

Get Aboard the Ark!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our text is from the Old Testament reading. **God said to Noah and his Sons with him, “Behold, I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”** Here ends our text.

Maybe you’ve heard someone say, “God wouldn’t really judge the earth would he? I mean, cast a bunch of people whom he created into hell? That wouldn’t be very fair. I don’t believe a loving God would do that. He probably makes his threats just to frighten us into behaving, like a mother looking at her mischievous son and counting to three.” Or maybe you’ve thought to yourself, “If there is a final judgment, would God save me? Would I be counted among the righteous? And if so, why?”

It had been 1500 years. It was 1500 years after God created his perfect earth with perfect people, a man and a woman he made in his image. But it was also 1500 years after the fall of Adam and Eve into the devil’s temptation. Adam had sons and grandsons in his own sinful image, murderers and unbelievers like Cain and Lamech. But Adam also had a believing son named Seth. God the Holy Spirit kept his Church alive through faith in God’s Word of promise – a promise that a descendent of Eve would crush the devil’s head and undo all the devil’s work. But the believing Sons of God took unbelieving wives from the daughters of men. Man multiplied greatly upon the earth, but God’s Church became only a small remnant.

The LORD looked down and saw the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and that every inclination of his heart was only evil all the time. The earth was corrupt in God’s sight and filled with violence. The LORD was grieved to his heart. He said, “I will blot out mankind from the face of the earth for I am sorry that I have made them.”

But there was one man who found favor in the eyes of the Lord. His name was Noah, a descendant of Shem. Noah was a righteous man. He walked with God. God said to Noah, “Make a great ark with three decks and many rooms. For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life. Everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you.” Noah believed the Lord’s promise. So Noah got busy with his hands. For over a hundred years Noah felled timber, sawed beams, pounded nails, and coated the wood with pitch. According to the Lord’s detailed instructions, a vessel approaching the size of a naval battleship took shape on the plain. It had no sail, rudder, or armament. Its only purpose was to save. But as he worked with his hands, Noah’s tongue wasn’t idle either. To all who came out to see this landlocked oddity, a ship on dry land, Noah preached righteousness. “The LORD is judging the earth. Repent! Turn from you wicked ways and believe God’s promise. Get aboard the ark and be saved.” But they only laughed at this madman. They carried on as usual, eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage. After a hundred years of preaching, only Noah and his wife, his three sons and their wives believed in the LORD. The Church of God was down to eight in all.

After Noah did all that God commanded, the LORD said, “Get aboard the ark, you and your household.” God filled all the empty rooms with animals of every kind, a pair of every unclean animal and seven pairs of every clean animal. Noah and his family and the animals entered the ark, and the LORD shut them in. Then the LORD opened the fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven. The flood waters covered the earth. People scurried to high ground, scrambled up embankments, and clawed their way up trees. Some ran to the ark and pounded on the door. But it was too late. The door was shut. As the water closed over their heads, their last sight was that of the ark of salvation bobbing away in the distance. There had been no sign of the flood’s coming and the judgment of the LORD other than the ark. No warnings other than the preaching of Noah. It was a great purging of evil from the face of the earth. A great washing away of sin and wickedness. A great baptism of the earth in water. All the wicked and unrighteous drowned and died. But God saved righteous Noah and his family who were aboard the ark.

Over a year later, God dried up the flood waters. Noah and his family and all the animals left the ark. The first thing Noah did was worship God. He built an altar and sacrificed one of the clean animals upon it. God was pleased with this sacrifice, not because it was done to appease his wrath. Rather this sacrifice foreshadowed the sacrifice of the Son of God upon the cross for the wickedness of the world, the clean Lamb of God without blemish or spot. And God made a covenant with Noah that he would never again destroy the earth by a flood. As a sign of this promise, God put a rainbow in the clouds. Whenever Noah and his family trembled after a thunderstorm, they would see the rainbow and remember God’s promise. This is a way that God works sacramentally. He tied his Word of promise to a visible sign, the rainbow, to encourage and strengthen the faith of Noah and his family in God’s promises. The rainbow is also a sign for us that God will never again destroy the earth by a worldwide flood. But it’s also a sign to us that the LORD won’t hesitate to judge the earth and punish man for his wickedness.

For all those who believe that God is only a loving God and not a just God who would judge and condemn wickedness, they only need look at the evidence of the worldwide flood. And for all those who believe that God is only a wrathful judge who hates mankind, they only need look at the people around them, the descendents of Noah whom God saved in the ark. There were plenty of rooms on the ark for many people, if they’d only repented and believed God’s promise. And that was exactly the reason why God saved Noah and his family. Noah didn’t find favor with God because of

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his upright life. Noah wasn't righteous in God's sight because of his good deeds. Noah found favor with God and was righteous in God's sight because he believed God's promises – the promise to send a Savior from the descendants of Eve and to save those descendants in the ark so the Savior would be born. The book of Hebrews tells us that Noah was saved by faith. And because of that faith he built the ark.

But Noah was still a sinner. Shortly after the flood, Noah planted a vineyard. He got drunk off the wine and disgraced himself by lying naked in his tent. His son Ham saw him and mocked his father's indecency. When Noah heard of it, he cursed Ham's son Canaan. The sinful nature of Adam was still alive and well. God had purged the earth of the violence and the wicked *outward* acts of man with a washing of water. But man's inner being and spirit were still corrupt. Another baptism was needed.

It was 2500 years after the flood. 2500 years since God had washed the earth of evil and started over. Man had multiplied greatly upon the earth. But the Lord looked down and saw that the wickedness of man was again great upon the earth, and that every inclination of his heart was only evil all the time. The earth again was corrupt in God's sight and filled with violence. The LORD was grieved to his heart. The LORD said, "I will judge mankind for his wickedness."

But there was one man who was righteous before God, the incarnate Son of God. His name is Jesus Christ. For over 30 years he built a new vessel of salvation. He was a carpenter by trade. But this vessel wasn't made of wood, nails, and pitch. It was made of flesh and blood. It was his own body. This body wore no kingly clothing, royal robes, or fancy headdresses. It had no special defenses or weapons. Its only purpose was to save. He was busy with his hands, healing people with his touch and blessing children. But he wasn't idle with his tongue either. He preached, "Repent and believe the Gospel. I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. In my Father's house are many rooms. Get aboard me and be saved!" Many people went out to see this oddity, this man who called God his Father and who claimed to be the Son of God. Most thought him to be a madman. They went back to life as usual.

But construction of the ark continued. Timber was felled, beams were sawed, and nails were pounded. The wood wasn't covered with pitch, though, but with the blood of Jesus. When Jesus was crucified upon beams of the cross, the new ark of salvation was complete. Just before he died, Jesus said, "It is finished." God the Father had poured out his judgment against the wickedness of all mankind upon Jesus, but all who believe God's promise of salvation get aboard him and are saved.

After Jesus was made alive by the Holy Spirit on Easter Sunday, just after he rose from the dead, he descended into hell. He went to hell, not to suffer punishment, but to preach to the souls in prison there. He preached to those souls who had disbelieved and disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. Jesus didn't preach repentance or a second chance. He proclaimed his victory over death and the devil. He preached condemnation against all those who disbelieved God's promises. He pronounced his judgment on all those who hadn't climbed aboard the ark. And because of their unbelief they were now outside the ark of God, the body of Jesus Christ. It was too late for them now. The door was shut.

Well, it's been 2000 years since the construction of the new ark, the ark of God. 2000 years since the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The LORD looks down on this earth and sees the wickedness of mankind, that the thoughts of his heart are only evil all the time. The Lord is planning his judgment against the earth. But the door to the ark is still open. The Lord's prophets still preach righteousness. "Repent and turn from your wicked ways. Believe in Jesus Christ for your salvation. Get aboard the ark and be saved!"

Of course in these last days, just like the apostle Peter predicted, "Scoffers have come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They say, 'Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.' But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was flooded and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men." This day of judgment will come without any signs. There'll be no warnings other than the preaching of God's prophets. People will be eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage just like in the days of Noah. Then the Son of God will come in judgment.

But that day won't surprise you. Nor will you fear. For you have found favor with God. You're righteous in God's sight. Not because of your goodness or good deeds, because like Noah, you're still a sinner. But you're righteous by faith. Also like Noah, you're righteous through faith in God's promise. At this very moment, you're sitting in the nave of the church, the boat. You're aboard the ark of Jesus Christ.

And though you may tremble because of your sin, God has made a covenant with you. He works sacramentally. He ties his Word of promise to a visible element. He binds his Word of promise to forgive your sin through the waters of holy baptism. By water he drowned man and his wickedness and washed the earth of evil. And by this same water combined with his Word, he drowns your old man and washes your sins away. The baptismal font is our rainbow. Whenever we see it we remember God's promise not to condemn us, but to save us through his Son. Everyday we repent and get aboard the ark. We get aboard Jesus Christ and are saved. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.