

Genesis 9:8-17
Psalm 25:1-9
1 Peter 3:18-22
MARK 1:9-15

NOAH'S ARK AND US

The story of Noah's Ark is not just a story for children. It is a story with many important spiritual truths in it, which are just as true and as valid whether or not anyone could ever find the remains of Noah's Ark. Personally, I think such a quest would be really missing the point, because there is so much of value which people of all ages can hear and take to heart just by learning the story.

Chapters 6-9 of Genesis are, however, even more powerful if they are compared to the flood story told by the Babylonian people, those who lived in ancient times in what is modern-day Iraq. The Babylonians believed that the gods sent a flood to destroy humanity because human beings were making too much noise and were keeping the gods awake at night. So, the gods resolved to wipe out the human race – because human beings were *annoying* and the divine powers were arbitrary, self-serving and amoral. One human being, Utnapishtim, was spared – not because he was a particularly good person but because he was, as it were, a “teacher's pet.” (One of the gods tipped him off that the flood was coming and it would be a good time to build a boat.) From all this we learn that the Babylonians believed that the ultimate powers in the universe were selfish, amoral, arbitrary, all-powerful, and played favorites, and that the only way to be saved was through “connections” and luck.

The Noah story, on the other hand, teaches that **God** (the one and only real God) sent the flood because the mass of humanity was *irredeemably wicked*, and Noah was saved, literally, because he was *righteous* and God graciously saved him, his family, and representatives of every species on earth (whether or not they were useful to human beings) by grace. From this we learn that there is one ultimate power in the universe, who judges people by their righteousness (or lack of it), who never acts arbitrarily or out of selfish interest, and whose ultimate goal is a fresh start with a new creation. That's quite a difference.

We also learn that God reaches out and tries to teach people right from wrong, but ultimately, *some people will be saved and some will not*. Moral: do the right thing and believe in God and you won't miss the boat. As Bill Cosby put it years ago in his rendition of this story, God asks, “How long can you tread water?” Let us not miss the boat.

Second, it wasn't raining when Noah started building the ark. His neighbors must have really wondered about all his trips to Home Depot and about the size of the things he was building – a long way from the ocean. Surely, he got ridiculed. So, let us have the *courage* to obey God's commands and face ridicule for doing so, if necessary. It takes guts sometimes to be righteous.

Third, the ark had no rudder. Noah had *faith to let God steer*. It worked out fine for him and also for Moses as a baby – who was in the only other boat in the Bible with no rudder. Let us have faith to let God steer our lives.

Fourth, the ark was built by amateurs; the *Titanic* was built by experts. If *God* draws up the design, *trust the design*.

Fifth, even if we do the right thing, have courage, are faithful and trust God’s design, we may still, like Noah, have a lot of “shoveling” to do in our lives. (Think of all those animals in the ark for all of those days with no place to go for walks.) Lord, “stuff happens” in life, even to the best of us; *give us strength to just keep “shoveling.”*

And sixth, this story is ultimately about the hope for a fresh start for people and the whole creation. Whenever we see a rainbow (as mentioned in today’s reading), let us remember God’s covenant with humanity.

So when (not if) we are tempted, let us not give in to the temptation to do wrong (see the 10 Commandments). Let us also not give in to the temptation to avoid giving our best when doing the right thing. Let us not give in to the temptation to do nothing. If Noah had given in to any of those temptations, he would not have made it.

If we do yield to temptation, we must make our confession to God and ask for his forgiveness so that we not be drowned in the flood of our sins, but be saved by his amazing grace, mercy and love.

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