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First Congregational Church of Westfield
Sermon on Noah
"God's Grief/God's Gift"
February 21, 2021

It's been a good long while since we have looked at the story of Noah and the Ark. I have pondered it many times in my now pretty long life. There are (as always) many ways to look at the story: A children's story, children's room wallpaper, Two by Two the animals came, to preserve their kind, to have a companion, to make sure things would continue after the flood. You can also look at the story as an allegory. That evil can drive our creator to do things that would otherwise seem unthinkable. God forgives. God is gracious and slow to anger. But God is a just God. God rains and shines on the evil and the good; only those with "special connections" are saved. When I used to walk home at the 5:00 siren in my home town from being with my friends, I walked past a sign that said, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." It seems like evil will win sometimes. Then we have the flood. We have our comeuppance. Then we have Noah, faithful, devoted, a little bit eccentric, but always there for God, a righteous man, Noah was.

Recently, however, I read something about the flood being God's tears. That God gave us free will, a conscience, a spirit of truth, and the sense of abiding love. And we often, very often, blow it. We turn away from God and listen to other messages. Imagine that the flood was the expression of God's extreme grief and longing for humanity to get it. God wants nothing more than for us to get, not how bad we are, but how good we are. Marked with the divine image. Made in love, with powerful creative energy. And so very often, we forget that. So very often we listen to the world's messages about what makes for happiness and wealth, satisfaction and success. The world's messages subtract, subtract, subtract. Separate and subtract others until there's very little left, except ourselves, our longings and habits, and maybe a few special people who we love and to whom we are attached. This has disastrous consequences, just practically speaking. Just think about a group of children playing. It never works to subtract, rather than share and be cooperative.

Another way to look at it: this makes God sad. It releases the flow of tears. For this, God grieves. Because, God knows what's possible. And wishes for us to know as well. God wants us to "have it all," but not in the way the world says that. God wants us to have abundant life. Beautiful garden. Plenty for all. Peace for the planet. No one left out. Ever. Miracles of harmony and reconciliation.

The message that God has for us only adds (that's abundance). Our family, our friends, those we know, appreciate, and those we don't know so much, and appreciate little. It's a pathway of beauty and growth, although not without heartache and challenge. As I've seen and heard so many times, Jesus saying, "I never said it would be easy. But it will be worth it."

The waters recede in the story of Noah. Have you ever heard the saying, "God will never give you anything you can't handle?" I would rather say, "God will never give you anything that with his help and guidance, you can't handle." This is the story of the flood. The waters will recede. There is joy in the morning. With God all things are possible. No one could attest to that more than Noah. The world had turned away from God's help and guidance. It needed cleansing, washing, a fresh new start. And so, it rained. And rained and rained. 40 days and nights (40 being one of the Bible's favorite numbers). God cried and washed the world. Many perished. Those who had safety in the storm were no doubt traumatized. Fearful. Uncertain to say the least. And then there was the sign. The covenant. The rainbow that signified that God wasn't angry. Maybe never was. He just knew. Something had to be done.

Then God gave us the Word. With me, you will never go under completely. With me, you will be saved; with me, you're good to go. It may feel like you're going under. There may be thunder and lightning and sheets of rain that blow sideways and make a lot of noise. But don't let all that fool you. I am here through it all. You may not see the bow in the sky right away. You may not feel safety and comfort, but that's how you grow. That's why you need faith. Faith will see you through. Faith will help you sustain the darkness, until the light comes. In many colors. And your heart and your life will be healed. That, my beloveds, says God, is my gift to you.

Let us pray:

Beloved, mighty God, may we all trust in you, have faith in you, and fear not you, but the consequences of our own careless and thoughtless actions. May we revere your guidance, your laws, and your great and holy compassionate ways. You are our source. You are our salvation. May we always and forever, remember, remember, remember, you will never leave us comfortless. You are always there. Your rainbow proves it, along with countless other signs. Amen.