in order that we might be God's renewed people, ready to love and serve him in whatever lies ahead.
- Then last Sunday we saw that when Noah off the ark, he's in a place he's never known before and he will do things he's never done before and that must have been overwhelming, but the first thing Noah does, is he worships God, he offers thanks with burnt sacrifices. Noah, again, is our example of faith: his trust and obedience to God remains steadfast.

There are two main characters in this story Noah and God. Noah is an interesting character. He's an example to us of faith and shows us what faith looks like. He's righteous, blameless and he walks humbly with God. He's an example of trust and obedience. And we're supposed to be like Noah. But in the end, the decisive and most interesting character is not Noah but God.

Who is God? That's really what this story is about. And more to the point, the story of Noah is about the question of how God will deal with a world in rebellion. How will God deal with us even when we are disobedient and destructive?

And at first, it looks for all intents and purposes that God is our worst nightmare. God is like Bill Cosby's father when he was a teenager. "I brought you into the world and I can take you out."

But then it appears as if God changes his mind. God changes - God repents - twice in this story. First, he repents that he ever made human beings in the first place. But in the end, God repents for the flood. "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." This is the first covenant between God and humanity in the Bible.

“As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.” Those are the words of the covenant.

A covenant is supposed to be a two-sided contract. Both parties agree to act in the future in a certain way. But in this covenant - this astonishing turn from God's judgement to God's assurance - there is no promise given on the human side: no repentance or resolve going on here. The inclination of the human heart is as “evil” at the end of the story - as it was at the beginning. Nothing has changed in the inclination of human beings.

All that has changed - and decisively changed - is God's resolve to remain faithful to his creation in spite of us. In this story, it's not humanity that moves closer to God in order to resolve this crisis. It is God who moves closer to us.

Walter Brueggemann writes: “There may be death and destruction. And evil has not been eradicated from creation. But we are now assured that these are not rooted in the anger or rejection of God. The relationship of creator to creature is no longer in a scheme of retribution. Because of a revolution in the heart of God, that relationship is now based in unqualified grace.”

So often people think that the God of the OT is a God of anger and judgment and the God of the NT a God of grace and forgiveness. But that's not true. From Noah's story and from here on out - God will embark on a long history of saving a disobedient humanity that resists God's purposes and will over and over again place the world in jeopardy. That's what follows in the rest of the OT and it will culminate in the saving grace of Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected.

I cannot do without this story. I cannot do without the God who has promised never to forsake or leave us, come hell or high water. I cannot do without that God who has promised to set a rainbow in the sky as a sign of an everlasting covenant, and who tells us, “Do not fear, I am with you.”

It is that God who finally emerges from the story of Noah and the Ark. It is that God whose love is from everlasting to everlasting. Amen.

Yours in the journey,

Pastor Kristen

Announcements

Return Leadership Team: The Return Team and your pastor have set the date of Sunday, August 16th as the time when we will return to in-person worship services. Our new worship services will be on Sunday at 10am and on Wednesday at 7pm.

We will also be offering online video of our worship services as well as online sermons and the weekly devotions on the Pastor's Page.

August 16th will also be a return to the in-person ministries of the church. Our Boy Scouts and support groups will be able to meet in the church, following CDC guidelines. However, our Before and After School Program and Enduring Strings Program will be closed until further notice.

Our first priority remains keeping one another safe. We care deeply for you, and remain committed to doing all we can for each other's safety and health. To that end, I'm offering a word of caution, that the August 16th date should be treated as preliminary. We will keep assessing the situation as time marches on and will inform you immediately should any changes be made to this schedule.

Thank you for your patience, understanding and prayers,

Pastor Kristen