

The Third Sunday in Advent – Pr. Faugstad sermon  
Genesis 8:15-22: “While the Earth Remains, so Does God’s Mercy.”  
December 14/15, 2024 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

**In Nomine Iesu**

+ + +

Lord God, heavenly Father, You gave Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to become Man and to come into the world that He might destroy the works of the devil, deliver us poor offenders from sin and death, and give us everlasting life: We beseech You so to rule and govern our hearts by Your Holy Spirit that we may seek no other refuge than His Word, and thus avoid the sin to which we are by nature inclined, in order that we may always be found among the faithful followers of Your Son, Jesus Christ, and by faith in Him obtain eternal salvation; through the same, Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, p. 147)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

---

*The sermon text for today is taken from the eighth chapter of the Book of Genesis. We read selected verses in Jesus’ name:*

Then God said to Noah, “Go out from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives with you. 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 – that they may swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.” So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him. Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by families from the ark. / Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in His heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.” (ESV)

---

*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, who “always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere” (2Co. 2:14), dear fellow redeemed:

After Noah and his family entered the ark, rain fell for forty days and forty nights. It was no gentle rain. Genesis 7 says that “all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened” (v. 11). The water kept rising and rising until the whole earth was covered. The water covered even the highest mountains by fifteen cubits, or more than twenty feet. Every living thing on earth died. If you were to look down on earth from a satellite view, you would have seen only blue. If you zoomed in, you might eventually spy something small floating on that great ocean – the ark.

God preserved Noah and his family and two of each kind of animal on this ark. They floated on the water for five months, everyone getting used to the constant rocking of the boat. Then suddenly they heard the bottom of the boat scrape something, and the rocking stopped. The ark had come to rest on the mountains of Ararat. But it was not time to disembark. Just as Noah waited for God's command to enter the ark (7:1), so he waited for God's command to leave it. This command finally came more than one year after they had climbed into the ark.

It was a big boat, but one year was a long time to be in it. I imagine it felt more and more crowded as each day passed. Wouldn't man and animal be eager to get out and enjoy the land and the fresh air again? But in the back of their minds, perhaps Noah and his family wondered, "Will we be safe? We've seen what God can do. We are not perfect. What if He gets angry with us? Are we safer staying in the ark in case this happens again?" God soon put those potential fears to rest. He told Noah and his family to "*go out from the ark*" and to bring out all the living creatures, so they might "*be fruitful and multiply on the earth.*"

So they went out, and not in the chaotic way we might imagine. By the guidance of God, the animals "*went out by families from the ark.*" As the animals fanned out in every direction, the first thing Noah did was build an altar to the LORD and offer burnt offerings from the seven pairs of clean animals that he brought on the ark. This sacrifice offered in thanksgiving and praise was pleasing to God. In wording that emphasizes the closeness of God, we read that "*the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma.*" It wasn't so much the smell, as the faith by which it was offered.

Before the Flood, the LORD was grieved by the wickedness of man. The stench of their sin filled His nostrils. Now He smelled the soothing aroma of faithfulness. And the LORD said in His heart, "*I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.*" That is good news for us, but it is a perplexing statement. God is stating that the people who left the ark were not any different by nature than the people who were destroyed. Before the Flood, God saw that "*every intention of the thoughts of [man's] heart was only evil continually*" (6:5). After the Flood, He still saw that "*the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth.*"

Nothing about man had changed. Ever since the fall into sin, every person is born in the image of sinful Adam. His sin is passed down generation to generation. It came down through his children and their children, through Noah and his family members, all the way down to us. The Flood cleansed the earth of wickedness, but it did not wash wickedness from the human heart. So why did the LORD say He would never again destroy the earth like He did in the Flood? It is not because we are better than the people were before the Flood. It is not because we have collectively learned our lesson or somehow deserve the LORD's goodness.

It is because God is a merciful God. Mercy means not punishing when punishment is deserved. Mercy is not earned by the one who receives it. Mercy comes from the heart of the one who has every right to punish. So a store owner might have mercy by not pressing charges against a thief. A judge might have mercy by commuting the sentence of a criminal. You might have mercy by not treating your neighbors in the hurtful way they have treated you.

You can see how mercy is tied to love. This is how God teaches us to be, to be loving as He loves us. We can certainly see the wrath of God by the destruction of the Flood. But we see His

love in sparing Noah and his family, even though they were sinners too. He spared them because He had made a promise. He promised Adam and Eve and all mankind that One would come from the woman to destroy the works of the devil. No one made God make that promise, and when He makes a promise, it cannot be undone.

He could not have destroyed all flesh on the earth and kept that promise. So Noah and his family were spared. He had mercy on them. In His love for the whole human race from Adam to Noah and to the end of time, God chose Noah to be in the line of that promise, to be a forefather of the coming Christ. Just as the days on the ark must have stretched on and on, so did the years from Noah onward. But God did not forget.

Thousands of years after the Flood, the LORD sent John to preach in the wilderness. When Jesus came to be baptized by him, the heavens were opened, and Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit. John now testified to any who would listen, *"He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God"* (Joh. 1:33-34).

Jesus showed who He was by His words and works. In the Holy Gospel for today, Jesus described His work to John's disciples, *"the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them"* (Mat. 11:4-5). This is mercy work. This is God's demonstration of His love for mankind.

This love was demonstrated even more clearly when Jesus drew all sin to Himself like the animals were drawn to the ark. All sin was sealed up in Him, so sin would no longer be counted against us. Then as God once poured out His wrath on the wicked world, He now poured out His wrath on His only Son.

The LORD said after the Flood, *"I will never again curse the ground because of man."* He would not destroy every living creature. But He was willing to put the curse on His Son. Galatians 3:13 says, *"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.'"* Jesus was cursed because God is merciful to you. You deserved the punishment Jesus received, but He accepted it for you. *"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him"* (Joh. 3:17).

So you don't need to wonder if you are safe with God. You don't need to worry that He is angry with you because of your weaknesses and sins. He knows that *"the intention of [your] heart is evil from [your] youth."* He knows who you are. He knows what you have done. And He chooses to have mercy on you. He has mercy because He is full-of-mercy—merciful. This is how He described Himself to Moses: *"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin"* (Exo. 34:6-7).

This is how He looks upon you, with mercy and grace, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, forgiving each and every one of your sins. You hear this each week in the ark of the church, before the LORD sends you out again to be fruitful in your vocations. Whether at home or at your job or in the community, like Noah you offer sacrifices of

thanksgiving and praise to God through your honest words, your good efforts, and your godly behavior.

These sacrifices of love rise up as a pleasing aroma to the LORD. He does remember you. You are His beloved child, washed clean of your wickedness by the blood of Jesus, covered in His righteousness through the waters of Holy Baptism. The LORD's mercy toward you is as certain as the changing of the seasons, *"seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night."* His love for you does not change. *"The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness"* (Lam. 3:23). Amen.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

+ + +