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## Lost in Translation | *Put a Bow on It*

Genesis 6-9

Pastor Sarah Fike

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The flood narrative. A very well known story in the Bible that if you went to Sunday School, you heard all the time. So let's hear that version now, this is from the Spark Story Book Bible.

Read Noah's Ark from the Story Bible.

It's such a nice, harmonious story about the biblical event. I bet often, when we think of this story we see these types of images as well. The snow globe is something I was given as a child at my First Communion.

But this type of children's story is far from what is actually happening. God sees humanity as getting worse and so God gets rid of everything except Noah's family and some of every living creature.

I went to Wartburg college and part of everyone's education is that you have to take 2 religion classes. The first one has to be RE101 which is learning about the bible in a more overview kind of way and the second you get to pick. Well after I added a religion major, I signed up for a Christian ethics course with one of my favorite professors. It was a second level class which are usually promoted for all students to be able to take. As a religion major, we had been learning how to look at the texts critically and through a different lens. One of the class sessions we looked at the flood story. All of the students who weren't religion majors spoke up recounting what they were taught in Sunday School about Noah's Ark. It was cute and clean, peaceful and everything was great in their recount.

Then, Dr. McBride called me and asked what I thought. I blurted out, "well, isn't this a divine killing?" God is angry at everyone and so God kills them. My professor says interesting, let's explore that. The other students were ready with pitchforks chanting off with her head...not really but they did get very defensive asking are you

saying God is mean or bad, or hates people. And after a bit of conversation I say, "well God regretted it and made a covenant not to do it again."

When I think back to that class conversation, I wonder what was missing. What is being lost in translation that we aren't getting? Because prior to this we had Adam and Eve eating from the tree and being expelled from the garden, then we have Cain and Abel coming before God with offerings and Abel's is favored more, so Cain's jealousy gets the best of him and the first act of murder is recorded. Now, we hear that humans are out of control, human rebellion is as an all time high. And God rather than being this angry, vengeful God, is in pain. It hurts God to see creation doing this to each other in the God created. So, God decides to do something about it. God's reaction is to destroy creation before it completely destroys itself.

We don't get taught this version because it makes us uncomfortable seeing this portrait of God reacting in this way, that God would be heartbroken over the behavior of creation. God sees where the ruination of creation is headed and has decided to accelerate the process to its completion. We are left with the sense then that God is not so much sending the flood to punish the world as much as facilitating, through the flood, the inevitable descent into chaos caused by human destructiveness and violence. God ruins an already ruined creation, and in so doing creates conditions for a reordering and a renewal to take place.

So, God picks Noah because he is righteous, blameless, whole. And by choosing Noah, we learn that others can be saved by one person's righteousness. What a perfect subject, because he never questions God about why he has to build this ark. He just does it. Noah completed the entire structure without knowing God's intentions; he had only the command which drove him to blind obedience. It wasn't until only immediately before his final entry into the ark did Noah learn of God's plan to destroy humankind by a flood. Of course, only by this communication could the meaning of the ark and its purpose become clear to him. But that was Yahweh's intention—to test Noah. To

Noah the command must have seemed strange and incomprehensible. A ship on dry land! That was a test of his obedience and faith. But he passed the test.

Everyone gets in the ark that are promised to be saved and a flood washes over the earth. Then finally, God remembers Noah in the ark and commands the waters to recede. This idea of remembering means marking the time when God will act on the promises God made. The flood waters receding begins a time of reversing everything that led up to the flood. It becomes a time of restoration by God. When God delivers from death, it is also an act of creation. God making this new. Because God values the restorative, renewing of what is ruined. Salvation then becomes this creative act.

And Noah lands on the top of the mountain waiting, faithfully waiting for the fulfillment of God's word and promises. where he brings this amazing offering to God. In that, God establishes a new covenant with creation. Proclaiming that God will no longer fix the world's problems by wiping them away. God recognizes that humanity hasn't really changed even with Noah, but God's approach to humanity, to creation could change. Does God bring divine justice on creation? Yes. Does that mean all the problems are solved? No.

So, God makes a covenant with Noah that God will never again treat creation as cursed. The covenant is like a repair mechanism—it is good, but it is not best. It binds the relationship together and prevents people from hurting one another while they wait for the arrival of the promised righteous one to put things right.

God attaches a symbol, a sign that will be a representation of the covenant God is making with creation. A bow. We think of it as a rainbow. The bow has a metaphorical meaning. It represents a bow and arrow. Where bow and arrows typically kill things, it shows us that God is hanging up God's bow. The rainbow shines upon a dark ground ... it represents the victory of the light of love over the darkness of wrath or rather God's pain. Originating from the effect of the sun upon a dark cloud, it

typifies the willingness of the heavens to penetrate the earth. Stretched between heaven and earth, it is as a bond of peace between both, and, spanning the horizon, it points to the all-embracing universality of the Divine mercy. The bright, seven-layered spectrum of light against a dark background is a beautiful picture of God's judgment and mercy together.

We have all stopped to look at a rainbow after a storm. But have you ever stopped to look at a rainbow to think about how this is God continually showing us the sign of God's promises are still faithful to us years and years later?

This story points to God's faithful promises with all of creation and how we are called to faithfully wait just like Noah for the fulfillment of those promises in the one who has and will come to deliver us from our corrupt world to open up the way back to Eden.