

The Flood – the lockdown is over!

Readings: Genesis 8 & Galatians 6:1-10

Last week Zane described the chapter of misery and horror, chapter 7 of Genesis. Today we come to the end of the Flood, with the retreat of the waters, the release of the captives and the rebirth of the earth. The eight humans and the menagerie had been cooped up in the ark for a year, and finally their ordeal was over and they were allowed to leave the ark – the lockdown had come to an end! As I read and reread this passage, I was struck by four things – God remembered, Noah waited, Noah worshipped and God promised.

Firstly, God remembered. Verse 1 “But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark.” This verse is the hinge in this story of the Flood, up until now things have just gone downhill but from this point things begin to look up. We hear echoes of God’s creation of the earth described in the beginning of Genesis present in this new creation. For example, we have the wind blowing over the waters (v1). We also find that chapter 8 mirrors many of the features of chapter 7 in reverse order. But I want to pick up this expression “God remembered”. This is a precious phrase in Scripture and could easily be missed. When we think of remembering, it is often because we have forgotten. We are busy doing our own thing and then we are reminded, often by someone else, of what we are supposed to be doing or where we are supposed to be! Forgetfulness is part of being human and as we age, it seems to me we become more accomplished in this skill. But forgetfulness is not a character of God. When we read “and God remembered Noah” it is not that God was busy off doing his own thing and then suddenly thought, O look there’s poor old Noah and his ark, I’d clean forgotten about them, I’d better do something. The remembering of God is always God being faithful to his covenant. God established a covenant with Noah in chapter 6 v18. To his covenant people through the ages, it seemed at times as if God had forsaken them, but God chooses his time to rescue and redeem them. When it says “God remembered” then this is God beginning to move in deliverance as he had promised. We see this again and again through the Scriptures, for example prior to the burning bush calling of Moses it says “ And God heard their groaning, and **God remembered** his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.” (Ex. 2:24) Or coming into the New Testament we hear Zechariah’s song of praise that God had visited his people, “to show the mercy promised to our fathers and **to remember** his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham” (Luke 1:72). God’s remembering is part of his faithfulness to his covenant, God is now about to act in deliverance. And we shall return to the theme of covenant later.

Secondly, Noah waited. Once the ark had rested on Mount Ararat, Noah might have been tempted to open the ark and let everyone go out, but no, he waited. He waited for God to say, now is the time. As he had waited for God’s command to enter the ark, so now he waits for God’s command to exit the ark – he is a model of trustworthy, obedience. As John Calvin said “How great must have been the fortitude of the man, who, after the incredible weariness of a whole year, when the deluge had ceased, and new life had shone forth, does not yet move a foot out of his sepulchre, without the command of God.” I suspect his sons might have been

saying to him, Dad when are we going to get off this barge, the rain stopped weeks ago. And Dad there are a lot of rabbits running around here, we need to let these creatures go. But Noah waited for the word from God. In verse 15 we read “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.” God re-established his creation mandate of Genesis 1 v 22 “be fruitful and multiply”. Noah had learned to wait for God’s voice and was obedient to the voice of God. Some of us have great difficulty with waiting and listening for God’s word, we want to be up and doing and we know what the Scripture says about doing good to everyone, as we read this morning in Galatians. Yet, if we are to achieve anything of lasting worth, we wait for the word of the Lord to show us how and when we start new church initiatives in our own day – we listen for the word that says “this is the way, walk in it”. God can give us the keys to open the opportunities for fruitful service in this community. I am reminded of the story of David in 2 Samuel 5, when he was fighting the Philistines towards the beginning of his reign. He had beaten them once but they came up again and David asked God for guidance and God said “You shall not go up; go around to their rear, and come against them opposite the balsam trees. And when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then rouse yourself, for then the LORD has gone out before you to strike down the army of the Philistines.” (2 Sam. 5:23-24). David had to wait for the Lord to act. Perhaps his commanders were saying this is a great position we are in let’s go and attack them, God delivered them into our hands last time, but David waited for God to act as he said he would, and then he obeyed.

Thirdly, Noah worshipped. Verse 20 “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.” This was Noah’s thanksgiving for his and creation’s deliverance from the flood. Although we have had reference to offerings before in Genesis, this is the first **specific** reference to both an altar and burnt offerings. Noah’s first response to being set free from the ark and delivered from the flood was an act of worship, acknowledging the sovereignty, faithfulness and salvation of God. As John Goldingay said “Noah worshipped not because he got something out of it but in order to give something to God.” Because Noah had saved more than one pair of the clean animals, he was able to offer some as sacrifices without endangering their future. One commentator wrote “As the whole sacrifice was consumed by fire and the smoke ascended, so it symbolized the total dedication of the worshipper to the service of God.” This aspect of the sacrifice is taken up by Paul writing to the Romans when he urges Christians “in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” (Rom. 12:1).

Lastly, God promised. We have at the end of this chapter, one of the great promises in the Bible, given both to humanity and to the whole created order. God said in verse 21 “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.” For the created order to flourish, there needs to be the continual rhythm of day and night and the seasons of the year. The Flood had not solved the problem of human sin, “for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (verse 21), but it had given a gigantic object lesson of God’s implacable hostility to sin and wickedness, and the interconnectedness of the whole creation. The problem of the human heart would be put on hold until the Messiah came and ushered in His Kingdom where the people of God are born again and given new hearts. This section at the end of chapter 8 really runs onto the beginning of chapter 9, an expansion of God’s covenant with Noah. We had the first reference to a covenant with Noah in chapter 6 v 18 and this expands upon it. Covenants are a key part of God’s dealing with mankind. It’s a word that is not common these days but a covenant is a binding agreement or a treaty. For example, when we first bought a house in England we had to sign a covenant that came with the house that stipulated what sort of fences we could put up around the house. (I never did find out who checked up on our observance of the covenant!) Turning back to Scripture, covenants can be made between people like Jonathan and David, where both parties to the agreement are human. However, when it comes to covenants with God, it is always God that initiates the covenant and declares the rules and the blessings, as he did here with Noah and later with Abraham, at Sinai and with David. It is an act of grace on his part. He invites a person or people to come under his covenant and he will protect them and look after them and, in return, they agree to his rules to live by them. God dictates the rules of the covenant and because God is faithful to his word, the covenant is guaranteed from God’s side. So having declared that Noah was in a covenant with God, God was faithful to his side of the covenant in delivering Noah from the flood. So Noah could celebrate God’s faithfulness to his covenant in his worship. We celebrate that God is and will be faithful to his new covenant in Christ Jesus; that in the fullness of time the earth will be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea and God’s Kingdom will be established in all its glorious fullness.

To conclude, I would like to quote some words of David Atkinson in his commentary on this passage:

“We live in a world which at point after point seems, as it was in the days of Noah, to be busying itself with everything except waiting for the coming of the Son of Man. Yet in this world we are called, like Noah in his generation, to display in our worship and our service, the righteousness of a trusting faith in God. A faith which hangs on to God despite all appearances, and a faith which seeks to translate his word into practice. A faith touched by the words which Jesus spoke to Peter: ‘What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand.’ A faith that holds to the cosmic Christ, that in him all God’s purposes for his whole creation come to their fulfillment. A faith which believes, as Kuyper put it, that ‘There is not an inch of this universe over which Jesus Christ does not say “It is Mine!” For from him, and through him and to him are all things!

But as the enormity of this cosmic perspective begins to overwhelm us, and we begin to feel lost in the vastness of God’s dealings with the world, let us hold on to that other more intimate strand in the story of Noah: God is holding on to us. Our Creator is also our Father. He invites us to live in covenant with him, sustained by a love that will not let us go.” Amen.