

“Noah: Hope When the Flood Waters Rise”

Date: July 9, 2017

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Genesis 6:5-14, 18-22;

Genesis 7:24; 8:1-14

Theme: Hope

Occasion: People of the Bible, series

Today we take a look at Noah, the third person in our series on people of the Bible. How outrageous must the call of God been to Noah when God told him to build an ark. In 2007 Steve Carell played the part of Noah in the comedy film *Evan Almighty*. Take a look at the film clip to catch a sense of how bewildered Noah must have been.

Fast forward – Noah has built the ark and the animals have all been gathered on board. And it has been raining, a really long time. Water: all Noah can see is water. The evening sun sinks into it. The clouds are reflected in it. His boat is surrounded by it.

Water to the north. Water to the south. Water to the east. Water to the west. All Noah can see is water. He can't remember when he's seen anything but. He and his boys had barely pushed the last hippo up the ramp when heaven opened a thousand fire hydrants.

Within moments the boat was rocking and for days the rain was pouring, and for weeks Noah has been wondering, “How long is this going to last?” For forty days it rained – hard rain. For months they have floated. They have eaten the same food, smelled the same smells, and looked at the same faces. After a certain point you run out of things to say to each other.

Finally the boat bumped, and the rocking stopped. Mrs. Noah gave Mr. Noah a look, and Noah gave the hatch a shove and he poked his head through. The hull of the ark was resting on ground,

but the ground was still surrounded by water. “Noah,” she yelled up at him, “what do you see?” He replied, “Water.”

He sent a raven on a scouting mission; it never returned. He sent a dove. It came back shivering and spent, having found no place to roost. Then, just this morning, he tried again. He pulled a dove out of the bowels of the ark and ascended the ladder. The morning sun caused them both to squint.

As he kissed the breast of the bird, he felt a pounding heart. Had he put a hand on his chest, he would have felt another. With a prayer he let it go, and watched until the bird was no bigger than a speck on a window.

All day he looked for the dove’s return. In between chores he opened the hatch and searched. He climbed into the crow’s nest to look around. The wind lifted his gray hair. The sun warmed his weather-beaten face. But nothing lifted his heavy heart. He had seen nothing. Not in the morning. Not after lunch. Not later.

Now the sun is setting, and sky is darkening, and he has come to look one final time, but all he sees is water. Water to the north, water to the south, water to the, well, you know the rest.

And I’ll bet you know the feeling, too. You’ve stood where Noah stood. You’ve known your share of floods – times when life felt overwhelming. Perhaps it was sitting in a doctor’s office, or standing in a cemetery, or feeling stressed about what your body won’t do any more, or if you’re young and you’ve been jilted – feeling like no one in the world could possibly love you again.

And you’ve needed what Noah needed; you’ve needed some hope. You’re not asking for a helicopter to come to your rescue, but

the sound of one would sure sound nice. Hope doesn't promise an instant solution, but rather the possibility of an eventual one. Sometimes all we need is a little hope. That's all Noah needed.

Think of your life as an ark. What are the conditions you're facing right now? Are you docked in a port, feeling safe and secure and full of hope? Are you drifting a little? Are you feeling the water level rise, maybe it's up to your ankles or maybe your knees? Or, are you like Noah, riding out a massive flood with no dry ground, and very little hope in sight? What we need is a sign, a sign of hope.

Jump over to chapter 8 of Genesis and the story continues. Noah is walking on the deck doing some chores and he hears a cooing sound. It was the dove he had let go previously. And there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf.

This leaf was more than a leaf; this was a sign of hope. In fact it was a promise; it was evidence that there was dry ground. Proof that holding on to hope was not in vain.

We all need olive branches from time to time in our life, a reason to hold on to our hope and not give up in vain. It's a true blessing to be able to receive an olive branch, a sign of hope. It's also a great blessing to be able to give an olive branch to someone who is on the verge of jumping off the ark and just plain giving up.

But, a friend calls and says, "Don't worry; we'll get through this together." Or, we give a few dollars to someone about to be evicted, enabling them to stay until things turn around. A father, sits down beside his son and consoles him, after his girlfriend dumped him for someone else, and tells him "there will be other girls." The doctor says, "It appears the cancer may be in remission." Hope.

You and I have the high privilege of serving as one of God's doves in the world, bringing an olive branch to another person who needs a reason to hold on to hope. We all need that olive branch at some point in our lives. What a privilege to extend it to someone else who needs it.

The thread of hope – regardless of circumstances – that runs through the story of Noah, weaves its way throughout the rest of Scripture. That hope finds its personification in Jesus. Jesus is the hope of the world. He personified hope in his life.

He stands next to a woman accused of adultery, about to be stoned to death. Noah could see nothing but water, but this woman could see nothing but anger. She has no hope. But then Jesus speaks, "If any of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw the first stone at her." They drop their rocks, and Jesus invites her to lead a new life. Into her shame-flooded world, he brings her a leaf of hope.

Jesus catches word that a good friend of his is deathly sick. He loves Lazarus, and his two sisters as well, Mary and Martha. But he gets there too late; Lazarus has died. Martha is bobbing in a sea of sorrow. As Noah opened the hatch, so Martha opens her heart, and she pours out her grief. And Jesus offers her a leaf of hope.

Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" Martha says, "Yes, Lord. I believe that you *are* the Christ, the Son of God who was to come into the world."

But how could he get by with such words? Who was he to make such a claim? What qualified him to offer grace to one woman, and

the promise of resurrection to another? Simple: He had done what the dove did. He'd crossed the shoreline of the future land and journeyed among the trees. And from the grove of grace he plucked a leaf for the accused woman. And from the tree of life he pulled a sprig for grieving Martha.

And from both, Jesus brings leaves to you and me. Grace and life. Forgiveness of sin. The defeat of death. This is the hope Jesus gives. Jesus does not promise that all our problems will go away. But he does promise grace and life, the hope we need.

My friends, I don't know where the ark of your life is right now, whether safely docked and secure, or out there in the middle of the sea with nothing but water all around you. I do know that there is hope through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are an Easter people. And because of Easter, there is always hope. Not even death can overcome us. Romans 8:38 and 39 says: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all of creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus."

Let us pray: "Loving God, thank you for sending us Your Son. We thank you that He laid down his life for the world, in order to give us hope. May that hope burn so brightly in us that it inspires others to hope, and to claim the gift of salvation that you offer. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

This sermon borrows heavily from *Ten Men of the Bible* by Max Lucado. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2015; pp. 1-8.