

**Prayer: Noah Swims Against the Current**  
**Genesis 6:5-8; 8:20-22**  
**October 7, 2018**

I want you to let your imagination run wild this morning and picture what it must have been like for Noah as he begins to build the great ark. God has told him that in order to save himself, his family and representatives of the animals he must build this gigantic boat. Now there is no other boat like it around. It is the middle of a great plain in ancient Mesopotamia over 5000 years ago. His neighbours must have scratched their heads in bewilderment at this bizarre project. Has old Noah lost his marbles? Where does he think he is going to sail this great ship? There's no water for miles and he can't drag it to water. What has happened to him?

Talk about swimming against the current of public opinion and the status quo of rational beings! Noah has lost it, they must have thought to themselves. Perhaps their kids would have mocked Noah's kids at the local school.

Let's read the Genesis story and see if we can make any sense of why this ark was necessary and why Noah was chosen as God's hope for a new humanity.

Many might think that the crisis in this early flood story is the deluge of water and God's judgment on the sins of the human family. But is that the real crisis? Walter Brueggemann says that the focus of this story is rather on the change that occurs in God which in turn opens the possibility of a new beginning for creation.

Why is God upset? God created the world to be his covenant partner. But the human family has proven resistant to God's call and purpose. Genesis gives us the words to describe this betrayal: wickedness, evil thoughts continually, corrupt, violence. God's response to this:

***And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, "I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created...for I am sorry that I have made them."(Gen.6:5ff)***

We often mistakenly think of God as one who is in control and aloof from feelings. Here in the flood story God is anything but impassive. Again Brueggemann reminds us: ***What we find there (in the flood story) is not an angry tyrant, but a troubled parent who grieves over the alienation...*** He concludes: ***The crisis is not the much water, which now has become only a dramatic setting. Rather, the crisis comes because of the resistant character of the world which evokes hurt and grief in the heart of God.***

Can God change his mind from his decision to destroy the world? Noah's response to God does change God's mind. Noah becomes in the story the bearer of an alternative possibility for the world. Why Noah? He finds favour with God. He, like Enoch before him, walks with God. By this we are to understand that this upright man lives his life out as a prayerful response to the Creator God.

But Noah's response to God, like ours today, is not an easy one. Most of his contemporaries have chosen to live life as if God didn't exist. God has no place in their thoughts or their actions.

Noah's faith and prayer is counter-cultural for him and for us.

He lives to a different set of values. He marches to a different drummer. His life of prayer and listening and walking with God sets him on the razors edge. It's not an easy place to live life. It exposes him and his family to ridicule and alienation. Building an ark in the middle of a Mesopotamian plain is not a rational thing to do. Taking God's word seriously is never a popular way to live, not then and not now.

Jesus knew this. We read in our Gospel today about the importance of watchfulness.

We read: ***For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man... Therefore, you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. (Matthew 24:36ff)***

What this story of Noah imprints on my heart is how much it cost God to alter the course of human history. God's response is to open up a new way for us through God's pain, sorrow and grief. God's response to creation is not as a remote tyrant who strikes out in vengeance against a recalcitrant creation. But rather he responds as a hurt parent who continues to desire covenant faithfulness from us.

The same pain and hurt God experiences in this early story of Noah and the flood reaches its climax in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Here again God's plan for a new covenant with us which began with Noah, a beginning shrouded in costly judgment, finds expression in God's own Son bearing the pain and sins of the world. Anyone who reads this Noah story in combination with the agonizing death scene at the cross surely will bow their knee in humility and gratitude that our Creator is compassionate and loving.

Noah the counter-cultural covenant partner with God assures the human race of a new possibility, a different future. We too in our generation signal a faithful response to God. We too, like Noah's, will be counter cultural in the sense that our values, ethics, and purpose in life are shaped by a prayerful response to God's word and to Jesus Christ. Christians offer a different vision of the good life as we look to live life under the Lordship of Christ. As followers of our Lord we weave our faith into the heart of our way of life: our work, relationships, play, purpose and goals in life. All are expressed, like Noah's, in relationship to God as Sovereign Lord. And so we gladly sing God's invitation to each one of us.

**Will you come and follow me if I but call your name? *Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?* Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known, will you let my life be grown in you and you in me.**

**Amen**