

Genesis 9

This chapter brings the Noah story to its conclusion. Previously we examined God's reason for the flood, God's calling of Noah, God's directing the building of the ark and the collecting of the animals, the loading of the ark, the flood, the cessation of the flood, the unloading of the ark by "families" Noah's sacrifices of thanksgiving and finally God promise to never again flood the earth.

The story resumes with a command, a gift and a warning. The command is that Noah and his sons are to *"be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth"*. They are to do so because humans are to care for God's creation, so there needs to be enough humans to fulfill the task. The gift is that human beings can go from being vegetarians to carnivores. This gift comes with one proviso, and that is the blood was not to be consumed. The blood was to be drained first and returned to the ground. This act was a reminder that the life force of all animals (the blood) belongs to God and therefore should be returned to God's creation. The warning is that human beings are not to shed the blood of other human beings. This is given because every human being is created in the image of God, and as such, is precious to the creator.

The writer now turns to the first great Covenant of the Biblical story, the Noetic Covenant. (We will encounter the second of the great covenants in a couple of weeks when we discuss Abraham and Sarah.) A Biblical covenant is an agreement between God and individuals in which promises are made. In this case, it is a covenant in which only God makes a promise. And even though God makes the promise to Noah, it is a promise intended for all of creation. The promise from God is that *"...never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."* What this means is that if God desires a humanity 3.0, God will create it in a way other than the destruction of most of humankind; which sets in motion the rest of the Biblical story as God seeks to redeem God's good creation.

One of the unusual aspects of this covenant is that it has a "sign" attached to it. This makes it different from the other Biblical covenants which don't have signs, but have positive outcomes attached to them (things such as a new land, family and blessing). The sign of this covenant is the rainbow. It is a reminder to God and to humanity, that God will never again destroy the earth by flood. Some commentators have noted that if we think of the rainbow as an archer's bow, it is pointed toward heaven and not earth, thus showing how seriously God takes this promise. That if God breaches it, God will pay the price.

This covenant immediately matters because human beings return to their evil ways as soon as they are off the boat. Noah plants a vineyard, makes wine and gets drunk. His son Ham engages in some illicit sexual activity (*"he saw his father's nakedness"*) and is thereby cursed by his father. Thus, humanity will always be dependent on God's covenant because of their continuing unfaithfulness.

Reflection: As Presbyterians, we are covenantal people. What this means is that we believe that across time, God made covenants, or promises to humanity. These include the Noetic covenant, plus covenants with Abraham, Moses, King David, and ultimately the new covenant, through Jesus. The heart of these covenants was God's ongoing promise to restore creation so that people can live in right relationship with God, neighbor and creation itself. Though some Christians believe that the new covenant through Jesus replaces all the other covenants, we do not. Each remains in effect, building on the one given before it.

Questions:

1. How do you demonstrate in your own life that all human beings are children of God?
2. What promises from God are most important to you?
3. Now that we are finished with the Noah story, what are your takeaways from it?