

Go! Sermon Series
Moses Leaves the Ark – Gen. 8:6-19
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I recognize the unfortunate coincidence of preaching on the story of the Great Flood when the eastern coast of our country has been battered by Hurricane Florence. So, let me say right away that there's an important comparison I want us to avoid making. In the Genesis story, God sends the flood to wipe out the earth and start over with Noah. Making God the cause of the flood is as means to an end of making a point about God's sovereignty and concern for God's creation. That does not mean that God is the cause of any natural disasters that take place, including Hurricane Florence, and to believe that is a dangerous perversion of scripture and of God's nature. I don't believe God sent Hurricane Florence, but I do believe God is present in the midst of it, and our prayers are with all those affected.

This modern-day parallel about devastating storms and the destructive power of water is a good way to get into this story that we all know so well. People who've never read the Bible or don't even believe in God know about Noah's Ark. It's a standard Sunday School teaching, there's cute little songs about it, and we've all seen children's books with grandfatherly Noah surrounding but fuzzy lions and grinning alligators and cuddly cobras and smiling tarantulas.

I tend to think that whole experience wasn't that easy for Noah. I'm guessing that smile he's wearing in those children's books is forced, don't you? Noah was a righteous man, and he trusted in God completely. He built his ark, just like God told him to, and through God's grace Noah rose above the waters instead of sinking below them, while the rest of humankind perished.

Imagine his situation: there's the storm of the century going on outside, he's adrift in a floating zoo, animals of all kind all around him, the tigers getting hungry, the rabbits doing their thing: "I thought we had only two rabbits! Where did these other 18 come from?" He's got no idea of what's going on outside, no idea of where they are, no idea of when they will get to leave. The boards from his homemade boat are creaking from the winds, water is starting to seep in through the cracks, claustrophobia must be closing in like a noose around his neck. He sees the panic on the faces of his family members, his kids are really starting to get on his nerves, "Daddy, tell Ham it's his turn to clean the elephant's pen!" He must have felt confusion, terror, fear of the unknown and the future. It's hard to keep the faith when the storm is raging around you.

But I have to wonder if there's a deeper concern in Noah's heart as he's floating along at the mercy of the waves. There's a children's story that goes like this: One child asks another, "Would you forget me in an hour?" "No." "Would you forget me in a day?" "No." "Would you forget me in a month?" "No." "Wanna hear a joke?" "Sure." "Knock knock." "Who's there?" "I thought you said you wouldn't forget me!"

Noah must be wondering if God has forgotten him. Have you ever felt forgotten by God? Can you relate to what Noah's experiencing? Feelings of fear, doubt, confusion. Not knowing why something happened, not knowing what's going to happen next, not knowing what our future is. How could God let this happen? Where is God during all this? Why won't God fix things? The walls begin to leak and the boat begins to rock. The

thunder gets louder and rains intensify. We are surrounded by panic, choked by fear, and whether it rains one day or forty days and forty nights, it feels like a lifetime. We put our trust in God and build our ark of faith, but in the darkness and chaos of the floods, our righteousness dissolves into doubt, our once sturdy faith becomes a leaky vessel, and we wonder if we've been forgotten. It's hard to keep the faith when the storms are raging around you.

And if we're really honest, our fear of being forgotten by God comes about because of our susceptibility to forget God. In the craziness of living life, sometimes we forget God, so when the waters begin to rise in our lives, we wonder if God will forget us. It's so easy to do. It doesn't take a big thunderclapper of a storm to cause our faith to sink. Sometimes it's simply the living of everyday life, making ends meet, living up to our responsibilities, keeping our schedule. Did I remember to pick up the kids from soccer? Did I remember the dinner party Friday? Did I remember to get bananas at the grocery? Did I remember to schedule the repairman? We struggle to recall all that we have to remember, and before we realize it, we've remembered all the little things, and forgotten the big thing. As we've tried our best to keep everything together, we've drifted away from our Anchor, the One who holds us in place. We've forgotten, and we wonder if God has, too.

That's why it's helpful to reinterpret the flood story, to move beyond our Sunday School understanding to see what God is doing here, because at its heart, it's a story about remembering. If we go back a few chapters to the beginning of the Bible, we learn that water covered the face of the earth, and God brought order to that chaos. God separated the waters of the sky – that's rain – from the waters of the earth, then made the waters of the earth dry up so that there would be land. Then God created the cuddly cobras and the smiling tarantulas all other living things.

A few chapters later, and we humans have made a real mess of things. So, God decides to start over and hits the reset button. The waters that God had separated God now brings back together, so that the rains that God put in the sky come pouring down, and water once again covers the face of the earth. We're back to where we started. But there's one significant difference. Noah and his ark. In the beginning, there were no living things around for the churning of the water, but now there is. Noah is experiencing first-hand the chaotic nature of the storm, but what he trusts is that God is once again in the mode of Creator. In a sense, the Noah's Ark story is a re-creation story, in which God will once again bring order to the chaos, separate the water, and cause dry ground to appear. As William Brown writes, "This is earth's re-entry into the womb. The waters bear the ark like amniotic fluid, while the ark holds the promise of the earth's reproduction. The storm scene is a womb scene."

And when that happens and God is done recreating, God tells Noah to go out of the ark, to re-enter this new world that God has created, to be reborn into this new life that awaits. But here's the thing: Noah didn't know what was on the other side of that door. Where do you find the strength to walk through a closed door, not knowing what awaits you on the other side?

What's on the other side of our storms? If only Jim Cantore and the Weather Channel could predict that, right? We've had the skies open up around us when we've received bad news, or lost a loved one, or had an unexpected diagnosis. We know chaos,

don't we? We know what it's like to face an unknown future, to not know what awaits us on the other side of a storm, to face that door that is closed in front of us.

God promises us that our storm scenes are womb scenes. What this story tells us is that what is waiting for us on the other side of our storms is new life, God's re-creation, the order that God has made out of the chaos we've experienced. God has remembered us. It may not be what we want to happen; I'm sure Noah wasn't thrilled about starting over with only his family to support him. It's not what we would want to happen when we come home to an empty house for the first time, or when we realize we can't physically do what we used to do, or when our hair falls out after a chemotherapy treatment. The storms in our lives take their tolls, don't they? But when the water recedes and the rain subsides, we walk through that door and find that God is still there and that new life awaits us. How does it change the way we weather our trials if we see our storm scenes as womb scenes?

That's the promise God made to Noah and God makes to us. I wonder if God knew what God was getting into with that promise. God knew what humans were like, and only 40 days or so before this covenant with Noah, we humans had provoked God so strongly that God wiped us all out. Do you ever wonder if God looks at the mess we've created and thinks, "What this world needs is a boat full of true believers and a really big flood?" Thousands of years later, and yet, we haven't changed.

But God did. Once Noah leaves the ark, God puts a rainbow in the sky, a sign of God's promise to never again destroy the world. Between the flood and the rainbow, something in God's heart was transformed. Even though we have provoked God in ways worse even than that of the people who lived during the flood, God has kept that promise.

By doing so, God faced a dilemma. How does God deal with this broken world without wiping the slate clean and starting over? How does God honor the rainbow? And then God did the unthinkable, the unimaginable, something so radical and foolish and passionate and full of love. Instead of sending a flood, God sent Jesus. God sent Jesus to remind us of the rainbow covenant, to show us that God remembers us and that God is at work in all things to bring about new life.

I don't know what storm awaits us, but I know that there is one. That's a fact of life. But it's also a fact that God is present in the midst of the chaos and that we don't ride the waves alone. We have God and we have each other; that's what it means to be the church. And when we arrive on the other side of the storm, we can trust that God is doing something new. The storm scene is a womb scene. Thanks be to God.