

"Grieved to the Heart"

September 6, 2026

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Genesis 6: 5-8, 8:15-21

Today I want to talk about the story of God and Noah and the ark and the flood because I really think this story helps us understand God, who God is, and why God does and doesn't do so many things in our world. But before we get there, we should remember how we got here. Remember in Genesis 1 and 2, God created the world and all that was in it. And it was good. God created people in God's own image to rule the earth as God's ambassadors. Genesis 1 uses the word dominion: giving them "dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." The deal was pretty straight forward. God set up the systems and the standards, and humans helped implement them. But then, with the help of the serpent, Adam and Eve, the first two people, started to see God as an enslaving bully instead of a loving provider. Instead of hearing "stay away from that tree of good and evil because it will hurt you," they started to hear, "God doesn't want you near that tree because it has the power to make you like God, and God wants to keep you down." Adam and Eve took the bait, disobeyed God in hopes of becoming more godlike, and got kicked out of the garden. They then established their own gardens where they were in charge and could follow their own hearts and do things their way. As you remember, that didn't go so well. The first generation's jealousy of God that led to disobedience became the second generation's jealousy that led to one brother murdering the other. As people continued to live life like they wanted, making up their own definitions of right and wrong with themselves and their feelings and their physical desires at the center; humanity turned farther and farther away from God and God's ways. And that is where we pick up the story with our first reading from Genesis 6.

It says, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved Him to His heart." You can't get much worse than that. "Every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually." And God's response is one of being hurt. It "grieved God to His heart." Two things here. One, many religions have created their gods with the understanding that in order for them to be god and be all powerful, they cannot be affected by us. As in, if we can make them happy or we can make them sad, then we have power over them and therefore they are not all-powerful. So emotional attachment is seen as a weakness. But the Bible boldly proclaims that God is emotionally invested in us. We affect God. What we do brings God joy and brings God pain. God is not removed from us, like a computer just running the numbers. God's heart is present with us, which makes God vulnerable. God is strong enough to be vulnerable. Secondly, God has been hurt by God's creation, but God's heart is not ready to give-up on it. God must

heavily reinvestment Himself if this world is going to make it. And God chooses to do that. You and I have both seen this kind of thing in action. We have met kids who were a handful, whose parents just gave up on them because they were too hard to manage. Those children grew up to be terrors and a drain on the community their entire lives. And we have met kids who were a handful, whose parents did not give up on them but kept fighting for them. Some of those kids end up being amazing adults – gifts to their families and community. In the same way, God does not give up on us. God insists on us making good choices and God is going to enforce consequences and discipline. God is not going to give into us and just be our buddy, but is going to make whatever changes need to be made in order to fix the problem. I celebrate that God loves us enough to do the work and bring the consequences to make us people as opposed to animals. But it is hard. In our story, God salvaged what He could and got rid of the rest. I cannot image the amount of tears God shed through the whole process. Maybe that is where the flood waters came from?

The only salvageable piece of humanity was Noah. Noah was different than everyone else. Even when everything and everyone around him was completely consumed by their physical desires, selfishness and greed; Noah sought God's righteousness. The next verse after our reading says, "Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God." God never gives up looking for individuals and communities who are ready to follow and thereby bring the gift of life in the midst of death and destruction.

You know the next part of the story. God has Noah build a huge boat we call the ark, then God helps Noah load some of every kind of animal onto the ark along with Noah's family, and it begins to rain. It rains for 40 days, all the springs and rivers overflow, and the world is underwater. Noah, his family and the animals spent a total of about a year in the ark before the flood waters receded and the land started producing enough food to sustain animal life again.

By the time we get to chapter 8, it looks like the creation reboot worked. Back in chapter 6, "the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually." Now in chapter 8, the first recorded thing Noah does when his feet hit dry land is build an altar to worship and lift sacrifices to God. His first act wasn't selfish. It wasn't evil. It wasn't greedy. It was worship. That is a good restart. And when God saw what Noah did, and smelled the pleasing odor of the sacrifices, verse 21 tells us, "the Lord said in His heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.'" God recognizes human hearts did not change. The inclination of the human heart is still evil from youth. We often forget that. We think we humans have evolved and we can trust our hearts and follow our natural desires and God will back us up. But God knows. We can fight our natural self-worship and we are called to fight it. You are here today because at some level you have realized the good life, real life, eternal life, revolves around

worshipping and obeying God over our selfish desires. Yet as Christians, we don't claim to be perfect or have it all together, because we know our hearts are self-absorbed from birth. We are not and will never be perfect, just forgiven.

But what I really like about what God is saying here, and something I strive for but seldom achieve, is God says despite who humans are and what they do, I will not respond to them with what they deserve anymore. I will be me and remember who I am regardless of who they are. If they are cruel and selfish, I will be compassionate and life-giving because that is who I am and they don't control me. If they are evil and murderous, I will be compassionate and life-giving because that is who I am and they don't control me. If they are brilliant and loving, I will be compassionate and life-giving because that is who I am and they don't control me. I want to be that. I want to respond to others because of who God is and what God has done for me. Not responding to others from who they are or what they have done, but respond to them by what God has done. If they are cruel and selfish, I will be compassionate and life-giving because that is who God calls me to be, and they don't control me, God does. If they are evil and murderous, I will be compassionate and life-giving because that is who God calls me to be, and they don't control me, God does. If they are brilliant and loving, I will be compassionate and life-giving because that is who God calls me to be, and they don't control me, God does.

God played our game of do unto others as they have done unto you and give them what they deserve, and it hurt God so deeply, God said, "never again". God hears us. God sees us and is affected by us on a deep emotional level. Sometimes that is incredible grief, sometimes incredible joy. God feels it all, but God is not controlled by us and how we make God feel. God is going to be compassionate and life-giving because that is who God is. Now, is it compassionate and life-giving to let people just do whatever they want and let all creation go to hell? This story reminds us the answer is no. But God is going to work from who God is and what God does, not how we would do it, not how we deserve to have it done, but by giving life, because giving death hurts too much. Oh that God's image could show through a little more in me.

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