

Good Morning! And Happy Father's Day to all the men out there. May God bless you and keep you.

Today and over the next few weeks we're going to be looking at the story of Noah - found in chapters 6-9 in the book of Genesis. We think of Noah and the Ark as a kids' story, right? All the animals in a floating zoo, a raven and a dove sent out to find dry land, a rainbow in the sky. That's the kids' version of this story.

But there's an adult version - and that's what we're going to be looking at because the story of Noah is very much an adult story. It's filled with profound and difficult theological themes. Its teachings are particularly relevant for us today, so for the next few weeks we'll asking ourselves: Is this story still our story.

As the story begins, we learn that God has had it. We're told at the outset, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of humanity was very great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts was continually evil and only evil." God says the imagination of their hearts are evil. Cuthbert Simpson, an Anglican Priest who was the Dean of Christ Church in Oxford says, "Sin is the result of a man fixing his imagination on himself."

Our imaginations - yours and mine - that's where our dreams come from. And most of the time our dreams revolve around ourselves - our next vacation, our next car, our next house. We become self-absorbed with our dreams and they revolve mostly around us. But God calls us to a higher standard. God calls us to dream about how we can make this world a better place to live in. God calls us to dream God's dreams, to live out God's purpose for our lives, not our purpose. In this story, God's looking down upon humanity and says that the imaginations of their hearts is self-absorbed. It appears that people are doing things for themselves instead of doing things for others and this begins to grieve God's heart.

In Hebrew, that word for evil or wickedness - it means disease. God's looking at the earth and the image here is that humanity is almost like a cancer that's spreading over the earth. Humanity had become self-absorbed, thinking only about themselves rather than others.

But God has more grievances to tell us. Verse 11 says, "Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth."

Now, that's three times we just heard that word corrupt - also translated as to destroy or to ruin. God's saying that the humans are destroying - they're ruining the earth. In the first chapter of Genesis - in the creation story - each day God creates another part of creation and at the end of each day, God calls what he created, Good. At the end of the last day of creation he calls it "very good!" And somehow, now, just 5 chapters later, these humans -who've been told to be stewards of the garden - to take care of God's creation - God's looking down upon the earth and humans aren't taking care of it. They're destroying it.

A friend of mine and her siblings inherited a cabin up north in Wisconsin. It's a beautiful cabin on a beautiful lake and during the summer when they weren't using it, they'd let us use it, which was incredibly generous of them. And while we were there, we could use their stuff, fishing equipment, floatation devices, whatever they had we could use. And we made sure we were careful to take care of it. Before we'd leave, we'd spend time cleaning it up, we wanted it to look as good, or better when we left - as it did when we'd arrived. And, before we left, we always made sure to leave a gift as a way of saying thank you. It's just the right thing to do when somebody gives you their place to at. At creation, God says, here, all of this, it's yours to enjoy, just take good care of my stuff, take care of my creation, and now just a few chapters later, we find the people are destroying the planet.

This is still our story today. And we learn from this story that that's also part of reason why God's gonna send the flood. It's another indictment against humanity.

And there's a 3rd indictment. It says, "and the earth was filled with violence." Right after the Creation story, what happens right after that - is that Cain kills Abel, brother kills brother. We learn after that that Noah's father kills somebody because he's been wounded by them. The earth is filled with violence. And once again we ask ourselves, is this our story today? Look around. It is still our story. In the last century, the 20th century was the most sophisticated, technological century than had ever been seen before. And yet more people died from war and violence and oppression than all the other centuries combined.

A critical issue in America today is that we are confronted with our long history of racial violence in this country. Unlike any other time, certainly I've not seen it in my adult lifetime, has there been such an urgent call to action, to finally hear the struggles of the black community, to grapple with our long history of racial inequality and violence and to take decisive and broad action to address injustices.

In Noah's story, we hear God's indictment on humanity. It also tells us something important about God, In verse 6 it says, "And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart." God's heart was grieved at what humanity was doing - to each other - and to creation because when God created us in his image, God gave us the ability to choose; the ability of free choice - to make our choices. We can choose to love or to hate. We can choose to care only for ourselves and what we're getting, or we can choose to care for others and ensure they get an equal share. God says in Noah's story, they have chosen hate and they are not only destroying each other, they're destroying my creation. It was not what God expected from humankind when he gave us free will. And it says that God was "sorry." God repents that he ever created them in the first place.

And so, God says: I will blot out the earth and everything on it...for I am sorry that I have made them." But then the story takes a decisive pivot. Right after this, it says, "But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord." Why? The story goes on to tell us three things about Noah - that Noah was a righteous man, that he was blameless in his generation and that Noah walked with God.

Righteousness - that Noah was a righteous man - means that Noah was choosing to do God's will. He didn't always get it right but he was trying to live a life where he was trying to choose God what God desired, what God would have him do. It says he was blameless - which doesn't mean he was perfect - it means he lived with integrity. Someone who wants to do the right thing, and lives that out consistently, daily, not just on going-to-church Sunday. (LOL) He lived with integrity. And it says that he walked with God, which means he knew God's presence in his life, he spoke with God and he prayed to God, did offerings to God and he listened for God to talk to him. He walked faithfully with God and God found favor with Noah.

In the end, God found favor with Noah because Noah was the opposite of everybody else on the planet at that time. They were self-absorbed, and didn't care about other people, but Noah cared about others. They were destroying the planet but Noah cared about God's creation. They were creating violent and evil acts but Noah was walking with God and so God found favor with Noah.

Noah is an amazing character. He is a righteous man - 600 years old at the time we are told - who puts his trust in God - suffers the ridicule of his neighbors - and goes on one of the most unbelievable building projects ever told.

Noah is meant to be an exemplary figure. He is meant to be an example of faith and obedience. He is meant to be a hero in the faith (at least in this part of the story). And through his trust and obedience, he saves the human race. In such a day as this, how can we be more like Noah?

John Wesley gave his Methodists 3 simple rules. If you're not familiar with them, the 3 simple rules are this: As followers of Christ, we're to 1. Do No Harm: we avoid evil, injustice and oppression in what forms they present themselves. 2, We're to Do Good: that means that every morning when we get up, we say, "God, use me today. God, show me where you need me today. Take me out of my self - so that my concern and my actions will bless and bring support to others. And then finally we: 3. Stay In Love With God: worship, scripture reading, praying, serving God, growing in the knowledge of God with our

heads and the love of God with our hearts and the service of God with our hands. We stay in love with God and we grow in our faith.

You see, Noah's story is an indictment on humanity - that they were self-absorbed, they were destroying the planet, and they were doing violent acts. Noah's story is our story. And the story calls us to be more like Noah. Our world needs more Noahs today. Our churches need to answer the call to be Noah churches in this day: a people who by our words and our actions, bear witness to what God would have done for humanity and this planet; that has integrity in word and action and who by our words and actions, show forth God's presence in Jesus Christ in the life of this world. A church that is righteous, blameless and walking with God. Let us do no harm, let us do good, and let us stay in love with God. And that's the lesson we learn from this part of Noah's story. Amen.