

Gather Us In
By Rev Todd Farnsworth
Genesis 6: 5-20



5 The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. 6 The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. 7 So the Lord said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them." 8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. 9 This is the account of Noah and his family.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. 10 Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. 12 God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. 13 So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. 14 So make yourself an ark of cypress[a] wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. 15 This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high.[b] 16 Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit[c] high all around.[d] Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. 17 I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every

creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. 18 But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. 19 You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. 20 Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. 21 You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.”

22 Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

The Lord said to Noah

There's going to be a floody floody

The Lord said to Noah

There's going to be a floody floody

Get those children out of the muddy muddy

Children of the Lord!

That's the lesson that we'll be teaching across at Sunday School today and it is a lesson that most of us have learned when we were wee people of faith. The story arc of people defying God, God choosing a remnant to survive, God wiping out the bad with a flood, and the reestablishing of earth (a second shot at Creation, if you will) is a classic as sturdy as Noah's ark, itself! And we teach it as though it is an original...but I think it's important, as we gather in today, that we note the nuances in the story that come from different religions.

Great Flood stories exist across cultures. Before our story about Noah and his clan, there were stories from

- the Atra Hasis (from 18th century BCE) the gods are looking to do some population control and send a flood to wipe out the people. A kind god intervenes and warns the hero of the story to build a boat and preserve his family. After the flood, the gods decide that there are better ways to deal with overpopulation.
- The 17th century BCE Epic of Gilgamesh which borrows heavily from the Atra Hasis. In this version, the great king Gilgamesh wants to be an immortal like Utnapishtim. Gilgamesh is warned by a kindly immortal named Enki, that a flood is coming. Gilgamesh preserves his family and the wrath of the gods who are out to kill him for his lack of humility.
- And since our story, the Great Flood motif has roiled on....
- In Canada the Ojibwe tribe tells the story of a great warrior, Nanabhozo, who kills the Great serpent threatening his people. As the serpent dies it creates a flood that threatens the tribe and Nanabhozo remembers the Indian children and warns them to go to the mountains. Nanabhozo builds a raft and many are saved. They remember that the Great Serpent will not threaten them again.
- The Inca of South America tell of a supreme being and creator god, Con Tici (Kon Tiki) Viracocha, who first created a race of giants, but they were unruly, so he destroyed them in a mighty flood and turned them to stone. Following the deluge, he created human beings from smaller stones. Some versions of the Unu Pachakuti have the surviving man and woman floating to Lake Titicaca in a wooden box.^[1]
- In India, [Pūlugā](#), the creator god in the religion of the indigenous inhabitants of the [Andaman Islands](#), sends a devastating flood to punish people who have forgotten his commands. Only four people survive this flood: two men and two women.

- And in Viet Nam, Virtually every Southeast Asian ethnic group in Vietnam tells a story of a great flood that leaves only 2 survivors who must consummate the marriage. Sometimes they are siblings, sometimes a woman and dog, but from this incestuous abnormality is born a gourd or a gourd-shaped lump of flesh, and the gourd becomes the source for various ethnic groups, according to Dang Nghiem Van, who explored the flood myths of Southeast Asia by collecting 307 flood myths in a field research in Vietnam in the early 90s, describing how they all have varying versions of essentially a similar story.^[27]

The point is, that every culture has a reason for telling the story of a Great Flood.

Our culture, which worships a unique deity named YHWH, tells the story to highlight our God. From Noah's tale, we learn that there was a time when God became angry with how people were treating one another. Folks were cruel and saw one another as commodities that were beyond love. Of course, this flew in the face of our God's expectations for humanity. *The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. 6 The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.* I'll bet that when early adherents heard this story it caused a little soul searching! I mean, who would want to trouble the heart of God???

Alas, the die is cast, and YHWH decides to start over with a few decent folks. The "remnant" is another classic motif in Judaism. God saves a small portion of humanity to re-establish a right relationship with Godself. In this story, God gives direction to Noah as to how he can save his family. Very

detailed cubit by cubit direction! God gives direction as to how the creatures of the earth can be saved. 2 by 2! Our God has a plan! Our God is concerned not only with humanity but with the seeds of the earth and all that dwells in it! Our God wants there to be a refuge from the storm so that life can be preserved!

We see examples of these “arks” of life throughout history. Through the faith and wisdom of God’s people we can recall:

- In 1939, when war broke out with Germany, how Princess Elizabeth and her sister Margaret were removed from harm's way. *The young princesses were two of over three million people—mainly children—(who were arked in trains and buses), who left cities for the safety of small towns and the countryside over the course of the war. The government’s Children’s Overseas Reception Board also evacuated over 2,600 children to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United States. On October 13, 1940, in response to this mass movement of people, Princess Elizabeth gave her first address from the drawing room of Windsor Castle as part of the BBC’s Children’s Hour in an attempt to boost public morale. She spoke directly to the children who had been separated from their families as part of the evacuation scheme.*

“Thousands of you in this country have had to leave your homes and be separated from your fathers and mothers. My sister Margaret Rose and I feel so much for you, as we know from experience what it means to be away from those you love most of all. To you living in new surroundings, we send a message of true sympathy and at the same time we would like to

thank the kind people who have welcomed you to their homes in the country.” Princess Elizabeth remembered her people.

(You can hear Princess Elizabeth’s address to the children of the United Kingdom in [this video](#).)

- In September of 2001, following the attacks on New York and Pennsylvania by terrorists, churches, mosques, and synagogues opened their arks to those who were fleeing the dust and destruction caused by the attacks. The houses of worship offered food, healing and prayer for those who entered their holy space. The people within those arks remembered God's promises.

Our God finds a way to preserve life. Our God teaches us to create arks so that people have refuge from the storms that threaten to overcome them.

Finally, and this is quite unique, in our story of the Flood, God makes a covenant with Noah. In the verses we have today, the first promise is vague: God says, *Everything on earth will perish. 18 But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you. 19 You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you.*

God’s part is kind of implied. God will keep Noah and his passengers alive. And God follows through on that offer.

But our God does something more. Like the warrior Nanabhozo, *God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded.* God remembers those who have gone through a great calamity, and God makes a further promise. A promise of compassion. A promise of hope.

In Chapter 9 of Genesis we read: **12** *And God said (to Noah and his sons), “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: 13 I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. 16 Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.”*

17 *So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.”*

The story we tell, the story our children will learn, is about a loving God who provides not only a place for us to gather in when the sea gets rough and our lives are in peril, but our God makes us a promise that we will be remembered and preserved through those hardships...or as the kids might sing:

The sun came out

And it dried up the landy landy

The sun came out

And it dried up the landy landy

Everything was fine and dandy dandy

Children of the Lord!

Remember our story.

Amen