

Genesis 9:8-17
Psalm 15:1-10

1 Peter 3:8-22
Mark 1:9-15

In 2002 something horribly frightening happened to our world. In February that year, a chunk of arctic ice the size of Connecticut broke free from the eastern tip of the Antarctic Peninsula and floated into the sea, exposing a massive swath of ocean that had been ice bound for more than twelve thousand years. As this floating glacier—and others that will follow—melts, climatologists predict that places like the Maldives, Solomon Islands, Fiji, parts of Bangladesh, and eventually coastal cities in our nation will slowly but steadily be submerged. By the end of the century, chronic flooding will be occurring from Maine to Texas and along parts of the West Coast. It will affect as many as 670 coastal communities, including four boroughs out of New York City's five. I'm just glad our politicians know more about climate change than do our scientists. Rising ocean levels is a fact, and they will continue to rise. An incremental, methodical flood is taking place in the world.

Today's Scripture tells the story of another flood, not a steady rise in sea water, but a sudden deluge from heaven that covered even the tops of mountains with water. We are only six chapters into the book of Genesis, just six chapters after God created humanity, and God saw that the earth was filled with violence, that the earth was corrupt. A Roman Catholic friend of mine grew up in Boston. He attended Roman Catholic schools all his life. When he was in grade school, all the children would file down to a large room every week. The children would line up at the various confessional booths around that room, waiting for their turn to confess their sins to the priests. There was one particular priest the children tried to avoid because he was rather harsh with his penance. One day, as the children were waiting, this rather harsh

boomed out, “You did what?” I bet that kid was looking for another way to get out of that booth! In our story, it is as though God asked one of the angels to go down, see how well things were going with God’s creation, God’s people, and report back to God. When the angel returned to report, God boomed out, “They are doing what?”

What was god to do? God determined that God was going to make an end of all flesh, he was going to destroy humanity because of their violence, their corruption. Thank goodness, there was one family worth saving, Noah’s family. God called Noah to build that ark, load his family onto that ark, load two of every creature onto the ark, and wait for the rain. God would spare them. The rain came as promised. After 150 days, can you imagine five months, the waters receded, and Noah, his family, and two of every creature finally exited that ark: two elephants, two giraffes, two cows, two rabbits, two more rabbits, two more rabbits, two more rabbits. Can you imagine what the landscape looked like? Have you ever visited a community after it has been wiped out by a tornado, a hurricane, an earthquake, or a flood? The pictures you see in the newspapers, on your television screens don’t even come close to how horrible it is. Everything stripped and lifeless, the ground soggy and gray as far as the eye can see. A holocaust cloaked in a natural disaster, global destruction. Noah’s family and the animals were saved.

How can God be so angry? How can God destroy God’s creation, God’s creatures, God’s people? Understandably, many have a difficult time picturing, accepting, such an angry God. It makes God look like some kind of monster. Jonathan Edwards, the New England preacher, delivered a sermon in 1741 that has come to be known as “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”. Rev. Edwards declared, “There is no

want of power in God to cast wicked men into hell at any moment.” He used some very vivid imagery of hell. He must have been effective for he was interrupted many times before finishing the sermon by people moaning and crying out, "What shall I do to be saved?" An angry God? However, there is more to the story. As Paul Harvey, the radio commentator said, “Now, the rest of the story.”

God changes God’s mind. God is saddened by the destruction the flood caused, just as we are saddened when we see those pictures in our newspapers and screens of the destruction of hurricanes and floods and tornadoes. Seeing the destruction, God promises that God will never again flood the earth to destroy humanity; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. Earlier in the story, God promises to never “again destroy every living creature as I have done.” Not that God will not destroy all of humanity with a flood, but never again will God destroy every living creature. You hear a distinct tone of regret as God makes this promise. The flood has not changed the human heart. Humanity does not change. But it has effected an irreversible change in God. God has always been committed to God’s creation from the beginning, but now God’s commitment has intensified. It is God who has changed! God!

Granted, evil things continue to happen. There still is death and destruction. There still is death and destruction. People still die. There was the holocaust of the last century. Natural disasters still happen. Evil has not been eradicated. But we are now reassured that these are not rooted in the anger or rejection of God. When something bad happens to us, it is not because we are being punished for a sin. When something bad happens to someone else, it does not mean they have sinned. I was told a story about a couple who had to get married. We are talking about the early 30s. This first

child, a daughter, was quite sickly and died while a toddler. The husband's mother declared the child died because the parents had sinned! No! I have had some people ask me if their illness or grief was due to some sin they committed. No. It is natural to think that when something bad happens to us or to a loved one, that we must have sinned. God did not send Hurricane Katrina to New Orleans because there was going to be a gay pride parade in New Orleans!. No! The relation of God to God's people is no longer a scheme of retribution.

And there is that rainbow. That bow is a promise to creation, to us. And it is a reminder to God of a promise that God will honor. God set the bow as a reminder to God not just a sign of his promise to us, but as a reminder to God of God's vow never to destroy all of humanity again! A reminder for God! God will not destroy all of humanity. George Mendenhall, who was a great American biblical scholar, looks at this bow from the perspective of a weapon. This bow is not a weapon, but an undrawn bow. God has won God's victory over chaos and evil. God is no longer in pursuit of the enemy. God's promise is that God will not be provoked to use God's weapon again! David Haller, in his marvelous book of interviews with children entitled *Just Build the Ark and the Animals Will Come*, received this response from Adam, age 7, when Haller asked him, "Judging from the Old Testament, how does God seem to communicate with people?" Adam replied: "He used to do it through storms, but I think he's more quiet now."

In God's own words, "Never again will I destroy every living creature as I have done."

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ
we bend our knees and lift up our hearts,
giving glory to God forever. Amen.