

“IN THE BEGINNING: III - NOAH”

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Genesis 6:5-22

A couple of weeks ago, I worked with the children of Vacation Bible School on their missions project. They raised money for the A. I. DuPont Hospital for Children. Each day, I brought another prop with me to encourage them to give. One day, I had a first aid kit filled with bandages, another day a wheelchair, another day a blanket, and so on. Well, one day I brought a children's book, because I told them, maybe some of their money would go to buy books for the sick children to read.

If you've ever looked through a bunch of children's religious books before, you know that before very long you'll run into a book about Noah's Ark. It's a very popular Bible story for children, and for children of all ages, for that matter. We love the story - so much so, that you can buy just about anything with Noah's Ark on it - mugs, tablets, wall hangings, bedspreads, pens, pencils, music boxes - you get the picture.

It's one of those stories that we love - for some reason we think of it as warm and fuzzy. Noah built this ark, and brought the animals onto it, two by two, and they were all saved, and there was a rainbow at the end. Warm and fuzzy, right?

Warm and fuzzy, maybe, for merchandising, but actually the real story is not so warm and fuzzy. Far from it, in fact. Let's revisit it.

The story begins in incredible sadness. The world is a great, huge mess, and humanity has made it that way. And God is absolutely disgusted over it. Absolutely, positively disgusted. This wonderful world He created, the wonderful human beings He created - all gone to pot. Corrupt, narcissistic, evil. Everything that God had intended for His wonderful creation was for naught, because the humanity He created totally messed it up. And He's had it! He's had enough. He's going to wipe out the whole kit and caboodle of them.

You see, not so warm and fuzzy, huh? And I don't know about you, but sometimes I wonder if our world isn't heading in such a direction these days. Corrupt, narcissistic, evil. How many times can we hear about the rich and powerful involved in embezzlement and schemes? How many news reports can we bear to listen to about bombs going off in cities and terrorists attacking innocent youth in a camp? How much more of the endless backstabbing and fighting can we

hear about from Washington? I know God must weep over the state of our world at times.

Well, in Noah's day, God was doing more than weeping. With a mixture of righteous indignation and a broken heart, God determined that He would wipe out the creatures He had created. Period. It was the only thing to do. He would wipe them all away - except for one man.

And that one man was named Noah. We don't know tons of things about Noah, but this is what we do know. He was the son of a man named Lamech, and he himself had three sons - Shem, Ham and Japheth.

More importantly, we know from the scripture passage that he was a righteous man, blameless in his generation, and he walked with God.

Someone has written a tongue-in-cheek description of things about Noah, kind of patterned on the "Everything I Ever Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten." It's entitled "Everything I Ever Needed to Know I Learned from Noah," and goes like this:

1. Don't miss the boat.
2. We're all in the same boat.
3. Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the ark.
4. Stay fit. When you're 600 years old, someone may ask you to do something big.
5. Don't listen to critics; just do the job that needs to be done.
6. Build your future on high ground.
7. For safety's sake, travel in pairs.
8. Speed isn't always an advantage. The snails were on board with the cheetahs.
9. When you're stressed, float a while.
10. Remember, the Ark was built by amateurs; the Titanic by professionals.
11. No matter the storm, when you are with God, there's always a rainbow waiting.

Not a bad list, huh? And there are some real truths in it.

Noah was well advanced in years, 600 to be exact, when someone, and that would be God, asked him to do something big. God saw that he was different, he "marched to a different drummer" than the rest of the world, if you will. He hadn't bought into the narcissism, the greed, the corruption. He was righteous, and walked fully and faithfully with God. He was a godly man in a very ungodly world.

And God saw that, and God spoke to him, and told Noah what He was about to do, that He was going to destroy all of humanity whom He had created. And then He said those fateful words to Noah, “Build an ark. I’ll tell you exactly how to do it.” And so God did. God told Noah what materials to use, the exact dimensions, who should go into it, how many animals he should take with him, and so on and so on. There was no question what Noah was supposed to do.

The question was - would Noah do it? It was crazy, wasn’t it? I mean, build an ark - a great, big, huge ark? In that place he lived, far away from any bodies of water. In the midst of a corrupt and evil people, who surely would wonder what the heck was going on.

Well, being the righteous, godly man he was, being a man who walked with God and trusted Him completely, Noah did exactly as he was told. And don’t you know, he paid quite a price for it.

In an outstanding sermon on this text, writer Frederick Buechner talks about that price. He wrote:

“There are so many things to say about Noah . . . the old landlubber with the watery, watery eyes, but the one thing that is certain is that he must have looked like an awful fool for a while, for all those days it took him to knock together the great and ponderous craft. Three hundred cubits long and fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high, all three decks of it covered inside and out with pitch, and he had nothing more plausible in the way of an explanation than that he was building it - and building it many a mile from the nearest port - because a voice had told him to, which was maybe God’s voice or maybe hardening of the arteries. Only a fool would heed such a voice at all when every other voice for miles around could tell him, and probably did, that the proper business of a man is to keep busy: to work, to play, to watch out for his own interests as all men watch out for theirs, and to leave the whole shadowy business of God to those who have a taste for shadows. So Noah building his ark becomes the bearded joke draped in a sheet who walks down Broadway with his sandwich-board inscribed REPENT.” (Frederick Buechner, *The Hungering Dark*, “A Sprig of Hope,” p. 38.)

It must have been horrible for Noah, carrying out this task from God. He must have suffered horribly at the hands of everyone who watched him build this monstrosity. But he did it anyway, because he loved God, he walked with Him, he trusted Him.

He trusted Him, even in the face of what appeared to be an impossible situation. If God was going to flood all of creation, and destroy everything, how could Noah hope to save anything. How could he possibly gather all the materials

necessary to build this incredibly big ark? How could he find all of those animals, how could he get it all done? What was God thinking asking one man to take on this impossible task?

And yet, Noah did it. And he did it, because he trusted the God who called him to it, and who, in fact, trusted him.

The late priest and prolific writer Henri Nouwen, once talked in one of his books about a family of trapeze artists who went by the name of “The Flying Rodleighs.” He spoke “about how their act, their performance, their livelihood, their survival is so dependent on trust in one another. And Nouwen is so right. That special relationship that exists between the flyer and the catcher in trapeze acts. The flyer lets go of his swing, sailing through the air toward the catcher on the other swing, releasing at just the right moment, and lying in an arc toward the catcher, trusting the catcher to grab him or her. It is an act of total, complete, absolute trust.” (James W. Moore, *There’s a Hole in Your Soul Only God Can Fill*, p. 25.)

What a great description of the situation between Noah and God. Noah flung himself out there into the great unknown, doing exactly what God asked of him, solely because He trusted that God was out there to be there for him, to catch him, and to save him. That’s why he did what he did. He knew God would be there with him every step of the way.

And God was. God was with him as he built and as he endured ridicule, God was with him as he loaded that ark, God was with him as the rains came and came and came and came, seemingly never wanting to end, God was with him when the flood was over. God was with him through it all.

And, at the end of the journey, there was a rainbow - a sign from God that never again would God destroy humanity - sign of God’s amazing love and grace.

Dear friends, with God, there is always a rainbow. There is always hope, always the promise of new life, always the reassurance of God’s presence with us. There is always Jesus, the most perfect sign of how much He loves us and cares for us.

So when God calls you to do something, ordinary or extraordinary, do it. Trust that something inside of you that is stirring, trust your gut, and do what God is calling you to do - big or little. If it seems impossible, do it anyway. If someone will laugh at you, do it anyway. If it doesn’t make sense, but you know God wants you to do it, do it anyway.

Remember that you do not do it alone. The God who has called you to it, will

equip you to do it. The God who has called you to it, will catch you if you fall. The God who has called you to it, will love you, no matter what others think of you. The God who has called you to it, though it may seem impossible, will make a way.

Just when I was finishing this sermon on Thursday, I picked up the morning paper, and I read about Noah. Oh, it wasn't about the real Noah, it was about a little girl named Rachel. I'm sure some of you read her story too.

Rachel Beckwith was an eight year old girl who felt called to do something about a dreadful situation in our world. She learned that millions of people in the world don't live to see their fifth birthday because they don't have access to clean, safe water. She was shocked by that.

In spite of the enormity of the problem, a problem so enormous that leaders like Bill and Melinda Gates are offering millions of dollars to people who can come up with a solution for the problem - in spite of all that, Rachel became a modern day Noah and decided to do something about it.

Just before her ninth birthday, she set up a website and asked her family and friends, instead of giving her presents for her birthday, to donate money to her campaign for clean water. By her birthday, which was June 12<sup>th</sup>, \$220 had been raised, and after that the website was shut down.

Tragically, just eight days ago, little Rachel was fatally injured in a 13-car pileup on an interstate in Bellevue, Washington. After her death, her pastor arranged for the website to be opened up again, and do you know, that in the space of about 4 days, some 10,000 people had donated more than \$400,000 in Rachel's honor.

The rainbow at the end of the story . . .

Who knows, dear friends, what God has for you to do? When He stirs something up in you or me, may we be like Noah and like Rachel, and step out into the great unknown in obedience, knowing that no matter where we go, He will go with us, and, at the end of the day, there will always be a rainbow, there is always hope, there is always Jesus. Thanks be to God.

Amen.