

**"THE SIGN OF THE COVENANT"**

**A SERMON BASED ON THE OLD TESTAMENT  
BOOK OF GENESIS (9:8-17) AND PRESENTED FOR  
ORLEAN UMC ON FEBRUARY 21, 2021----THE  
FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT**

**HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED THE POSSIBILITY  
THAT THERE ARE JUST SOME THINGS GOD  
CANNOT DO? IF YOU OR I ARE WATCHING THE  
EVENING NEWS AND WE GET SICK OF THE  
VIOLENCE OF IT ALL OR WE HAVE SIMPLY HAD  
ENOUGH POLITICAL RED AND BLUE TO LAST A  
LIFETIME -----ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS CHANGE  
THE CHANNEL OR TURN OFF THE TV... GO DO  
SOMETHING ELSE.**

WELL GOD CAN'T DO THAT..... GOD CAN'T  
“MOVE TO THE SUBURBS OR CLOSE A DOOR TO  
HIDE FROM THE VIOLENCE OR POLICAL STRIFE  
AND DISCORD..... GOD’S EYES ARE NOT  
AVERTED..... GOD’S HEART IS NOT NUMBED. WE  
SEE ONLY THE THINNEST SLICE OF HUMAN  
DEPRAVITY AND SOMETIMES DESPAIR..... BUT  
GOD SEES IT ALL.”

ONE OF THE MOST ENDEARING STORIES IN THE  
BIBLE – ONE WE TEACH OUR CHILDREN GLADLY  
– IS AT THE HEART OF IT A MOST VIOLENT  
STORY.

I AM REFERRING TO THE OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVE OF NOAH AND THE FLOOD. THINK ABOUT IT... GOD FINALLY GETS SICK OF ALL THAT IS HAPPENING ON THE EARTH AND DECIDES THAT A FLOOD IS IN ORDER.....AND IT WILL DESTROY THE WHOLE LOT THEM... PEOPLE, ANIMALS, EVERY LIVING THING. THIS JUST A SYMBOLIC DEATH OR THE STUFF OF STORY BOOKS, IT'S THE REAL THING. GOD DECIDES TO START OVER.

DESPITE ITS VIOLENCE, HOWEVER, THIS STORY OF NOAH AND THE FLOOD HAS CAPTIVATED US SINCE WE WERE CHILDREN AND IT STILL DOES.

**QUITE OFTEN, IF YOU LOOK AT THE ART  
CREATED BY OUR CHILDREN IN SUNDAY  
SCHOOL OR VBS, THERE YOU WILL FIND AN ARK  
SITTING HIGH ON THE WATER WITH ANIMALS  
STICKING THEIR HEADS OUT OF THE  
PORTHOLES OF THE CRUDELY-MADE SHIP. I  
HAVE MADE MANY WOODEN ARKS IN MY WOOD  
SHOP OVER THE YEARS COMPLETE WITH A  
HOST OF ANIMALS....ENTERING TWO BY  
TWO....GREAT GIFTS FOR GRATEFUL  
CHILDREN.....**

**BUT YOU AND I KNOW – AND SOME OF YOU HAVE  
FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE – ABOUT WHAT A  
REAL FLOOD CAN DO. IT DOES NOT MAKE FOR  
CUTE ART OR SWEET STORIES.....THE ARE NO  
FLUFFY ANIMALS WITH GENTLE SMILES  
BEGGING TO BE HELD OR HUGGED OR PLAYED  
WITH..... FLOOD WATERS KILL WITHOUT  
RESPECT. THEY RUIN HOMES AND DESTROY  
LIVES. THERE IS NOTHING CUTE OR SWEET  
ABOUT A FLOOD.**

**AND IT DOESN'T TAKE VERY LONG FOR GOD TO  
GET SO FED UP WITH HIS CREATED WORLD THAT  
HE DECIDES TO END IT ALL WITH THE FLOOD...**

**AT LEAST ACCORDING TO THE VERY FIRST  
BOOK OF OUR BIBLE --- THE BOOK GENESIS.  
THE FIRST STORY, OF COURSE, IS OF THE  
CREATION..... GOD DECLARES HIS WORLD TO BE  
GOOD, VERY GOOD. GOD GIVES THE KEYS OF  
HIS NEW EARTHLY KINGDOM TO HIS HUMAN  
CREATION**

**BUT IT ONLY TAKES THREE CHAPTERS IN  
GENESIS BEFORE CAIN MURDERS HIS BROTHER  
ABEL AND BY CHAPTER SIX CREATION HAS  
ALREADY BECOME A COLOSSAL MESS.**

**“THE LORD SAW THAT THE WICKEDNESS OF HUMANKIND WAS GREAT IN THE EARTH, AND THAT EVERY INCLINATION OF THE THOUGHTS OF THEIR HEARTS WAS ONLY EVIL CONTINUALLY.” THIS IS CHAPTER SIX FOLKS!!! .....GOD TAKES A HARD LOOK AT WHAT HIS PEOPLE ARE DOING AND SAYS, “...*I AM SORRY THAT I HAVE MADE THEM.*”**

***IT JUST MAY BE THE MOST SOBERING STATEMENT IN ALL OF SCRIPTURE.***

**THEN, IN CHAPTER SEVEN GOD DECIDES TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT. HUMAN SINFULNESS HAS GOTTEN SO BAD THAT GOD DECIDES TO START OVER.**

**GOD LAMENTS THE WORLD THAT HAD BEEN  
CREATED..... *AND IN ANGER AND REGRET, GOD  
BRINGS DOWN THE RAIN AND EXCEPT FOR  
NOAH AND HIS FAMILY, AND THE ANIMALS HE  
HAS MANAGED TO SAVE ON HIS BOAT, ALL IS  
GONE.....ALL IS LOST..... EVERY LAST THING.***

**WHEN YOU TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AT IT, YOU  
CAN'T HELP BUT FIGURE OUT THAT IT DIDN'T  
TAKE LONG AT ALL FOR HUMANS TO MESS UP  
THE WORLD. I THINK, IF WE REALLY  
UNDERSTOOD THE IMPLICATION OF THIS  
VIOLENT STORY, WE WOULD NEVER, EVER TELL  
IT TO OUR CHILDREN.**



BUT IT'S AN APPROPRIATE STORY FOR US TO  
CONSIDER AS WE BEGIN OUR FORTY-DAY  
LENTEN JOURNEY. THIS IS A GOOD TIME – NOT  
THAT THIS IS THE ONLY TIME, BUT IT IS A GOOD  
TIME – FOR US TO CONFRONT OUR SIN AND  
MAKE CONFESSION OF OUR GUILT. ....IT IS A  
TIME IN WHICH WE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT OUR  
SIN IS SERIOUS AND OUR ALIENATION FROM  
GOD IS SEVERE..... IT IS THE SEASON IN WHICH  
WE ASK IF WE HAVE DONE ANYTHING THAT  
WOULD MAKE GOD WANT TO START OVER WITH  
US.

OFTEN I LOOK UPON THIS STORY AS DEPICTING GOD'S IMPATIENCE. "THAT'S IT. I'VE HAD ENOUGH. I DECLARE A MULLIGAN. WE'RE GOING TO TRY IT AGAIN AND HOPE THAT THIS TIME WE GET IT RIGHT....."

BUT PETER LOOKED AT IT DIFFERENTLY, DIDN'T HE? HE SAYS, "GOD WAITED PATIENTLY IN THE DAYS OF NOAH... *GOD WAITED PATIENTLY.*"

*PATIENTLY FOR WHAT?* -----WHAT IN THE WORLD COULD PETER HAVE POSSIBLY BEEN THINKING? -----

I MEAN, THE FLOOD TAKES PLACE IN CHAPTER SEVEN! I THINK THAT'S PRETTY QUICK, DON'T YOU?

**THE STORY IS TOLD AS IF, AFTER THE FLOOD WATERS HAVE RECEDED, GOD LOOKS AT THE DESTRUCTION AND REGRETS HAVING DONE WHAT HE DID.**

**“...NEVER AGAIN WILL ALL LIFE BE DESTROYED BY THE WATERS OF A FLOOD; NEVER AGAIN WILL THERE BE A FLOOD TO DESTROY THE EARTH”**

**IT'S AS IF GOD REPENTS OF HIS IMPATIENCE. GOD SETS THE RAINBOW IN THE SKY AND SAYS TO NOAH, “THIS IS THE SIGN OF THE COVENANT THAT I HAVE ESTABLISHED BETWEEN ME AND ALL FLESH THAT IS ON THE EARTH.”**

**MAYBE THAT'S WHY THIS STORY CAPTIVATES THE CHILDREN. IT'S NOT JUST THE BOAT AND THE ANIMALS..... IT'S THE RAINBOW HANGING GLORIOUSLY IN THE SKY. CHILDREN, ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, LOVE A RAINBOW.**

**THERE ARE JUST SOME WORDS IN THE BIBLE THAT ARE SO STRONG YOU CAN'T HELP BUT KNOW THEY'VE COME STRAIGHT FROM THE LIPS OF GOD..... GRACE IS ONE OF THOSE WORDS. LOVE, OF COURSE, IS ONE OF THEM TOO... AS LONG AS YOU KNOW WHAT KIND OF LOVE THE BIBLE IS TALKING ABOUT.**

**ADD THE WORD COVENANT TO THIS SHORT LIST.**

**IT'S A STRONG WORD, A GOOD WORD, A WORD**

**THAT COULD ONLY BE THOUGHT UP BY GOD.**

**AND GOD USES IT WITH NOAH... WHICH IS  
PRETTY STRANGE, WHEN YOU STOP LONG  
ENOUGH TO THINK ABOUT IT. JUST A COUPLE  
MONTHS BEFORE, GOD WAS READY TO  
DESTROY EVERYTHING HE HAD CREATED ON  
EARTH. NOW, GOD SAYS HE WILL NEVER DO IT  
AGAIN... AT LEAST BY MEANS OF FLOOD. WHAT  
HAPPENED THAT CHANGED GOD'S HEART?  
AFTER ALL, WE – YOU AND I AND THIS WHOLE  
SINFUL HUMAN RACE OF OURS – WE'VE NOT  
CHANGED.**

**DO YOU THINK GOD HASN'T TAKEN NOTE OF THAT? THE FIRST THING THAT HAPPENS AFTER THIS CONVERSATION BETWEEN GOD AND NOAH IS THAT NOAH GETS DRUNK AND ALL KINDS OF BAD STUFF BEGINS TO HAPPEN..... AND IT DOESN'T GET ANY BETTER AFTER THAT.**

**WE SEE SOME LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL WHEN GOD CALLS ABRAHAM OUT OF HIS FATHER'S COUNTRY TO BEGIN A NEW NATION OF PEOPLE WHO WILL BELONG SOLELY TO GOD.....BUT ABRAHAM IS FAR FROM PERFECT AS ISAAC AT TIMES LEAVES MUCH TO BE DESIRED AS WELL.....**

**AND IF THAT IS NOT BAD ENOUGH WE THEN  
MEET ESAU AND THE SCHEMING JACOB, AND  
EVERYTHING STARTS TO GO DOWNHILL YET  
AGAIN..... FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OF SLAVERY  
IN EGYPT AND GOD'S PEOPLE ARE LIBERATED  
BY A MURDERER..... THE TEN COMMANDMENTS  
MIGHT AS WELL HAVE BEEN TEN WISHES OR  
TEN RECOMMENDATIONS, THE WAY ISRAEL  
CONTINUES TO SIN AGAINST THEIR GOD.**

***AND THINGS HAVEN'T GOTTEN ANY BETTER  
SINCE. GOD'S HUMAN CREATION IS NOT GOING  
TO CHANGE. THAT'S THE GUTS OF IT.....***

**DO YOU EVER WONDER IF GOD HAS EVER  
REGRETTED THE COVENANT HE MADE WITH  
NOAH NEVER TO FLOOD THE EARTH AGAIN?**

**IN EVERY CASE, WHETHER IT'S NOAH OR JACOB  
OR DAVID OR ANY OF THE OTHER COLORFUL  
AND SINFUL CHARACTERS THAT FILL THESE  
PAGES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT, WE KEEP  
HEARING GOD SAY, "NEVER AGAIN, NEVER  
AGAIN."**



**“...NEVER AGAIN WILL ALL LIFE BE DESTROYED**  
**BY THE WATERS OF A FLOOD; NEVER AGAIN**  
**WILL THERE BE A FLOOD TO DESTROY THE**  
**EARTH” -----NEVER AGAIN.....NEVER AGAIN.....”**  
**ESTABLISH MY COVENANT WITH YOU.....”**

**TIME AFTER TIME GOD’S PATIENCE WOULD BE**  
**TESTED TO THE LIMIT..... YOU CAN’T HELP BUT**  
**WONDER HOW OFTEN GOD HAS BEEN TEMPTED**  
**TO GO BACK ON HIS WORD..... MAYBE THAT IS**  
**WHAT PETER MEANT WHEN HE SAID, “GOD**  
**WAITED PATIENTLY IN THE DAYS OF NOAH...”**  
**TRUTH BE TOLD, GOD’S BEEN PRETTY PATIENT**  
**SINCE THEN TOO.**

PASTOR AND SPEAKER AND VERY POPULAR  
CHRISTIAN WRITER BARBARA BROWN TAYLOR  
MAKES A POINT THAT I THINK MAY BE WELL-  
TAKEN..... SHE SAYS THE RAINBOW IN THE SKY  
IS NOT A REMINDER TO NOAH OF THE  
COVENANT GOD MADE, IT IS A REMINDER TO  
GOD..... GOD SET THE RAINBOW IN THE SKY TO  
JOG GOD'S OWN MEMORY.....

“NEVER AGAIN,” SAYS GOD, ““...NEVER AGAIN  
WILL ALL LIFE BE DESTROYED BY THE WATERS  
OF A FLOOD; NEVER AGAIN .....NEVER AGAIN...  
NEVER AGAIN.....

**EVEN THE MOST CYNICAL PERSON ALIVE  
CANNOT HELP BUT STOP AND STARE AT A  
RAINBOW.....I HAVE EVEN SEEN SOME ICONIC  
DOUBLE RAINBOWS AND PROBABLY MANY OF  
YOU HAVE AS WELL..... YOU'VE GOT YOUR  
RAINBOW STORIES AND I'VE GOT MINE..... WE  
CAN REMEMBER WHERE WE WERE – AND  
OFTEN, WHEN – WE SAW A FULL RAINBOW  
COVERING THE SKIES.**

**NOW TELL ME... HAVE YOU EVER SEEN A  
RAINBOW AND NOT THOUGHT OF NOAH?**

***WE ARE NOW IN THE SEASON OF LENT, THAT  
TIME WHEN WE CONSIDER JUST HOW FAR GOD  
WILL GO TO KEEP COVENANT WITH HIS PEOPLE.  
THIS IS THE SEASON, LIKE NO OTHER, WHEN THE  
WORDS GRACE, LOVE, AND COVENANT ALL  
COME TOGETHER TO MEAN THE SAME THING.  
AND THEY ALL POINT TO ONE PERSON, THE ONE  
WHO IS THE FULL AND FINAL EMBODIMENT OF  
GOD'S REDEEMPTIVE COVENANT.***

**GOD WAITED PATIENTLY, INDEED, AND THEN**  
**GOD SENT HIS SON. THAT'S ALL THE COVENANT**  
**WE NEED. DURING THIS LENTEN SEASON, MAY**  
**WE ALL GIVE THANKS THAT GOD, IN HIS GREAT**  
**AND ETERNAL PATIENCE, LOVES US THAT MUCH.**

**PRAISE GOD AND MAY IT BE SO FOR YOU AND**  
**FOR ME.....AMEN**