

## **“Noah’s Ark: Hope for God’s Broken Creation”**

A Sermon by Rev. Betsey Moe - July 20, 2025

Community Presbyterian Church, Post Falls, Idaho

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### **Genesis 6:5-22; Genesis 9:8-17**

One of my favorite parts about parenting young children was getting to read bedtime stories. I don’t know if you are familiar with this one, called, *No, David*, by David Shannon. David is a crazy, energetic, sometimes rascally kid who all day is told, NO, NO, NO. But at the end of the day, his mother gives him a hug and says, YES, David, I love you.” No matter what happened with my kids during the day, I liked to be reminded to tell them, “Yes, I love you.”

Bedtime stories can comfort, they entertain, they lull to sleep. I even like to read to myself now before I go to bed, for all those benefits. But the very BEST stories are ones in which I can see my own story. It’s amazing how I can be reading a story about WWII, and somehow, I see my own story. Because the best stories, no matter when they are set in history, or even IF they are set in actual history, are ones which reveal something about your own story to you and help you understand it better.

The story of Noah’s Ark has long been used as a bedtime story. Some scholars think that it was always meant to be a story for children. Maybe it seems a little harsh to be purely entertaining, but for the people of Israel, it was a story in which they were supposed to see themselves. They were supposed to learn something about the God to whom their nation belonged – at a time when they were in danger of forgetting.

You see, the majority of the Noah’s Ark story was written during Israel’s exile in Babylon. If you were here for the first sermon in this series on the creation story in chapter 1, you may remember that I mentioned then that some of these earliest stories in Genesis were written *late* in Israel’s existence. That although stories like the six days of creation and Noah’s Ark come first in the Bible, they were actually some of the last stories in the Old Testament that were written down.

Israel’s exile in Babylon was one of the most unsettling times in Israel’s history. The kingdom had been divided – North and South -- and then divided internally, invaded and destroyed. Israel to the North and Judah to the South had suffered under the greed and corruption of their own political and religious leaders. Without good leadership, God’s people had become adrift and had forgotten what it meant to be the people of God in the world. By the time Israel was living in exile, they did not have a clear direction about their future as a people.

“Where IS God,” they were asking, and “How does God plan to SAVE humanity out of chaos, terror, violence, and corruption?”

And so the few faithful priests that remained thought, “Now is the time we need to tell the story of Noah’s Ark. A story about a great flood that may have happened around the year 3,000 BC told by a surprising number of religious and people groups in the Ancient Near East. They told this story as a warning against caving in again to corruption and apathy and violence, AND to bring back hope among their people about the faithfulness of God.

And so, sit back, take a deep breath, and consider how the story of Noah’s Ark unfolds, and how it would have felt relevant to a group of God’s people living in the chaos and uncertainty of exile.

The story begins with a description of how far humanity had fallen into sin. “The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.” After Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel, the flood story simply follows the pattern of one sin leading to another, a slow descent to rock bottom.

The remarkable thing about God’s reaction is that God is *grieved*. It doesn’t say that God was angry; God was *sad* about what had become of God’s creation. God was sorry; God felt pity on all that God had created. Because there was so much pain being multiplied. God had set up these beautiful systems of reproduction in which the created order was to “be fruitful and multiply,” yet the biggest thing being reproduced was not life, but violence.

Creation was so corrupt, that God determined to destroy all flesh – which is devastating. Does God really destroy? Here’s where it’s helpful to see the Hebrew plays on words. The word for “destroy” is the same as the Hebrew root used for “corrupt.” Creation’s corruption brought their destruction; it was as if they were self-destructing more than being “punished” by an angry God.

And remember – the people telling this story saw it as a description of what led to Israel’s exile. Their corruption had brought their own destruction. The kings and the priests had been greedy and corrupt; and without strong leadership, the people were NOT doing the basic things God had commanded them to do. (We have a record of just how bad things had gotten in the books of the prophets.) The priests telling the Noah story wanted their audience to see themselves and how far they had essentially self-destructed as a nation, as God’s people.

There are real and serious consequences for sin. It’s not just about being separated from God when you die; the world suffers when sin multiplies without check.

The message was: OPEN YOUR EYES TO WHAT’S HAPPENING. BE AWARE, AND TAKE RESPONSIBILITY.

But then, there’s a big “and yet” in the story. “But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord.” In the darkness – the chaos, terror, violence, and corruption – God made a way. Total destruction was not inevitable; there would be one family through whom new life would come. Noah was not perfect, but he was obedient. He “walked with God,” but the true colors of his character

came *after* he was chosen – when he built the ark in faith in the midst of a world falling apart around him.

Perhaps the priests in exile who were telling this story saw themselves as Noah's family, keeping faith alive when everything around them had crumbled. But this was also their call to all of God's people – this little nation that had been set apart to bring blessing to the world – to be in that moment who they were originally called to be. People who lived counterculturally with courage: to guard and revere human life, worship God alone, not money, look out for the widow, the orphan, the foreigners; be that shining light of love and faithfulness to the rest of the world.

The message was: REMEMBER THAT YOU WERE CHOSEN AND SET APART TO BRING SALVATION.

The end of the Noah story could be called There's Life on the Other Side.

“Go out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and your sons' wives with you. 17 Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—so that they may abound on the earth and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.”

The family of Noah does not stay on the ark; they are commanded to go out after the water subsides and *bring out* every living thing to be fruitful and multiply. And then *God* determines to stick with this chaotic, violent, corrupt world until the end.

God vows to be closely involved with a sinful creation and leads the way forward through non-violence – setting down the bow once and for all. What a word of life to people living in the fearful and chaotic times of the exile.

The message was: THERE'S LIFE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FLOOD. THE WORLD ISN'T OVER UNTIL IT'S OVER.

But this is also *our story*.

As Christians, we see Jesus as the one man – the obedient one – who makes a way through the rising waters. When we board the boat – through baptism, through clinging to faith in him, making HIS way of life OUR way of life, we become a part of that life-generating family that restores life to a chaotic world.

I want to talk about church architecture for a minute. In our church and in many other churches, you'll see exposed beams above the pews in the sanctuary. This is not simply to draw the eye upward. It's actually an architectural tradition in which sanctuaries are built to be an upside-down ship – or ark. In some sanctuaries, it's even more obvious, and maybe you've attended church in one in which the sanctuary is long and narrow. You didn't know you were

worshipping in a boat, did you? In fact, the long, narrow portion of a sanctuary where the pews are located is called the nave, which sounds like navy, naval. It's from the Latin word, "navis," which means ship.

The idea is that every Sunday when we gather, we remember that we are part of God's chosen family – the Body of Christ – through whom God is bringing hope and life to the world. When we set sail in this ship, we remember how much we are valued – even though we are sinners. We remember that we have been saved by a gracious God from the powers that enslave us. We remember the call to be obedient in the small actions of daily life – following in the compassionate, self-giving, truth-telling ways of Jesus. We remember that we're all in this boat together.

And then, we have to disembark to go live out our faith however our vocation or our phase in life calls us to do that. Sometimes, we will be a safe haven for people in distress. Sometimes we will be the voice that speaks to the powers. But in our bodies – in our actions – we carry God's redemptive story. We carry God's determination to save.

Perhaps Noah's Ark is God's YES to each of us. Yes, Betsey, I love you. Yes, CPC, I love you.

May we not just be comforted, but freed and empowered by hearing this story of hope. Amen.