

The story of Noah is fascinating, and we come away with lots of questions. For instance, I wonder if he didn't hire outside help to build the Ark. And, also, what kind of tools did he use to cut the trees into planks? One of the biggies for me is how did he and his family keep the Ark clean? They were in the Ark for more than the 40 days of rainfall. We read that they lived in the Ark for over a year! Yes, we might have many questions. But, alas, as interesting as they are, God doesn't provide the answers we want. And that's because we're not asking the right questions. Studying the Bible is a lot like the game show Jeopardy: We look for the questions God actually provides answers for.

In the case of Noah and the Flood, the question is, "What is faith?" That's what we're going to talk about this morning, about what Noah's faith looked like and how this same kind of faith might make a difference in our walk with God and with one another.

## **OPENING PRAYER**

### **GENESIS 9:1-9**

**God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. <sup>2</sup>The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. <sup>3</sup>Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything. <sup>4</sup>"But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. <sup>5</sup>And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being.**

**<sup>6</sup>"Whoever sheds human blood,  
by humans shall their blood be shed;  
for in the image of God  
has God made mankind.**

**<sup>7</sup>As for you, be fruitful and increase in number;  
multiply on the earth and increase upon it."**

**<sup>8</sup>Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: <sup>9</sup>“I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you.**

What kinds and how many animals were on the Ark anyway? All we know for sure is that there were no velociraptors or unicorns. There are some things we do know, however. What kind of lighting did they have on the Ark? Flood lights. And where did Noah keep the bees? In Ark hives, of course.

Anyway, before we plunge into the passage which is the centerpiece of our study this morning, Genesis 9:1-9, I want to review the previous chapter. Here we read that after Noah sent forth a dove from the Ark it returned to him with an olive branch. Even today this is a lovely image which signifies peace. Luther pointed out that olive trees are short trees, thus Noah must've made the observation that the water had abated significantly. He waited another week, and he sent out another dove. This time it didn't return to him, and that's when he knew God had completed his task of cleansing the earth.

At this time, God spoke to Noah, and he told him to release all the creatures, the birds and animals and **“every creeping thing that creeps on the earth,”** that they might **“be fruitful and multiply.”**

It must've been an amazing site: Noah threw open the doors of the Ark, and life in all its different shapes, sizes, colors, and sounds cascaded across the threshold of Earth.

Noah and his family followed the herds and flocks and packs of animals onto solid ground. I'm sure they were nothing but smiles as they set their feet into the earth for the first time in over a year. And as Noah did so, he proceeded to do one of the most dramatic things that happens in the whole story. It's easy to miss with a quick read. Luther said that when Moses wrote this and the other stories in Genesis, he used an economy of words. But that should not hinder us, for these words are God's Word, and as we meditate on it the Lord has promised to use it to build us up.

The drama of Noah's story climaxes when after he and his family step off the Ark. What's the first thing he does? He builds an altar, and he worships God. The tricky thing about reading a Bible story is gleaning the message behind it. Moses just tells the story. Rarely does he give us the moral of the story. So it's easy to skip through the text and miss the gist of what's been said.

For example, there's no record that God commanded Noah to build an altar and to prepare a burnt offering, but he must've done so for its "soothing aroma" pleased him, and he blessed Noah for it.

Another interesting point is God's blessing of Noah after his offering. He proclaimed, **"I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth" (8:21)**, which is something of a backhanded blessing. It sounds like God was saying, if I keep punishing man in this way, I'll have to flood the planet every other generation! Earlier, God assessed the insidious nature of original sin, saying that **"that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time" (6:5)**. That's pretty bad.

But the idea of original sin is not popular today, that rebellion against God is an inborn trait for us all. We don't like to hear that. Even Christians who say they believe in original sin, often talk another game. They believe they can obey God's law and participate in their salvation. But if "every intent of the thoughts of" our hearts are "only evil all the time," how is this possible?

Paul wrote to the church in Rome that **"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)**, and to the Ephesians that **"[we indulged] the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3)**.

Nonetheless, the Lord decided to love us anyway. That's our salvation.

Last week we contrasted God's will and reason with that of man, that whenever man can find a way to wriggle out from under God's lordship, he will, using every excuse and justification he can conjure up. We say things like I need to figure things out for myself before I bother The Man Upstairs; or because God is distant and abstract, I need to discover my truth for myself.

These are man's attempts to free himself from the weight of sin by his own will, ignoring God or replacing God with ideas, feelings, and things that have nothing to do with God. We saw how that worked out for Adam and Eve and Cain over the last two weeks—not so well. Whenever our will is opposed to God's will, we are under condemnation, under God's wrath, and we cannot free ourselves, not even a little bit. But Jesus said, **"everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.... [But] if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:34,36)**.

In our lesson this morning, we read that **“God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. <sup>2</sup>The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. <sup>3</sup>Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything”** (vv.1-3).

Before this declaration, man was a vegetarian. Interesting factoid. We also learn that God gave humanity complete dominion and responsibility for all life on earth.

Luther said that God loves life more than we can ever possibly imagine, for he is the very essence of life. For example, Jesus said that God could’ve raised up sons of Abraham from stones (Matthew 3:9). But he didn’t. Instead, the Lord chose to bless marriage and the bearing of children, a very messy and troublesome business, indeed. But that’s what life is, and God loves it.

In celebrating the life of family, Psalm 127 reads,

**Behold, children are a gift of the LORD,  
The fruit of the womb is a reward.**

**<sup>4</sup>Like arrows in the hand of a warrior,  
So are the children of one’s youth.**

**<sup>5</sup>How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them...”** (vv.3-5).

I hope that or something like it was your reflection over Thanksgiving! The Lord loves life; he loves yours and he loves that of your whole family.

The lesson reads the Lord said to Noah, **“But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. <sup>5</sup>And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being.**

**<sup>6</sup>“Whoever sheds human blood,  
by humans shall their blood be shed;  
for in the image of God  
has God made mankind.**

**<sup>7</sup>As for you, be fruitful and increase in number;  
multiply on the earth and increase upon it”** (vv.4-7).

To “**not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it**” is a prohibition against eating a creature that is still alive, as some animals do. Created in the image of God who is the essence of life, we do not deal with death lightly.

In this passage, God also commands us not to murder. Indeed, how can one take another life unjustly if he ever hopes to regain the image of God? Another point is the allusion to the responsibilities of civil government. The Lord said, “**Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed.**” Later, St. Paul clarified this teaching when he wrote in Romans 13 that the government “**is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil**” (Romans 13:4). So civil government has the responsibility to punish the wicked, for it is God’s love of life that they protect.

After Noah worshipped the Lord, he grew a vineyard and then he blessed his family. Do you see the progression of Noah’s devotion? He built an altar and worshipped; then he got busy and went to work, growing a vineyard; and then he blessed his family. Our calling is the same: Worship, work, and family.

Walking by faith is not an abstraction, some great mysterious movement of the Spirit we cannot see or hear. Rather we do as Noah did: We receive God’s Word, we open our hearts to God’s will, and we walk with him in our worship, our work, and our family.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this week may you be blessed with wisdom as you explore the pages of God’s Word in your own home.

May you take hold of the life God originally promised you with every fiber of your being.

And may you have the opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.