

September 28, 2014  
Noah  
*Noah's Covenant*  
Genesis 9:1-17

**Opening words:** In October of 2011, a 7.2 magnitude earthquake struck eastern Turkey. The news reported that 366 were killed. More than 2,200 buildings collapsed. It is truly quite miraculous that 47 hours after the earthquake hit, a two-week old baby was pulled out of the wreckage. Next came the baby's twenty-five year old mother. Then, the baby's grandparents. Stories like that one never get old. I love it when people escape death. I like it even more when people live to the fullest.

This is my third and final sermon on Noah. I originally wrote this sermon series because so many people had questions after seeing the movie. In some ways, the movie was correct. The story is dark and depressing. It is not a children's story about animals, it is an adult story about judgment. God eliminated Noah's world because it was so wicked. The instrument of death was water, so God instructed Noah to build an ark. Last week, Noah and his family escaped the coming flood by entering that ark. The scriptures tell us it rained for forty days and nights. When the rain stopped, the water began to recede. A dove signaled it was safe, and Noah's family exited the ark. That brings us today's scripture lesson, Genesis 9:1-17. Let me call this message *Noah's Covenant*.

**Genesis 9:1-17** <sup>1</sup>Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. <sup>2</sup>The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. <sup>3</sup>Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.

<sup>4</sup>"But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. <sup>5</sup>And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being.

<sup>6</sup>"Whoever sheds human blood,  
by humans shall their blood be shed;  
for in the image of God  
has God made mankind.

<sup>7</sup>As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it."

<sup>8</sup>Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: <sup>9</sup>"I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you <sup>10</sup>and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. <sup>11</sup>I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

<sup>12</sup> And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: <sup>13</sup> I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup> Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, <sup>15</sup> I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. <sup>16</sup> Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."  
<sup>17</sup> So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth."

I love the story of the one hundred one-hundred-year-olds who were interviewed. Each one was asked a single question, if you had to live your life over again, what would you do differently? The answer was almost unanimous. Ninety-nine of the one hundred one-hundred-year-olds said they would take more risks. Let me ask you these questions: How many risks have you taken in your life? Do the people in your life consider you a risk-taker? Perhaps, this is a better question. Are you living or just waiting to die? If those questions makes you think, say, "**Amen!**" Let's look at the scripture lesson together.

When we last left Noah, the end was near. God had instructed him to build an ark to escape the flood. When the rain came, Noah found himself locked inside the ark with his wife, sons, daughters-in-law and all the animals. That means the world's population is suddenly about to drop to eight. There is no other way to say it. It must have been an uncomfortable ride inside the ark. According to our first scripture reading, the flood lasted one hundred and fifty days. That is a long time being penned in with the family. If family and fish stink after three days, what do they smell like after one hundred and fifty days? What do animals smell like after one hundred and fifty days? When the rain finally stopped, everyone must have been filled with joy. It signalled the end of their voyage was near. If that was exciting, the moment the ark stopped rocking must have felt like heaven. The scriptures tells us it settled near the top of Mount Ararat. Then the best happened. Between our two readings, the water receded enough for Noah and his family to get out of the boat. The job of repopulating the world was theirs. Yet, there is one thing left before their work begins. God establishes a covenant with Noah.

What is a covenant? Webster defines a covenant as an agreement or promise between two or more parties defining proper behavior. We understand the meaning of a covenant because we have many informal covenants in our lives. Your covenant with your spouse defines expected behavior. Your covenant with your children defines proper behavior. Your covenant with your parents defines proper behavior. Your covenant with your neighbor defines proper behavior. You have as many different covenants in your life as your do relationships. Each one is different, and each one deserves to be treated with respect.

God made several covenants through time with mankind. We are living under the new covenant. It may sound familiar. Know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, and you will go to heaven.

Noah had a covenant with God. It is the first covenant found in the Bible. Noah's covenant with God is lop-sided. Even though God is in a position of authority, mankind reaps the benefits. Noah's covenant has three parts. First, God says mankind will rule over the earth (9:2). Second, God says mankind will now be carnivorous, meat eaters (9:3). Third, God says he will never destroy mankind by a flood again (9:11). I do not know why our all-knowing God needs a reminder, but he places a rainbow in the sky to remind himself of that promise. Noah's covenant speaks to us because it reveals the very heart of God. He is much more comfortable with life than he is with death. If you don't believe me, then look at the very incarnation of God, Jesus. So much of what he did and said was about life.

Did you know there are thirty-nine healing stories found in the Gospels? How many can you name? Jesus healed Legion. He was the man filled with demons. He exorcised them and sent them into a herd of pigs. Jesus healed the centurion's servant. The master didn't even have to go there. He just said the word and the servant was healed within the hour. Jesus healed Simon's mother-in-law. She was lying in bed with a fever, but got up to serve others once Jesus healed her. (In our time, she would have been sent to rehab.) Do you know why Jesus performed so many miracles? They were a sign that Jesus was the Messiah. They are evidence that God is more comfortable with life. It isn't just what Jesus did, it is what he said. Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth and the life."* Jesus said, *"I came to give life and give life abundantly."* God built the entire faith on life. Jesus came back from the dead so you could live for eternity. It is obvious. God is more comfortable with life than he is with death. That speaks to us, because we are more comfortable with life than death. The greatest gift you ever received was Jesus. In my opinion, the second greatest gift is your life. What are you going to do with your life? Are you living your life to the fullest? It isn't just true of God, it is true of us!

There is nothing sadder than death, and there is nothing sadder than lost potential. We hear stories of lost potential all the time. I hate the ones that come in the spring. You have heard the story too many times. The combination is deadly. A group of high school seniors are out celebrating their accomplishment. There are too many people crowded into the car. The driver is driving too fast; the road is too windy. Seat belts are too limiting. Seconds earlier, everyone is laughing, but it all changes in a second. The car hits another car or the car hits a tree. Some of the teens are killed, but never the driver. He or she has to live with the truth that they killed their friends. How do you live the rest of your life knowing you killed your friends? I hate stories about death. I hate stories about lost potential. Like God, we are more comfortable with life. If you like life, say, **"Amen!"**

On Wednesday night, I preached at Copeland Oaks. It was odd being there. It was the first time in many years that a family member wasn't there. At first it was my mother. Then, it was my in-laws. They are all gone now, and it was depressing. When I got home, Kathryn was watching a movie called *I Never Sang for my Father*. It was released in 1970 and starred a young Gene Hackman. I didn't expect it to happen, but I got lost in the story. It is a story about a young man's responsibility to his aging, declining father. The father was in denial, but the son saw the truth. He begins to look for nursing care facilities. I found those scenes to be shocking because they were so realistic. I have seen it a million times. The people were herded into large wards. Some were mindlessly lying in bed, not knowing if it was day or night. Others were parked in the hallway with their noses running, asking for water. Everyone is called "sweetie" or "honey". The next thing to come is another exciting game of Bingo. Do you know why those scenes bothered me? It is the same reason they bother you. I am afraid that is my future. I don't like Bingo! It is a waste of time. I don't want a stranger calling me sweetie and asking about my last BM. I don't want a glass of water being my only stimulus. Is anyone here comfortable with that future? That is why Noah's covenant speaks to us. God is more comfortable with life than he is with death. So are we!

One of my favorite Bible stories comes from Joshua 14. The great leader had conquered the Promised Land and it was now time to divide it up. Everyone wants the best land; no one wants the worst land, except Caleb. The scripture tells us he is eighty-five years old and in good health. The land that he desires is simply called "hill country." It was more than hilly. It was a horrible piece of land that required the most amount of work. At eighty-five years old, Caleb is asking for the greatest challenge in his life. I love that story, because God expects us to live. What great challenge are you looking forward to? Are you living, or are you just waiting to die?

What do you want to do with the rest of your life?

1. What books do you still want to read?
2. What places do you still want to visit?
3. What do you still want to learn?
4. Who do you still want to help?
5. Who do you still want to meet?
6. What do you want to do again?

God is extremely comfortable with life, are you? Are you living or are you just waiting to die? Don't just sit there, do something! God gave you your life, he expects you to do something with it! If that makes you think, say, "**Amen!**"

On Wednesday morning, Kathryn and I drove to the Pittsburgh Airport. It was an emotional ride because Vlad and Kolya were returning to Russia. On some level, they have become part of my family. This time, they lived with us for two weeks. In some ways it seemed longer, in some ways it seemed shorter. During those two weeks, they got their prosthetic legs repaired. They will return again for future repairs. I have never been prouder of my wife.

She not only cared for them, but she raised, with the help of many wonderful people, all the funds she needed, an amount totalling approximately \$15,000, and most of it came during that two-week period. God was truly in our midst. Her work is vital because without the legs, Vlad and Kolya would be sitting in Russian institutions their entire lives. With their legs, they will have the opportunity to live normal, productive lives. Kathryn has done all she could do to give them a normal life; the rest is up to them. They are going to be fine. However, it isn't just Vlad and Kolya's story, it is our story. God gave us life, but it is up to us to do something with it. Are you living your life to the fullest, or are you just waiting to die? Mae West once said, "*You may only live once, but if you do it right, once is enough!*" And all of God people said, "**Amen!**"