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11 o'clock service

The Community Church of Issaquah
Issaquah, Washington

“Beginnings: Renewal”

Genesis 6-9

The flood bothers me. Have you stopped to think about it recently? This is one messed-up story! God, the one who has just created the heavens and the earth out of love, now turns and is wiping out all flesh and destroying all living beings except for a favored few. Does anybody else think that these first eleven chapters of Genesis should come with parental warnings?! PG-13—at least—for murder, excessive violence and intense action sequences.

If the story of the Flood doesn't bother us at first sight, it should! We are the ones who claim, “for God so loved the world.” I can understand why people want to focus in on trying to find out the exact location of where the ark landed on Mount Ararat or the mechanics of how the flood might have happened, because if you *don't* have those kind of questions to think about, then the only question *left* to think about is what kind of a God would do something like this?

I'm just going to say up front: Despite all of the vast erudition and insight I gained from my 20 hours of sermon prep this week, and a Master of Divinity degree, I don't have the flood story all figured out. But I do have three helpful things to keep in mind. And two things about the story we might notice. And then one spectacular thing that I think God is up to.

So first, before we get that one spectacular things, the three things to keep in mind:

Thing number one: These beginning stories in Genesis—the stories we've been going through these last three weeks—are fundamentally preaching. And by calling them preaching I mean that they're proclamation of who God is and who we are in relation to God, the world and one another. Now, I've been around a lot of

preachers. And preachers tell a lot of stories. Some of those stories are factually true in all of their details. And some of those stories are...embellished, shall we say. A preacher's illustrations aren't necessarily perfectly factual, but they are told to make a point. They intend to be *revelatory*, to open up the people of God to seeing the world like God wants us to see it.

So first these stories are preaching and so we understand that the stories don't necessarily strictly adhere to exactly how things happened.

Now the second point builds on this first point. The second point is that many other people in the ancient near East had similar flood stories in which a god decides to flood the whole world and destroy humankind. Who knows why different ancient religions all have this similar story. Perhaps around that time there had been a massive flood and all of these religions were trying to explain how such a catastrophe could have happened. I don't know. What it does mean though is that if the flood destroying the world is the piece of the story that *everyone* tells, then what's important is the piece of the story that *Israel* tells. What is *unique* about the Jewish story of the flood? What is the piece that tells us what Israel's God, what *her Lord* is like? That God destroyed with a flood wasn't a radical idea. But WHY Israel's God sent the flood and what Israel's God did afterward...that's what we're going to see is unique.

Now the final thing to keep in mind as we read about the flood is that we Christians have a special way of reading the Old Testament—and that is through Jesus Christ. The Old Testament witnesses to the *same God* that was born in a manger in Bethlehem. So whatever we say about what the Lord is up to at the flood, we have to

reconcile what we say with the fact that that same Lord goes without a mumbling word to the Cross and that same Lord says, “Let all the little children come unto me,” and that same Lord says, “Blessed are the meek and those who mourn.”

So we have three things to hold in mind: that the Flood story is preaching, second what’s important about the story is the uniquely Jewish take on it, and third that we understand the God of the flood is the God we know in Jesus. So with those in mind, what is Genesis 6-9 trying to tell us about ourselves and God?

So here are the TWO things about the story we might notice: The flood is about God’s *relenting*. And the flood is about humankind’s *renewing*.

Now here is where things start getting interesting. See all of the other ancient near eastern religions have a god destroying the world out for no other reason than just because they want to. Maybe they’re immature gods or bored gods or vindictive gods. But they’re not responding to any human action.

The Lord on the other hand *is* responding. And the Lord is specifically responding to human creatures becoming completely, absolutely corrupt. Now over these past few weeks as we’ve heard about Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel, we’ve thought of God as the center, the boundary at the middle. But now, we’re getting a picture of God not as some emotionless, personality-less boundary, but God as a scorned lover. How does God react to the violence of the world? Genesis says that the Lord was grieved to his heart. To his heart. The deepest part of God was grieving. This is what is unique about Israel’s God. Israel’s God is a God in grief.

How amazing is that to think about: human beings can affect God. Human beings, made of dust, a hairy, sweaty, creature, actually affect how the Ruler of the universe is feeling.

And what does this grieving God feel? What do all scorned lovers feel? I think country singer, Carrie Underwood captures it best, when she sings, “I dug my keys into the side of that pretty little souped up four wheel drive. I carved my name into his leather seats. Maybe next time you’ll think before you cheat.” Scorned lovers with a sense of self-worth don’t walk away meekly, they are ready to destroy. They are ready to burn that house DOWN. And that is basically what God does. God burns the house down. “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence. I am going to destroy them”

But then here’s the thing. God is also not like most scorned lovers. Most scorned lovers burn the house down and get out of there. But God. God is different. God, scorned by the humanity who he gave life to (!) decides in complete freedom to *relent*. The storm wails and the seas grow higher and then all of a sudden, without any reason given, the Bible says that God remembered Noah and all the wild animals who were with him on the ark. God remembers. And then the heart of God softens and a healing wind blows across the surface of the waters, pushing them back to where they belonged.

This is our God. Our God is emotionally invested into us. If you love something, it hurts when that person or thing is taken away. God is hurting. But then God—even with the pain of humanity’s betrayal—decides to relent, decides to remember, and decides to take back. And then, absolutely unexpectedly, God makes a covenant with Noah. A covenant that declares that never again will the Lord burn the house down. Never again will God destroy in his anger like he did with the flood.

Kintsugi is the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold. When a piece of pottery gets broken, a craftsman bonds the shards back together with seams of gold. What results is a

piece of pottery more beautiful than before. In fact, it's rumored that when the practice began in the 15th century, it was so popular that collectors were accused of smashing valuable pieces of pottery just so that they could be repaired with kintsugi's gold seams.

Kintsugi is the embodiment of Japanese aesthetic that says that the wear and tear of life actually makes things more beautiful not less. The brokenness parts of life can—with the right touch—be made glorious.

God making the covenant with Noah is the divine kintsugi. The covenant is the gold joinery that begins to put back the pieces of humanity's broken lives. God, grieved by our rejection, hurt by our scorn, still decides to love us without us ever asking to be loved.

The gold seams in our chipped and cracking lives is this love that comes down from heaven. It's our *new* beginning. I say that from personal experience. God's love is the gold seam in my life. It has been, it is, and I know it will be. God's love is what has made my absolutely ordinary, not so special life, beautiful. God's covenant to not give up on us is what makes all of our lives new. God is the one who picks up the shards of our lives and does amazing things.

You know. We've been talking about the fall for three weeks now. But what I haven't told you all is that theologians actually have called the fall the *happy* fall. It's happy because the further we fall, the further God goes to bring us back and the more beautiful our return becomes. Paul says in Romans, "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (5:20).

Think back through the stories we've been reading in Genesis. At every moment that we crack and break, we see God putting the pieces back together, and with gold. Adam and Eve eat from the apple and hide because of their nakedness. But then God gives them clothing.

Cain murders Abel his brother, but then God protects Cain from retribution and gives Eve another son. Humanity turns to violence and creation goes to ruin, and then God gives the world a fresh start in Noah and unexpectedly makes a covenant of love and protection. The fall turns to happiness. It's the happy fall—the fall that shatters our lives that are then knit back together with gold.

So today we had three helpful hints about trying to understand the flood. And then we had two insights that God relents and that humanity is renewed. And then there is one final thing. One spectacular thing.

And that is this: that the divine craftsman is just getting going with the covenant to Noah. Only the first seam of gold has been laid. See, every time that God has repaired what has gone awry it is laying the groundwork for when God will repair in a way that no one could have expected. And that spectacular thing is Jesus. Jesus. Who hangs upon the Cross—the new tree of life that everyone can touch. Jesus is Eve's murdered son who is then brought back to life. Jesus who is the ark into which we all must enter to be saved. Jesus is the healing of our life. Our beginning in Genesis finds its end in Jesus. Or better yet, our beginning in Genesis is pointing to our new beginning in Jesus.

Three. Two One. Straw into gold. Brokenness into beauty. The God makes our lives new. The beginning and the end. Amen.