

Genesis 5

5 The Lord saw that humanity had become thoroughly evil on the earth and that every idea their minds thought up was always completely evil. 6 The Lord regretted making human beings on the earth, and he was heartbroken. 7 So the Lord said, "I will wipe off of the land the human race that I've created: from human beings to livestock to the crawling things to the birds in the skies, because I regret I ever made them." 8 But as for Noah, the Lord approved of him.

9 These are Noah's descendants. In his generation, Noah was a moral and exemplary man; he[c] walked with God. 10 Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. 11 In God's sight, the earth had become corrupt and was filled with violence. 12 God saw that the earth was corrupt, because all creatures behaved corruptly on the earth.

13 God said to Noah, "The end has come for all creatures, since they have filled the earth with violence. I am now about to destroy them along with the earth, 14 so make a wooden ark.[d] Make the ark with nesting places and cover it inside and out with tar. 15 This is how you should make it: four hundred fifty feet long, seventy-five feet wide, and forty-five feet high. 16 Make a roof[e] for the ark and complete it one foot from the top.[f] Put a door in its side. In the hold below, make the second and third decks.

17 "I am now bringing the floodwaters over the earth to destroy everything under the sky that breathes. Everything on earth is about to take its last breath. 18 But I will set up my covenant with you. You will go into the ark together with your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives. 19 From all living things—from all creatures—you are to bring a pair, male and female, into the ark with you to keep them alive. 20 From each kind of bird, from each kind of livestock, and from each kind of everything that crawls on the ground—a pair from each will go in with you to stay alive. 21 Take some from every kind of food and stow it as food for you and for the animals."

22 Noah did everything exactly as God commanded him.

Genesis 9

God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fertile, multiply, and fill the earth. 2 All of the animals on the earth will fear you and dread you—all the birds in the skies, everything crawling on the ground, and all of the sea's fish. They are in your power. 3 Everything that lives and moves will be your food. Just as I gave you the green grasses, I now give you everything. 4 However, you must not eat meat with its life, its blood, in it.

5 I will surely demand your blood for a human life,
from every living thing I will demand it.
From humans, from a man for his brother,
I will demand something for a human life.
6 Whoever sheds human blood,
by a human his blood will be shed;
for in the divine image
God made human beings.

7 As for you, be fertile and multiply. Populate the earth and multiply in it." 8 God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9 "I am now setting up my covenant with you, with your descendants, 10 and with every living being with you—with the birds, with the large animals, and with all the animals of the earth, leaving the ark with you.[a] 11 I will set up my covenant with you so that never again will all life be cut off by floodwaters. There will never again be a flood to destroy the earth."

12 God said, "This is the symbol of the covenant that I am drawing up between me and you and every living thing with you, on behalf of every future generation. 13 I have placed my bow in the clouds; it will be the symbol of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, 15 I will remember the covenant between me and you and every living being among all the creatures. Floodwaters will never again destroy all creatures. 16 The bow will be in the clouds, and upon seeing it I will remember the enduring covenant between God and every living being of all the earth's creatures." 17 God said to Noah, "This is the symbol of the covenant that I have set up between me and all creatures on earth."

Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

The State of Louisiana knows all too well the destructive power of floods. After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, floodwaters wrecked havoc upon entire neighborhoods, perhaps most famously the 9th Ward. One of the poorest neighborhoods in NOLA, the 9th Ward is where a levy broke when a poorly secured barge burst through the dirt and stone, spilling inconceivable amounts of water through the streets. When we went as mission teams in the time after the floods, we saw places where entire homes were swept off of foundations, leaving only empty lots with concrete steps leading up a few feet to empty space. Now, again, the state suffers under a deluge of floodwaters, this time more focused in Baton Rouge and Lafayette, where once again the people of Louisiana are in a state of emergency, and

once again, our Lutheran Disaster Response partners at Camp Restore are calling out for help. As a local and national church, we will respond, just as we responded to the floods in WV, just as we responded before to Katrina. We will support the people so adversely affected by floods in the rebuilding of their lives in whatever ways that we can. Highlander Lutherans is already exploring a potential Spring Break Mission Trip with VT students to serve alongside our friends and siblings in Christ in Louisiana, and if that doesn't work, we'll find another opportunity to go.

In something of an ironic twist, often the first thing that's needed after floods are massive amounts of fresh, bottled water. Floods often disrupt water purification systems of towns and cities, so the very thing that threatens life also returns to save life, to promote life, to foster life's return to the region. Water's work isn't simply destruction, but it's renewal, it's restoration to life. This is something ancient

Hebrews knew all too well during their slavery in Egypt, for every year the Nile River flooded, and every year those floods brought nutrient-rich silts and soils to foster strong crops and produce abundant harvests. That's what we find in the midst of this flood story, not just the expectation of destruction, but the experience that water also brings new life, new opportunities for growth. That's why we read the beginning and the end of the Noah story, because in them we see both the anticipation of utter destruction and the realization of a lush new opportunity for life.

That's one of the reasons why much of Christian tradition thinks about the flood story and the journey of Noah's Ark as one of reCreation. It's in the part of Genesis that many view as prehistory, as the formative legends that tell the people of Israel who they are and who their God is. And, in short, we find that God is radically committed to life,

so much so that God won't let the mistakes of Adam and Eve lead to eternal tragedy for all the earth.

Surprisingly, we see this commitment to life in a story that begins with God talking about regret, where God wonders whether we should've ever been made. But what God does in this story is not destroy all humanity; instead, it seems God hits a sort of reset button on the Nintendo of creation. God commits to preserving the main characters, members of humanity and of every type of animal on the earth, and then wipes the slate clean. That's the power of a flood, especially one of such grand magnitude: not only are the nutrients spread around, but most everything is flattened, like wiping the Legos off of the base to rebuild once again. If you've ever walked a floodplain after the waters receded, you know that these waters can rip homes off of foundations, trees with even the deepest root systems. Every ounce of earth is reshaped by floodwaters.

The same is true in our baptisms, the place where we're remade by God. The floodwaters rush over us, and in the words of the catechism, this signifies death and resurrection. These waters not only cleanse us from sin, but unite us with the death and rebirth of Jesus. As any woman who's given birth can tell you, there's a reason there's always water involved in stories of creation and rebirth. Birth involves a lot of water, and the same is true of our baptisms. Our old selves die in the font, and in the same floodwaters that carried Noah into safety through destruction, God gives birth to us once again, giving birth to new and abundant life within us. There's a profound imagery in this narrative, where Noah's flood serves as creation's baptism and rebirth. God cleanses molecule of the earth from the taint of Adam and Eve's rebellion. While humanity must wait until Jesus to fully know liberation from sin, God acts in the flood to wipe away the sin stuck to the stuff of the earth, to ensure that not all

creation will end up on the same tragic trajectory as humanity.

That's something to take seriously about recreation: it is a process where the old must die for the new to truly take hold. ReCreation means that something must go, that we must admit, along with God, that things are not as we intended them to be, as we wished them to be, as we know they should be. It's something like cauterizing a wound. To truly bring healing and renewal, you must first burn away the putrid flesh and disease that's set in. Or, for a more 21st century example, it's like a computer with a virus in the hard drive, meaning you must completely wipe all the information clean in order to start over with a renewed machine. ReCreation, our chance at new life, means that some things must go with the floodwaters.

Recently, one of you shared with me that you wished more of the sermons you heard had an active element, a

practical application that directly applied what we're talking about to your lives. Let me say that I love this kind of feedback! It's so important for preachers to hear both what you appreciate about preaching but also what kind of things you'd find more powerful.

So, here's the rub: We can't experience reCreation unless we're willing to leave the things that tie us to death in the floodwaters. For instance, we can't pretend to be a part of God's new creation if we ignore God's call to welcome immigrants, foreigners, and refugees, something that appears throughout the Bible. Whether it's fear for safety, selfishness with our resources, or just plain prejudice, a refusal to welcome refugees is a commitment to death, to sin, to the kind of life God wipes out in the flood. Any time we try to prefer ourselves over others and the needs they bring, then we've abandoned the Gospel for the same selfishness that led Adam and Eve to take the fruit from the

forbidden tree, the kind of selfishness that looks to God's witness and declares our distrust and distaste for God's inclusive vision for all creation. God doesn't want that life for us, because that life leads to the flood. That life leads to destruction, to death, both our death and the deaths of others. That's the kind of thoroughly evil tendency that God seeks to wash away in the flood. Through the flood, God calls on Noah to save two of all creatures, not just the creatures that are most convenient or easiest to care for. We too are called to care for all creatures, reCreating opportunities for life when people like refugees have literally been pulled from the flood of imminent death.

One of the most profound images in this story is when God places the rainbow in the clouds as a sign that God won't destroy the earth again. This shows us, perhaps more than anything else, God's commitment to life. While we think of the rainbow as an innocent image, in the ancient

world this was seen as a warrior hanging up a bow, putting the devices of war on the shelf in plain sight for all to see so that we'd never again have to fear this kind of vast destruction. Much like the death and resurrection of Jesus, the flood was also a once-for-all kind of event. Never again will God try to wipe out creation in order to rid the world of sinfulness, but as we see much later in Scripture, God in Jesus will go to the very ends of the earth, and even the depths of hell, to ensure that recreation takes hold in the core of our being.

Notice that the commands given to humanity also call for peace. We're meant to further the lives of others, not to take life or preserve only our own lives. Being reCreated in God's image means being committed to helping everyone climb on the ark and get through the floods in our lives. It means that all the food on the earth is meant to fill the bellies of all people, not just some. That all the resources

cleansed by the flood are meant to support life for all people, for American citizens and refugees, for the poor and the wealthy, for Republicans and Democrats (and libertarians and socialists for that matter). The very atoms of the earth were cleansed so that we might all, **together**, find new life, vibrant life, abundant life in Christ. We've received life that we might give life. We've been reCreated so that we too might work alongside Christ to reCreate a world that reflects the love of our Creator. That's surely worth leaving the trappings that tie us to death. Amen.