

Shelter from the Storm
3 Pentecost Proper 4
St. Francis of Assisi Episcopal Church
Written and preached by the Rev. Susan D. Parsons¹

Generally the preacher is expected to
Focus on the Gospel reading for the sermon and
On the words and actions of Jesus but
The story of Noah and the Ark is
So full of meaning and so misunderstood that
I simply could not just 'Sail past it'

We don't hear this story read as a
Sunday morning scripture reading very often
It has for the most part become
A children's story often complete with
A whole set of sweet little animals and
A pudgy wooden boat so
It's something of a shock when
We hear the story read in church and
Are suddenly reminded that
This is a very disturbing Bible story about
God deliberately killing off
All the people on earth
Because they are sinful
-Except for Noah and his family-
Why we would ever tell this story to a child and then
Give them an ark to play with
Unless we were the Addams family
Is beyond understanding

Perhaps more surprising is that

¹ The readings on which this sermon is based are found at the end of the sermon.
I ask your patience with regard to the layout of my sermons – they are written out in a way that makes it easier for me to read aloud. Unfortunately, it may make the silent reader wonder if the writer had ever been apprised of the usefulness of punctuation.

There are people who seem to
Want this story to be literally true
Archeologists and adventurers are out there
Climbing about on Mt Ararat
The place where the ark is said to have come to rest after the flood
And they are scanning photographs taken by satellites and
Just generally picking through most of the Middle East
Searching for some evidence of Noah's ark
And just in case the ark doesn't turn up
Geologists have joined the hunt
Hoping to at least find proof of a devastating flood

But when we reduce the story of Noah and the flood
To an historical event
We lose so much
This is a story with depth and
With layers of meaning *breathe*
It's a story about faith and hope and
Doing what God asks us to do

So to begin we are going to leave behind
All that foolishness about
God killing people and
Look instead to Noah as an example of faith
What kind of faith did it take to
Listen to God the way Noah did and
Begin to build a boat
When he really didn't need a boat
He probably had lots of other stuff to do
The neighbors undoubtedly thought he was crazy
His wife probably did too but
He kept building
And what kind of faith did it take for
Noah's family to get on the boat and the animals
And once the waters began to rise and
The boat began to float and
Noah didn't look so crazy anymore

What kind of hope did it take
To keep them all from going quite mad
When they looked out from the deck and saw
Nothing but water

Noah and his family aren't
The only people who have
Suffered through catastrophe
Steve Sayles pointed this out in Bible study the other night
We all of us must weather horrible storms when
Grief or despair or sickness floods our lives.
The way Noah survived was by
Listening to God who told him how to
Create a refuge an ark that
Would be protection from the coming storm and
Noah responded and
Gathered together the resources he'd need and
The creatures that needed care and
Through it all he had
Faith and hope that in the end
He would sail into a safe dry harbor again
And this is what we must do too
And our faith and hope will be strengthened
With every storm we go ride out

This is where the words we heard
From Jesus today come in
He says

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell"

To build an ark that will survive
It is not enough to just have faith and hope
We have to do some building
We have to do just what we try to do in this church

Listen and respond to God and Jesus
Not just come to church and
Eat donut holes and go home but
Get involved in building up the ark that is
Your soul and this church

The monks in Burma could tell you about building an ark
Back in August the oppressive military junta that rules Burma -Without explanation or warning -
Increased fuel prices by 500% over night
This was unconscionable in an already
Unbelievably impoverished nation and
Meant the price for fuel was
Beyond the reach of most everyone in the country
Protests began almost immediately -
Even though in the past protests against the
Government have sparked
Violent and deadly crack downs.
The junta's response this time was no different but
What made this protest different and
So much more damaging for the government
To put down were the
Buddhist monks who joined the protest by the thousands
The interdependence of the monks and people is ancient -
The monks receive alms from the people and
In return offer spiritual comfort to the village
But instead of walking through the streets each morning to
Collect alms for the day
The monks walked through the streets
Protesting with the people
In some places the people lined the streets to
Hold back the military to
Keep the monks from harm
The protests were stopped a month later
When the military attacked both
The monks in their monasteries and the people
Leaving many them including the monks
Dead or injured and the monasteries ransacked or ruined

It seemed like the ark they were all trying to
Build together had foundered

Then just four weeks ago on May 2
A devastating cyclone hit Burma
Killing 134,000 people and
2.4 million others without food or water or homes

And in response
The world stepped forward and
Offered aid to Burma but
The government of Burma has refused
They will not allow the food and water and doctors and
Tents and medicine and clothes to be given to their people
They are too jealous or too embarrassed or
Too evil

But the Burmese monks are helping
The monks are finding ways of
Getting aid to the people
They are organizing the relief campaigns and
Donations from other parts of Burma are
Pouring into the monasteries *breathe*
Volunteers who are able to help
Go to the monasteries

The monasteries are feeding people and
They have become temporary shelters and
They have set up makeshift clinics and
They are the ark the Burmese people needed when the flood came

The story of Noah and the ark is
As useful today as it ever has been
The winds and waters of outrageous fortune
Continue to destroy and
Whether we understand the ark to be ourselves
Or our church or a monastery

Or a nation or this earth

We all need arks

We need to be attentive to God ready to do

Even if everyone around us thinks we are crazy

We need to be building and

Gathering and protecting

Then when the floods come and our boat

Creaks and wobbles and praise God begins to float

No one gets left behind

We pull them onto the boat with us

Because storms aren't created by God to

Punish us or to warn us or to deepen our compassion

On the contrary

It is God who designs the arks that will

Carry us safely into the harbor

OLD TESTAMENT: Genesis 6: 9 - 22, 7: 24, 8: 14 - 19 (RCL)

Gene 6:9 (NRSV) These are the descendants of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. 10 And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. 12 And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth. 13 And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth. 14 Make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. 15 This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. 16 Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and put the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks. 17 For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. 18 But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. 19 And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. 20 Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every kind shall come in to you, to keep them alive. 21 Also take with you every kind of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them." 22 Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

7:24 And the waters swelled on the earth for one hundred fifty days.

8:14 In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. 15 Then God said to Noah, 16 "Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons' wives with you. 17 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-so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth." 18 So Noah went out with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. 19 And every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out of the ark by families.

PSALM 46 (RCL)

Psal 46:1 (NRSV) God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.

2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;

3 though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
 the holy habitation of the Most High.
 5 God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;
 God will help it when the morning dawns.
 6 The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;
 he utters his voice, the earth melts.
 7 The LORD of hosts is with us;
 the God of Jacob is our refuge.
 8 Come, behold the works of the LORD;
 see what desolations he has brought on the earth.
 9 He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
 he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;
 he burns the shields with fire.
 10 "Be still, and know that I am God!
 I am exalted among the nations,
 I am exalted in the earth."
 11 The LORD of hosts is with us;
 the God of Jacob is our refuge.

46 *Deus noster refugium* (ECUSA BCP)

1 God is our refuge and strength, *
 a very present help in trouble.
 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be moved, *
 and though the mountains be toppled into the
 depths of the sea;
 3 Though its waters rage and foam, *
 and though the mountains tremble at its tumult.
 4 The LORD of hosts is with us; *
 the God of Jacob is our stronghold.
 5 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, *
 the holy habitation of the Most High.
 6 God is in the midst of her;
 she shall not be overthrown; *
 God shall help her at the break of day.
 7 The nations make much ado, and the kingdoms are shaken; *
 God has spoken, and the earth shall melt away.
 8 The LORD of hosts is with us; *
 the God of Jacob is our stronghold.
 9 Come now and look upon the works of the LORD, *
 what awesome things he has done on earth.
 10 It is he who makes war to cease in all the world; *
 he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear,
 and burns the shields with fire.
 11 "Be still, then, and know that I am God; *
 I will be exalted among the nations;

12 I will be exalted in the earth."
The LORD of hosts is with us; *
the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

NEW TESTAMENT: Romans 1: 16 - 17, 3: 22b - 28 (29 - 31) (RCL)

(NRSV) For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."

3:21 But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, 23 since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; 24 they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; 26 it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

27 Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. 28 For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. 31 Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

GOSPEL: Matthew 7: 21 - 29 (RCL)

Matthew 7: 21 - 27 (Roman Catholic))

Matt 7:21 (NRSV) "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?' 23 Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.'

24 "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. 25 The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell-and great was its fall!"

28 Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, 29 for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

