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Genesis 6:9–13, 9:8-12 ESV

6 ⁹ *These are the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God. ¹⁰ And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.*

¹¹ *Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. ¹² And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth. ¹³ And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them. Behold, I will destroy them with the earth.*

9 ⁸ *Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ "Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." ¹² And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations.*

Two floods.

In Genesis Chapters 6 to 9 we hear the story of the great Flood. We all know how it goes. God regrets creating human beings because they have turned out to be so completely evil. There is total separation between humans and God. In fact, people have so irrevocably contaminated earth that God decides to not only get rid of people, but all other living creatures as well. People have thwarted God's

original plans for earth. But there is one major exception to the total depravity of humanity. Although people of the age of Noah are lawless, corrupt, and sinful, Noah, his wife, and his offspring are righteous, innocent, and godly. They have maintained their relationship with God. It's important to note that God's decision to destroy all life isn't based on hatred or malice. It's not an angry whim. It is based on justice. God has every right, and in fact, a duty to reclaim what he has created. As it turns out, though, God is also merciful. Noah is instructed to make a boat out of gopher wood, which might have been cypress wood, and pitch. The ark is about 500 feet long and 75 feet wide and 50 feet high. It could hold about 400 or 500 modern semi-trailers. Although this is about as big as a ship made entirely of wood could be, ships of a size close to this were known to exist in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. There were probably tens of thousands of animals on the ark. Noah is told to take two of every kind of animal, along with his family.

Of course, not everyone is sure that the ark really existed and that there was a global flood, but there is some evidence of a great flood having happened. There is a pre-existing flood story in the tale of Gilgamesh in Mesopotamia. There is indeed some evidence of a great flood in ancient times, and it would have included much of the known biblical world. In what was Mesopotamia,

archeologists have found a layer of mud about a dozen feet thick. Under the mud are the ruins of a very ancient city. To people of the day, it would have appeared that almost all life was indeed drowned. So, people reading this story in Israelite scripture would have found this story far from fanciful. It would have had a ring of historical truth to it.

But getting back to the story, as we have discussed in a previous sermon, 40 days is used in the Bible to describe the duration of the flood because it represented in biblical times a sense of completeness. After 40 days of rain, God has finished cleansing the world. It was time for God to show grace and mercy. Olive trees do not grow at high elevations, and so, when a dove plucks an olive tree leaf and brings it back to the ark, it shows that low-lying areas have been drained. People and animals leave the ark. It is at this point that God issues a blessing and a command. God says that life on earth has been cleansed and that people and animals alike are to be fruitful and multiply. Noah now sacrifices some of the animals from the ark in worship. God accepts this offering.

Interestingly, the flood has not inherently changed people. We are still the source of evil. But God decides that never again will there be such destruction on earth. Noah and his family carry the seeds of hope for the future of humanity. We are to make a fresh start under the hand of God. But indeed, we still carry that ability to

be sinful and to disobey God. This new covenant, where humans will still do great harm to each other, but where God will never again destroy life on such a grand scale, is symbolically guaranteed by the presence of a rainbow. Noah and his family settle down to a life of worship and agriculture.

I'd like to talk about another flood, one that happened in September of 2013 and wasn't quite as big as Noah's flood. It happened in Boulder. When I first moved there in 1982, I was warned about buying property in the flood zone in Boulder. There was a concern that an unusually heavy snowfall in the winter followed by a sudden and strong heatwave in the Spring could lead to so much snow melting at the same time that water could rush eastward out of the mountains and across the Boulder Creek system. Then the creek system would over run itself; it would then spread outward and flood the city. But when the big flood finally happened, this wasn't the reason at all. It was simply a strong, sustained rainstorm in the Fall that did it. The ground just couldn't soak up all that water quickly enough. I remember nervously watching our dirt crawlspace all day and all night. Little by little, I watched the water rise up and over our furnace. It made it to just below the ground floor before the rain finally let up and the water began to soak into the soil. Ours was the only dirt crawlspace in the neighborhood; almost all of our neighbors have finished, cement basements.

They were all badly flooded, and when debris clogged the Boulder sewer system, nasty stuff backed up into people's basements. People pulled carpets, furniture, artwork, books, and electronics out of their basements and piled it all up in their driveways. In the days that followed the flood, our house became a place where people came to shower and cook. One of our neighbors became dangerously ill from carbon monoxide poisoning after using a generator to pump out her basement. Many of our neighbors had no flood insurance and suffered dramatic financial losses. It was many months before our neighborhood was back to normal.

The night that the flood happened, I happened to be in our garage without my contacts in. Without them, I have very limited vision. I noticed at some point what seemed like dirt on one of the walls of the garage. I thought that perhaps water and mud was moving in from somewhere, and so I held my face up against the wall to try and see what was happening. Then, I realized that my face was inches from hundreds of giant wolf spiders that were fleeing our crawlspace and crawling up the wall of the garage. It was as if our basement was some sort of ark that was there to save a big spider colony from drowning. Let's just say that I retreated quickly.

In the end, nobody in our neighborhood died. Nobody lost their home. There was no need for us to build a big boat and collect up a bunch of animals and wait for the water to recede. We did not send a dove out to find an olive leaf. But it was a reminder that God is in charge. We can mold the face of the earth with giant machines. We cover the ground with cement, wood, and steel. We build structures that seem to poke through the top of the sky. We can seemingly conquer the earth. But, God can always reclaim what God has created, and acts of nature remind us of that. That's what happened during Noah's flood. God said hey, you've made a mess of the home I gave you. You are corrupt. You live for the things of the earth, the things that you make, not the things that I have told you are important. So, I'm going to take back what I have given you. It was a symbolic act, one meant to make people realize what happens when you drift away from God.

Noah and Noah's family weren't saved for no reason at all, though. The animals were not saved for no reason. Humanity wasn't given another chance just because God was blindly merciful. God had a reason for what God did. Let's step back. Noah's flood is often seen as a symbolic story, not something to be taken literally. I mean, I remember wondering as a boy how the entire earth could have been covered by water. Where did all that water come from? I

remember wondering how the fish managed to drown. I remember wondering how Noah and his family managed to save animals that didn't live in their part of the world, like elephants and penguins. The flood is a metaphor for God's justifiable anger at humans when we don't do what we're supposed to do. And the new agreement that God made with Noah and his family represents God's willingness to be merciful. But mercy comes for a reason. God wouldn't take something that is permanently and completely useless and keep it around. God isn't stupid. God kept humanity alive because there was something worth saving.

That reason for God's mercy involves another metaphor, and that is Noah himself. Remember that our passage tells us this: *Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.* In fact, all of Noah's family were good people. Noah and his family, as the only non-corrupt, non-hopelessly sinful people on earth, represent the innate goodness that is inside of all of us. Noah represents the saving grace that all of us embody. God is willing to be merciful with all people, as it turns out, because all of us have a bit of Noah inside of us. We are all redeemable. We can all be made whole again. We can all be saved. That is what Jesus Christ came to this planet to tell us. Here is what Noah did, and what all of us need to do if we want to see God's mercy. We need to do three things. First, we need to listen. We need to read and study God's word, the

teachings of the Gospels. If you read the Gospels, if you study what Jesus taught us, there isn't much you have to learn. It's not very difficult to see what we must do. Second, we need to trust God. We have to believe that God does know what is right for us, and that there isn't anything else we need to know to not only be godly, but to also be happy and secure. And third, we need to obey. We need to do what God teaches us. Listen. Trust. Obey. It's as simple as that. Noah is symbolic. Noah represents our innate ability to listen, trust, and obey.

I see in God's promise to Noah to never again flood the earth a hint of the new Covenant that Jesus Christ would one day bring to this world. God said that it is actually quite simple. It's not hard to know what to do. Have faith, believe in God. That's the big lesson that we need to listen to. That's number one, listening to what Jesus Christ taught us. The second thing is to trust that God isn't going to lead us to unhappy, unsatisfying lives; the teachings of Jesus are all we need. The third thing is to live a way that shows we do have faith, that we do trust God. Obeying means that we will be gracious, have empathy, be forgiving, and treat the lowest person in society as if they are the most important person alive.

During that flood in Boulder, there were neighborhoods that were much harder hit than ours. There were streets where the houses were under water.

But Boulder has done a tremendous amount of flood mitigation since the flood of September 2013. They've engineered ways for water to spread out quickly, so that it doesn't fill in basements and flood streets again. Still, though, we have to be careful about thinking that we are in charge. This is actually at the heart of corruption, the belief that we make the rules, that we are the ones who decide what is right and what is wrong. We have to remember that we must pay attention to that Noah inside of all of us. Only if we do this, only if we stay in contact with the Noah within us, will God show mercy on us. Please pray with me.

God, each and every one of us has the ability to save humanity. We can fill that ark with two of every kind of animal. We can ride out forty days of nonstop rain. We can send out that dove and watch it come back with an olive branch. Let us never forget that this is the important part of us. It's not what we own, what we accomplish in human society, how smart we are, or how powerful we are. It is the Noah within us that tells us to 1) listen to your teachings, 2) to trust that you will guide us down the path to a life in the Kingdom of God, and 3) to obey your teachings by living according to the words of Christ. Thank you for those reminders from nature that never let us forget that we are certainly not in charge. And thank you for your mercy. Amen.