

We know, that at some point in the history of our world, there was a great flood. We don't know if it was localized, or regionalized, or even global, but we know this event was catastrophic enough that nearly every ancient culture wrestled with its impact. This flood, whenever it was, however it occurred, resonated with the whole of humanity, and humanity, in addition to seeking a new beginning, sought to find meaning in the flood's destruction, and fullness, and even in its grace.

I don't have much time this morning, and our lection is laser-focused on the story's resolution, so that's where I am gonna invest the majority of my energy. But I do want to offer a quick disclaimer.

I will tell you that I struggle with the theology of a good God, a loving God, who is so invested in creation that their solution for saving creation is to wipe everything out, and start all over again. I cannot, and I will not proclaim the flood as the verdict or judgment for humanity's shortcomings, anymore than I can proclaim the death of Jesus on a cross as payment for corporate sin. So I choose to read the flood recounts not as proclamation, nor historical summary, nor indisputable, ineffable theological tenet, but instead as a human attempt to explain those things we humans cannot fully explain. And I see these texts as invitations for each of us to join in the process of offering our own human, incomplete, but no less authentic understandings of the universe, and the One who created it.

So, this week, as I discerned our text, I approached it as an invitation to consider, and even offer my own flimsy takeaways from the difficult complexities of life. I don't love how we got to God's covenant of promising never to flood the Earth again. But there are some components in the retelling of this contractual agreement that I find helpful, even poignant.

Here goes!

I want you to remember three things this morning:

Everybody. Everything. Every time.

Everybody. Everybody. Everybody. The world reset. Yes, God makes this promise of protection and new life to Noah's family, but guess what? Noah's family represents everybody. When God puts the rainbow in the sky, it's for everyone, in every place on earth to see. This is the covenant of a global God, one in relationship with the whole of humanity. Everybody is created in God's image. It's no wonder the rainbow, and like images of color spectrum have been used as universal symbols of inclusion, affirmation, love, and value. Today's covenant, for all its faults, is one crafted for everybody.

Everything. Everything. Everything.

They were co-conspirators, all of them. Those naughty oak trees allowed themselves to be felled and turned into habitats for the Nephilim, the sons of giants, who managed to romance Adam's daughters. Those plotting mules and oxen; they allowed themselves to be compromised, complicit in the conspiracy, they lugged humanity's largest stones to make false idols. The flamingos were running a numbers game; the zebras were known to charge outrageous interest rates; the roosters, well they were just too loud in the mornings, and you can't just keep disturbing the peace ad infinitum.

This may be one of the most ridiculous paragraphs I have ever composed. But I hope it articulates an important point: the parts of creation excluding humanity – the plants and vegetation, and the creeping things, and the flying things – this part of creation was not, nor has it ever been sinful. But despite their innocence, the flood waters do not spare their numbers.

This morning's covenant does two things to remind us of God's vastness. The covenant includes God's committed protection for the whole of creation (though admittedly, the legislation could have been much stronger!). God acknowledges the value of plants and animals, and reminds humanity of its responsibility to be their stewards. The mention of plants and animals in this covenant is also a reminder of our place in an ecosystem: human actions don't just have consequences for humanity, but they also have consequences for the whole of creation.

Everybody. Everything. Every Time.
Bob Stillerman
First Sunday of Lent, 2-21-2021
Genesis 9:8-17



a spiritually
progressive
community
of faith

That rainbow ought to remind us that everything is made in God's image, and we cannot live into God's intended calling for ourselves, if that calling is not steeped in the wellbeing of our ecosystems.

Every single time, y'all. Every time, every time, every time.

God resurrects, brings new life, keeps on recreating. Don't get me wrong, I really would have loved a clause in the covenant whereby in addition to agreeing not to destroy the earth by flood, God would also agree not to wreak any other form of destruction covered by Farmers Insurance, or strange occurrences that Mr. Mayhem can conceive. But that rainbow, it sure is a powerful symbol of consistency, especially this week. Because I've seen the flooding, and I've heard the thunder, and I've seen the lighting, and I've watched the little creek in our backyard move from swift trickle to violent current. And in the middle of all this water, my mind drifts to 14 million Texans who don't have enough of it, not to mention homeless neighbors in our own backyard who spend their days seeking a gallon or two. The very thing that quenches and sustains our Earth can become more volatile than a hot stove in an instant. But somehow, someway, I keep on seeing rainbows.

This covenant isn't God's promise to eliminate chaos, or catastrophe, or heartache. But it is God's promise to be with us in every time of life.

Friends, as our Lenten season begins, we might be pondering if this global pandemic of ours is another iteration of an historical flood. I think where today's text can be valuable, if we choose to let it be, is to point us away from the why of chaos, and trauma, and the complexities of our natural world. And I think instead, the text can point us in the direction of seeing each day, each coming season, as an opportunity for renewal and rebirth. God has promised to be vested in everybody, and everything, and every time. And if we are to seize the rainbows in front of us, we must commit now to forging a community where every time is the right time to live in ways that reflect a tangible love of everybody and everything God has created.

May it be so. And may it begin today. Amen.