

July 15, 2018

Genesis 7:1-3

We Live, We Love: "Finding Refuge"

The Rev. Lynn P. Lampman

Robert Fulghum wrote a book entitled "All I Really Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten." It was so popular that it spawned spin-offs, one of those is an essay entitled, "All I need to know I learned from Noah's Ark." Here it goes:

1. Don't miss the boat.
2. Remember that we are all in the same boat.
3. Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark.
4. Stay fit. When you're 600 years old someone may ask you to do something really big.
5. Don't listen to critics, just get on with the job that needs to be done.
6. Build your future on high ground.
7. For safety's sake travel in pairs.
8. Speed isn't everything. The snails were on board with the cheetahs.
9. When you're stressed, float awhile.
10. Remember the Ark was built by amateurs; the Titanic by professionals.
11. No matter the storm, when you are with God there's always a rainbow waiting.

There are basically two ways to approach this story of Noah's Ark. The first is to focus on the controversial issues, "What was the extent of the flood? Did it really cover the entire earth? How large was the ark? How did Noah get those animals into the ark?" That all presupposes you believe the Ark was history, rather than a story merely meant to communicate spiritual truth.

Yet, if we concentrate only on the controversial elements whether we believe them or not, we risk missing the larger message. And that larger message was about Noah, and his family finding refuge.

First things first, Noah was finding refuge in the Lord. Secondly, and equally as important, Noah built an ark so his family could find refuge.

Noah's refuge was God. He was living in rough times, nothing new right! His world was filled with violence, people seeking their own good to the exclusion of the common good, and then there was the obtaining of power and the keeping of it at all costs.

Yet, Noah knew someone who had a far better plan for society as a whole. God's plan was to give Noah shelter and refuge if we wanted it, and he did. Then, part two of God's plan was once Noah saw God as his refuge, he would make sure to provide refuge and safety for others, as God had done for him.

We can't give away what we don't have. So, this morning the question begs to be asked, what storm are you going through, or if you fortunate enough to be in good weather now, what was the name of your last hurricane? How did you weather it? Did you go for shelter or did you just stay out in the storm holding on to the light pole? Did you seek to come in from the deluge and natural disaster? Why not? Is it because God is too small to handle it, or maybe you think God is too big to give time or help to an individual or small group of people? Maybe, you think you deserved the torrent, and thus just took the pelleting you got.

Have we forgotten the God the Psalmist knew “God you are my refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble.” We don’t have because we don’t ask. We don’t ask because we think we should be self-sufficient. We think we should be totally independent because society tells us so – not God. Rather, God desire for us, and all – interdependency, that is the divine plan and Emmanuel’s agenda. Noah trusted God and what God promised. So, in faith and in the spirit of interdependency, he built and got in the boat.

Thus, Noah saved his own skin. Yet, he also saved the skin of his family right away and humanity for the long run.

Noah built an ark to save his family.

The Hebrew word translated “ark” is used in only two places in the Old Testament. In both places it basically means “box” or “container.” This is significant when you consider that the other occurrence of this particular Hebrew word comes in Exodus 2 where it refers to the basket in which the infant Moses was placed when his mother hid him in the bulrushes. It is not a coincidence that the “basket” of Exodus 2 is coated with “pitch,” the same resinous material used in the ark Noah built. The major point here is that Noah’s Ark was not like a motorboat or a yacht or a three-masted schooner. It was essentially an enormous container designed to keep Noah and his family and the animals afloat during the long duration of the flood. It had no rudder because Noah didn’t need to steer it. He just needed a boat that would float, which is exactly what God told him to build.

Noah and his family had the container they needed when they were threatened and in danger. In similiar ways, the Church can serve as such a container in our time. We can’t solve all the world’s problems. Matter of fact, we can’t pay the large

amount of rent back owed for even one of our food pantry families. Yet, we can provide groceries for a few days. Those who have been on the receiving end of physical, emotional, and spiritual violence will come to us. And we will offer them refuge. Yes, they will probably still have flashbacks, and scars. Yet, we will provide them with a place here, where we have all gathered to sustain life and love.

What will the inside of our ark look like?

There will be crates to jump on for safety when we are afraid, like must have been there for Mrs. Noah when the mice scurried by.

There will be loving listening even when the tone of voice seems to be roaring, as well as when a whisper is barely heard, like Noah did when he listened to the trumpeting elephant and as well as to the turtle that had retreated into his shell.

There will be help in removing what is no longer needed, like Noah's son's and daughter-in-laws did by the shovelful as they cleaned out stall after stall.

The formula for finding refuge is not overly complicated: Find your refuge in God, and then provide refuge for someone else, a safe container where they can shelter from the storm. That's the blueprint, Noah built it according to God's plan, Jesus did too, for:

“At the table of our Savior
No mouth will go unfed
And His children in the shadows
Stream in and raise their heads
O give us ears to hear them and give us eyes to see
For there is One who loves them
I am His hands and feet

There is One who loves them
I am His hands and feet.” Amen.
 (“Little Things With Great Love” Song by Audry Assad)