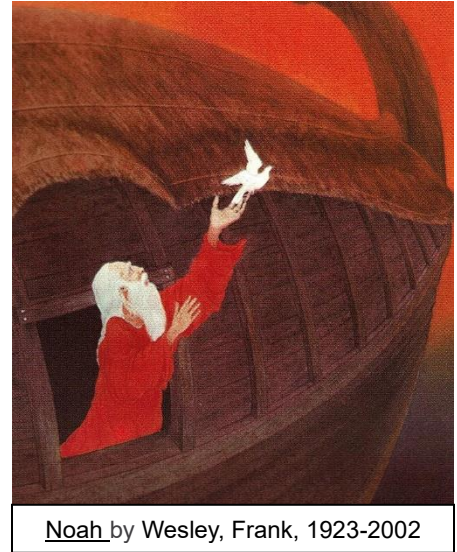


February 23, 2024

My dear church family,

Last Sunday was the first Sunday in Lent. I preached on “The Gift of Uncertainty” using the story of Noah’s Ark as our Old Testament scripture. The continual rainstorms we are having made this a particularly apt narrative!

It is exciting to look closely at the biblical account of a narrative that we are very familiar with. Most of us probably remember the story of Noah from our Sunday School days, when we were either a child or the Sunday School teacher.



In the children’s classroom, we emphasize the pairs of animals boarding the ark, or God’s goodness in saving Noah and his family. Rarely do we wonder with the children about the uncertainty that Noah and his family must have felt, nor the destruction of the earth, including all its inhabitants.

The devotional I am using includes a script from a 15<sup>th</sup> century miracle play. The internet informed me that this play, called “Noah’s Flood,” is one of the “Chester Plays” named after Chester, England where the plays originated.

Following is a section of the play describing the unwillingness of Noah’s wife to enter the Ark. The mention of Christ shows that it is not faithful to the biblical account. In addition, it paints an unfavorable picture of Noah’s wife as a defiant, unwitting person. The Bible gives us no reason to believe that is true. I didn’t understand much of the vocabulary. For example, Noah’s wife speaks of her “gossips.” I believe these are the group of friends that she must leave behind.

Despite the unfamiliarity of the language, it was easy to grasp the gist of the dialogue. The play highlighted for me the uncertainty that Noah’s family may have felt.

Noah:

Wife, come in! Why stands thou there?  
Thou art ever froward, that dare I swear.  
Come in, on God's half! High time it were,  
For fear lest that we drown.

Noah’s Wife:

Yea, sir, set up your sail,  
And row forth with evil hail,  
For, without any fail,  
I will not out of this town.

But I have my gossips everyone,  
One foot further I will not gone;  
They shall not drown, by St. John,  
And I may save their life.

They love me full well, by Christ;  
But thou wilt let them in thy chest,  
Else row forth, Noah, whither thou list,  
And get thee a new wife!

Noah:  
Shem, son, lo! thy mother is wrow:  
Forsooth, such another I do not know.

Shem:  
Father, I shall fetch her in, I trow,  
Without any fail.

*Shem goes to his mother.*  
Mother, my father after thee sent,  
And bids thee into yonder ship wend.  
Look up and see the wind,  
For we be ready to sail.

Noah's Wife:  
Son, go again to him, and say  
I will not come therin today!

Noah:  
Come in, wife, in twenty devils way,  
Or else stand there without!

Ham:  
Shall we all fetch her in?

Noah:  
Yea, sons, in Christ's blessing and mine;  
I would you hied you betime,  
For of this flood I am in doubt.

Gossips:  
The flood comes fleeting in full fast,  
On every side it spreads full far;  
For fear of drowning I am aghast;  
Good gossips, let us draw near.

And let us drink ere we depart,  
For oft-times we have done so;

For at a draught thou drink'st a quart,  
And so will I do ere I go.

Noah's Wife:  
Here is a pottle of Malmsey, good and strong;  
It will rejoice both heart and tongue;  
Though Noah thinks us never so long,  
Yet we will drink alike.

Japheth:  
Mother, we pray you altogether-  
For we are here your own childer-  
Come into the ship for fear of the weather,  
For his love that you bought!

Noah's Wife:  
That I will not, for all your call,  
But I have my gossips all.

Shem:  
In faith, mother, yet you shall,  
Whether you will or nought.  
*Her children drag her into the Ark.*

Noah:  
Welcome, wife, into this boat.

Noah's Wife:  
And have thou that for thy note!  
*She boxes him on the ear.*

Noah:  
Aha! marry, this is hot!  
It is good to be still.

Ah, children, methinks my boat moves;  
Our tarrying here hugely me grieves.  
Over the land the water spreads;  
God do as God will!  
Ah, great God that art so good,  
That works not thy will is wood.  
Now all this world is on a flood,  
As I well see in sight.

This window will I shut anon,  
And into my chamber will I gone,  
Till this water, so great a one,  
Be slaked through thy might.

Noah's wife demands that Noah let her "gossips" on the ark, for she is determined to save them rather than let them drown. If Noah refuses, she informs him she will stay and drink Malmsey wine with them rather than be rescued herself. She advises Noah to get a new wife if he won't take them all aboard.

Reading the account now, as adults, brings the question of the character of God to light. On Wednesday evening, after enjoying soup together, we read Genesis 6-8. There was much thought-provoking discussion in each small group. The question of the goodness of God was raised, "How could a loving God destroy all those people? Did God make a mistake when God created humanity? Had God decided to "try again" by giving Noah's family the chance to repopulate the earth?"

Before the flood, God saw that all of humanity was wicked and that the "thoughts of their hearts" were evil. The earth was filled with corruption and violence. I am reminded of Russian President Putin. Is his persistent war against Ukraine anything but unwarranted violence? Is the death of countless Ukrainians as well as the young men of Russia anything but heartless? After the death of Alexei Navalny, a Ukrainian official stated, "[President P]utin is the ultimate evil who is afraid of any competition. The lives of [R]ussians are nothing to him."<sup>[1]</sup> In the face of such inhumanity, it is easy for me to judge the evil doer and even wish for his death. How much more should we acknowledge the right of a holy God to end such violence?

The Story of Noah illustrates that God is not indiscriminate with punishment. There is a short and powerful word in scripture, the word "but." Whenever this word appears, it behooves us to pay close attention. This word appears in the story of Noah and the ark: "**But** Noah." "**But** Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord." (Genesis 6:8.) Noah was righteous, blameless and walked with God. God did not destroy all of humanity. God saved Noah. This is the justice of God.

God describes to Noah the destruction which will take place, then reassures him saying, "**But** I will establish my covenant with you." (Genesis 6:18) Three times in Genesis 7 we read that Noah did what God commanded him. Then the rains fell and the flood waters swelled killing all living creatures.

Chapter 8 begins with that short word "but", "**But** God remembered Noah...and all that were with him in the ark." God stopped the rain and caused the land to dry and blessed Noah and his sons. God placed a rainbow in the sky as a sign of God's promise, God's covenant with Noah, that God would never again destroy the earth with a flood.

Last Sunday we discussed that uncertainty, one of the gifts of the dark wood, leads to trust. Eric Elnes writes, "[The saints of old] did not become saints by moving from uncertainty to clarity. They moved, rather, from uncertainty to *trust*, which requires the ongoing presence of uncertainty."<sup>[2]</sup> For all we know, Noah was as uncertain about the future as the miracle play leads us to believe Noah's wife was. Surely Noah had no idea how long he would be in the ark, or how he and his family would endure the environment on the ark, or what the earth would be like when the waters dried up. But, he trusted God and did what God commanded.

Elnes continues, “The call of the Holy Spirit, as inviting as it is, also tends to shake things up and bears with it a particular Dark Wood gift: the gift of *uncertainty*.”<sup>[3]</sup> The call of God, with all its uncertainty, calls us into places we would not usually go of our own accord. Peter was a good example of this.

Matthew 14 tells the story of Jesus’ call to Peter, “Come.” Peter stepped out of the boat, a step into uncertainty, a step he normally would not have taken. But, stepping out enabled him to experience the trust in Jesus that was required to walk on water! His goal was to walk to Jesus. However, when Peter took his eyes off Jesus and gave his attention to the strong wind and turbulent sea, he faltered and sank. **But** Jesus... but Jesus was there to save him. Jesus, in his great mercy, immediately reached out his hand and lifted Peter to safety.

God promised Noah never again to destroy humanity in a flood. Instead, God offered Jesus to receive the destruction of death, a punishment for the evil of humanity. This is the story of Good Friday. God goes on to show us God’s grace, the gift of eternal life, offered to each person. This is the glorious story of Easter Sunday. God is a God of mercy and grace.

Elnes concludes the chapter on uncertainty writing, “uncertainty teaches us to let go of all concerns but the ones we truly face, giving us the courage and power to face them. In so doing, uncertainty provides the unexpected invitation to live our lives *wholeheartedly*.”<sup>[4]</sup>

May we, as a congregation and as individuals, trust God with our concerns and uncertainties, giving us the freedom to live our lives wholeheartedly.

In trust,  
Pastor Cindy

[1] <https://thehill.com/policy/international/4476183-ukrainian-official-navalvys-death-shows-putin-is-the-ultimate-evil/>

[2] Elnes, Eric. Gifts of the Dark Wood, 2015, page 8

[3] *ibid.* page 25

[4] *ibid.* page 40