

September 21, 2014

Noah

*Noah's Ark*

Genesis 6:9:-22, 7:1-12

**Opening words:** While researching for this sermon series, I came across a list called "All I really need to know I learned from Noah's Ark." This is the list.

1. Noah didn't wait for his ship to come in, he built one.
2. Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the ark.
3. Stay fit. When you're 500 years old, someone might ask you to do something REALLY big.
4. Speed isn't always an advantage. The cheetahs were on board the ark, but so were the snails.
5. Remember that the ark was built by amateurs and the Titanic was built by professionals.
6. No matter how bleak it looks, if God is with you, there's always a rainbow on the other side.
7. And above all else... don't miss the boat.

Last week, I began a three-part sermon series on Noah. We have already looked at Noah's world. You may remember, it was wicked. It is a judgment story. Next week, we are going to look at Noah's covenant. Every time I look at a rainbow I am reminded of Noah. This morning we are going to look at Noah's Ark. I have divided this morning's scripture lesson into two parts. The first is Genesis 6:9-22. The second is Genesis 7:1-12. If you want Noah's Ark to come alive for you, then remember that it is similar to the perfect church. Let me call this morning's message *Noah's Ark*.

**Genesis 6:9-22** <sup>9</sup> This is the account of Noah and his family.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God. <sup>10</sup> Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

<sup>11</sup> Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. <sup>12</sup> God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways.

<sup>13</sup> So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth.

<sup>14</sup> So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. <sup>15</sup> This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide and thirty cubits high. <sup>16</sup> Make a roof for it, leaving below the roof an opening one cubit high all around. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower,

middle and upper decks. <sup>17</sup> I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. <sup>18</sup> But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. <sup>19</sup> You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. <sup>20</sup> Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature

that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. <sup>21</sup> You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them."

<sup>22</sup> Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

**Genesis 7:1-12** <sup>1</sup>The LORD then said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. <sup>2</sup> Take with you seven pairs of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and one pair of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, <sup>3</sup> and also seven pairs of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth. <sup>4</sup> Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made."<sup>5</sup> And Noah did all that the LORD commanded him.<sup>6</sup> Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters came on the earth. <sup>7</sup> And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives entered the ark to escape the waters of the flood. <sup>8</sup> Pairs of clean and unclean animals, of birds and of all creatures that move along the ground, <sup>9</sup> male and female, came to Noah and entered the ark, as God had commanded Noah. <sup>10</sup> And after the seven days the floodwaters came on the earth.<sup>11</sup> In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month—on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. <sup>12</sup> And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.

When I was in the Cleveland area, I had a parishioner by the name of Rita. She was a little Italian woman in her late sixties. She was one of those people who came every time the church door opened. She came early and stayed late. I talked to her regularly and she told me her story. She was raised in the Italian section of Cleveland by staunch Roman Catholic parents. Her mother saw the Roman Catholic as the only true church and told Rita to never step into a protestant church. As a matter of fact, her mother told she would go to hell if she ever stepped into a protestant church. She believed those words because they came from her mother. She said those words were tested when she was in the first grade. She said one day she was walking home from school, when a big thunderstorm hit. The water came down in buckets and the lightning struck close. Rita said she was terrified and wanted to get out of the storm but the only public building between her school and her home was a Methodist church. She said, "Russ, I am was only in the first grade but I had to make a difficult decision. I could stand in the storm and possibly get hit by lightning or I could go into that protestant church and go to hell." I asked her, "What did you do?" She answered, "I stood in the storm. The storm was temporary, hell is eternal." If you can understand Rita's story then you can understand this morning's message. If you are ready to begin say, **"Amen!"**

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When we last left Noah, things looked bad. His entire generation was wicked and was on the verge of being eliminated. However, Noah himself stood out like a sore thumb. While everyone else is described as wicked, he is described as righteous. It is for this reason God decided to spare him and his family. The instrument of death for everyone else would be water, so God instructs Noah to build an ark. God gives Noah general guidelines to build it. First, it is to be made of cypress wood with various compartments on the inside (v. 14).

Second, the whole thing is to be coated with pitch, inside and out (v.14). Third, it is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high (v. 15). Fourth, it is to be covered with a roof (v. 16). Fifth, it is to have a door on the side and three decks (v. 16). Finally, Noah was to enter the ark with his family, along with all the creatures, one week before the rain began to fall. Verse twenty-two tells us Noah was obedient; he does everything that God requires. Genesis 7:6 says Noah was 600 years old when the flood came. It rained for forty days and forty nights (Genesis 7:12).

Everyone knows Noah's story for various reasons. Everyone knows about Noah, because the storyline is simple. Everyone know about Noah because the song is familiar. You can hear it in your head right now. Everyone knows Noah's story because we are crazy about animals. We like animals more than we like people, especially cute furry animals. We aren't sure about animals with scales. You know it is true. Noah's story is common knowledge in our society. It is not exclusive to the believing world. There is something about Noah's story that resonates with us. We may consider it a child's story, but it has an adult side. The ark offers us two things that everyone wants, **security** and **sanctuary**.

I do not want to give too much information, but on Monday I had a colonoscopy. I haven't had one in seven years, so it was time. I am glad to report everything is fine, but it isn't a pleasant experience. Last Sunday, I was on a special diet and drank the special liquid. I stayed home the rest of the day. I was at the hospital early on Monday morning and was led into the back by a nurse. She took me to small bathroom and told me to slip into my birthday suit. I was given a hospital gown and a pair of socks with tread on the bottom. (Before I put on the gown, I stood in front of a small mirror and flexed my massive muscles. It was quite impressive!) Wearing my hospital gown and socks, I was led to a bed and was asked to wait. A few minutes later, another nurse came up to me and asked me a series of questions. Are you a diabetic? Do you have false teeth? What medications are you on? She read the questions like she had done it a million times. Finally, she said, "This is the last question. Do you feel safe at home? I began to laugh. She said they are required to ask that question because there is so much domestic violence in our society. I answered yes, but the question itself made me sad. You know it is true. Our world is a violent place. That is why we are preoccupied with security.

In less than two weeks, Kathryn and I are going to Germany. It is on my bucket list of things to do before my colonoscopy reveals something ugly. We are really excited because we are going on a self-guided tour to study Martin Luther, the great reformer. We start off in Berlin and take the high-speed train to places like Nuremberg, Heidelberg, Wittenberg and Munich, before we end in Frankfort. I really haven't said much about the trip because people are so funny about traveling, especially outside of the United States. We seem to have a surplus of cowards. When I told someone we were going to Germany someone paused and said, "Germany? You should be safe there." Would anyone here feel unsafe in Western Europe? We are preoccupied with security.

I have told you the story in the past about my trip to the Post Office. I was standing in line as another person applied for their passport. The one clerk who was free waited on one person after another. I am not nosy, but my hearing is good. The person ahead of me wanted to overnight a package to downtown Youngstown. The cost was about \$25. When it was my turn, I walked up to the clerk and asked if that happens often? The clerk said, "What?" I said, "Overnight a package to downtown Youngstown." He said, "All the time; people are afraid to go downtown." I said, "Next time call me. I'll charge them only \$20." We are preoccupied with security.

Do you have any weather-dominated people in your life? I do. She is one of my favorite people in the world, and she knows everything about tornados. She can tell you where they are most likely to happen. She can tell you when the last one happened. She has eliminated living in any state in "tornado alley" because she is not taking any chances. She is afraid of tornados. We are preoccupied with security. How many of you have a security system in your home? How many people think we should buy a security system here at Western Reserve?

There is a level of Noah's story that speaks to us because we are preoccupied with security. When Noah entered the ark, he was safe! All the bad guys were locked out. Wouldn't it be nice if we could lock the doors of the church and lock the bad guys out? One of the reasons we come to church is to feel protected. God is watching out for us. In the ark, Noah and his family were safe. Everyone should feel safe at church. If you can agree with that, say, "**Amen!**" The story of Noah speaks to us for another reason.

One of the great pieces of scripture in the Bible is Isaiah 6:1-8. In the year 740 BC, Isaiah had a vision, and in the vision he saw God. There is no doubt about it, it was God, high and exalted, seated on a throne. The train of his robe filled the temple. He is surrounded by angelic flying creatures, who are calling to one another saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord almighty; the whole earth is filled with his glory." God is so magnificent, Isaiah is intimidated. He becomes aware of his imperfections and says, "Woe to me." Isaiah is purified when a hot coal from the altar is placed on his lips. In the end, he volunteers for divine service. I love that piece of scripture because Isaiah experiences what we all want, to experience God. Rudolph Bultmann once said, "*Within each one of us is a faint recollection of Eden calling us home.*"

One of the blessings I have in my life is working in this building. It really is nice, but the best room is the sanctuary. There is just something about it. I like it when the sanctuary is full, like on Christmas Eve or Easter morning. I like it when it is empty. I love to sit in there alone. I sit near the altar so I can be alone with God. Sometimes I pray and sometimes I don't. I just sit and rest, or I just sit and think. I like this sanctuary for the same reason I like that passage from Isaiah. I can sit here and experience God, and so can you.

One of the great things about God is that he is omnipresent. That means God is everywhere. You can experience God on a golf course. (You may even mention Jesus's name occasionally.) You can experience God at the beach. I love to walk along the coast. I don't know how you can't experience God during an Ohio autumn. The leaves are outstanding. When you hold your child for the first time, or your grandchild for the first time, God is there. When a loved one peacefully passes away, God is there. Where can you go to get away from God? The answer is nowhere, because God is everywhere. That is a good thing, because we all want to experience God. You can experience God anywhere, but your best chance to experience God is at church. This church does not exist to have one fundraiser after another. This church does not exist so you can make new friends. This church exists so you can experience God. That is why you come to church weekly, to experience God. There is something wrong when you don't experience God at church. If you don't experience God at church, then you should ask for a refund. We all want to experience God!

That is why Noah's story speaks to us. In verse Genesis 6:9, it says that he walked with God and continued that relationship into the ark. God instructed Noah to take clean and unclean animals for a reason. They were to be sacrificed, because there was worship inside the ark. Noah experienced God inside the ark and you can experience God at church. When was the last time you experienced God? When was the last time you experienced God at church? If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

During the years 2007 and 2008, a group called the Noah's Ark Ministry went to Mount Ararat to search for the ark. It is located in a politically sensitive area, between the Russian and Turkish border. They found seven wooden compartments near the peak of the mountain, 13,000 feet above sea level. They tested the wood and found it to be some 4,800 years old. The team is 99.9% sure they have found the true Noah's Ark. Critics have their questions. What do you think? Do you think they have found Noah's Ark, or not? Wouldn't it be wonderful if they did? Either way, we have something even better. We have the church! Just like the ark, in church you can take refuge from our violent world. Just like the ark, in church you can experience God. And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**