



Rev. Roslyn Hogan

All In the Same Boat

Two Sundays ago our children did a beautiful job portraying Noah's ark in a musical. And you may be wondering why we're revisiting this story so soon. And the truth is when I saw that this was one of the lectionary passages for this Sunday I just couldn't resist it. I wanted to preach on Noah's ark because it's one of the most popular Bible stories around. Even folks who've never stepped foot into a church or synagogue are familiar with this narrative. And when it comes to popular Bible stories like this it's easy to think we have them all figured out. Most of us have heard this story dozens of times. What else could it possibly teach us? Well, the truly amazing thing about scripture is that we can visit passages again and again and if we're really listening more often than not we'll hear something helpful and maybe even something new. The children's musical focused on God's grace and the rainbow promise, but I'd like to focus on something a little different this morning. So, let's go back Noah and the ark and find out if this story has anything else to teach us.

The world is so evil, so violent that God decides to drown life out. In verse 6 we're told that, "God was sorry that God had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved God's heart. So God said, 'I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created - people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.'"

Humankind "grieved God's heart." This is a powerful and moving image of God. We see that God feels nothing but sorrow and disappointment as God witnesses the ways we human beings wound each other, the ways we tear each other apart. And God decides only Noah and his family and pairs of every living thing will survive the flood. Now that's a tough and deeply disturbing decision if you think about it.

God calls on old Noah and tells him the plan - "Noah, the world is doomed; it's going to be swallowed up by flood waters. You need to build an ark for you and your family and pairs of every living creature." I picture Noah standing there, mouth gaping. I mean, can you imagine how he must have taken the news? I would think Noah felt a mixture of horror and gratitude and bewilderment. But, Old Noah does exactly as he's told. He starts building.

Noah's family probably thought he was crazy at first. And I'll bet he was the talk of his town. You can almost hear people murmuring, "Boy, I feel sorry for Noah's wife. Old man has lost his mind." After all, it wasn't raining when the ark

was under construction.

But then the rains do come pouring down from the heavens, and Noah and his family and two pairs of every living thing board the giant ark. Can you picture alligators, and cats, and hippos, and spiders, and kangaroos making their way up the long gangplank two by two? It's a funny image.

All silliness aside though; there are horrifying elements to this story. We don't read about this in Genesis, but when we stop and consider it we realize that men, women, children, animals, and other living things that didn't get to board the ark would be perishing all around Noah and his ship mates. One only needs to think back to Katrina, back to the devastating images that filled our television screens to imagine how awful the flood in our story would have been.

And Noah and the others float for 150 days on the ravaging waters. Finally, Noah decides its time to send a raven out to look for signs of life, signs of hope. But the raven returns without anything. Imagine Noah's and his family's disappointment.

Noah waits seven days and sends a dove out. He thinks, "Maybe this time." But the dove returns without anything.

Noah waits seven more days and sends the little dove out again. And you know he must be feeling frustrated and desperate at this point. He paces back and forth. And finally the little bird returns with a sprig of fresh olive leaves in her

beak. This is the sign Noah and his family have been waiting for, the sign that the waters have receded. Imagine how much joy that tiny sprig of leaves brought them.

Then the ark finally finds its way to land. And God blesses its passengers and they go back to living life. And God sends the rainbow as a promise that God will never again rain down that kind of terror and destruction on this earth.

This is an old story, an odd story. But this ancient passage has valuable things to teach us today. For example, think of the ark and its passengers. Imagine Noah and his family packed together with raccoons, and snakes, and sheep, and lions, and bears, and beetles, and zebras, and more. Now, I don't know about you, but 150 days on a boat with my family and I'd probably be ready to jump ship. That doesn't even take into account the creatures on the boat and the fact that each one would have its own wants, and needs, and noises, and *smells*. You probably know the old joke: If it hadn't been for the storm outside they never would have been able to stand the stench inside.

Joking aside, I find it remarkable that these mismatched passengers were all in the same boat, and they needed to stay alive despite their differences and incompatibilities. *They needed each other.*

And the ark in our story is just a smaller version of the ark we're traveling on at this very moment, this diverse and beautiful planet floating in the vastness of

space. We can't replace this ark. We can't build a bigger one. And we can't toss passengers we dislike overboard without diminishing ourselves. *This is it.* We're all in the same boat: black and white and brown; Christian and Muslim and Buddhist and Hindu and Jew; rich and middle-class and poor; male and female; plants and birds and fish and creeping things - we're all in the same boat. And we're challenged to stay afloat *together*, because *we need each other*.

We're meant to sail with all sorts of people and creatures, even people and creatures that frighten us, or seem alien to us, or irritate us to no end. We must sail together because God put us on this planet together. And maybe God put us together because God knew that an ark would be much stronger and more interesting than a solitary life raft.

But, sailing together is sometimes difficult. So, how do we learn to do it? Well, one way we learn that we need each other, one way we recognize the truth that we're better off together than we are apart, is by getting involved in a community - a community like this for example.

In communities like this we worship, and learn, and serve, and fellowship together. And we're all different. We're young and old, introverts and extroverts, leaders and followers, traditional and progressive and everything in between. And we all have our own wants, and needs, and noises, and smells. But despite our differences, as our commitment to this faith community deepens we find we get

used to the quirkiness of our ship mates. And some of us come to value those things that make our traveling companions unique. And we find that our ability to value those *outside* this community becomes an easier and an essential thing to do.

And think of the opportunities here to work together. We can learn together by leading and attending Sunday school and Bible studies. We can serve on councils and committees. We can volunteer to work together at the Micah 6 food pantry. We can be deacons or elders. College students can join Disciples Student Fellowship and participate in faith related studies and fun events and mission trips. Those with musical abilities can join this amazing group of people sitting behind me and sing the choir. And I could keep going and going. In this community alone there are a variety of ways to learn that we are stronger and wiser when we stand together.

In places just like this we learn that we need each other. We come to see that we can do far more as partners than we can as individuals in building peace, and love, and hope in this world - a world that continues to grieve God's heart with its hatred and violence.

Friends, once we recognize that we're all in the same boat, we learn to *appreciate* the gift God has given us in putting us here together, and *we become* the rainbow sign: a myriad of color and beauty, a living promise of peace and friendship and hope. Amen.

